

# THE THEOLOGICAL ONTOLOGY OF LEONTIUS OF BYZANTIUM AND THE CIRCUMSCRIBABILITY ARGUMENT IN THE ICONOPHILE POLEMICS

VLADIMIR BARANOV

Novosibirsk State University of Architecture, Design and Arts (Russia)  
baranovv@academ.org

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**ABSTRACT.** The theological contribution of Leontius of Byzantium played a crucial role in adapting the notions of substance and hypostasis from their original Trinitarian to a Christological context. The Leontian concepts, such as enhypostasized substance, distinction between the principle of substance and mode of existence, as well as “relational” ontology of reversed unions and distinctions at the levels of substances and hypostases was adopted by Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus in their polemical application of Neo-Chalcedonian Christology, as well as the by the Iconophiles of the Second Iconoclasm in support of the circumscribability of Christ.

**KEYWORDS:** Leontius of Byzantium, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite, Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople, hypostasis, substance, properties, circumscribability.

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Hypostasis is a traditional theological category elaborated during the Trinitarian Controversy of the fourth century for distinguishing numerically different Persons in the Holy Trinity united in their common substance, and essentially understood as individualized divine substance with distinguishing personal properties.<sup>1</sup> However, in the Christological controversies of the sixth century, this notion

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<sup>1</sup> On hypostasis as a principle of individuation in Late Antique Patristics, see Zachhuber 2014; Zachhuber 2012; Corrigan 2008; Choufrine 2003; Zachhuber 2001; Turcescu 1997; Drecoll 1996; Hammerstaedt 1994; de Halleux 1984; Richard 1945; Erdin 1939; Witt 1933; Michel 1922; Rougier 1916-1917.

of hypostasis as the principle of individuation proved to be insufficient for the proponents of the Council of Chalcedon, since their Miaphysite or Nestorian adversaries could use it to justify their doctrine of one composite nature of Christ, or conversely, of two hypostases of Christ corresponding to his human and divine natures.<sup>2</sup> In a new paradigm, the theological concepts of substance and hypostasis of the Cappadocians<sup>3</sup> were rethought based on the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophical framework.<sup>4</sup> Maximus the Confessor thus described this paradigmatic shift in the application of the term “hypostasis”: “According to the philosophers, hypostasis is substance with properties, while according to the Fathers, it is each individual man, personally distinguished from other human beings,”<sup>5</sup> indicating the need for a different context and conceptual apparatus needed for the Christological application of the term.

Several polemical treatises of Leontius of Byzantium (ca. 485–ca. 543) against the Miaphysite and Nestorian Christological positions played a crucial role in adapting the notions of substance and hypostasis from their Trinitarian meaning for solving Christological problems and elaborating a conceptual framework for the notions of substance, hypostasis, and properties in order to clarify the Chalcedonian formula “two natures in one hypostasis.”

One of the most important contributions of Leontius of Byzantium is further elaboration of the concept of “enhypositized” substance which has its being in a hypostasis other than its own, used for safeguarding the Chalcedonian doctrine on the unconfused union of two natures in one Christ Incarnated.<sup>6</sup> The history of

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<sup>2</sup> Gleede 2012, 49-50; Zachhuber 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Although the expression “ὑπόστασις ἐστὶ οὐσία μετὰ ἰδιωμάτων” can be found in Pamphilus (ed. Declerck 1989, I, 7, p. 128 with the list of parallel passages in the *fontes*), the phrase “Τοῦτο οὖν ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπόστασις... ἀλλ’ ἡ τὸ κοινόν τε καὶ ἀπεριγραπτόν ἐν τῷ τινὶ πράγματι διὰ τῶν ἐπιφαινομένων ἰδιωμάτων παριστώσα καὶ περιγράφουσα” (Basil of Caesaria, *Epistula* 38, 3.8-12, ed. Deferrari, 1926, 82-83 = Gregory of Nyssa, *De differentia essentiae et hypostaseos ad Petrum fratrem*) expresses the same thought. On the *Epistle* 28, see Hübnner 1972; Zachhuber 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Gleede, 2012, 69-100; Zhyrkova 2019.

<sup>5</sup> “Ὑπόστασις δὲ ἐστὶν, κατὰ μὲν φιλοσόφους, οὐσία μετὰ ἰδιωμάτων· κατὰ δὲ τοὺς Πατέρας, ὁ καθ’ ἕκαστον ἄνθρωπος, προσωπικῶς τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων ἀφοριζόμενος” (Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 26, *Ex quaestionibus a Theodoro monacho illi propositis*, PG 91, 276B; cf. ed. Roosen 2021, 256). Maximus used the traditional definition of hypostasis, for example, in *Epistula* 13, PG 91, 528A.

<sup>6</sup> Ed. Daley 2017, 132.19-134.20. We should deliberately leave aside the question of whether, according to Leontius of Byzantium, human nature was enhypositized in the hypostasis of the Word, or both natures, divine and human, were enhypositized in the

this concept, its development by Leontius of Byzantium, and its reception in the Christological discussions has been a subject of numerous studies.<sup>7</sup> Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580–662) and John of Damascus (ca. 676–before 754) were important authors in the reception, development, and transmission of this and other concepts by Leontius of Byzantium.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Maximus followed the Leontian distinction of “hypostasis” and “enhypostasized,” and elaborated a consistent system of terminology, applicable equally well to the intra-Trinitarian relations of hypostases and Christological relations of natures.<sup>9</sup> He consolidated the identity of Christ Incarnated as the Word of God – the second hypostasis of the Trinity timelessly born from the Father and born from the Mother in time by treating the property of Sonship as a mode of existence, since in both generations the hypostasis of the Word actualized divine and human natures without altering their *logoi* in their new mode of existence<sup>10</sup> and appropriated the properties of both natures as His own.

Maximus adopted the Leontian distinction of the principle of substance (or being—λόγος τῆς οὐσίας or λόγος τοῦ εἶναι) and mode of existence (τρόπος τῆς ὑπάρξεως or τοῦ πῶς εἶναι τρόπος) introduced in the context of the Christological debates.<sup>11</sup> According to Maximus, in the Incarnation, the Word replaced the male

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*nous* Christ as argued by D. Evans (Evans 1970, 137-138). For an overview of the current state of research on Leontian Origenism, see Baranov 2020b.

<sup>7</sup> Gleede 2012, 61-69; Davydenkov 2018; Krausmüller 2017; Zhyrkova 2017a; Davydenkov, 2016; Hovorun 2006; Dell’Oso 2003, 69; Gockel 2000; Otto 1968, 38; Lang 1998.

<sup>8</sup> On Maximus’ use of Leontius of Byzantium, see Grumel 1926; Heinzer 1980, 90-116; Krausmüller 2019, 205-206. On Maximus’ use of the *enhypostaton* concept, see Butler 1994, 142-157; Gleede 2012, 139-155. On the use of “πρόσωπον” and “ὑπόστασις” in Maximus, see Podbielski 2017, 201-204; Larchet 2018. On the concept of *enhypostaton* in John of Damascus, see John of Damascus, *De natura composita*, 6, ed. Kotter 1981, 413.14-414.15; *Dialectica*, 44, ed. Kotter 1969, 109.2-110.22; Krausmüller 2017, 434-36; Gleede 2012, 162-181; Khristos 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Gleede 2012, 155.

<sup>10</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 15, *PG* 91, 556CD; on this distinction, see Larchet 1996, 141-151. Cf. John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei* IV, 4 (77), ed. Kotter 1973, 174.1-4; *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus* 37, ed. Kotter 1981, 222.1-4; *Contra Jacobitas*, 52, ed. Kotter 1981, 127.55-58; 79, *ibid.*, 136.4-14.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example: “For we say God, angels, man, animal, and vegetable exist as substances, and the term ‘substance’ is applied commonly to all, but the ‘existence’ of these things signifies not the nature of them or the manner [of their existence]; for the particular definitions of each thing go on to indicate those aspects” (Leontius of Byzantium, *Epilyseis*, ed. Daley 207, 278.2-5, transl. *ibid.*, 279). See Gleede 2012, 144-145; Butler 1994, 110-113. On this distinction, see Daley 2002; Sherwood 1955, 155-166; Louth 2017.

seed in conception and thereby acquired the human mode of existence entailing mortality, and in this new *tropos* preserving the intact *logoi* of His both natures and unity of hypostasis.<sup>12</sup> This view was based on Aristotle's suggestion that the male semen gives form and the principle of movement to the matter provided by the female.<sup>13</sup> The soul acquired with the male seed, gradually reveals itself in actuality with the formation of each relevant organ as a form participating in the formation of the body.<sup>14</sup> In the context of the Incarnation, Christ's conception was considered to be seedless, and his human soul did not join his body through male semen, but through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Maximus the Confessor thus explains the phrase of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, "and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary": "Some among the saints say that the soul is sown by the Holy Spirit in the manner of a man's parent, and the flesh is formed from the virginal blood."<sup>15</sup>

According to Maximus, in the Incarnation, the divine nature and human nature did not change their principle of being, but acquired a new mode of existence in the composite hypostasis of Christ, when the Word of God became the individuating and structuring principle in the formation of Christ's body in the virginal womb. Thus, the bodily and facial features, complexion, height and other visible features of Christ perceived by the senses could properly be understood as those shaped by and belonging to the Word of God. Moreover, the divinity in Christ is comprehended not only through intellection – the very face of God on Mount Tabor reveals the hiddenness of His divinity, according to Maximus' treatment of the Transfiguration.<sup>16</sup>

John of Damascus sometimes employed the Leontian idea in the form moderated by Maximus,<sup>17</sup> as was the case with the concept of the divine hypostasis of the Word which preserved its unchangeable principle of divine nature but willed to exist in another mode in the Incarnation by replacing the human seed which

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<sup>12</sup> See Gleede, 2012, 151-155 and n. 500, p. 151 for the references.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 1.2, 716a4-7 [GA]; GA 1.20, 728a; On Aristotle's embryology, see Mayhew 2004, 38-41; Congourdeau 2007, 184-185; Jones 2007, 22-32.

<sup>14</sup> GA 2.1, 734b, see also GA 2.3, 736b, GA 2.5, 741aA.

<sup>15</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Questiones et dubia*, 50, ed. Declerck 1982, 43.3-5, cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 4, PG 91, 60A. See also Congourdeau 1999.

<sup>16</sup> For the references, see Louth 2008, 266-272; Blowers 2016, 79-82. Cf. *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, 42, PG 91, 1320AC.

<sup>17</sup> Erismann 2010, 270.

naturally provides hypostasis to humans, and existing in the human *tropos*.<sup>18</sup> On other occasions, John of Damascus used Leontius directly, such as his close paraphrase of a Leontian passage against the Myaphysites that number does not introduce division but merely indicates a totality or quantity, and thus rather unites than divides, where John of Damascus reproduced not only the argument and its wording, but also the examples which Leontius provided for illustrating his point.<sup>19</sup>

Leontius of Byzantium's apology of the Chalcedonian Christology of two natures and one hypostasis was based on the ontological perception of the *ratio*: the Word was united to humanity the same way as a human soul is united to its body. This analogy had serious limitations; one of them was that multiple compounds of soul-body constitute the human species, whereas there is only one divine-human compound Christ without a corresponding species<sup>20</sup> and Leontius was aware of that.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Leontius pushed the analogy so far as to claim that both body and soul were perfect in themselves and their "imperfection" could only be applied to the composite of the whole in which they existed;<sup>22</sup> even ensoulment occurred as a supernatural act of God,<sup>23</sup> and they were regarded as distinct natures as far as their principles of substance are concerned. However, in conjunction, they are still perceived as one human species, and have a common definition, which could easily give way to Miaphysite abuse of the analogy, using it precisely for their claim of one composite nature of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> On the distinction of the principle of nature and mode of existence, cf. John of Damascus, *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus* 7, ed. Kotter 1981, 183.81-184.27; Gleede 2012, 178. On the Word replacing the human seed in the Incarnation as a hypostasis-making principle, see *De fide contra Nestoriannos*, ed. Kotter 1981, 286.32-287.47; *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus* 7, ed. Kotter 1981, 192.39-48; Gleede 2012, 178-179.

<sup>19</sup> John of Damascus, *Contra Jacobitas*, 50, ed. Kotter 1981, 124-125 (cf. *Expositio fidei* III, 5 (49), ed. Kotter 1973, 119.29-43) corresponds to Leontius of Byzantium, *Epilyseis*, ed. Daley 2017, 274.1-276.8. Cf. also Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 13, *PG* 91, 513AB.

<sup>20</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*, 5, ed. Daley 2017, 152.24-29.

<sup>21</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*, 2, ed. Daley 2017, 134.21-136.28.

<sup>22</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*, 2, ed. Daley 2017, 138.6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Leontius of Byzantium, *Epilysis* 8: "I am so far from saying that God the Word is united to our [manhood] by the law of nature, that I am not even prepared to say that the union of the human soul with its own body is experienced naturally, apart from the divine power" (ed. Daley 2017, 300.13-17, transl. *ibid.*, 301).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Disputatio cum Pirrho*, *PG* 91, 336C; *Ambiguum* 7, *PG* 91, 1100A-1101C. For the antimonophysite context see Garrigues 1974, 189-196; Madden 1993, 175-182). On the distinction of Maximus' and Leontius use of the body-soul union as an

Maximus, and John of Damascus who followed him, overcame the limitations of the analogy taken in a strict sense by assigning one of the two definitions of hypostasis mentioned in Leontius of Byzantium<sup>25</sup> to the natural union of hypostases in the species, and the other one exclusively to the composite supernatural union which does not emerge from natural procreation of individuals in the species.<sup>26</sup> By integrating the Leontian distinction of hypostasis into Neochalcedonian Christology, they emphasized the extraordinary nature of the hypostatical actualization of Christ indicating the unique composite hypostasis and not a member of the species or composite nature.<sup>27</sup>

The concept of *enhypostaton* in Leontius of Byzantium was not an isolated idea; his apologetic drive was underlined by a carefully designed philosophical system. In order to expose the mistake of two theological camps, Leontius created his Christological framework which would safeguard both the union of natures in single subject Christ, and their distinction of natures. Leontius defines *substance* as the universal determination in which beings receive the definition of their nature. Accordingly, *hypostasis* is the individualizing determination of the unions and distinctions of beings. Thus, according to Leontius, nature provides:

the definition of being (τὸν τοῦ εἶναι λόγον), but hypostasis also [the definition] of being-by-oneself (τὸν τοῦ καθ' ἑαυτὸν εἶναι), and the former comprises the definition of species, while the latter indicates the individual. And the former indicates the character of a universal thing, while the latter distinguishes the particular from the general.<sup>28</sup>

In this passage, Leontius of Byzantium treated both “substance” and “hypostasis” as universal definitions of unions and distinctions in beings, and as definitional opposites to one another: if the hypostasis is put in distinction, the substance must be put in the opposite relation, that is, union. For this conceptual framework, Leontius introduced the twofold relations of beings:

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analogy for the union of natures in Christ, see Thunberg 1995, 99-107; Uthemann 1982, 283-312; von Balthasar 1988, 237-239.

<sup>25</sup> “...we can define as ‘hypostasis’ either things which share a nature but differ in number, or things which are put together from different natures, but which share reciprocally in a common being” (*CNE*, 1, ed. Daley 2017, 134.11-13; transl. *ibid.*, 135).

<sup>26</sup> Gleede 2012, 145. Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 13, *PG* 91, 532BC.

<sup>27</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum* 16, *PG* 91, 201D-204A, cf. *Epistula* 13, *PG* 91, 529A. See also John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei*, III, 3 (47), ed. Kotter 1973, 113.50-114.57; *De natura composita*, 7, ed. Kotter 1981, 414.14-415.1.

<sup>28</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*, 1, ed. Daley 2017, 134.6-9.

All beings are joined to each other by universal commonalities (ταῖς καθόλου κοινότησι) and are distinguished from each other by specific differences (εἰδοποιοῖς διαφοραῖς)... And the definition of these unions and distinctions is twofold (διττός): some things are united by species and distinguished by hypostases, [whereas] others are distinguished by species but united by hypostases.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Leontius proposed the theory of the interchange of relations, thus writing about the hypostatic and substantial unions and distinctions, which are the reversed counterparts of each other:

It can be discovered that the set of relations of things belonging to different species to things of the same species is interchangeable (ἐπαλλάττουσαν): for in respects in which things of the same species are in common with things of different species, they are distinguished between each other; and in respects in which they are distinguished from things of different species, they are joined to each other. For they are distinguished from each other but joined to things of other species by number, and they are joined to each other but distinguished from things of other species by definition.<sup>30</sup>

This distinction resulted in three universal pairs of links and distinctions: two relations of the Father to the Word and the Word to the Father, two relations of the Word to the flesh and the flesh to the Word, and two relations of Christ to us and us to Christ. That which connects and distinguishes the relations in the first and third pairs, is opposed to that which connects and distinguishes the relations in the middle pair.<sup>31</sup> Leontius again illustrated this concept by the anthropological analogy:

Soul is united to soul by having the same essence, and is distinguished by the difference in hypostasis. This is the first and the final relationship of the pairs. The soul is distinguished from its body by the difference in nature, and is united [to it] by the category of hypostasis, which their mutually coherent life brings into full being. The second or middle relationship preserves this. But man is completely distinguished from his body by itself and his soul by itself as being their totality; because he has the first sort of relationship to his parts, he brings about the second sort of sharing between them.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*, 7, ed. Daley 2017, 168.26-170.6.

<sup>30</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*, 4, ed. Daley 2017, 144.25-146.4.

<sup>31</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*, 4, ed. Daley 2017, 146.19-148.5.

<sup>32</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*, 4, ed. Daley 2017, 148.7-18.

John of Damascus not only used the concept of the *enhypostaton* in his philosophical and Christological treatises, but also followed the analogy of the union of soul and body as a model of two distinct natures actualized in a single human person, and applied the anthropological paradigm to show how the properties of the natures are preserved intact and unaltered in the hypostatic union, be it the union of soul and body in a man, or human and divine natures in Christ, with composite hypostasis in each case securing indivisibility of the union, and immutability of the natural properties. Composite nature, on the contrary, produces a change in the qualities of its constituent components, as is the case with the human body, resulting from the union of four elements. In using the analogy of the soul-body compound, John of Damascus follows the Leontian logic of unions and distinctions:

Thus it is with the hypostasis in the case of the soul and the body, for here one hypostasis is made of both the compound hypostasis of Peter, let us say, or of Paul. This keeps in itself the two perfect natures that of the soul and that of the body and it preserves their difference distinct and their properties unconfused. And in itself it has the characteristic differences of each, those of the soul, which distinguish it from all other souls, and those of the body, which distinguish it from all other bodies. These, however, in no wise separate the soul from the body, but they unite and bind them together, at the same time marking off the one hypostasis composed of them from all other hypostases of the same species. Moreover, once the natures become hypostatically united, they remain absolutely indivisible. And this is so because, even though the soul is separated from the body in death, the hypostasis of both remains one and the same. For the constitution in itself of each thing at its beginning of being is a hypostasis. Therefore, the body remains, as does the soul; both always having the one principle of their being and subsistence, even though they are separated <...> And again, it is impossible for things that have once begun to subsist in themselves to have another principle of subsistence, for the hypostasis is subsistence in self.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John of Damascus, *Dialectica*, 66, ed. Kotter 1969, 139.8-24, 140.34-36; transl. Chase 1958, 104-105. A close parallel is Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 15, PG 91, 553BC; a correspondence with Leontius of Byzantium was noted in Krausmüller 2019, 205-206. Cf. also “Every whole, and especially when it is seen to be from different (sc. things) according to composition, monadically preserves the identity of its own hypostasis, while having in an unmixed fashion the difference of its own parts from one another, according to which it preserves without adulteration the substantial account of one part as compared with other” (Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 13, PG, 91, 521C, transl. Krausmüller 2019, 205).

Once the hypostasis emerged in the conception and ensoulment in the case of humans,<sup>34</sup> or when the hypostasis of the Word assumed human nature as its own in the Incarnation,<sup>35</sup> in both cases it remained indissoluble<sup>36</sup> and secured the restoration of the union of one's immortal soul separated from its mortal body in the resurrection. John of Damascus also explains how the two opposing sets of properties coexist in one composite hypostasis of the Son:

...and in our Lord Jesus Christ, the bodily form and visible countenance, and Him being the Son of the Virgin to Him being the Son of God without form, determines not the differences in hypostases, but differences in natures, while separating one hypostasis from those consubstantial to it according to the divinity, that is from the hypostases of the Father and the Holy Spirit, and from hypostases consubstantial to it according to the humanity, that is from the mother and other individual people, for when one composite hypostasis originates from two natures, both, that is to say, natural and hypostatic properties of the divine nature, and of humanity become the constituting properties of the hypostasis. Hence Christ is God and Man, beginningless and having a beginning, one and the same hypostasis, visible and invisible, created and uncreated, limited and boundless, suffering and passionless, the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin, that is, the Son of Man, Motherless from the Father and Fatherless from the Mother, undepictable and in the form of a slave and in the countenance of a man, "fairer than the sons of men" (Ps. 44: 2). All this constitutes and distinguishes the hypostasis of Christ God, and He is named by all [properties] together and by each individual one.<sup>37</sup>

This treatment of hypostasis with enhypostasized substances, and substance with ensubstantiated hypostases results in a reversed order of relationships at the level of the inner Trinitarian relationships, and the Incarnation: just as hypostases are numerically distinguished in the single substance of the Holy Trinity by their hypostatic properties, substances are numerically distinguished by their substantial properties, preserving their definition of substance in the single hypostasis of Christ after the Incarnation.

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<sup>34</sup> On the theories of ensoulment in Antiquity, see Congourdeau 1989, 695; Congourdeau 2007; Solère, Congourdeau, and Brisson 2008; Krausmüller 2020.

<sup>35</sup> John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei*, III, 26 (71), ed. Kotter 1973, 170.21-24.

<sup>36</sup> For the dossier of Patristic texts related to the problem of the relationship between the Word, body, and soul in the period when the dead body of Christ was in the tomb, see Lebon 1927; Lebourlier 1962-1963.

<sup>37</sup> John of Damascus, *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus*, 2, ed. Kotter 1981, 174.15-175.33. See also Zhyrkova 2009; Zhyrkova 2017b.

All these developments, including the Leontian ontological theology of hypostases with their characteristic properties and enhypostasized substances with their definitions, reversed relationships between unions and distinctions at the hypostatic and substantial levels, were adapted for for the Neo-Chalcedonian Christological doctrine by Maximus the Confessor and were followed by John of Damascus.

John of Damascus has been rightly credited with the reputation of a theologian who was the first to set the apology for icons into a Christological perspective. In his *Apologies* in defense of icons, John appeals to Christology, and more precisely to the role of Christ's flesh in the Christological union, replying with a typical Neo-Chalcedonian Christological formula to a certain rebuke by someone who stated that the Iconophiles perceived Christ's flesh on the icon as a "garment or a fourth *prosopon*" in the manner of Nestorius:

I venerate together with the King and God the purple of [His] body, not as a garment or a fourth person (οὐχ ὡς ἱμάτιον οὐδ' ὡς τέταρτον πρόσωπον) (God forbid!), but as proclaimed to be and to have become unchangeably equal to God, and the source of anointing. For the nature of the flesh has not become the divinity, but as the Word became flesh immutably, remaining what He was, thus also the flesh became the Word not losing what it was, but rather becoming equal to the Word according to the hypostasis. Therefore I dare to depict the invisible God, not as invisible, but as becoming visible for our sake by participation in flesh and blood.<sup>38</sup>

A close parallel to the argument of St. John of Damascus in the polemics within the specifically Eastern Syrian context indicates the familiarity of John's adversary with the Antiochean theological tradition,<sup>39</sup> and John's formulation of the

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<sup>38</sup> John of Damascus, *Apology I*, 4, ed. Kotter 1975, 77.62-78.85. The same charges against the Iconodules in introducing quaternity into the Holy Trinity and in Nestorianising perception of Christ's flesh by depicting Christ's tangible flesh on the icon appear in the writings of the Iconoclastic Emperor Constantine V (*PG* 100, 248D-249A) and in the *Definition* of the Iconoclastic Council of Hieria (754) (ed. Lamberz 2016, 662.7-11); see also Baranov 2002, 51-53.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. "...God the Word 'dwelt' according to the preaching of the son of thunder 'among us.' How? In the holy womb of the virgin. He wove for himself a human robe and clothed himself with it, and he went forth into the world. The eyes of those who are created were not able to observe the glorious brightness of his godhead without the veil of his body or the curtain which was flesh (cf. Ex. 34: 29f). <...> This being so, how can the Adamite body be consubstantial with the Trinity, and quaternity be confessed in the nature of the Trinity? (Shahdost, from the "Separation between Orientals and Westerners," eds. Abramowski and Goodman 1972, 31.10-21).

Christological dimension of the image doctrine vis-à-vis his opponents from the Nestorian and Miaphysite camps in Palestine.

Although it is not yet clear to which extent the theological legacy of John of Damascus was used in Constantinople during the second Iconoclasm,<sup>40</sup> concepts used by him such as the uniqueness of Christ as one of the Holy Trinity beyond the species, indissolubility of his hypostasis even when two of its constituent components (body and soul) separated after death until the Resurrection, and appropriation of substantial properties of both natures thus becoming Christ's own, were used by the Iconophiles of the Second Iconoclasm in formulating several arguments against the Iconoclastic claim that Christ was incircumscribable. One of the arguments used by both Iconophile champions who left their polemical writings against the Iconoclasts – Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople (806–815), and Theodore the Studite (759–826) – employs the “relational” ontology of unions and distinctions of Leontius of Byzantium.

Already Leontius of Byzantium formulated this problem, asking his interlocutor: “When the Logos assumed human nature, did he assume it as seen in the species or as in an individual?”<sup>41</sup> One of the Iconoclastic arguments was precisely that Christ assumed only general human nature, without distinguishing features<sup>42</sup>, which were all that could be depicted on the icon, thus considering the icon of Christ an arbitrary choice of an artist, false from an epistemological viewpoint, and idolatrous from a theological viewpoint.

The symmetrical theological ontology of Leontius entailed a reversed order of relationships: whatever distinguishes hypostases at the level of *theologia* and human species, unites natures at the level of *oikonomia*. In the context of the anti-Iconoclastic polemics, this symmetric Christology led to a syllogism: if we confess three hypostases of the Holy Trinity in one substance with its proper definition, and one hypostasis of Christ in two natures, appropriating the “extremes” of

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<sup>40</sup> Louth 2002, 197-198. However, this observation rather results from the lack of research into the possible use of John of Damascus by the later Iconoclasts. Thus, the editor of the *Refutation of the Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia* by Patriarch Nicephorus noted a number of parallels and large amount of the same testimonies from the *florilegia* used by both authors (ed. Featherstone 1997, 372-373).

<sup>41</sup> “Φύσιν ὁ Λόγος ἀναλαβῶν ἀνθρωπίνην, τὴν ἐν τῷ εἶδει θεωρουμένην, ἢ τὴν ἐν ἀτόμῳ ἀνέλαβεν;” (Leontius of Byzantium, *Epilysis* 1, ed. Daley 2017, 270.15-16).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, *Antirrheticus* III, 1, 15, *PG* 99, 396CD. For the background of this doctrine in the Christological controversies of the sixth century, see Krausmüller 2014; Baranov 2020a. For more details on the Iconophile response to the Iconoclastic concept of “man in general (ὁ καθόλου ἄνθρωπος)” assumed by Christ in the Incarnation, see Erisman 2017; Erisman 2018; Krausmüller 2018; Lourie 2019, 101; Tollefsen 2018, 60-67.

both natures including the full sets of substantial properties which become his own, not only *can we*, but *we must* confess the opposite substantial properties of his human nature. Thus, the unquestionable Trinitarian formula of the three consubstantial hypostases sharing divine nature with its immaterial, invisible, intangible, incircumscribable, etc. properties, implied a complete set of the opposite human properties, material, visible, tangible, and circumscribable, belonging to one and the same Christ, whose hypostatic properties and therefore the hypostasis, were revealed, named, and venerated on the icon despite the difference in material substance.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, it followed that those who denied the validity of that conclusion, had to inevitably disagree with either of the premises, and therefore side with the heretics of the past – Arians, if they rejected the first premise, or Monophysites if they rejected the second premise. Patriarch Nicephorus thus rebukes his Iconoclastic opponents who denied the circumscription of Christ:

As in the economy of the Incarnation, the natures are united in hypostasis, so in the Holy Trinity, the hypostases differ by their personal properties. As in the Holy Trinity, the hypostases are united by the sameness of nature, so in the economy of the Incarnation, natures differ by substantial difference of their properties. Therefore, just as in the Incarnation they [the heretics] do not recognize the distinguishing features of nature, which separate them from beings of a different nature, so in the Holy Trinity they should not at all allow for any distinguishing properties between the hypostases, which set apart the hypostases as considered to be of one and the same substance, from each other. And as they had disagreements about hypostasis then, they also have disagreements about nature now, for they do not see the difference in the distinctive property. What can I say to this? That if, according to their assumption, the flesh should not be circumscribable because of its union with the Word, in the other

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<sup>43</sup> “It is not a different hypostasis from that of Christ in his icon, but clearly it is the same hypostasis or character which, by the form of his appearance is revealed and venerated on the icon” (Theodore the Studite, *Letter to John the Grammarian*, ed. Fatouros 1992, 790.60-63). This doctrine is essential for St. Theodore the Studite: “when we venerate the icon of Christ, we venerate Christ Himself through one veneration [given] to both, which does not differ because of different natures, appropriating the opposites in virtue of the union of the same hypostasis” (Theodore the Studite, *PG* 99, 497C). Cf. the *Definition* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787): “The one who venerates the icon venerates the hypostasis of the person depicted on it” (ed. Lamberz 2016, 826.17-18). For this teaching of Theodore the Studite with more references, see von Schönborn 1986, 223-227; Bratu 2003, 339-341. T. Tollefsen disagrees with the hypostatic identity of the icon and prototype, arguing that these passages of Theodore the Studite should be understood not that the same hypostasis is *present* in the icon, but rather that the same hypostasis is *represented* on the icon (Tollefsen 2018, 123).

case [in the Holy Trinity] one has to arrive at similar absurdities, since there one must reason differently than in the case of the Incarnation.<sup>44</sup>

Theodore the Studite also used the Leontian system of relational oppositions against the accusation of the Iconoclasts that representing Christ on the icon only renders his human aspect and thereby “splits apart” his divinity and humanity in the manner of Nestorius:

For, as in in the Holy Trinity, that which constitutes the properties (τό ἰδιάζον) of the hypostases does not divide the single nature of divinity, but that which shares the commonality by nature is distinguished by hypostasis; in the Incarnation, on the contrary, that which constitutes the properties of nature does not divide the single hypostasis of God the Word, but that which shares the commonality by hypostasis is distinguished by nature. If division were introduced with circumscription which is a property of human nature, accordingly, here too, the Ungeneratedness, the Generatedness, and the Procession, which are the properties of the three hypostases, would divide the single nature; but, of course, they do not, although they are different from each other. Therefore, here, too, the incircumscribability of the divinity and circumscribability of humanity – although they are different from each other – [do not divide] the hypostasis of Christ.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Nicephorus of Constantinople, *Antirrheticus* I, 21, PG 100, 248CD. Patriarch Nicephorus was directly familiar with treatises of Leontius of Byzantium, quoting a passage from the *CNE* (ed. Daley 2017, 140.6-18) on the soul which is not circumscribed by the body but is a distinct entity, in the *florilegium* to his *Refutation of the Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia*, 61 (ed. Featherstone 1997, 102.8-103.22).

<sup>45</sup> Theodore the Studite, *Quaestiones aliquae propositae iconomachis*, 13, PG 99, 484CD, cf. *Antirrheticus* III, 4, 7, PG 99, 432AC). Cf. “Christ is called not only with a common noun (τῷ προσηγορικῷ) but also with proper name (τῷ κυρίῳ ὀνόματι) that separates him by the hypostatic properties (τοῖς ὑποστατικοῖς ἰδιώμασιν), from the rest of the people. This is why he is circumscribable... he is one of us, even though he is God, one of the Holy Trinity. In the same way as he is distinguished there from the Father and the Holy Spirit by the property of Sonship, he is also separated from all humans by the hypostatic properties and therefore he is circumscribable” (Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus* III, 1, 18-19, PG 99, 397D-400A). Cf. “the Logos himself, separated as Son and Logos by distinguishing characteristics from the common substance of Godhead, is not separated by the same marks from the humanity he shares in, but being distinguished by one set from the Father and the Spirit, and by another set from his Mother and from humans, he receives through these distinguishing characteristics of the ‘extremes’ his coherence and unity with himself, united and divided by the essential likeness of the ‘extremes’ and the essential difference of the ‘parts’; and realizing the difference in a way opposite to [the way] the ‘extremes’ [do] – if indeed in their case, the sameness of essence unites and the dif-

However, by applying the Leontian logic of relational unions and distinctions, Theodore the Studite went a step further. He includes the artificial image of Christ into the system of paired relationships at the levels of substance and hypostases, arguing that the sameness of divine substance shared by the Father and the Son, which makes them one God, at the level of *theologia*, in reversed order of paired relationships at the level of *oikonomia* entails the sameness of hypostasis for Christ and his image, which makes them one Christ despite the difference in material substrate:<sup>46</sup>

If, that which distinguishes the Son from the Father – and He is distinguished only by the property of Sonship (τῷ ὑἱκῷ ἰδιώματι), does not harm Him from being of one and the same substance and worship with the Father, that which distinguishes the image from the prototype – and it is distinguished by the definition of substance, does not harm it either from being one and the same likeness and worship with the prototype. As in the former case Christ differs from the Father by hypostasis, in that latter case he differs from his own image by substance.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the theological adaptation of the notions of substance and hypostasis from their original Trinitarian to a Christological context by Leontius of Byzantium, involving enhypostasized substance, distinction between the principle of substance and mode of existence, as well as “relational” ontology of unions and distinctions at the levels of substances and hypostases was adopted and reworked by Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus for articulating the Neo-Chalcedonian position in their Christological polemics. Furthermore, the Iconophiles of the Second Iconoclasm used the relational model of Leontius against the Iconoclastic Christology which claimed that general human nature without distinguishing features was assumed by Christ, leading to his incircumscribability. The use of the Leontian conceptual framework in support of the circumscribability of Christ, made it possible to postulate not only circumscribability and thus the depictability of Christ, but also the unity of his hypostasis and artificial image

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ference of hypostasis divides, while here the difference of essence divides and the sameness of hypostasis unites” (Leontius of Byzantium, *Solutiones*, ed. Daley 2017, 272.15-26, transl. *ibid.*, 273).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. “The prototype in the icon is not according to substance..., since the definition of nature (ἔρον τῆς φύσεως) in each of the two is different, but according to hypostatic resemblance which does not constitute another principle of definition (λόγος τῆς διορίσεως)” (Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus* III, 3, 1, PG 99, 420D, cf. *Letter* 57, ed. Fatouros 1992, 168.110-113). See also Krausmüller 2021, 357-364.

<sup>47</sup> Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus* III, 3, 7, PG 99, 424AB.

based on the unquestionable Nicean doctrine of consubstantiality of Persons in the Holy Trinity.

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