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## ПОЯСНЕННЯ «АНТИНОМІЇ» В ТЕОЛОГІЇ ВЛАДИМИРА ЛОССЬКОГО

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**Adnotacja.** Artykuł ujawnia treść pojęcia “antinomia” na podstawie prac teologa XX wieku Władimira Łosskiego. Termin ten jest rozpatrywany tylko w duchu teologicznym. W. Łoski nazywa teologię prawosławną “antinomiczną”, a pojęcie “antinomii” w jej systemie teologicznym ma wyłącznie charakter ontologiczny i niesie tylko pozytywną treść. Ma na celu podkreślenie tajemniczego charakteru dogmatów, ma formę teza + antyteza. Łoski analizuje szereg antynomii teologii prawosławnej (Jedyność i Trójedyność Boga, transcendencja i immanencja Boga, antynomia wiedzy o Bogu, jedność natury Boskiej i ludzkiej w Chrystusie). Według Łoskiego istnieje związek antynomiczny między teologią apofatyczną a katafaticzną. Autor wskazuje również na znaczenie stwierdzeń antynomicznych w teologii prawosławnej, a także na niebezpieczeństwo naruszenia równowagi między tymi stwierdzeniami.

**Słowa kluczowe:** teologia antynomiczna, przebóstwienie, poznanie Boga, dogmat, tajemnica, Trójca Święta, światło niewidzialne.

## THE CONCEPT OF ANTINOMY IN THE THEOLOGY OF VLADIMIR LOSSKY

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**Abstract.** The article explains the meaning of the concept of “antinomy” according to the works of the theologian of the 20th century Vladimir Lossky. The concept is considered in a theological context only. V. Lossky calls Orthodox theology “antinomian”, and in his theological system the concept of “antinomy” has an exclusively ontological nature and carries only a positive meaning. It is used to underline a mysterious character of dogmas and has a form of thesis + antithesis. Lossky analyzes a number of antinomies of Orthodox theology (the Unity and Trinity of God, the transcendence and immanence of God, the antinomy of knowledge of God, the union of the divine and human natures in Christ). According to Lossky, an antinomian link exists between apophatic and cataphatic theology. The researcher also points at significance of antinomian statements in Orthodox theology as well as at the danger of disturbing the balance between these statements.

**Key words:** Antinomian theology, deification, knowledge of God, mystery, Holy Trinity, invisible light.

## ПОНЯТТЯ «АНТИНОМІЯ» У БОГОСЛОВ'Ї ВОЛОДИМИРА ЛОСЬКОГО

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**Анотація.** У статті розкривається зміст поняття «антиномія» за працями богослова XX ст. Володимира Лоського. Термін розглядається лише в богословському ключі. В. Лоський іменує православне богослов'я «антиномічним», а поняття «антиномія» в його богословській системі має виключно онтологічний характер і несе лише позитивний зміст. Воно покликане підкреслити таємничий характер догматів, має форму теза + антитеза. Лоський аналізує низку антиномій православного богослов'я (Єдиності і Троїчності Бога, трансцендентності та іманентності Бога, антиномію Богопізнання, єднання божественної і людської природ у Христі). Згідно Лоського, антиномічний зв'язок існує між апофатичним і катафатичним богослов'ям. Також автор вказує на значення антиномічних тверджень у православному богослов'ї, а також на небезпеку порушення рівноваги між цими твердженнями.

**Ключові слова:** антиномічне богослов'я, обоження, богопізнання, догмат, тайна, Св. Трійця, незриме світло.

The term “antinomy” first appeared in legal theory and then found its way to philosophy. It acquired a theologian meaning due to works of I. Kant. Encyclopedia Britannica Online offers a philosophical interpretation of the concept, namely: **antinomy**, in philosophy, contradiction, real or apparent, between two principles or conclusions, both of which seem equally justified (Antinomy, 2017). According to modern researcher Alexander Kazarjan, antinomy in philosophy and theology means a contradiction between two logically sound statements (Казарян, 2000: 494). Antinomian statements are based on Revelation and mystical experience. A special feature of theologian antinomies is that they cannot be reconciled at the level of discursive reasoning. Orthodox theologians call for keeping the balance between elements of antinomy which are thesis and antithesis. For theology, although synthesis of antinomian statements is possible it does not lead to resolution of contradictions.

In 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries philosophers and religious thinkers started actively using the concept of antinomy, in particular, Priest Pavel Florensky, Prot. Sergey Bulgakov, Prot. John Meyendorff, Prot. Georgy Florovsky, St. Sophrony (Sakharov), Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware), Metropolitan John (Zizioulas), S.S. Khorunzhy, C. Yannaras, J.-C. Larchet and, naturally, V.M. Lossky.

Having such predecessors as his compatriot thinkers Pavel Florensky and Sergey Bulgakov who used the concept of antinomy in their works, V. Lossky contributed to understanding and development of the concept which he uses only in theologian meaning because, as he pointed himself, his works are practical theology, theology of experience and not a philosophical system in any case (Медведев, 1979: 6). His teaching is based on writings of Fathers of Church and in a certain sense it is an explanation and interpretation of the patristic thought. The works of Lossky are full of references to writings of the Great Cappadocians, St. Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Theodoret of Cyrus, St. Isaac of Nineveh (the Syrian), St. Maximus the Confessor, St. John of Damascus, St. Gregory Palamas and others.

Lossky is known for his fundamental works including *The Mystical Theology of Eastern Church*, *Dogmatic Theology* and a collection of essays *In The Image and Likeness of God* as well as for his own theologian theory based upon two mysteries, a mystery of God (the apophatic approach to God) and a mystery of man (mysticism of knowledge of God and deification of man).

So far there have been no studies focusing on an analysis of the concept of antinomy in the theology of V. Lossky and this makes this article relevant. The issue was only partly studied by some contemporary scholars like Priest Daniil (Goriachev), Nikolay Medvedev and A. Kazarjan.

At the same time Lossky is not simply using the concept of antinomy in his works, he also comprehends and explains it and even considers antinomianity (i.e. the existence of irrefutable antinomies) to be a specific feature of Christian theology.

#### ***Antinomian theology***

Antinomian theology – this is how Lossky refers to Orthodox theology – is articulated “by way of contrasting statements which are opposite but equally true” (Лосский, 2006: 588) [The translation of quotes into English was made by the author unless a quoted source is originally in English]. So, for Lossky an antinomy has the following form: *thesis + antithesis*. Maintaining the equilibrium between thesis and antithesis of an antinomy is necessary as it helps to stay in touch with reality of Revelation and to restrain from replacing the data of Revelation with notions of human philosophy. Accordingly, a possibility of reaching a *synthesis* as such does not solve an antinomy, to the contrary, it only makes it more acute. That means that synthesis is possible but it does not cancel an antinomy. Thus, Pavel Florensky sees as a symbol of an antinomy a caltrop, or *zhelezny rogul’ka* – “in its simplest form this is an iron object whose four radial branches are inscribed in a regular tetrahedron and have sharp serrated points resembling fish hooks. Each of the rods is about 3/4 *vershoks* long [1 *vershok* = 4.4 cm], and the angle between bars is 120 degrees... It is clear that however one throws this projectile it will always sit stably on three branches, while the fourth will stick upward with its sharp point” (Florensky, 2004: 589). This symbol signifies a struggle against excessive rationalism in theology.

Lossky points at an ontological nature of antinomy and, as Kazarjan puts it, “he does not narrow it down, as some other scholars do, to a contradiction of human mind with itself which inevitably brings about a threat of subjectivism inadmissible in dogmatic theology” (Казарян, 2000: 498). In order to grasp antinomian reality, one needs a religious feeling, will and intellect. God is transcendent and simultaneously immanent to the created world. Immanence of God makes it possible to name the transcendent. As long as God is transcendent, “we cannot think God in Himself, His Nature in His inmost mystery” (Медведев, 1979: 11). Lossky says that Christian theology does not experience jumps into “super-logic”, this is why it produces antinomies (Лосский, 1957: 59-61) and tries to solve them by way of “distinguishing” in God a single simple nature and multiple energies, a single simple nature and three hypostases.

This view of Lossky at Christian theology is based on teaching of Cappadocians, *Corpus Areopagiticum*, St. John of Damascus and St. Gregory Palamas. For instance, the author of *Corpus Areopagiticum* “contrasts the «unions» (ένώσεις) with the «distinctions» (διακρίσεις) in God» (Lossky, 1957: 72). The word “unions” relates to the nature of God in its mystery which is transcendent to the created; the word “distinctions” relates to multiplicity of energies of God which are immanent to the world. God reveals Himself through energies but His nature passes contemplation and knowledge; God differs in energies while staying simple in nature, He multiples by energies while keeping His unity. The teaching on transcendent and immanent existence of God is a foundation for appearance of other theological antinomies.

Lossky refers as to antinomian to the theological teaching on simultaneous unknowability of God and possibility of knowledge of God. Following the patristic tradition, he says that affirming the unknowability of God does not

mean agnosticism and refusal to know God. On the contrary, there is an affirmation of a special way of knowing which consists of communion with living God with the purpose of deification. God Himself may become known only in Revelation. “Thus theology will never be abstract, working through concepts, but contemplative: raising the mind to those realities which pass all understanding” (Lossky, 1957: 43). This is exactly why Christian truths are antinomian. This antinomian theology is in no way based on intellectual speculations, instead it relies on existential, experiential knowledge. Perception and verbal expression of such knowledge also requires the purity of life before Living God thanking to which the mind is “changed”, sanctified.

#### ***Antinomian Relation of Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology***

This question of the existence of an antinomian relation between the two ways of theology and of defining this relation as antinomian is raised by Archpriest John Meyendorff, Archpriest Sergey Bulgakov, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), M.S. Ivanov and also others. On antinomian relations of apophatic and cataphatic theology Lossky writes based on teaching of St. Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Gregory Palamas: “The starting point of the theology of St. Gregory Palamas is an antinomy between the knowable and the unknowable in God. This is an antinomy between two theological paths established by St. Dionysius the Areopagite: by affirmations (kataphatic) and by denials (apophatic)” (Лосский, 2006: 589).

According to Lossky, the form of antinomy in apophatic and cataphatic ways of theology looks like follows:

*Thesis:* «It is possible to know God with help of affirmative statements attributing to Him those perfections which we see in the created world: goodness, wisdom, life, love and existence» (Лосский, 2006: 589).

*Antithesis:* «It is also possible to know Him negatively, by apophatic way, by denying Him everything related to the sphere of existence because God exceeds the existence and He is above all and anything that may be named» (Лосский, 2006: 589).

Thus, if the first way, i.e. cataphatic, leads to some knowledge of God, then the second way, i.e. apophatic, leads to total ignorance of Him.

Antinomian *synthesis* of apophatic and cataphatic ways is in their unity for theology. Any other synthesis for theology as a science is impossible because it would result in making a single way or even in giving precedence to one way over the other. Referring to St. Gregory Palamas, Lossky says that the opposition of these two ways of theological thought and two kinds of theology cannot be cured by any coordination between them (Лосский, 2006: 589) because the antinomy between apophatic theology and cataphatic theology has its real ground in God just like all other antinomies have (Лосский, 2006: 590).

Lossky also draws attention to how Thomas Aquinas and Nicolas of Cusa considered this issue.

A follower of Areopagite thought and scholastic, Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) writes that there are no two ways of theology: «...cataphatic way and apophatic way may and must be coordinated and agreed, or, to put it more precisely, reduced to one way, to cataphatic way of positive theology: the way of negation and denial in such a case is nothing but an addition, a correction to the way of affirmation; its role is limited to an indication that all statements related to the Divine nature should be understood in some higher sense» (Лосский, 2006: 590).

Lossky notes that Catholic Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa (1401 – 1464) maintains a deeper thought on antinomy as compared to Thomas. For him antinomy «...of two theological ways (*cataphatic and apophatic* – M. A.) preserves all its significance: these are irreconcilable for the human mind but their opposition disappears in God» (Лосский, 2006: 590).

So, we see that for Lossky the apophatic theology and the cataphatic theology are in an antinomian relation which is not limited by the framework of intellectualism. The apophatic theology foresees the transformation of mind towards mysteries of Revelation and because of this it keeps the original antinomy of “perfect identity and no less perfect distinction in God, it does not try to delete antinomy and instead it is looking for a way to express it appropriately... to let “the truth set us free” from our human limitations” (Лосский, 2006: 615-616).

A modern researcher M.S. Ivanov notes: “Between the cataphatic way and the apophatic way of knowing God there is not a dialectic opposition, there is antinomian unity” (Иванов, 2017: 696). This unity of two ways was also acknowledged by Lossky.

#### ***Antinomy of Unity and Trinity of God***

For Lossky, the dogma of Holy Trinity is a paramount of Divine Revelation; according to him, it “is pre-eminently an antinomy” (Lossky, 1957: 46). The antinomy of Trinitarian dogma is a mystery of identity of One-Trinity.

*Thesis:* God is one (single Divine nature) “consubstantial”.

*Antithesis:* God is Trinity (there is three Divine hypostases, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit) – trinitarian or trihypostatic.

*Synthesis:* one Divine nature and three Hypostases.

Lossky says that Trinitarian theology expresses itself through the antinomy: God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are “one and united with Him (*God the Father* – M.A.) in division and divided with Him in Unity, however unusual this expression might seem, says Gregory the Theologian..., and Basil the Great would put his best efforts to demonstrate that there is nothing of quantitative nature in the Trinity (Лосский, 2006: 564).

In order to come to contemplation of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity and “to contemplate this eternal reality in all its wholeness, one needs to attain the goal set for us, that is, to reach the state of deification because, according to words of Saint Gregory the Theologian, “they should be successors of perfect light and contemplation of the Holy and Sovereign Trinity... those who absolutely unite with the perfect Spirit, and this, I believe, should be the Kingdom of Heaven.”” (Лосский, 2006: 376).

Our mind is weak and limited but according to Lossky «thought must be in continuous motion, pursuing now the one, now the three, and returning again to the unity; it must swing ceaselessly between the two poles of the antinomy, in order to attain to the contemplation of the sovereign repose of this threefold monad» (Lossky, 1957: 46).

***More Examples of Antinomy by V. Lossky***

Lossky underlines the antinomian nature of texts of the Holy Scripture. For instance: on the one hand, one should not give dogs what is sacred and cast pearls before pigs (Matthews 7:6), on the other hand, “there is nothing hidden that will not be made known” (Matthews 10:26; Luke 12:2) (Лосский, 2006: 676). There is another example: there are words told “in darkness”, whispered “in the ear”, “in houses” but in light these words will be preached upon the housetops (Matthew 10:27) (Лосский, 2006: 676-677). Lossky says that this is an indication of mysterious meaning of the Apostle Tradition, this is “wise economy of the Church which opens up the mysterious depths of its teaching only insofar as its explicit proclamation becomes a necessity” (Лосский, 2006: 676).

V. Lossky gives an original name to Beatitudes. In the tenth chapter of his book *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* he calls them “antinomies of Blissfulness” and while doing so he does not disclose the antinomian meaning of these precepts.

There are also examples of dogmatic antinomies in the works of Lossky.

*Antinomy of Transcendence and Immanence of God*

*Thesis:* We profess Divine simplicity.

*Antithesis:* God has nature and energy.

*Synthes:* “Energy is God Himself but beyond His nature” (Стойчев, 2019: 68).

*Antinomy of knowledge of God*

*Thesis:* Unknowability of God is a property of His nature.

*Antithesis:* Real knowledge of God may happen through the manifestation of Divine energies.

*Synthes:* “God, Who, therefore, unknowable by nature will become known in His energies” (Уэр, 2015).

*Antinomy of Unity of Divine and Human Natures in Christ*

*Thesis:* Jesus Christ is God.

*Antithesis:* Jesus Christ is a human being.

*Synthes:* There is two natures of Jesus Christ, divine and human, having one divine hypostasis, the Son of God.

*Antinomy of Contemplation of Invisible Divine Light*

Theology of light, or of Divine light is expressed by Lossky as a separate topic (Лосский, 2006: 430-433). He refers to Symeon The New Theologian and points that Symeon “says that we see this light and at the same time calls it “invisible light”” (Лосский, 2006: 431). The form of this antinomy looks like follows:

*Thesis:* We see Divine light.

*Antithesis:* Divine light is invisible.

*Synthesis:* Humans see invisible light.

Then Lossky explains that Divine light is an uncreated reality which is perceived by the whole human nature, by a human personality. Contemplation of Divine light is a meeting with God and, as Lossky notes with reference to Symeon the New Theologian, it is of no relevance if a man ascends to God or God descends to a man for the result is the same, the contemplation of Divine uncreated, invisible light.

*Significance of Antinomies for Christian Theology According to Lossky*

Lossky emphasizes the necessity of antinomies as strongly as possible: «antinomies, the more difficult to resolve the more sublime the mystery which they express» (Lossky, 1957: 43). Theology is in constant search for words which, when found, are best fit for explaining Christian truths; nevertheless, in this process it is necessary to always keep intact an antinomy which has already been expressed in the words of Divine Revelation. The task is not to eliminate antinomies by adapting them for understanding, but to change: «but of a change of heart and mind enabling us to attain to the contemplation of the reality which reveals itself to us...» (Lossky, 1957: 43). That is, *adapting antinomy for understanding* means solving it though a simple wording of two logic statements which are in contradiction towards each other, and according to Lossky this solution is impossible. It is impossible to attain logical reconciliation of two contradicting logical statements. It is necessary to ascend to another level of perception of Divine truths, up to the level of contemplation. *To direct a human being towards contemplation of Divine truths is the primary purpose of antinomian theology.* It is trying “...not to develop a system of concepts but to serve as support for the human mind contemplating divine truths. From every antinomian opposition of two ruthless statements stems a dogma, that is, a real distinction, real although unspeakable, ungraspable; it can be neither based on concepts nor proven in the course of reasoning as long as it is an expression of religious reality” (Лосский, 2006: 589).

We see that Divine Revelation is often marked with contradicting statements which build thesis and antithesis of antinomies, and Lossky stresses that this is not a theological problem or an evidence of fallibility or absurdity of Revelation, to the contrary, such contradictions must be detected and noted. “If we have to define these concepts (*dogmatic formulas* – M.A.) then we do it exactly in order to preserve antinomy, to prevent the human mind from breaking antinomy and falling into delusion which makes way to contemplation of divine mysteries by the method of primitive rationalism where concepts replace living experience. Antinomy, on the contrary, elevates the mind above the domain of concepts and focuses it on concrete data of Revelation” (Лосский, 2006: 589). A believing mind takes Divine truths as spiritual realities which are grasped with faith and contemplation of a sanctified mind.

Lossky insists that one cannot affirm one of two antinomian statements and deny the other because both statements belong to Revelation. Why is it so? For it is a source of heresy. As an example, Lossky takes Savely who was unable to state that “God is one and is not one – he saw only nature – and lost the idea of trinity of Persons...” (Лосский, 2006: 588) – this is a heresy of Unitarianism. Another extreme escape from the balance between the nature and Hypostases is found in a heresy of Tritheism.

The antinomian relation and its violation are clearly visible in a dispute between Latins and Greeks. As Lossky says, “the former try to establish that personal distinction in the aspect of ομοουσιος, that is, they rely on natural identity. The latter better understand the trinitarian antinomy – the antinomy of "ousia" and “hypostasis”, and taking into account the consubstantiality they glorify the oneness of the Father” (Лосский, 2006: 611). The triadology of Filioque destroys the main antinomy of the Trinity between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. Lossky compares this heresy to a descent into the plains of religious philosophy instead of holding on the pinnacle of theology.

**Conclusion.** A theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Vladimir Lossky does not just use the concept of “antinomy”, he analyzes it, emphasizes the necessity of antinomian statements in Orthodox theology and even calls this theology antinomian.

Antinomy is of exclusively ontological nature and expressed by way of contrasting opposite but equally true statements. A dogma is an example of antinomy. Christian dogmas are taken as antinomies by human mind.

Lossky points that a believer thinker should not seek the elimination of antinomian nature of dogmas by adapting them to understanding but he should himself change and transform in order to contemplate Divine reality which reveals itself in mystic experience. If antinomy suffers from a breach of balance between opposing statements or one of the two is deleted then there emerges a heretical teaching. Lossky gives examples of Biblical and dogmatic antinomies as well as examples of triadological heresies.

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