



## Christian Love and the freedom of the person

### **V. Bakouros**

*In the Christian faith, Love is not merely an emotion, a sentiment. It is far more than that! Given this fact, we shall present here an extract (the first part) of an article by the University teacher V. Bakouros that was published in the magazine “TREETO MAHTI” (December 2004 edition No.128, pages 22-26, with the general title “Socialistic Social Solidarity and Christian Love”).*

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#### **a) How “God is Love”**

The notion of **love** in reality constitutes the cornerstone of Christian thought, both at a dogmatic (theological) level as well as a social one. To be precise, it is not actually a notion, but an experience; and not only of mankind, but of God Himself! In John’s Gospel, we find the following, succinct definition of God: “**God is Love**”.

Unfortunately, the frequent repetition of this phrase and especially it’s mishandling by orators whose speeches proved to be inconsistent (to the practices that those words dictate), rendered the content of these words a coined expression. In this unique, affirmative definition of divinity that is recorded in the New Testament, John is actually providing the *existential way of the divine*, as a **community of free personae**.

However, given that man is a creation made “*in the image and the likeness of God*”, dogmatic theology cannot therefore be a dictatorial system of thought; it is essentially a form of **sociology**, because it underlies a **concept of man analogous to God** (proportionately of course), inasmuch as it is a free person who lives historically “in communion” with other free persons.

## **b) Love and Freedom. The philosophical ground of everyday speculation**

So, what is the concept of Love in John's above phrase, and what is its relation to the *essence* of God? Orthodox Patristic theology perceives love, **not as a simple expression of sentiments**, but as a voluntary experiencing of the divine personae of the Christian Trinity. Given that these personae have chosen love, **they come together as a unity. The God of Christianity is not One as a *unit*, but as a *unity*!** Every one of the divine personae with its particular distinctive features freely chooses to love the other two; it is in this way that "God is", that God "exists" as "one". Therefore, **the *essence* of the One divinity consists of love** as a personal experience, since it is through love that each of the divine personae is enraptured and united, thus constituting God as an inseparable whole.

**Freedom - in this specific, *existential relationship* - plays a leading role.** First of all, it constitutes a composing element of the persona, because the absence of freedom annuls self-government –responsibility- and leads to a state of bondage. Freedom may of course be a necessity, but freedom per se is not sufficient, because Satan is also free, per se.

At a spiritual level, the freedom of the persona –**while comprising an expression of its essence- does not actually guarantee it**, because it is nothing more than a façade when the persona is no longer self-confirmed through it. **If the freedom of the persona is limited to the boundaries that it alone defines, without involving other personae, it is led to self-enslavement and is eventually converted to "fate"**. The persona, being free to be what it wants, cannot "not be". In other words, it is obedient to a role that cosmic Order has pre-designated for it.

It is this futile type of freedom that the (atheist) existentialism (Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus) denounces, by moving away from it –as an existential element of man- to an "absolute nihilism".

Jean-Paul Sartre's quote is both characteristic and tragic: «*Man is condemned to be free. If he transcends his natural (essential) necessity, he is cancelled*».

## **Freedom and Divinity in Ancient Greek thought and the Fathers**

*The ancient Greek philosophers may have progressed significantly in their search for God; however, they finally reached a dead end. This dead end was the result of a "subjugated God", who was not the master of his own existence! And this is where the superiority of Christian revelation became evident; when God Himself –through our Fathers- clarified the solution to this problem.*

**This morph -of a subjugated divinity- did not of course worry all of the pre-Christian religions, because either those societies that believed in this did not have the necessary gnostic background to analyze such a speculation, or, because freedom did not constitute an organic part of those societies' lifestyle.**

But it did preoccupy the -rational or not- Hellenic philosophical Reason, especially that of Plato who, for the sake of solving this fundamental problem of divine self-definition transposed it to another level of speculation, but did not essentially solve it. Plato proposed that the gods are what they are, but within a framework ordained by Eimarmeni, otherwise known as the cosmic Destiny, or, more accurately translated, the *cosmic order-harmony*. In the light of such hermeneutics, the problem appears to be solved **gnostically, but not morally**. This theory takes the problem of "self-compulsion" and turns into a problem of "hetero-definition", thus multiplying subjugation. The nature of divinity is no longer defined by the compulsory element that its very essence imposes; instead, the essence itself is such (divine), because it has been so ordained by a superimposing factor that is above the gods themselves: Destiny.

This ontological problem is not only theological in its essence but also philosophical, given that **the way in which man is seen to perceive God is directly influenced by the way in which man perceives himself and is led into self-understanding.**

The Hellenic (or Hellenic-speaking) Fathers of the first centuries (Athanasius the Great, Cyril of Alexandria, Vasileios the Great, Gregory of Nyssa) and even the heretics (Origen, Theodore Mopswestias) immediately perceived the criticality of the problem. If they were to strive for a new *anthropology* through a new Community (the Church), they had to previously provide such a solution to Plato's philosophical impasse, that would first convince gnostically **and thereafter be selected as a living experience.**

They naturally used the gnostic tools of Hellenic rumination by selecting the tradition of Aristotle, whose normative methods provided the prerequisites for safer conclusions.

Based on the Aristotelian speculation regarding the Essence of beings, they started by **distinguishing between the Essence and the Persona in the God of Christianity**, by viewing the persona not as a simple expression of the essence, but as a logical proof of it. Given that the essence of God is inaccessible gnostically, the only thing that **man can speculate on, is the persona of God**, since it was presented voluntarily, within History. For man, God exists because He is a Persona, not because He is an Essence.

Thus, by theologically preserving the essence of divinity from the scandal of its enclosure in the finite human mind, they formulated a **theological speculation with the form of a philosophical system and indeed, based on the Hellenic Word**. This system was an *ontological* one as regards the essence of man and *existential-moral-*

*gnosiological* as regards God and Man.

Thus, philosophical thought from then on was rendered mainly Aristotelian, and not because the Fathers weren't familiar with the earlier Plato or the pre-Socratic philosophers. On the contrary, it was precisely because they had embraced in depth the Platonic system, that they had perceived its gnostic impasse and had striven to overcome it. To the Fathers, Aristotelian thought was not looked upon as a mere hermeneutic tool (which in itself was by no means negligible, as a scientific enterprise); it was used as a construction tool, for the formulation of a new theological perception (of God), as well as a new philosophical stance (for Man).

Love now became a philosophical notion instead of a vague sentiment, without however losing its emotional weight. It is worth noting that **the noun for 'Love' (Greek=Ἀγάπη - Agape) is used in Greek literature for the first time** by Christian thought, as a derivative of the verb "agapo" which was already encountered in Homer's work (Odyssey, v.289). It is also worth noting that, during the first Christian usage of this term, it had already acquired a social content: In the first years of Christianity, the common meals of the faithful were called "Agapes". The contextual term "eros" is closer related to the *corporal* realization of the sentiment of love. It is used by Homer (Odyssey 212) and in all of his references or interpretations he uses it to denote the carnal attraction and the sentiment that underlies it. This is the kind of activity that is latent in the homonymous God that is so characteristically portrayed in the Hellenistic years mainly.

In evangelical terminology, the word "agape" was preferred, as being a more general term and less dependent on bodily functions, hence easier to relate to God, who is "spirit".

Love, therefore, is -for divine personae- a spontaneous expression, an act of communion between them. It is spontaneous, in the sense that it is freely chosen by each persona, because it is **not imposed by God's essence**, since that essence per se cannot "have" any volition. Volition presupposes the procedure of self-defining and God as essence "cannot" be contra-distinguished with anything else so that it can define itself, as Aristotle teaches.

To be more specific, God's essence is pre-eternal, beyond time, and it cannot be registered in full, in any dialectic relation to something "other", since there is nothing analogous, or similar, or opposite to it. This is the very source of "being". Self-defining, however, presupposes a point of reference – but, a point of reference besides this source cannot exist without eliminating it, since it would then exist as the "something" that would be "beyond" God. This is the familiar (Aristotelian) argument of "the third person", with which the philosopher opportunely undermined the philosophical prestige of the Platonic theory of Ideas.

This was the same cogitative means that was used by the Fathers in their ontological perception of God. This doesn't mean they manufactured an idea of God. The issue was not to create a rational theological system. Patristic thought is not an original

philosophical composition. It is an interpretational enterprise. It was necessary to rationalize -as much as was possible- the Logos of God as recorded in the Gospels, so that He can become more perceptible and therefore experienced. So they used the only worthy philosophical instrument of their time: the Hellenic Word.

The fruit of this enterprise was the introduction – or, rather, the invocation- of the divine personae. In fact, the Cappadocian Fathers [related the term “persona” with the term “hypostasis”](#), by suggesting (on the basis of the available and versatile Aristotelian terminology) that the “persona” is that which provides “hypostasis” (existence) to the essence.

If, therefore, the essence of God has no volition (with our noetic measures), the **personae of God** do have volition, because they define themselves, within a process of relations of each one to the other.

Therefore it is their volition to be such personae. So far, God “has succeeded” – through the Fathers- in being a “*necessary being*”, that is, a being that is subjugated to necessity (with regard to its essence) and free (with regard to its persona), thus overcoming the Platonic impasse of the slave (of Destiny) God.

But it still hasn’t attained unity, thus allowing for the potential of polytheism to appear.

This ontological problem was solved by the Fathers, with the invocation of the existential dimension of Love (Agape), given that the divine personae willingly –of their own free volition- love one another and are thus *in communion* with each other. “In communion” does not imply ordinary “communication”, but a “co-existence”, and, in the case of God, “communion” is the unifying factor of the one essence, since God “exists” in the form of personae and not of essence.

The immense ontological upheaval that was brought about by the Fathers with the introduction of the **concept of “Agape”** as an existential category in the arsenal of Hellenic philosophical Reason, **was that the essence (necessity) exists in the manner that the persona chooses and it is not that which defines the existence of the persona**, since it (the essence) “cannot” exist without the persona, as it alone does not have the “volition” to exist.

## Love and Triunity

*When we Christians say: “God is Love”, we mean it literally, because it is God’s will, that He exist as a loving community of personae.*

*It is with His self-willed love, that God Himself defines His own existence.*

Directly dependent on the existential-personal dimension of Love, is the *dogma of triunity*. The term “**Dogma**” does not apply to something “**inexplicable**” (as we shall see further down), but to something “**rudimentary**”. To be precise, it signifies the “**rationalizing of something that cannot be expressed**”; a rationalizing that founds the gnostic edifice.

If God –as an absolute essence– had only one persona, then that persona could not exist independently of the essence, and subsequently would not be able to be in communion with it existentially, through Love.

*If the beyond-time and non-finite essence of God were expressed (existentially) through one persona only, then **that persona would have been obliged to acknowledge it** (the essence) out of necessity, otherwise it would be abolishing itself. Furthermore, the persona would also be incapable of loving the essence, because it would - inevitably- be in an eternal co-existence with it, ontologically as well.*

Therefore, on the basis of Aristotelian logic, what would the single persona of the divine be contradistinguished with existentially (in order to define itself), if the essence alone were the “other reigning factor”? We can see how this would have meant a compulsory relationship, and not a relationship of freedom, of Love.

The problem of *a God subjugated to Fate*, which was previously an ontological problem, is posed once again - but now as an existential problem - and cannot be solved. Triunity (the co-existence of three personae) solves this problem of a *servant God*, because the three personae define themselves individually and each other, and they also freely choose to love, to exist in communion with each other, thus giving that same divine essence a hypostasis. At an ordinary ontological level, this issue appears impossible to solve.

Love, therefore, in Christian theology and life theory, is not a simple sentiment. It is an existential category, which **defines that very concept and experience of God, and even further, the very concept and experience of man.**

If God exists in this manner because He loves, then man also is understood-fulfilled in this manner, and not in any other, because he loves. When this does not occur, man is self-annulled.

## Love and the human community

*The Christian conception of God as a Trinity solves the ancient problem of divinity subjugated to its fate and “allows” God to transcend His essence (and consequently the fate that “compels” Him to be God), since the Personae of the Trinity freely choose to exist in that manner. Similarly, man as a Persona can transcend his own “essence” and freely choose the manner that he wants to exist.*

*This interpretation – which clearly has a Hellenic philosophical background and has rooted deep inside Orthodoxy – transcends the “bloodline” ideologies that want the essence to also determine the purpose and thus frees man of his descent, his trends and his fate, without overlooking their significance however.*

*Besides, this is why Christianity has not adopted any social titles of nobility, aristocracy, etc., and it is for this same reason, that in Greece’s Orthodoxy there is no room for traditions related to “sacred genealogical lines”, or “Holy Blood”, or hereditary Monarchies and Orders that defend such hereditary rights, whereas all of the aforementioned are in full bloom, to this very day, in the West.*

Love, as we saw previously, is **not so much an esoteric condition of the human self**, as it is **an externalizing, from the self (the “me”) towards the other person (the “you”)**. This externalizing is not a mere verbal expression; it is an **act** of love towards the other person, since it justifiably has a social character. **If there is no act** (of love), **then there also cannot be any love involved**, because in moral philosophy, the «γίγνεσθαι» (= “becoming”) logically precedes the «εἶναι» (= “being”), since the former proves the existence of the latter, whereas the latter – even if subjected to change – does not induce any changes to the “me” and the “you”, unless it is implemented. Therefore, if a Christian loves only with words, without **acts** of love, then according to Saint John the Damascene, that person loves in the same way as Lucifer, because he too speaks of love, but doesn’t enforce it...

The Christian community (= the Church) is different to the other ones, because in it, the motive, communal power and the connective force of its structure is Love –both towards God and towards fellow man- according to the [model of the Trinity](#). Man offers love (“eros”) towards God, and love (“agape”) towards fellow man. Love of God is expressed through piety, while love of fellow man is expressed through **philanthropy** (altruism, solidarity, etc.)

The gnomon for one’s love of God is the *awareness of sacrifice*, since, no matter how much man may offer to God, he offers far less by comparison to what he receives.

The gnomon for one’s love towards fellow man is *equality*, because without it, subjugation will ensue. Equality does not mean simulation; it is for this reason that Christians acknowledge the hierarchy of the state, except that they acknowledge it as a functional and not a physical role.

**To a Christian, the acknowledgement of “aristocracy” – with all of its**

**appurtenances – reflects social decadence**, or, to be more precise, it is an oppressive imposition of the *futile* upon History; and, given that it has become obsolete, it is also something infernal.

Consequently love – in its social dimension – constitutes an **act** that confirms equality, and in practical terms, it is addressed to all of its community members as an overall reinforcement; however, **its aim is to mend social impoverishment, which often hinders the establishment of equality because of the uneven distribution of wealth.**

This uneven distribution is corrected ( or, should be corrected ) through the initiatives of the wealthy, by equalizing the poor with themselves, in order to render them their equals.

**To Christianity, imposing upon the wealthy to contribute towards a financial equilibrium (through taxation for example) has no moral benefits, because – despite its practical outcome- it does not lead to salvation**, in other words, to a union with God; any kind of ‘contribution’ should be an act of personal choice, **a verification of one’s personal freedom....**

## **Christianity, Marxism and Love**

*Social struggles that have become instituted, chiefly after the appearance of Socialism, have indeed contributed significantly to the raising of people’s standard of living, thus pressing societies to continuously struggle for a better way of life. Nevertheless, Christianity points out that at the same time, we must not cease to strive to cure the uneven distribution of wealth that is imposed by initiatives on the part of the “wealthy”.*

*The compulsory demand for the wealthy to contribute to the financial equalization (e.g., through taxation) has no ethical gravity in the eyes of Christianity, because, despite its practical results, it does not necessarily contribute towards the creation of free and moral Persons, whose actions confirm their personal freedom...*

The confusion between Marx’s social theory and the corresponding Christian theory was **initially an intentional act for the misleading of the popular masses**, so that they would support the political powers which aimed at materializing communist objectives. An attempt was made, to present the communist society as a structure resembling the first Christian societies. In other words, Communism was perceived as a social ideology of Christianity, while the Church represented a decadent realization of the Christian spirit, because of its functional associations with the authorities (i.e., the feudal or urban ones).

The correlation – or, more accurately, the extortionary coinciding - of Christianity



and Communism had been prepared by the movement of *utopian Socialism*, which was more like a sermon of protest against the papist legalistic mentality, and less of a strictly political system. This is why it first appeared with its center in France, where the relations between the Church and the State were problematic from the period of the French Revolution onwards.

On examining matters from a philosophical standpoint, we would furthermore point out with sobriety that, as a system of positive thought, interpretation and guidance in the history of mankind, **Marxism did not place Man at its center**, and that is why it never formulated any anthropology equivalent to, or at least as complete as, Christianity. Love, therefore, as an emotional term, is absent from Marxism. There is a *social solidarity* of course; but, being something practical, it has no moral character, because quite simply, according to Marxism, History does not comprise a moral achievement, since it **is not the product of the selections made by individual persons, but by the impersonal social powers**.

The interest that K. Marx and the pursuant communist practice (political, administrative, economic) showed towards the socially weak is often highlighted, thus creating the fundamental misunderstanding that –apparently- Marxist thought is “humanistic”.

In reality, Marxism has no organic ideological association with “humanism” as an ideological current. This movement (Humanism) comprises an expression of the urban spirit and reflects the world-image and the people-image which, during the Renaissance, the upcoming bourgeois class counterpoised against the old, feudal order. In this counterpoising, it had utilized a warped notion of the Hellenic-Roman civilization, precisely for the purpose of serving the new correlated interests (which was correctly pointed out by K. Marx in his studies).

Himself a bourgeois, K. Marx made an attempt at class self-criticism, when formulating a new philosophical theory whose purpose was to overthrow the ideological edifice of the bourgeois society. In fact, through this same ideological subversion, he also strove for social change by abolishing the (unequal) bourgeois society and replacing it with a *class-less* society of communist equality.

As bearer of this change, Marxist thought selected the *working class*, because it was to be the recipient of the benefits of this change. With this new placement of purpose, his famous words that “*the work of philosophy was until now the interpretation of the world; from now on, its work is to change it*” are fully comprehended. So, the motive behind the favour that Marxism shows towards the working class is not philanthropy or a love for the oppressed workers; it is only because this social sub-stratum comprises the ultimate instrument for the realization of this Marxist, chiliastic goal.

This goal **shifted the traditional philosophical center, from Man to Society**. This philosophical system – dialectic materialism – after selectively assimilating a variety of elements from preceding philosophical schools, moved on to a subversive philosophical section that differentiates it and fences it off, against all others.

K. Marx apothegmatically introduced material as something of value in the realm of moral philosophy, by regarding that the “*historical ‘being’ precedes human conscience*”. This precedence does not have a chronological inference, only an inference of worth. In simpler words, it means that the laws that govern the course of history (positive, not moral laws) precede the laws governed by conscience. **Therefore, the human persona as the center of society is cancelled, and history as an act of humankind is rescinded.** The end of history’s course is “*social prosperity*”, but to this, Marx gives a material hypostasis.

**To Marxist thought, prosperity means a society that has utilized the productive powers of nature in the most beneficial (to nature) way, so that the equilibrium between them, which was upset by man, can be restored. We can therefore understand how - according to Marxist thought - the human persona that is self-governed and self-defined offers negative services to history, since it – apparently- causes interference in the (natural) relationship that we described between society and Nature. It is in this radically negative view of the human persona, that the huge difference lies, between Marxism and the preceding materialistic philosophical systems (for example Feuerbach’s). Pre-Marxist materialism regards man as a material value. K. Marx abolishes Man, and elevates Material as a value. Since the historical “being” precedes human conscience, then it has no need for existence, as the laws that govern this “being” are formulated in its absence, by society’s natural, historical necessity.**

Undoubtedly, the social measures that this system of interpretation and world-changing involves, present exceptional similarities to those of many other systems. For example, social equality, the distribution of labour, etc., were also measures foreseen in Plato’s Republic and in Aristotelian political thought, as well as in Christian communities. This doesn’t mean however, that their sociology is analogous to Communism’s. In all of these systems, the social measures were dictated by the human persona that selected them freely, in order to realize a goal much higher than material prosperity: VIRTUE, according to the meaning that every system gave to it. In Marxism, both the personal motive, as well as the goal, are absent.

Consequently, Communism “*with a human face does not exist*”. There is a Communism with a “*human mask*”, which we must remove, if our purpose is to select ideologies that are not only respectable, but also self-conscious ones. This point is of immense significance, because millions of people became passionately organized within the communist movement - but unfortunately not consciously – and many of them sacrificed their lives, thus promoting the Marxist principles into moral values superior to their lives, when in fact those very “values” were founded on the underestimation of the human person’s potential to choose and to set down moral values.

## Marxist practice and Christian Love

*For Marx, the support shown towards the Working Class was not an act of philanthropy or of social justice, only of social necessity. This is why it doesn't have a moral character, but merely a mechanistic one.*

It may be widely known, that K. Marx and his descendants wittingly fought against not only organized religion, but religiosity as well, considering them to be displays or indications of historical decadence. They actually theorized that religion was an ideology for the manipulation of the people to the callings of the powers that be. The famous expression “Religion is the opium of the people” that is attributed to Marx but was in fact coined by the atheist theologian V. Bauer, successfully portrays the Marxist perception that we just outlined; however, it doesn't adequately explain the aggressive policy of Marxist dialectics towards the phenomenon of religion.

To Marx, religion is an ideology; in fact, it is a reactionary-anachronistic ideology. This error in methodology that the Marxist School (Marx, Engels, etc.) pursued is quite possibly attributed to the protestant influences that K. Marx absorbed from the German society and the historical experiences of the theocratic structure –especially of Austria-Hungary- that he had studied in depth.

The term “ideology” in Marxist terminology is used in a derogatory sense, and it implies “*a sum of ideas that do not reflect reality, and are used to conceal the historical truth*”. According to Marx, ideology as a product of conscience is rescinded by the evolution of history, which is something inevitable, given that it is executed by natural laws. Thus, the natural evolution of society abolishes religion, which – amongst its other ideologies- is the most persistent, because it is the most traditional and is based on the ignorance and the weaknesses of the populus. To the Marxist perception of life, faith (and moreso the Christian faith) is an indication of defeat, an inability to confront life's difficulties with one's own means, a resorting to a divine super-ego that covers the shortages of the personal ego. A Marxist has no need of Christian love, because he is assured that the progress of history is governed by positive laws.

The fact that Marxism itself ended up an ideology also, was something that Marx didn't live to see ( and would have naturally condemned ), because his theory is essentially an interpretation of a “development” that would be realized as a “fact”, regardless of the personal convictions of people, since a person's conscience is totally subject to historical-natural laws. That is why it is of no significance if workers are benefited and the rich (for example) are killed; because, in both cases, they are not providing a service to justice, but to the evolution of history. Both these practices are equally laudable, when, through them, the social benefit is promoted – as of course interpreted by the analytical Marxist model. Personal, moral responsibility is non-existent, since man is obeying an irrefutable law. His obligation is to promote it

sooner.

Marx is especially condemnatory towards Christianity, because opposite Islam, it overthrows (or tries to overthrow) in vain according to Marx, the historical course using Christ as a model-figure. Love, as a motive for social intervention, is not only futile for Marx; it is actually harmful. To begin with, it makes the person addicted to intervening in the social flow of affairs, independent of historical laws; moreover, however, because it becomes manifest amongst the unfortunate, who are judged by moral criteria as being unfortunate, and thus contradicting the social Darwinism that Marxism embraces, i.e., in the process whereby the fittest prevails, on the basis of the natural laws that govern the function of society. This is also the reason that K. Marx was totally opposed to the Hellenic Revolution of 1821.

For Marx, the support shown towards the Working Class was not an act of philanthropy or of social justice, only of social necessity. This is why it doesn't have a moral character, but merely a mechanistic one. Thus, the cure for poverty is not sought because the socialist world theory foresees mercy, but because poverty as a phenomenon hinders the smooth historical and cultural progress of society. It is therefore not the moral sense of justice, but necessity that imposes the specific "philanthropic" provisions in the social system that Marxism evangelizes.

According to Marx, the interpretation of *historical necessity* is dependent on **party members**, whose gnomon is –naturally– his own theory. We shouldn't therefore be surprised, that the most heinous communist leader, Joseph Stalin, was simultaneously the friendliest of all towards the Church. This doesn't mean he was a believer, (despite the fact that this education was ecclesiastic, as he had graduated from the ecclesiastic college of Tiflis). When World War II coincided with his rule, the rallying together of the Russian people in order to confront the Nazi onslaught imposed this stance of friendliness, since it was the only way to reinforce the defences of the land of the Soviets. This same opportunist interpretation imposed on the Communist Revolutionaries during the Civil War in Greece a respect towards the popular religious faith, in order to whet **the misunderstanding between the social message of equality in Christian love, and the Marxist practice of a mechanistic, class-less society.**

**Translation by A. N.**