

4. The Distinction between God's Essence and Energy: Gregory Palamas' idea of Ultimate Reality and Meaning

1. INTRODUCTION

In presenting St. Gregory Palamas and his distinction between God's Essence and Energy, we hope to share with URAM readers and researchers his mystical notion of Ultimate Reality and Meaning. Our goal will be achieved if this presentation can expand their understanding of the experience of God, and, in particular, of the possibility of having a mystical union with God.

Many in the more rational West are not familiar with the teaching of this Eastern saint. It is also true to say that the Eastern mystical heritage does not seem to be widely understood even among the Orthodox (cf. Halleux, 1973, 441-442). Because we are dealing here with a permanent mystical treasure of the universal Church (Meyendorff, 1983, x), the discovery or rediscovery of Palamas would be to our benefit.

It is our hope, too, that the following brief treatment of Palamas and his distinction might help to shed some light on one of the most serious obstacles between the two mainstreams of Christian tradition (Coffey, 1988, 329; *Istina*, 1974, 257). Historically the most serious of these obstacles had to do with the '*Filioque*' ('and the Son') addition to the original creedal formula by Western Christianity. According to Western Christians the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, as witnessed in the earliest Creeds.

The arguments over the '*Filioque*' question continue, but it has been superseded by the topic of this article. For the majority of Orthodox theologians in Europe and North America, the heart of the doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas is 'the real distinction in God of the essence and the (uncreated) energies', and this had become for them the key to the theological dispute between the Orthodox against Catholicism, replacing the '*Filioque*' question as the most serious obstacle in the way of union between the two Churches.

2. LIFE OF ST. GREGORY OF PALAMAS

2.1 *Constantinople*

St. Gregory Palamas was born c. 1296, the first-born of a noble family in Constantinople, and he died as the Archbishop of Thessalonica in 1359. Palamas was recognized as a saintly monk and a mystical theologian by four local non-ecumenical Councils held at Constantinople during his life time or shortly after his death in 1341, 1347, 1351, and 1368 (Ware, 1975, 129). He became a major teacher of Byzantine Christianity. In our own day Palamas' status in Eastern Christianity has been rediscovered by Orthodox theologians, and he has rightly been restored to a central position (*Ibid.*) Further, St. Gregory Palamas in the East can be compared with St. Thomas Aquinas in the West (LaCugna, 1992, 181).

2.2 *Early Secular Life and Education*

Gregory Palamas belonged to an aristocratic family of Asia Minor who emigrated to Constantinople at the end of the 13th century. His father was Constantine Palamas, a pious senator in the immediate entourage of Emperor Andronicus II who entrusted Constantine with the education of his grandson, the future Emperor Andronicus III.

Gregory was brought up in a family atmosphere of imperial loyalty, and received an excellent education in Christian piety centred on monastic prayer. When his father died in 1303, Gregory was seven and Andronicus II took over the care of the youngster's education. At home in the palace Gregory seemed to have established a solid friendship with the future Andronicus III who was exactly his age and later gave Palamas much needed support (Meyendorff, 1974a, 28).

Under the Emperor's patronage, Gregory attained great success both in grammar and in rhetoric. Pursuing the studies of physics, logic, and the science of Aristotle, he was admired by his teachers. Andronicus II intended that Palamas should become a high officer in the State (cf. Meyendorff, 1974a. 28-29).

At the same time, Palamas came under the influence of certain monks with whom the family was acquainted, especially with the mystically-minded metropolitan Theoleptus of Philadelphia. He gave Palamas instruction in holy sobriety and revealed the mysteries of mental prayer even while the latter was still occupied with worldly affairs (Philokalia, 1979, 382). Finally, at about the age of 20, Palamas decided to enter formal monastic life. He also persuaded all the other members of his family who were still alive, his mother, two sisters, and two brothers, to do likewise (Meyendorff, 1983, 5).

2.3 *Monastic Formation and Theological Education*

The second stage of Palamas' life lasted about 18 years. It began when he entered Mount Athos in 1316 as a novice and lasted until 1334 when he started to promote the traditional monastic hesychasm or practice of sacred quietude. In Greek, *hesychia* means quietude (Meyendorff, 1983, 1). Thus Palamas began a prolific literary career as he became the great defender of hesychasm, a preacher of grace (Meyendorff, 1974b, 7), and the doctor of the Uncreated Energies (Hussey, 1974, 22). In retrospect, none of this would have been possible without his early formative years.

Theoleptus of Philadelphia continued to influence him as a spiritual master. It seems that there were five other persons who helped shape his life and thought. The first was a hesychast monk called Nicodemus who directed Palamas as his spiritual father for his first three years at Mt. Athos in 'fasting, sleeplessness, spiritual vigilance and uninterrupted prayer' (Meyendorff, 1974a, 33). Palamas' second spiritual father was also a hesychast monk called Gregory the Great (not the Sinaite of the same name) who directed Gregory for two years at Glossia, on the north-western slope of Athos (cf. Meyendorff, 1974a, 33-34). The third person of great influence on Palamas seemed to be Isidore, a friend and a young layman, the future Patriarch. Apparently, Isidore's spiritual father, Gregory the Sinaite, passed on to him the great monastic virtues and insights (Meyendorff, 1974a, 34-35).

Two other influential forerunners to Palamas, apart from Theoleptus, were Gregory of Cyprus, Patriarch of Constantinople, from 1283 to 1289, and Anthonasius I, Patriarch of Constantinople from 1289-1293 and from 1303-1309. The former was noted for his theological Orthodoxy (cf. Meyendorff, 1974a, 13-16) and the latter for his monastic spirituality and diplomacy in practical affairs (cf. Meyendorff, 1974a, 20-25). In 1326, at the age of 30, Palamas was ordained a priest at Thessalonica at his friends' insistence.

He, then, retired with other monks to a hermitage on a mountain near Beroea. He stayed there for five years and returned to Mt. Athos and settled in the hermitage of St. Sabbas. His schedule at both places were rigorous: five days a week in total isolation, practicing silence and prayer of the mind. But on Saturday and Sunday he came out to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and talk with brothers in the hermitage. That was the type of life which had been highly recommended by the hesychast tradition since its beginning. It was a balance between solitude and community life,

taking the advantages of both to attain a harmonious development of the spiritual life (Meyendorff, 1974a, 37-38).

2.4 Later Religious Life and Thought

The third stage of Palamas' life consisted in his subsequent monastic life, religious thought and literary writings.

2.41 Outline of Palamas' Later Life

Palamas' later life lasted about 25 years, from 1334 when he began writing at the age of 38, until 1359 when he died of an intestine paralysis at the age of 63. He was named Archbishop of Thessalonica in 1347 (cf. Hunter, 1967, 873-874). This was a period of great external crises threatened by the invading Turks and Serbs, severe internal conflicts caused by top imperial and ecclesiastic figures, and ferocious intellectual debates conducted between the rational humanist and mystical hesychasts. Palamas had to employ every bit of his earlier education in diplomacy and in hesychastic prayer through it all, in order to achieve the results he did.

For Palamas this later period of his life was above all marked by his battles with the anti-hesychastic humanists, in particular with Barlaam, the Calabrian philosopher, as well as with Gregory Akindynos and Nicephorus Gregoras, two Byzantine humanists. In 1341 a council in Constantinople rebuked Barlaam, upon which he left Byzantium (Meyendorff, 1974a, 55). In 1347 and particularly in 1351, two more councils endorsed the theology of Palamas. They refuted the anti-hesychastic arguments of Akindynos and Gregoras whose general position more or less coincided with that of Barlaam (Lilienfeld, 1986, 284).

Palamas was canonized by the synod of Constantinople in 1268. To this day his relics have been venerated at the cathedral of Thessalonica. In the following hymn, the Orthodox Church chants to St. Gregory Palamas in the liturgy of the second Sunday of Lent, in veneration of the saint who, several decades before the fall of Byzantium, integrated hesychasm — Eastern Christianity's ancient tradition of contemplative monasticism — into a doctrinal synthesis (Meyendorff, 1974b, 7):

O light of Orthodox, teacher of the Church, its confirmation!

O ideal of monks and invincible champion of theologians!

O wonder-working Gregory, glory of Thessalonika and preacher of grace!
Always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved!

2.4.1 *Essence of Palamas' Religious Thought*

Palamas' hesychastic mysticism cannot be claimed to be the only Orthodox mysticism which has taken many forms throughout history and does so even today. But he 'can be called a master of orthodox mysticism inasmuch as his work transcends the limits of one school of spirituality and renews in its deepest essence the life of the Christian Mystery' (Meyendorff, 1974b, 7). The avowed goal of the hesychasts is the unitive deification or *theosis*, through their union with Christ as initiated by Him (cf. Meyendorff, 1983, 8; *Triads* III.i.15; Mantzaridis, 1984). Oftentimes, after a long repetition of the Jesus Prayer (i.e., 'Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner!') in holy *hesychia*, the pious believer is given an affirming sign of this prayer of the heart through a living vision of God's Uncreated Light.

And this Light is identical with the 'Taboric Light' seen by Christ's disciples at His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Hansbury, 1979, 1660). This real experience of God's Uncreated Light, Energy, Power or Grace (cf. Synodical Tome of 1351, 46; Karmiris, 1960, 408; Ware, 1975, 130-131) is regarded by Orthodox mystical hesychasm to be the result of our unmediated union or communion with God Himself who has made it truly possible for us to partake in such an experience, both on earth and in Heaven (Meyendorff, 1983, 37; *Triads* I.iii.20). Palamas stated this doctrine as follows (Lossky, 1974, 61; Krivocheine, 1938-1939, 198):

He who participates in the divine energy... becomes himself, in a sense, light; he is united with the light and with the light he sees in full consciousness all that remains hidden for those who have not this grace; for the pure of heart sees God [the light].

Acting as the authentic spokesman for hesychasm, St. Gregory was simply safeguarding a traditional Eastern spirituality of mystical prayer which has existed since the 4th century (cf. Krivocheine, 1938-1939, 207-208). Through the distinction between God's Essence and Energy, Palamas desired to solidify an objective theological foundation to justify this practice which was a prayer possibility not only for monks, but also for all Christians (Meyendorff, 1983, 8). The essence of Palamism is

merely a theological expression of that fundamental truth concerning the real intimate union between God and us established by Christ's incarnation.

2.4.3 *Palamas' Writings*

The first work of Palamas was the *Life of Saint Peter the Athonite* and his second the long *Treatise on the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (Meyendorff, 1974a, 39). However, beginning with his correspondence with Barlaam in 1336 at the age of 40, most of his literary productions were devoted to defending hesychasm. Besides the nine treatises in the *Triads*, he wrote ten treatises against Akindynos and five against Gregoras.

Palamas was also the author of small tracts, letters, and a poem of 618 iambic verses. Six of his compositions were against Latin theology. In addition, he wrote apologetic tracts, a commentary on the Ten Commandments, as well as 150 chapters (henceforth *Capita 150*) on spiritual practices, ethics, and theology. A homiliarium with 63 pieces was published soon after his death (Hunter, 1967, 874; for a more comprehensive classification of Palamas' works, see Meyendorff, 1984, 85-90; Jugie, 1932, 1743-1750).

The essential meaning of hesychasm and Palamism is fully expressed in the *Triads* (Meyendorff, 1983, 9). Considered by the East as the most important of all his writings, surpassing even the shorter yet more mature *Capita 150* (Sinkewicz, 1988, 288), the *Triads* were put together to refute the oral teaching and written polemics of Barlaam (Meyendorff, 1983, 1). Entitled *For the Defence of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude* (*Ibid.*), or *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* (*Ibid.*, ix), these nine treatises published in three groups of three books each were composed by Palamas between 1338 and 1341 (*Ibid.*, 1).

3. PALAMAS' DISTINCTION BETWEEN GOD'S ESSENCE AND ENERGY

The Ultimate Reality and Meaning of the Palamite theology consists of the distinction between God's Essence and Energy. This is a way of expressing the idea that the transcendent God remains eternally hidden in His Essence, but at the same time the God also seeks to communicate and

unite Himself with us personally through His Energy. One may say that the very focus of hesychasm, the practice of sacred quietude, is a sacred experience of God's personal union with us through His Divine Energy as He seeks to reach out to us in this prayerful quietude. Palamas's defence of hesychasm is also the defence of his distinction between God's Essence and His Energy.

3.1 *The 1351 Council in Constantinople*

The 1351 Constantinople Council was the most important doctrinally of all the Councils related to Palamas and his teaching and summed up succinctly the Palamite distinction in eight main points (cf. Synodical Tome of 1351, 18, 46; Karmiris, 1960, 385, 400; Ware, 1975, 129-130):

- (1) There is in God a distinction (*diadrisis*) between the essence and the energies or energy. (It is equally legitimate to refer to the latter either in the singular or in the plural).
- (2) The energy of God is not created but uncreated (*akistos*).
- (3) This distinction between the uncreated essence and the uncreated energies does not in any way impair the divine simplicity; there is no 'compositeness' (synthesis) in God.
- (4) The term 'deity' (*theotis*) may be applied not only to the essence of God but to the energies.
- (5) The essence enjoys a certain priority or superiority in relation to the energies, in the sense that the energies proceed from the essence.
- (6) Man can participate in God's energies but not in his essence.
- (7) The divine energies may be experienced by men in the form of light — a light which, though beheld through men's bodily eyes, is in itself non-material, 'intelligible' (*noeron*) and uncreated. This is the uncreated light that was manifested to the apostles at the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, that is seen during prayer by the saints in our own time, and that will shine upon and from the righteous at their resurrection on the Last Day. It thus possesses an eschatological character: it is 'the light of the Age to Come'.
- (8) No energy is to be associated with one divine person to the exclusion of the other two, but the energies are shared in common by all three persons of the Trinity.

The 1351 Council also formally endorsed Palamas' *Confession of*

Faith submitted by him. What is particularly significant in this *Confession* is Palamas' linking as synonymous God's *energeia* with God's grace and power through which God enters into intimate union with us. His *Confession* shows that his teaching on God's Divine Energy is substantially a theology of grace:

He [God] is not revealed is his essence (*ousia*), for no one has ever seen or described God's nature (*physis*); but he is revealed in the grace (*charis*), power (*dynamis*) and energy (*energeia*) which is common to the Father, Son and Spirit. Distinctive to each of the three is the person (*hypostasis*) of each, and whatever belongs to the person. Shared in common by all three are not only the transcendent essence — what is altogether nameless, unmanifested and imparticipable, since it is beyond all names, manifestations and participation — but also the divine grace, power, energy, radiance, kingdom and incorruption whereby God enters through grace into communion and union with the holy angels and the saints. (Ware, 1975, 130-131)

Thus, St. Gregory of Palamas has made it clear that we can participate in God's very nature and become one with Him via His grace, power or Divine Energy, both on earth and in Heaven, though in different degrees.

3.2 *Understanding God as Transcendent-Immanent*

Palamas' God is a transcendent-immanent God who is transcendent in His Essence and yet at the same time immanent to us through His Energies. Hence, Palamas' God can be called a divine transcendent-immanent being or the Divine Essence-Energy Being. This transcendent-immanent concept of God helps us comprehend better how God can be hidden and revealed to us simultaneously. It provides us with an authentic Christian immanentism, as it expands the horizon of our traditional Platonic transcendental tendency to identify the supernatural primarily with the transcendent.

Palamas' personal existentialism applies the concept of divine simplicity not to God's Essence but to God's Tripersonal Being who is revealed to us in His free acts, operations or Energies while He remains forever transcendent to us in His Essence (cf. *Triads* III.iii.13-14). While this simple Tripersonal Being is fully present both in His Essence and Energy, He is imparticipable in Essence and participable in Energy

insofar as human are concerned. Coming from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, each Divine Energy of God is Tripersonal through which all of God unites Tripersonally with us (cf. Fahey-Meyendorff, 1977, 38-39). In God's reaching out to us personally, these participable Energies of God flowing eternally from His imparticipable Essence are used by the Tripersonal God to communicate to us personally so that we can have a personal union with God, without going through His untouchable Essence (cf. Hussey, 1974, 26-27).

As a concept, it seems better to take Palamas' God as the Tripersonal Essence-Energy Being rather than the Triune 'Essence-Hypostasis-Energy' Being (Fahey-Meyendorff, 1977, 37). This would help us avoid certain unnecessary misinterpretations of Palamism. Apparently, Palamas did not set up the Divine Persons as a kind of intermediary level between God's Essence and Energy. He neither made the Divine Energies the intermediaries between the Divine Persons and the creature, nor did he situate the Divine Persons in the imparticipable, unknowable realm of the Divine Essence (cf. LaCugna, 1992, 187, 192-198). As the Tripersonal transcendent-immanent God, the Three Persons are at the same time transcendent in their Essence and immanent in their Energies.

3.3 The Blind Spot in Essentialist Thomism

In viewing God principally as an essence (cf. Maloney, 1978, 5-15; Hartshorne and Reese, 1953, 76-163), we in the West tend to focus mainly on His supernatural transcendence. This can lead to an intellectual 'blind spot' lurking in our traditional essentialist theology. It tends, among others, to distract us unintentionally from a deeper awareness of God's personal, omnipresent immanence and, in particular, the possibility of a real, personal, and unmediated union with Him everywhere.

Following Palamas' distinction, we may view God as the Divine Essence-Energy Being radiating unceasingly His very Essence-Energy Being in all directions, embracing, and permeating all creation. Notwithstanding this omnipresence of God, we can only partake in His participable Energy, but not in His imparticipable Essence. Similarly, we might view God as the eternal imparticipable-participable 'light' (1Jn 1:5) radiating His very imparticipable-participable Being or 'light' to all creation. In His divine simplicity, God in His Essence is personally present in His Energy. Likewise, God in His imparticipable light is also personally present in His participable light.

Without the Palamite distinction, we would tend to assume either one of the following choices: (a) that God is imparticipable Essence, or that God is personally present only in His very transcendent difficult-to-participate Essence (as in the traditional Western essentialist theism), with the result that no real unmediated personal union with God is really possible on earth; or (b) that God is all-participable Energy (or Light), which would result in pantheism, with its assumption that we are already Gods (or Divine Persons) since we can become one with all of God without any barrier, difficulty or distinction.

3.4 *God's Personal Union with Us is Possible Everywhere*

Through His Energy God is reaching out and seeking a personal union with everyone everywhere. This awareness enables us to add God's immanent, participable dimension to the transcendent, imparticipable concept of God which views God largely as a divine essence. The Orthodox concept that God's Divine Energies are within everything and outside everything (Lossky, 1976, 89) helps us grasp God's real personal immanence to us everywhere. Palamas adds concisely: 'God is entirely present in each of the divine energies, we name Him from each of them, although it is clear that He transcends all of them' (*Triads* III.ii.7; cf. Meyendorff, 1983, 95-96).

Without denying God's absolute transcendent existence in His Essence, Palamas wrote: 'Indeed, it is only through his energies that one knows that God exists; hence, he who rejects the divine energies... must necessarily be ignorant of the [all-pervasive immanent] existence of God' (*Dialogue, Coisl.* 99, fol. 48v; cf. *Cap. Phy.* 141, col. 1220A; Meyendorff, 1974a, 211). Apparently, God's Divine Energies are God Himself coming down personally to meet us and embrace us everywhere. They are God's real personal immanence in the whole universe, through which God makes our personal union with Him possible everywhere.

As partakers of His divine nature (2Pet 1:4), we should be aware of the two dimensions of God in Palamism. God, in all His divine simplicity, is at the same time both personally imparticipable and personally participable to us. Moreover, this God is constantly seeking a personal union with each of us everywhere through His omnipresent Divine Energies which can be regarded as God-for-us in His participable nature, life or constitution. God's accessible Energies are not God's inaccessible Personal Being. God's imparticipable being, nature, life or constitution

remains eternally transcendent and unapproachable in His Divine Essence.

3.5 Plato's Block Mentality and Palamas' Energy Mentality

Built on the spiritualistic presupposition of the dualistic Platonic idealism, essentialist theism does not seem to possess in its infrastructure an appropriate conceptual tool to describe and expand on God's personal, existential immanence in our daily, tangible and participable world. This philosophy tends to make us view God and the immortal soul in the spiritual, transcendental, non-human, outer space on the one side, and view the flesh and the world in the physical, non-mystical, material area on the other (Lossky, 1974, 63).

Palamas' distinction can help us effectively surmount this two-story 'block mentality' of Platonic dualism which has been with us for centuries. This Orthodox energy mentality informs us that God, via His Divine Energies, has penetrated the whole of creation (Lossky, 1976, 89). God, thus, becomes ever present to us as He seeks unceasingly to be personally united with each of us through His Divine Energies. Wherever we are, if we are truly open to His all-in-all energetic immanence, God can really abide in us and we in Him (Jn 14:4), in a mutually intimate and personal union.

3.6 Palamas' Distinction and its Importance for Theology

Theologically, the traditional classical theism in the West tends to isolate the divine and supernatural from the human, material and temporal dimension, placing God and the spiritual completely in the immaterial, inaccessible and transcendent 'block' (cf. Maloney, 1978, 7-19; Hartshorne and Reese, 1953, 76-163). Besides identifying God largely as an eternal divine essence, this mentality presents to us a supreme Deity who is perfectly conscious but is not present to us in a face-to-face manner. Nor is this God interested in embracing personally each person, family, community, society, as well as all their details, aspects and dimensions.

Hopefully, more people who have been brought up in the essentialist tradition would be open to Palamas' distinction (cf. Yannaras, 1975, 232-245). As a result, they could begin to apply and extend to different branches of theology this Eastern Christian concept of God's personal immanence in seeking an intimate union with us. Solidly based on the

Palamite notion of Divine Energy as a rediscovered or renewing paradigm in essentialist theology, this theology of Divine Energy or divine energetic immanence (cf. Maloney, 1978; Kucharek, 1976; Cheng, 1992) can espouse, theologize and bring alive our knowledge of a transcendent God who, however hidden in His Divine Essence, is personally present and revealed to us all through His Divine Energies everywhere (cf. Ware, 1975, 125-136).

3.7 *A Genuine Christian Mysticism*

Another mental block to a personal union with God today is our modern scientific nominalism or demythologizing. This tends to reduce God's Light or Energy as experienced by the Apostles and the hesychasts to a mere symbol or created phenomenon, on the order of purely atmospheric (Lossky, 1974, 49), thereby denying the genuine experience of the Christian mystics.

Not surprisingly, Palamas protests throughout his works against a symbolic interpretation of the 'Light on Tabor' and of Christian experience, for such nominalist symbolism seemed to him both a negation of the Incarnation and a rejection of the realized eschatological Kingdom (cf. *Triads* III.i.11; *Against Akindynos*, IV, 5, 18, *Coisl.* 98. 100v, 110v, in: Meyendorff, 1974a, 196). God's immanent Divine Energy is neither a subjective imagination nor some abstract metaphor but God Himself reaching out to us as His participable grace, power, energy, radiance or Kingdom (Karmiris, 1960, 408; cf. Ware, 1975, 130-131). Evidently, God has already become personally present and participable to a true hesychast or mystic, however veiled still from those who have yet to become one.

To St. Gregory, the doctrine of the Divine Energies is the intellectual basis for all true mystical experience (Maloney, 1978, 99; cf. *Triads* III.ii.5-15). In defending this understanding against anti-hesychastic rationalism, Palamas has provided a solid grounding for an authentic Christian mysticism (cf. Meyendorff, 1974b, 119-175). This is good news as well as an exciting conceptual break-through for those searching for a more immediate understanding and experience of God in both the East and West today.

3.8 *Participating in God's Nature: East and West*

'God's divine power has given us everything needed... so that through it

you may escape from the corruption that is in the world and may become participants of the divine nature' (2Pet 1:4). Palamas reiterates: 'We must seek a God who can be shared in one way or another, so that each of us participating therein receives, in the way most proper to him and by analogy of participation, being, life and deification' (*Triads* III.ii.4; cf. Meyendorff, 1974a, 221)

Notably, the East and the West use the term 'divine essence' in different senses. For example, the understanding in the West that only the souls taken into Heaven can 'clearly see the Triune God and enjoy the divine essence for all eternity' (Jesuit Fathers, 1973, 353) represents a significant difference in comprehension regarding the term essence. To Eastern 'realized eschatology', the West as a whole has yet to address this divine immanence or promise of God for us to become participants of His nature here on earth in a real, unmediated fashion (cf. Maloney, 1978, pp. 7-123). Moreover, to the East, God's Divine Essence is eternally imparticipable to us creatures; it is only participable among the Three Divine Persons in Their essential union.

Had Palamas' distinction been integrated with Western tradition, we might have said that those in Heaven can forever enjoy, according to their fullest created capacity, God's Divine Energy as experienced earlier on earth to a certain degree by the holy Apostles and mystics. At any rate, the East and the West are not contradictory in affirming that God will be seen face-to-face or participated in without created medium in Heaven. Following Vatican II's encouraging spirit of theological renewal (*Gaudium et spes*, 62, in: Flannery, 1981, 966-968), it seems that both traditions would benefit much each other from their openness to one another.

On the one hand, ecumenically speaking, it is important that we conduct many in-depth studies ahead regard the term essence and energy. On the other, let us not forget that, as a balance, Palamas was fond of repeating that Christianity is not a question of words, but of realities (Meyendorff, 1974a, 239): 'Things are not to be altered because of words, but the significance of words should depend upon things and should be adapted accordingly'. (*Antirhetius against Akindynos* V, xvii, 68, in: Mantzarides, 1977, 14, n. 37). As a holy monk attesting to an hesychastic mysticism, he naturally wants us to focus more on the unalterable divine realities rather than the ever-changeable philosophical or analogical terminologies.

4. PALAMISM AND ANTI-PALAMISM

4.1 *Palamism and Barlaamism*

‘During most of the six hundred years since the death of Gregory of Palamas, the standard interpretation of his spirituality and theology among Western theologians and scholars has been coloured by the polemics of his adversary, Barlaam’ (Jaroslav Pelikan cited, in: Meyendorff, 1983, xi). A brief comparison between the essential thoughts of the mystical hesychastic Palamas and the intellectual anti-hesychastic Barlaam back in the 14th century is, therefore, vital to understanding the subsequent history of Palamism in the West.

4.2.1 *Barlaam and his Thought*

Born and educated in 1290 in Italy, Barlaam, the Calabrian monk and philosopher, was imbued with the intellectual spirit of the Renaissance and philosophical humanism. About 1328 he came to Constantinople, the land of Plato and Aristotle, to seek a deeper knowledge of Hellenism which the monks generally deplored. However, he found great support there from non-hesychastic quarters and soon became an important consultant over diverse matters such as astronomy, philosophy, theology and diplomatic questions (Meyendorff, 1974a, 42). His numerous works include scientific treatises, theological writings, philosophical and literary works in Greek.

Barlaam was a scientist of some repute and a friend of many intellectual ideas (cf. Sinkewicz, 1981, 184-194). His theological works include anti-Latin, anti-hesychastic and Latin-friendly pieces, as well as those on the reunion between Rome and Constantinople (cf. Tinnefeld, 1980, 213-214). Although it ended with no practical result, he did go in 1339 as Imperial Ambassador to Avignon to meet Benedict XII to propound his views on the reunion of East and West (Meyendorff, 1974a, 74).

Intellectually, most of the hesychastic monks whom Barlaam met were poorly educated and could not satisfy the rational logic and aspirations of an intellectual skeptic. Moreover, he seemed to have little or no genuine understanding and experience of the hesychastic method of prayer (cf. Meyendorff, 1974, 45-46). With this background he accused the contemplative monks of practicing an illegitimate breathing spirituality and of experiencing a questionable divine Light or Energy. He referred to

them disparagingly as *omphalopsychoi* (people-with-their-souls-in-the-
 navel; Meyendorff, 1974a, 46). Palamas, then, became the chief defender
 of Orthodox hesychasm on behalf of the monks. Barlaam was rebuked in
 the 1341 Council at Constantinople, after which he left Greece. His
 fundamental difficulty with hesychasm seemed to have been caused by
 his lack of personal understanding and experience of hesychastic prayer
 and of its mystical union with God.

4.2 A Comparison between Palamism and Barlaamism

Revolving around the issue of hesychasm, we witness here the very first
 conflict of Palamism and anti-Palamism, although the degree of mis-
 understanding between Palamas and Barlaam could have been lessened
 with better communication between them (cf. Sinkewicz, 1980, 489-500).

Palamism represented traditional Byzantine mystical hesychasm (cf.
 Meyendorff, 1974c, VI, 905-914) and Barlaamism illustrated Byzantine,
 Hellenistic intellectual scholarship as two discussion methods on the
 theory of the knowledge of God (*Gotteserkenntnis*), as well as of
 theology in that period (cf. Podskalsky, 1985, 203-204; Podskalsky, 1977,
 124-173). Despite the triumph of the Palamite Councils it appears that
 these two schools have continued to enjoy a dialectical relationship ever
 since in the East, more or less as its apophatic mystical conservatism and
 its kataphatic intellectual liberalism. In the following chart, one can find,
 comparatively speaking, some of the general differences between the two
 diverse expressions, understandings or approaches to God:

Palamas' Mystical Hesychasm	Barlaam's Intellectual Scholarship
<p>1. Hesychasts depend on God's grace to attain sacred wisdom and vision. Palamas rejects Greek philosophy and secular science as a necessary step to mystical contemplation or union with God. Via God's grace and prayer of the heart, we can penetrate into God's mysteries (cf. <i>Triads</i> I.i.20-22).</p>	<p>1. As a prolific author in science, philosophy, literature and mythology (cf. Sinkewicz, 1981, 185-194), Barlaam is a philosophical theologian who makes little allowance for infused hesychastic vision and knowledge of God (cf. Meyendorff, 1983, 118, n. 3). He downplayed the mystical aspect of Christianity (<i>Ibid.</i>, 117)</p>

<p>2. The mind possesses both an intellect to see intelligible things and a capacity for union with God in which many hesychasts in ecstasy begin to see God in His unspeakable glory, Light or Energy (cf. <i>Triads</i> I.ii.20-23; II.iii.15).</p>	<p>2. Barlaam concentrates on the mind's intellectual power to obtain unmystical knowledge and wisdom. He does not think that the mind can truly transcend itself and acquire an angelic form to attain a supernatural wisdom and vision of God (cf. <i>Triads</i> I.iii: The third question, 4,5; Sinkewicz, 1982, 219-222.).</p>
<p>3. Hesychasm transfigures us into radiant sons and sons of God, filled with His Light. The goal is union with God in holiness. In this deification, we become gods by God's grace, as well as by our heroic imitation of God and uninterrupted prayer synergetically (cf. <i>Triads</i> III.i.27, 28, 34).</p>	<p>3. Barlaamism transforms us into great individuals of intellectual knowledge of God and ascetic virtues (cf. Sinkewicz, 1982, 237). Its fulfillment consists mainly in the perfection of the rational nature in us (cf. <i>Triads</i> III.i.30-31). This gift of illumination is given by God to the Apostles and Greek philosophers, inaccessible by natural means (cf. Sinkewicz, 1982, 241-242).</p>
<p>4. The divine Light or Energy seen on Mt. Tabor by Christ's Apostles and subsequently experienced by the hesychasts is real and uncreated (cf. <i>Triads</i> III.iii.9-10; 146 of <i>Capita</i> 150). The transfigured or divinized mind (or eyes) is naturally capable of a taste of divine mysteries and mysticism (cf. <i>Triads</i> II.iii.11,15; 76 of <i>Capita</i> 150).</p>	<p>4. The divine Light or Energy seen on Mt. Tabor and experienced by the Apostles and later by saints is only material, symbolic or created (cf. <i>Triads</i> III.iii.9-101 cf. 147 of <i>Capita</i> 150). How can our human sense and intelligence permit us to see and know God directly Who is neither sensible nor intelligible (cf. <i>Triads</i> II.iii.37,68)? Barlaam believes that the experience of the Apostles and saints is only a human sensory knowledge (<i>Triads</i> II.iii.37).</p>
<p>5. 'The end of prayer is to be snatched away to God' (<i>Triads</i> II.iii.35). In this mystical union with God, the transfigured hesychasts</p>	<p>5. Barlaam thinks that hesychasts have claimed to see God's Essence (cf. <i>Triads</i> II.iii.12). To him, these monks see only</p>

<p>partake only in God's Energy, not God's Essence (cf. <i>Ibid.</i> III.iii.1-15). Yet this Light will continually and endlessly dazzle them in the Age to Come (<i>Ibid.</i> II.iii.20).</p>	<p>symbolic apparitions and allusions in their imaginations (<i>Ibid.</i>, I.iii.20). This imaginary light may even be a hallucination (cf. <i>Ibid.</i>, III.i.15) or something coming from the devil (cf. <i>Ibid.</i>, I.iii.3rd question).</p>
<p>6. The transcendent God remains transcendent in His Essence, but He also reaches out and communicates to us, uniting Himself personally with us through His very Energy (cf. <i>Triads</i> III.ii.7-8; 74 of <i>Capita</i> 150).</p>	<p>6. For the philosophical Barlaam, God is identical with His Essence. There is no possibility for us on earth to have a direct, real and unmediated personal union with God the transcendent Essence (cf. Meyendorff, 1983, 21; <i>Triads</i> III.i.24).</p>
<p>7. God's real immanence is taught: His energetic presence, grace, salvation, deification and personal union with us pertain to our real soul and body, in an unmediated manner (cf. <i>Triads</i> III.iii.12-13).</p>	<p>7. God's abstract immanence is taught: His essential presence, grace, salvation, sanctification and personal union with us pertain to our real soul and body only in an abstract transcendent way (cf. <i>Triads</i> III.iii.10-11).</p>
<p>8. For the hesychasts <i>hesychia</i> is the praxis or activity <i>par excellence</i> (Mantzaridis, 1977, 9). Practicing this spirituality of the heart, the hesychasts gather the mind and enclose it in the heart — most interior to the body. Via unceasing prayer, the whole person — body and soul — is transfigured (cf. <i>Triads</i> I.ii.1-4).</p>	<p>8. The anti-hesychasts misunderstand or lack the knowledge of the hesychasts' spirituality. Emphasizing rational activity and transformation of the world, they do not practice the hesychastic method of prayer, nor do they possess the mystical experience of God's divine Light or Energy (cf. <i>Triads</i> I.iii.3rd question).</p>
<p>9. The <i>via negativa</i> is positive knowledge, a way of mental detachment towards infused mystical knowledge and personal experience of God. In hesychasm, the <i>via negativa</i> is true faith seeking infused union with God and knowledge of God through self-denial</p>	<p>9. God is indirectly but positively known by reflecting on His created works. Rational scholarly inquiry is necessary for theology. Barlaam's <i>via positiva</i> consists in traditional faith seeking intelligent understanding of God and His works in creation. It welcomes</p>

<p>and uninterrupted prayer in <i>hesychia</i>, using neither rational philosophy nor positivistic inquiry (<i>Triads</i> I.iii; Meyendorff, 1983, 117, n. 3; Adnès, 1969, 381-199).</p>	<p>rational philosophy and natural theology (cf. <i>Triads</i> I.i.3rd question; Meyendorff, 1983, 118, n. 5; Sinkewicz, 1982, 238, 242; Podskalsky, 1985, 203-204).</p>
<p>10. Palamism advocates the contemplative and mystical tradition of the East whose goal is unitive knowledge or personal union with God. Intellectual knowledge is often a hindrance to this prayerful apophatic approach of seeking God. Hesychasm stresses the use of <i>nous</i>, i.e., the spiritual mind or intuition, capable of direct apprehension of God's mysteries (cf. <i>Triads</i> I.iii.17-21; Meyendorff, 1983, 117-118, n. 3; cf. 76 of <i>Capita</i> 150).</p>	<p>10. Barlaamism is a kataphatic positivism stressing the use of <i>dianoia</i>, i.e., the analytic discursive intellect that knows things and works out problems by logical rationale. While acknowledging illumination as a gift of God, a real intellectual study is required. This intellectual approach is somewhat similar to that of Aristotelian Thomism in the West (cf. Podskalsky, 1977, 127-164; Meyendorff, 1983, 117-119, n. 2-6; Sinkewicz, 1982, 241-242; Swiezawski, 1995, 1-78).</p>
<p>11. Palamism is a classical example of the Orthodox antinomic mystical theology which seeks to affirm both opposite aspects of the same reality at the same time, e.g., God is simultaneously hidden [in His Essence] and revealed [in his Energy] (cf. <i>Traits</i> III.ii.5-18; Halleux, 1973, 418- 422; Ware, 1977, 46-54; Ware, 1975, 125-136).</p>	<p>11. God's Essence is inaccessible to created eyes. If the hesychasts could see God's divinity, it would be a material vision of the divine Essence — an error of the Messalians (cf. Tinnefeld, 1980, 212-214). Viewing God's Energy as created, not uncreated, Barlaam's essentialistic concept of God allows no room for Palamas' distinction between God's inaccessible Essence and accessible Energy (<i>Triads</i> III.iii.6).</p>
<p>12. Palamism transcends the limits of hesychasm as a school of spirituality and presents in its deepest essence the mystical tradition of Eastern Orthodox (Meyendorff, 1974b, 7). It allows little or no room for any synthesis between Orthodox faith and Greek</p>	<p>12. Barlaamism is characteristic of scholastic humanism which has integrated different Platonic and Aristotelian elements into its philosophical as well as theological presuppositions and contents. All in all, it tends to encourage a suitable synthesis</p>

philosophy (cf. <i>Triads</i> I.i; Meyendorff, 1947c, V, 47-48).	between Christian faith and Hellenistic philosophy (cf. Podskalsky, 1977, 124-173; Sinkewicz, 1981, 184-185)
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Although this chart above may not sum up all the differences in details between the two mainstreams of Christianity, it has given us some significant highlights of the two vital traditions for our reference.

4.3 *Palamism and Anti-Palamism in History*

In varying degrees, the conflict between Palamas' traditional mystical hesychasm and Barlaam's Hellenistic intellectual scholarship, and subsequently between neo-traditional hesychastic Palamites (or defenders of Eastern Orthodox hesychastic Palamism) and modern intellectual anti-hesychastic anti-Palamites, has been going on intermittently to this day.

Some of the neo-Palamites are Basil Krivocheine, Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff, Kallistos Ware, André de Halleux, Georges Barrois, George Mantzaridis and Christos Yannaras. Examples of modern anti-Palamites are Martin Jugie, Sébastien Guichardan, Juan-Miguel Garrigues, Juan Sergio Nadal, Rowan Williams, Dom Illtyd Trethrowan, Gerhard Podskalsky and Catherine LaCugna. After the Synods of 1347 and 1351 which definitely recognized Palamism, it was somewhat put aside in the East for several centuries due to social, political and religious upheavals (Barrois, 1975, 212). However, a revival began to take place in the early 1900s among Greek, Russian and Romanian Orthodox, etc., who took Palamism as an authentic expression of the Orthodox tradition (cf. Fahey-Meyendorff, 1977, 26-27).

The battle between modern Palamites and anti-Palamites in the West seems to have been started by Martin Jugie and Sébastien Guichardan. In 1932 the former, a Thomist, published two critical essays on Palamas, i.e., 'Palamas Grégoire' and 'Palamite (Controverse)' in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*. In 1933, the latter published his work 'Le problème de la simplicité divine en Orient et en Occident aux XIV et XV siècle: Grégoire Palamas, Duns Scot, Georges Scholarios'. In response to these critical comments on Palamas, we have witnessed the apologetic works of Basil Krivocheine ('Essai sur la Théologie de saint Palamas Grégoire' in 1936), Vladimir Lossky ('Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l'Eglise

d'Orient' in 1944), and John Meyendorff ('Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas' in 1959).

Between 1959 and 1972, learned publications on Palamism totaled more than three hundred titles (cf. Stiernon, 1972, 231-237). The dispute was further accentuated in 1974 by Jean-Philippe Houdret, Juan-Miguel Garriques, Juan Sergio Nadel, and M.-J. Le Guillou who resumed Jugie's and Guichardan's Thomistic criticism of Palamism in their articles published by *Istina*. The four anti-Palamite essayists of *Istina* were countered by at least three pro-Palamite articles written in 1975 by Halleux ('Palamisme et Tradition' in *Irénikon*), Barrois ('Palamism Revisited' in *SVTQ*), and Yannaras ('The Distinction between Essence and Energies and Its Importance for Theology' in *SVTQ*).

Recently, Fairy von Lilienfeld in her analysis divided hesychasm into six related types (cf. Lilienfeld, 1986, 282-289): 1) Byzantine and Slavic monastic hesychasm from the 12th to 16th century; 2) hesychasm as an ancient monastic spirituality since the 3rd century; 3) The speculative theological hesychasm of Palamism and his disciples; 4) The churchwide Byzantine hesychasm of the 14th and 15th century; 5) Neo-hesychastic neo-Palamite spirituality of the Orthodox Church from the 18th to 20th century; 6) Neo-hesychastic neo-Palamite Orthodox theology of the 20th century. Accordingly, the battle between neo-traditional hesychastic Palamism and modern intellectual anti-hesychastic anti-Palamism seems to represent the conflict between hesychasm type six (as represented by Meyendorff, Ware and Yannaras) and type three (as interpreted by Jugie, Podskalsky and Williams). Due to the overwhelming interpretive disagreements between them (cf. Lilienfeld, 1986, 284; LaCugna, 1993, 192, 197, 198), this discord or debate is likely to continue for quite some time (cf. Ware, 1977, 56, 63).

Fundamentally, this dispute revolves around at least four controversial issues pointed out by LaCugna and Schultz (cf. LaCugna, 1993, 186-198; Schultz, 1975, 105-135): a) whether Palamas' distinction between God's Essence and Energy is a genuinely orthodox expression of the early Greek Patristic Fathers as well as that of the Orthodox position, or whether Palamism is mainly an invention of Palamas himself; b) whether this distinction between God's Essence and Energy is ontologically real as such in God, or whether it is only epistemological to explain our conception of it; c) whether our participation in God's nature, Light or Energy is real, or whether it is simply metaphorical; d) whether,

taken as a whole, Palamism is an antinomic theology, or whether it is a defective rational logic.

While neo-hesychastic Palamites (many with an Orthodox background) generally affirm the first proposition within each of the four preceding issues with their historical, philosophical and theological arguments, modern anti-hesychastic anti-Palamites (many with a Western background) tend to assert the second proposition. The fear of the modern anti-Palamites is concrete and legitimate: They do not want Western Christianity, for example, to be led astray by a certain resurgence of un-Christian Platonic or neo-Platonic ideology, by an un-Orthodox emanatist doctrine and practice, or by a heretical Palamite distinction which might destroy God's divine simplicity (Barrois, 1975, 220).

4.4 Understanding Palamism and Anti-Palamism

Indeed, the interpretive disharmony between these two schools of scholars can perhaps be linked to their personal cultural, educational, spiritual, philosophical, theological, and experiential differences. As a whole, the divergences between Eastern and Western Christian traditions are intractably wide and too subtle for any easy understanding and acceptance of one by the other (cf. Szeptekyj, 1930, 570-574). Unless one is willing to take the time and trouble to examine and live through the countless disparities, one is doomed to misunderstand the other to a greater or lesser degree.

Theologians of one tradition simply cannot just apply their normal categories of experience, philosophy and theology to measure that of the other tradition. For example, unless a 'doubting' Thomist in some way undergoes a personal mystical experience of God's Uncreated Light or Energy, few intellectual arguments and genuine personal testimonies prove serviceable to readily convince him or her of this omnipresent uncreated reality.

Facing these two diverse perceptions of God, grace and soteriology, one solution is take the time and nuisance to understand them, in theory and practice, before making any conclusive statements (cf. Barrois, 1975, 228-229). We should not merely dismiss either of the two schools prematurely. Many neo-Palamites and modern intellectual anti-Palamites, as well as perhaps Palamas and Barlaam themselves, may have overlooked this way of discernment to some degree. However conflicting, Palamism and Barlaamism, as well as neo-Orthodox Palamism and

neo-Thomistic anti-Palamism, seem to represent two equally valid expressions of the Christian Gospel (cf. Fahey-Meyendorff, 1977, 29; Halleux, 1973, 409-442; Halleux, 1975, 479-493).

These two individual theological schools, systems or methods (Lialine, 1945-46, 282), like any single recognized school, can only be widely appreciated within the specific intellectual and spiritual tradition or orientation from which they originate (Russo, 1988, 179). While no one can really claim that he or she does not belong to any school(s), to cling to any school or system as if it can fully express all eternal truth or the entire Christian faith would be to deny the historicity of truth (Rahner and Vorgrimler, 1965, 428). We should be aware of the unavoidable limitations of all schools or traditions, and be open to the potential of each to compensate for another's imperfections.

Palamas' mystical hesychasm appears to offer us an in-depth mystical theology of God and His grace, inspiring us to a deeper personal relationship and union with God. 'Theology in the highest sense is not knowledge of God but possession of God' (LaCugna, 1992, 191; cf. *Triads* I.iii.42). On the other hand, the approach of Barlaam and modern intellectual anti-Palamism is that of a philosophical theology. Done well, its Christian synthesis with various philosophies, cultures and sciences can be an excellent means of pre-evangelization and evangelization for non-Christians, re-evangelization for lapsed Christians, as well as continuing education for Christians.

A second possible solution is by way of integration in varying degrees between the two traditions. Not only are the two theological systems to be studied painstakingly with an open mind, but also a way to be found to integrate their genuine merits such that we can embrace both systems, applying the best of each to supplement the other's omissions. For example, using the notion of uncreated grace, Russo appears to be able to partially integrate Palamas' system of grace with that of Rahner, the German transcendental Thomist (cf. Russo, 1988, 157-180; DiNoia, 1989, 183-204; Coffey, 1988, 329-358). Although we will never attain any perfect integration or balance of the two traditions to the satisfaction of every individual or party involved (Halleux, 1973, 432), this brave approach as exemplified by Russo is invaluable to the present ecumenical age. Anything worth doing is worth doing even imperfectly.

5. CONCLUSION

The most important aspect concerning Palamas' distinction as his idea of Ultimate Reality and Meaning boils down to our real personal mystical experience (Lison, 1994, 277). It is possible that many in both East and West may have experienced a certain personal mystical union with God through His grace or Energy without knowing (cf. Aumann, 1980, 122-135). However, if this eastern Orthodox tradition is indeed altogether beyond our genuine personal experience, it becomes at best an empty theory, however beautiful and sacred it appears to our mind. Ware remarks soundly: "Tradition and present experience are complementary, not conflicting, for without the element of living experience there can be no genuine Tradition whatever" (Ware, 1970, 138). On the level of rational argumentation, theological controversy proves unending. But there is one thing, so St. Gregory believed, that is always decisive: the experience of the saints. The true aim of theology is not rational certainty through abstract arguments, but personal communion with God through prayer' (Ware, 1977, 63).

Our intellectual notion as well as our personal experience of God could be raised to a new level if we became altogether open to the Ultimate Reality and Meaning of Palamas' distinction. In our definition of God as an essence, we may need to upgrade our conception of God. Accordingly, we can reconceive of God as a Divine-Energy Being whose presence via His Divine Energy is already here deep within and around us, everywhere in the entire creation, waiting since time immemorial to grant each of us a real personal union with Him. As Palamas indicated, this divine life, Light or Energy of God is 'the foundation and beauty of the age to come' (cf. *Triads* II.iii.38; Meyendorff, 1974a, 196). Lack of communion or union with God often restricts us to our ordinary human powers of sense-perception, thus turning our environment into a prison and shutting us off from divine reality which is ever transcendent, and yet, at the same time, remains immanent to us (Mantzaridis, 1977, 11).

In fact, Palamas has distinguished three classes of people seeking a personal relationship with God: 1) those who possess direct personal experience of God's Divine Energies; 2) those who do not themselves enjoy such personal experience, but who believe and trust those who have it; 3) those who, lacking personal experience of their own, refuse to trust and learn from those who possess it (Ware, 1970, 139). Indeed, only the

third class is reproved by Palamas; the second class is praised for their humble and faithful trust; but it is the first class, those saintly mystics taught by God, who know — not from others but from their personal experience — which constitute the most advanced theologians, i.e., the real living witnesses to the Sacred Tradition, in every age (cf. *Ibid.*)

Finally, this Palamite distinction between God's Essence and Energy reflects only our limited participation in our human union with God or in God's union with us. It is Palamas' ingenious model of interpretation in defending hesychasm, particularly our real but limited union with God. To God, as it is, there is no need of any distinction at all in His divine simplicity. It is human beings who need such a distinction between God's Essence and Energy for the adroit guarantee and subsequent blessing of a sound theology, spirituality and mysticism, etc.

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