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Agnieszka Świtkiewicz-Blandzi

Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas

The Byzantine Synthesis of Eastern Patristics



PETER LANG

Agnieszka Świtkiewicz-Blandzi

Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas

The study shows the reception of the views of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite by Gregory Palamas. The author presents the doctrinal context of Palamas' dispute with Barlaam from Calabria on the possibility of knowing God, the most important issue in 14th-century Byzantium. The author distances herself from many previous interpretations of this problem. She proves that, considering how much Palamas succumbed or did not succumb to the Areopagite or "corrected" his position, he has a very weak doctrinal basis. The author notices that over-emphasizing Dionysius' dependence on the Neoplatonic tradition does not lead to a solution to the problem. Palamas' teachings are placed in the context of the traditions of the Christian East and their relation to the thoughts of the Areopagite himself.

The Author

Agnieszka Świtkiewicz-Blandzi is a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw, Poland. Her main area of research concerns Byzantine philosophy, especially the philosophy and theology of Gregory Palamas and the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor.

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Cover photo: (c) Olga355 www.fotosearch.com Stock Photography. The Basilic of Divine Wisdom (Haghia Sophia) in Thessaloniki in Greece, which was built in the 8th century, was the witness to the events described in this book, and St. Gregory Palamas was a frequent guest there.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	9
1 Studies in the Presence of Pseudo-Dionysian Thought in the Works of Palamas	19
1.1 The Consistency of the Palamite Doctrine with the Patristic Tradition of the Eastern Church	30
1.2 The Relation of Gregory Palamas' Doctrine to the Thoughts of the Western Church and Protestant Theology	45
1.3 Research in Poland on Gregory Palamas' Thought	50
2 Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: The Person and His Thinking	53
2.0 Introduction	53
2.1 Scholarship on Pseudo-Dionysius' Neoplatonism	54
2.2 The Issue of the Reception of <i>Corpus Areopagiticum</i> in the Eastern Church from the Sixth to the Fourteenth Centuries	59
2.3 Doctrinal Commentary: "Scholia" by John of Scythopolis and "Mystagogia" by Maximus the Confessor	61
2.4 <i>Corpus Areopagiticum</i> in the Byzantine Liturgy and Patristic Thought	69
3 Gregory Palamas and His Era	75
3.1 The Life and Work of Palamas Against the Background of Fourteenth-Century Byzantium	75
3.2 Discussions with Barlaam and Akindynos. Circumstances of the Creation of Works, Treatises and Synodal Volumes	76

3.3	The Dispute over Gregory Palamas' Doctrine Against the Backdrop of Church-State Relations	79
4	The Issue of Knowing God in the Thought of Pseudo-Dionysius	89
4.1	The Patristic Tradition	89
4.2	Theological Discourse: Ways of Knowing God According to Pseudo-Dionysius	92
4.3	Onomatodoxia and Cataphatic Theology	97
4.4	Symbolic Theology as a Path Upward	112
4.5	Apophatic Theology	115
5	Conditions for the Possibility of True Knowledge of God According to Gregory Palamas	119
6	The Palamite Distinction of Divine Essence and Un-created Energies as the Basis for the Metaphysics of Light ...	131
7.	The Light of Good and the Light of Knowledge in the Thought of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas	139
8.	Palamas' Metaphysics of Light in Relation to the Hierarchical and Symbolic Structure of Pseudo-Dionysius' World	155
8.1	The Cognitive Dimension of Hierarchy and the Role of Symbol	157
8.2	The Moral Aspect of the Dionysian Hierarchy as Interpreted by Gregory Palamas	177
9	Christ as the Foundation of Knowledge in the Thought of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas	181

10. The Areopagite's Thought in the Context of Palamite Anthropology	191
11 Unifying Vision	205
Conclusion	211
Bibliography	221
Abbreviations	221
A. Primary sources	221
B. Primary sources	222
C. Secondary sources	224
D. Encyclopedias and dictionaries:	236
Index of Names	237

Introduction

Theosis is said to go hand in hand with gnosis. ... Ignorance divides and separates, knowledge connects and deifies. R. Roques¹

The path to the light passes through darkness. The path to knowledge begins with ignorance. The figure of Gregory Palamas, the most outstanding theologian and philosopher of the Byzantine Empire, whose influence on contemporary Russian philosophy and Orthodox theology cannot be overestimated, is almost unknown to Polish audiences. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the second figure to whom this book is devoted, is also a mysterious character to such an extent that it is a matter of dispute to this day as to who this exceptional theologian and mystic actually was. That having been said, without his *Corpus Areopagiticum*, we would be hard-pressed to imagine the culture of the Middle Ages broadly understood, the treatises of St. Thomas Aquinas, even Gothic architecture.

So, we begin our story like a wanderer at the foot of a mountain whose magnificent peak is shrouded in clouds, invisible at first sight and yet so promising. We begin by acknowledging our ignorance, but also our desire that the darkness be brightened by the light of knowledge.

And finally, the problem of knowing God, raised by both thinkers, can be summed up in one word: apophatic, by which we mean, quite precisely, abscission, understood as abstract thinking, the abandonment of concepts, the process of negation. The cognitive order from dark to light is also tied to the stages of spiritual development about which Pseudo-Dionysius and Palamas write using the vast tradition of Eastern monasticism and mysticism.

The philosophy and theology of Gregory Palamas, the most versatile thinker of the fourteenth-century Byzantine Empire, has become increasingly the subject of study for Polish historians of philosophy. Over the past several decades, a variety of academics in Europe (including Poland), the United States and Russia (on universities in St. Petersburg and Moscow) have published his works translated into their national languages. At the same time, scholars have published numerous works on specific issues. Thanks to broader and deeper studies focusing on the writings of Gregory Palamas, historians of medieval philosophy

1 R. Roques, *L'Univers dionysien: structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris, 1954), 88.

unanimously view him as the author of an extremely interesting doctrine, one that is deeply rooted in the tradition of the Eastern Church²

Gregory Palamas, known as the Doctor of Hesychasm,³ is the creator of the synthesis of patristic thought, around which – as Vladimir Lossky wrote – many misunderstandings arose and whose true value was underestimated for many years.⁴ Recently, however, the conviction has deepened that an understanding of the Bishop of Thessaloniki's views, along with their theological and philosophical foundation, is a prerequisite for getting to the heart of orthodoxy. After all, Palamas' metaphysics of light, based on the tradition of Greek patristics, is one of the most important attempts to present the foundations of Eastern Christianity in philosophical language. Nowadays, scholars have no doubts that Gregory Palamas was the thinker through whom the prayer practices of the hesychasts and the doctrinal framework of the Eastern Church's theology found their fullest expression. At the same time, he was a figure who closely tied to his epoch. The most important political events in fourteenth-century Byzantium – dynastic struggles and political disputes – found their dramatic reflection in the life of the Doctor of Hesychasm and had a fundamental influence on the development of his doctrine. It was fully presented in the work entitled *The Triads*,⁵ which

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- 2 For a bibliography and the state of research in the Polish language, see Yannis Spiteris, *Palamas: La grazia e l'esperienza: Gregorio Palamas nella discussione teologica* (Rome 1996). The author who first conducted research on the entirety of Palamas' works (he studied them in manuscript form and published some of them) was J. Meyendorff. He published the results of his research in his now classic work *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris 1959). We also find there a detailed biography of Palamas (pp. 45–170) and a thorough list of his works (Appendix 1, pp. 331–401).
 - 3 “A hesychast – a person who practices (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ) inner quiet; a term sometimes used to denote a hermit or a recluse; used especially for monks from Mount Athos who practiced constant prayer, especially the Jesus Prayer and who sought to achieve a vision of divine light” – from Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Liadain Sherrard, Contemporary Greek Theologians Series, no 2, English and Greek Edition (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, 1997, 1984); see also T. Špidlik, *I grandi mistici russi* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1983; M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 3 (Chicago 1988), 218–220).
 - 4 Vladimir Lossky, “The theology of Light in the thought of St. Gregory Palamas,” in *In the Image and Likeness of God* (London 1988), 45–69.
 - 5 Gregory Palamas, Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶν ἡσυχάζοντων (“*Triads For The Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude*”), PG 150, 1101–1118; a critical edition and French translation, J. Meyendorff, *Grégoire Palamas. Défense des saints hésychastes. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Louvain 1959).

emerged gradually, during discussions on the interpretation of the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius. Many scholars of Palamas' achievements believe that the significance of *The Triads* in Byzantine theology and philosophy can be compared to the role played by Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* in the development of Western Christianity's philosophy and theology.

The circumstances of the creation of *The Triads* and treatises written in defense of the hesychasts are related to a dispute that flared up at the court of the Byzantine emperor Andronikos III. The essence of this dispute over the conditions for knowing God was nothing new, since the Fathers of the Eastern Church considered themselves from the beginning with the way in which a human being can come to know the Creator. In the patristic tradition, it was a firmly established belief that knowing God, possible through the experience of a unifying vision along (that is, full communion – *σύναξις*), constitutes the highest and most necessary goal of human life realized through the process of deification.⁶ Therefore, the doctrine of salvation is perceived precisely as a way to resemble God. The presence of this issue, as Vladimir Lossky noted, is a characteristic feature of all dogmatic controversies within the Eastern Church, “all the history of Christian dogma unfolds itself about this mystical center.”⁷ In other words, theology revolves around the problem of the absolute transcendence of God as the source of all existence, with the simultaneous revelation of the Trinity to its creations (both noetic and corporeal beings) out of consideration for love of him, thanks to which it can return to its Creator in unifying cognition. In

6 Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (ISD LLC, 1991), 4–17.

7 *Ibid.*, 6. Lossky continues (pp. 5–6): “All the development of the dogmatic battles which the Church has waged down the centuries appears to us, if we regard it from the purely spiritual standpoint, as dominated by the constant preoccupation which the Church has had to safeguard, at each moment of her history, for all Christians, the possibility of attaining to the fullness of the mystical union. So the Church struggled against gnostics in defense of this same idea of deification as the universal end ... She affirmed, against the Arians, the dogma of the consubstantial Trinity; for it is the Word, the Logos, who opens to us the way to union with the Godhead ... The Church condemned the Nestorians that she might overthrow the middle wall of partition ... they would have separated God from man. She rose up against the Apollinarians and Monophysites to show that, since the fullness of true human nature has been assumed by the Word, it is our whole humanity that must enter into union with God. She warred with the Monothelites because, apart from the union of the two wills, divine and human, there could be no attaining to deification ... The Church emerged triumphant from the iconoclastic controversy, affirming the possibility of the expression through a material medium of the divine realities—symbol and pledge of our sanctification.

this antinomic (transcendence/presence in the world) understanding of God, there is a whole spectrum of issues considered by the Cappadocian Fathers, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, and the monastic tradition starting with Evagrius Ponticus. I have deliberately listed here theologians who wanted to show how a non-participatory being becomes participatory through its manifestations, its actualizing powers, just as it is simultaneously indivisible and divisible, and then how these energies find hypostatic constitutions in the three Persons of the Trinity, though they are not its consecutive persons. I consider – on the one hand – how the divine-human person of Christ is a condition for the possibility of transforming human nature to know the essence of God through energies, and on the other hand – how man, a psycho-physical being, is capable of experiencing the Supreme Being, seeing It thanks to deifying energy, while at the same time It is beyond all participation. These considerations culminated precisely in fourteenth-century Byzantium, when monastic thought was already fully formed, based on the tradition of generations of monks, holy elders, and ascetics. Understanding and support for the mystical experience, which already dominated the religious life of the Eastern Empire at the end of the thirteenth century, clashed with resistance derived from *paideia* – a certain intellectual baggage possessed by society’s educated classes. Byzantines, who considered themselves to be Romans and claimed Constantinople to be the second Rome, were undoubtedly the heirs of the ancient Greek culture.⁸ According to L. Bréhier, the Byzantine Empire should be understood as an organic whole of the Hellenized and Christianized Roman Empire. Bréhier sees in Byzantium three basic elements of European civilization that make up one whole: Hellenism, Roman law and Christianity; Byzantine society was thus the heir to antiquity.⁹ This heritage, rich and at the same time constraining, found its reflection in every area of life, including in language, literature, art and, of course, philosophy. The Cappadocian Fathers, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and

8 See S. Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 1970).

9 L. Bréhier, “Le développement des études d’histoire byzantine du XVIIe au XXe siècle,” *Revue d’Auvergne* 1 (1901): 1–35; these words are quoted in Basil Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, trans. N.J. Moutafakis (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2003), preface, xi–xii: “The Byzantine Empire ... is the organic development of the Hellenized and Christianized Roman Empire. We find in Byzantium the basic elements of European civilization: Hellenism, Roman law, and Christianity. Byzantine society is the immediate continuation of ancient society,” all in the same spirit: “We hope to demonstrate that Byzantine philosophy constitutes one form – the Christian form – of the thought, reason, and spirit of Greece” (p. xii).

John of Damascus put a great deal of effort into adapting Greek concepts to the presentation of Christian truth in order to use them in a way that would exclude heresy. As B. Tatakis notes in his introduction to *Byzantine Philosophy*, the Church Fathers tried to systematically and consistently express the new faith by assimilating Greek contents that did not conflict with the truths of faith. Therefore, as the Greek scholar writes, “they are true masters; the authority of tradition does not burden them, for they create tradition.”¹⁰ And yet, the problem of their dependence on the Plato or Plotinus’ thought as a factor that runs contrary to orthodoxy is raised to this day.¹¹ While, in the field of theology, heresies originating in Greek thought (e.g. the views of Arius, Eunomius, Origen) were condemned, in other areas Byzantine scholars were faithful disciples and followers of the ancient masters. As M. Wesoly emphasizes, there is nothing contradictory in this:

The distinction was accepted between external knowledge, which was secular Hellenic science, from internal knowledge, the inexpressible mystery of revealed faith and apophatic theology.¹²

The anathema of the *Synodicon*, repeated every year, clearly defined the boundaries beyond which an interest in “secular knowledge” could not go:

For those who plumb the depths of Hellenic teachings and nurture them not only for the sake of education, but who follow and follow these vain views as true, and thus regard them as something certain ... – anathema!¹³

Fourteenth-century Constantinople, Nicaea, Thessaloniki, and Mystras were thus the cities where Plato and Aristotle’s teachings were studied. From these philosophers, their inhabitants learned logic, the art of analysis, and synthesis. For this reason, in court and church circles steeped in Hellenism, the tension between the ancient legacy and Eastern Orthodoxy became increasingly acute. Doubts emerged both among the clergy, where many higher ecclesiastical functions were performed by people studying Greek philosophy, and among well-educated aristocrats familiar with the scholarship of antiquity. The emperor’s court and its

10 Ibid., xiii.

11 See K. Leśniewski, *Ekumenizm w czasie. Prawosławna wizja jedności w ujęciu Georges’a Florowsky’ego* (Lublin 1995), 146–173. This is an interesting study of the Hellenization of Christian theology.

12 M. Wesoly, “Posłowie,” in B. Tatakis, *Filozofia bizantyńska*, 297.

13 The seventh anathema applied to John Italus, *Synodikon*, ed. J. Gouillard, “Centre de Recherche d’histoire et civilisation de Byzanc,” in *Travaux et mémoires* 2 (1967), 56. Translation from B. Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, 285.

philosophical school were a place that brought together both groups, where the orthodox patristic tradition was simultaneously cultivated. In 1330, the monk-scholar Barlaam of Calabria was officially appointed head of the philosophy faculty at the imperial university. John Kantakouzenos, marshal of the court (megas domestikos) during the reign of Emperor Andronikos III, entrusted Barlaam with this position based on latter's broad knowledge of mathematics, astronomy and logic. During his lectures, the Calabrian thinker dealt mainly with the works of Pseudo-Dionysius; John Kantakouzenos thus officially appointed Barlaam to interpret and expound upon the Areopagite's thoughts on the issue of knowing God.¹⁴ Describing Dionysian thought more in the spirit of nominalism rather than patristic antinomy, Barlaam came to the following conclusions: 1. God is absolutely unknowable and utterly transcendent to human cognitive faculties, both mental and sensual. 2. Man is unable to transcend the determinants of his created nature. 3. The only knowledge about God we can possess results from the knowledge of created beings, and it is therefore partial and incomplete. 4. We know God only in a way that is possible for us – that is, through created symbols and analogies arranged in a specific hierarchy.¹⁵ Barlaam claimed that Pseudo-Dionysius derived these conclusions from his reading Greek philosophy, and that in his *Mystical Theology* he even used expressions he had found in the writings of the Pythagoreans, Panaetius of Rhodes, Brontinus, Philolaus, Charmides, and others.¹⁶ The Calabrian thus believed that the light-energy visions of the hesychast monks of Athos had no epistemological value, since it was one of many created divine manifestations; cognition therefore remains in the sphere of natural knowledge. In Barlaam's view, the monks were uneducated ignoramuses, and their visions were without divine grounding, mere delusions. His attack on both the theory and practice of Hesychasm initiated a stormy discussion, whose essential focus was the question of one's ability to know God. Palamas' subsequent responses consistently focused on various aspects of the issue. Thus, the first of the three parts of *The Triads* deals mainly with the possibilities of getting to know God through the acquisition of knowledge in the process of secular education.

14 See Nikefor Gregoras, *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina Historia* (Bonn: L. Schopen, I. Bekker, 1829–1855), XIX, chapter 1, 923; compare G. Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz* (Würzburg 2005), 253–261.

15 See Barlaam, unpublished treatises, cited in J. Meyendorff, *Un mauvais théologien de l'unité au XIVe siècle: Barlaam le Calabrais, Mélanges Lambert Beauvin* (Chevetogne–Paris, 1955), 47–64.

16 See Barlaam, *Epistula ad Palamas II, Barlaam Calabro. Epistole greche. I primordi episodici e dottrinari delle lotte esicaste*, ed. G. Schiro, Testi, 1 (Palermo 1954), 298–299.

Palamas' opponents, as I mentioned, believed that knowledge of God could be achieved indirectly through beings' knowledge. Barlaam based his position on a literal interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius' works *De Coelesti Hierarchia* and the *Divine Names*. In his opinion, negative theology, Pseudo-Dionysius conceived it, serves only to emphasize the limitations of the human mind in terms of knowing God's nature. The essence of apophaticism is the assertion that our mind, as a creation that is subject to change, cannot know the essence of its source. It thus produces negative concepts related to the object of knowledge – i.e. it can only define what God is not. This cognition, partial and uncertain, should avail itself of the image of the world acquired through the senses, since the cosmos as created by God shows traces of his presence in the form of symbols; it leads to the Creator through hierarchies and analogies. According to Barlaam, real knowledge available to man relating to the supreme Being is symbolic knowledge, and therefore relative. Full illumination – i.e. knowledge of the essence of the divine being – can be achieved by a rational creature after the death of the body, have reached a new state of mind permeated with divine energies. According to the Calabrian philosopher, Pseudo-Dionysius' system excludes the possibility of a direct vision of divine essence, which it is absolutely inaccessible, and if one has any chance of crossing through the cloud of ignorance, it is after getting rid of the mortal shell of the body.

This was the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, supported by numerous quotations from his writings, that Palamas had at his disposal. Due to the thematic framework of my work, I will omit the issues that are currently under discussion by academics about Barlaam's correct or incorrect understanding of Pseudo-Dionysius. I will only point out here that an excellent introduction to this issue is provided by the works of a renowned translator and researcher Robert Sinkewicz, e.g. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian* (1982); Reinhard Flogaus, *Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: A Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium* (1998); and the most recent study by Håkan Gunnarsson, *Mystical Realism in the Early Theology of Gregory Palamas* (2002).¹⁷ On the other

17 R. Sinkewicz, "The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian," *Medieval Study* 44 (1982): 181–242; R. Flogaus, "Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998), No. 1: 1–32; H. Gunnarsson, *Mystical Realism in the Early Theology of Gregory Palamas* (Göteborg 2002). See also G. Kapriev, *Pholosophie in Byzanz*, 250–308; G. Ostrogorsky, *History*

hand, it seems to me of paramount importance to highlight the role that Barlaam played in the Palamite reading of the *Areopagitics*. Let us note that Gregory's intention was not to reinterpret undisputed patristic authority or to provide any correction, but to discuss with Barlaam and find a doctrinal foundation in defense of his brothers – the monks of Athos, whom Barlaam had ridiculed and contemptuously named *omphalopsychoi* (men with their souls in their navels), reflecting one of the details of the prayer practice. According to the Calabrian, this is the “prayer of the heart” – i.e. the long-lasting and constantly repeated formula “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us,” a kind of “mantra,” that caused a state of inner quiet (*hesychia*), enabling one to see and experience divine light, visions as experienced by the apostles on Mount Tabor during the Transfiguration of Christ.¹⁸ Barlaam deliberately simplified and trivialized this process, presenting centuries-old prayer practice as a purely automatic activity which – without the need for internal transformation – was supposed to lead to visions of God. Based on Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic theology, he found such a belief very harmful, and he argued that these visions were symptoms of mental illness. According to this interpretation, the monks of Athos were at risk of being accused of preaching the heretical view that one could attain illumination of the mind through a specific prayer practice, not only by ignoring the knowledge of created beings, but also by denying the order of sacraments and the mediation of priests. Through such an approach, the teaching of the hesychasts would be both a falsehood and a doctrinal error like that taught by the Bogomils and condemned by Alexios I Komnenos.¹⁹ In view of the far-reaching consequences of

of the Byzantine States (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1968; B. Tatakis, *Filozofia bizantyńska*, 213–229).

- 18 The prayer of the heart, also known as the Jesus Prayer and presented as a form of Christian meditation, has been covered by many studies, among others: J. Serr, O. Clément, *Prière du coeur*, Collection spiritualité orientale, 6 bis (Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1977)]; Jean-Yves Leloup, *Écrits sur l'Hésychasme: une tradition contemplative oubliée* (Paris 2014)]; J. Lafrance, *La Priere du Coeur* (Paris 1978).
- 19 The Bogomils – a sect founded in Bulgaria by an Orthodox priest, Bogomil, in the tenth century. Its doctrine was based on the Manichean belief that two elements – Good and Evil – ruled the world. It treated the world as a product of Satan. Bogomil's followers rejected the church hierarchy and the sacraments, believing that God can be known directly, without the mediation of priests. This sect quickly pervaded Bulgaria and Macedonia, and soon spread to Serbia, Italy and southern France. See D. Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A study in Balkan Neo-Manicheism* (Cambridge 1948); J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford 2010), 154–160.

Barlaam's interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, it is obvious that Palamas' main goal, who was closely associated with the Athos community, was to challenge his opponent's conclusions. The Doctor of Hesychasm therefore directed his argument against Barlaam, and he was forced, by way of counterarguments, to present a correct understanding, in his opinion, of Pseudo-Dionysian thought – i.e. to carry out a plan that, absent the controversy, he would have never had in the first place.

In this book, I try to answer the fundamental question about the way Palamas understood and assimilated the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition, not only in *The Triads* (where Pseudo-Dionysius is most often quoted, but also in other treatises cited due to their significant and substantive content: *Apologia dieksodikotera*, *Hagioretic Tome*, and *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters (Capita physica, theologica, moralia et practica CL)*).

After many years of study – beginning with the monastic tradition expressed in the *Apophthegmata* of the Desert Fathers and the broadly understood Byzantine theology broadly understood (comparative works on Pseudo-Dionysius, Theodore the Studite, John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor) and ending with the doctrine of Gregory Palamas – I noticed that that the method adopted by most historians of philosophy does not allow us to obtain satisfactory results when analyzing the influence of Pseudo-Dionysian thoughts on the works of Palamas. The current method of research has a tendency to deal with strictly defined issues concerning the relationship between the Doctor of Hesychasm's thoughts and the patristic legacy. This is done by quoting the text he used and then providing comparative context, though it is tacitly assumed at the outset that Palamas' writings are either contradictory or compatible with the particular thread under investigation. With such an approach, disputes – especially those concerning the presence and meaning of Pseudo-Dionysian thought in Palamas' works – become difficult to resolve. It seems to me that the solutions used so far, which consist of analyzing the explicit or implicit dependencies of Pseudo-Dionysius' doctrine on Neoplatonism, and then showing how much Palamas was, or was not, influenced by this thought, cause greater controversy and do not solve the problem. Therefore, the method applied here is different than previous methods. For example, I consider theological and philosophical problems in connection with specific issues by placing them in the context of the tradition in which the author moved and the polemics from which these issues arose and were clarified, and by situating them in their respective historical environment. This methodology was postulated by Stefan Swieżawski when, in *Rozmyślanie o wyborze w filozofii (Reflecting on choice in philosophy)*, he wrote that scholars should consider issues of medieval philosophy and theology from

the inside – i.e. from a medieval rather than modern point of view.²⁰ Instead of only examining the compatibility of Gregory Palamas' thoughts with the output of his predecessors – in this case, instead of referring to Pseudo-Dionysius, as if superimposing the former's works on the latter's – I made an attempt to analyze controversial issues and terms in their natural surroundings: personal, theological and historical. In other words, my intention in this work was primarily to examine, on the basis of source texts, the intentions of both thinkers, and to check whether they were consistent in their basic doctrinal assumptions. The next stage of deliberations was an attempt to read the *Areopagitics* through the eyes of the Bishop of Thessaloniki, while maintaining the most impartial position possible. At the same time, I tried to determine whether, according to Palamas, a correction of certain aspects of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought was necessary; whether this correction took place at all; if so, what it consisted of; and finally, whether this was a conscious procedure or one that also the need, resulting from polemics, to demonstrate the doctrinal foundations of the hesychasts' practices. In a broader sense, another intention emerges from the studied works of Gregory, namely the desire to present the mystical experiences of his confreres using the systematic language of theology, one which was drawn from the rich legacy of the Cappadocian Fathers, Maximus the Confessor, Pseudo-Dionysius, John of Damascus, Macarius of Egypt, and Evagrius Ponticus. For this reason, one of my aims is to present the thoughts of the Doctor of Hesychasm as a synthesis of the great heritage of the Eastern Church, thought inspired by many components of tradition, which requires at the same time that I provide an overall look at the *quantum* of issues that inspired Gregory.

20 S. Swieżawski, "Rozmyślenia o wyborze w filozofii," in Swieżawski, *Dobro i tajemnica* (Warszawa 1995), 20–23. See also A. Świtkiewicz-Blandzi, "Metoda badawcza i wątki ekumeniczne," in S. Swieżawski, *Dzieje europejskiej filozofii klasycznej* (Warszawa–Wrocław 2000), 916–920.

1 Studies in the Presence of Pseudo-Dionysian Thought in the Works of Palamas

Essentially, the Palamite controversy concerned the interpretation of the Areopagite's views on knowledge of God.¹ Thus, in the works of Palamas discussed here, Pseudo-Dionysius² is the author most often quoted and examined. Moreover, although Dionysian terminology often found its application in the mind of the Bishop of Thessaloniki, the impact of his doctrine itself and its interpretation still seem to require further study. In the opinion of some scholars, the Areopagite's tradition was deformed, even distorted, while others believe that its influence on the works of Palamas was clear only on a linguistic level. However, the dispute presented below, which continues to this day, concerns the question whether the Doctor of Hesychasm made a Christological correction in Pseudo-Dionysius' thought in order to apply it to his patristic synthesis, or – on the contrary – the views of the author of *Corpus* are an important element of tradition and require no transformations.

John Meyendorff started this discussion with the publication in 1959 of Palamas' fundamental work *Défense des saints hésychastes* (Υπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶν ἡσυχαστῶν) in a French-Greek version and the publication of extensive

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- 1 As P. Scazzoso pointed out, it is also worth considering the question of what allowed *Corpus* itself to evoke such contradictory interpretations on the part of participants in the fourteenth-century debate – Barlaam, Gregory Akindynos, and the Doctor of Hesychasm himself. See P. Scazzoso, "Lo Pseudo-Dionigi nell' interpretazione di Gregorio Palamas," *Rivista di Filozofia Neo-Scolastica* VI (1967): 678.
 - 2 The person of Pseudo-Dionysius, his influence on Eastern Church traditions, both liturgical and theological, as well as his association with Christianity or Neoplatonism, are still matters of fiery discussion. For this reason, I have devoted a separate chapter to this issue alone. For summaries of discussions on various issues and aspects of the Palamas doctrine. See Norman Russell, *Gregory Palamas and the Making of Palamism in the Modern Age* (Oxford University Press, 2019), which discusses research conducted on Palamas' thought, the results of that research, mutual affiliations and the resulting controversy. In particular, it presents Martin Jugie's works and the position taken by defenders of Palamas from the Eastern Orthodox environment. It also presents the philosophical and theological basis of Palamite thinking in the light of recent research.

commentary in his book *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*.³ In this work, Meyendorff expressed his beliefs about Pseudo-Dionysius' Neoplatonism and an examination into how Maximus the Confessor, in his *Scholia* (commentaries on *Corpus*) subjected Pseudo-Dionysian thought to a Christian correction. J. Meyendorff expressed his views on these matters most clearly in two works: *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (1959) and *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (1969), where we find his argument about the necessity of the "Christological corrective" applied to *Corpus*, in his opinion, by Maximus the Confessor and then – within the currents of this tradition – by Gregory Palamas.⁴ In the chapter on Pseudo-Dionysius *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, Meyendorff describes the purported student of St. Paul as an apologist whose aim was to integrate the hierarchical world of Neoplatonism with the Christian system. He mistakenly believes that he was able to save the essence of Christian revelation by placing it at the heart of pagan doctrine, which he adopted especially for Christianity through the implementation of the concept of God's absolute transcendence.⁵ Despite this belief, Meyendorff tries to locate Dionysian thought within the perspective of the Byzantine theology of salvation.

On the level of theology in the strict sense, Pseudo-Dionysius continues and develops the patristic thought. While he adopts the language and the conceptual system of the Neo-Platonist, he separates himself from these very clearly when he speaks of transcendence as belonging properly to the divine essence.⁶

According to Meyendorff, it must be admitted that in theology Pseudo-Dionysius managed to go beyond Neoplatonism. However, it is difficult to say the same about his reflections on cosmology and ecclesiology, since the lack of Christological references makes the Areopagite's efforts to fully bridge the gap between the Gospel and Neoplatonism seem fruitless. The American scholar believes that this is particularly visible in ecclesiology, where continuity in the relationship between the initiator of enlightenment and the particular levels of the hierarchy is broken. This is especially true when the roles carried out on

3 J. Meyendorff, *Grégoire Palamas. Défense des saints hésychastes. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Louvain 1959); Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris 1959).

4 J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington 1969); cited in this edition: *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (New York 1975); see also Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. G. Lawrence (London 1964).

5 See Meyendorff, *Christ*, 92–111.

6 *Ibid.*, 93.

each level in the hierarchy (the sacramental roles of the bishop, the priest and the deacon) are “isolated from their original context and serve merely as an artificial form for a preconceived hierarchical system.”⁷ The priesthood in such a system, as Meyendorff argues, is not defined as an element of the internal structure of the Church-community, but as the personal state of a chosen, enlightened individual. It thus seems that the Christian concept of a Church-community, with a bishop at the forefront who is to impart grace and lead the faithful to God, is completely alien to the Dionysian perspective. Also, the role of the sacraments in this rigidly conceived hierarchy is reduced to the transmission of knowledge-illumination from one person to another; according to Meyendorff, even the Eucharist loses its communal dimension in favor of symbolic and moral meaning. The author of *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* argues that in Pseudo-Dionysian doctrine, hierarchies exist in two kinds: dynamic and immovable. They function immovably as an intermediary scale so as to be included in the Neoplatonic triad system. This immovable concept of hierarchy represents salvation and the sacraments in complete separation from the central mystery of Christianity, the Incarnation through which the grace of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross reaches all people, breaking down all hierarchies. Meyendorff believes that:

... undoubtedly Dionysius, who probably belonged to the Severian Monophysite party (hence the mono-energetic formula he used once), mentions the name of Jesus Christ and professes his belief in the incarnation, but the structure of his system is perfectly independent of his profession of faith.⁸

This means that the idea of the First Priest who descends in order to become human and to spiritually unite with believers is incompatible with the idea of the immovable nature of the hierarchy. Although in the Pseudo-Dionysian dynamic interpretation of the hierarchy there is room for a personal encounter with God and personal holiness, in its immovable understanding the role of the sacraments is limited to initiation through symbols, a fact which in turn reduces the ecclesiological level to a magical rite. The fundamental problem that Meyendorff sees in the interpretation of Dionysian texts is the need to explain why successive Church Fathers considered Pseudo-Dionysius’ works authoritative, and why they cited them in a strictly Christian context. Meyendorff solves this problem by claiming that, although Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus obviously owed a great deal to Pseudo-Dionysius, they did so by “integrating him

7 Ibid., 104.

8 Ibid., 108.

into a system of thought fundamental independent of him.”⁹ In addition, the later Fathers, and especially Gregory Palamas, applied a “corrective” to the theology conceived by the author of the *Areopagitics* in order to be able to include it in their synthesis. Meyendorff also states unambiguously that the Dionysian influence on the development of the Byzantine liturgy brought definitely negative results. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, he believes, it is only by ascending the steps of the hierarchy, through initiation, that an individual member of the Church can reach the mystery that is always hidden in its essence. Without initiation, we only have indirect knowledge gained through symbols interpreted by the hierarchy of priests. This is how the author of *Corpus* perceives the role of the liturgy and sacraments, the internal, Christological and eschatological meaning of which remained unclear. The necessary correction to Pseudo-Dionysius’ thought was, in Meyendorff’s view, rapidly incorporated into the domain of theology, but his symbolic and hierarchical conception of the liturgy was forever imprinted in the sphere of Byzantine piety, which – the American scholar concludes – led to the way mass is celebrated in the Eastern Church, a symbolic drama where the assembled faithful participate as spectators in a mystery that can only be accessed by the initiated.

Meyendorff also examined the thesis of Christological “improvement” of the Dionysian *Corpus*, as performed by the Doctor of Hesychasm, in his *A Study of Gregory Palamas*. He argues that it was precisely the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius that was at the center of Byzantine controversy in the fourteenth century.¹⁰ He also portrays Barlaam and Palamas as dueling exegetes, who both try to correctly read the thinking contained in the *Areopagitics*. According to Meyendorff, the Doctor of Hesychasm’s opponent applied the cataphatic theology (positive terms of God as the inevitable Creator and the cause of everything) used in *Divine Names* to deny the possibility of man reaching the state of deification and thus participating in the inaccessible nature of God. This, in turn, allowed the Calabrian monk to lend an exclusively nominalist or symbolic meaning to passages from the Holy Scriptures, to the traditions of the Fathers, and especially to Pseudo-Dionysius himself when he speaks of the possibility of a created being participating in divine nature. As a result of such an approach, on the part of Barlaam, to Dionysian thought, as Meyendorff points out, “the system of the Areopagite neutralized itself, and at the same time neutralized

9 Ibid., 110.

10 See J. Meyendorff, *Study*, 204–205.

Revelation.”¹¹ In his opinion, Gregory, following Maximus’ thinking, saves Pseudo-Dionysius’ authority by applying a Christological corrective to Dionysian doctrine as expressed in the statement that Christ’s incarnation and sacrifice of Christ abolishes hierarchy. In Meyendorff’s view, the Doctor of Hesychasm, who referred constantly to the Areopagite, put himself in such clear opposition to him that he had to resort to a compulsory and artificial exegesis of Pseudo-Dionysian thought to avoid being accused of a direct attack on such a venerable authority. The Palamite Christological correctives, however, completely changed the structure of the Areopagite’s thought.¹² This difference is especially visible in the complete degradation of the Dionysian, hierarchical universe to the pre-incarnation field of “natural cosmology.” Gregory performed this procedure fully aware of the Neoplatonic nature of the Pseudo-Dionysian system. Thus, in the Palamite version, hierarchies belong to a category that was completely abolished by the existence of a historical and in principle new reality after the Incarnation of the Word. In effect, although angels are superior to man in the natural order, man – after incarnation – exceeds the angels and is as more like God-man.

John Meyendorff’s interpretation of the Areopagite’s thought in *Study of Gregory Palamas* came under sharp questioning by Father John Romanides in his two-part review essay “Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics” (1960).¹³ Romanides criticized Meyendorff’s “imaginative theories concerning Palamite monistic prayer and anthropology, and Incarnational and sacramental heart mysticism.” According to Romanides, Meyendorff engaged in an intense struggle to present Palamas as a heroic biblical theologian who devoted himself to the idea of Christological correctives applied to the last remnants of Neoplatonic apophaticism among its supposed followers, the Neoplatonic-Byzantine-nominalist humanists. Romanides continues in a typically polemical manner:

Since Dionysius the Areopagite is supposed to be the big bad boy of Patristic Platonism which produced Barlaamite nominalism, Father John is forced into a peculiar position by Palamas’ obvious and, one may say, even unconditional acceptance of Pseudo-Dionysian authority.¹⁴

11 Ibid., 205.

12 Ibid., 189–191.

13 J. Romanides, “Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6.2 (Winter 1960–61); “Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics – II,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 9.2 (Winter 1963–64): 225–270.

14 Romanides, “Notes,” 249–250.

In order to manage this difficulty, according to Romanides, Meyendorff portrays the author of *The Triads* as a thinker who was constantly (consciously or otherwise, it is not always clear) applying Christological correctives to Dionysian theology. Romanides claims that the American scholar tacitly assumes that it was the Calabrian philosopher, not the Doctor of Hesychasm, who correctly read the main themes in *Corpus*, which is indicated by the fact that Meyendorff does not mention those places where Barlaam distorted the Areopagite's thought, and does not even examine those cases in which Palamas interprets Pseudo-Dionysius more accurately than his opponent. And nowhere does he cite even one example where the Calabrian's version is more accurate than the one put forward by Palamas. Meyendorff offers us only his unproven theories. In this light, John Romanides proposes a different reading of the Dionysian *Corpus*, and in so doing he criticizes the American scholar for ignoring the most important features of its author's patristic position and accepting the erroneous opinions about the Areopagite common to the Latinized minds of the modern West. Romanides points out that Pseudo-Dionysius and Palamas are of the same spiritual and theological kind. Both believe that the individual can be led by spiritual fathers to a union with God; they know from their own experience the paths to purification, they themselves stand on higher levels of perfection and knowledge of divine matters. In the Pseudo-Dionysian system, there is a real and immediate connection with God at all levels of spiritual development, so in this sense there are no intermediaries between the Creator and the created. On the contrary, at every stage there are those who help others on the lower levels; thus, as Romanides concludes, there is nothing immovable in the hierarchy, and the Dionysian *De Coelesti Hierarchia* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* do not make up the closed system that Meyendorff believed. First of all, refinement is an eternal process that never ends, even at the highest levels, because not even for the shortest span of time can there be a moment of complete fusion with the divine essence, as in the Neoplatonic and Latin beatification vision. If Meyendorff had drawn attention to these principles of Greek patristic thought, he would certainly have gotten to the core of understanding the eternal principles of hierarchy and the movement that constituted it.

Many of the critical remarks contained in the article by J. Romanides concerning John Meyendorff's arguments were taken and developed, even if in a more irenic form, by the American Orthodox bishop Alexander Golitzin in his publications from 1994–2002.¹⁵ Of Golitzin's many works on Pseudo-Dionysius,

15 A. Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with*

I will consider two of the most representative works: the first written in 1994 – “Et introibo ad altare dei: *The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita*,” and the second, from 2002 – “Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas.” Each of these articles addresses questions raised by Romanides about Pseudo-Dionysius’ place in the fabric of Orthodox spiritual life and Meyendorff’s statement about the influence of Neoplatonism on the Areopagite’s thinking.

In his introduction to *Et introibo*, Golitzin emphasizes that when he began his studies on the Dionysian *Corpus* while at Oxford (as he points out, this was already after his studies at Saint Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary undertaken through the auspices of J. Meyendorff, teacher, mentor and one of the leading Orthodox historians of philosophy in the twentieth century), he was absolutely convinced that the position of his master was right. But Golitzin was concerned by the fact that, given the lack of internal cohesion within *Corpus* as viewed from the perspective of academic studies, a theologian of Maximus the Confessor’s caliber could consider this work credible. Golitzin found the answer to his concerns not in further studies, but by spending two years in Greece, at the Simonopetra Monastery on Mount Athos. According to Golitzin, the experience of religious life acquired through personal and communal prayer and an understanding of the ascetic phenomenon of the holy *starets* (an elderly figure at the center of Eastern Christian piety since at least the fourth century) helped him discover what he regards as the heart of the Dionysian *Corpus* and the reason behind its complete assimilation into the patristic tradition. Simply put, Father Alexander Golitzin found what he considers to be the only and true way to study, with understanding, the Areopagite’s works so as to find the lost perspective through which the Fathers read and accepted *Corpus*.¹⁶

Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition (Thessaloniki 1994); “On the Other Hand: A Response to Father Paul Wesche’s Recent Article on Dionysius,” in *St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Quarterly* 34 (1990): 305–323; “A Contemplative and a Liturgist: Father Georges Florovsky on Corpus Dionysiaca,” *St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Quarterly* 43.2 (1999); “Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a ‘Christological Corrective’ and Related Matters,” *St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Quarterly* 46.2 (2002): 163–190; “‘Suddenly, Christ’: The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, eds. Michael Kessler and Christian Shepherd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 8–37; “The Body of Christ: Saint Symeon the New Theologian on Spiritual Life and the Hierarchical Church,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38.2 (1994): 131–179.

16 See Golitzin, *Et introibo*, 8–9.

In the article “Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a ‘Christological Corrective’ and Related Matters,” Golitzin criticizes the need to apply “Christological correctives” to the Areopagite’s thoughts. He notes from the start that most scholarship attempts to answer the question whether Gregory was a faithful and accurate interpreter of Pseudo-Dionysius, and then draws conclusions about the doctrine of both thinkers. In the studies published so far, Golitzin found three ways in which this issue has been raised: Gregory Palamas is treated, first, as a faithful disciple of Pseudo-Dionysius who is therefore “guilty of Neoplatonism;”¹⁷ second, as a theologian who corrected the author of *Corpus* in a clumsy fashion so that it would agree with Christian doctrine (unlike Thomas Aquinas, who did it in a perfect way);¹⁸ and finally as a thinker who treated Dionysius as “the lonely meteorite in the night of the patristic thought” whose authority was based on a belief in its apostolic origin.¹⁹ There is also a belief that Palamas, provoked by Barlaam, was forced to refer to the Areopagite doctrine, and – in so doing – changed the system of Pseudo-Dionysian system under the guise of interpretation.²⁰ J. Meyendorff is, according to Golitzin, the source of this last and most widespread position. Father

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- 17 See Golitzin, “Dionysius,” 166–168. Mentioned here: G. Podskalsky, “Gottesschau und Inkarnation. Zur Bedeutung der Heilsgeschichte bei Gregorios Palamas,” *Orientalia christiana periodica* 35 (1969); B. Schutze, “Grundfragen des theologischen Palamismus,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* 24 (1975): 105–135; R. D. Williams, “The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,” *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977): 27–44; J. Nadal Canellas, “Denys l’Aréopagite dans les traités de Grégoire Akindynos,” ed. Y. de Andia, *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident* (Paris 1997), 535–563.
- 18 E. von Ivanka, *Plato Christianus* (Einsiedeln 1964), 228–289.
- 19 On the absence of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Eastern patristic tradition see P. Sherwood, “Influence de Denys l’Aréopagite,” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique*, ed. A. Rayez, P. Sherwood, Vol. 3 (Orient), Paris (1957), c. 286–318; I. Hausherr, “Les grands courants de la spiritualité orientale,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 1 (1935): 124–125. A. Golitzin borrowed the term “lonely meteorite” from the work of J. Vanneste, “Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1963): 288–289.
- 20 A. Golitzin, “Dionysius,” 166. See also *Study of Gregory Palamas*. Within the literature confirming Meyendorff’s hypothesis, Golitzin also includes R. Sinkiewicz, “The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,” *Medieval Studies* 44 (1982): 181–242, in which the author claims that Barlaam correctly interpreted Pseudo-Dionysius thought as requiring Neo-Platonic correction; and P. Wesche, “Christological Doctrine and Liturgical Interpretation in Pseudo-Dionysius,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 33.1 (1989): 53–73.

Alexander claims that the need for a “corrective” is an academic invention, and we can trace the beginning of this practically universal, theological error back to a misunderstanding of the meaning and functions of the Dionysian hierarchies. The fact that they were derived from Neoplatonism was accepted by researchers and theologians ranging from Martin Luther (*plus platonizans quam christianizans*), through such nineteenth-century scholars as Joseph Stiglmayr and Hugon Koch, who attempted to prove the dependence of the Areopagite doctrine on Iamblichus and Proclus.²¹ Gregory Palamas, however, did not belong to this school of thought; he was a fourteenth-century representative of the continuous, coherent reading of Pseudo-Dionysius understood in the spirit of the monastic, ascetic-mystical and liturgical tradition of the Christian East. One should therefore not lose sight of the fact that *Corpus* can only be correctly interpreted in the context of the tradition from which it emerged, a fact which the Palamite community has always remembered well. In Golitzin’s view, the origin of the Dionysian “problem” in the West dates back to the twelfth and thirteen centuries. With the rediscovery of *Corpus*, Pseudo-Dionysius’ doctrine was transformed into the already existing line of Latin theology, spirituality and ecclesiology. In this process of transformation, the uniform quality of Dionysian thought was broken into different parts and then incorporated into the mainstream of questions contemplated by medieval thinkers – e.g. the speculative theology of the *Summa*, the mysticism of Eckhart, the architectural plans of Suger, Abbot St. Denis, or the ecclesiology of papal apologists and canonists.²² With reference to these themes, the question arose regarding the need for a Christological corrective, which is particular to Western thought – in other words, an artificial problem projected

21 See A. Golitzin, “Dionysius,” 167; H. Koch, “Proklus als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius in der Lehre vom Bösen,” *Philologus* 54 (1895): 438–454; J. Stiglmayr, “Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253–273, particularly pp. 721–748; “Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften und ihr Eindringen in die christliche Literatur bis zum Lateranconcil 649. Ein zweiter Beitrag zur Dionysius Frage,” in *IV Jahresbericht des öffentlichen Privatgymnasiums an der Stella matutina zu Feldkirch* (Feldkirch 1895). A later monograph by Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen* (Mainz 1900) cemented the opinion of the lexical and doctrinal parallel between Pseudo-Dionysius and the late Neoplatonists. Citations and numbering of citations from: *Corpus Dionysiacaum I: De Divinibus Nominibus*, ed. B. Suchla (Berlin–New York 1990); *Corpus Dionysiacaum II*, ed. G. Heil, A.M. Ritter (Berlin–New York 1991), vols. 33 and 36.

22 A. Golitzin, “Dionysius,” 185.

onto the thinking of Pseudo-Dionysius and Palamas. The basic problem, Golitzin writes, is not the scholars who study Pseudo-Dionysius, but the filter through which they read him; therefore, Dionysius' "problematization" should not exist at all. However, considering the fact that patristic studies in their modern form are a Western invention and it was in the West where this issue was raised, it was not difficult for Orthodox scholars to fall into the error of this "non-issue," which clearly happened – Golitzin claims – not only with Meyendorff, but even with – to a lesser extent – Father G. Florovski and many of our contemporary scholars.²³ However, because he did not want to attack his spiritual master, Golitzin chose as the object of his criticism an essay by Adolf Ritter (co-editor of the critical edition of *Corpus Areopagiticum*) "Gregor Palamas als Leser des Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagita," which was published in a collection edited by Ysabel de Andia at the Sorbonne (1997).²⁴ According to Father Alexander, Ritter fully believes that his publication has proven conclusively that the "Christological corrective" of the Areopagite's works is completely indisputable (*völlig unbestreitbar*). As Golitzin writes: "I wish to register, first, my view that the 'corrective' is not only not 'incontestable,' but that it is an illusion, a scholarly invention" that Gregory Palamas is supposed to have provided to counteract what G. Florowski called the "staircase principle" of the Dionysian hierarchies.²⁵ A. Ritter proves his thesis by referring to what are, in his opinion, the Neoplatonic overtones of certain fragments of *De Coelesti Hierarchia* (XIII, 4) and the treatise *Divine Names* (I, 5) concerning the principles of hierarchical mediation and the view (contemplation) of God, inaccessible to people, through angels. In response, Golitzin presents a different way of interpreting these famous passages, one by which he deprives them of their hierarchical Neoplatonic character. Because I devote a large part of this work to the juxtaposition and analysis of the aforementioned *Corpus* texts and the Palamite *Triads*, and given that I also cite both interpretations, here I will limit myself to saying that Golitzin is absolutely convinced that he has overcome the difficulties that result from Ritter's interpretation. Then A. Golitzin offers criticism of a fragment from one of Palamas' late works, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, cited by the German scholar, more precisely from chapters 36–40 devoted to the presentation of the human soul as *imago trinitatis*.

23 Ibid., 187.

24 A.M. Ritter, "Gregor Palamas als Leser des Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagita," in Y. de Andia, ed., *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité* (Paris 1997), 565–579.

25 G. Florovsky (Florowski), *The Byzantine Ascetical and Spiritual Fathers* (Belmont 1987), 221.

According to the Doctor of Hesychasm, each person – composed of intellect, mind and soul, reflects the image of God and the Trinity at the same time. Ritter treats Gregory's extensive argument here as a silent correction (*stillschweigende Korrektur*) of the Dionysian *Zwischenglieder*, while he emphasizes that it is the harmonious coexistence of the divine-human nature in the person of Christ that guarantees direct access to that which is divine. This fragment presents some difficulties for Ritter's opponent; the scholar admits that in fact – according to his knowledge – Pseudo-Dionysius nowhere claimed that man has an insight into the nature of God equal to the angels, nor does he affirm the soul as an *imago trinitatis*, despite his obvious sympathy for the triadic structure of divine and human reality. Although Areopagite thought clearly differs from the Trinitarian considerations of the Cappadocian Fathers, Golitzin tries to exploit this difficulty to confirm his argument that there is no need to "correct" the Pseudo-Dionysian world, which is what I will present in the relevant chapter of this book. Father Alexander emphasizes Ritter's deep respect for the Orthodox tradition, which did not prevent him, however, from misinterpreting *Corpus*. According to Golitzin, many scholars (e.g. Lossky, Romanides, Louth, Roques) fortunately avoided this error, presenting Pseudo-Dionysius in the proper light.²⁶ Among Unfortunately, Golitzin's list of scholars does not include the translator, Italy specialist and professor at the University of Milan – Pier Scazzoso, whose article entitled "Lo pseudo-Dionigi nell'interpretazione di Gregorio Palamas" (1967) proved to be valuable reading for me, particularly helpful when considering the issue of the "Christological corrective."²⁷ Scazzoso notices that both pro-and

26 See V. N. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge–London 1968); J. S. Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6.2 (1960/61): 186–205, and *ibid.*, 9.2 (1963/64): 225–270; A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (CT 1989); A. Golitzin, "Anarchy vs. Hierarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and their Common Roots in Ascetical Tradition," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38.2 (1994): 131–179. For Catholic and Western scholars, see R. Roques, *L'Univers dionysien*; O. von Semmelroth, a series of articles in *Scholastik* 20–24 (1949); 25 (1950); 27 (1952); 28 (1953); and 29 (1954); H. U. von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Aesthetik* (Einsiedeln 1962), Vol. II, 147–214; Y. de Andia, *Henôsis: l'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Leida–Kolonja–New York 1996).

27 P. Scazzoso, "Lo Pseudo-Dionigi nell'interpretazione di Gregorio Palamas," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*, fsc. VI (Milan 1967): 671–700; Scazzoso, *Ricerche sulla struttura del linguaggio del Pseudo-Dionigi Areopagita. Introduzione alla lettura delle opere pseudo-dionisiane* (Milan 1957); Scazzoso, *La teologia di san Gregorio Palamas* (Istituto di studi teologici ortodossi S. Gregorio Palamas (Milan 1970).

anti-Palamites tried to extract from the Areopagite's writings thoughts confirming completely different theses, one result being that Meyendorff found it justified to accuse Dionysian writings of being ambiguous because they can be reduced to statements that not only inconsistent, but even contradictory.²⁸ Undoubtedly, in *Corpus* there is no systematic reading Christology, but it is true that we also do not find it in the works of either Gregory of Nyssa or other Cappadocian Fathers. The concept of Christology in its mature form appeared much later, namely in the writings of Maximus the Confessor from the seventh century. Piero Scazzoso, by way of a response to Meyendorff's accusations, placed the Palamas doctrine in the context of the examined structure and doctrinal content of *Corpus*. In his conclusion, the Italian scholar stated:

it does not seem justified to speak of correctives or additions to Pseudo-Dionysian teachings on the part of Palamas, but rather of the necessary supplements, thereby reducing the impression that the Areopagite's writings were ambiguous ... This ambiguity results, of course, from the opposing tendencies of its interpreters.²⁹

In Scazzoso's view, Gregory Palamas carried out his exegesis of the work of Pseudo-Dionysius in the light of the living faith and in accordance with the patristic tradition. Thus, without the need for a correction, the Doctor of Hesychasm placed *Corpus* within his harmonious synthesis of the monastic and dogmatic traditions of the Eastern Church.

1.1 The Consistency of the Palamite Doctrine with the Patristic Tradition of the Eastern Church

The essence of the doctrine put forward by the author of *The Triads* is the antinomy that God exists as totally inaccessible in essence and yet is attainable – that is, he is knowable in his energies – visible, deifying light. The question whether the Doctor of Hesychasm is thus an innovator, whether he continues the patristic tradition, or whether he created a great synthesis of the two, was asked from the very beginning when his metaphysics of light and remains first emerged, and remains open to this day.

The matter of faithfulness to tradition, understood as an inviolable dogmatic framework, is the most important of all issues raised, from the very beginning, in the heart of the Eastern Church. This is because Palamas considers it his main goal to defend orthodoxy (literally: “righteous faith”) – that is, the only truth

28 J. Meyendorff, *Triades*, introduction, XXXV; from P. Scazzoso, “Lo Pseudo-Dionigi,” 678.

29 *Ibid.*, 682.

revealed once, in the person of Christ. B. Tatakis was very much on target when he wrote that orthodoxy is the search for logical explanations and relationships within dogma, while heresy is the result of philosophical and logical investigations or a mystical experience that goes beyond dogma's framework. At the same time, Eastern Orthodoxy emphasizes its doctrinal immutability: revelation of the truth happened once, it was written in the Gospels; therefore, nothing else can be added. The Greek scholar notes:

The main difference between Orthodoxy and the heresies evolves from the Orthodox desire to stay close to the historical base of Christianity, a desire exemplified by the great debates about the nature of Christ.³⁰

To be sure, over the centuries, the interpretation of the Gospel and Christ's words contained in it have been debated and questioned. By the same token, the content of conciliar statements was usually negative – i.e. it talked about what should *not* be believed. In the case of particular disputes, tradition was an indisputable system of reference, and especially the criterion of the holy Fathers' opinions. Thus, the bishop of Thessaloniki – in support of his theology and metaphysics – compiles, in many places, quotations from the writings of the Fathers, thus referring to the so-called “purpose of the Fathers” (φρόνημα τῶν Πατέρων).³¹ The question of Palamite thought and its doctrinal fidelity to the traditions of the Fathers is directly linked to its suspected illegitimacy from the very beginning of the Palamite and anti-Palamite discussions. It was Barlaam who first accused Palamas of heresy before the Patriarch John Calecas, and to justify his position, he published *Against the Messalians*, in which he openly accused the Doctor of Hesychasm of supporting the formally condemned sect of Messalians and Bogomils. This harsh accusation was based on the belief that Gregory identified the unknowable essence of God with the energies accessible by human cognition, which led in turn to the conviction held by the followers of heresy that since God is sensually knowable, man can therefore unite with the whole of God and become a god-man – that is, a second Christ. This accusation forced Palamas to write the last of *The Triads*, the subject of which focuses on the antinomic nature of God's undivided essence, the assumption of its absolute un-knowability and, at the same time, its accessibility through participation in

30 B. Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, 84.

31 See J. Klinger, *O istocie prawosławia* (Warszawa 1983), 151; K. Leśniewski, *Ekumenizm w czasie. Prawosławna wizja jedności w ujęciu Georges'a Florowsky'ego* (Lublin 1995), chapter “Zobowiązująca wartość opinii Ojców,” pp. 138–146.

un-created energies. In turn, claims about the un-created nature of divine energies exposed Palamas to the accusation of polytheism and the introduction of additional persons into the Trinity. But this argument was the result of a misunderstanding of, or ignorance about, the apophaticism and antinomies always present in the Doctor of Hesychasm's doctrine. After all, consistent apophaticism proclaims that such terms as "essence," "energies," "Trinity" cannot be exhaustive terms for God Himself – καθ'ἑαυτον. God, as their cause, exceeds and transcends everything, even his own divinity. In response to the accusations, Palamas not only wrote a number of works and apologies, but above all he wrote, in 1340, a summary of his views known as the *Hagioretic Tome*,³² which was signed by the spiritual leaders of all the Monasteries of the Holy Mountain and then sent to Constantinople. At the Ecumenical Synod convened by Emperor Andronikos III, Barlaam's doctrine was finally condemned, and Palamas' manifesto was determined to conform to Orthodoxy.

The future Bishop of Thessaloniki, having successfully rebutted Barlaam's accusations of heresy, was accused by the dogmatic monk Akindynos of misinterpreting and distorting patristic texts, and of introducing a new doctrine into Orthodox canon, inviolable since the Council of Constantinople of 843. In the spirit of the Eastern Church, which speaks for itself – in the words of J. Klinger – as a "green tree in tradition,"³³ this accusation may threaten final consequences – that is, the announcement of an excommunication at the synod and the inclusion of its text in a series of sentences repeated throughout Church history. Regarding the author of *The Triads*, Y. Spiteris notes:

... Akindynos had already accused him of being – in a negative sense – a "new theologian:" he presented his teaching as "a new theology" and thus alien to the patristic tradition: it was, in his opinion, a true *kainotomia* (an illegitimate innovation).³⁴

The arguments put forward by Akindynos, who had so far acted as a mediator in the dispute, were supported by the two great humanists and thinkers Nicephorus Gregoras and Demetrios Kydones, who had previously been against Barlaam. In this situation, it is understandable that Palamas used all means at his disposal

32 *Hagioretic Tome*, PG 150, 1225–1236.

33 J. Klinger, *O istocie prawosławia*, 151.

34 See Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie Kościoła*, 202–203; 252–260; J. Nadal Canellas, "La critique par Akindynos de l'herméneutique patristique de Palamas," *Istina* 19 (1974): 297–328; Palamas, "Epistula I ad Akindynon," *Gregoriu tou Palama Syggrammata* I, ed. P. Christou (Saloniki, 1962), 203–219; *ibid.*, "Epistula II ad Akindynon," *Gregoriu tou Palama*, 221–225.

to refute the suspicion that his doctrine was somehow novel. The rejection or acceptance of Gregory's arguments on this issue was one of the reasons behind the division of positions among Byzantine clergy. A dispute flared up which extend into in medieval history as a debate over the roots and traditions of the Byzantine intellectual legacy.

The Cappadocian Fathers, to whose authority Palamas referred, saw no discord between theology and mysticism, since they believed that the two form single unity; the feed on and complement each other. "A true theologian is one who has lived the content of his theology," according to one maxim expressing the conviction that the axis of Byzantine theology is to experience an encounter with God. Nevertheless, Akindynos' counter-arguments were precisely related to the practice of the hesychasts.³⁵ Meyendorff's thesis is well-known; it detects a clear distinction between two planes in this conflict: the pro-humanist one with purely secular tendencies, and the Palamite one with a theological or even mystical posture.³⁶ In support of his opinion, Meyendorff refers to the works of outstanding thinkers, humanists, and opponents of Hesychasm, Nicephorus Gregoras, Theodore Metochites and Demetrios Kydones,³⁷ who attacked those elements of Gregory's doctrine that directly referred to ascetic practices and mystics. The dispute, according to J. Meyendorff, which can be called, in a

35 See J. Nadal Canellas, "La critique par Akindynos d l'herméneutique de Palamas," *Istina* 19 (1974): 297–328; T. Boiadjiev, "Gregorios Akindynos als Ausleger des Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagita," in *Die Dionysius-Rezeption in Mittelalter*, eds. T. Boiadjiev, G. Kapriev, A. Speer (Turnhout 2000), 107–118; G. Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz*, 256–259.

36 J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 100, 134–137 (for more on the polarity between the humanists and the monks, see chapter "Monks and Humanists," pp. 30–33). See P. Scazzoso, "Lo Pseudo-Dionigi," 672; R. Flogaus, "Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42.1 (1998): 1–32.

37 The great Byzantine historian Nicephorus Gregoras in the work *Λόγοι στηλιτευκοί* (unpublished, manuscript. Genève grec 35, fol. 77, see J. Meyendorff, *Notes sur influence*, 548) openly criticizes Pseudo-Dionysius for being inconsistent with the tradition of the Fathers and for the ambiguous thinking behind which, according to Gregoras, there is a lack of deep theological reflection. In contrast, in his *Byzantine History*, he argued that each theology is merely a symbol of God, whom we know only through His works. Since the separation of divine essence from energy is a purely nominalistic procedure, it is heresy to proclaim the possibility of knowing God through His energies, see Nicephorus Gregoras, *Historia byzantina*, Vol. 30, PG 149, 1123CD; *ibid.*, Vol. 32, PG 149, 357 AB.

succinct and slightly simplified manner, “a dispute between monks and humanists,”³⁸ clearly defined – on the one hand – the limits to which Greek philosophy and the spirit of the Renaissance were accepted, and – on the one hand – forced the parties in the dispute to revise their position on orthodoxy and dogma. This outstanding Palamist believes that along with Barlaam, the spirit of the Renaissance was also condemned, and thus Palamas’ doctrinal victory was a triumph for orthodoxy and the national faction of monks.³⁹ B. Tatakis partly favors this interpretation of the Palamite controversy, though he emphatically emphasizes other, equally important aspects of the issue:

Thus, the dispute over Hesychasm is more than just another battle fought by the Byzantines against the ambitions of the West. The parties were not in fact Byzantium and the West, but simply religion in its particular expression – that is, the desire of the spirit to transcend itself and unite with God, battling a different kind desire within the human mind, which we call philosophy – the desire for rational systematization and consistency.⁴⁰

Thus, B. Tatakis clarified both Meyendorff’s thesis and a much earlier view expressed by L. Uspensky (1892), according to which Palamite debate was, in essence, a philosophical dispute between Platonists and Aristotelians, and then turned into a theology dispute. The author of *Byzantine Philosophy* concludes:

For all of its links to Greek philosophical thought, it is clear that the Hesychastic controversy started and ended purely as a theological controversy. It is the form in which was cast the debate within the Greek Church between mysticism ... and rationalism.⁴¹

It is worth noting that Martin Jugie and Piero Scazzoso did not agree with Meyendorff’s statements; they emphasized the intra-theological nature of this Byzantine controversy. The argument made by the author of *Byzantine Philosophy* also raised concerns regarding E. von Ivanka and H.-G. Beck’s publication, according to which the discussion was limited to the dispute between two theological trends referring to a common tradition.⁴² According to these scholars, the

38 See J. Meyendorff, *Society and culture*, 54–58.

39 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 82: “The victory of Palamism in the fourteenth-century was therefore the victory of a specifically Christian, God-centred humanism for which the Greek patristic tradition always stood in opposition to all concepts of man, which considered him as an autonomous or ‘secular’ being” (quote on p. 47).

40 B. Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, 225; see also, 229.

41 *Ibid.*, 225.

42 See M. Jugie, “Palamas,” in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, Vol. 11, eds. A. Vacant, E. Mangenot, E. Amann (Paris 1931), c. 1735–1776; H. G. Beck, “Humanismus und Palamismus,” in *Actes du XII Congrès International d’Études Byzantines, Ochrid 1961*

fact of the decisive and irresolvable opposition between a love of divine matters on the one hand, and a love of knowledge on the other, should be postponed in time. In the Palamas era, this polemic appeared as “*ein inner-byzantinischer Gegensatz*.”⁴³ According to P. Scazzoso, the correction to Meyendorff’s thesis could be based on the following explanation: the dispute between the Palamists and anti-Palamists did not mean the final separation of philosophy and theology, although it contained the seeds of a later distinct split between the two paths. According to the Italian scholar, a reading of Palamas’ works and the fragmentary writings of his opponents allows one to grasp two divergent theological attitudes, the basic assumptions of which cannot be rendered compatible with each other. Indeed, Palamas appealed to the Bible and to the traditions of the Church Fathers to affirm the highest and most complete form of man’s knowledge of God, which is a unifying vision. His opponents, on the other hand, denied this possibility; they considered God an unknowable being and were skeptical of mystical gnosis. They turned, with full confidence, to reason, which provided the only possible knowledge through created nature. According to P. Scazzoso, although the open conflict between faith in divine illumination and trust in natural cognition is sometimes visible also in the West, it gave rise in the East to heated polemics.⁴⁴ Y. Spiteris presents this dispute in a slightly different manner; he refers to the later views of G. Podskalsky (1976) and N.A. Matsoukas (1995), writing that the discussion between Palamas and Barlaam started with the question of whether theological arguments could lead to “proof” of divine realities, or whether theology was reduced to rational dialectics. By way of a conclusion, Spiteris states that the effect of this polemic was the monastic movement’s strong rejection of the Latin method of practicing theology, typical of scholasticism.⁴⁵

Discussion about the extent to which Palamas’ thinking was consistent with the tradition of the Eastern Church – which included the works of Athanasius,

(Belgrade 1963), 74; E. von Ivanka, *Plato Christianus* (Einsiedeln 1964); compare. P. Scazzoso, “*Lo Pseudo-Dionigi*,” 672; R. Flogaus, “Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 42.1 (1998): 1–32.

43 H. G. Beck, “Humanismus und Palamismus,” 70.

44 See P. Scazzoso, “*Lo Pseudo-Dionigi*,” 672.

45 See Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie Kościoła*, 204–205; J. Meyendorff, “L’hesychasme, problème de sémantique,” in *Mélanges H.Ch. Puech* (Paris 1974), 543–547; G. Podskalsky, “Zur Bedeutung des Methodenproblems für die byzantinische Theologie,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 98 (1976): 391–393; N. A. Matsoukas, *Teologia dogmatica e simbolica ortodossa I* (Roma 1995), 106–117.

John Chrysostom, Macarius of Egypt, Evagrius Ponticus, Cyril of Alexandria, the Cappadocian Fathers, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus and Symeon the New Theologian – flared up at the beginning of the twentieth century first in the pages of *Échos d'Orient*, and then in other periodicals: *Istina*, *Irenikon*, and *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*. This discussion included both historians of philosophy and theologians from the Orthodox Church and the Western Church, often dividing even researchers associated with a similar intellectual current.

One of the first and more extensive books examining the dependence of Palamite thoughts on tradition in the context of the views of Duns Scotus and Gennadius Scholarius is S. Guichardan's book *Le problème de la simplicité divine en Orient et en Occident aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles: Grégoire Palamas, Duns Scot, Georges Scholarios* (1933).⁴⁶ From the outset (pp. 19–57), the author examines the study of God in connection with the problem of God's unity, from the point of view of cataphatic theology and Thomistic scholasticism. Consequently, Guichardan analyzes the Palamite doctrine through Thomistic philosophy. It is clear that the author is much closer to Thomism than to Eastern Church doctrine; he devotes much less space to that doctrine than to analysis of the thoughts of Duns Scotus and Gregory Scholarios. His treatment of Palamas himself is not very revealing, and his polemics with Palamite theology are filled with negative evaluative phrases such as: “*abberation mystique de moines ignorants*” (p. 79) and “*Milieu illétre*” (p. 114). An analysis of Palamas' thinking carried out from the Thomistic point of view leads the book's author to make the following objections: it is heresy to distinguish the essence of God into knowable and unknowable parts because it leads to an understanding of God as divisible and complex, and therefore imperfect; statements about divine light as knowable energy are purely poetic and rhetorical; grace is given to each person separately and has a created nature; it is heresy to understand it as un-created and infinite energy; Palamite doctrine is not rooted in the tradition of the Greek Fathers and their thinking; and it was founded to defend the monks of Athos against the Barlaam's attacks. According to the French scholar, Palamas invented most of the quotations from the Fathers' writings that appear in his works. For his part, Guichardan presents the study of God as a being whose attributes are only the development of the idea of being, its properties. God's simplicity, or rather his non-complexity, also come from being; it makes up His first transcendent quality.

46 S. Guichardan, *Le problème de la simplicité divine en Orient et en Occident aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles: Grégoire Palamas, Duns Scot, Georges Scholarios* (Lyon 1933).

God also therefore cannot be complex, because parts are always worse than the whole, which means that some parts of God would have to be worse. Guichardan even compiles a table of God's *distinctions* made by the three eponymous authors (p. 42) and describes it in detail (pp. 37–50). Some scholars (e.g. Krivocheine) are upset by the application of this type of treatment to the thoughts of theologians and philosophers who were completely alien to a similar methodology. The French scholar also writes (p. 171) about the Russian Orthodox Church having deleted Palamas' name from the list of saints, which is not true; Gregory is mentioned on the Second Sunday of Lent, and the temporary changes introduced in the eighteenth century by Gawryla Twerski, also included Athanasius the Great and Cyril of Alexandria.

V. Grumel's review of this book, published in *Échos d'Orient*, is very interesting.⁴⁷ Regarding the part devoted to the comparison of Eastern and Latin Church traditions, the author accuses Guichardan of translating too superficially the texts of Maximus the Confessor, John Damascus and Gregory of Nyssa concerning the distinction in the essence of God (pp. 85–88). This, in effect, leads to over-interpretation and the drawing of erroneous conclusions. Assessing the chapters devoted to Palamas (pp. 88–95), Grumel notices the dependence of Guichardan's publications on the works of M. Jugie, his limited knowledge of the subject both in relation to the Greek Fathers' tradition and Eastern Church writings, as well as the uncritical nature, and superficiality, of his conclusions.

In the 1930s, alongside the above-mentioned critical publications, a powerful current of research on Palamas emerged in the West, presenting his thought in close connection with Eastern Church traditions. This phenomenon was associated with the post-revolutionary emigration from Russia (1917–1923), and thus with work conducted in research centers in the Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, Belgium, and the United States by outstanding scholars of Russian Orthodoxy: B. Krivocheine, V. Lossky, P. Evdokimov, G. Florowski.⁴⁸ Currently, the

47 V. Grumel, "Grégoire Palamas, Duns Scott, Georges Scholarios devant le problème de la simplicité divine," *Échos d'Orient* 37 (1935): 84–96.

48 A. Nichols, *Light from the East: Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology* (London 1999), 14–17. This publication is an in-depth study of the Orthodox academic community operating in the diaspora. The Academy of the Russian Orthodox Church was established as the first in exile (Seminarium Kondakovianum) in Prague, a branch of Charles IV University. V. Lossky, who moved to Paris in 1924, and Fr. Basil Krivocheine were associated with the institution. In 1926, the Saint-Serge Institute was established in Paris, researching Orthodox theology and philosophy and continuing the tradition of the pre-revolutionary academies in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev and Kazan.

belief that Palamas' metaphysics of light is one of the most important attempts to express the doctrinal foundations of Eastern spirituality is shared by almost all Orthodox Christians and by many Western historians of philosophy and theology.⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, the establishment of this opinion was due in large part to the extensive and innovative work of the Orthodox clergyman Father Basil Krivocheine, entitled "Asketiceskoje i bogoslavskoje uczenije sw. Grigorija Palamy," which was quickly published in English- and German-language periodicals.⁵⁰ Krivocheine, with his sharp polemic against M. Jugie's interpretation as presented in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, initiated a new research method for Gregory's works. Father Basil's article, published in 1936, was the most comprehensive study to appear for the next twenty-five years, thanks to the discussion of previously unused source texts, a broad approach to the subject, and a recapitulation of existing research. The majority of the major publications written up to 1959 – that is, until the fundamental preparation and publication of the translation of *The Triads* at the Sorbonne in Paris, together with a critical commentary by J. Meyendorff, were based precisely on this work.

It is also worth mentioning the discussion that arose around Palamite thought among French scholars in the 1930s associated with the aforementioned *Échos d'Orient*. The volume *Autour du Palamisme*, published in 1938 and edited by J. Gouillard, contains a detailed study of research on Barlaam's writings, along with a critical summary of the above-mentioned article by B. Krivocheine and

Vladimir Lossky, Sergey Bulgakow and Georg Florowski were associated with the Institute, the latter of which put a great deal of effort into renewing research on the tradition of the Fathers, especially the Cappadocian Fathers, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas. In 1946, Florowski emigrated to the United States, where he, together with John Meyendorff and Aleksander Schemann, restored the academic splendor of the Seminarium St. Włodzimierz in Westchester, New York.

- 49 As Y. Spiteris wrote in *Ostatni Ojcowie*, 202: "According to P. Christou (from the author: publisher of all the works of Palamas), Palamas was the one who revitalized Orthodox theology after centuries of stagnation, adding an important impetus to it, the effects of which are more alive today than ever."
- 50 B. Krivocheine, "Asketiceskoje i bogoslavskoje uczenije sw. Grigorija Palamy," *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 8 (Praga 1936): 99–154; with a French summary; English translation in *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 3 (1938); German translation in *Das Östliche Christentum* 8 (1939). A presentation of the main ideas in Krivocheina's article in A. Świtkiewicz, "Próba rekonstrukcji myśli Grzegorza Palamasa w artykule B. Krivocheine'a pt. Asketiceskoje i bogoslawskoje uczenije sw. Grigorija Palamy," *Przeгляд Filozoficzny* 6, No. 3 (23), Nowa Seria (1997): 153–167.

a polemic written there by I. Hausherr.⁵¹ The collection of lectures and articles by V. Lossky published in Paris in 1944 and his later works on Palamas contributed to the popularization of Krivocheine's work and the position he represents. The book *La théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* provides inspiring reading; it contains a comprehensive overview of the Eastern Church's theological and mystical thought.⁵² Some chapters refer directly to the Palamite doctrine, and in principle, the quotations, their discussions and examples they contain do not go beyond the material contained in the article by Krivocheine, which V. Lossky knew well since his studies in Prague.⁵³

Over the course of the next several decades, a number of works appeared which examined the dependence of Palamas' patristic synthesis on biblical themes and the traditions of the Eastern Church. In his *Bulletin sur le palamisme*, published in 1972, D. Sternon discussed several hundred articles appearing as part of the ever-lively discussion on the influence on the Doctor of Hesychasm's thinking of Neoplatonism, the Greek Fathers, Eastern monasticism and the intellectual culture itself of fourteenth-century Byzantium.

The works of Palamas are still studied in terms of their dependence on the broadly understood patristic tradition and specific themes occurring in them – i.e. the presence of the doctrine of particular Greek Fathers and their works' influence. In the first case, it can be stated without doubt that research conducted from both Orthodox and Catholic points of view fully recognize Palamas as an interpreter and continuator of the tradition of the Fathers. The list of most important works must include the publications of G. Florowski, C. Kern, G. Manzaridis, K. Ware, J. Meyendorff, V. Lossky, P. Evdokimov, J. Klinger, B. Tatakis,

51 I. Hausherr, "À propos de spiritualité hésychaste: Controverse sans contradicteur," *Orientalia christiana periodica* 3 (1937): 260–277; see also Hausherr, "La méthode d'raison hésychaste," *Orientalia christiana periodica* 9 (1927): 77–94.

52 V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (ISD LLC, 1991), original title *Théologie mystique de L'Église d'Orient* (Paris 1944); and *On the Image and Likeness of God* (London 1988). This book is a collection of articles written in the period we are describing here, including "Darkness and Light in the Knowledge of God," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 8 (1950): 460–471, and "La théologie de la lumière chez saint Grégoire de Thessalonique," *Dieu Vivant* 1 (Paris 1945): 95–118.

53 This is particularly visible in V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 33; B. Krivocheine, "Asketiceskoje," 117; V. Lossky, 32 – B. Krivocheine, 117, note 79; V. Lossky, 61 – B. Krivocheine, 123, note 119; that very same quote was used by Lossky, without source citation; V. Lossky, 198 – B. Krivocheine, 138, note 167; V. Lossky, 199 – B. Krivocheine, 139; and many others places.

and P Scazzoso.⁵⁴ The problem of Palamas' interpretation of patristic achievements is also briefly summed up by P. Christou – one of the most important researchers of Palamas' works, and editor of a critical edition of his works (Thessaloniki 1962–1992), who states:

Palamas, whose discussion forces him to express his thoughts on the basis of the Fathers' authority, emphasizes that each of their words is correct, in an attempt to show that there is agreement even when there are often differences in judgment.⁵⁵

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Another issue examined in the works of the Doctor of Hesychasm is the dependence of the Palamite doctrine on the thoughts of individual Eastern Church Fathers. Most studies are devoted to Palamite thinking in the context of issues raised by the Cappadocian Fathers. E. von Ivanka is of the opinion that Palamas' interpretation of the essence-energies relation not only disagrees with the tradition established by Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great, but is also an unfair superimposition on patristic science. This view of the Hungarian scientist is also supported by H.-G. Beck and G. Podskalsky.⁵⁶ A number of publications showing the incompatibility of the Palamas doctrine with the teachings of the Fathers can be found in the pages of *Istina* (1974), published by the French Dominicans. One of the authors, the Carmelite J.-P. Houdret, writes that “on this important point, we must recognize the deep discrepancy existing between the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers and that of Gregory Palamas.”⁵⁷ The series of critical

54 See G. Florovsky, “Grégoire Palamas et la Patristique,” *Istina* 8 (1961–62): 115–125; K. Kern, “Les éléments de la théologie de Grégoire Palamas,” *Irénikon* 20 (1947), pt. 1, pp. 6–33, pt. 2, pp. 164–193; G. Mantzaridis, “Tradition and Renewal in the Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas,” *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977): 1–19; K. Ware, *The Debate about Palamism*, 45–64.

55 See *Gregoriju tou Palama Syggrammata* III, ed. P. Christou (Saloniki 1970), 21; opinion quoted from Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie*, 189–191; Y. Spiteris, 191: “[...] more than once he tries to bend texts to his argument, not avoiding a certain bias,” “[he] distorts a patristic text or omits its context.”

56 See E. von Ivanka, *Plato*, 437; “Palamismus und Vatertradition,” in *L'Église et les Églises* (Chevotegne 1954), Vol. II, 29–46; H.-G. Beck, *Die byzantinische Kirche: das Zeitalter des Palamismus* (Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte, III/2), ed. H. Jedin (Freiburg im Br. 1968), 603; G. Podskalsky, “Gottesschau und Inkarnation. Zur Bedeutung der Heilsgeschichte bei Gregorios Palamas,” *Orientalia christiana periodica* 35 (1969): 5–44.

57 J.-P. Houdret, “Palamas et les Capadociens,” *Istina* 3 (1974): 260–271; translation from Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie*, 254; J.-M. Garrigues, *L'energie divine et la grâce Maxime le Confesseur*, 272–296; J. Nadal Canellas, “La critique par Akindynos de l'herméneutique

articles that gave the impression of a regular attack received a quick response from Catholic scholars as well – especially the outstanding publications of the Franciscan A. de Halleux of Louvain, *Orthodoxie et Catholicisme and Palamisme et tradition*⁵⁸ from 1975. The issue of the consistency of Palamite doctrine with the Cappadocian Fathers' thinking was addressed by such experts on the subject as G. Habra, G. Florowski, L.H. Grondijs, and K. Ware.⁵⁹ Among the latest works showing continuity between the Doctor of Hesychasm's achievements and the Cappadocian tradition, one should mention the thorough, source-based studies by A. Torrance found in *Precedents for Palamas Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers* (2009) and T. Tollefsen's *Activity and Participation in Late Antiquity and Early Christian Thought* (2012).⁶⁰ At the same time, the latter publication is a broad study of two basic concepts of ancient pagan and Christian thought, namely the terms "energy" and "participation." Tollefsen discusses the works of the Church Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas in the context of Aristotelian philosophy and Neoplatonism; he analyzes how lower-level entities can participate in higher ones, i.e. receive divine energies. The Swedish scholar wants to investigate the term energy which – in the minds of the Church Fathers – is manifested as God's action in the eternal constitution of the Trinity, the creation of the universe, the incarnation of Christ and salvation as understood by the concept "deification."

de Palamas," 297–328; M. J. Le Guillou, *Lumière et charité dans la doctrine Palamite de la divinization*, 329–339; *ibid.*, *Le mystère du Père* (1973).

- 58 A. de Halleux, "Orthodoxie et Catholicisme," *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 4 (1975): 3–30; "Palamisme et Tradition," *Irénikon* 48 (1975): 479–493.
- 59 G. Habra, "The Sources of the Doctrine of Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 12 (1958), 6–7: 244–251; G. Florovsky, "Saint Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of Fathers," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 5.2 (1959–60): 119–131; L. C. Contos, "The Essence-Energies Structure of Saint Gregory Palamas with a Brief Examination of Its Patristic Foundation," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12.3 (1967): 283–294; Ch. Yannaras, *On the Absence and Not-knowing of God* (Athens 1967); L. H. Grondijs, "The Patristic Origins of Gregory Palamas Doctrine of God," *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 323–328; K. Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence-Energies Distinction," *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1975): 125–136; The Debate about Palamisme, *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977): 45–63.
- 60 A. Torrance, "Precedents for Palamas Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers," *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009): 47–70; T. Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antiquity and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford 2012).

T. Tollefsen is also the author of a broad study of Maximus the Confessor, whose doctrine – alongside the thoughts of the Church Fathers – is a frequently researched theme in the works of Gregory Palamas. Tollefsen's study *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (2008)⁶¹ focuses on the Maximus' doctrine of creation, which denies the possibility of coexistence without any intermediate medium, un-created divinities, and created, limited beings. Tollefsen tries to show that, according to Maximus, God establishes and orders the cosmos through *logoi*. Within the universe arranged in this way, various species-beings are ontologically related to man, who is the center of the created world. The study of Maximus' thinking is of paramount importance here, since Maximus – who took over the work of John of Scythopol on commentaries on *Corpus Areopagiticum* – is believed to have rescued Pseudo-Dionysian thought for Eastern Orthodoxy. By clearing him of any suspicions of mono-physical heresy through commentaries on *Corpus – Scholia*,⁶² he joined these writings with theological and liturgical tradition. As B. Tatakis notes in *Byzantine Philosophy*: “Maximus has the honor of introducing to the bosom of Christianity Pseudo-Dionysius' Neoplatonism.”⁶³ This was also the result of Maximus the Confessor's broader metaphysics and anthropology, which he laid out mainly in the works *Mystagogia* and *Ambiguorum liber*,⁶⁴ which was a commentary on doctrine set forth by the Areopagite and Gregory of Nyssa. Among the works on Maximus' theology, there is a revealing book by S.L. Epifanowicz entitled *Priepodobnyj Maksim Ispoviednik i Vizantijskoje Błogoslavije*, published by the Kiev Academy in 1915. This text, written in pre-revolutionary Cyrillic, comes with unusually rich footnotes, commentaries and references, especially to German-language literature. Another frequently cited works are L. Thunberg's *Microcosm and Mediator* (1965) and A. Riou's *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor*

61 T. Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford 2008).

62 Maximus the Confessor, *Scholia*, PG 4, 527–576. Consistent with the state of today's research, according to H.U. von Balthasar, which was confirmed by B. Suchla, the author of most of the *Scholia* is Jan of Scythopolis. See an English translation of selected *Scholia* in *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, P. Rorem, J. Lamoreaux (Oxford 1998, first part: *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 7–139; A. Louth, “The reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor,” 60.

63 B. Tatakis, *Filozofia bizantyńska*, 82.

64 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguorum Liber*, PG 91, 657–717.

(1985).⁶⁵ Maximus' works on the liturgy he describes have been published in numerous fundamental studies, because they include the foundations of his theology on divine principles (λόγοι), Christology, deification, and anthropology. I found many valuable substantive and historical indications, which I used in the study of Maximus' *Mystagogia*, in I.H. Dalmais's article "Mystère liturgique et divinisation dans la Mystagogie de saint Maxime le Confesseur" (1972) and in the extensive book by A. Riou entitled *Le monde et l'Église selon Maxime le Confesseur* (1973).⁶⁶

Discussion about the ties between Maximus and his theology of divine principles, the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius (symbolism of sacraments, epistemology), and the Palamite concept of energy, was initiated by P. Sherwood in his book *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (1955).⁶⁷ In this highly interesting and pioneering work, Sherwood studied Maximus' arguments against Origen's heresy, and he demonstrated the relationship between Maximus' *Ambigua* and the thought of Gregory of Nyssa. He thus clearly delineated the filiation of Gregory and Maximus' thoughts and, although he was unfamiliar with Epifanowicz's work, he came to a similar conclusion. It concerned the influence of the Neoplatonic system on the Areopagite's thinking, a system which, however, is not part of Maximus' theology. The relationship between Maximus and the Pseudo-Dionysius on which he commented, and then with Gregory Palamas, who in turn often refers to the authority of both thinkers, has been further researched. Such works by Maximus as *Mystagogia* and *Ambiguum liber* were well known and often cited in the works of Palamas, to the point that J. Meyendorff was able to write that the Doctor of Hesychasm had studied Pseudo-Dionysius through Maximus' Christocentric filter.⁶⁸ The results of Urs von Balthasar's research contradict Epifanowicz, Sherwood and Meyendorff's thesis that Maximus' theology constitutes a patristic reference for Palamas. Although he admits that Maximus' apophaticism is an *Ansatzpunkt* for the Doctor

65 S.L. Epifanowicz, *Priepodobnyj Maksim Ispovednik i Vizantijskoje Błogoslavije* (Kijev 1915); L. Thunberg, *Microcosmos and Mediator* (Lund 1965); A. Riou, *Man and Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood–New York 1985).

66 I. H. Dalmais, "Mystère liturgique et divinisation dans la Mystagogie de saint Maxime le Confesseur," in *Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Daniélou* (Paris 1972), 55–62; A. Riou, *Le monde et l'Église selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris 1960).

67 P. Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome 1955).

68 J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood 1975), 131–153; 202–203.

of Hesychasm's theology, he denies that in the teachings of Maximus and the Greek Fathers there was a lesson about dividing God into His essence and energy.⁶⁹ This position is upheld by the Catholic scholar J.-M. Garrigues, who – in the article “L'énergie divine et la grâce chez Maxime le Confesseur” (1974) – emphasizes the extent to which the Palamite doctrine of divine energies lacks a foundation in the teachings of Maximus the Confessor to which the Doctor of Hesychasm refers.⁷⁰ The above-mentioned subject matter, i.e. the influence of Maximus' thinking on the Palamite understanding of Pseudo-Dionysius and the doctrine contained in his works, can also be found in the above-mentioned book by Tollefsen, in the articles by J. van Rossum, “The λόγοι of Creation and the Divine ‘energies’ in Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas” (1993), and by A. Louth, “The Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor” and “The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas” (2008).⁷¹ Louth recapitulates previously set-forth views in *Maximus the Confessor* (1996),⁷² where he notes the undoubted influence of Pseudo-Dionysius' Neoplatonism on Maximus' theology, as revealed in his *Mystagogia*. I find this thesis highly debatable, as reflected in my article “Notes about Denys Areopagites. *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and Its Influence on St. Maximus the Confessor's Mystagogy*” (2000),⁷³ as well as in one of the chapters of this book devoted to an analysis of the main themes in *Mystagogy*.

We owe a great deal to J. von Rossum,⁷⁴ a scholar from the Saint-Serge Institute in Paris, for the interesting research intuitions contain in his article. First of all, Rossum emphasizes that most of the publications related to the comparison of the theologies of Maximus and Palamas rejected the basic research requirement

69 H.U.von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie* (Einsiedeln 1962), 596.

70 J.-M.Garrigues, “L'énergie divine et la grâce chez Maxime le Confesseur,” *Istina* 3 (1974): 272–296. See also Garrigues, *Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris 1976).

71 J. van Rossum, “The logoi of Creation and the Divine ‘energies’ in Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas,” *Studia Patristica* 27 (Leuven–Paris–Dudley 1993): 213–221; A. Louth, “The reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor,” 43–55; Louth, “The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas,” in *Re-thinking Dionysius The Areopagite*, eds. A. Coakley, Ch. Stang, *Modern Theology* 24, 4 (Blackwell 2008), 55–71.

72 A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London–New York 1996).

73 A. Świtkiewicz-Blandzi, “Notes about Denys Areopagite's. *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and Its Influence on St. Maximus the Confessor's Mystagogy*,” *Studia Mediewistyczne* 34/35 (2000): 55–70.

74 J. van Rossum, “The logoi of Creation.”

for comparative studies, namely the context in which both thinkers developed their theological reflection on the *logoi* of creation and divine energies. Rossum's work first carefully studies the contextual condition, and then considers the possibility of juxtaposing the two theologians' doctrines. The interesting and controversial issue of the presence of *Corpus* in Maximus' writings, and then their influence on Palamite thought, is discussed in a separate chapter of this book.

1.2 The Relation of Gregory Palamas' Doctrine to the Thoughts of the Western Church and Protestant Theology

The greatest and fundamental problem in reading and interpreting Gregory's doctrine, which his contemporaries pointed out to him, is precisely the polemical nature of the author of *The Triads*.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Palamas himself emphasizes that his intention was to refute charges, defend the doctrine of Hesychasm and its consequences, rather than care for the literary form and continuity of the argumentation.⁷⁶ As a result, what has come down to us are works written in a language full of question marks, exclamation marks and rhetorical phrases (such as *The Triads* or the *Apologia dieksodikotera*). The difficult literary form and antagonistic positions taken by the Palamites and anti-Palamites significantly influenced the further study and reading of the Doctor of Hesychasm's text by historians of philosophy. Interpretation of Palamas' views raised problems not only for scholars dealing with their dependence on the patristic tradition and consistency with Eastern Church doctrine, but also for scholars influenced by Western thought. In recent decades, a serious body of literature on the subject has been gathered, mostly of a polemical nature, trying to reconcile

75 See Jan Kyprisiotis, *Palamiticarum transgressionum*, PG 152, 680 CD; "Palamite doctrine originated in contention and strife," cited in Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie*, 162, note 16. This outstanding Italian scholar of Palamas' achievements believes that if it were not for a combination of socio-political circumstances, the Doctor of Hesychasm would have become a quiet monk, known for his ascetic works. Y. Spiteris writes pointedly: "problems with Palamas appeared – and in a very sharp way – during his lifetime. It can be said that he himself is the fruit of polemics. He came into being as a theologian by accident, forced to provide a response to his opponents." *Ibid.*, 161–162.

76 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1,2; "we write out of an obligation which cannot be avoided. ... My words are caused by necessity, not a desire to show off," cited in Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie*, 189. Y. Spiteris analyses the issues discussed here in *ibid.*, 189–190.

or demonstrate the contradiction between the thoughts of the bishop of Thessaloniki and Western Church doctrine.

The radical distinction in God of essence and energy contained in the Palamas system, a point of contention with Thomist doctrine, recognized by the Church, of the absolute simplicity of God, was noted by the eminent Byzantine theologian and philosopher Jerzy Scholarios, who tried to somewhat alleviate the matter.⁷⁷ Our considerations thus enter the plane of a serious theological conflict that has dominated the path that scholarship on Palamism took in the West.⁷⁸ One of the first clear signs of this critical tendency was a discussion that had been going on for years in the French *Échos d'Orient*. In an article published in 1902, J. Bois briefly recapitulates the history of Hesychasts, in which their teaching about un-created grace and divine light is treated as heresy, because from the point of view of Catholic Church doctrine, grace has a created and finite character.⁷⁹ But this position was most emphatically expressed by the Catholic Byzantineist and Augustinian M. Jugie in entries on Palamism in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* published in 1922. M. Jugie subjected the synthesis of Palamas to Thomistic criticism, which resulted in the following accusations against Gregory's doctrine: his division of God into knowable and unknowable parts causes the division of His essence and thus its complexity, which is heresy; the terms concerning divine light are treated by the French scholar as pure rhetoric and poetry (in Palamas, Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus); he treats the description of seeing divine light as an account of a miracle, and this is supposed to represent Palamas' attempt to escape Barlaam's accusations into the sphere of the supernatural.⁸⁰ At the same time, the Augustinian attributes to the Doctor of Hesychasm the view that in the next century the saints would not be able to see all of God directly, but only a part of God – i.e. His energies, and he applies the science of energies to the Aristotelian understanding of *actus purus*. As a result of this approach, Palamas' doctrine is rendered heretical and pantheistic from the point

77 Gennadius II Scholarios, *Oeuvres Complètes de Georges Scholarios*, Vol. III, edition L. Petit, X. Sidéridès, M. Jugie (Paris 1930), 434–452. See also B. Tatakis, *Filozofia bizantyńska*, 243; A. Siemianowski, *Tomizm a palamizm* (Poznań 1998), 48.

78 A. Nichols, *Light from the East: Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology* (London 1995), 48–56.

79 J. Bois, “Les débuts de la controverse hésychaste,” *Échos d'Orient* V (1902): 353–362; *ibid.*, “Le Synode hésychaste de 1314,” *Échos d'Orient* VI (1903): 50–60.

80 O.M. Jugie, “De theologia Palamitica,” *Theologia dogmatica Christianorum orientalium ab Ecclesia Catholica dissidentium*, 2 (Paris 1933): 95 – “ut a difficultate se expediret... ad miraculum confugit.”

of view of Western Church theology. The eminent Calvinist theologian K. Barth, along with S. Swieżawski,⁸¹ spoke in a similar vein. To this day, M. Jugie's chapters on the Palamite controversy in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* and in the later *Theologia dogmatica Christianorum orientalium* from 1933 set the direction for Catholic criticism of Hesychasm, thanks to the great knowledge of the epoch that the author exhibits in his works, and through his broad, philosophical and theological treatment of the issue.⁸²

Less radical views were presented by the Dominican Y. Congar in the three-volume work *Je crois en l'Esprit-Saint* (1995). According to the French theologian, it is possible to reconcile Palamism with the Catholic faith, and when the scholar uses the term faith, he means it in the strict sense, because even the most sympathetic examination of Bishop of Thessaloniki's doctrine reveals enormous departures from the theology of Augustine or Thomas Aquinas.⁸³ Above all, as Congar notes, we are dealing with two completely different theological languages. The scholastic tradition explains the relationship with God through consistent logical terms, while Palamas remains faithful to the antinomy of a God knowable by un-created grace and unknowable in its essence, divisible and indivisible at the same time.⁸⁴ Difficulties associated with bridging the gap between East and West should come as no surprise. An attempt to describe a mystical experience in terms of Aristotelian logic and distinctions borrowed from philosophy is doomed to failure and – as H.-G. Beck aptly puts it – becomes an easy target for attack.⁸⁵ The personal experience of meeting with God is at the heart of

81 "The Western Church rightly sided with Barlaam and his followers, since the doctrine of the Hesychasts divides what cannot be divided." K. Barth, *Dogmatique. La Doctrine de Dieu*, Vol. 1, trans. F. Ryser (Genewa 1957), 78, see also pp. 49–55; S. Swieżawski, *Dzieje europejskiej filozofii klasycznej*, 306–307.

82 M. Jugie, "Palamas," c. 1735–1776; *ibid.*, "Palamite. Controverse," in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, c. 1777–1818; *ibid.*, "De theologia Palamitica," in *Theologia dogmatica Christianorum orientalium ab Ecclesia Catholica dissidentium*, Vol. 1 (Paris 1926), 6–33; Vol. 2 (Paris 1933), 47–183.

83 Y. Congar, *Wierzę w Ducha Świętego*, trans. L. Rutowska (Warszawa 1996), 91 (French original: *Je crois en l'Esprit-Saint* [Paris: Cerf, 1995 [1re édition en 3 tomes de 1978 à 1980]. See extensive reflections on the reception of Palamite theology in the Catholic Church in Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie*, 254–260.

84 Y. Congar, *Wierzę w Ducha Świętego*, 84–94, where the views of Cardinal Journet, J.-M. Garrigues, J. Kuhlmann, and G. Philips are presented; A. De Halleux, "Palamisme et scolastique," *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 4 (1973): 409–422.

85 H.-G. Beck, *Il millennio bizantino*, 256–257; Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie*, 256–259.

Orthodox theology and the tradition of the Eastern Fathers, which is repeatedly emphasized in fundamental works by P. Evdokimov and V. Lossky: The eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church.”⁸⁶ Thus, according to Y. Spiteris, an ecumenical attempt to escape the impasse may involve the reinterpretation of Palamism by purging it of conceptualization “by once again explaining it in the context of mystical theology, which is the proper way of speaking about the mystery of God in oneself and in us (grace), both on the part of the Eastern and Western traditions.”⁸⁷ Y. Congar’s view is confirmed by comparative research works juxtaposing the thought of Gregory Palamas with the achievements of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. The rich literature on the subject undoubtedly emphasizes the existing differences in how to understand the indivisible (as the Orthodox prefer to define it) or the simple (in words used by Catholics) nature of God, as well as the doctrine of, respectively, un-created or created grace. Nevertheless, these comparisons are made in a conciliar spirit, emphasizing shared doctrinal sources and the examination of ideas in their natural, historical environment. This is precisely the tone of articles by Ch. Journet, “Palamisme et thomisme” (1960), G. Philips “La grâce chez les Orientaux” (1972),⁸⁸ and J. Kuhlmann’s work *Die Taten des einfachen Gottes. Eine römisch-katholische Stellungnahme zum Palamismus* (1968). The relationship between Gregory Palamas’ doctrine and the works of Aquinas has also been the focus of newer works, including A. Siemianowski’s *Tomizm a palamizm* (1998), a widely recognized work by D. Bradshaw which has proven to be highly

86 V. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 5.

87 Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie*, 258. See A. Siemianowski, 56: “after a long period of Western distrust toward the Palamite synthesis and its creator, serious attempts to revalue the main ideas of this trend have only recently begun to appear there.” It seems that this postulate is slowly being realized – during a sermon delivered in Ephesus in 1979, John Paul II remembered Gregory Palamas with great respect as an Eastern Church authority. While in a statement issued in 1995 by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity concerning the Greek and Latin tradition about the origin of the Spirit, the Vatican document states that Augustine’s ascribed understanding of the Spirit as a gift of the Father’s love for the Son can also be found in the theology of Gregory Palamas.

88 Ch. Journet, “Palamisme et thomisme: À propos d’un livre récent,” *Revue Thomiste* 60 (1960): 429–462; J. Kuhlmann, *Die Taten des einfachen Gottes. Eine römisch-katholische Stellungnahme zum Palamismus* (Würzburg 1968); G. Philips, “La grâce chez les Orientaux,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 48 (1972): 37–50.

inspiring, *Aristotle East and West, Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (2004), in particular the chapter entitled "Palamas and Aquinas," and B. Bucur's article "The Theological Research of Dionysian Apophatism in the Christian East and West: Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas" (2007).⁸⁹

These scholars' interests included references in the works of Palamas' thought not only to the legacy of Thomas but also to Augustine's thoughts, and above all to his Trinitarian theology and hamartiology. The Trinity theme presented in this context can be found in the above-discussed articles by Golitzin and Ritter, while J. Lössl, in his "Augustine's *On the Trinity* in Gregory Palamas' One Hundred and Fifty Chapters," studies the Augustinian influences visible in the extensive work of Gregory's *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*. The relationship between Augustine's thought and Palamas' thought is also the focus of J. A. Demetracopoulos' work, *Augustinus und Gregorios Palamas*, published in Greek in Athens (1997).⁹⁰

From the standpoint of Evangelical theology, the question about Palamas' place in ecumenical understanding was asked by Reinhard Flogaus in his extensive work *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther. Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch* (1997)⁹¹ devoted to the study of deification in Gregory Palamas and Martin Luther. The German scholar tries to eliminate the polarizing meaning of Palamism by showing, for example, that Western theology's influence on Barlaam's thought was negligible during his struggle with Gregory Palamas. Although Palamas accused his opponent of being a follower of *Filioque*, it is known that there are also treatises by the Calabrian in which he speaks against the doctrine of the origin of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. Such examples induced Flogaus to put forward an extremely important argument for the ecumenical reception of Palamism: both Palamas' dispute with Barlaam and the subsequent conflict over the study of energies express an internal Byzantine dispute about the possibility

89 A. Siemianowski, *Tomizm a palamizm*, B.G. Bucur, "The Theological Reception of Dionysian Apophatism in the Christian East and West: Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas," *The Downside Review* 125 (2007): 131–146; D. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West, Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge University Press 2004), chapter "Palamas and Aquinas," pp. 221–242.

90 A. Golitzin, "Dionysius;" A.M. Ritter, "Gregor Palamas als Leser des Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagita;" J. Lössl, "Augustine's *On the Trinity* in Gregory Palamas' One Hundred and Fifty Chapters," *Augustinian Studies* 30.1 (1999): 61–82.

91 R. Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther. Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch* (Göttingen 1997); *Die Theologie des Gregorios Palamas – Hindernis oder Hilfe für die ökumenische Bewegung?* (im Aufsatzband) (Berlin 1998).

of knowing God. Intensive theological research has proved that it is possible to agree not only on the pneumatological issue, but also on the controversy related to the concept of created and un-created grace. Flogaus mentions that in Palamas and in contemporary Roman Catholic theology (Karl Rahner SJ), there is content that justifies a moderate optimism regarding a common agreement on the problem of grace. The chances of overcoming old prejudices are created by a comparative analysis of the Doctor of Hesychasm and Augustine, whose name has been in the diptychs of the Greek Orthodox Church since 1968. Existing questions among both the Western (Roman Catholic and Evangelical) and Eastern churches justify the claim that the “normative expression” of Palamite theology has not yet been explored in relation to the overall perception of Christian faith.⁹²

1.3 Research in Poland on Gregory Palamas’ Thought

Recently, interest in Gregory Palamas’ thought in Poland has been growing steadily. This is due to the published translations of many of the most important works on Orthodoxy, the Eastern tradition, and Palamas himself. The studies of paramount importance should be mentioned here J. Meyendorff’s *Byzantine Theology* (1984) and *Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (2005), V. Lossky’s *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1989), P. Evdokimov’s *La Connaissance de Dieu selon la tradition orientale: L’enseignement patristique, liturgique et iconographique* (1996), T. Spidlik’s *I grandi mistici russi* (1983), T. Spidlik, I. Gargan *La spiritualità dei padri greci e orientali* (1997), A. Louth *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (1997), the extensive comparative analysis with a bibliography by P. P. Ogórek OCD entitled *Mistyka chrześcijańskiego Wschodu i Zachodu* (2002), W. Beierwaltes’ *Platonismus im Christentum* (2003), and a historical-philosophical study by T. Obolevitch entitled *Od onomatodoksji do estetyki. Aleksego Łosiewa koncepcja symbolu* (2011). Studies of detailed themes include an extensive study of Palamite anthropology in the context of the Fathers’ tradition by G. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Tradition* (1997), and Y. Spiteris’ *Palamas: La grazia e l’esperienza: Gregorio Palamas nella discussione teologica* (2006). It is worth noting that B. Tataki’s *Byzantine Philosophy* (first edition 1959), a work on Byzantium of fundamental

92 Based on the article D. Bruncz, “Grzegorz Palamas – pomoc czy przeszkoda w dialogu ekumenicznym?,” the internet edition of *Magazyn Teologiczny Semper Reformanda* – www.magazyn.ekumenizm.pl (accessed 07 June 2014).

importance, was recently (2012) translated and published in Polish, edited and with an extensive afterword by the renowned Polish Byzantinist Marian Wesoły, in which he recapitulated the state of research on this field in Poland.⁹³

Works by Palamas that have been translated into Polish so far include fragments contained in J. Naumowicz's *Filokalia. Teksty o modlitwie serca* (2002), I. Zogas-Osadnik's *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera*, 2010) and *Triady. W obronie świętych hesychastów* (2019). Detailed studies on Gregory Palamas' thought can be found in my articles published since 1997.⁹⁴ The encyclopedia of religion, published by PWN in 2002, contains an extensive piece, authored by me, on the thought of Gregory Palamas.⁹⁵

93 B. Tatakis, *Filozofia bizantyńska*, trans. S. Tokariew (Kraków 2012), *Afterword* by M. Wesoły, pp. 255–301.

94 A. Świtkiewicz-Blandzi, "Próba rekonstrukcji myśli Grzegorza Palamasa w artykule B. Krivocheine'a pt. Asketiczeskoje i bogosławskoje uczenije sw. Grigorija Palamy," *Przegląd Filozoficzny* No. 3 (23), Nowa Seria (1997): 153–167; "Doktrynalne źródła nauki Grzegorza Palamasa," *Premisla Christiana* VIII (1999): 373–391; "Dzieje filozoficznego i teologicznego sporu wokół doktryny Grzegorza Palamasa na tle relacji państwo–kościół w XIV-wiecznym Bizancjum," *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 45 (2000): 103–117; "Metafizyka światła Grzegorza Palamasa," *Przegląd Filozoficzny. Nowa Seria* 4 (2000): 60–68; "Notes about Denys Areopagite's. *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and Its Influence on St. Maximus the Confessor's Mystagogy," *Archiv für Mittelalterliche Philosophie und Kultur* 6 (Sofia 2000): 2–22.

95 A. Świtkiewicz-Blandzi, "Grzegorz Palamas," in *Religia: encyklopedia* PWN, Vol. 4, eds. T. Gadacz, B. Milerski (Warszawa 2002), 279–282.

2 Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: The Person and His Thinking

2.0 Introduction

Pseudo-Dionysius remains an undefined character; to this day, his historical identity has not been established. He writes about himself that he was converted after hearing the words of St. Paul in the Areopagus in Athens as confirmed in the Acts of the Apostles.¹ In his writings, Pseudo-Dionysius calls St. Paul his teacher, and he addresses letters to his alleged companions, the apostles Timothy, John, and Titus. He claims to have witnessed the darkness that followed Christ's death on the cross. In his *History of the Church*, Eusebius of Caesarea presents Dionysius as the first bishop of Athens. In turn, the French tradition says that he was the apostle of the Gauls and the first bishop of Paris who was martyred on the Montmartre hill. However, except for testimony provided by the author of *Corpus Dionysiacum* himself, there is no evidence that he is the Dionysius Areopagite from Acts. According to nineteenth-century research, *terminus ante quem* is tied to references to the work of Pseudo-Dionysius appearing around the 6th century in the third letter of Severus the Patriarch of Antioch to John the Grammarian and in his other works: *Adversus Apologiam Iuliani* and *Contra additiones Iuliani*, which were written between 518 and 532. We may establish a *terminus post quem* based on a reference in the third chapter of *De Coelesti Hierarchia* to the sung *Creed*. This form was introduced into the Monophysite liturgy in 486 by Patriarch Peter the Fuller, which means that Pseudo-Dionysius' activities can be placed at the end of the fifth century.²

1 Acts 17, 34 ff.

2 J. Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogenannten Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre von Übel," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253–273, 721–738; H. Koch, "Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen," fasc. 2–3: 49–62; Koch, "Proclus als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius in der Lehre vom Bösen," *Philologus* 54 (1895): 438–454; Koch, "Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften und ihr Eindringen in die christliche Literatur bis zum Lateranconcil 649. Ein zweiter Beitrag zur Dionysius Frage," *IV Jahresbericht des öffentlichen Privatgymnasiums an der Stella matutina zu Feldkirch* (Feldkirch 1895), in which H. Koch defined the terms *ad quem* (486) and *a quo* (532) for Pseudo-Dionysius and indicated Christian Syria as the environment from which he came. Until today,

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, which summarizes the state of research among nineteenth-century Western European scholars, Pseudo-Dionysius is identified as a student of Proclus, probably a monk of Syrian origin. In turn, R. Hathaway provides a list of the most probable persons with whom Pseudo-Dionysius can be identified: Ammonius Saccas, Great Dionysius, Peter the Fuller, Dionysius the Scholastic of Gaza, Severus of Antioch, and Sergius of Reschain.³ The Georgian researcher, Sh. Nutsbidze, and his Belgian colleague, E. Honigmann, are the authors of a theory identifying the Areopagite with Peter the Iberian,⁴ and more recent studies show him to be the Athenian scholar Damascius.⁵ Hence, there is no consensus on the identity of Pseudo-Dionysius, the prevailing view today being that he was a Greek, probably a monk, active in Syria at the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries.

2.1 Scholarship on Pseudo-Dionysius' Neoplatonism

A thorough analysis of Pseudo-Dionysius' influence on Eastern Church theologians and philosophers is confronted by considerable difficulties, given that most of the sources still remain unpublished.⁶ This can be clearly seen when carefully reading articles in which specialists' opinions on this subject are often radically different. With the current state of research, it is difficult to formulate final conclusions; at most, we can make some comments based on the published texts.

According to A. Louth,⁷ scholars' opinions regarding the scope and depth of Pseudo-Dionysius' influence on the Eastern Church's theological and liturgical tradition of are extremely divided. He believes that, on the one hand, we are dealing with publications by V. Lossky (as well as Balthasar, Epifanowicz,

this view has basically not changed. See A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1983), 159–179.

- 3 R. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the definition of order in the letters of Pseudo-Dionysius: A study in the form and meaning of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings* (Haga–Nijhoff 1969).
- 4 Sh. Nutsbidze, *Mystery of Pseudo-Dionys Areopagitē* (Tbilisi 1942); E. Honigmann, *Pierre l'Ibérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l'Areopagite* (Brussels 1952).
- 5 C.M. Mazzucchi, "Damascio, Autore del Corpus Dionysiacum, e il dialogo Περί Πολιτικής Επιστημης," *Rassegna di scienze storiche linguistiche e filologiche* 80.2 (2006): 299–334.
- 6 See P. Sherwood, "Influence de Pseudo-Denys en Orient," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique* (Paris 1957), c. 286–318.
- 7 See A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Morehouse–Barlow 1989), 120 and note 21.

Krivocheine and Sherwood) emphasizing this influence⁸ and, on the other hand, with opinions set forth by J. Meyendorff (Bornert, Dalmais, Hausherr, Żywiec), which clearly diminish the importance of Pseudo-Dionysius' influence.⁹ It seems that A. Louth's judgment does not fully reflect the existing state of affairs because, as historians of philosophy belonging to so-called "modern orthodoxy" view it, we should distinguish two issues that only apparently overlap. The first is the problem of Pseudo-Dionysius' Neoplatonism, and the second is the influence of the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition on Eastern Church theologians. Indeed, it is highly tempting to identify scholars who admit that St. Paul's alleged disciple was a Platonist with those who diminish the influence of his thoughts in the Eastern tradition, and vice versa; this would equate the opponents of Neoplatonic influences with defenders of a position about its importance for Eastern Orthodoxy.¹⁰ The picture thus gained is misleading, because a careful reading of both the source texts and the aforementioned researchers' publications draws completely different dividing lines.

The issue of the relation between Neoplatonism and Christian tradition in the concept put forward by Pseudo-Dionysius is a problem that has aroused lively discussions since the appearance of pioneering works by J. Stiglmayr and

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- 8 See S.L. Epifanowicz, *Priepodobnyj Maksim Ispowiednik i Vizantijskoje Błogosławije* (Kijów 1915); V. Lossky, "Otricatielnoje Bogosławije w Ucenii Dionizija Areopagita," *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 3 (1929): 133–144; Lossky, *Apophysis and Trinitarian Theology, Darkness and Light in the Knowledge of God, In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York 1974); B. Krivocheine, "Asketiceskoje i Bogoslawskoje Uczenie sv. Grigorija Palamy," *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 8 (1936): 99–154; P. Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism* (Rome 1956); H.U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie* (Einsiedeln 1961).
- 9 See I. Hausherr, "Les grands courants de la spiritualité orientale," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* I (Rome 1935): 114–138; I. H. Dalmais, "Place de la Mystagogie de saint Maxime le Confesseur dans la théologie liturgique byzantine," *Studia Patristica* 5 (Berlin 1962): 277–283; J. Meyendorff, "Notes sur l' influence dionysienne en Orient," *Studia Patristica* 2 (1957): 547–552; Meyendorff, *Le Christ dans la pensée byzantine* (Paris 1969); R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins de la Divine Liturgie du VIIIe au XVe siècle* (Paris 1966); M. W. Żywow, "Mistagogia Maksyma Wyznawcy i rozwój bizantyńskiej teorii obrazu," trans. R. Mazurkiewicz, in *Ikona, symbol i wyobrażenie* (Warszawa 1984), 81–105. (in Russian, in *Chudożestwiennyj jazyk sredniowiekowija*, ed. W. A. Karpuszyn [Moscow 1982]).
- 10 Such an attitude appears, for example, in a work that is widely considered an oversimplification: G. Habra, "The Sources of the Doctrine of Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 12 (1957): 244–252.

H. Koch,¹¹ in which Pseudo-Dionysius is considered a pagan-Neoplatonist whose declarations that he was a Christian are purely verbal and are not at the core of his system. Such views run contrary to many later opinions of historians of philosophy, such as E. von Ivanka or H. Puech. Also, the works of scholars in Orthodox Church circles (e.g. V. Lossky and E. Perl) emphasized Pseudo-Dionysius' clear Christian inspirations, derived from the thinking of the Cappadocian Fathers and the monastic tradition.¹² In the body of scholarship on the Areopagite and his work built up over almost a hundred years, we also find many treatises presenting a greater or lesser degree of dependence of the Christian *Corpus* on the Plotinian system of emanation and theurgy developed in the spirit

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- 11 With H. Koch's work "Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen," *Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur- und Dogmengeschichte* 1 (Mainz 1900), the belief in the nexus between Pseudo-Dionysius' thought and the writings of the late Neoplatonists was firmly established.
 - 12 See H. Koch, "Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita," Koch, "Proklus Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Ar. in der Lehre vom Bösen," *Philologus* 54 (1895): 438–454; W. Siebert, *Die Metaphysik u. Ethik des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita* (Jena 1894); E. von Ivanka, "Der Aufbau der Schrift 'De Divinis Nominibus' des Pseudo-Dionysios," *Scholastik* 15 (1940): 386–399; H.-Ch. Puech, "La Ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et dans la tradition patristique," *Études Carmélitaines* 23.8 (1938): 33–53. Selected studies showing Pseudo-Dionysius' grounding in the patristic tradition: V. Lossky, "La notion des analogies chez Denys le pseudo-Aréopagite," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 5 (1930): 279–309; J. S. Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6.2 (1960/61): 186–205; A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton 1989); A. Golitzin, "Anarchy vs. Hierarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and their Common Roots in Ascetical Tradition," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38.2 (1994): 131–179; Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Saloniki 1994). Works by scholars from the Catholic Church and the Western tradition: R. Roques, *L'univers dionysien*; O. von Semmelroth, series of articles in *Scholastyk*, No. 20–24 (1949); 25 (1950); 27 (1952); 28 (1953); 29 (1954); H. U. von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Aesthetik* (Einsiedeln 1962), part II, 147–214; and one of the last works by Y. de Andia, *Henôsis: l'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Leida–Kolonja–New York 1996); E.J.D. Perl, "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39.3–4 (1994), 311–356; and Perl, "The Metaphysics of Love in Dionysius the Areopagite," *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 6.1 (1997), 45–73.
 - 13 H. F. Müller, *Dionysios, Proklos, Plotinos. Ein historischer Beitrag zur neuplatonischen Philosophie* (Münster 1926); A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London 1953); J.-M. Hornus, "Quelques réflexions à propos du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et la mystique chrétienne

of Proclus.¹³ Over the past 20 years, as the Areopagite's writings were reissued (Berlin 1990–1991)¹⁴ and numerous (re) translations were produced in English, French, Russian and Polish, a view connecting the two poles prevailed in the concept of “representative of a Christian version of Neoplatonism.”¹⁵ A similar spirit permeates the considerations on Pseudo-Dionysius in E. Bréhier's *La philosophie du moyen âge* and B. Tatakis' *Byzantine Philosophy*.¹⁶ S. Swieżawski, author of *Dzieje europejskiej filozofii klasycznej*, emphasizes, on the one hand, the undeniable influences of Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus on Dionysian thought and, on the other hand, its Christian roots in the patristic tradition. What seems interesting here is the convergence of opinions so distant in time as presented by Swieżawski (the book consists of edited lectures at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Catholic University of Lublin in the years 1956–1972) with the remarks of J. McEvoy (1990), who postulated that terms like “Neoplatonism” not be used pejoratively, but as pointing to sources.¹⁷ J. M. Rist expresses himself in a

en général,” *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse* 27 (1947): 37–63; J. Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu* (Brussels 1959); R. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius* (Haga 1969); B. Brons, *Gott und die Seienden: Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von neuplatonischer Metaphysik und christliche Tradition bei Dionysius Areopagita* (Getynga 1976); S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leida 1978); P. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto 1984); Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Oxford–New York 1993); Rorem, J. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford 1998); W. Beierwaltes, *Platonismus im Christentum* (Frankfurt-am-Main 1998).

- 14 Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Corpus Dionysiacum* I, ed. B.R. Suchla (Berlin 1990); *Corpus Dionysiacum* II, ed. G. Heil, A.M. Ritter (Berlin 1991).
- 15 This concept was used by A. Kijewska in reference to Eriugena. But it seems that in the light of the presented research, the expression perfectly reflects the attitude of the Areopagite; see A. Kijewska, “Neoplatonizm,” 19; E. Jeaneau, “Denys l'Aréopagite Promoteur du Néoplatonisme en Occidente,” in *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale. Actes du Colloque international de Corfou* (Turnhout–Louvain–La Neuve 1997), 1–23; T. Stępień, *Pseudo-Dionizy Areopagita – chrześcijanin i platonik* (Warszawa 2006) (only in Polish).
- 16 Basil Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, trans. N. J. Moutafakis, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2003), 63: “In the end, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite did not hesitate to clothe the Christian image in the garments of Neoplatonism, with no concern or sensitivity for this profound difference.”
- 17 S. Swieżawski, *Dzieje europejskiej filozofii klasycznej*, 370 (only in Polish): “Christian orthodoxy dominates in the rejection of pantheistic monism, emphasizing the pluralism

similar fashion in his highly interesting study (1992), and although he describes the Areopagite as a Neoplatonist in a Christian's mantle (defines his Christianity as "dressing," or even a "vener" on Neoplatonism), he also states that Pseudo-Dionysius presents a "specifically Proclusian version of Christianity."¹⁸ Generally speaking, it is generally believed that the works of Pseudo-Dionysius should be read in conjunction with the tradition of the Fathers, which was firmly established at the time of *Corpus Areopagiticum*. Of course, the question immediately comes up whether we can treat the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nyssa as one of the varieties of Neoplatonism. Both J. Meyendorff¹⁹ and scholars belonging to his circle answer in the negative. They fully share the view formulated by V. Lossky regarding the history of Byzantine philosophy he researched:

Centuries of struggle and superhuman effort will be required to go beyond Hellenism, by liberating it from its natural attachments and its ethnic and cultural limitation, before it will finally become a universal from of Christian truth.²⁰

The work of the Church Fathers was not only about expressing faith in a language conditioned by contemporary philosophy.²¹ From a purely historical point of view, it is impossible to consider the possibility that the Fathers simply took over terms without giving them new content. They were the ones who created a new philosophy that was different from Aristotelianism, Platonism, and Neoplatonism. Thanks to the Church Fathers, as J. Klinger wrote, Christianity was immortalized and sanctified in Greek thought, and the thought of Plato and Aristotle was transformed. In this process, this thought "passed through mystical death in order to rise again not as Greek thought, but as universal thought,

and transcendence of God and its substantial difference to creatures;" see J. McEvoy, "Neoplatonism and Christianity: Influence, Syncretism or Discernment?," in *Proceedings of the First Patristic Conference at Maynooth 1990* (Dublin 1992), 160–162.

- 18 J.M. Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul," in *Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of E. Jeuneau* (Leida–New York–Kolonja 1992), 138: "If he did so regard himself, his 'vener' of Christianity may be factual enough, but he is not, as some interpreters think, merely out to prolong the life of Neoplatonic beliefs by dressing them up as Christianity." *Ibid.*, 151.
- 19 See J. Meyendorff, "Historical Relativism and Authority of Christian Dogma," *Sbornost* 5.9 (1969), 629–643.
- 20 V. Lossky, *Vision of God* (London 1963), 58.
- 21 See A. H. Armstrong, R. A. Markus, *Wiara chrześcijańska a filozofia grecka* (Warszawa 1964); W. Hryniewicz, "Dogmat i Ortodoksja. Rozważania ekumeniczne," *Znak* 46 (1994), No. 473: 4–18; K. Leśniewski, *Ekumenizm w czasie* (Lublin 1995).

becoming a symbol of the eternal truth expressed in dogmas.”²² G. Florowski called this new philosophy, which was – as it were – the work of the Church Fathers, “Christian Hellenism,” while Lossky described the process as the “Christianization of Hellenism,”²³ and this idea can also be found in the lectures on Jaeger, and its broad interpretation in B. Tatakis’ *Byzantine Philosophy*.²⁴

The conclusion reached by all of the above-quoted authors is the undeniable presence in Pseudo-Dionysius’ writings of the traditions of the Cappadocian Fathers, monastic thought and the tradition of the Syrian liturgy. This prompts us to interpret the *Areopagitics* more in the Christian spirit than in the Neoplatonic spirit²⁵ and if J. Meyendorff diminishes the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on the thinking of the Byzantine Church, this applies only to the fourteenth-century writings that he studied.²⁶ We see, then, that even scholars with contradictory opinions agree when they express doubts about the extent to which there was a power to shape the influence of Areopagite thought on the theology, philosophy, and liturgy of the Eastern Church. An attempt to answer this question requires that we show, based on the sources known to us, how Pseudo-Dionysius’ thoughts were received.

2.2 The Issue of the Reception of *Corpus Areopagiticum* in the Eastern Church from the Sixth to the Fourteenth Centuries

The authority of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Eastern Church has never been as strong as in the Western tradition.²⁷ Several factors have contributed to this fact, but it is worth noting that neither Athanasius the Great, nor Cyril of Alexandria, nor any of the Fathers referred to this author’s writings, so it is doubtful that they considered him a disciple of the apostle Paul. *Corpus Areopagiticum* appeared at

22 J. Klinger, *Tradycja starożytności w doktrynie i duchowości Kościołów wschodnich*, chapter “O istocie Prawosławia” (Warszawa 1983), 151.

23 See G. Florovski, “Faith and Culture,” *St. Vladimir’s Quarterly* 4.1–2 (1955–1956); Florovski, *Creation and Redemption*, chapter “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology” (Belemont Mass. 1976), 21–34; see also K. Leśniewski, *Ekumenizm*, 150.

24 See W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge 1961); B. Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, 1–11.

25 See W. Stróżewski, “Problem panteizmu w *De divinis nominibus* Pseudo-Dionizego Areopagity,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 5 (1957), Vol. 3: 39–59.

26 See J. Meyendorff, *Notes sur influence*, 547.

27 See A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 111–120.

a time when the Eastern Church tradition was already formed at its core. Therefore, it should not be surprising that in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, there are ideas (mainly regarding the unknowable essence of God), the origin of which comes from such various places as Syria and Palestine, Antioch and Alexandria. After the Syrian liturgy, Ephrem the Syrian (373) emphasized the impenetrable distance that separates man from God, and John Chrysostom (351–386) wrote 12 homilies on *De incomprehensibili Dei natura*,²⁸ denying the possibility of any vision and direct knowledge of God. We find apophatic theology with a strong intellectual tinge 150 years earlier in Clement of Alexandria. Clement placed it in a Christocentric context, giving a new meaning to the notion of deification. Origen developed both themes – θεόςσις and the two natures in Christ, and the doctrine of deification found its continuation in Athanasius the Great (293–373). Only the Cappadocian Fathers established and clarified the uncertain terminology. Basil of Caesarea (330–379) explained how it is possible to know God in the Trinity and in His energies; Gregory of Nazianzus (328–379) gave shape to anthropology and the doctrine of deification; Gregory of Nyssa (325–399) described man’s cognitive powerlessness as “divine darkness.” He also developed the study of theophany, thus trying to reconcile the unknowable nature of God with His knowable actions – names. In many respects related to the knowledge of the nature of God, the Nyssenian became a precursor of Pseudo-Dionysius, to whom, however, Christological and anthropological themes remained foreign. Finally, Cyril of Alexandria (370–444) introduced the so-called patristic proof, which meant that the unanimous views of the Fathers became the unquestionable authority in doctrinal disputes. Cyril thus made a great synthesis of the thoughts of Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers and John Chrysostom. Proof “through the Fathers” was recognized by the Council of Ephesus.²⁹ Here we touch upon an important problem in understanding the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Eastern Church. First of all, it is difficult to distinguish purely Dionysian inspirations in later authors, because it is a very common phenomenon that theologians who directly quote Pseudo-Dionysius simultaneously refer to the views of other Fathers – that is, “patristic evidence” that weaves a homogeneous but multi-threaded carpet. The writings of Pseudo-Dionysius were

28 John Chrysostom, “De incomprehensibili Dei natura (Contra Anomoeos),” in: *Sur l’incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, in: J. Daniélou, “Sources Chrésiennes,” 28, Paris 1951), 92–322.

29 On the extraordinary importance of the opinion of the Fathers and their role in the Church, see J. Klinger, *O istocie*, 151; K. Leśniewski, *Ekumenizm*, 134–146.

also shaped by monastic life not only through the Syrian liturgy and the tradition of the Fathers (Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, and John Chrysostom), but also through the influence of Evagrius and Macarius of Egypt. Evagrius Ponticus (345–399), a disciple of Origen, divided spiritual development into *πράκτικη* (ascetic life that frees one from passion and leads to *ἀπαθεια*), *φυσική* (knowledge of nature through *λόγοι*) and *θεόλογια* (knowledge of divine things at its culmination is the contemplation of the Trinity). His intellectual tone of his considerations clearly separated him from Macarius of Egypt, the author *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies*.³⁰ According to the Coptic Apoftegma, he was the one who created the tradition of “Jesus Prayer” and the theory of the state of Hesychasm. In the teachings of Macarius, there is even a mention of the “mysticism of light,” thanks to which man can gain individual knowledge of God. Macarius, however, did not specify the nature of this vision. Both directions – mysticism of the heart combined with intellectual mysticism – were synthesized by Diadochos of Photiki.³¹ Elements of the Evagian doctrine of “prayer of the mind,”³² which in Macarius’ thinking becomes “prayer of the heart,” can be found in Pseudo-Dionysius in the description of the stages of the change of mind necessary to come to know God. It consists of three consecutive steps: the mind adjusts itself to inner feelings, then it turns to itself, and finally, through prayer, it elevates itself to God. Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Divine Names* is also a description of that path of self-knowledge of the mind, of ascent and development, the culmination of which is mystical theology – that is, true knowledge, contemplation of the deity’s inexpressible essence.

2.3 Doctrinal Commentary: “Scholia” by John of Scythopolis and “Mystagogia” by Maximus the Confessor

We see the direct influence of *Corpus Areopagiticum* on the writings of the Eastern Church theologians mainly in the commentaries, Scholia and texts in which the words of Pseudo-Dionysius are quoted, though always with commentary or explanation. However, so far we do not know the theological or philosophical text

30 Macarius of Egypt, Ὁμιλία πνευματικά, PG 34, 235–62; 405–968.

31 Diadochos, *Capita centum de perfectione spirituali*, PG 65.

32 This is a state in which the mind, free from all activity stimulated by perceptions and passions, turns towards itself. See Evagrius, *De Oratione*, PG 79, 84; Macarius of Egypt, *Homilia I, XI, XV, Die 50 geistlichen Homilien des Makarios* (Leipzig 1961).

in which we can note the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius' thoughts on the shaping of the entire doctrine.

The first known commentary on the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, the so-called *Scholia*, were compiled by John of Scythopolis before 532 AD.³³ He tried to defend the doctrine of the author of the *Areopagitics* against the accusations directed at the Monophysites. Indeed, Pseudo-Dionysius' writings may have seemed heterodox and inconsistent with the Council of Chalcedon, since their tone was too clearly heretical. Work on the commentary by John of Scythopolis was undertaken by Maximus the Confessor (580–662), who continued *Scholia*.³⁴ It was Maximus, by cleansing suspicions of Monophysical heresy, who saved Pseudo-Dionysius for Eastern Orthodoxy and ensured that his writings would be included in the sequence of both philosophical, theological and liturgical traditions. It happened not only because of the *Scholias*, but above all because of the entire theology, cosmology and anthropology of Maximus the Confessor, which he laid out primarily in the works *Mystagogia* and *Ambiguorum liber*,³⁵ which was a commentary on the works of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa. At the heart of Maximus' philosophical and theological system is the doctrine of the Cappadocian Fathers, the Christology of Cyril and the spirituality of Macarius and Evagrius, and it was from Pseudo-Dionysius that he adopted a subtle analysis of reality. Influenced by Areopagitics, he deepened the apophatic theology of the Fathers and the understanding of the hierarchy of heavenly creatures. In the spirit of Pseudo-Dionysius, he developed the Evagrian-Macarian triad of purification – enlightenment – improvement (τελείωσις) and pursued the matter of knowing God through ecstatic love. In his comments, Maximus the Confessor placed great emphasis on all the consequences stemming from the dogma of the Incarnation of Christ. As a result, he used the terminology of Pseudo-Dionysius, which took on a strictly Christian meaning. In Maximus' interpretation, the fact of incarnation is not one of the many divine appearances (πρόοδος) through which one knowable aspect of divinity is revealed to people. It is the person of Christ that guarantees, for Maximus, the possibility of deification. It is because of

33 See H.U. von Balthasar, "Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von Scythopolis," *Scholastik* 15 (1940): 16–38.

34 Maximus the Confessor, *Scholia*, PG 4, 527–576. Hans Urs von Balthasar suggested that John was the author of much of Maximus the Confessor's scholia; see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von Scythopolis* (Esch & Company 1940). For a broad discussion of this matter, see P. Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua...*, Excursus I, Note on the Scholiasts of the Pseudo-Denis, pp. 117–12.

35 PG 91, 657–717.

being in Christ, in a way both perfect and unabashed, of the divine and human nature, and of the energies that permeate them. It is a deified humanity that has in no way lost its human qualities. For the author of *Mystagogy*, the goal of human existence is to return to Christ, understood as participation in His deified nature permeated by the common energy of the Father and the Spirit. Thus, the Dionysian term for return to God (ἐπιστροφή) took on a new character. First of all, the whole person participates in it as a psycho-physical unity. Maximus tries to reduce the distance between the body and the soul, in a way characteristic of Pseudo-Dionysius. This return then takes place through a lively and conscious participation in the liturgy, which is a true meeting with God. Maximus’ understanding of communion sheds its symbolic character and becomes a real revelation of the true God. Thus, man is not subject to necessity, he becomes a “wandering rung” in the hierarchy of beings. His meeting with God takes place through grace and individual effort, since Christ came to each person directly. The meaning of life becomes a return to God understood as a divinity:

In the same way in which the soul and the body are united, God should become accessible for participation by the soul and through the soul’s intermediary by the body in order that the soul might receive an unchanging character and the body immortality; and finally that the whole man should become God deified by the grace of God—become-man becoming whole man—soul and body—by nature and becoming whole God—soul and body—by grace.³⁶

These thoughts were emphatically expressed in Maximus’ most mature work, the above-mentioned *Ambiguorum liber*. They are also reflected in his earlier treatise, *Mystagogy*, in which the author openly and purposefully refers to *De Coelesti Hierarchia*. Among the works by Maximus most frequently quoted by Palamas are *Ambiguorum liber* and *Centuria gnostica*. Although *Mystagogy* is quoted in *The Triads* only twice, it is a very important text and well known to Palamas, because it is the first full interpretation of the Byzantine liturgy of the Constantinople rite.³⁷ It was created between the years 628 and 630, and – as a

36 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguorum liber* 7, PG 91, 1088 C; cited in J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 192.

37 See. R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 82–123; I. H. Dalmais, *Place de la Mystagogie*, 277–283; A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London–New York 1996), 28–33, 63–81; A. Riou, *Le monde et l’Église selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris 1973), 103–170; H. Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy* (New York 1990), 67–103. Among the works by Maximus most often cited by Palamas are *Ambiguorum liber* (PG 91) and *Centuria gnostica* (PG 90). *Mystagogia* (PG 91) is cited twice, fragments 5, 681B and 7, 688B.

commentary explaining to fellow monks, this liturgical form touches on a whole spectrum of various issues. The *Mystagogy* is reflected in Maximus' theology based on the tradition of Scripture, the Fathers, and Ecumenical Councils; on the writings of Evagrius Ponticus and Diadochos of Photiki; on Macarius' homilies, the dogmatism of the Cappadocian Fathers, and the *Areopagitics*.

The work consists of two parts preceded by an introduction: the first section (chapters 1–7) is devoted to Church symbolism, and the second section (chapters 8–23) contains an interpretation of the liturgy. The *Mystagogy's* main goal is to provide a complete theological commentary on the Eucharistic rite. For this reason, Maximus relies entirely on the Eucharistic commentary made by Pseudo-Dionysius in the third part of *De Coelesti Hierarchia*. At the same time, Maximus states with great reverence that since such a great mind has already done this work, *Mystagogy* will not repeat the previously presented way of reasoning.³⁸ The term μυσταγωγία is often replaced with the word “contemplation” (θεωρία), and although in this case both mean introduction, preparation for the mystery, the latter is more often used to denote particular steps leading to union with God (communion). Thus, Maximus writes about the contemplation of Scripture (ἡ γραφικὴ θεωρία), liturgy and theology. Θεολογικὴ μυσταγωγία is the crowning achievement of the spiritual knowledge of the noetic world to which minds are raised through natural knowledge of the world (φυσικὴ θεωρία), knowledge of the true reasons behind things (λόγοι), and contemplation of liturgical symbols (συμβολικὴ θεωρία).

The presence of the Areopagite tradition in Maximus' views is beyond dispute, though as R. Bornert and M.W. Żywow argue,³⁹ Maximus repeatedly presents the thoughts of the author of *Corpus* with additional commentary. This phenomenon is most clearly visible in the second part of *Mystagogy* (8–23), when Maximus explains the liturgy and comments on it at length. As a starting point, Maximus accepts the Areopagite's cosmology when he writes that the world created by God is divided into a spiritual world, consisting of intelligible and incorporeal natures (ἐκ νοερῶν καὶ ἀσωμάτων οὐσιῶν), and a sensual and corporeal

38 “But since the symbols of the sacred celebration of the holy synaxis have also been considered by the most holy and truly divine interpreter Dionysius the Areopagite in a manner which is worthy of his great mind in his treatise *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, it should be known that the present work will not repeat these same things nor will it proceed in the same manner.” Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. G. C. Berthold (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985), 184.

39 See R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 83–125, 267–268. See also M. W. Żywow, “Mistagogia Maksyma Wyznawcy i rozwój bizantyńskiej teorii obrazu,” 85–92.

nature (καὶ θτον αἰ θτον αἰαητόν). σωματικόν). Both levels exist in relation to each other in that the noetic and sensory levels are presented as isomorphic.⁴⁰ In this way, any material object can be regarded as a symbol of a noetic object. Such a system makes it possible to explain the liturgy through a set of symbolic actions on symbolic objects that enable man to ascend to participation in the divine reality. This comes as the result of a Christocentric approach to the liturgy (contemplation not of noetic beings, but of Christ himself in Christ), historicism (emphasis on the moment of the real repetition and duration of the history of salvation in the liturgy, in this one cosmic moment), and eschatology (history leads to salvation, the liturgy of the catechumens to the liturgy of the faithful). These differences boil down to the constantly expressed conviction that deification and Incarnation in the liturgy is real. Maximus consistently deals with providing explanations for the nature of Christ, which for him – as in the treatise of “The Great Dionysius” – is the principle and cause of all processes taking place in the world. However, he does not stop – as his master did – with a statement about the incarnation of the Logos, which took on human form without undergoing any change. Maximus’ doctrine goes beyond admiration for this mystery and tries to present it using the formulas of the Council of Chalcedon.⁴¹ He clearly states that there is, in the one person of Christ, the divine and human nature, so that the incarnate Logos is permanently permeated by two energies and two wills proper to both natures, operating no confusion. The mystical union of the two unchanged natures and their wills, in the one undivided person of Christ, constitutes the paradigm of Maximus’ cosmos; it is the principle and model of the process of unifying all creation under the influence of divine actions. The divided material world is reunited thanks to the connection of the Logos and λόγοι contained in creatures:

God realizes this union among natures of things without confusing them but in lessening and bringing together their distinction ... in relationship and union with himself as cause, principle, and end.⁴²

40 See Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 2, 699A.

41 The Council of Chalcedon took place in 451 AD. One of its achievements was the condemnation of the Monophysites and the expulsion of two advocates of this heresy, Eutyches and Dioscorus. See: J. L. González, *A History of Christian Thought Volume II: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 2010), 76–107.

42 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 2, 668 C; and further: τῇ πρὸς ἐατὸν ὡς αἰτίαν καὶ ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος, ἀναφορᾶ τε καὶ ἐνώσει παραμυωοῦμένός τε καὶ

The Christological perspective of Maximus' writings means that the world, in order to regain its lost unity, needs no integrating hierarchy uniting, no gradual acquisition of knowledge and symbolic treatment of the sacraments. All people are gathered in the person of Christ through the sacrament of communion that unites them. The second of the divine persons, through his dual nature, gathers mankind without violating human nature; this mutual relationship is thus kept in perfect harmony.

Maximus' the concept of deification (θέωσις) finds its source, no doubt, in the treatise of Pseudo-Dionysius, the author who makes it "the supreme goal of every hierarchy" and understands it as a search for spiritual knowledge, a process of mental ascension. The deification of man is similarly the central theme of the *Mystagogy*, but at the same time it is placed in a completely different context. Maximus' Christ-centered orientation allows him to regard deification as "the supreme goal of every human being" because the deified nature of Christ, permeated with the energies of the Father and the Spirit, is a condition for direct contact with the communicable "part" of the divine essence. Placing the problem of deification in a new context means that, although the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius remains indisputable, the optics of the issues raised change. Therefore, Maximus thinks it is necessary to undertake a broad discussion of anthropology, a motif absent from the *Hierarchy*. According to Maximus, every human being is a composition of soul and body, elements that are inseparably connected with each other (καὶ οὐχ ὅλου μὲν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τοῦ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος κατὰ σύνθεσιν φημι συνεστῶτος).⁴³ For a more complete explanation of this issue, Maximus draws parallels between the structure of the church (*Myst.*, 4), the Scriptures (*Myst.*, 6), the words (*Myst.*, 7) as an image of man, and vice versa, he shows a reflection of these elements in man's composition. By making a range of distinctions between the different parts of the soul, he takes the mind as the supreme part and likens it to a church altar, the soul as a whole to the sanctuary, and the body to the nave. All parts of the church constitute an integral whole in relation to the entire structure of the building, much like all parts of a human being relate to one another and constitute one with the human person. The body is enlightened by spiritual knowledge acquired by holding to the commandments. On the other hand, the soul is led to God by the natural contemplation of "reason" (λόγοι), while the summit of divine revelations can only be

ταυταποιοούμενος. Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. G.C. Berthold (Paulist Press, New Jersey 1985), 188.

43 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, PG 91, 5, 672 D.

reached through the "altar of the mind."⁴⁴ Maximus further states that man in his complexity was created in the image and likeness of God,⁴⁵ therefore God is the image of man, and man is the image of God. This reciprocal pattern is the key to understanding Maximus' concept of deification. It assumes that man, because of his inner shape, is naturally oriented to a search for his prototype, and at the same time the incarnate Word initiates God's turn to his creation: "Jesus my God and Savior, who is completed by me who I am saved, brings me back to himself."⁴⁶ Discovering the image of God contained in man takes place not only through mental reflection, but also, and equally importantly, through virtuous practices and observance of God's commandments. God thus comes and reveals himself to creation through grace and actions (energies), and thus the human person becomes a meeting place; permeated with divine energies, he becomes deified. The outstanding scholar of Maximus' writings, Lars Thunberg, concludes: "divine incarnation in the virtues and human fixity in God are two sides of the same process of deification through which God is thus revealed in man."⁴⁷ Maximus seems to be under the heavy influence of Pseudo-Dionysius when he writes that only the soul has the ability to transcend itself, to attain the highest knowledge of God, when, through abstraction, it detaches itself from sensory impressions and sees only noetic reality. The author of *Mystagogy* adds, in the Areopagite's spirit, that the soul is ready for deification not by acquiring divine, enlightening knowledge, but through the grace and prayer it has received. Then it is truly prepared to receive God, who

takes it [the soul] up becomingly and fittingly as only he can, penetrating it completely without passion and deifying all of it and transforming it unchangeably to himself. Thus, as says the very holy Dionysius the Areopagite, it becomes the image and appearance of the invisible light.⁴⁸

44 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 4, 672 C; Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 190.

45 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 4, 672 B; ὡς εἰκὼνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν ὑπάρχουσιν τοῦ κατ' εἰκὼνα Θεοῦ καὶ ὁμοίωσιν γενομένου ἀνθρώπου.

46 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 5, 676B; Ἰησοῦν μὲν τὸν ἐμὸν Θεὸν καὶ Σωτῆρα συμπληρωθέντα δι' ἐμοῦ σωζομένου, πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐπανάγει. Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 192.

47 L. Thunberg, *Microcosmos and Mediator* (Lund 1965), 135.

48 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 23, 701 C; ποτ. καὶ ἀπαθῶς ἑαυτὸν ἐνιέντος, καὶ ὄλην θεοποιήσαντος ὡς εἶναι, καθὼς φησιν ὁ πανάγιος Ἀρεοπαγίτης Διονύσιος..., Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, p. 206.

The liturgy according to Maximus represents God's redemptive plan from the moment of incarnation through the second coming of Christ and Final Judgment. The entrance of the bishop to the temple is a figure of the first appearance of Christ in the body. Through his human life, he released the human race from corruption and death. The entrance of the faithful to the temple together with the bishop means the transition from ignorance to faith, from error to the reconsideration of God. At the same time, we see that the turn toward God depends not only on the activity of Christ, but also the free will of man. Everyone, even a murderer or a thief, can start his return through voluntary life changes by practicing virtues and following the commandments. The goal and effect of the ritual of reading the Psalms and the Scriptures in general is to prepare believers to celebrate the mystery. Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus interprets it as a way of joining God. However, the author of *Mystagogy* then recommends abandoning the mediation of hierarchy and Scripture (ὑπερβάς τὸ γράμμα) and open the soul to the grace of the Spirit. As a result, a person will find the real wisdom contained in his heart, which is already penetrated by divine energies. Gregory Palamas maintains the following in the context of highlighting the superiority of the direct vision of the light over gradually transferred knowledge: If anyone turns out to be absolutely worthy, he will find within himself a God etched into tablets of his heart through the grace of the Spirit.⁴⁹

For Maximus, the most important of the sacraments, communion (gathering as one – σύναξις), has a special meaning. He treats it as the pinnacle of man's mystical ascent to God, as a union beyond knowledge and understanding. The act of communion is the summary of the entire economy of salvation, because the incarnate Logos gathers human nature within itself (i.e. transformation into oneself, μεταποιούσα πρὸς ἑαυτήν),⁵⁰ without absorbing it or altering its essence; it allows for participation in divine light (i.e. the transmissible "part" of the divine nature): "There they behold the light of the invisible and ineffable glory."⁵¹ Man, being wholly permeated with divine energies, becomes god through grace (κατὰ τὴν χάριν θεοῦς). His union with Christ is accomplished through being

49 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, PG 91, 7, 688B; ᾧ εἴ τις ἐντὸς ἄξιος γενέσθαι φανήσεται, τὸν Θεὸν αὐτὸν εὐρήσι ταῖς πλαξὶ τῆς καρδίας ἐγγεγραμμένον διὰ τῆς ἐν πνεύματι χάριτος. See Gregory Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 41.

50 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, PG 91, 21, 697A; Καθ' ὃν ἀφανοῦς καὶ ὑπεραρρήτου δόξης τὸ φῶς ἐνοπτεύοντες.

51 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, PG 91, 21, 697A., Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 203.

the true son of God: “so that they also can be and be called gods by adoption through grace because all of God entirely fills them and leaves no part of them empty of his presence.”⁵²

Maximus adds a completely new thought to the Dionysian structure, namely the corporal aspect of man. M. W. Zywow, a scholar of Maximus’ theology, writes in the conclusion of his considerations on *Mystagogy*:

the material, the body, is deification, that is, to receive the divine energies; the deification of the body is one aspect of the salvation of the cosmos and man. ... It became possible thanks to the Incarnation of Christ, thanks to His adoption of the image of man, thanks to the perichoresis of the divine and human nature in Christ.⁵³

2.4 *Corpus Areopagiticum* in the Byzantine Liturgy and Patristic Thought

Maximus’ writings occupied an enormously important place in the Eastern Church tradition. We are convinced of their importance not only through the monk Nicodemus the Hagiorite’s *Philokalia*,⁵⁴ which contain extensive quotations of Maximus’ works, but also by the dominant influence of his *Mystagogy* on the Byzantine liturgy.⁵⁵ However, one cannot say that the works of Pseudo-Dionysius had such an influence. Contrary to claims made by A. Louth,⁵⁶ the above-mentioned works of I. H. Dalmais and R. Bornert show that the argument that *Corpus* had a broad influence on the liturgy is not justified in the source material. We find confirmation of these opinions in the fundamental study of issues tied to the Byzantine liturgy by H. Paprocki. Analyzing the structure of

52 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 21, 697A; Ὡστε καὶ αὐτοὺς δύνασθαι εἶναι τε καὶ καλεῖσθαι θέσει κατὰ τὴν χάριν θεοῦς, διὰ τὸν αὐτοῦς ὅλως πρηρώσαντα ὅλον Θεόν. Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 203.

53 M. W. Zywow, “‘Mistagogia’ Maksyma Wyznawcy i rozwój bizantyńskiej teorii obrazu,” in *Ikona, symbol i wyobrażenie*, trans. R. Mazurkiewicz (Warszawa 1984), 101 (Russian version: *Chudožestwiennyj jazyk sredniowiekowija*, ed. W. A. Karpuszyń [Moscow 1982]); for more on this topic, see I. H. Dalmais, *Mystère liturgique*, 57–58; J. Daniélou, “L’Apocatastase chez s. Gregoire de Nysse,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 30 (1940): 347; A. Riou, *Le monde et l’Église selon*, 98–107; P. Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, 216–221.

54 See *Filokalia* (Wenecja 1784) (English translation: Palmer, Sherrad, Ware, *The Philokalia. The Complete Text*, 2 Vol. (London 1981).

55 See I. H. Dalmais, *Place de la Mystagogie*, 277–283; R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 102–103.

56 See A. Louth, *Denys*, 116–117.

the Byzantine church and the role played by the narthex in the liturgy of catechumens, Paprocki notices that it is a mistake to rely on the testimony of Pseudo-Dionysius, because he described the rites of the Syrian liturgy, not the Byzantine liturgy.⁵⁷ These conclusions find confirmation in the work of the archaeologist and art historian P. Mathews.⁵⁸ The Syrian liturgy is reflected in the construction of the church, because through the architectural layout and successively applied curtains and divisions it emphasizes the importance of hierarchy and the unknowability of God. Mathews, after examining the preserved plans of churches in Constantinople, stated that the Syrian rite described in Pseudo-Dionysius' *De Coelesti Hierarchia* could not be applied in the churches under study. Certainly, this issue requires further detailed research. Similar doubts are raised by assertions⁵⁹ about the Areopagite's influence on the Byzantine liturgy through the work *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation*⁶⁰ attributed to Germanus of Constantinople. This quasi-official explanation of the Divine Liturgy for the Byzantine Christian world has been thoroughly studied by R. Bornert,⁶¹ who shows that, above all, it is difficult to say whether the line of the *History* was dominant in the Byzantine liturgy until the fourteenth century, if only in the sense that Maximus' *Mystagogy* was much more read and studied, and the number of preserved manuscripts strongly exceeds the *History*. Besides, Bornert notes that the *History* represents a Byzantine type of commentary, emphasizing as it does the concrete fact of the history of Salvation and assuming the relationship between liturgical acts and Christ's earthly life. At the same time, he writes that both works maintain a common doctrinal line, one which is much more realistic than we find in Pseudo-Dionysius' interpretation of the term "symbol" in relation

57 See H. Paprocki, *Le Mystère de l'Eucharistie. Genèse et interprétation de la liturgie eucharistique byzantine*, trans. F. Lhoest (Paris 1993), 143–144: "Depuis le XVIIe siècle, les byzantinistes proclamaient que le narthex était destiné aux catéchumènes et aux pénitents. C'est une erreur méthodologique. Car pour l'affirmer, on se fonde sur le témoignage du Pseudo-Denys de l'Aréopage, qui décrit la liturgie syrienne et non la liturgie byzantine."

58 See P. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople, Architecture and Liturgy* (Pennsylvanian 1980).

59 See A. Louth, *Denys*, 116–117.

60 *Historia ecclesiastica et mystica contemplatio*, PG 98, 39–454; "Germanus of Constantinople, *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation* in: *On the Divine Liturgy*," trans. J. Meyendorff (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, NY 1984), 55–107.

61 See R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 125–179.

to the Eucharist liturgy.⁶² Bornert emphasizes that the Pseudo-Dionysian system could never be accepted into the Byzantine liturgy, in which the Neoplatonic understanding of the sacraments was always corrected by reference to the history of the economy of Salvation.⁶³

Among the mystics of Maximus' time, the best commentator on monastic spirituality was John Climacus (525–605), the author of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.⁶⁴ His reflections on the weaknesses that threaten monks, contained in 30 chapters (rungs), have been widely read, translated into many languages. The last part entitled *To the Pastor*, which is an appendix addressed to John, Abbot of Raithu, testifies to the clear influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, but also Gregory of Nazianzus.⁶⁵ It seems, however, that John Climacus was directly inspired by his own experiences of spiritual life.

We detect the clear tradition of the *Areopagitics* in the theological works of John of Damascus (640–749). And yet, a detailed analysis is required to see to what extent it is a direct influence of the Areopagite's thoughts, and to what extent it is tied to Maximus, who for John is an unquestionable authority. John of Damascus's *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*⁶⁶ contains a synthesis of the entire tradition that preceded it, in which the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius had gained considerable importance. Writing about God, John follows in the

62 See Pseudo-Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* III, 13; R. Roques comments on this fragment in the following way: "Denys ne présente jamais formellement la communion eucharistique comme une participation au corps et au sang de Sauver. ... Il faut donc reconnaître que Denys envisage plus volontiers la communion eucharistique comme une participation à l'Un ... que comme une participation à l'humanité du Christ;" R. Roques, *L'Univers dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris 1954), 269.

63 See R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 268: "Jamais le système dionysien ne fut accepté tel quel par la mystagogie byzantine. La platonisme sacramentaire fut toujours corrigé par la vision historique d'une économie divine dans le temps;" see J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 133.

64 Jan Klimak, Κλίμαξ, PG 88, 631–1210.

65 See P. Evdokimov, *Poznanie Boga w Kościele wschodnim*, trans. A. Liduchowska (Kraków 1996), 57. French original: Paul Evdokimov, *La connaissance de Dieu Selon la tradition orientale* (Lyon 1967, reprint; Desclée de Brouwer, 1988).

66 John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa*, PG 94; [John of Damascus, *The Fountain of Wisdom*, part 3: *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (Ékdosis akribès tēs Orthodóxou Pisteōs); *Exposition of the Orthodox faith*, transl. Reverend SDF Salmond, in *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. 2nd Series, vol 9 (Oxford: Parker, 1899) [reprint Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963].

footsteps of the *Areopagitics* and firmly confirms that the divine nature is unknowable. He believes that only his actions, God's powers given *ad extra*, remain within the sphere of human cognition. In terms of deification, however, he clearly follows Maximus when he writes that in a transformed humanity, people will be able to see the energies – the light of God – and thus participate directly in Him. John of Damascus's presents the knowledge of God with a Christocentric approach, and the one who reveals the Son and – at the same time – initiates the $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ process, is the Spirit.⁶⁷ This is clearly a motif taken from the Alexandrian school (Cyril of Alexandria), alien to the Antiochian and Syrian traditions from which Pseudo-Dionysius came.

During the iconoclastic disputes,⁶⁸ the defenders of icons, with John of Damascus⁶⁹ and Theodore the Studite⁷⁰ at the forefront, developed a theology of the visible symbol of the invisible reality that participates in this symbol. These themes lead us to Pseudo-Dionysius' reflections on unity and differentiation in the nature of God. In the *Divine Names* (2) he reflects on the antinomy between the notions that God is inaccessible in his existence and that he is knowable through energies imparted to people. Pseudo-Dionysius writes that God transcends all known and ideal existence, that there are no proper names for Him, neither now or in the future; he emphasizes that there are no words or images to represent His essence. Pseudo-Dionysius calls this essence of God – who, being the cause of all creation, remains unknowable to him – God in and of Himself. On the other hand, he claims that under the name of the Good, God makes himself available and reveals himself to the world. The Areopagite describes manifestations of the Good in the world using the well-known term “movement toward” ($\pi\rho\acute{o}\omicron\delta\omicron\varsigma$), he also calls them “energies” ($\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$) or “powers” ($\delta\upsilon\acute{\nu}\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$). We know God in creatures permeated with His energies, which, like rays of light, pour out of the divine essence and penetrate all levels of the hierarchy of being. The antinomy, which is the distinction in God of an unknowable essence and knowable energies that cause no divisions in Him ($\delta\iota\acute{\alpha}\kappa\rho\iota\sigma\iota\varsigma$), is possible only

67 See P. Evdokimov, *Poznanie Boga w Kościele wschodnim*, 62–63.

68 See L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 48–142.

69 *Orationes pro sacris imaginibus*, PG 94; *Three Treatises on the Divine Images. Popular Patristics*, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003); see also U. R. Jeck, “Ps.-Dionysius Areopagites und der Bilderstreit in Byzanz. Überlegungen zur Dionysiosrezeption des Joannes von Damaskos,” *Hermeneia. Zeitschrift für ostkirchliche Kunst* 8.2 (1992): 71–80.

70 See Jeck, “Die Bilderlehre des Theodoros Studites und Ihre Areopagitischen Wurzeln,” *Studia Mediewistyczne* 32 (1997), 7–22.

because of the supra-essential (ὑπερουσιότητος) nature of God. This position taken by Pseudo-Dionysius allowed defenders of icons to recover from the heavy accusation of idolatry made against them by the iconoclasts. This accusation was based on the belief that the icon (image) was identical and co-essential with its pre-image, and this belief was, in turn, strongly rejected by Theodore the Studite, who emphasized the impenetrable distance that separates the world of creatures from the inherently unknowable God:

... no one could be so foolish as to think that reality and its shadow ... the prototype and its representation, the cause and the consequence are by nature ... identical.⁷¹

It is the energies that make icons worthy of the highest veneration and make them the medium through which the deity is revealed to men. Icons are permeated with divine powers, not because they represent the divine nature, but because they represent a person in whom the divine and human nature endures in an unmixed and undivided manner. Thus, the deified humanity of Christ, the Mother of God and the saints – i.e. human nature permeated with divine energies – becomes a part of the icon. John of Damascus puts it this way: “So material things, on their own, are not worthy of veneration, but if the one depicted is full of grace, then they become participants in grace, on the analogy of faith.”⁷²

Thus, the icon differs in essence from its divine prototype, in its nature inconceivable and unknowable, but it is similar to that prototype because of the pre-image’s energies that permeate it. How icons are worshiped will therefore be different from the worship that is due to a supernatural God. The Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 stated, in the form of a dogma, that “the image, or icon, since it is distinct from the divine model, can be the object only of a relative veneration or honor, not of worship which is reserved for God alone.”⁷³ So the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysian thought made by Maximus the Confessor gains strength again. The distinction between the unknowable essence and the knowable energies seen in the Christocentric context allowed him to state that it was Christ’s deified humanity that became the condition for the mutual

71 Theodore the Studite, PG 99, 341 B; cited in L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 150.

72 John of Damascus, *De imaginibus oratio*, PG 94, c. 1264; *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: 2003), 43. We need to remember that in Eastern theology, grace is identified with divine energy, which has the power to deify human nature.

73 *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, wyd. J.D. Mansi, Florence–Venice–Paris), 1759–1927, 13, 377D., see Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 40.

interpenetration of the image and the pre-image. Therefore, M. W. Żywow, in the conclusion of his study, could write:

The icon cult theory ... is a special case of the general theory of the image, the development of which, continuing the teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers, radically transformed Neoplatonic views and theorems (Evagrius, Pseudo-Dionysius), leading them to the main, Christocentric-soteriological current of patristic thinking.⁷⁴

In the eleventh century we note a case in which the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius was developed in an extremely detailed way, by Niketas Stethatos (1005–1080), a student and biographer of Symeon the New Theologian. This is all the more surprising because Symeon, one of the greatest authorities on monastic life who developed the doctrine of deifying light, manifests in his work no influence at all from the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition. Niketas' work *On the Hierarchy*,⁷⁵ in terms of dependence on the Areopagite's writings, has been carefully analyzed and commented on by A. Louth.⁷⁶ Niketas' *Hierarchy*, however, in no way influenced either Eastern Orthodoxy's liturgy or its theology.⁷⁷

Many researchers, including J. Meyendorff, believe that Pseudo-Dionysius' reception in the Eastern tradition took place not directly, but through the "Christian filter" of Maximus and his works.

At the same time, this conclusion seems to be an answer to the question about the possibility of Pseudo-Dionysius' significant, doctrinal influence on the thought of the Eastern Church. However, bearing in mind that works already published require new thorough (comparative) studies, and that most manuscripts are waiting to be published, we can conclude that the question of Pseudo-Dionysius' influence on Eastern Church thought remains open.

74 M. W. Żywow, *Mistagogia Maksyma Wyznawcy*, 102.

75 Niketas Stethatos, *Opuscules et Lettres*, ed. and trans. J. Darrouzes (Paris: Sources Chrétiennes 81, 1961).

76 See A. Louth, *Denys*, 117–119.

77 See A. Wenger, "Niketas Stethatos," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique*, ed. A. Rayez, P. Sherwood, Vol. 14 (Paris 1988), col. 307–309.

3 Gregory Palamas and His Era

3.1 The Life and Work of Palamas Against the Background of Fourteenth-Century Byzantium

Theological and philosophical disputes were an inherent and universally accepted part of the political, social and cultural life of the community at that time, which is particularly evident in the history of the struggle against heresy. From this perspective, it seems absolutely necessary to place Palamas' works in their proper context, which involves not only the story of their author's life, but also the issues of his time.

Gregory Palamas was born in 1296 in Constantinople into a rather wealthy, aristocratic family. His father held high office at the imperial court, he was respected and recognized by Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos. Palamas Sr. was thus able to provide his son with a thorough education under the patronage of Theodore Metochites, a great statesman and scholar of humanities. At the age of twenty, Gregory pursued secular studies in the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, which included reading Aristotle's works, especially those on logic. In 1316, despite his promising court career, Palamas decided to follow his vocation and give up secular life. In this he was probably encouraged by the example of his spiritual teacher and guide Theoleptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia, who initiated him into the basics of monastic practice of the so-called pure prayer of the heart. After his father's death, Gregory, as the eldest son, was required to take care of his family, which is why his decision to enter the convent also led to the beginning of monastic life for his mother, two brothers and two sisters. In 1317, Palamas and his brothers entered the monastery of Vatopedi belonging to the republic of monks on Mount Athos, where for three years they were under the spiritual care of the monk hesychastic monk Nicodemus. After Nicodemus's death and the unexpected death of his younger brother, Gregory moved to the very heart of the community of Athos monasteries, the Great Lavra of Saint Athanasius, with whom he was spiritually connected until the end of his life. Palamas' next retreat was the hermitage of Glossia, where he began his life as a hermit-monk, which was interrupted by the Turkish invasion given that the monastery, which lacked defensive walls, was easy prey for sea pirates. He spent the following years with the future master of Hesychasm in Thessaloniki, where he performed spiritual exercises under the direction of Isidore, a student of Gregory of Sinai and the future patriarch of Constantinople. After being ordained as priest at the end

of 1326, he started organizing a community of hermits at Berrhoea (Βερροη) in Macedonia. For five years he practiced a strict life of isolation, meeting with his companions only for the Eucharist on Saturdays and Sundays. His hermit life was interrupted by the invasion of the Serbs around 1331, when Gregory Palamas returned to Athos, settled in the hermitage of Saint Sabbas, near the Great Lavra, in order to attend weekly services. At the turn of 1335 and 1336, the Doctor of Hesychasm served as the abbot of the large monastery of Esphigmenou, but he alienated the monks with overly strict discipline, so he happily accepted his recall and returned to his retreat. It did not last long, however, because a few months later, after discussions with Barlaam, a Calabrian monk, scholar and philosopher, Gregory Palamas unexpectedly became a public figure.

3.2 Discussions with Barlaam and Akindynos. Circumstances of the Creation of Works, Treatises and Synodal Volumes

Barlaam, a Calabrian-born Greek thinker, arrived in Constantinople in 1330 and quickly gained a reputation as a thoroughly educated person who was sincerely committed to Eastern Orthodoxy. The fame gained through his extensive knowledge of mathematics, astronomy and logic, led John V Kantakouzenos to officially appoint him as head of the chair of philosophy at the imperial university. During his lectures, Barlaam focused mainly on highlighting the thoughts of Pseudo-Dionysius.¹ The philosopher from Calabria emphasized the main themes of the *Areopagitics* and put them into two main groups of issues. He argued that, in Pseudo-Dionysius' view, all knowledge comes from sensory experience, even knowledge about God, which is acquired through a special sense. Moreover, he believed that, since God is super-substantial and transcends all created beings, all knowledge about Him cannot be acquired directly, but through the symbols we experience. The object of mystical knowledge is therefore only symbolic reality.² Such an interpretation of the Areopagite's thoughts led the

1 Nicephorus Gregoras *Byzantina Historia*, XIX, 1, 923.

2 See Barlaam, unpublished treatises, cited in J. Meyendorff, *Un mauvais théologien de l'unité au XIV^e* (Chevetogne 1955), 47–64. Barlaam also claimed that he derived these postulates of Pseudo-Dionysius from his study of Greek philosophy, and in *Mystical Theology* he even employed expressions used by the Pythagoreans, Panaetius, Brontinus, Philolaus, Charmides, and others. See esp. Second letter to Palamas, in: *Barlaam*

Calabrian philosopher to the conviction that next to the necessary truths logically deduced from Revelation, there is a realm of merely possible truths that cannot in any way be deduced from revealed premises. Barlaam, fascinated by the philosophy of Aristotle, gradually began to depart from the theology of the Greek Fathers, based on antinomy and apophatics, in order to start an open discussion with the patristic tradition. The first public debate in which Barlaam confronted the famous historian and humanist of great authority, Nicephorus Gregoras, was a failure for him in that it showed Aristotelianism's utter alienation from the "mystical realism" of Eastern theology. The solution that got to the heart of the issue under discussion here was first proposed by Gregory Palamas. In 1336, Palamas' faithful student, Akindynos, sent him the works of Barlaam of Calabria, which he read and discussed in his school in Thessaloniki. In them, Barlaam criticized the Thomistic philosophy practiced by Italian university circles close to him. He wrote that since God is absolutely unknowable and remains beyond all discourse, the position taken by Latins that the Spirit originated from the Father and the Son had no basis whatsoever. One must get rid of the Thomistic belief that there are wholly certain truths about the Trinity or the nature of God, given that that nature is completely inaccessible to human reason. Paradoxically, Barlaam – while attacking Thomism and scholasticism – collided with the mystical realism of the Eastern Church, as J. Meyendorff put it succinctly.³ Palamas, in response to the claims made by the Calabrian philosopher presented to him in a letter by Akindynos, wrote the *Apodictic Treatises*. The Doctor of Heschasm's counterarguments were based on the conviction that negative theology, considered in terms of Aristotelian logic led, however, to conclusions completely alien to patristic thought. Barlaam rejected its inherent antinomy, which consequently undermined the dogma of Eastern Christianity and its proclamation that it is possible to know God through His energies in a certain and direct way. Thus, he rejected the realm of mysticism as an area of divine theophany directed at every believer. Palamas' *Treatises* were met with a vehement reaction from Barlaam. During the dispute, Gregory had to specify his position regarding the possibility of getting to know God, whose nature, while remaining completely unknowable and indivisible, is at the same time communicated to people through divine energies, light – grace, transforming man. One factor supporting

Calabro. Epistole greche. I primordi episodici e dottrinari delle lotte esicaste, ed. G. Schiro, Testi, 1 (Palermo 1954), 298–299.

3 J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 89; idem, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. A. Fiske (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1974), 89.

human action in order to open up to this transfiguring power was precisely the Hesychasts' method of prayer, practiced for many centuries on Mount Athos. Barlaam, knowing that Palamas genuinely supported the mysticist Hesychast movement, and even used this prayer himself, decided to subject the method to overwhelming criticism and ridicule his adversary. He thus began to frequent the monastic community in Thessaloniki, where he heard the teachings of such mystics and ascetics as Nicephorus the Hesychast. These simple people, completely unprepared for theoretical investigations presented to the newly arrived, with no fear, the elements of practice established for centuries. Barlaam's attack was a complete success. Byzantine intellectuals were surprised to learn about the method used by monks, deliberately described in a trivial, overly simplified manner. Greek *paideia* turned out to be stronger than sympathy for universally respected monks.

Called on for help by his confreres, Gregory Palamas found it necessary to locate Hesychasm within the tradition and culture of Byzantium, and to define its relationship with the theological dogmas of original sin, the incarnation of Christ and Redemption. He thus openly defended the monks, writing the first of three parts of his main work, *The Triads for the Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* (ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶν ἡσυχαστῶν). In response, Barlaam published a three-part treatise *On Acquiring Knowledge, On Prayer, On The Light of Knowledge*, in which he softened overly harsh statements, particularly about practices, but he did not give up his resistance. Palamas rejected his adversary's main arguments and proved why they were fallacious in the second of the *Triads*, written when the Calabrian philosopher was in Avignon in 1339. Immediately after his return to Constantinople, Barlaam – standing before Patriarch John Calecas – accused Palamas of heresy. At the same time, to justify his position, he published *Against the Messalians*, in which he openly accused Palamas of supporting the formally condemned sect of Messalians and Bogomils. This intense accusation was based on the conviction that Palamas consciously identifies the unknowable essence of God with the energies available to human cognition, which thus led to the belief held by the followers of heresy that since God is fully knowable, man can unite himself – by the power of his own will, without the need for the mediation of sacraments – with the whole of God, to become a god in life. This objection forced Palamas to write the last of the *Triads*, in which he focused on the existence in God of an inaccessible divine being and un-created energies, none of which causes, however, any division in His essence. In 1340, Gregory Palamas

wrote a summary of his views known as the *Hagiorite Tome*,⁴ signed by the spiritual heads of all monasteries of Holy Mountain Athos and then sent to Constantinople. At court, the work gained the support of John V Kantakouzenos and received a more critical reception by Patriarch John Calecas. The latter, however, wanted to avoid open controversy with the hesychasts and Emperor Andronikos III, who favored them. He therefore convened a universal synod on June 10, 1341, during which the Barlaam doctrine was finally condemned, and the Palamas manifesto was determined to be in line with orthodoxy. In light of this turn of events, the Calabrian left for Italy, where he converted to the Roman-Catholic faith. He spent the last years of his life in Gerace, where he taught the great Petrarch Greek. He died in 1348.

3.3 The Dispute over Gregory Palamas' Doctrine Against the Backdrop of Church-State Relations

The Palamas doctrine was unexpectedly reflected in the political and social life of the Byzantine empire at the end of the fourteenth century. The reasons for this state of affairs can be found in the essential features that made up that empire's character. Many scholars of this topic view it as monolithic in the sense of the unchanging durability of its particular rituals and traditions; they emphasize its ahistoricity and temporality. This phenomenon can be explained when we look at the triad of *basileia*, *Ecclesia* and *paideia* that move and inspire the human community. During Byzantium's thousand years, these terms acquired a specific meaning, different from the interpretations of *regnum*, *sacerdotum* and *studium* that organized the medieval Christian West. Let us take a closer look at Church-state relations. The Byzantine *basileus* and the power it exercised were closely related to the "realm of the spirit." The monarch was at the very center of the Church hierarchy. He was a living symbol of the Christian community, one based on the dogma of the Incarnation. In the double, divine-human nature of Christ, the Byzantines saw the most perfect model of fusing the hierarchy of the state and the Church.⁵ A clear definition of this relationship – in which the state defends the honor of the Church, and the Church lays the foundations for social life⁶ – can be found in the text of the famous VI novella of Justinian. We find

4 *Hagiorite Tome* (Ἀγιορετικὸς Τόμος ὑπὲρ τῶν ἡσυχάζοντων), PG 150, 1225–1236.

5 See J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 259–263.

6 See P. Evdokimov, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel, *Woman and the Salvation of the World: A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994; see also *The Enactments of Justinian, the Novels VI, How Bishops and other Ecclesiastics*

there significant words describing the mutual relationship between the emperor and church leaders as a “symphony:”

There are two greatest gifts which God, in his love for man, has granted from on high: the priesthood and the imperial dignity. The first serves divine things, the second directs and administers human affairs; both however proceed from the same origin and adorn the life of mankind. Hence, nothing should be such a source of care to the emperors as the dignity of the priests, since it is for the [imperial] welfare that they constantly implore God. For if the priesthood is in every way free from blame and possesses access to God, and if the emperors administer equitably and judiciously the state entrusted to their care, general harmony will result, and whatever is beneficial will be bestowed upon the human race.⁷

As Meyendorff noted, the fundamental error of this assumption was the conviction that it is possible to realize Christ’s perfect humanity in the form of a perfect Byzantine monarch⁸ and the methods he employs. This “symphony” between imperial and church authorities was disrupted once again in the 1440s. After the empire, only a shadow of its former glory remained, while the Church gained unprecedented influence, which is particularly evident in the example of changes in monastic life. The monasteries of Mount Athos, which had been governed by the imperial administration of Andronikos II, were placed under the patriarch’s jurisdiction. After 1347, this position was taken by other disciples of Palamas, who was ordained priest there in 1316 (Isidore, 1347–1349; Callistus I, 1350–1354, 1355–1363; Philotheus 1354–1355, 1364–1376; Macarius, 1376–1379; Nilos, 1380–1388, etc.).⁹ Many of them, as we shall see, had a direct influence on the imperial court’s pro-Palamas politics when influential “humanists” were directly confronted by monks, thanks to the Palamas doctrine. The growing importance of the patriarch, just as the state was losing strength, resulted in a clear increase in the influence of the Church on the policy of the empire towards

Shall be Ordained, and Concerning the Expenses of Churches, S. P. Scott, *The Civil Law*, XVI (Cincinnati, 1932): “For if the priesthood is, everywhere free from blame, and the Empire full of confidence in God is administered equitably and judiciously, general good will result, and whatever is beneficial will be bestowed upon the human race” https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Anglica/N6_Scott.htm].

7 Justinian, *Novella VI, Corpus iuris civilis*, ed. R. Schoell (Berlin 1928), HI, 35–36; cited in J. Meyendorff, *Theology*, 259. See also J. Meyendorff, “Justinian, the Empire, and the Church,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22 (1968), 45–60.

8 *Ibid.*, 272.

9 See J. Meyendorff, *Society and Culture*, 51.

countries that were territorially subordinate to it. G. Ostrogorski describes this phenomenon as follows:

The difference between the range of influence of the Byzantine Church and the shrinking territory of the Empire was growing increasingly clear. The state was dwarfed, and the patriarchy of Constantinople continued to be the focal point for the Orthodox world; it was responsible not only for metropolises and bishoprics located in the former Byzantine territories in Asia Minor and on the Balkan Peninsula, but also in the Caucasus, Russia and Lithuania. This made the Church the Byzantine Empire's most enduring element.¹⁰

Both geographically and morally, the patriarch's influence on society was far greater than that of the imperial throne, a fact which had economic and political consequences. On the other hand, viewed formally, imperial authority was limited in no way in relation to the Church. Back in 1393, when the Grand Prince of Moscow Vasily Dmitriyevich asked Patriarch Antony for permission to omit the emperor's name during the liturgical memorial in the Russian Church, he received a refusal supported by a significant statement: "The emperor is the emperor of the Romans, that is of all Christians" (βασιλεὺς καὶ αυτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων, πάντων δηλαδὴ τῶν χριστιανῶν).¹¹ It was the emperor, and not the patriarch of Constantinople, who had the power to approve dogmas, and without the emperor's participation the council lost its legislative status. Thus, the Byzantine autokrator had two tasks: issuing arbitrary decisions in doctrinal matters and battling those who opposed the power he exercised. The consequence of combining these functions was the transfer of ideological divisions into the matter of political life.

The political dispute over the Palamas doctrine arose out of a divergence of views on Hesychasm between the Grand Domestic John Kantakouzenos¹² and the Patriarch of Constantinople John Calecas.¹³ This discrepancy came to light very quickly when, a few days after the Palamas' triumphant council, during the orthodoxy of his doctrine was approved, Emperor Andronikos III Palaiologos

10 G. Ostrogorski, *Dzieje Bizancjum*, 383.

11 *Acta patriarchatus Constantinopolitani*, eds. F. Miklosich and I. Muller (Vienna 1862), II, 190; cited in J. Meyendorff, "Society and Culture," *ibid.*, 61, note 44.

12 From the eleventh century, the Grand Domestic exercised the highest command over the army, and over time also had full administrative powers.

13 For source texts on the debate, see N. Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, I–II; J. Kantakuzen, *Historia*, I–IV, ed. Bonn 1828–1832, and J. Meyendorff *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 65–173.

died (June 15, 1341).¹⁴ A dispute over the succession to the emperor's throne immediately flared up between John Kantakouzenos and Anne of Savoy, Empress-mother of the nine-year-old rightful ruler John V Kantakouzenos, who was the actual head of state during the reign of Andronikos III and was his closest friend, and claimed the right to exercise regency on behalf of the minority ruler. Anna of Savoy, supported by the patriarch John Calecas, based her rights on a document drawn up by Andronikos III during the council in 1334. This document, written as Calecas took the title of patriarch, stated that the emperor entrusted the Church with the care of his family and his children in case of political difficulties.¹⁵ The two parties not only fought bitterly over the throne, but also took specific positions in Gregory Palamas' dispute with Barlaam and Akindynos. It would be simplistic to say that all the supporters of the Grand Domestic, who backed Palamas, were also (automatically, as it were) supporters of Palamas' position. We can find the reasons for this state of affairs, on the one hand, in the so-called the problem of orthodoxy of the Palamas doctrine, and, on the other hand, in the polarization of attitudes of the Byzantine community towards monk tradition and ascetics. Thus, the people closest to Kantakouzenos were the staunch adversaries of "Palamism" mentioned above – Nicephorus Gregoras and Demetrius Kydones,¹⁶ who did not accept the monastic roots of doctrine.

The second group, led by Anna of Savoy, was also divided into supporters and opponents of Palamas. While the Empress favored Gregory, her closest advisers, Patriarch John Calecas¹⁷ and Megaduke Alexis Apocaucus¹⁸ were his staunch opponents. The patriarch made the worst possible accusation against Palamas,

14 See G. Ostrogorski, *Dzieje Bizancjum*, 392–416.

15 Nicephorus Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, X, 7, 496; cited in J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 95.

16 Nicephorus Gregoras (1290–1360) – the outstanding scientist and humanist, author of *Ῥωμαϊκὴ ἱστορία* and a number of political speeches and condemning hesychasts; Demetrius Kydones (1324–1397) – a highly interesting writer of great works, author of rich correspondence and rhetorical writings, a treatise against Palamas *Κατὰ τοῦ Παλαμά*, translator into Greek, among other languages, of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*; for more on both characters, see S. Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (London: CUP 1970).

17 John XIV Calecas, patriarch of Constantinople in the years 1334–1347, author of the treatise *Περὶ οὐσίας καὶ ἐνεργείας* opposing Palamas' theses, supporter of union with the West.

18 Alexis Apocaucus, initially a supporter of Andronikos III and friend of Kantakouzenos, then his staunch opponent in the Civil War, murdered in 1345.

namely that that the Doctor of Hesychasm had introduced a new doctrine and heresy. He presented the theological arguments made in the work *Περὶ οὐσίας καὶ ἐνέργειας*, and he quickly put his hostile attitude into action, which – according to Meyendorff – was directly caused by the Palamite crisis.¹⁹ In September 1341, the absence of Kantakouzenos, who was off fighting the Serbs, was exploited in the capital. The empress declared him an enemy of the motherland, his property was confiscated, and his supporters were imprisoned. The regency, along with Anna of Savoy, was headed by a patriarch hostile to Palamas. Gregory openly condemned this coup d'état, something he could afford to do because of family ties linking him to the court and the spiritual authority underpinned by his recent triumph over Barlaam. However, he did not want to be openly involved in a political conflict, and preferred rather to act as a mediator bringing peace between the opposing parties. Despite Palamas' strenuous efforts, his actions were completely fruitless, and he thus decided to withdraw to the monastery of Michael, located near the capital. At the end of 1342, on the orders of the Patriarch Calecas, who enjoyed great support from the court, Gregory was sentenced to complete isolation. He was forcibly removed to a monastery near the residence of the governor of the Church. Nonetheless, he faced further attacks, this time from his former apprentice Akindynos. In June 1343, he wrote a report for the patriarch in which he interpreted past events, from which emerged an image of Palamas as a heretic, and which was used by Calecas as a sufficient doctrinal argument to support the fundamentally political decision to imprison Gregory. In 1344 the patriarch went even further, convening a synod at which Palamas was excommunicated and Isidore was removed as bishop of Monemvasia. Akindynos was awarded the title Metropolitan of Thessaloniki,²⁰ which led to a serious dispute with the regent who supported him. She accused Calecas of not respecting the resolutions of the synod of 1341, convened under imperial auspices, and of elevating the heretic Akindynos to the dignity of a bishop. Consequently, despite a series of hearings in which the patriarch defended his position, his protégé never took the bishopric. Let us note an interesting fact here – Empress Anna of Savoy, even though she had to defend a man supported by a hostile party, did not hesitate to veto the patriarch. Her attitude probably resulted from the conviction that it is the emperor's responsibility to apply and

19 J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 121: "C'est donc le patriarche Jean Calécas qui porte la responsabilité de la crise religieuse subie par l'Eglise byzantine au cours de la guerre civile."

20 See *Ibid.*, 105–109.

defend canons established by the synod. In the *Codex Justinianus*, Justinian had already ordered that canons have the force of law; guarding the Church and the law, the emperor could thus not be above dogmas and canons.²¹

In 1342, one might have thought that the case of John V Kantakouzenos and the “Palamists” was finally lost. Supporters abandoned him to save heads and fortune. The lonely anti-emperor, however, did not give up the fight. In July 1342, he asked the Serbian Tsar Dušan for help, but the conflicting interests of both rulers soon led to open conflict. At the end of that year, Kantakouzenos allied himself with Umur of Aydın, but it was the support given to the anti-emperor by the Seljuk Turks that quickly turned the tide of victory toward him. Supported by the strong Hesychast movement and his new ally, Sultan Orhan, his march to victory was unstoppable. Thanks to this armed support, in May 1346 the Patriarch of Jerusalem crowned Kantakouzenos in Adrianople. But the synod of Thracian bishops convened in this city and announced that John XIV Calecas be deposed on the charge of ordaining a condemned heretic. Anna of Savoy, threatened by the increasingly powerful Kantakouzenos, tried to win over the Hesychasts, thinking that their support would ensure her rule. In February 1347, on the empress’s order, the patriarch was removed and the Palamist Isidore was appointed in his place. In the end, Gregory Palamas was released from prison and elevated to the bishop of Thessaloniki. The empress’s efforts did not prevent her from losing power, and on February 3, 1347, John Kantakouzenos triumphantly entered the capital of the empire. In May 1347, after being accepted by the people, the senate and the army, the new patriarch of Constantinople, Isidore, solemnly coronated Emperor John VI, the name that Kantakouzenos had taken. He ruled for ten years on behalf of John V, to whom he gave his daughter Helena as wife. Thus ended the long and devastating civil war. The only point of resistance to the new government remained Thessaloniki. Eventually, in 1349, the ruling zealots there were overthrown. A year later, John VI was able to enter the city, and Gregory took over his bishopric. A few days after his entry, described by Philotheus as triumphant,²² Palamas wrote the first of the 70 *Homilies* in which he condemned the zealots and emphasized the need for forgiveness and peace.²³ Clearly, the emperor’s victory was a victory for the “Palamists” and ended a long period of dogmatic disputes. In June 1351, at the Palace of Blachernae in Constantinople, a highly solemn synod was convened, attended by representatives of

21 See Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 89.

22 See Philotheus, *Encomion*, PG 151, 617–618.

23 See Gregory Palamas, *Homilia 1*, PG 150, 12d.

all factions of the Eastern Church. The Synod, being ecumenical and therefore having the highest possible power and authority, issued the Synodal Tome, in which Hesychasm was recognized as fully orthodox doctrine. At the same time, it excommunicated both Barlaam and Akindynos. The document, confirmed by successive local synods, was included in the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* – the supplement to the liturgical books of the Church.²⁴ Gregory Palamas could now completely legally exercise the office of Bishop of Thessaloniki. Deeply respected, and thanks to his well-balanced and deliberate actions, he staved off feuds between his opponents. Although he was supported by the imperial administration, he often condemned, in his sermons and homilies, the ruler's abuses, social inequality and the excessive splendor of the Church. In 1352, Palamas suffered the first attack of malaria, but nevertheless set off on a political mission to the capital. There was a threat of a new civil war, caused by the overbearing rule of John VI. The Bishop of Thessaloniki did not reach his destination. In 1354, it fell into the hands of the Turkish ruler Suleiman, who occupied Gallipoli. He remained in captivity for a year, treated very well by the Sultan. Two letters come from this period, as well as an account of a long theological discussion he conducted with Muslims, members of an unknown sect Chiones,²⁵ and with the emir's son. He presented himself at court as a man full of the spirit of ecumenism, full of respect for the position of a religious opponent. Palamas remained in Asia Minor until the spring of 1355. Meanwhile, major changes took place in the capital. In November 1354, John V, supported by the Genoese, assumed power as the rightful emperor. Forced to abdicate, Kantakouzenos entered a monastery and took the name of his brother Joasaph. Thanks to his broad connections and wealth, he still had a considerable influence on the state's policy, which was noticeable when the anti-Palamite party represented by Nicephorus Gregoras became active in efforts to change the ruling party. Although the emperor refused to support the man whose views had been condemned more than 10 years before, an open discussion had to take place, which happened on the initiative of John V Kantakouzenos in 1355, when the papal legate Paul, Bishop of Smyrna, arrived in Constantinople. Paul knew Palamas' views from Barlaam's account, and he himself was convinced that since Thomism and Palamism were mutually exclusive, the positions of the two Churches were incompatible. The discussion took

24 See *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, PG 151, 717–762. See also J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 148–152.

25 See Nicephorus Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, XXX, 2, cited in J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 164.

place at the imperial palace, attended by the Doctor of Hesychasm, Gregoras and the papal legate Paul. The record of the dispute in the version offered by Nicefor Gregoras²⁶ carefully omits most of Palamas' statements as not worth remembering. The official protostrator's note is more impartial, but both versions agree. The discussion brought nothing new to the previously defined positions. The adversaries broke up, sticking to their opinions; while Gregoras argued for the unity of the divine nature, Palamas argued for the distinction in God of an unknowable essence and knowable energies. It should be noted, however, that some success in the pursuit of mutual understanding was achieved. Palamism, though recognized as an official doctrine of the Eastern Church, was not considered at the Council of Florence in 1389 as one of the causes of the schism.

After the debate, Palamas returned to Thessaloniki. As the bishop of this living center, he took an active part in the life of the local Church, wrote and delivered homilies for almost every feast of the liturgical calendar. In 1359, a sudden attack of malaria forced him to stop active preaching work. He delivered his last homily (November 13, John Chrysostom's day) through a student, as he was unable to get up from bed himself. He died on November 14, 1359 at the age of 63. He was buried in the Cathedral of The Holy Wisdom in Thessaloniki, and to this day enjoys great veneration among the inhabitants of the city, along with their patron Demetrius. In 1363, at the request of the Patriarch of Constantinople Philotheus, the canonization procedure was started. Based on the testimonies of witnesses, Philotheos Kokkinos wrote the *Encomion*, a report on the life and works of Palamas. Local respect and popularity, the cult of Mount Athos and Kastoria were preceded by the official canonization. It was confirmed by the decision of the synod of 1368 presided over by Philotheos, and at the same time, the name of the saint was introduced into the calendar of the "Great Church" of God's Wisdom in Constantinople, on the second Sunday of Lent.

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The years of Gregory's life coincided with the great crisis of the Byzantine state. Torn by internal wars, it had to face Turkish, Serbian and Bulgarian invasions. At the same time, the problem of union with the Western Church was revived, and new theological controversies arose. None of the events of this troubled period can be summed up by any simple statement. The divisions within the parties involved, the motives for their actions, and the sympathies of the people involved, each require separate analysis. In the light of the *Ecclesia-basileia* relationship, it is difficult to close the matter of Palamism with one simple conclusion. This

26 See *Ibid.*, 2, 267, and 164–166.

relationship developed over the course of the Byzantine Empire's thousand years. Nonetheless, it has not been the subject of any systematic reflection on the nature and role of the state as a body permeated with the spirit of Christianity.²⁷ Some scholars believe that this may be the reason for the events that took place during the battle against the Valentinian heresy, which led to the martyrdom of Maximus the Confessor, to clashes during iconoclastic disputes, and to the theological controversies in the period we are discussing. It was a mistake to assume that the state as such could become essentially Christian. Emphasis placed on the "symphony" between Church and state and a charismatic understanding of the role of the emperor was obviously devoid of political realism.²⁸ However, we should emphasize clearly that Caesaropapism never became a binding principle. The independence of the Church from the state was guarded by monastic orders, which always engaged in a dispute with the empire when its policies threatened orthodoxy. The presence of monastic communities in every corner of Byzantium seemed to remind us that, however, a perfect parousia never came about, that great effort still had to be made to achieve harmony between the kingdoms of heaven and earth.

27 See J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 257–263.

28 See *Ibid.*, 262; *Epanagoge* – a document from the ninth century, edited by Photius, legally obliging the emperor to know theology, participate in councils, and do good, defining the imperial duty. See Ἐπαναγωγή τοῦ νόμου (*Ius Graeco-Romanum*), ed. C.E. Zacharias (Athens: von Ligenthal, 1931).

4 The Issue of Knowing God in the Thought of Pseudo-Dionysius

4.1 The Patristic Tradition

Reflections on the essence of God constitute the main theme of the Greek Fathers' writings. But we would seek in vain an explanation of what its Oneness is. At the heart of Eastern theology is the conviction that the truth about God is unknowable and ineffable. John of Damascus writes: It is plain, then, that there is a God. But what He is in His essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable.¹

In the Greek patristic tradition before the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, the problem of getting to know God was dominated by the polemics with the Arian heresy of the fourth century.² Three Cappadocian Fathers and John Chrysostom took part in a debate that was to show doctrinal errors in the views put forward by Bish Eunomius of Cyzicus as the head of the sect of “anomoean” Arians. According to Eunomius,³ in order to understand the essence of God, one must find the proper name that defines Him. The author of *Apology* distinguishes between two types of names that designate the object of knowledge. The first type are terms invented by man (κατ' ἐπίνοιαν), without an objective reference. The second type consists of words which, while expressing the proper essence of the object of knowledge, is not the product of human reflection but is the work of the Creator himself. The discovery of the intelligible meaning in the name is made here through careful analysis. The bishop of Cyzicus further claims that we name God by these two kinds of names, the former having no cognitive value, and the latter perfectly explaining his essence. Eunomius considers the term “unborn”

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- 1 John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, ed. Paul A. Böer Sr., trans. S.D.F. Salmond (Oklahoma: LLC, 2012), 22. For a comprehensive reflection on the apophatic tradition in the Eastern Church, see D. Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs), Vol. 19 (Louvain 1995), particularly chapter IV, “Christian Apophasis and Gregory of Nyssa,” 222–258.
 - 2 See John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 138–141; J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington 1975), 93–94.
 - 3 Eunomius, *Apologia*, PG 30, 835–868; see the excellent work on this subject by V. Lossky, *The Vision of God* (London 1963), 61–75.

(ἀγέννητος) to be such a name. Indeed, “unborn-ness” implies a being in itself, self-sufficient, self-determining and self-defined. Through the exclusive identification of this name with God the Father, Eunomius stated that man can know the Father to the extent that God knows himself. Thus, he posed a fundamental question to Christian thought: either we admit that a divine essence is knowable, or we fall into agnosticism.

Of course, the tradition established by the thought of Origen, whose intellectual and simplified variation is presented by Eunomius, tends to adapt the first possibility. Although Origen, following Philo of Alexandria, speaks of “divine darkness,” he tries in this way to exclude from the knowledge of God any material or sensual imaginations, though he assumes the possibility of reaching His essence. Negative theology coincides here with his thought of “platonizing” anthropology, which – as a condition for cognition – requires the “de-materialization” of the mind. According to Origen, the mind, freed from sensual notions and thus deprived of its material nature, discovers the divinity contained in it, enabling it to know God in his deepest essence. God, therefore, is unknowable not so much by definition as by the imperfection of human nature. The Cappadocian Fathers, in opposition to this argument, maintained the unconditional transcendence of divine nature in relation to all created beings.⁴ Basil of Caesarea, first of all, criticized Eunomius’ concept of cognition. According to Basil, the division of names into those that reach the true essence of the object and those that, as a product of the mind, do not have an objective referent, is wrong. In his treatise *Against Eunomius*,⁵ Basil expresses the view that there is only one type of name, because all names we give to perceptible objects come from our minds. Information about the existence of a given thing reaches the mind, which through gradual reflection determines its properties, the result being that we assign increasingly appropriate names defining the features of an object and its relations to other things. According to Basil, we are unable to exhaustively define any thing; there will always be some part of it that will not be amenable to intellectual analysis. This reasoning is true in relation to the world of matter, and pertains all the more to divine reality. The names we give God reveal to us merely some aspect of the contemplated divinity, bringing it closer to us. And yet, none of these names can

4 Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium (Refutation of the Apology of the Impious Eunomius)* PG 29 these three books against Eunomius of Cyzicus were written about 364; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium (Against Eunomius)* PG 45, 237–1121.

5 Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium* I–III, PG 29.

explain what the divine essence is.⁶ Negative names in their basic meaning say what qualities are not due to God, while positive ones define proper qualities. However, both kinds are secondary to the essence of God, because they result from its existence. Basil notices an extraordinary moment of divine activity here. Getting to know objects requires obvious human activity, but it is not sufficient in the process of getting to know divine realities. God must reveal Himself, discover Himself, in order to be known by His creation, and all the names contained in Scripture are precisely the manifestation of the divine theophany.

With his views, Gregory of Nyssa – who also took an active part in the discussion with the Arians – fully endorsed Basil’s position on the names given to things. In considering the positive and negative names ascribed to God, he noticed that in fact all names have negative meanings. In fact, positive expressions also say what God is not. For example, when we call Him good, we thus state that there is no place for evil in Him, and the name “principle (the beginning of everything)” means that He Himself has no beginning. In four treatises in *Against Eunomius*, Gregory presents the foundations of the apophatic theology which we later find in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas. He believes that since God is the source of creation, he is therefore not limited by either time or space.⁷ He stands above all being, and in this sense it is Himself a non-being as infinite and inconceivable in its essence.⁸ The negation of apophatic theology is far from a simple relation to the limitations of the human mind. It turns to the impossibility of knowing God as a constitutive property of his being. It is designated by the divine name “Creator,” which on the one hand defines God as the transcendent source of beings that come from him, and on the other hand emphasizes his presence in each of his creatures. This antinomy, perhaps the most characteristic of Orthodox thought, can also be seen in Basil’s arguments in the work *Against Eunomius*. The bishop of Caesarea explains that the essence of God is knowable and unknowable at the same time, and the name most appropriate for Him is “being,” indicating the very existence of God.⁹ At

6 Ibid., I, 14: “I believe that the concept of the essence of God is beyond the capacity of not only humans, but of any rational nature,” from Sz. Pieszczocho, *Patrologia* (Poznań 1964), 108.

7 Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I, PG 45, 364–365 and 368 A.

8 Ibid., III, 601 B.

9 Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium* I, PG 29, 10, 536. As E. Gilson wrote: “Obviously, we are witnessing the conflict of the two contradictory attitudes, for Eunomius wanted to reduce the object of faith to the exigencies of dialectical reasoning, whereas Basil wanted to use dialectics in order to define with precision the object of

the same time, calling God “Creator” protects the Cappadocian Fathers against agnosticism, because it leads to the introduction of divine categories of actualizing powers, energies. In the sixth *Homily*, Gregory of Nyssa explains the apparent contradiction between the promise of seeing God by people of a pure heart (Matthew 5: 8) and the words of Paul, who talked about the God “whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (1 Timothy 6: 16), writing, that he (God), who is invisible by nature, becomes visible through his energies, manifested through what is around him (Ὁ τῆ φύσει ἀόρατος ὁρατὸς ταῖς ἐνεργείαις γίνεταί ἔτορον νετσορ).¹⁰ Basil of Caesarea speaks in a similar vein, creating a specific definition quoted in later patristic literature:

While we affirm that we know our God in his energies, we scarcely promise that he may be approached in his very essence. For although his energies descend to us, his essence remains unapproachable.¹¹

In his *Letter to Amphilocus*, Basil cites Eunomius’s counterargument, which accuses him of ignoring God himself as a consequence of his claim that the divine essence is unknowable. In response, the bishop of Caesarea asks himself a rhetorical question about how he can be saved. through faith, though faith can know that God is, but not who (what) He is.¹² Basil’s statement thus reflects the essence of the Christian faith in a personal and acting God, even if one that is beyond human cognition.

4.2 Theological Discourse: Ways of Knowing God According to Pseudo-Dionysius

The tension between transcendence and causality is the axis around which the Dionysian system revolves, which remains for many researchers an obvious reflection of the Neoplatonic scheme in which the causative element simultaneously

Christian faith.” See Gilson’s *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (CUA Press 2019), 55.

10 Gregory of Nyssa, Hom. VI on the Beatitudes, PG 44, 1269 A; see also J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 94.

11 Basil of Caesarea, *Epistola 234 (ad Amphilochium)*, PG 32, 869 AB; trans. *The Vision of God* (London 1963), 65.

12 Basil of Caesarea, *Epistola 234 (ad Amphilochium)*, PG 32, 869. “how am I saved? By faith. But faith can know that God is, but not what he is.” See J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 94.

constitutes the creator-creation relationship.¹³ However, at the theological level, in the strict sense of the word, Pseudo-Dionysius continues and develops patristic thought. The Areopagite's God is, therefore, at the center of the world as its cause, and for the same reason is infinitely distant from it.¹⁴ God himself surpasses both the principle of all divinity and himself at the same time, and on the other hand, as the efficient cause of all beings, he manifests himself through creatures, the world constitutes His visible theophany.¹⁵ Thus, the doctrine of God (θεο-λογία), according to the Areopagite, speaks of a God that is inaccessible but at the same time knowable through His manifestations,¹⁶ through names and analysis of the Holy Scriptures.¹⁷ We can say that theology as defined by the author of *Corpus* is a kind of "journey towards unveiled mystery." This expression, used by D. Carabine,¹⁸ perfectly reflects the Dionysian antinomy that constitutes his theology. It refers to the divine unity, which is revealed to man in Scripture and liturgy, covered with a veil of symbols, so that he can gradually – with natural forces, through hierarchies, knowledge and initiation – find unity in multiplicity, discover successive veils and find the unifying good which is the common denominator of all creatures. However, at the end of the cognitive

13 See D. Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition*, 283; J. Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu* (Bruges 1959), 130–131.

14 See A. Kijewska, *Dionizy Areopagita*.

15 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN VII, 3, 872A: "ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς πάντων τῶν ὄντων διατάξεως ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ προβεβλημένης καὶ εἰκόνας τινὰς καὶ ὁμοιώματα τῶν θείων αὐτοῦ παραδειγμάτων ἐχούσης εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ὁδῶ καὶ τάξει κατὰ δύναμιν ἄνιμεν ἐν τῇ πάντων ἀφαιρέσει καὶ ὑπεροχῇ καὶ ἐν τῇ πάντων αἰτία. Διὸ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ὁ θεὸς γινώσκειται καὶ χωρὶς πάντων" ("But we know him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out of him, and this order possesses certain images and semblances of his divine paradigms. We therefore approach that which is beyond all as far as our capacities allow us and we pass by way of the denial and the transcendence of all things and by way of the cause of all things. God is therefore known in all things and distinct from all things." It continues: "for he is praised from all things according to their proportion to him as their Cause." Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works, The Divine Names*, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem [New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987], 108–109).

16 Literally "going out on the road" – πρόοδος, where the source is obviously "road" – ὁδός.

17 See D. Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 286; J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 94; R. Roques, "Note sur la notion de theologia chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 25 (1949): 204; P. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols in the Pseudo-Denys Synthesis*, chapter 2.

18 D. Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 287.

process, we find this mystery, and although stripped of its veil and covering, it remains a mystery, inaccessible to natural cognition. The most striking element in Pseudo-Dionysius' writings is precisely the theme of the absolute transcendence of divine nature towards the world of creatures. Pseudo-Dionysius places a great deal of emphasis on the divine being's inaccessibility, and it seems that no word carries enough weight to reflect this distance. For the author of *Divine Names*, there is no word "either in this world or in the age to come" that would adequately name the divine essence, because to name an object, you must know it, but divinity exists and does not exist at the same time. It exists because – as the source of beings – it has all the principles and patterns of eternity.¹⁹ It does not exist because it transcends everything to such an extent (πάντων ἐπέκεινα) that it can be called "non-existence," thus it is above all knowledge:

Just as the senses can neither grasp nor perceive the things of mind, just as representation and shape cannot take in the simple and the shapeless, just as corporal form cannot lay hold of the intangible and incorporeal, by the same standard of truth beings are surpassed by the infinity beyond being, intelligences by that oneness which is beyond intelligence.²⁰

To emphasize the incomprehensibility of the divine essence, and at the same time its antinomic character, Pseudo-Dionysius creates negation by adding *alpha privativum*: "inconceivable reason (νοῦς ἀνόητος), the inexpressible word (λόγος ἄρρητος),"²¹ nature in which one cannot participate (ὁ ζέθηκε) αἴτιος). He strongly emphasizes that aspect of the divine being in which everything is surpassed. Thus, he creates terms by adding the prefix "supra" (ὑπὲρ) to talk about divinity as "supra-substantial" (ὑπερούσιος οὐσία), the "supra-divine" (ὑπερθεός), "beyond the mind" (ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν νοῦν), "above all that inexpressible and, beyond all understanding, unmoved" (τῆς ὑπεραρρήτου και ὑπεραγνώστου μονιμότητος). Dionysius recalls that "He who completely precedes being" (ὁ ὄντως πρόων) is defined in Scripture with all possible expressions of what is (κατὰ πᾶσαν τῶν ὄντων ἐπίνοιαν πολλαπλασιάζεται). The Areopagite explains that those who praise God with such words make it clear that He is above all (τὸ κατὰ πᾶσαν αὐτὸν ἐπίνοιαν ὑπερουσίως εἶναι σημαίνει) and that he is the cause of all that "is" (τῶν πανταχῶς ὄντων αἴτιον). In his case, it is not "what is, and

19 See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, V, 4, 817C – 8, 821C: πάντα ἐστίν, ὡς πάντων αἴτιος, καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ πάσας ἀρχας, πάντα συμπεράσματα, πάντων τῶν ὄντων συνέχων και προέχων. p. 98.

20 Ibid., I, 1, 588B; trans. trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 49.

21 Ibid., I, 1, 588B.

what is not, that he is and is not like that” (οὐ τόδε μὲν ἔστι, τόδε δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ πῆ μὲν ἔστι, πῆ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν), because He is “in every way” (πάντα ἔστιν), “as the cause of everything and the source of all beginning” (ὡς πάντων αἰτίας καὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ πάσας ἀρχάς), is simultaneous with everything and it anticipates everything (πάντα συμπεράσμενα πάντων τῶν ὄντων συνέχων καὶ ὑπερών). He is above everything, anticipating everything, supra-existent (καὶ ὑπὲρ τὰ πάντα ἔστιν ὡς πρὸ πάντων ὑπερουσίως ὑπερών).²² In this way, Pseudo-Dionysius constituted a specific canon of antinomic and hyperbolic descriptions of God, which would be used many times in the patristic tradition – let us quote one of the most characteristic statements:

Indeed the inscrutable One is out of the reach of every rational process. Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this Source of all unity (a henad unifying every henad), this supra-existing Being. Mind beyond mind, word beyond speech, it is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name. It is and it is no other being is. Cause of all existence, and therefore itself transcending existence, it alone could give an authoritative account of what of what it really is.²³

Never before had any Christian thinker seen the need to emphasize so strongly that God is unknowable.²⁴ After all, the basic assumption of every revealed religion is the claim that it is possible to know God because He, as the immanent causative agent of all beings, causes them to move towards each other, made possible precisely by the analogies (similarity) they contain. Thus, by asking the question whether the Areopagite’s imperceptible God is a knowable God, we examine at the same time the extent to which the author of *Corpus* remains faithful to the Christian tradition. However, it is difficult to accuse the Areopagite of a faithful imitation of the thoughts of Proclus, as the aforementioned thread also has a strong reference in the Cappadocian tradition.²⁵ The central thesis is the idea that God is known through his appearances and works (προόδοι, ἐνεργεῖαι) or divisions (διακρίσεις), but unknowable in essence (ὑπαρξίς, οὐσία) or unity (ἐνώσις). Because Pseudo-Dionysius is far from identifying God with

22 See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 4, 640D–641A; *ibid.*, V, 2, 816C; see D. Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 292–293.

23 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 1, 588B, 49–50; *ibid.*, 588A: Τῆς γὰρ ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ νοῦν καὶ οὐσίαν αὐτῆς ὑπερουσιότητος ἀγνωσία. Αὐτῆ τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἐπιστήμην ἀναθετέον, τοσοῦτον ἐπὶ τὸ ἀναντες ἀνανεύοντας.

24 See D. Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 282–285.

25 Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilia VI on the Beatitudes*, PG 44, 1269 A. See J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 95–96; D. Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 283.

the Plotinian unity, it is possible for him to talk about the “differences” of the divine essence, which are the basis of His omnipresent causality. The author of *Mystical Theology* states categorically the inability to participate in the divine nature (ὁ μέθεκτος αἴτιος),²⁶ but this emphasis on the incomprehensibility of the super-substantial Divinity (ὑπερουσίου καὶ κρυφίας θεότητος)²⁷ is just one pole of the antinomy. The second pole, explicated just as strongly, is the availability of divinity, its communicability and the possibility of multiplication without causing division within it. The “Great Dionysius,” when he wants to emphasize the possibility of the communication of divinity with the intelligible world, speaks of “divine appearance, outpouring” (πρόοδος Θεοῦ), about “the father’s movement to reveal light” (πατροκινήτου φωτοφανείδος πρόοδος)²⁸ about the revelation of divinity (θεοφανείας), illumination or divine rays (ἔλλαμψις, ἀκτῖνα). According to Pseudo-Dionysius, the knowledge of God that we can obtain through the study of created natures must be essentially secondary and adapted to our cognitive abilities, so it is not knowledge of God as such. The question arises as to whether such knowledge is the only way to know divinity, or whether there is another way for the human mind to reach the highest regions of true cognition, and at the same time for the One to remain beyond the reach of all discourse. This issue is the main theme of *Corpus*, in which the author considers various ways of considering the divine nature.²⁹ Thus, there are three consistent modes of judging the nature of divine sovereignty: affirmative – cataphatic theology (i.e. knowledge of God as an efficient cause), symbolic theology (συμβολικὴ θεολογία, i.e. knowledge of God as a cause of purposeful reading through the interpretation of the visible symbolism, participation in the liturgy), and mystical theology, which results, as it were, from following the path of apophatic theology – that is, antinomic knowledge about God transcending all knowledge and ignorance, being and non-being as their cause. Although this path of ignorance is more appropriate (κυριώτερόν ἐστι), all paths complement each other and are necessary moments in the search for truth. Judgment (καταφάσεις) should always be interpreted in terms of negation (ἀποφάσεις) in order to keep divine nature at an absolute distance from creatures.

26 See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, 12.

27 See *ibid.*, I, 1, 585B.

28 See *ibid.*, CH, 1.

29 See A. Kijewska, *Dionizy Areopagita*.

4.3 Onomatodoxia and Cataphatic Theology

The antinomy of non-sovereignty and, at the same time, sovereignty of divine nature is reflected in the issue of names, which for Pseudo-Dionysius are problems of a theological nature.³⁰ The author of *Corpus* thus places himself in the patristic tradition, ranging from Justin and Clement to Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa. This matter was also the subject of deliberations for the Neo-Platonic authors Iamblichus and Proclus, in the context of their theoretical activities.³¹ This did not prevent Pseudo-Dionysius from approaching the subject in such a way that made the treatise *Divine Names* the fullest expression of this issue for Christian thought of the early Middle Ages.

Pseudo-Dionysius begins his considerations with God's answer to the question posed to him by Moses about His name, when he described himself as "the one who is." In the *Septuagint*, this is translated using the participle ὢν, so that the Areopagite wonders what this "being" means in relation to God. "God is not 'somehow something' which is" (ὁ θεὸς οὐ πῶς ἐστὶν ὢν), that is, one of many beings, but "a whole inbred being in its limitlessness, actual and anticipating" (ἀλλ' ἀπλῶς ἀπεριορίστως ὅλον ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸ εἶναι συνειληθῶς καὶ προσειληφῶς). God as "he who is" (ὁ ὢν) is the supra-cause of the totality of being (ὅλου τοῦ εἶναι ὑπερούσιος αἰτία), the creator-demiurge (δημιουργός) of variously defined realities (ὄν, ὕπαρξις, ὑπόστασις, οὐσία, φύσις), he is the beginning and the measure of the ages and times (ἀρχὴ καὶ μέτρον αἰῶνων καὶ χρόνων), and is also the One from whom comes eternity and existence and being, time and arising, and that which arises (ἐκ τοῦ ὄντος αἰὼν καὶ οὐσία καὶ ὄν καὶ χρόνος καὶ γένεσις καὶ γινόμενον). That is why he is called the "King of the Ages" (βασιλεὺς λέγεται τῶν αἰῶνων), because it is in Him that all being and existence, all that will be, arises as the cause (ὡς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν παντὸς τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ὄντος καὶ ὑφωστηκότος), so that we will not say about Him either: "he wasn't" (οὔτε ἦν) or: "he will not be" (οὔτε ἔσται), and instead of "nor is he" (οὔτε ἐστίν) it will be better to say: nor did he arise, nor is he arising, nor will he arise" (οὔτε ἐγένετο οὔτε γίνεταί οὔτε γενήσεται). God as the total cause of time and being is "being for those who are" (τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὖσι), not only when they already exist, but also "being the very same of those who are" (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι

30 See an interesting study of Onomatodoxia by T. Obolovitch, *Od onomatodoksji do estetyki* (Kraków 2011), 93–129.

31 See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence II, The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* (Bonn 1986); A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1983), xii–xii.

τῶν ὄντων), and he himself endures timelessly, coming “from that which existed for ages” (ἐκ τοῦ προαιωνίως ὄντος), because he himself is “eternal over the ages” (αὐτὸς γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ ἰὼν τῶν αἰώνων).

There is a difficulty tied to the issue of naming God, namely whether He has no name or has many names. While some who have taken up this problem are ready to deny the Divine any names at all, others praise Him with all names. Mystical and symbolic revelations may speak to the the namelessness of God, such as “marvelous” in response to a question about the Deity’s name.³² Dionysius suspects that in this “strangeness” there is, in fact, the surpassing of all names, that is, ultimately – namelessness, something that surpasses all naming. Thus, in private revelations, God wishes to remain unnamed. It is differently in universal revelation, where the Creator meets the need of creatures to praise Him in tongues, and reveals himself in the constant efforts of the creatures themselves, who want to bring the Lord closer and honor Him with the most wonderful names, even if only figuratively.

Here, according to the author of *Corpus*, one should speak of a poly-names, a polynomial (πολυώνυμον) God. The terms and epithets that Pseudo-Dionysius collected number in the several dozen, which is simply astonishing, but it is worth reviewing them briefly because of the permanent place they found in later patristic tradition.³³ Divinity itself says about itself: “I am who I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν), “life” (ἡ ζωή), “light” (τὸ φῶς), “god” (ὁ θεός), “truth” (ἡ ἀλήθεια). Those divine sages, on the other hand, who emphasize that it is the cause of everything, praise divinity with multiple terms taken from the effects of her actions, such as “good, beautiful, wise, beloved” (ὡς ἀγαθόν, ὡς καλόν, ὡς σοφόν, ὡς ἀγαπητόν), but also “God of gods” (ὡς θεὸν θεῶν), “Lord of lords” (ὡς κύριον κυρίων), “saint among saints” (ὡς ἅγιον ἁγίων).³⁴

People attempt to know the nature of God through His revelations in the names of duration, time and eternity: “eternal, being and overseeing the eternal,” “timeless, unchanging.”³⁵ Theophanes also consider of a gnoseological character,

32 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 6, 596A: “οἱ θεολόγοι καὶ ὡς ἀνώνυμον αὐτὴν ὑμνοῦσι καὶ ἐκ παντὸς ὀνόματος. Ἀνώνυμον μὲν, ὡς ὅταν φασι τὴν θεαρχίαν αὐτὴν ἐν μίᾳ τῶν μυστικῶν τῆς συμβολικῆς θεοφανείας ὀράσεων ἐπιπλήξει τῷ φήσαντι· ‘τί τὸ ὄνομά σου;’ ... Τοῦτο ἔστι θαυμαστόν.” Ἡ οὐχὶ τοῦτο ὄντως ἐστὶ τὸ θαυμαστόν ὄνομα ‘τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὄνομα, τὸ ἀνώνυμον, τὸ ‘παντὸς’ ὑπεριδρυμένον ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου.”

33 Ibid., 596A–596C.

34 Ibid., I, 6, 596B: καὶ ὅταν αὐτοὶ τὸν πάντων οἱ θεόσοφοι πολωνύμως ἐκ πάντων τῶν αἰτιατῶν ὑμνοῦσιν.

35 Ibid., I, 6, 596B: ὡς αἰώνιον, ὡς ὄντα καὶ ὡς αἰώνων αἴτιον; ibid., I, 6, 596B: ὡς παλαιὸν ἡμερῶν, ὡς παλαιὸν ἡμερῶν, ὡς ἀγήρω καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον.

such as “Wisdom, Reason, Word-Thought, the Knowing, He who has all the treasures of all knowledge,”³⁶ as well as features relating to strength and will: “Power, Ruler, King of kings, Salvation, Justice, Sanctification, Redemption, the One who is greater than everything, but is also in a light breeze.”³⁷ People give names to God that come from the revealed world, so they use the names of heavenly bodies: “Sun and stars” (ἥλιον καὶ ἄστρα), meteorological phenomena: “dew, cloud” (δρόσον, νεφέλην), elemental terms: “Fire, water, breath of wind, rock, i.e. bedrock” (πῦρ, ὕδωρ, πνεῦμα, αὐτόλιθον καὶ πέτραν). Granting God omnipresence in everything, that is “in the sphere of thoughts and in souls, but also in bodies, in heaven and in the earth”³⁸ causes Him to be recognized as intra-world, and at the same time embracing the whole world, as well as supra-heavenly and supra-being (καὶ ἅμα ἐν ταύτῳ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐγκόσμιον, περικόσμιον, ὑπερκόσμιον, ὑπερουράνιον, ὑπερούσιον). As the cause of everything, divinity turns out to be the Fullness (one could say “universal”), due to the multitude of things, and the Unity (τέλειον καὶ ἓν), because it captures them all together.³⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius explains that the divine cause encompasses everything on the basis of its very simple infinity, and everything participates in it singly, just as one and the same sound is perceived as one by many listeners.⁴⁰ Considerations about what God is are concluded with the characteristic Dionysian antinomy: “That he is all that He is no thing” (πάντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ οὐδὲν τῶν ὄντων).⁴¹

Pseudo-Dionysius, with all limitations and reservations, considers “Good,” or even “Good itself,” to be the most appropriate name for the nature of God.

36 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 6, 596B – 596C: ὡς ‘σοφίαν,’ ὡς ‘νοῦν,’ ὡς λόγον, ὡς γνώστην, ὡς προέχοντα πάντας τοὺς θεσαυροὺς ἀπάσης γνώσεως.

37 Ibid., I, 6, 596B (2–5) ὡς ‘δύναμιν,’ ὡς δυνάστην, ὡς βασιλέα τῶν βασιλευόντων, ὡς παλαιὸν ἡμερῶν, ὡς ἀγήρω καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον, ὡς ‘σωτερίαν,’ ὡς ‘δικαιοσύνην,’ ὡς ἀγιασμόν ὡς ἀπολύτρωσιν, ὡς μεγέθει πάντων ὑπερέχοντα καὶ ὡς ἐν αὐρα λεπτή.

38 Ibid., I, 6, 596B (5): καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἐν νόοις αὐτὸν εἶναι φασι καὶ ἐν ψυχαῖς καὶ ἐν σώμασι καὶ ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐν γῆ.

39 Ibid., XIII, 1, 977B (7–8): ἡ θεολογία τοῦ πάντων αἰτίου καὶ πάντα καὶ ἅμα πάντα κατηγορεῖ καὶ ὡς τέλειον αὐτὸ καὶ ὡς ἓν ἀνυμνεῖ. In another place (DN V, 9, 825A, 17–18) this thought was more developed: “We must attribute all things to this Cause and we must regard them as joined together in one transcendental unity,” p. 102: πάντα οὖν αὐτῇ τῇ αἰτία τὰ ὄντα κατὰ μίαν τὴν πάντων ἐξηρημένην ἔνωσιν ἀναθετέον.

40 Ibid., V, 9, 825A (2–3): πάντα μὲν ἐν ἑαυτῇ προέχει κατὰ μίαν ἀπλότητος ὑπερβολήν; (4–5): πάντα δὲ ὡσαύτως περιέχει κατὰ τὴν ὑπερηπλωμένην αὐτῆς ἀπειρίαν; (5–6): καὶ πρὸς πάντων ἐνικῶς μετέχεται, καθάπερ καὶ φωνῆ μία οὔσα καὶ ἡ αὐτῇ πρὸς πολλῶν ἀκοῶν ὡς μία μετέχεται.

41 Ibid., I, 6, 596C, p. 56.

At the end of the work *Divine Names*, he states that there is no name – strictly speaking – that would reflect the nature of the Divine, and even “Good” is not entirely appropriate. But if we want to understand and express that nature somehow, we must stay with this name.⁴² The Areopagite concludes that it is the worthiest for such an unexplained creature.⁴³ Although this name does not reflect the truth, Pseudo-Dionysius thinks it is appropriate to agree with theologians who discuss the Divine (καὶ συμφωνήσοιμεν ἄν κἀν τούτῳ τοῖς θεολόγοις, τῆς δὲ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀληθείας ἀπολειφθησόμεθα). Let us note that there is, in this way, a contamination of the philosophical and biblical approaches, because in this definition of God the philosophical Platonic tradition and the teaching of the sacred books coincide. It is known that Plato put Good as the highest principle, and in the Gospel, in response to the call of one of his listeners: “Good Master,” Jesus responds: “Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God.” Pseudo-Dionysius quotes these words, interpreting them in such a way that God is the giver of the good as the One who not only endowed creatures with existence, but also protects them under his providence.⁴⁴

In the work *Divine Names*, the author devotes a great deal of space to the question of the name “Good” as expressing the essence of God. Pseudo-Dionysius claims that Divinity deserves this term, so experts in divine matters (οἱ θεόλογοι) give them a “supra-divine divinity.”⁴⁵ According to the Areopagite, these “sacred writers” called the essence of divinity Good (DN, IV, 1, 693B, 11: τὴν θεαρχικὴν ὑπαρξιν ἀγαθότητα λέγοντες), not only to distinguish it from everything, but because as the very reality of good, it spreads good to all beings.⁴⁶

It is worth considering this theme for a moment, because the combination of the biblical and patristic tradition in Pseudo-Dionysius extends not only to Good, but by identifying this name with Light, also to this divine name, which is so important in our further deliberations. According to ancient thinkers, light – being an inexhaustible cause of life and growth and a phenomenon whose matter is particularly difficult to grasp – is an exceptionally supportive metaphor for conveying the inexpressible nature of God and the principle of omnipotence.

42 Ibid., XIII, 3, 981A: καὶ οὐδὲ αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς ἀγαθότητος ὡς ἐφαρμόζοντες αὐτῇ προσφέρομεν, ἀλλὰ πόθῳ τοῦ νοεῖν τι καὶ λέγειν.

43 Ibid., XIII, 3, 981A: περὶ τῆς ἀρρήτου φύσεως ἐκείνης τὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων σεπτότατον.

44 Luke 18: 18, 19: οὐδεὶς ἀγαθός, εἰ μὴ ὁ μόνος ὁ θεός; see DN, II, 1, 636C.

45 Ibid., IV, 1, 693B: ἐπ’ αὐτήν ἤδη τῷ λόγῳ τὴν ἀγαθονυμίαν χωρῶμεν.

46 Ibid., IV, 1, 693B: καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων ἀφορίζουσιν αὐτήν ... καὶ ὅτι τῷ εἶναι τάγαθόν ὡς οὐσιώδες ἀγαθὸν εἰς πάντα τὰ ὄντα διατείνει τὴν ἀγαθότητα.

Hence, the theme of light and darkness, which is among the central biblical themes, was also used by philosophers of the ancient world, a fact which is particularly evident in the centuries-old tradition of Platonism. In philosophical terms, this particular value of light was most poignantly formulated by Plato. In Book VI of *The Republic*, the most luminous of all principal idea of Good is defined both as the principle of knowledge and of existence. Therefore, he compares them to sunlight, which begets everything and at the same remains, as the source, entirely transcendent: “the sun is only the author of visibility in all visible things, but of generation and nourishment and growth, though he himself is not generation.”⁴⁷

Plato demonstrates the correspondence of the structure of the noetic world, where the idea of Good reigns and the sensual world, where the supreme role is that of the visible Sun. the author of *The Republic* makes it particularly clear by means of a parable of the cave. This image, together with its metaphysical and epistemological message becomes a foundation of considerations both for Neo-Platonist and Christian thinkers. The central motive is the pursuit of truth-source by transcending opinion and actual spiritual effort. Light is understood here as the most perfect manifestation of Good itself, which begets absolute existence and illuminates our mind so that it could become acquainted with truly existing things:

... in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual (ἐν τε ὁρατῷ φῶς καὶ τὸν τοῦτου κύριον τεκοῦσα, ἐν τε νοητῷ αὐτὴ κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ νοῦν παρασχομένη); and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.⁴⁸

The metaphor of light as the factor that animates and enables true cognition will be creatively developed in the philosophy of Plotinus, who compares the process of the emanation of the Absolute to radiation and sunlight (περίλαμψις),⁴⁹

47 Plato, *The Republic*, 509b, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

48 Ibid., 517b 8-c 6, trans. W. Witwicki, 364. Plato, *The Republic*, 517b 8 – c6, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

49 Cf. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, I,8,1; V,3,12: “The entire intellectual order may be figured as a kind of light with the One in repose at its summit as its King; but this manifestation is not cast out from it: we may think, rather, of the One as a light before the light, an eternal irradiation resting upon the Intellectual Realm; this, not identical with its source, is yet not severed from it nor of so remote a nature

while the soul's way upwards is described as a gradual illumination and ever increasing participation in "a different, stronger light."⁵⁰ This theme will be continued in Neoplatonic philosophy, particularly by Proclus, who however was influenced by Chaldean Oracles "separates and combines in distinct orders what for Plotinus was a dynamic unity. For Plotinus, Good, Light, the One were different names of one and the same reality."⁵¹ Thus the goal of the mind is unification, not with Plotinus' One, but with Being, understood as an element of the intelligible triad: Being–Mind–Soul. This unification is effected by the cessation of cognitive activity of the mind and "confiding oneself to the divine light."⁵² In Pseudo-Dionysius' texts we will find a very powerful influence of this theme, combined with Neoplatonic understanding of the meaning of theurgical acts and hierarchy in the process of becoming acquainted with the supreme principle. The works of the Areopagite are not mere footnotes to Proclus and Iamblichus, as they also contain a good deal of references to the Books of the Old and New Testament. It should be stressed that they are not only verbal references, but attempts to render the spirit of the Christian faith in the personal God.

The motive of light and, in a sense, a proemium to the "metaphysics of light" can already be found at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, in the description of Creation. This well-known passage mentions "the beginning," when darkness reigned over the created waters and land, and God said: "Let there be light;" and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.⁵³

Light, the first to have been called Good by its Creator, will become a metaphor for descriptions of divine acts, and even the nature of God himself. The Bible

as to be less than Real-Being. Cf. VI, 8, 18: What is present in Intellectual-Principle is present, though in a far transcendent mode, in the One: so in a light diffused afar from one light shining within itself, the diffused is vestige, the source is the true light; but Intellectual-Principle, the diffused and image light, is not different in kind from its prior".

50 Cf. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, V,3,12; VI, 7, 21.

51 Cf. Agnieszka Kijewska, *Neoplatonizm Jana Szkota Eriugeny*, Lublin 1994, 78–79. According to *Chaldean Oracles*, the aim of the unification of the soul is God-Light (Eternity-Aion), born of the Father, who being the source remains beyond any cognition.

52 Cf. Proclus, *Theology of Plato*, TP I, 25; cf. Kijewska, 80.

53 Gen 1: 3–5. All biblical references to New King James Version (NKJ) unless otherwise specified.

contains numerous expressions to describe the essence of God by the metaphor of light, e.g. “Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment,”⁵⁴ or “dwelling in unapproachable light.”⁵⁵ In the language of the Old Testament Light often means life in happiness and prosperity, while in the supernatural sense – God’s grace and His guidance in following the Law.⁵⁶ In the New Testament, the symbolism of light is inseparably connected with the person of Christ, even identified with God-Man. In the Old Covenant, hidden under the name of “Wisdom,” which is a “a reflection of the eternal light,”⁵⁷ foretold by the prophets, awaited by humanity that sits “in darkness and the shadow of death,”⁵⁸ appears on the Earth as the Word incarnate. It is “the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.”⁵⁹ Christ confirms these words: I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.⁶⁰ John the Evangelist says directly: “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”⁶¹

One of the fundamentals of all Christian mysticism and divine theology of divine light is the description of the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor.⁶² For philosophers and theologians who interpret this passage, light becomes the model epiphany of divinity, and the possibility of spiritual interpretation of divine light is tantamount to participation, acquaintance with divine energies, i.e. divine acts (actualizing acts).⁶³

Equally numerous are liturgical testimonies that speak of God’s light, exalt its glory in hymns, and show its sacramental symbolism. Mystic light plays a particular role in the first of the sacraments, which is a kind of impulse that stimulates the soul to seek its prototype. As M. Eliade writes in his studies “Mephistopheles and the Androgyne:”

undoubtedly, the symbolism of Baptism is of course extreme rich and complex, but elements of illumination and fire play a very important role in it. Justin, Gregory

54 Ps 104: 2.

55 1 Tm 6: 16.

56 Cf. Ps 27: 1; 43, 3; 119: 105, Prov 6: 23.

57 Wis 7: 26 (New Jerusalem Bible, NJB).

58 Lk 1: 79.

59 Jn 1: 9.

60 Jn 8: 12; 9: 5.

61 1 Jn 1: 5.

62 Mt 17: 1; Mk 9: 2; Lk 9: 28.

63 Cf. M. Eliade, “Mephistopheles and the Androgyne: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol,” Sheed and Ward, 1965, Wirginia, 56–64.

Nazianzen and other Fathers of the Church call baptism “illumination” (photismos); they base themselves, as we know, on the passages of the Epistle to the Hebrews,⁶⁴ in which those who have been initiated in the Christian mystery, that is to say baptized . . . , are distinguished by the name *photisthentes*.⁶⁵

These ideas were quickly accepted by the Christian world. We will find them in Augustine’s epistemology, in Robert Grosseteste’s and Bonaventura’s physical and aesthetic cosmology, in Albert the Great’s and Thomas Aquinas’ ontology. But the founder of this metaphysics, where light is the first principle of being as well as of cognition is Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Throughout the Middle Ages, the creator of the *Areopagitics* was rightly called the “eulogist of light.” His works, translated by John Scotus Eriugena, were located in the monastery of St. Denis, who was supposed to be the founder and at the same time a disciple of Christ. Influenced by those works, Suger, Abbot St. Denis, rebuilt the choir in the convent near Paris, thus revolutionizing the architecture and giving a powerful stimulus to the new style, which was the openwork Gothic of French cathedrals with their unusual stained glass windows. The vision of the cascade of light, which permeates all levels of the divine and earthly hierarchy, became an inspiration for new art, of which the church erected by Suger is a model.⁶⁶ We learn from two treatises by the abbot – *Libellus alter de consecratione Ecclesiae Sancti Dionysii* and *Sugeria Abbatis Sancti Dionysii Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis* – that the reconstruction of the old abbey was not an accident, but a carefully thought-out concept.⁶⁷ The latter, while not being a treatise on theology or aesthetics, shows us the profound influence of both fields on the mind of the Abbot St. Denis. Suger confesses, using Dionysian terminology:

... when the enchanting beauty of the house of God has overwhelmed me, when the charm of multicolored gems has led me to transpose material things to immaterial things and reflect on the diversity of the sacred virtues, then it seems to me that I can see myself, as if in reality, residing in some strange region of the universe which had no previous existence either in the clay of this earth or in the purity of the heavens, and

64 Heb 6: 4, 10: 32.

65 M. Eliade, “Mephistopheles and the Androgyne: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol,” Sheed and Ward, 1965, Wirginia, 57.

66 See G.Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals: Art and Society, 980–1420* (Chicago 1983), 100–103.

67 *Oeuvres complètes de Suger*, ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche (Paris 1867).

that, by the grace of God, I can be transported mystically from life on earth to the higher realm.⁶⁸

Suger's first and most important postulate, read in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, was the idea to rebuild the church so that it would be the most perfect symbol of the Absolute. For the abbot, this meant saturating the building with light, so the choir became the domain of aesthetic change. It was to be a focal point of light as a place of liturgy, an east-oriented central part of the church. Here, Suger decided to remove the walls, and to this end he ordered the builders to use the full set of possibilities offered by the rib vault – that is, what until then had been only an architectural trick. A new style was born. Changes in the structure of the vaults allowed for the introduction of large window openings, and walls were replaced with pillars. Arranged semicircular chapels with walls pierced by huge stained-glass windows gave visible shape to Suger's dream: "semicircular sequence of chapels, which cause the entire church to glow with marvelous uninterrupted light, shining through the most radiant of windows."⁶⁹

Pseudo-Dionysius proclaimed the unity of a universe merged by divine, illuminating light. It therefore seemed necessary that from the choir to the front door, the light could easily cover the entire interior with its stream, so that the building would become a symbol of the work of creation. Suger ordered the removal of the rood screen "so that the beauty and magnificence of the church would not be dimmed which was as dark as a wall and cut the vessel in two."⁷⁰ The light-blocking barrier was torn down, and Suger was able to announce in triumph:

Once the new rear portion was joined to the forward portion of the church, its middle portion, now luminous as well, made it a splendid sight, for that which is brilliant coupled with brilliance is likewise brilliant and the noble edifice is resplendent with the new light floods it.⁷¹

Originally, Abbot Suger's choir was surrounded by a double ambulatory with a wreath of nine chapels. After the reconstruction of these chapels, only shallow, shell-like conchs remained, spacious enough to accommodate an altar; the rest was absorbed by the bypass line. The walls of each chapel are pierced with two

68 Suger, "Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis," in G. Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals: Art and Society, 980–1420* (Chicago 1983), 102.

69 Suger, "Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis," in G. Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals: Art and Society, 980–1420* (Chicago 1983), 101.

70 *Ibid.*, 101.

71 *Ibid.*, 101.

large windows, which reduce the surface of the wall to the size of the frame. It is through these shallow chapels that light flows freely into the ambulatory. According to Suger's aesthetic and, at the same time, precise description, the whole church shines with a wonderful and uninterrupted light that penetrates through the holiest windows."⁷² To be sure, we are talking about Abbot Suger's famous stained glass windows, with which the history of Gothic stained glass painting begins.⁷³ The above passages on the aesthetic reception of Pseudo-Dionysius' thoughts make it clear enough how much his ideas left a mark on the minds of his contemporaries. The works of the Areopagite were not only translated and commented on, but were the face of the world; the current world view and aesthetic canon were changed in line with the concepts contained in the works of the Great Dionysius. We might say that the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius found Europe Romanesque, heavy and dark, and left it Gothic, soaring and luminous. The stimulus for the Franconian abbot was undoubtedly the fragment in which Pseudo-Dionysius develops the motif of light as one of the divine names. This is particularly evident in the Areopagite, who also uses the Platonic metaphor of the sun. By its very being, it gives light to everything that is able to draw from It, similarly Good, for which the Sun is only a dark image, with its essence spreads rays of goodness without limits, giving them analogously to all beings (DN, IV, 1, 693B 5: *πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσι ἀναλόγως*).⁷⁴ The metaphor of the Sun emitting rays of light, which at the same time constitutes its own essence, reflects well the essence of the action of Good. Pseudo-Dionysius returns to this metaphor many

72 Suger, "Libellus alter de consecratione Ecclesiae Sancti Dionysii," 4; Otto Georg von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (Princeton University Press 1988), 61–142.

73 The abbot ordered them with artists from Lorraine and the Rhine region. Their works glittered as amethysts or rubies, and thus were to render the noble beauty of God's light and guide toward it in the human mind "by way of anagogic meditation." Suger was not the first to see in the stained-glass window special opportunity to demonstrate this "anagogic theology" (i.e. one that lifts up the soul). The metaphor of the stained-glass window was employed by Hugh of St. Victor (in *In didactione ecclesiae. Sermones*, PL 177, 904). However, Suger gave the long-known element a completely new meaning. For him, windows were not holes in the wall, but lit-through walls, which in a most perfect manner expressed the aesthetic sensitivity of the people of the time.

74 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 1, 693B (1–5): ὡσπερ ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἥλιος ... αὐτῶ τῶ εἶναι φωτίζει πάντα τὰ μετέχειν τοῦ φωτὸς αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὸν οἰκεῖον δυνάμενα λόγον; (3–4): οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὰγαθὸν ὑπὲρ ἥλιον ὡς ὑπὲρ ἀμυδρὰν εἰκόνα; (4–5): αὐτῇ ὑπάρξει ... ἐφείσει τὰς τῆς ὅλης ἀγαθότητος ἀκτῖνας πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσι ἀναλόγως.

times, justifying why Good is known under the name of light.⁷⁵ He is intrigued by the spontaneity of solar radiation, corresponding to the spread of Good (DN II, 4, 697B 1–2). The Areopagite emphasizes that the sun that shines completely and everlastingly, with all its enormity, even if it is a clear image of the divine Good, is only its weak reflection.⁷⁶ The analogy of the Sun and the Good manifests itself mainly in beneficial influence on everything without exception, regardless of the value and dignity of the objects given to them. The author of *Corpus* describes the Sun as that which illuminates everything, whatever is able to participate in it, pours out his light, embracing the entire visible world with its own rays of light, descends and ascends.⁷⁷ It is the same with God's Good, which surpasses everything. It also spreads good to the highest and the lowest, regardless of the greater or lesser perfection of the beings offered. It is common to the action of the sun's light and the light of the Good that its power depends on the receptive abilities of the beings upon which it acts. Therefore, the transcendent Good gives its light to everything that is able to receive it, and if the creature does not receive it, it is because of its defective perception ability, and not because of too little power of the Light-Good.⁷⁸ It is similar with all kinds of His beneficial influence, Light – Good calls into existence (δημιουργεῖ), gives life (ζωοῖ), sustains (συνέχει), and perfects (τελεουργεῖ). Due to the diversity of recipients, the Good plays the role of an ordering principle in various aspects, e.g. it gives measure, establishes number, order, cause, and goal.⁷⁹ The Areopagite notes that in addition to the term “Good,” inspired writers define the essence of God as “Beauty,” both in the adjectival form καλὸν and the noun form κάλλος.

75 Ibid., II, 4, 697B (3–4): διὸ καὶ φωτωνυμικῶς ὑμνεῖται τὰγαθὸν ὡς εἰκόνι τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἐκφαινόμενον.

76 Ibid., II, 4, 697B (1): περὶ αὐτῆς καθ' αὐτὴν τῆς ἡλιακῆς ἀκτίνος; (1–2) ἐκ τὰγαθοῦ γὰρ τὸ φῶς καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος; 697C (11–12): ὁ μέγας οὐτος καὶ ὀλοαμπῆς καὶ ἀείφωτος ἥλιος; 697C (10–11): τῆς θείας ἀγαθότητος ἐμφανῆς εἰκὼν; 697C (12): κατὰ πολλοστὸν ἀπήχημα τὰγαθοῦ.

77 Ibid., II, 4, 697C (12–13): πάντα, ὅσα μέτεχειν αὐτοῦ δύναται, φωτίζει; 697C (13–14): ὑπερπλωμένον ἔχει τὸ φῶς εἰς πάντα; 697D (14–15): ἐξαπλῶν τὸν ὄρατὸν κόσμον ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω τὰς τῶν οἰκειῶν ἀκτίνων αὐγάς.

78 Ibid., II, 4, 697B–C (4–5): ἡ τῆς πάντων ἐπέκεινα θεότητος ἀγαθότης; DN, 147, 5–6: ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνωτάτων καὶ προβυτάτων οὐσιῶν ἄχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων διήκει καὶ ἔτι ὑπὲρ πάσας ἐστὶ; 697C (4–8): ἡ τῆς πάντων ἐπέκεινα θεότητος ἀγαθότης ... φωτίζει τὰ δυνάμενα πάντα.

79 Ibid., II, 4, 697C (9–10): καὶ μέτρον ἐστὶ τῶν ὄντων καὶ αἰὼν καὶ ἀριθμὸς καὶ τάξις καὶ περιοχὴ καὶ αἰτία καὶ τέλος.

The latter form, Pseudo-Dionysius explains, is used to express that in which the beautiful participates – that is, the source and cause of all that is beautiful. That which is beautiful in the transcendent sense – κάλλος – is treated as an inherent beauty because it is from Him that every thing obtains its proper beauty. It is therefore about the work of all harmony and splendor, an agency which, like light, illuminates everything with its beautiful and creative participation in its own rays as in the source.⁸⁰ At the same time, in the case of both Good and Beauty, Pseudo-Dionysius emphasizes its causal relativization. The transcendent Being Himself is absolutely beautiful, more beautiful than anything else, always unchanging and beautiful without blemish. It undergoes no changes in this state, nor does it show the slightest detriment or hint of ugliness, nor any fluctuations in this respect. This everlasting and homogeneous Beauty is the source and necessary condition of beauty, of everything it causes.⁸¹ As Good and Beauty, God is called “Love,” which is the cause and reason of creation: “And we may be so bold as to claim also that the Cause of all things loves all things in the superabundance of his goodness, that because of his goodness He makes all things.”⁸²

The claim that the cause of creation is love is an important moment, one which shows how distant the Neo-Platonic notion of the One is in Dionysian thought, and how close it is to its Christian interpretation.

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Classification of divine names runs in a different way when Pseudo-Dionysius tries to explain the issue of knowledge and, at the same time, the total transcendence of Divine Nature, which he does by emphasizing the distinction between common and united names (ένώσις) and the differentiated being of God or divine distinction (διακρίσεις), between the hidden essence of divinity (ύπαρξις,

80 Ibid., IV, 7, 701C (4): καλόν μὲν εἶναι λέγομεν τὸ κάλλους μετέχον; 701C (4–5): κάλλος δὲ τὴν μετοχὴν τῆς καλλοποιουῦ τῶν ὄλων καλῶν αἰτίας; 701C (5–6): τὸ ὑπερουσίον καλόν; 701C (6–7): διὰ τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσι μεταδιδομένην οικειῶς ἐκάστῳ καλλονῆν; 701C (7–8): ὡς τῆς πάντων εὐαρμοστίας καὶ ἀγλαίας αἰτίου; 701C (8–9): δίκην φωτὸς ἐναστράπτου ἅπασιν τὰς καλλοποιούσας τῆς πηγαίας ἀκτίνος αὐτοῦ μεταδόσεις.

81 Ibid., IV, 7, 701D (10–12); καλόν δὲ ὡς πάγκαλον ἅμα καὶ ὑπέρκαλον καὶ αἰεὶ ὄν κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως καλόν; 701D (12–13): οὔτε γινόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον οὔτε αὐξανόμενον οὔτε φθίνον, οὔτε τῇ μὲν καλόν τῇ δὲ αἰσχροὺς οὐδὲ τοτὲ μὲν, τοτὲ δὲ οὐ; 701D (15–16): ὡς αὐτὸ καθ’ ἑαυτὸ μεθ’ ἑαυτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν καλόν; 701D (16–17): ὡς παντὸς καλοῦ τὴν πηγαίαν καλλονὴν ὑπεροχικῶς ἐν ἑαυτῷ προέχον.

82 Ibid., II, 10, 705D–708A, p. 79: – Ὁ θεῖος ἔρωσ ἀγαθὸς ἀγαθοῦ διὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. Αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ ἀγαθοεργὸς τῶν ὄντων ἔρωσ ἐν τὰγαθῷ.

οὐσία) and processions or manifestation (πρόοδος).⁸³ Therefore, for Pseudo-Dionysius, the essence of the Divine remains covered by the darkness of ignorance, rests in Divine peace (ἡσυχία), silence (σιγή, ἀφθελγία), but at the same time – thanks to its separating names – can be revealed through creation:

As I said elsewhere, those fully initiated into our theological tradition assert that the divine unities are the hidden and permanent, supreme foundations of a steadfastness which is more than ineffable and more than unknowable. They say that the differentiations within the Godhead have to do with the benign processions and revelations of God.⁸⁴

When calls the following manifestations – the limitless distribution of gifts, the source of substance and life, the creation of wisdom, as well as all other gifts of goodness – “the undifferentiated divine unity,” it seems that he is thinking about divine processions towards man, which in revealing themselves remain indivisible in themselves.⁸⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius extends the antinomic character of the nature of God, which, despite the divisions, remains unity (given that distinction is not division), also to the issue of its knowability. Through differentiating names, the divine becomes known, but at the same time, as the causative factor, it remains beyond the reach of all reason.⁸⁶ While Pseudo-Dionysius attributes the unifying name to God as an unknowable, simple monad and henad (μοναδα μὲν καὶ ἐνάδα),⁸⁷ the source of differentiating names, or the theophany of God in the world, is for him the Trinity. In the Areopagite’s writings we do

83 Ibid., II, 11;

84 See *ibid.*, II, 4, 640D; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 61.

85 *Ibid.*, II, 5, 644A; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 62: “On the other hand, if differentiation can be said apply to the generous procession of the undifferentiated divine unity, itself overflowing with goodness and dispensing itself outward toward multiplicity, then the things united even within this divine differentiation are the acts by which it irrepressibly imparts being, life, wisdom and the other gifts of its all-creative goodness.”

86 *Ibid.*, II, 5, 644A; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 61, “Now his is unified and one and common to the whole divinity, that the entire wholeness is participated in by each of those who participate in it; none participates in only a part. ... However, the nonparticipation of the all-creative Godhead rises far beyond comparison of this kind since it is out of reach of perception and is not on the same plane as whatever participates in it”

87 *Ibid.*, I, 4, 589D; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 51: “And so all these scriptural utterances celebrate the supreme Deity by describing it as a monad or henad, because of its supernatural simplicity and indivisible unity.” “Θεν ἐν πάσῃ σχεδὸν τῇ θεολογικῇ πραγματείᾳ τὴν θεαρχίαν ὀρῶμεν ἱερῶς ὑμνουμένην ὡς μονάδα ἐνάδα μὲν καὶ ἐνάδα διὰ τὴν ἀπλότητα καὶ ἐνότητα τῆς ὑπερφυοῦς ἀμερείας.

not find a systematic Trinitarian theology, although the mystery of the Trinity finds its place in his works when he writes about the divine essence as one principle of persons united and unmixed.⁸⁸ The condition for the possibility of the existence of unity and division is the creative aspect of the Trinity (τριάδα), defined by the author of *Corpus* as the cause of beings.⁸⁹ In his deliberations on Pseudo-Dionysius' Trinity, consistent with an emphasis on God's transcendence, one cannot hesitate to state that divinity, as the cause of everything, also exceeds its unity and trinity.⁹⁰ Due to his consistent apophatism, it would be a simplification to call Pseudo-Dionysius a Neoplatonist, given that he is one above the Trinity. The author of *Corpus* accords the latter a place equal to the monad and defines God as the "Triadic Unity" (τὴν τριαδικὴν ἐνάδα φημί).⁹¹ However, we would search in vain for a clearly expressed formula of one being common to three people, permeated with their respective energies. Although the Areopagite emphasizes that it is possible, thanks to one of the persons of the Trinity, to learn about divine matters, and more precisely through energy – the manifestations of Jesus' activity,⁹² but He is not the only path leading to the

88 Ibid., II, 4, 641A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 61: "they [sacred scriptures] assert that the invisible Trinity holds within shared undifferentiated unity its supra-essential subsistence;" *ibid.*, 641D: "Each of the divine persons continues to possess his own praiseworthy characteristics, so that one has here examples of unions and of differentiations in the inexpressible unity and subsistence of God," 62.

89 Ibid., I, 4, 592A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 51: "They also describe it is a Trinity, for with a transcendent fecundity it is manifested as 'three persons.' His is why 'all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is and is named after it.' They call it Cause of beings;" ὡς τριάδα δὲ διὰ τὴν τρισυπόστατον τῆς ὑπερουσίου γονιμότητος ἐκφασιν, ἐξ ἧς πάσα παρὰ ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ἐστι καὶ ὀνόμαζεται, ὡς αἰτίαν δὲ τῶν ὄντων.

90 Ibid., XIII, 3, 980D–981A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 128: "And the fact that the transcendent Godhead is one and triune must not be understood in and of our own typical senses. ... But no unity or trinity ... can proclaim that hidden-ness beyond every mind and reason for the transcendent Godhead which transcends every being."

91 Ibid., I, 5, 593B. The term for the Trinity that appears in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius was incorporated by later Christian commentators and theologians. At the same time, it is treated by some scholars as the crowning evidence that Pseudo-Dionysius broke free from Neoplatonic terminology. See V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 28.

92 Ibid., XI, 5, 953 AB, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 124: "We must work together and with the angles to do the things of God, and we must do so in accordance with the Providence of Jesus 'who works all things in all' [1Cor 12: 6] ... reconciling us to himself and in himself to the Father" – κατὰ πρόνοιαν Ἰησοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν ἐνεργοῦντος ... καὶ ἀποκαταλλάσσοντος ἡμᾶς ἐαυτῷ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δι' ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ πατρὶ.

Father.⁹³ Dionysian Trinitarianism loses none of its ambivalence, all the more so because when considering the Trinity, its aspect of being transcended by divinity definitely prevails.⁹⁴ The fact that the Trinity is not the crowning of Christian knowledge about God, but a stage on the path that leads man into the inaccessible spheres of divinity, is guided by further fragments of the Areopagite's works. In this spirit, the famous invocation to the Trinity in *Mystical Theology* also begins, in which the author asks for guidance in the regions of the highest mysticism, non-discursive knowledge of the unity, "the summit greater than the unknowable and transcending light" (ὑπεράγνωστον ὑπερφαῖ καὶ ἀκροτάτην).⁹⁵ So to what, then, does the Trinity lead if not to participate in itself? The Areopagite explains this by making a significant statement, one with Neoplatonic overtones which complicate matters for commentators and scholars. Consistent as he was in emphasizing God's transcendence, Pseudo-Dionysius would not hesitate to state that the Divine, although called unity or trinity or other comprehensible names, nevertheless transcends all these terms and none of them is able to reveal its secret, because divinity goes infinitely beyond the cognitive abilities of the intellect; it remains unnamed and incomprehensible.⁹⁶ The Areopagite strongly

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- 93 Ibid., I, 3, 592 AB, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, pp. 51–52: "But they especially call it (trinity) loving toward humanity because in one of its persons it accepted a true share of what it is we are, and thereby issued a call to man's lowly state to rise up to it. In a fashion beyond words, the simplicity of Jesus became something complex" Continuing (ibid., I, 3, 592 C, p. 53): "We use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With this analogy we are risen upward toward the truth of the mind's vision."
- 94 Ibid., XIII, 3, 980B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 127: "And if you take away the One, there will survive neither whole nor part nor anything else in creation. The reality is that all things are contained beforehand in and are embraced by the One in its capacity as an inherent unit. Hence scripture describes the entire thearchy, the Cause of everything, as the One."
- 95 Ibid., TM, I, 1, 997A; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 135: "Trinity!! Higher than any being, any divinity, any goodness! Guide of Christians in the wisdom of heaven! Lead us up beyond unknowing and light, up to the farthest, highest peak of mystic scripture" – Τριάς ὑπερούσιε καὶ ὑπέρθεε καὶ ὑπεράγαθε, τῆς Χριστιανῶν ἔθορε θεοσοφίας, ἴθυνον ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τῶν μυστικῶν λογίων ὑπεράγνωστον καὶ ὑπερφαῖ καὶ ἀκροτάτην κορυφήν.
- 96 Ibid., DN, XIII, 3, 980D–981A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 129–130: "And the fact that the transcendent Godhead is one and triune must not be understood in and of our own typical senses.... And as we prepare to sing his truth we use the names Trinity and Unity for what which is in fact beyond every name, calling it the transcendent being above every being. But no unity or trinity ... can proclaim that hidden-ness beyond every mind and reason for the transcendent Godhead which transcends every

emphasizes that the division within God of unifying and differentiating names causes no separation in Him. Describing the differences and unity within the Trinity that are transcended by the Divine, Pseudo-Dionysius uses the image of several lamps⁹⁷ which, when brought into a room, give a common light, though they are separate (“they interpenetrate each other, but are nonetheless separate”).⁹⁸ When we take out one of the lamps, its glow will disappear with it, but it will not diminish the light of the other lamps or leave any part of the removed glow. This means that their mutual relationship is complete and perfect and, at the same time, neither reduces their inter-dependence nor leads to a mingling of any part of them.⁹⁹

Summarizing the above considerations, it should be stated that in Pseudo-Dionysius’ thinking, the divine name does not represent knowledge about God himself. The Areopagite explains that they were given to bring the unknowable to the finite human nature. Their task is to raise the mind to divine matters by discovering the true meaning of names disguised as symbols.¹⁰⁰

4.4 Symbolic Theology as a Path Upward

Calling the causative factor Good, Pseudo-Dionysius justifies not only the possibility of the existence in God of dividing names, but also the reasons why divinity appeared to people. God – Pseudo-Dionysius emphasizes – reveals himself so that all beings can return to Him.¹⁰¹ The Supreme Good, filled with love for its

being. There is no name for it nor expression. We cannot follow it into its inaccessible dwelling place so far above us and we cannot even call it by the name of goodness.” (Διὸ καὶ μονὰς ὑμνουμένη καὶ τριάς ἡ ὑπὲρ πάντα θεότης οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ μονάς, οὐδὲ τριάς ἡ πρὸς ἡμῶν ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν ὄντων διεγνωσμένη, ἀλλὰ ἵνα καὶ τὸ ὑπερνωμένον αὐτῆς καὶ το θεογόνον ἀληθῶς ὑμνήσωμεν, τῇ τριαδικῇ καὶ ἐνιαίᾳ θεωνυμίᾳ τὴν ὑπερώνυμον ὀνομάζομεν).

97 See *ibid.*, II, 4, 641A–641B. We find this image for the first time in Origen, then it was used by Eriugena in the Latin tradition and Palamas in Eastern Church theology.

98 *Ibid.*, II, 4, 641A.

99 *Ibid.*, II, 4, 641B.

100 Devoted to this question is *Letter IX*; see also Pseudo-Dionysius, DN VII, 1 (865C–D), XIII, 3, 980D. See also P. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto 1984).

101 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 2, 588D, 50: “And yet, on the other hand, the Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenment proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it.” See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, I, 2, 121B.

creation, allows itself to be known through symbols contained in the Holy Scriptures, in the liturgy, which – when interpreted by enlightened hierarchs – gradually introduce the faithful to the mystery of the divine nature. We will deal with this path of knowledge – called symbolic theology (συμβολική θεολογία) by Pseudo-Dionysius – in later chapters. Here, in the fragments of interest to us, the author draws attention to the appropriate measure according to which a being can be enlightened and drawn in its upward journey. Beings thus receive as much knowledge as they can take on a given level, and likewise cannot rise higher than what is intended for them. Getting to know God in such a context not only presupposes the need for intermediaries, but most of all seems to lose the universal character of the Christian faith, reserving it for a select few.¹⁰² At this point it is worth emphasizing that the symbolism and hierarchy contained in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius are often cited as comprising the most important argument demonstrating the undoubtedly Neoplatonic orientation of their author.¹⁰³ First of all, it seems that scholars often overlook the reason why divinity manifests itself in hierarchies and symbols. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, as I wrote above while discussing the name Good, it is the triune love for the human race (φιλανθρωπία), an element that cannot be found in the systems produced by Proclus and Iamblichus.¹⁰⁴ The Creator, in his love and goodness, wants creatures to return to him, and thus achieve full happiness. Their return may take place through cognition, but here the human mind is too weak to immediately know the divine essence, which is why It has been given theophanies

102 Pseudo-Dionysius, Ep 9, 1105B–C; Pseudo-Dionysius; TM, I, 2, 1000A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 136: “but see to it that none of his comes to the hearing of the uninformed;” Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, I, 1, 372A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 195: “Keep these things of God unshared and undefiled by the uninitiated. Let your sharing of sacred befit the sacred things: Let it be by way of sacred enlightenment for sacred men only.”

103 See H. D Saffrey, “New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus,” in D. O’Meara (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1982), 65–74.

104 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 4, 592A; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 51: “We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils of that love toward humanity with which scripture and hierarchical traditions cover the truths of the mind with things derived from the realm of senses;” “Και ἡμεῖς μεμνημέθα νῦν μὲν ἀναλόγως ἡμῖν διὰ τῶν ἱερῶν παραπετασμάτων τῆς τῶν λογίων καὶ τῶν ἱεραρχικῶν παραδόσεων φιλανθρωπίας αἰσθητοῖς τὰ νοητὰ καὶ τοῖς οὐσι τὰ ὑπερούσια περικαλυπτοῦσης καὶ μορφᾶς καὶ τύπους τοῖς ἀμορφώτοις.”

and symbols, by which knowledge takes place gradually, under the guidance and care of initiated fathers, sages, i.e., hierarchs, priests. All elements mentioned here are deeply rooted in the monastic tradition and the doctrine of inner development. Spiritual cognition must always take place gradually due to the dangers that an adept may face when the level of acquired knowledge exceeds his/her cognitive abilities. It must be accompanied by internal purification, transformation, maintenance of the commandments, all leading to an openness to grace, divine energy. This process must be controlled by a person who is at a high level of initiation; among the monks this person was always the spiritual father, who played the role of a guide not only communicating knowledge and revealing the meaning of symbols, but also helping the adept to make progress by providing him advice and assistance. Considering the issue of symbols, Pseudo-Dionysius reveals the great importance of knowledge (gnosis) and hierarchy in the process of ascending towards divine things. When comparing liturgical rites or the reading of Scripture to discovering particular symbols that lead us to God, the Areopagite always emphasizes that only initiates and the worthy can achieve this by understanding the hierarchy. The importance of symbols lies primarily in their intelligible content, which must be discovered by gradually acquiring knowledge of their true meaning. Pseudo-Dionysius develops the science of cognition through analogy,¹⁰⁵ where the analogy not only has symbolic value, but also constitutes an existential, real (through λόγοι) relationship with its proto-image. Because of this, the very fact of learning analogies is in itself a return to God.¹⁰⁶ This relationship is reflected in the created reality, which – as a set of symbols – has a hierarchical arrangement. Thus, cognition by analogy will always be cognition within the hierarchy,¹⁰⁷ and its culmination is mystical cognition, divine ignorance. For Pseudo-Dionysius, the energies (πρόδος Θεοῦ) through which God comes to man are transmitted in a gradual cognitive process.¹⁰⁸ According to René Roques, author of the fundamental work *L'univers dionysien*, this proves that the Pseudo-Dionysian system is not a Neoplatonic

105 See H.-Ch. Puech, “*La ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys*,” *Études Carmelitaines* 9 (1938): 33–53; R. Roques, *L'univers dionysien*, 60–65; T. Obolovitch, *Od onomatodoksji do estetyki*, 116–121.

106 See P. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 93–97; see also V. Lossky, *La notion des analogies chez Denys le Pseudo-Aréopagite*.

107 V. Lossky believes that Pseudo-Dionysius equates the concept of cognition by analogy with cognition through hierarchy, calling the hierarchical order ἀναλογία ἱεραρχικῆ; *La notion des analogies chez Denys le Pseudo-Aréopagite*, 280.

108 See R. Roques, *L'univers dionysien*, 101–111.

one, as the act of salvation is thus a process of rebuilding a hierarchy destroyed by sin. Hierarchy, therefore, has an ontological and epistemological meaning, while symbolic theology appears as the mind's way of ascending from the level of sensory perception towards a purely divine reality.¹⁰⁹

At the end of these introductory considerations on symbolic theology, we should take note of an important idea in the Dionysian explanation of the role of symbols. The author of *Corpus* writes that “dissimilar” symbols are more adequate to reach the essence of God than “similar” symbols. The latter can easily take the place of divinity instead of leading to transcendence. Dissimilar symbols, on the other hand, cause detachment, a mental leap beyond what is sensually knowable.¹¹⁰ The fact that the “dissimilar” symbol is more easily negated is an excellent starting point for understanding apophatic theology – that is, getting to know God through what He is not.

4.5 Apophatic Theology

The best path to ascend toward God is arguably apophatic theology (ἀποφατικῆ θεολογία), which is a consistent understanding, put forward by the Areopagite, of divine transcendence and causality at the same time. Negation – that is the rejection of individual meanings, the process of abstraction, and literally “detaching,” and “depriving” (ἀφαίρεσις) – appears to Pseudo-Dionysius as a necessary introduction to true knowledge, a transition to a higher cognitive level, and not as a denial of the possibility of knowing God. According to the author of *Corpus*, we start with affirmative names (the cataphatic path), which – however – we deny because God, as their cause, completely transcends them. So the Creator is not a body, there is no place, no shape, no quality, no senses; there is no change in Him in the sense that we mediate from the world of creatures. At the same time, it is neither being nor life nor reason, nor good nor beauty in the sense in which the beings created by it are endowed with them. The author of the *Divine Names* writes: “Therefore every attribute may be predicated of him and yet he

109 See D. Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 290–291.

110 Pseudo-Dionysius Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, II, 2 140C; see R. Roques, “Symbolisme et théologie négative chez le Pseudo-Denys,” *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* (1957), 105.

is not any one thing. He has every shape and structure, and yet is formless and beauty-less.”¹¹¹

Knowledge of the One is gained through natural knowledge and ignorance resulting from denial, the suspension of attributes and definitions given to Him. The Areopagite teaches that while God must be given all the attributes that are inherent in what is, it is he who is the ultimate cause, though it would be more appropriate to deny Him those attributes, since he surpasses them all.¹¹² However, there is no contradiction between denial and granting, because He is above all denial and granting (ὕπερ πᾶσαν καὶ ἀφαίρεσιν καὶ θέσιν).¹¹³ The process of negation, therefore, goes beyond contradictory negations and assertions, because God is above the opposites that unite in Him:

He is known through knowledge and through unknowing. Of him there is conception, reason, understanding, touch, perception, opinion, imagination, name, and many other things. On the other hand he cannot be understood, words cannot contain him, and no name can lay hold of him.¹¹⁴

The consistent negation of divine attributes (i.e., God is good and at the same time not-good, if we think of Him in terms of good that we perceive it sensually, because as the cause, he is completely different from it) leads to another aspect of the path of negation, known as abstraction, or literally cutting off (ἀφαίρεσις) successive concepts, in order to face the mystery of divine sovereignty with a

111 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN V, 8, 824B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 101; Διὸ καὶ πάντα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἅμα κατηγορεῖται, καὶ οὐδὲν ἐστι τῶν πάντων πάνσχημός, πανείδεος, ἀμορφος, ἀκαλλής.

112 Ibid., VII, 3, 872A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 108–109: “God is therefore known in all things and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing. ... He is not one of the things that are and he cannot be known in any of them.” Καὶ διὰ γνώσεις ὁ θεὸς γινώσκειται καὶ διὰ ἀγνωσίας. Καὶ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ καὶ νόησις καὶ λόγος καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ αἴσθησις καὶ δόξα καὶ φαντασία καὶ ὄνομα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα, καὶ οὔτε νοεῖται οὔτε ὀνομάζεται.

113 Ibid., III, 3, 684C (3–4): δέον ἐπ’ αὐτῇ καὶ πάσας αὐτὰς τιθέναί καὶ καταφάσκειν θέσεις, ὡς πάντων αἰτία; 684C (4–5): καὶ πάσας αὐτὰς κυριώτερον ἀποφάσκειν [δέον], ὡς ὑπερ πάντα ὑπερούσης; 684C (5–6): καὶ μὴ οἶσθαι τὰς ἀποφάσεις ἀντικειμένους εἶναι ταῖς καταφάσεσιν; 684C (6–7): ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρότερον αὐτὴν ὑπερ τὰς στερήσεις εἶναι; 143,7: ὑπερ πᾶσαν καὶ ἀφαίρεσιν καὶ θέσιν.

114 Ibid., VII, 3, 872A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 107–108; Ibid., II, 4, 641A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 61: “(Godhead is) the assertion of all things, the denial of all things, that which is beyond every assertion and denial:” ἡ πάντων θέσις, ἡ πάντων ἀφαιρέσις, τὸ ὑπερ πᾶσαν καὶ θέσιν καὶ ἀφαιρέσιν.

mind completely free from all knowledge and ignorance, to enter the path of mystical knowledge. Thus, apophatic theology leads to the inexpressible, culminating in a mystical ignorance described by Pseudo-Dionysius as a state of mind. In the treatise *Mystical Theology*, the “Great Dionysius” exhorts Timothy, the target of his writing, to achieve these mystical cognitions. First of all, one has to give up sensory experiences and mental operations, everything sensual and mental, what is not there, and what is there, in order to reach to the extent possible, without reflection, union with Him who surpasses all being and knowledge. By cleansing, by the absolute and ruthless separation of oneself from oneself and from everything that occupies the mind and body, from all shapes and imaginations, one then comes to the One who transcends all that is, to the ray of the divine shadow (πρὸς τὸν ὑπερούσιον τοῦ θεοῦ σκότους ἀκτίνα.).¹¹⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius does not say much about the mystical union of the human mind with God, because the experience is beyond description. The Areopagite says, in literal translation: “But again, the most divine knowledge of God, that which comes through unknowing, is achieved in a union far beyond mind” (καὶ ἔστιν αὐθις ἡ θειοτάτη θεοῦ γνώσις ἢ δι’ ἀγνωσίας γινωσκομένη κατὰ τὴν ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔνωσιν).¹¹⁶ A state is reached in which the mind, having put aside all sensory and intellectual activities and then having divested itself, becomes one with this bright radiance and – in both directions as it were, “from there and to there,” – becomes illumined by the unexplored depth of wisdom.¹¹⁷ It is a unique, particular way of achieving knowledge, as if through “shortcuts.” However, there is always the indirect, symbolic and hierarchical cognition discussed earlier, through created things, in the process of adjudication and negation, abstraction.¹¹⁸

In conclusion, Pseudo-Dionysius, by reflecting on the names of God, shows a path toward knowing His nature. On the one hand, it is a positive path, consisting of the assignment of attributes to Him (of course, to the highest degree),

115 Ibid., TM, I, 1, 997B (6–7): ἀπόλειτε καὶ τὰς νοεράς ἐνεργείας καὶ πάντα αἰσθητὰ καὶ νοητὰ καὶ πάντα οὐκ ὄντα καὶ ὄντα; 997B (8–9): καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἔνωσιν, ὡς ἐφικτόν, ἀγώστωσ ἀνατάθητι τοῦ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν καὶ γνώσιν; 1000A (9–10): τῇ γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ πάντων ἀσχέτῳ καὶ ἀπολύτῳ καθαρῶς ἐκ στάσει; 1000A (10): πρὸς τὸν ὑπερούσιον τοῦ θεοῦ σκότους ἀκτίνα.

116 Ibid., DN, VII, 3, 872B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 109.

117 Ibid., VII, 3, 872B (13–15): ὅταν ὁ νοῦς τῶν ὄντων πάντων ἀποστάς, ἔπειτα καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἀφείς ἐνώθη ταῖς ὑπερφάεσιν ἀκτίσιν ἐκεῖθεν καὶ ἐκεῖ τῷ ἀνεξερευνητῷ βάθει τῆς σοφίας καταμπόμενος.

118 Ibid., VII, 3, 872B (15–16): καίτοι καὶ ἐκ πάντων, ὅπερ ἔφη, αὐτὴν γνωστέον.

because He is the cause of everything (καὶ ἐν τῇ πάντων αἰτίᾳ). And on the other hand, abstracting Him for the sake of His transcendence, because He surpasses everything (ἐν τῇ πάντων ἀφαιρέσει καὶ ὑπεροχῇ). Therefore, the Areopagite, in the spirit of antinomy, writes that God is known in everything and beyond everything (διὸ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ὁ θεὸς γινώσκειται καὶ χωρὶς πάντων), so it remains for us to learn about Him through knowledge and ignorance (καὶ διὰ γνώσεως ὁ θεὸς γινώσκειται καὶ διὰ ἀγνωσίας).¹¹⁹ While a certain part of divine mysteries are available to the mind prepared by divine mysteries (liturgies), in some matters one is dependent solely on the Scriptures and mystical union. According to the author of *Corpus*, all paths must complement each other, and without the support of the other, one would be doomed to failure.

119 Ibid., VII, 3, 872A, 1–4.

5 Conditions for the Possibility of True Knowledge of God According to Gregory Palamas

The categorical claim that the essence of God is unknowable, as we have seen in the works of Gregory of Nyssa or John of Damascus, is the basis for the Palamite interpretation of the Areopagite thought.¹ Like Pseudo-Dionysius, it is evident from the assumption that finite creation cannot know infinity through intellectual inquiry, and that God cannot give the human mind more cognitive power than it is capable of receiving. In other words, man as a sensual, complex and material being does not have a cognitive disposition sufficient to embrace a single, simple, immaterial being with his mind. At the same time, God, being the source of everything, transcends all being in the mode of his existence, thus avoiding any knowledge. In the dialogue *Theophanes*, which came about before *Triads* were written, Gregory explains that the supra-essential nature of God can neither be expressed, nor conceived, nor seen; it is unknowable and ineffable to everyone, forever.² Palamas emphasizes this radical apophatism with other, equally

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- 1 See: V. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 33–43; St. John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa*, I, 4, PG XCIV, 800BA; *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (Wyatt North, LLC 2012), 1, 4: “In the case of God, however, it is impossible to explain what he is in His essence, and it befits us rather to hold discourse about His absolute separation from all things. For he does not belong to the class of existing things: not that he has no existence, but that He is above all existing things, nay even above existence itself. For if all forms of knowledge have to do with what exists, assuredly that which is above knowledge must certainly be also above essence: and conversely, that which is above essence will also be above knowledge. ... God then is infinite and incomprehensible and all that is comprehensible about Him is His infinity and incomprehensibility. But all that we can affirm concerning God does not show forth God’s nature, but only the qualities of His nature.”
 - 2 Palamas, *Theophanes*, PG 150, 937A: “The super-essential nature of God is not a subject for speech or thought or even contemplation, for it is far removed from all that exists and more than unknowable, being founded upon the uncircumscribed might of the celestial spirits – incomprehensible and ineffable to all for ever. There is no name whereby it can be named, neither in this age nor in the age to come, nor word found in the soul and uttered by the tongue, nor contact whether sensible or intellectual, not yet any image which may afford any knowledge of its subject, if this be not that perfect incomprehensibility which one acknowledges in denying all that can be named. None

often quoted words from *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* on nature: “For if God be nature, then all else is not nature. If that which is not God be nature, God is not nature, and likewise He is not being if that which is not God is being.”³

Gregory Palamas is a faithful disciple of Pseudo-Dionysius when he writes that the essence of God is absolutely unknowable, when he emphasizes the lack of words and images to represent the totality of His nature. Like the author of the *Corpus*, he takes – as the source of this state – the divine transcendence which, as the efficient cause of all creation, surpasses not only being, but also itself. Palamas’ God transcends everything an infinite number of times (ἀπειράκις ἀπειρώς),⁴ each with his name, being and non-being. In the *Triads*, the Doctor of Hesychasm quotes the words of Pseudo-Dionysius when he writes about divine transcendence in the face of non-being: “When Denys said that ‘God possesses the superessential in a superessential manner’ [he affirms precisely...] that which is non-being by virtue of transcendence is superessential, God is even beyond that, for He possesses the superessential superessentially.”⁵

Palamas quotes the author of the *Divine Names* precisely when he emphasizes the divine transcendence of non-being to show that the Lord of Necessity is not subject to any of the laws of creation, above all affirmation and negation (οὔτε ἐστὶν αὐτῆς καθόλου θέσις οὔτε ἀφαιρέσις).⁶ According to the Bishop of Thessaloniki, the absolute transcendence of the essence of divinity eludes all discourse: “Since this essence transcends all affirmation and all negation” (ἐπεὶ κατ’

can properly name its essence or nature if he be truly seeking the truth that is above all truth.” Cited in V. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 37; see also G. Kapriev, “Systemelemente des philosophisch-theologischen Denkens in Byzanz. Zum Dialog ‘Theophanes’ des Gregorios Palamas,” *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 64/2 (1997): 263–290.

3 Palamas, *Capita physica* 150, cap. 78, PG 150, 1176B. Cited in V. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 37.

4 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 3, 14.

5 Ibid., III, 3, 14, p. 110: ὑπερούσιόν ἐστι τὸ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν μὴ ὄν, ὑπὲρ τοῦτο ὁ Θεός ἐστιν, ὑπερουσίως ἔχων τὸ ὑπερούσιον; see Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 10, 648D οὐσία ταῖς ὄλαις οὐσίαις ἀχρά ἐπιβατεύουσα καὶ ὑπερουσίως ἀπασης οὐσίας ἐξηρημένη; p. 66: “It is the supernatural possessor of the supernatural. It is the transcendent possessor of transcendence.” Trans. C. Luibhed & P. Roem, 68: “it permeates all substances, but as a super-substantial being it rises above all substances.”

6 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 14, p. 110: “How will you reply to one who affirms that the divine transcendence is beyond all affirmation and all negation? Is He not beyond non-being in His transcendence?” Θεοῦ ὑπεροχὴν; Ἄρ’ οὐχ ὑπὲρ τὸ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν μὴ ὄν. See Pseudo-Dionysius, TM 5, 1048AB: οὐδὲ τι τῶν οὐκ ὄντων, οὐδὲ τι τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν ... οὔτε ἐστὶν αὐτῆς καθόλου θέσις οὔτε ἀφαιρέσις.

αὐτὴν πάσης ὑπέρκειται θέσεώς τε καὶ ἀφαιρέσεως,⁷ transcends the thearchy, the very principle of the divinity (ὑπὲρ θεαρχίαν, τουτέστιν ὑπὲρ ἀρχὴν θεότητος, ὑπάρχει ὁ Θεός).⁸ Following the Areopagite, The Doctor of Hesychasm a Godhead who is “more-than-God” and “superessential” – αὐτοὑπερουσίως ὑπερούσιον.⁹ Presenting the nature of God as surpassing knowledge and ignorance is an argument for Palamas to consider the reasons why cataphatic, symbolic, and even apophatic theology constitutes an imperfect instrument of knowledge, the reason being that they belong to the created world – i.e. they are based on acquired knowledge and rational discourse. Commenting on this phenomenon, J. Meyendorff quotes Jules Lebreton’s apt statement that “all these speculations do not get us beyond natural theology.”¹⁰ Meanwhile, Palamas’ intention is to go beyond the closed circle of natural, partial cognition and to show the possibility of an essential cognition of God by man, understood as the composition of soul and body. The Doctor of Hesychasm does this in two ways. On the one hand, he defines the epistemological boundaries of theology, and on the other, he shows the possibility of reaching hidden divinity through contemplation. We should not forget that Pseudo-Dionysius also often emphasizes the most perfect way of knowing, which is mystical theology. But at the same time, he treats the achievement of “divine darkness” as a highly unique experience, reserved only for chosen and initiated. In the Palamite interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, the mystical experience largely loses its exclusivity by emphasizing that the foundation of true knowledge is not apophatism, but the Trinity and its energies, in which God reveals the creation of His essence, while remaining hidden. Gregory clearly writes that apophatics is the closure of the mind in the circle of created natures, and although it shows the enormous distance that separates them from the creator, it does not bring us closer to Him. He believes that, despite its inexpressible nature, negation alone is not enough for the mind to rise above sensual things. He expresses the opinion that the light of negative theology is nothing more than a kind of knowledge and rational discourse, while the light contained in contemplation has an objective existence.¹¹ He shows that

7 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 11, p. 98.

8 *Ibid.*, III, 1, 29, p. 84.

9 *Ibid.*, III, 1, 23, p. 81; note 79; see Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, V, 2, 916C: Οὐ γὰρ ἐκφράσι τὴν αὐτοὑπερούσιον ἀγαθότητα καὶ οὐσίαν καὶ ζῶην καὶ σοφίαν τῆς αὐτοὑπερουσίου θεότητος ἐπαγγέλλεται τῆς ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἀγαθότητα καὶ θεότητα καὶ οὐσίαν.

10 J. Lebreton, *Tu Solus Sanctus* (Paris 1948), 115, cited in J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 99.

11 Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 35.

ascending the path of negation is only realizing how much all things are different from God; it merely conceives a formless state of contemplation or the mind's attainment of full unification in contemplation, but it is not in the slightest degree that fullness itself.¹² The author of the *Triads* wonders how we can achieve union with a God who, through his transcendence, remains infinitely distant from created beings.¹³ He concludes that certainly not by apophatic theology, because following the path of negation, we do not have to transcend ourselves, and even angelic minds, in order to gain divine vision, must go beyond their intellect. On the other hand, the mind, which moves in the circle of apophatic theology, thinks “merely” about what is different from God, and not about what transcends it. Gregory also emphasizes the limitations of negative theology flowing from the supra-essence of God when he considers the meaning of the term “ignorance” (ἄγνοια) in relation to the essence of divinity. He writes that since God is above all knowledge and intellectual cognition, union with him cannot be intelligible, nor defined as knowledge, even metaphorically. In view of divine transcendence, this union deserves the term “ignorance” rather than knowledge, or even “over-ignorance.” Whatever expression we would use to describe a mystical union, Palamas writes, whether as “union,” “vision,” “perception,” “knowledge,” “intellect” or “illumination,” none of these terms would be appropriate.¹⁴ Using the Doctor of Hesychasm's words, it can be said that monks know that the divine essence also surpasses the fact that it is sensually unattainable, because the Existent is not only above all things existing, but also Above-God. The perfection of Him who transcends all things is not only above all judgment but also beyond negation: he surpasses all perfection attainable with the mind.¹⁵ At the same time, Palamas says, it is not an orthodox one who does not follow the path of negation and, as he emphasizes in the text, he himself has a strong grasp of

12 Ibid., I, 3, 19: Ἀλλ' οὐχ, ὅτι ἀφθεγκτα, δι' ἀποφάσεως μόνης επιτεύξεται ὁ νοῦς τῶν ὑπὲρ νοῦν. καὶ ἡ τοιαύτη γὰρ ἄνοδος, νόησις τις ἐστὶ τῶν ἀπεμφαιόντων τῷ Θεῷ καὶ εἰκόνα μὲν φέρει τῆς ἀνειδέου ἐκείνης θεωρίας καὶ τῆς κατὰ νοῦν θεωρητικῆς ἀποπληρώσεως, ἀλλ' οὐκ αὐτὴ ἐστὶν ἐκείνη.

13 See *ibid.*, II, 3, 35.

14 See *ibid.*, II, 3, 33: καθ' ὑπεροχὴν γὰρ καὶ ἀγνοια ἐστὶ δηλονότι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἀγνοίαν. ... καὶ ἢν ἂν ἐπονυμίαν εἶποι τις αὐτῆς, εἴθ' ἔνωσιν, εἴθ' ὄρασιν, εἴθ' αἴσθησιν, εἴτε γνῶσιν, εἴτε νόησιν, εἴτ' ἔλλαμψιν, ἢ κυρίως ταῦτ' οὐκ ἔστιν, ἢ μόνη κυρίως ταῦτα πρόσεστιν αὐτῇ.

15 *Ibid.*, II, 3, 8: ἐκείνοι δὲ καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸ πάσαις αἰσθησεσιν ἀνέπαφον τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ γινώσκουσιν, ἐπεὶ μὴ μόνον Θεὸς ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ τὰ ὄντα ὧν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπέρθεος, καὶ μὴ μόνον ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν θέσιν ἐστὶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἀφαίρεσιν ἢ ὑπεροχῇ τοῦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα καὶ πᾶσαν ὑπεροχὴν ὁπωσοῦν ἐπὶ νοῦν γινομένην ὑπερβέβηκεν.

the essence of this theology. He further notes that Pseudo-Dionysius tells us that a union with divine light is indescribable and incomprehensible even for those who have experienced it.¹⁶ Palamas fully agrees with the author of *Mystical Theology* when he argues that the task of apophatics is to abandon the construction of the intellect in order to reach a being that surpasses its own divinity, its being and non-being. From the suspension of all conceptual knowledge emerges the possibility of reaching regions the existence of which the seeking man did not even suspect. For the Doctor of Hesychasm, therefore, apophatism can only be considered from within the perspective of a mystical experience, because only then does it cease to be a negation of the possibility of knowing God directly, and even reveals its positive aspect. And while the quoted fragment in its linguistic layer is very similar to the fragments from the works of *Mystical Theology* or *Divine Names*, it emphasizes – in its basic meaning – above all the limitation of apophatics in favor of mystical experience, which is said to result from the very nature of God: “[The human mind] sees, not in a negative way ... but in a manner superior to negation. For God is not only beyond knowledge, but also beyond unknowing.”¹⁷

Pseudo-Dionysius’ path to negation is thus seen as an introduction to true cognition; the death of the senses and the suspension of the intellect are not the end but the beginning of epistemology. According to the Doctor of Hesychasm, theology should lead to knowledge of the Supreme Being, but, importantly, not by seeking positive or negative knowledge about God and the world, but by the seeker’s personal experience. Palamas observes:

Let no one think that these great men [Denys and Maximus the Confessor] are referring here to the ascent through the negative way [ἀφαίρεσις καὶ ἀπόφρασις]. For the latter lies within the powers of whoever desires it; and it does not transform the soul so as to bestow on it the angelic dignity. While it liberates the understanding from other beings, it cannot by itself effect union with transcendent things.¹⁸

The process of negation alone is not enough to transform the consciousness of the knower, it must be accompanied by grace, commandment, and spiritual practice. Gregory explains that contemplation is not simply abstraction and negation, but is a union and deification that becomes mystical and unspeakable

16 See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 5, 593 BC.

17 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 4, p. 32; see Pseudo-Dionysius, TM I, 1, 997B; Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 4, 592B; *ibid.*, I, 5, 593B; *ibid.*, II, 4, 640D.

18 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 20, p. 37.

through God's grace, it is something that transcends abstraction.¹⁹ Palamas strongly emphasizes the need for divine energy and active action of the part of the knowing subject himself in order to achieve true cognition. It seems that the author of the *Triads* does this consciously, because the emphasis on the theme of spiritual practice and the need for grace protects both thinkers from being accused of messalianism. In the case of the author of the *Corpus*, it additionally clears him of any suspicions of Neoplatonic theurgy, which strongly emphasizes the initiates' passivity and the aspect of a certain automatism of actions. For this reason, according to Palamas, Pseudo-Dionysius indicates a special type of mind prayer that has a unifying power.²⁰ After all, prayer requires the active awareness of the knower, and the moment of grace that preceded it excludes accusations of Messalian heresy. This is what the Doctor of Hesychasm means when he writes that contemplation is a gift and union, that is, something that is given to man and which requires his cooperation.²¹ Gregory Palamas draws from the Areopagite's thoughts an absolute conviction of divine transcendence, and at the same time, in his interpretation, he supplements the Dionysian concept of uniting contemplation with essential elements. The latter is perceived as a consequence of cognition through negation, necessarily enriched by the action of grace and man's active cooperation with God (synergy). The significant difference between the Palamite interpretation and Barlaam's version is caused by a different understanding of the relationship of divine transcendence to the very nature of God, described in terms of differentiating names. For Pseudo-Dionysius, the relation of causality and transcendence is the system's epistemological axis, while Palamas additionally emphasizes the simultaneous existence of unity and multiplicity in God, which for the author of the *Triads* is a condition for the possibility of true cognition. Palamas' interpretation of the theme considered in Pseudo-Dionysius relies on the hidden assumption that the name "triune God" is transcended by nothing. Hidden because, although Palamas admits that a divine being surpasses the principle of all divinity, he will not directly write, as Pseudo-Dionysius did, that he also stands above the Trinity. When Palamas speaks of God, he always means the Trinity. In the *Hagioretic Tome*, confirming

19 Ibid., I, 3, 17: Οὐκ οὐκ ἀφαίρεσις καὶ ἀπόφασις μόνη ἐστὶν ἡ θεωρία, ἀλλ' ἔνωσις καὶ ἐκθέωσις, μετὰ τὴν ἀφαίρεσιν πάντων τῶν κάτωθεν τυπούντων τὸν νοῦν, μυστικῶς καὶ ἀπορρήτως χάριτι γινομένη τοῦ Θεοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ μετὰ τὴν ἀπόπασιν ἢ καὶ μείζον ἐστὶ τῆς ἀφαιρέσεως.

20 Ibid., II, 3, 35.

21 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 18; see Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.*, V, 1073 A.

the orthodoxy of his views, he admits: “apart from the divine in Three Persons, I give the name of divinity to nothing, neither Being nor Person.”²²

The matter of unity and multiplicity, which were at the foundation of Greek philosophy, found its continuation in Christian philosophy, in the form of considerations about the nature of the three-person God. This complicated topic presented many difficulties to such thinkers as Origen, Philo, and Clement of Alexandria. Pseudo-Dionysius, and even more so Gregory Palamas, when considering the problem of the Trinity, could already fully use the terminology established in the era of the Cappadocian Fathers. The fathers of the fourth century, the “Trinitarian” age, made a great effort to go beyond the notions of Hellenistic thought,²³ because staying in their circle was threatened, on the one hand, by Sabellian or Arian heresy, and on the other by pagan polygamy. Adopting the formula of “consubstantial” (*homoousios*)²⁴ of the Father and the Son averted this danger, and since the Council of Nicaea, the Holy Trinity was understood as the antinomic unity of monad and triad, the identity of one nature and three hypostases, as John of Damascus defined it in his *Exposition of the Orthodox faith*²⁵ With the unity of substance, the difference between the persons of the Trinity

- 22 Palamas, *Tomos hagioreticos*, PG 150, cd. 725B (see “Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera),” trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, in *Palamas, Bulhakow, Łosiew* (Warszawa 2010), 163: “Hadn’t he [Barlaam] heard with his own ears as we made with our own lips the good confession that the Council Fathers called a symbol of piety as proof enough that we worship one God and recognize one deity in three perfect hypostases?”)
- 23 See V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 50: “It required the superhuman efforts of an Athanasius of Alexandria, of a Basil, of a Gregory of Nazianzus and many others, to purify the concepts of Hellenistic thought.” See Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 8, 2: “One must confess that there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, as the scriptures teach and those who have sublime understanding of them. And those who accuse us of three gods will be told that we profess one God not in number, but in nature,” trans. Sz. Pieszczocho, 108.
- 24 The formula adopted by the Council of Nicaea in 325, which said that the Son of God was begotten by the Father, not created, as the Arians preached, and therefore equal in substance (consubstantial). This statement was formulated in the form of the Creed.
- 25 John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox faith*, I,8, 829, “For, as we said, they are made one not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other without any coalescence or commingling. Nor do the Son and the Spirit stand apart, nor are they sundered in essence according to the diaeresis of Arias. For the Deity is undivided amongst things divided, to put it concisely: and it is just like three suns cleaving to each other without separation and giving out light mingled and conjoined into one.”

is apparent through their mutual relation. “that is to say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one in all respects, save those of not being begotten, of birth and of procession.”²⁶ as the author of the quoted treatise writes. This should be understood by the formula adopted after the tradition of the Greek Fathers, according to which the unborn God gives birth to a Son, and from him also comes the Holy Spirit who acts through the Son (*Filioque*).²⁷ We should note that the relationship between the three hypostases of one being is not a relationship of interdependence. Christ and the Spirit are two separate persons coming from one Father, who are also inseparable in the action of revealing His presence.²⁸ The Doctor of Hesychasm understands the dogma of the triune God in the spirit of the Cappadocian Fathers, as expressed by John of Damascus in his *Exposition of the Orthodox faith*. So he adopts the antinomy that there are three equal persons-hypostases in one divisible divine being. Their existence, however, does not cause any division in God, He remains an uncomplicated entity permeated with energies. In his work *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, Palamas expresses it directly, saying: “Three elements belong to God: essence, energy, and the triad of the divine hypostases.”²⁹ In other words, God, as understood by

26 *Ibid.*, I, 8, 828.

27 *Ibid.*, I, 8, 824: “All then that the Son and the Spirit have is from the Father, even their very being: and unless the Father is, neither the Son nor the Spirit is. And unless the Father possesses a certain attribute, neither the Son nor the Spirit possesses it: and through the Father, that is, because of the Father’s existence, the Son and the Spirit exist, and through the Father, that is, because of the Father having the qualities, the Son and the Spirit have all their qualities”... I,8, 829: When, then, we turn our eyes to the Divinity, and the first cause and the sovereignty and the oneness anti sameness, so to speak, of the movement and will of the Divinity, and the identity in essence and power and energy and lordship, what is seen by us is unity. But when we look to those things in which the Divinity is, or, to put it more accurately, which are the Divinity, and those things which are in it through the first cause without time or distinction in glory or separation, that is to say, the subsistences of the Son and the Spirit, it seems to us a Trinity that we adore.”

28 *Ibid.*, I,8, 833: “Further, it should be understood that we do not speak of the Father as derived from any one, but we speak of Him as the Father of the Son. And we do not speak of the Son as Cause or Father, but we speak of Him both as from the Father, and as the Son of the Father. And we speak likewise of the Holy Spirit as from the Father, and call Him the Spirit of the Father.”

29 Palamas, *Capita physica, theologica, moralia et practica* 150, PG 150, 1173 (cap. 75); trans. J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 240; See B. Krivocheine, *Asketiczeskoje i bogoslawskoje uczenije sw. Grigorija Palamy*, 99–154; J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l’étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 279–310.

Palamas, is transcendent and at the same time present in his creation, knowable by his energies, and – surpassing everything – unknowable. In the detailed defense, he declares:

Indeed, God is non-unity – because of his superiority, because he is above unity and defines this unity. It is also non-unity because it is divided – one God is divided into three perfect hypostases; Father, Son and Holy Spirit are different Persons of one divinity, not allowing any mutual exchange or communion. Finally, it is distinguished by the complete and unchanging humanity of Jesus. Thus, one God, worshiped in three hypostases and one being, is indivisible and completely divided into different energies as well.³⁰

In the reflections of Gregory Palamas, such an understanding of the Trinity constitutes the path to true knowledge. The first cause and ultimate goal of this journey is the Triune God, seen as an essential whole. But one cannot come to the Father otherwise than through the Son, and one cannot meditate on the mysteries of the Son without being influenced by the grace of the Spirit. It is his actions (grace) that open man to the un-created light, the energy of Jesus. By participating in the knowable, un-created energy of the Son (revealed in the form of light – φῶς), we get to know the true nature of God, we achieve the fullness of contemplation, while the divine essence shared by the three persons remains secret and unrevealable. Let us now quote another passage that illustrates well the gentle shift of emphasis, thanks to which Palamas moves from the position of Dionysian cataphatic and apophatic to the position in which the second person of the Trinity is the foundation of theology. The Doctor of Hesychasm defines the divine-human person of Christ as the cause behind the possibility of man's return to God, and at the same time he treats the incarnation of the Logos as a fact that transcends all knowledge available to man. In the fragment under analysis, when the Byzantine theologian speaks of the principle of deification, he means the divine nature, which remains beyond all cognition as an efficient cause. When it touches on the theme of participation in divine nature through deification, it means the energy of Jesus, a way of revealing true knowledge to creatures.

The Principle of deification, divinity by nature, the imparticipable Origin whence the deified derive their deification, Beatitude itself, transcendent over all things and supremely thearchic, is itself inaccessible to all sense perception and to every mind, to every incorporeal or corporeal being. ... Only those beings united to It are deified "by

30 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 3, trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, 130.

the total presence of the Anointer,” they have received an energy identical to that of the deifying essence, and possessing it in absolute eternity, reveal it through themselves.³¹

Let us note that, according to the Areopagite, through the actions of the Trinity (differentiating names, energies), divinity makes itself known, while being unavailable, because it transcends the Trinity. On the other hand, according to the Doctor of Hesychasm, we recognize divinity when we participate in the Trinity, in the energies revealed by it, and at the same time it remains beyond the reach of any discourse, because it is based on the essence of divinity. In Theophanes’ dialogue, a statement by the Doctor of Hesychasm is key to our considerations:

... the divine nature must be said to be at the same time both exclusive of, and, in some sense, open to participation. We attain to participation in the divine nature, and yet at the same time it remains totally inaccessible. We need to affirm both at the same time and to preserve the antinomy as a criterion of right devotion.³²

The very fact of being both multiplicity and unity is not only the highest possible transcendence, but above all the core of Christian faith, a dogma beyond which Palamas does not want to go. This assumption means that for the Doctor of Hesychasm, the only basis and condition for the possibility of knowing an inaccessible God is the Trinity. Palamas seems to add to what the Areopagite expressed in a veiled way when he says that the cause of differentiating names, or revelations, is Good, and that these distinctions are the actions (theurgies) of Jesus to save people. By placing Good in the perspective of the Trinity and emphasizing the Dionysian theme of love, Gregory sees Good as a personal God who died on the cross to save humanity. In this way, the Trinity becomes a testimony to God’s incomprehensible goodness, which agrees to be available and accomplishes it through its humility and love for people, through the incarnation of Christ and the grace of the Spirit.³³

Therefore, according to the great Dionysius, “if the divine discernment is a good departure, and since the divine union through good multiplies itself, the limitless giving of the gifts of substantiality, life, and wisdom is united in divine discernment,” but what is distinguished in this good discernment concerns the humanity of Jesus’ theurgy, because neither the Father nor the Spirit participated in it in any way, unless we accept that they cooperated with his intentions out of goodness and full of love for people and in the entire ... theurgy that he fulfilled (the Word of God).³⁴

31 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1, 33.

32 Palamas, *Theophanes*, PG 150, 932D, from V. Lossky, *Mystical theology*, 69.

33 See Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 10.

34 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)*, trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, 131–132; see Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 5–6.

Palamas accomplished what was required to – so to speak – “re-orient” the Dionysian system by simply shifting his emphasis: no theology, even apophatic, enables man to know the true essence of God, which he can attain only through a unifying and differentiating principle, the Trinity. It is the end of cognition, and by going out through its actions (energies) to every human being, it makes mystical experience possible through grace and synergy. The guarantee and principle of this state is the incarnation of Christ, his divine-human unmixed nature, permeated with divine energies that can be given to people. Thus, for Palamas, the basis of the unknowable and simultaneous knowledge of the nature of God will not be transcendence and causality, but the Trinity. It is in this spirit that the Doctor of Hesychasm explains the thought of the Areopagite, trying to show that it is for him the beginning and the end of all theology, positive, symbolic, negative, and mystical.

6 The Palamite Distinction of Divine Essence and Un-created Energies as the Basis for the Metaphysics of Light

As shown in the previous chapter, it was of key importance for Gregory to place these issues into the perspective of the Trinity, which reveals the foundations of the possibility to know an unknowable God without falling into the heresy of the Bogomils, Monothelites or, even worse, faith in superstition or polytheism, of which the Hesychasts were accused. Palamas, considering the issue of an unknowable essence and a granted energy creation, uses Dionysian terminology and solutions used in the analysis of divine names both uniting and differentiating. Let me remind you that in the Pseudo-Dionysian thought cited by Palamas, divine differences are caused by the shedding of the good of divine unity (θεία διάκρισις ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγαθοπρεπτής πρόοδος τῆς ἐνώσεως τῆς θείας), which entirely penetrates all creatures.¹ At the same time, existing beings do not have access to the divine being and remain infinitely distant from it. Here, Pseudo-Dionysius uses the characteristic image of the wheel and lines radiating toward points at the perimeter, and also compares this relationship to the stamp and its imprint, although as he writes that they are inadequate comparisons against divinity and participating at the same time in creation.² The Doctor of Hesychasm accentuates especially often the antinomic nature of this relationship, and in the work *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, he emphasizes that the essence of God is unavailable, but knowable through its energies. In the light of the patristic tradition, actualizing powers (δυνάμεις) exist in God which, moving toward action-energies, become divine revelation. Palamas calls them divinities, un-created light, grace. He also specifies them through Dionysian terms “activities” (ἐνέργεια) and “effusions,” “procession” (πρόοδος). This last term means “progress forward, towards,” i.e. a timeless, un-created act of divine revelation. These are divine energies presented in contrast to a fixed and unknowable being. Pseudo-Dionysius, explaining how it should be understood that God moves and

1 See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 5, 644A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 62. “On the other hand, if differentiation can be said to apply to the generous procession of the undifferentiated divine unity, itself overflowing with goodness and dispensing itself outward toward multiplicity”.

2 Ibid., II, 5.

penetrates everything, while being perfectly unwavering and unknowable, uses these terms:

What is signified, rather, is that God brings everything into being, that He sustains them, that He exercises all manner of providence over them, that he is present to all of them, that he embraces all of them in a way which no mind can grasp, and that from him, providing for everything, arise countless processions and activities (προνοητικαῖς προόδοις και ἐνεργείαις).³

Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Palamas admits that there is no name that would reveal the nature of God, therefore all concepts with which we try to express the inaccessible Divinity refer only to Its actions, that is energy.⁴ He therefore believes that the Areopagite – calling the unfathomable Mystery “good,” “life,” “light,” “word,” “eternal glory,” “god” or “divine essence” – meant only the deifying power which, as the cause of everything, grants everything existence.⁵ All of these names are given to God solely because of His energies operating in the world, and each of these actualizing powers is His name, which means that God reveals himself completely in each of his energies, maintaining his inexhaustible and unknowable character:

Hence, God himself is non-participatory and participatory: in the first case as super-substantial (i.e., a supra-being), and in the second, as the creator of being, having both the power (i.e., potency) and the exemplary and purposeful agency of all things.⁶

3 Ibid., IX, 9, 916C; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 118; ἀλλὰ τὸ εἰς οὐσίαν ἄγειν τὸν θεὸν καὶ συνεχεῖν τὰ πάντα, ... καὶ ταῖς ἐπὶ τὰ ὄντα πάντα προνοητικαῖς προόδοις καὶ ἐνεργείαις.

4 Palamas, *Triades*, III 2, 10.

5 Ibid., III 2, 10, and 7, 11. Palamas, *Obrona szczególna (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 16, trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, 139: “This supernatural being is nameless as one who surpasses all names. Also the names which the Lord used of Himself in speaking – ‘I am who I am,’ ‘God,’ the ‘Light,’ ‘Truth and Life’ – and which theologians refer to the divine divinity, are the names of energy. For he [Pseudo-Dionysius] say: ‘If we call this super-substantial mystery God or Life, or substance or light, or reason, we do not mean anything other than powers that flow over us and impart to us either a likeness to God, or a substance or life or gifts of wisdom.’ When we call Him the ‘Saint of Saints’ or ‘Lord of lords’ ... we show that we mean His powers that come out to us and that we worship him through energies and participation, by participating or striving to participate in them.” See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 4–7, and III, 2, 10.

6 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 25: Ἀμέθεκτος ἄρα καὶ μετεκὸς ὑπάρχει ὁ αὐτὸς Θεὸς, ἐκεῖνο μὲν ὡς ὑπερούσιος, τοῦτο δὲ ὡς οὐσιοποιὸν ἔχων δύναμιν τε καὶ ἐνεργεῖαν παραδειγματικὴν καὶ τελικὴν τῶν πάντων;” Palamas, *Theophanes* 937D. Here, Palamas

At the same time, actualizing powers, as the cause of all beings, surpass all positive terms borrowed from the world of creatures, and are themselves transcended by divinity – their source. What constitutes the reality of a supra-essence transcends both energies and all names in such an absolute way that even the term “essence” refers to only one of the energies. Considered in itself, this reality also transcends all supernatural relationships that we distinguish in the Trinity. The Doctor of Hesychasm states that since God is fully present in each divine energy, we call Him by the name of each of them, although it is clear to us that He transcends them all. This is because Palamas asks the question of how God, sharing in a multitude of energies, could participate in each of them without any division, if he were not transcendent to all his actions.⁷ In his *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, the Bishop of Thessaloniki emphasizes that it is thanks to this relationship that the essence of God is inaccessible, but knowable in its energies.⁸ This issue is also discussed in detail in *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)*:

Of course, in that which concerns essence, God surpasses all energies, because on the one hand, in what concerns essence, He is above the name and is called according to energy, and on the other hand, because of essence, He is non-participatory, and because of them [energies] – participatory. Moreover, He is completely incomprehensible as to the essence, and as to the energy – understood in a way. ... Although the essence and energy of God are in some way the same, and although there is one God, the essence is the cause of energy and as a cause exceeds them.⁹

To understand what the manifestation of God in His energies consists of, we must first eliminate all causality in His essence. And if Palamas, walking in Pseudo-Dionysius’ footsteps, calls the essence of God “resting higher” (ὑπερκειμένη), and he describes energies as “lower” (ὑφειμένη), he expresses the thought not that energy is diminished in relation to essence, but that essence, as the cause of energy, must be regarded as something higher.¹⁰ By this, he does not mean that divine powers emerge in a timely and logical order, since that would represent a divide in essence of God. Palamas also defines the relation of essence and energy as the relation of cause and effect (τὸ αἴτιον καὶ τὸ αἰτιατόν),

relies on Pseudo-Dionysius’ argument about the simultaneous knowability and unknowability of God; see Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 7, 596C.

7 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 10–11; *ibid.*, III 1, 29.

8 Palamas, *Capita physica 150*, PG 150, 945C; 1192B.

9 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)*, 19, trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, 141.

10 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1, 8; Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.* II, 1068–1069.

though he thinks more about the Father-Son relationship. It is an order within the essence of God, not an epistemological order, and therefore cannot be considered analogously to a cause-and-effect relationship in the created world. Any images with which Palamas tries to convey this particular relationship of divine essence and energy are, he says, inadequate. Thus, he compares the essence of divinity to the solar disk, and the energies to its rays.¹¹ In this vivid image, which Gregory quotes just as Pseudo-Dionysius did, he tries to show that although the essence of divinity does not identify with its energies as their transcendent source, they must, at the same time, be considered completely connected with it (inseparable – ἀχώριστοι).¹² The exclusion of the idea of causality in the divine essence-energies relationship confronts us with the question of the created or un-created nature of divine powers. Barlaam, Palamas' greatest opponent, took the view that, according to the Areopagite, only a divine being has no beginning or end, and thus is the causative factor for all other beings. Thus, divine actions are nothing more than God-dependent creatures. Gregory states that the essence of God is indeed eternal, but he adds, at the same time, that there are other realities, different from the divine essence, and, like that essence, un-created.¹³ What he means here is not only energies (i.e., Virtue), but also certain divine Works (ἔργα¹⁴), such as Providence (ἡ πρόνοια) or Foreknowledge (ἡ πρόγνωσις). After all, Gregory argues, if the latter were not eternal, it would be impossible to create the world in time. Likewise, it is difficult to imagine the moment where divine

11 Palamas, *Capita physica* 150, PG 150, 1185D; *ibid.*, 1188CD; Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 4, 697D.

12 See Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 26; see *ibid.*, III 2, 13; II 3, 15; III 1, 34; III 2, 20. The motif of transcendence and causation, known to us from Pseudo-Dionysius' thought, appears here. Energies are those realities which, by existing around God (τὰ περὶ θεοῦ), allow one to participate in Him (Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, III 2, 25), though as "models of all creatures," or their principles, that constitute divine un-knowability – *ibid.*; see Palamas, *Obrona szczególna (Apologia dieksodikotera)*, 19–20.

13 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 5–7.

14 Palamas uses the word ἔργα not to mean an Old Testament "creation" or "work of God," but divine powers such as Providence and Foreknowledge; in a broader sense, ἔργα also refers to ideas that exist eternally in the divine mind, since Providence is both the power and the work of God, ἔργα equals δυνάμεις. Palamas uses the word δυνάμεις to denote both the power and actions of God, which is also called ἐνέργεια. Here we see that the concept of divine energies is very broad in scope, since it encompasses the powers present in the divine mind and their manifestation in actions. Palamas identifies powers and actions because they occur simultaneously in God, which is another divine antinomy. See Palamas, *Obrona szczególna (Apologia dieksodikotera)*, 21.

self-contemplation begins, for that would mean that there was a time when God was deprived of that self-contemplation. On the other hand, to deny the preexistence of God's wisdom is to reject the eternally existing Logos. Gregory sums up his considerations by writing:

These works of God, then, are manifestly unoriginate and pretemporal: His foreknowledge, will, providence, contemplation of Himself, and whatever powers are akin to these. But if this contemplation, providence, prescience, predetermination and will are works of God without that are without beginning, then virtue is also unoriginate, for each of His works is a virtue.¹⁵

Palamas also states that Barlaam is mistaken when he asserts that having a beginning or an end in time implies being created. Powers (Virtues) revealed in the act of creation, or Providence ending with the end of the world, had their beginning and end in time, solely as "external" actions of God. These powers have always been and will be, in the divine mind, as potentialities for which the existence or non-existence of the created world is irrelevant. The main argument for the non-creation of energy is the fact that it flows from the un-created essence of God and is therefore inseparably connected with it. This issue is discussed by the Doctor of Hesychasm both in the *Triads* and *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)*:

Not only in the case of wisdom, but also in life and good, holiness and immortality, and in all beings in general, the following regularity occurs: some were created and began as participatory, others that appear as participating are un-created and without beginning, because they are eternal divine energies, always connected with the ever-omnipotent and perfect God and Ruler of all, who, because of his non-participatory essence for all existences, surpasses and is above all those participatory [qualities], which by nature are eternally perceived by thought as the things that surround him.¹⁶

The assertion of the un-created nature of divine energies exposed Palamas to accusations of polytheism and having introduced additional persons into the Trinity as a consequence of dividing God's nature into essence and energies. This argument is the result of misunderstanding and ignores the apophatism in the doctrine of Pseudo-Dionysius and Palamas. Consistent apophatism proclaims that such terms as being, existence cannot be exhaustive terms for God in Himself – καθ' ἑαυτόν. God as their cause transcends and transcends everything,

15 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 2,6, trans. M. Gendle, 94.

16 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)*, 41, trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, 154; see Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 10.

even his own divinity. Therefore, we cannot transfer the properties of created being and the laws of logic that govern it into the being of God. Thus, it is legitimate to use the antinomy in the study of the three hypostases, the two natures of Christ, the energies, and the indivisible divine essence. On the one hand, it is difficult to speak of a systematic lecture of cataphatic and apophatic theology in the works of Gregory Palamas. On the other hand, the numerous remarks we find in *Obrona*, *Theophanes*, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, and interpretations of quotations from Pseudo-Dionysius, especially in the *Triads*, leave no doubt as to his position. Palamas believes that the distinctions contained in God are neither expressive categories of logic nor other terms derived from the world of created beings. He notices that these divisions occur in the mind of the knowing subject (διάκρισις κατ' ἐπίνοιαν) who, by nature, is subject to the laws of logic. According to the Doctor of Hesychasm, we can speak of God only in the way of God – θεοπρεπῶς, these distinctions also exist in the way of God – θεοπρεπῆς ἀπόρρητος. Palamas defines the division in God into essence and energies as an existing distinction – πραγματική διάκρισις, in contrast to the existing separation – πραγματική διαίρεσις, which in God does not exist. This division in God is something like *distinctio realis minor* – that is, it exists in the object but does not infringe upon its unity. Therefore, God possesses all powers in himself in a unique, unrepeatable and unifying way, and like the sun that gives its light but cannot be looked at directly, His inaccessible divinity pours out its powers, which pass into the world of matter. Taking into account the different needs and receptive abilities of creatures, we cannot help but talk about the “multiplication” (πολυπλασιασμός) of divinity.¹⁷ Palamas refers directly to Dionysian considerations on one of the divine names, namely “otherness” (τα ἕτερότατα). The Areopagite explains that by ascribing forms and shapes to God, we speak of various manifestations of His active powers, while the essence of divinity remains the same:

... but I would like now to emphasize that difference in God must not be supposed to indicate any variation of his totally unchanging sameness. What is meant in his unity amid many forms and the uniform processions [*πολυγονίας προόδους*] of his fecundity to all.¹⁸

17 See Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1, 23; *ibid.*, III, 2, 11–12; *ibid.*, III, 2, 25.

18 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IX, 5, 913B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 117; Νῦν δὲ αὐτὸ τὴν θεϊαν ἕτεροτητα μὴ ἀλλοίωσιν τινα τῆς ὑπερατρέπτου ταυτότητος ὑποπετεύωμεν, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐνιαῖον αὐτοῦ πολυπλασιασμόν καὶ τὰς μονοειδεῖς καὶ τὰς μονοειδεῖς τῆς ἐπὶ πάντα πολυγονίας προόδους.

For Palamas, as for “The Great Dionysius,” this does not mean a division within God at all. In his deliberations, the Doctor of Hesychasm uses Dionysian images and comparisons, even though he shifts the emphasis decisively from the divine essence – which for the Areopagite, as “all in everything,” remains completely identical as the cause of all beings – toward the persons of the Trinity – different, but essentially united:

We never separate power from Your nature, for it is right for us to know that it is one, undivided and indivisible, and that those [powers] are not only numerous, but, according to the holy Fathers, cannot be counted. Through each of them you are known as One, simple, present and active everywhere.¹⁹

Palamas also points out that energies do not have their own hypostases, but are manifestations of the three Divine Persons, thanks to which they maintain the undivided and inaccessible unity of their common essence: “Essence exceeds energies all the more because they are neither equal in essence nor different in essence, for they belong to that which has an independent hypostasis, and no energy has an independent hypostasis.”²⁰

Here we reach a very important point in Gregory’s teaching – namely, where he emphasizes that all energies are hypostatic (ἐνυπόστατον ἔλλαμψιν), i.e., none of them occurs without the person of the Trinity and therefore does not transform into a multitude of persons. “These energies do not have a separate hypostasis, but are powers that reveal the existence of God, and because of them there is no other, different God.”²¹

This is the context in which Palamas uses the Dionysian image of a circle, from the center of which, without dividing or multiplying, it is possible to mark an infinite number of points on the circumference. For the Doctor of Hesychasm, this means that we cannot reduce the three hypostases to one; they are separate, essential identities. For this reason, only the Trinity can lie at the foundation of a true knowledge of God, because the energies that lead to Him are not some abstract powers, but concrete revelations of a personal God and Spirit. Gregory Palamas uses the Dionysian motif of granting and transcendence, but places it

19 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 13, trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, 137–138.

20 Ibid., 19, 141; see Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 25.

21 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 37, trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, 151. See Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1, 8. Here, Gregory cites Maximus the Confessor, who thus defines the deifying rays; see Maximus, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium, Scholia*, PG 90, 644D.

in his own optics, the center of which is the Trinity. According to the author of the *Triads*, it is the Trinity, not the One, that remains at the heart of the religious experience, because it is the action through which God comes to man. It always takes its origin in the Father, passes through the Son, and is fulfilled in the Spirit. Thus, various manifestations of the divine nature, which Gregory – like Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor – calls energies, show us the Trinity as the source and goal of mystical experience.²² Palamas faithfully conveys Pseudo-Dionysius' thinking, but in the *Areopagitics* we would search in vain for a clear distinction between knowable energies, hypostases and the unknowable essence of God.²³ For the author of the *Divine Names*, the Trinity is the cause of the differentiating names, while for Gregory it is one divine being in three hypostases; it is a dynamic source of revealed, working energies. The Doctor of Hesychasm explains this aspect to Barlaam, quoting Pseudo-Dionysius:

If “we try to unite and distinguish divine things in the way that they too are united and differentiated,” then we must admit that the essence of God is one thing and the hypostasis, or person, is another, although there is one God in one essence and three hypostases; and something else is the essence of God, and something else is going out, that is, the energies or will of God, although there is one God, who acts and wants.²⁴

Thus, we see that divine names, including processions (πρόοδος) and works (ἐνέργειαι), reveal to the Areopagite an aspect of the transcendent and super-substantial Oneness. For the bishop of Thessaloniki, they are the only condition for the possibility of truly knowing God in three persons, while remaining, at the same time, hidden.

22 See Palamas, *Theophanes*, PG 150, 941CD; V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 62.

23 Palamas finds this missing link, i.e., the division into nature and its specific energies, manifestations and actions in the thought of Maximus the Confessor in *Ad Marinum, Disputatio cum Phyrro*, and of John of Damascus in *Exposition of the Orthodox faith*. He also addresses this matter in detail in *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)*, 3–26.

24 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 3, trans. I. Zogas-Osadnik, 131; Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 6.

7. The Light of Good and the Light of Knowledge in the Thought of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas

Considerations about divine actions, energies understood as theophanies that make it possible to know God Himself, lead to the Palamite metaphysics of light. The study of light, un-created, and at the same time perceptible divine energy, is at the heart of Palamas' doctrine and is perhaps a specific determinant of his thinking. After all, the purpose of the *Triads* was to justify the possibility of getting to know God in the way that the hesychasts experienced Him. Palamas does this primarily by carefully analyzing the nature of the light they perceive. According to the Byzantine theologian, it is one of the energies through which God makes himself present in the world, while his essence remains hidden. There is clearly a similarity to the Dionysian theme of the imperceptible Good, which is manifested by pouring its rays onto all beings. It should be remembered, however, that this idea was expressed long before the rise of the Areopagites and entered permanently into the patristic canon. Basil the Great drew a very clear distinction between God's unknowable essence and his knowable manifestations, which Palamas invokes in his *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)*:

It is by His energies – he says – that we say we know our God; we do not assert that we can come near to the essence itself, for His energies [ἐνέργεια] descend to us, but His essence [οὐσία] remains unapproachable.¹

In the words of Pseudo-Dionysius, Palamas confirms the concept of un-created, deifying energies – grace and light. The Areopagite believes in deification through the light of knowledge, which he identifies with the knowable and energy-participatory Good – that is, divine interventions towards creation. As René Roques, one of the most important researchers of his works, puts it: “θέωσις is said to go hand in hand with γνῶσις. Both are inseparable from purification and union with love. Ignorance divides and distances, knowledge unites and divinizes.”² According to Pseudo-Dionysius, the highest manifestation of divinity

1 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 39; St. Basil *Epistola 234 (ad Amphiloichium)* PG 32, 869 AB; Cf. *Adversus Eunomium*, II, 32, PG., 29, 648.

2 R. Roques, *L'univers dionisien*, 88: “La θέωσις, nous le verrons, va de pair avec la γνῶσις. Et l'une et l'autre son inséparables de la pureté et de l'unité de l'âme. L'ignorance divise et dissout; la science unifie et divinise.”

is Good, the principle of all beings, penetrating the entire universe and being completely transcendent to them.³ It is light through which Good is revealed to creatures, and its transcendence is fully preserved through the relationship of the archetype and the visible icon: Light comes from the Good, and light is an image of this archetypal Good. Thus, the Good is also praised by the name “light,” just as an archetype is revealed in its image.⁴ Light is therefore the energy emitted by Good, which at the same time reveals the cause of its existence and leads to it. This return takes place according to a specific order, because Good is the source of the hierarchy and arrangement of forms. Higher beings transmit good and its gifts to lower beings, thus conditioning them for an orderly ascension to the Supra-existent Being.⁵ Good is therefore a final cause (*causa finalis*), the source of life understood as a constant desire to return to its cause, a constant “desire for good” and, at the same time, the fulfillment of this entelechy according to its inner possibilities; at the same time, it is the *causa efficiens*, which strengthens its actualization by directing them towards itself: “The Good returns all things to itself and gathers together whatever may be scattered, for it is the divine Source and unifier of the sum total of all things. Each thing looks to it as a source, as the agent of cohesion, and as an objective.”⁶ The Dionysian world is a hierarchically arranged cosmos in which movement towards Good takes place within a fixed order. The Areopagite emphasizes this by many times repeating the formula that the goal of the hierarchy is to become like God and become one with Him,⁷ while the hierarchy itself causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of

3 See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 1–6; IV; Pseudo-Dionysius 4, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 74: “The goodness of the transcendent God reaches from the highest and most perfect forms of being to the very lowest. And yet it remains above and beyond them all, superior to the highest and yet stretching out to the lowliest. It gives light to everything capable of receiving it, it creates them, keeps them alive, preserves and perfects them. Everything looks to it for measure, eternity, number, order ... It is the Cause of the universe and its end.” See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.* II, 1068, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 262: “Now if this is the source of becoming divine and good of all those made divine and good, then he who transcends every source, including the divinity and goodness spoken of here, surpasses the source of divinity and of goodness.”

4 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 4. trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 74.

5 *Ibid.*, DN, I, 2.

6 *Ibid.*, IV, 4.

7 See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, III, 1, 165 A: Σκοπὸς οὖν ἱεραρχίας ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἕνωσις; see *ibid.*, 164D.

God himself.”⁸ In this way, it also emphasizes the inextricable relationship of Good – that is, the principle of all beings, thanks to which they want to return to their creator through light, which is his epiphany – and the energy that makes this return possible. The movement toward Good (*causa finalis*), effected by the creative movement (*causa efficiens*), and by the same token written in each being, however small, Pseudo-Dionysius puts on two planes: the noetic and the sensual. In both cases light plays the primary role, “the visible image of good” (DN, IV, 4). Between the world and the Good, which leads to its archetype according to the hierarchy, is a link in the form of actualizing powers, energy. This journey, being essentially a gradual acquisition of knowledge a realization of each of these beings’ entelechy, and takes place according to their internal capabilities. The same principle applies both on the intelligible plane and in the world subject to the perception of the senses. The author of the *Corpus* tries to show this by first describing the lowest level (the material world), i.e., the action of the sun’s rays, in which the basic features of the prototype are fully revealed. It is the ability to arouse life, grow, improve; it is a matter of giving measure and creating time. Above all, however, the sun is the principle of the unity of the sensual world, where all living things move towards the refreshing rays of light. The only exception are beings that are inherently incapable of accepting light,⁹ aside from them, the whole of creation is flooded with a cascade of life-giving rays.

So it is with light, with this visible image of the Good, It draws and returns all things to itself, all the things that see, that have motion, that are receptive of illumination and warmth, that are held together by the spreading rays. Thus is it the “sun” for it makes all things a “sum” and gathers together the scattered.¹⁰

The Areopagite points out that true knowledge is knowledge of the empirical type, because revelation does not come from the deceptive words of human wisdom (οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας ἀνθρωπίνης λόγοις, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀποδείξει δυνάμεως), but from God Himself as the revealed power, light-energy that transforms and enables us to take part in the participatory nature of the divine. This knowledge is dynamic, capable of transforming the mind of its recipients, so that they can continue to give this gift to those lower in the hierarchy. In describing

8 Ibid., CH, III, 1, 165 A: τῆς ἀρχιφώτου καὶ θεαρχικῆς ἀκτίνας.

9 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 4, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 74: “It sends its shining beams all around the visible world, and if anything fails to receive them the fault lies not in the weakness or defect of the spreading light but in unsuitability of whatever is unable to have a share in light.”

10 Ibid., DN, IV, 4, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 75.

this process, Pseudo-Dionysius speaks clearly of the enlightening cognition that causes its recipients, formed by light, to pass this knowledge on to others, making their minds perfect:

... and we thereby come to look up to the blessed and ultimate divine ray of Jesus himself. Then, having sacredly beheld whatever can be seen, enlightened by the knowledge of what we have seen, we shall then be able to be consecrated and consecrators of this mysterious understanding [καὶ τῆς τῶν θεαμάτων γνώσεως ἐλλαμφθέντες τὴν μυστικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἀφιερῶμενοι καὶ ἀφιερῶται]; formed of light, initiates in God's work, we shall be perfected and bring about perfection [φωτοειδεῖς καὶ θεουργικοὶ τετελεσμένοι καὶ τελεσιουργοὶ γενέσθαι δυνησόμεθα].¹¹

Considering the ways of knowing God, Pseudo-Dionysius places the One-Good itself beyond the possibility of any prediction as transcending not only the world of creatures and the noetic realm, but also itself. The author of *The Divine Names* does admit, however, that pure angels' minds, but also other "intellects of divine form" might be worthy of unification with "supra-divine light" by *aphairesis*, negative theology: the abandonment of all concepts and cessation of all "intelligent activity."¹² In this case as well, the name of divinity is strongly associated with knowledge, and more precisely with the final end of its acquisition (i.e. ignorance standing above all knowledge and ignorance, with a level that can be reached only through mystical theology), with the source and the point of reaching the human intellectual experience:

We leave behind us all our own notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our minds and, to the extent that is proper, we approach the ray which transcends being. Here, in a manner no words can describe, preexisted all the goals of all knowledge.¹³

People who attain knowledge through grace – the energy of the Spirit are true theologians (τῆς πνευματοκινήτου τῶν θεολόγων δυνάμεως),¹⁴ who, thanks to these energies, contact the inexpressible and inconceivable God in a way that cannot be understood by our abilities and notional and rational actions.¹⁵ The

11 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH I, 5, 372B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 196. Here, we emphasize use of the word φωτοειδεῖς – "formed of light" – to emphasize the Dionysian thought that the deified (i.e. transformed by light) hierarch has an active (i.e. transforming) power of light-energy, thanks to which he can initiate the faithful.

12 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 5, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 54.

13 Ibid., I, 4,, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 53.

14 Ibid., 108, 1–3.

15 Ibid., 108, 1–2: τῆς πνευματοκινήτου τῶν θεολόγων «δυνάμεως»; 108, 3–4: καθ' ἣν [sc. δύνανμιν] τοῖς ἀφθέγκτοις καὶ ἀγνώστοις ἀφθέγκτως καὶ ἀγνώστως συναπτόμεθα; κατὰ τὴν κρέττονα τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς λογικῆς καὶ νοεῖας δυνάμεως καὶ ἐνεργείας ἔνωσιν.

light of knowledge allows the mind to gain unity lost by being stuck in ignorance and misconceptions; it enables the mind to ascend to Good and attain perfection.

... it is the presence of the light of the mind which gathers and unites together those receiving illumination. It perfects them. It returns them toward the truly real. It returns them from their numerous false notions and, filling them with the one unifying light, it gathers their clashing fancies into a single, pure coherent, and true knowledge.¹⁶

The fulfillment of the cycle of Jesus' revelation through the energies (ἡ πρόοδος), which initiate the return (ἡ ἐπιστροφή) of creation to its source, dynamizes the Dionysian cosmos, above all in the mental sphere. That is why the Areopagite stresses that Good is in the first place entitled to the name of "intelligent light," i.e., one that is an unchanging and transcendent unity, and at the same time the source of illumination of intellects as well as a dynamic force which unifies, perfects and guides toward the One. In the first place, illumination comes to intelligible entities, or angels' minds that perceive directly. They transmit (ἄγγελοι – i.e. messengers) the received gifts to the beings at the lower levels of the hierarchy, thus enabling them elevation toward Good. Pseudo-Dionysius, writing about the process of illumination, in essence tells us about the hierarchical transmission of knowledge by "luminous lights" (angels' intelligences¹⁷) to intelligent souls subject to the limitations of their own nature:

Next to these sacred and holy intelligent beings are the souls, together with all the good peculiar to these souls. These too derive their being from the transcendent Good. So therefore, they have intelligence, immortality, existence. They can strive towards angelic life. By means of the angels as good leaders, they can be uplifted to the generous Source of all good things and, each according to his measure, they are able to have a share in the illuminations streaming out from that Source.¹⁸

Noetic intelligent light, like the sun described earlier, pours out upon the essence of intelligible entities. The fact that not all (Satan, the demons) are subject to his saving power is due not to the weakness of light, but to the reluctance of minds. They can, by their free will, turn from the light of knowledge to errors and judgments, but this light always remains within their reach. Similarly, when

16 Ibid., IV, 6, DN, IV, 6, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 76.

17 Ibid., IV, 2, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 73: "From his Source it was given to them to exemplify the Good, to manifest that hidden goodness in themselves, to be, so to speak, the angelic Messenger of the divine source, to reflect the Light glowing in the inner sanctuary.

18 Ibid., IV, 2, DN, IV, 2, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 73.

minds desire to acquire more knowledge than their cognitive powers and hierarchy allow, they are somewhat “blinded,” i.e. deprived of previously acquired knowledge.¹⁹ At the same time, Pseudo-Dionysius emphasizes the immutability and independence of divine light from whether the recipient is able to perceive it or not, because the source is the highest principle:

Still, as I have already said, the divine Light, out of generosity, never ceases to offer itself to the eyes of the mind, eyes which should seize upon it for it is always there, always divinely ready with the gift of itself.²⁰

We see, therefore, that in the context of *Corpus Dionysiacum*, light itself is defined in a three-fold manner. The author of *The Divine Names* speaks of light in a metaphorical sense, referring its properties to the manner in which knowledge is transmitted (emanation, radiation, illumination, life-giving, permeation), and thus moves on to use the term “light” in order to render the actualizing powers being the manifestation of Divine Authority called Good, which he calls “supra-substantial light,” in what the transcendent One allows divine intellects, i.e. in the highest knowledge of itself available to creatures. It seems that the “Great Dionysius” uses the term “light” to describe various aspects of knowledge, and in principle uses both interchangeably (i.e. knowledge = the light of the intellect). Light, therefore, has an intelligible dimension, and its influence pertains to the intellect and is limited by the hierarchy of beings in its range, mode and power of influence.²¹ Note, however, that Pseudo-Dionysius goes on to speak of gradualist and analogous cognition that occurs through the “ray of divine revelation” solely in

19 See Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, II, 3. This is one of the most deeply ingrained thoughts in the tradition of wisdom in ancient cultures: the *paideia* process must be gradual, under the constant control of the teacher (spiritual master). Omitting the necessary steps causes regression and a return to a state of even greater chaos. This is literal blinding, the kind that the observation of a solar eclipse can cause without proper procedure and precautions.

20 *Ibid.*, Cf. EH, II, 3, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 205.

21 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 5, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 75: “The Good is described as the light of the mind because it illuminates the mind of every supra-celestial being with the light of the mind, and because it drives from souls the ignorance and the error squatting there. It gives them all a share of scared light. It clears away the fog of ignorance from the eyes of the mind and it stirs and unwraps those covered over by the burden of darkness. At first it deals out the light in small amounts and then, as the wish and the longing for light begin to grow, it gives more and more of itself, shining ever more abundantly on them because they ‘loved much’ and always it keeps urging them onward and upward as their capacity permits.”

the context of the limited perceptual faculties of human reason. It notices the necessity of preparing a person by his pious deeds and acquired wisdom to accept such a transformation, and above all emphasizes the existence of good will in the divine essence that grants the power of transfiguration.²² In the first chapter of *Divine Names*, the author talks about the many traces that Providence left in order to enable initiates to reach Him.²³ The basis of initiation will be the study of the Scriptures, and the knowledge thus obtained will be able to understand the inconceivable, of course, in proportion to the ability of knowing reason. Pseudo-Dionysius points out:

We are raised up to the enlightening beams of the sacred scriptures, and with these to illuminate us, with our beings shaped to songs of praise, ... we behold the divine light, in a manner befitting us. ...²⁴

The concepts of Pseudo-Dionysius discussed here found their application in the Palamite reflection on the nature of divine energies – light. The author of the treatise *Against Akindynos*, emphasizes above all the complete separation of the energies provided from the nature of God, which is beyond the reach of reason. Namely, that God is called light not because of his nature, but because of his energies (Φῶς ὁ Θεὸς οὐ κατ’ οὐσίαν, ἀλλὰ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν λέγεται).²⁵ The Areopagite calls the unknowable and inaccessible divinity God, life and substance, stressing that he means not its essence, but the powers it grants and through which it reveals itself as their root cause. The Doctor of Hesychasm carefully quotes the entire Areopagite’s argument to conclude: “Here are the essential powers. Likewise, the deifying light is essential, but it is not itself the essence of God.”²⁶

22 See DN I, 1, 588A, (1); author’s translation: “excess knowledge about it must be left to it (αὐτῇ τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἐπιστήμην ἀναθετέον – 588A, 9), reserving for each as much as he wishes to lend himself a ray of divine revelation (τοσοῦτον ἐπὶ τὸ ἅπαντες ἀνανεοντας, ὅσον ἑαυτὴν ἐνδίδωσιν ἢ τῶν θεαρχικῶν λογίων ἁκτίς – 588A, 10), immeasurable splendors adjusting to prudence in divine matters and piety (πρὸς τὰς ὑπερτέρας αὐγὰς τῆ περι τὰ θεῖα σωφροσύνη καὶ ὁσιότητι συστελλομένου – 588A).”

23 Ibid., DN, IV, 4. trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 52: “This is the kind of divine enlightenment (theurgical lights) into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers, a tradition at one with scripture.”

24 Ibid., DN, I, 3, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem 50–51.

25 Palamas, *Contra Accin.*, PG 150, 823.

26 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 7, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 63–64: “When for instance, we give the name of ‘God,’ to the transcendent hiddenness, when we call it ‘life’ or ‘being’ or ‘light’ or ‘Word,’ what our minds lay hold of is in fact nothing other than

The Bishop of Thessaloniki expresses this very emphatically, repeatedly saying that light is not the essence of God, because it is inaccessible and incommunicable.²⁷ The enormous emphasis that the author of the *Triads* places on the inaccessibility of the divine essence will accompany his deliberations on the nature of light at practically every moment. The element that invariably connects the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius and that of Palamas is the constant emphasis on the transcendence of divinity in the face of all differentiating and unifying names, in the face of predicative and negative names. Gregory expresses this thought many times when he writes that divine light is a concrete divinity, revealing God as much as He makes Himself known, but at the same time it must be remembered that the One transcends its own revelations infinitely, remaining beyond the reach of any discourse. Describing the divine transcendence towards energy – light, the Doctor of Hesychasm unequivocally points to the *Areopagitics* as the source of his thoughts. Palamas devotes one chapter of the third Triad and *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* to the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius' words in this context.²⁸ He cites the Dionysian terms of light as a “superluminous and theurgic ray”²⁹ and points out that for “Great Dionysius,” it is precisely “the deifying gift and the principle of the Divinity.”³⁰ And although the One descends towards its creation in its full divine and divining energies (i.e. authority, divinity, light), it remains permanently unknown and unavailable in the inexhaustible mystery of its being (super-substantial essence). We must be aware that all knowledge we can acquire about God at the time of union with

certain activities apparent to us, activities which deify, cause being, bear life and give wisdom,” see Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, V, 1–3; Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1, 23.

- 27 Palamas, *Triads*, II, 3, 8, trans. N. Gendle, 57: “The monks know that the essence of God transcends the fact of being inaccessible to the senses, since God is not only above all created things, but is even beyond Godhead. ... This hypostatic light, seen spiritually by the saints ... but it is an illumination immaterial and divine, a grace invisibly seen and ignorantly known;” and *ibid.*, II, 3, 9, trans. N. Gendle, 57: “This light is not the essence of God, for that is inaccessible and incommunicable;” *ibid.*, III, 1, 29, trans. N. Gendle, 84: “But you should not consider that God allows Himself to be seen in His superessential essence, but according to His deifying gift and energy ..., the enhypostatic illumination.”
- 28 *Ibid.*, III, 1, 29; Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 30; compare Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, III, 2.
- 29 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 29, trans. N. Gendle, 84. See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, III, 2, 165A.
- 30 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 29, trans. N. Gendle, 84. See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, III, 2, Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.* II, 1068–1069.

Him will always be limited in comparison with His nature beyond all imagination. Palamas, adhering to the Dionysian tradition, states:

You should think that is the principle of the divinity, the deifying gift, in which one may supernaturally communicate, which one may see and with which one may be united. But the essence of God, which is beyond principle, transcends this principle, too.³¹

It is a thought fully drawn from the Areopagitics, in which divinity is the source of principles and as such stands above all relations. Therefore, the distinction in the nature of God between essence and light causes no division in Him, as in the case of the distinction between essence and energy considered above. The author of the *Triads* declares that if we confirm that divine light is inseparable from divine essence, then Super-substantial Being is not, for this reason, a composite.³² The constant emphasis on the difference between imperceptible divinity and sensually perceptible energy – light is of paramount significance: it places Palamas' thought within the patristic tradition; it is a direct reference to Pseudo-Dionysian thinking and defends the doctrine against the accusations of introducing divisions in the nature of God or multi-deities. Pseudo-Dionysius tells us about the Good that is imperfect and exceeds all else, which is revealed through the gift of light-knowledge, automatically transforming its recipient.³³ Also, according to Palamas, light is a dynamic force; it is inseparable from the one who transmits it, while it is – at the same time – infinitely transcended by its cause. At this point, however, Palamas once again makes use of the thought of Maximus, which is supplemented by the Dionysian line of deliberations on essence and energy. As I wrote earlier, for the Byzantine theologian, the only basis and condition for the possibility of knowing God is the Trinity, revealed through the common energy, proper to individual people. For this reason, Palamas repeatedly describes light as *ἐνυποστάτως*,³⁴ that is, grounded in the persons of the Trinity. Gregory emphasizes in this way a few momentous moments. First of all, he emphasizes that light is not an additional person, but an energy revealing a person, contemplated in a person and different from his unknowable essence:

It is “enhypostatic,” not because it possess a hypostatic of its own, but because the Spirit “sends it out into the hypostasis of another,” in which it is contemplated. It is then

31 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 29, trans. N. Gendle, 84–85. The presented line of thought referring to the quoted fragment of DN can also be found in Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 32.

32 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 2, 10.

33 See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.* II, 1068 A–1069 A.

34 See Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 8.

properly called “enhypostatic,” in that it is not contemplated by itself, nor in essence but in hypostasis.”³⁵

In this way, the light becomes a special energy that is proper to the whole Trinity and reveals its individual persons. As it is the inherent energy of a divine being, it also reveals the divine nature of Christ and the nature of the Spirit. In the passage quoted below, the author of the *Triads* writes about light as a deifying gift of the Spirit, a grace that is invariably bound to its giver. It is precisely the gift of transformation that is inherent in the essence of the Spirit’s action:

It is properly called “Spirit” and “divinity” by the saints, in-so-much as the deifying gift is never separate from the Spirit Who gives it. It is a light bestowed in a mysterious illumination, and recognized only by those worthy to receive it.³⁶

We thus see that for Palamas, the light cannot be contemplated as a separate entity, but is transmitted exclusively through the person of the Trinity, in a concrete hypostasis. Because of this, he reveals its true nature, even if the essence common to the three people remains, of course, secret. This is what happened during the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor when the disciples saw, or knew and experienced, the true nature of Christ. The light radiating from the second person of the Trinity transformed the human nature of the disciples, enabling them to see things for what they really are. After all, this is the action of light as energy, it transforms its recipient and leads to its cause – the person it reveals. The Doctor of Hesychasm explains it using other words, pointing to the anti-nomic principle that the Holy Spirit is both the giver and the one to whom is given, that is, through the grace he grants, he leads to himself. In the *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)*, he explains that “the Holy Spirit is the one who grants the deifying grace and the grace given.”³⁷ Just as the Dionysian Good transcends its own manifestations, the person of the Trinity also transcends light as its inexhaustible cause. Consequently, Palamas also applies this account personally: “But the Holy Spirit transcends the deifying life which is in Him and proceeds from Him, for it is its own natural energy.”³⁸

Continuing this thought, Palamas quotes Pseudo-Dionysius’ words about the divine cause transcending his names (i.e. powers) such as deification and life. For this reason, the Holy Spirit, according to the Bishop of Thessaloniki, is in

35 *Triads*, III, 1, 9, trans. N. Gendle, 71.

36 *Ibid.*, III, 1, 9, trans. N. Gendle, 71.

37 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 32.

38 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 9, p. 71.

fact unknowable, but knowable only through energy – grace: “Hence the Spirit is essentially nonparticipating, while regarding the deifying energy (through which the Son is originated, given and sent) he is participated in by those who are worthy of it.”³⁹ Energy – light is the revelation of the Triune God, although it does not reveal His essence to us. The Bishop of Thessaloniki refers to the words of Pseudo-Dionysius, who calls the deifying gift of the Spirit “Godhead” (θεαρχία) and “Divinity,” “first-born light” (ἀρχιφωτον), “beam of Divine Sovereignty,” emphasizing the notion that he exceeds all these names as the principle of the Divine and the Power of Good (ἀγαταρχία).⁴⁰ For Palamas, light as divine energy is a manifestation of the persons of the Trinity, a dynamic force revealing Their un-created nature. Treating light as created energy leaves man in the circle of natural cognition, thus depriving the hesychasts’ vision of the value of truth. The question of the creation or non-creation of the light of transfiguration was thus at the center of Palamas’ dispute with Barlaam and Akindynos. According to Gregory, the Light of the Transfiguration is un-created and, as divine energy, has all its inherent qualities: “This mysterious light, inaccessible, immaterial, un-created, deifying, Eternal, this radiance of the Divine Nature, the glory of divinity . . . , is at once accessible to sense perception and yet transcends it.”⁴¹

At the heart of Palamas’ position are two assumptions. The first is the conviction that each energy leads to the nature of its source, and the second is that light is an energy that reveals the true nature of Christ and makes it possible to know that nature – i.e. to participate in it. An important argument in favor of the non-creation of divine light (and therefore treating it in terms of divine energy) are the considerations of Maximus the Confessor and the thought of Basil the Great, whom Palamas recognized and quoted often, that the guarantee of the existence of each being is its natural energy, which leads to the nature of its creations.

For if – according to Saint Maxim – the nature of every thing is determined by its energy and “un-created energy shows un-created nature, and created energy – created nature,” and if what it shows is necessarily different from what is shown, then this is where energy differs from the divine nature it shows.⁴²

39 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 33, see Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 7, 645B.

40 Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 30, see Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.* 2; Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, 1, 4–7.

41 Palamas, *Triads* III, 1, 22, trans. N. Gendle, 80.

42 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 2, 7, trans. N. Gendle, 95: “As Basil the Great says, “The guarantee of the existence of every essence is its natural energy which leads the mind to the

For this reason, the author of *Obrona szczególowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* believes that if a deifying gift were created, then it could not deify creatures, and would have to be called “deified,” and not “deifying.” If the light of Tabor were created, then the nature of the Son of God, of which he is the epiphany, would also have to possess a created character. The Doctor of Hesychasm therefore responds to Barlaam: “But if the divinity of God designates the divine energy par excellence, and if the energies are, as you say, created, the divinity of God must also be created.”⁴³ Barlaam’s objection that divine light, by its created nature, does not have the value of truth – that is, it does not reveal the true essence of God – was as serious as the claim of the Calabrian monk about the merely symbolic dimension of the light of Tabor. The problem of symbolic cognition is therefore particularly important for Palamas in this context, because for him the reality of light is a paradigm for the possibility of seeing the divine nature by hesychast monks.⁴⁴ The Bishop of Thessaloniki tries to reconcile the belief that the light of Transfiguration and the divine nature of Christ are coexistent with the claim that it is only a symbol of divine energies. According to Palamas, if we take the light of the Transfiguration as a symbol, interpreting Pseudo-Dionysius literally, as Barlaam and Akindynos did, then it would be merely an allusion to the divine nature and not itself. So, what the Apostles, hesychasts, and saints experienced is a product of their excited imaginations, or at best a vision of their own mind. Palamas goes on to say that if light were not true divinity, but its created symbol, one could say that it was not revealed divinity that caused the appearance of light, but that the mere sight of light caused the Apostles to symbolically associate with the vision of divinity. Of course, nothing could be more false. After all, the essence of the transformation, Palamas argues, was precisely the revelation (θεοφάνια) to the apostles of Christ’s true nature, revealed in the form of divine light. And in fact, not Christ was changed, but the apostles who, thanks to grace-light, could contemplate the infinite God with their corporeal eyes. Here, we can see clear echoes of Barlaam’s objection that light is nothing

nature’;” Basil the Great, *Epistulae*, PG 32, 692; Palamas, *Obrona szczególowa (Apologia dieksodikotera)* 12, Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Marinum* oraz *Disputatio cym Pyrrho*.

43 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 2, 10, trans. N. Gendle, 97.

44 Palamas devotes extensive fragments of the second Triad to consideration of the symbolism of light, see paragraphs 11 to 24. See J. Meyendorff, *A study of Gregory Palamas*, 194–198; especially p. 196: “Throughout his works Palamas protested against a symbolical interpretation of the light on Tabor and of Christian experience, for such symbolism seemed to him both a negation of the Incantation and a rejection of the eschatological Kingdom.”

more than a symbol devoid of cognitive value, because it does not lead to revealed nature.⁴⁵ Palamas considers this claim to be blatantly inconsistent with the patristic tradition. He refers to the authority of Gregory the Theologian, who says that “it was as that light the divinity was manifested to the disciples on the Mountain,”⁴⁶ recalling the testimonies of Andrew of Crete, Macarius of Egypt and Pseudo-Dionysius.⁴⁷ The Bishop of Thessaloniki contradicts his adversaries, or – to be precise – their interpretation of the Areopagite’s thoughts, by revealing the source of unity between the experience of the hesychasts and the eschatological reality of light – that is, the eternal joy of the “eighth day” foretold. The light of Tabor is a “prelude” to the second coming of Christ and as such cannot be a created, temporary symbol. Gregory considers it absurd to say that Christ revealed himself in the glory of his light only for a short moment on Mount Tabor. The Son of God has energy – light in a way that is unchanging, eternal, identical today and in the age when he will come again:

Therefore Christ possesses this light immutably, or rather, He has always possessed it, and always will have it with Him. But if it always was, is and will be, then the light which glorified the Lord on the Mountain was not a hallucination, nor simply a symbol without subsistence (οὐκ ἦν ἄρα φάσμα τὸ φῶς, οὐδ’ αὐτὸ τοῦτο μόνον ἀνυπόστατον σύμβολον).⁴⁸

The Doctor of Hesychasm, however, does not reject the use of the term “symbol” in reference to the light of Tabor, but adapts its meaning to the orthodox Christian dimension. He follows Maximus, who often describes light as a symbol, but always as a fact inscribed in the history of salvation, i.e. in a strictly Christocentric context.⁴⁹ Gregory analyzes the problem of treating light as a symbol with great accuracy. According to Palamas, there are three kinds of symbols. Natural symbols (σύμβολον φυσικόν) come from the very essence of the object they symbolize (e.g. the dawn is a symbol of the rising sun, heat is a symbol of the nature of fire), and thus they are always associated with the symbolized

45 Palamas cites this view in: *Triades*, III, 1, 11.

46 Gregory the Theologian, *Homilia* 40, 6; PG 36, 365A; see Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 12, trans. N. Gendle, 73.

47 Here, Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1, 10 cites Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 4, 592BC; in *Triades*, III, 1, 16, cites Pseudo-Dionysius CH, VII, 2, 208C; See J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 259–273.

48 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 16, trans. N. Gendle, 77.

49 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1, 13; See J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 260.

object and dependent on it.⁵⁰ They are its attributes, so in this case the object conveys existence to its symbol, the symbol becomes a symbol through the community of nature. The second type are symbols of various natures, unnatural (ἄλλοτριον, οὐκ φυσικὸν σύμβολον), i.e. having an existence independent of the symbolized object. They are of a different nature and appear only at the moment of the act of symbolizing. Thus, they exist separately from the marked object, they last “before” and “after” the very moment of signification, in which their existence is momentary. The same is true of the examples provided by Maximus, who claims that Moses is a symbol of Providence and Elijah is the symbol of the Last Judgment.⁵¹ From this context it follows that for Maximus, the symbol is not a manifestation of something, but an independent being of a different nature, only temporarily connected with another being in the mind. It is the entity through which our mind makes a “mental leap” from created nature to divine nature. If the light of Tabor were to be included in this kind of symbol, it would have its own existence, and then one must assume the existence of a third nature in Christ, alongside the divine and human, or the existence of a fourth divine person. Gregory rejects such a conclusion as inconsistent with the dogma of the Trinity. The obvious conclusion is that light cannot be a symbol of divinity in this sense. The third kind, which are symbols that neither possess nor do not possess a nature of their own, are simply signs. It seems obvious that, according to Gregory Palamas, the light in Tabor belongs to the first of the above-mentioned categories:

So the man who has seen God by means not of an alien symbol but by a natural symbol, has truly seen Him in a spiritual way (οὕτως εἶδε τὸν Θεὸν ὅστις οὐκ ἄλλοτριῶν, ἀλλὰ φυσικῶν συμβόλων πνευματικῶς ἐώρακεν αὐτόν).⁵²

Gregory gives some momentous conditions under which light can be treated as a very special symbol of the divine, revealed nature. First of all, it must be a natural symbol, that is, one when a given object is a symbol of itself (a real symbol). This situation occurs precisely in the case of the divine nature, which remains implicit and at the same time manifests itself to people. It became possible at the moment of Christ’s incarnation, thanks to which, in the words of Maximus, He became his own symbol (σύμβολον ἑαυτοῦ).⁵³ Due to the interpenetration of the

50 Palamas, *Triades*, III, 1, 20.

51 *Ibid.*, III, 1, 13.

52 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 35, trans. N. Gendle, 90.

53 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguorum liber* 1165D, cited by Palamas in *Triads*, III, 1, 20, trans. N. Gendle, 79: “Also, the remark of Maximus, that ‘on account of His love of

divine nature and human nature of the Son of God, the apostles – who contemplated the light with their corporeal eyes – remained within the realm of mental cognition. At the same time, while light can be perceived as a symbol, the totality of the nature it symbolizes remains inaccessible. In the case of Christ, the divine nature of the Son of God, revealed through the light, gave his symbol the qualities of true being, non-creation and immutability. Light understood as divine, un-created energy is therefore a necessary factor of true knowledge, available directly through the incarnation of Christ. Man exposed to the action of energy-light leaves the realm of natural knowledge and obtains true knowledge of the divine essence.

men, He became His own symbol,' shows that this light is a natural symbol." Compare J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 271–272.

8. Palamas' Metaphysics of Light in Relation to the Hierarchical and Symbolic Structure of Pseudo-Dionysius' World

The hierarchical and symbolic structure within which Pseudo-Dionysius sees the possibility of getting to know God poses the greatest interpretative difficulty for most scholars.¹ It seems to be a Neoplatonic construction, one that cannot be

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- 1 In the opinion of some researchers, the Areopagite's thought was distorted and twisted by Palamas to a great extent, while others believe that its influence on the works of the Doctor Hesychasm was only on the linguistic level. This discussion was initiated by John Meyendorff with the critical publication in 1959 of Palamas' fundamental work *Défense des saints hésychastes* in the French-Greek version and the publication of extensive commentary contained in the book entitled *Introduction a l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*. According to Meyendorff, we must admit that in theology Pseudo-Dionysius managed to go beyond Neoplatonism, but it is difficult to say the same about his deliberations in the field of cosmology and ecclesiology, because the absence of Christological references makes the Areopagite's efforts to completely close the gap between the Gospel and Neoplatonism seem fruitless. Meyendorff believes that this is particularly evident in ecclesiology, where the continuity of the relationship between the initiator of enlightenment and the various levels of the hierarchy is broken. This is especially so when the role of each level in the hierarchy is to "isolate themselves from the original context and serve only as an artificial form to a previously conceived hierarchical system." The priestly state in such a system, Meyendorff argues, is not defined as an element of the internal structure of the Church-community, but as the personal state of a chosen, enlightened individual. Thus, it seems that the Christian concept of a Church-community with a bishop at the head, who is to impart grace and lead the faithful to God, is completely alien to the Dionysian perspective. Also, the role of the sacraments in this rigidly understood hierarchy is reduced to the transmission of knowledge – illumination from one person to another. Even the Eucharist, according to Meyendorff, loses its communal dimension in favor of its symbolic and moral meaning. The author of *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* argues that in Pseudo-Dionysian doctrine, hierarchies exist in two ways: dynamic and static. They function statically as an intermediary scale designed to be included in the Neoplatonic triad system. This static concept of hierarchy represents salvation and the sacraments in complete separation from the central mystery of Christianity – the Incarnation – through which the grace of Christ's sacrifice on the cross reaches all people, abolishing all hierarchies. This means that the idea of the First Priest descending to become human and uniting spiritually

adapted to the Christocentric vision of the world put forth by Maximus the Confessor and Palamas. It is therefore all the more puzzling that both theologians not only did not reject the Areopagite's authority, but repeatedly refer to it. If we study the works of the Bishop of Thessaloniki carefully, we will notice that indeed, as Alexander Golitzin wrote, the "problematization" of Pseudo-Dionysius should not exist at all, and the main issue is not the scholars who study his works, but the filter through which they read them.² It is enough to analyze them with the historical assumption that the Doctor of Hesychasm did not study the *Corpus* from the Neo-Platonist perspective, but placed it in the moral, gnoseological, epistemological and monastic tradition he knew. Certain convergences and a lack of contradiction emerge already at the moment when he defines the goal and task of the Dionysian hierarchy. There is no doubt that at the root of the structure of the Areopagite cosmos is the question of the soul's return to God, understood as knowing its source in the most perfect way, by attaining a unifying union, a unity. Pseudo-Dionysius' intention here is to express, through such a construction of the world, the simple Christian idea that everything was created with a view toward returning to its Creator.³ According to Pseudo-Dionysius, a special gift given in an immaterial and intellectual way is the hierarchy, which is to ensure that man's return is understood as salvation and deification:

The blessed Deity which of itself is God, is the source of all divinization. Out of its divine generosity it grants to the divinized the fact of this divinization. It has bestowed hierarchy as a gift to ensure the salvation and divinization of every being endowed with reason and intelligence (ἀγαθότητι θεία τὴν ἱεραρχίαν ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ καὶ θεώσει πάντων τῶν λογικῶν τε καὶ νοερῶν οὐσιῶν ἐδώρησατο).⁴

It seems extremely important that in the analyzed fragments, the author of *Divine Names* emphasizes the necessity of neither hierarchy, nor analogies, nor symbols, but rather the dynamics of transforming theophany, which adapts itself

with believers is incompatible with the idea of the static nature of the hierarchy. There is room in the dynamic interpretation of the Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy for a personal encounter with God and personal holiness, but in its static understanding, the role of the sacraments is limited to initiation through symbols, which in turn reduces the ecclesiological level to a magical rite.

- 2 A. Golitzin, "Dionysius the Areopagite in the Works of Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a 'Christological Corrective' and Related Matters," *St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Quarterly*, 46.2. (2002), 185.
- 3 See J. Meyendorff, *Christ...*, 107–111.
- 4 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, I, 4, 376B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 198.

to each individual. He insists on trusting the divine wisdom that knows exactly how much light of knowledge can be absorbed by creation, and for Pseudo-Dionysius, this aspect is the most important reason for the existence of a cognitive hierarchy.

For, if we may trust the superlative wisdom and truth of scripture (δεῖ τῇ πανσόφῳ καὶ ἀληθεστάτῃ θεολογίᾳ πείθεσθαι), the things of God are revealed to each mind in proportion to its capacities (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν ἐκάστου τῶν νόων ἀνακαλύπτεται τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἐποπτεύεται); and the divine goodness is such that, out of concern for our salvation, it deals out the immeasurable and infinite in limited measures (τῆς θεαρχικῆς ἀγαθότητος ἐν σωστικῇ δικαιοσύνῃ τῶν ἐν μέτρῳ τὴν ἀμετρίαν θεοπρεπῶς ὡς ἀχώρητον ἀποδιαστελλοῦσας).⁵

8.1 The Cognitive Dimension of Hierarchy and the Role of Symbol

Let us, therefore, consider the symbolism and epistemological hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius' doctrine from a Palamite perspective, which hinges on several assumptions: Through his love and goodness, God wants man to truly know him and participate in him. However, due to the limited cognitive powers, a creature can get to know its Creator only gradually, discovering His traces in the world, properly interpreting symbols, participating in the liturgy, self-improvement under the care and guidance of experienced teachers, saints, monks, and priests. Knowledge thus obtained only brings us closer to true knowledge, it comes about thanks to the divinizing grace that transforms the whole person. The condition for the possibility of this transformation is theandry – the divine-human nature of Christ permeated by the common energy of the Trinity, which is at the basis of every hierarchy. Let us take a closer look at each element of the Areopagite system as understood and introduced by the Doctor of Hesychasm.

In the first part of the *Triads*, as well as in extensive paragraphs of the second Triad devoted to the issues of acquiring knowledge, the origin and meaning of the so-called true knowledge, we find numerous references to the works *Divine Names* and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Let us recall that the issue of acquiring knowledge was the most serious point in Barlaam's deliberations on the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius. The Calabrian philosopher, describing the thought of the author of the *Corpus* in the spirit of nominalism rather than patristic antinomy, reached the following conclusions:

5 See *idem*, DN, I, 1, 588A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 49.

1. God is absolutely unknowable and remains completely transcendent to human cognitive faculties, both mental and sensual.
2. Man is unable to transcend the determinants of his created nature.
3. The only knowledge about God we can acquire results from knowledge of created beings; therefore, it is partial and incomplete.
4. We only know God in a way that is possible for us – that is, through created symbols and analogies arranged in a specific hierarchy.⁶

Barlaam argued that Pseudo-Dionysius drew these conclusions from Greek philosophy, and in *Mystical Theology* he even uses the same expressions used by the Pythagoreans, Pantaenetus, Brotinos, Philolaos, Charmidas, and Philoxenos and others.⁷ Consequently, the Calabrian believed that the vision of light by the Hesychasts had no epistemological value, because it was one of many created divine manifestations, so that knowledge remains in the circle of natural knowledge. In response, Palamas invokes the chapter in *Divine Names* which is entirely devoted to the issue of knowing God and acquiring knowledge.⁸ According to their author, if we consider how we humans get to know God, who is inaccessible to our mind or senses and is not being some universal among what is, we must agree that we do not derive knowledge about God directly from His nature. Such cognition is impossible because it completely transcends thought and all understanding.⁹ Getting to know God through natural forces is not only possible but necessary. The Areopagite warns that “one should not neglect knowledge of the divine mysteries (οὐ χρὴ τῆς ἐνδεχομένης τῶν θείων γνώσεως ἀμελεῖν).”¹⁰ We should do so in accordance with God’s sublime command, that we acquire knowledge to the best of our ability and then generously pass it on to others.¹¹

6 See Barlaam, *Traité inédits*, cited in J. Meyendorff, *Un mauvais théologien de l'unité au XI^e siècle, Melanges Lambert Beauduin*, Chevetogne (1955), 47–64.

7 See Barlaam the Calabrian, *Second Letter to Palamas, Barlaam Calabro. Epistole greche. I primordi episodici e dottrinari delle lotte esicaste*, ed. G. Schiro, Testi, 1 (Palermo 1954), 298–299; compare J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (NY 1973), 34.

8 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, VII, 3, 869 D-872 C.

9 Ibid., VII, 2, 869C, 17–18: πῶς ἡμεῖς θεὸν γινώσκομεν οὐδὲ νοητὸν οὐδὲ αἰσθητὸν οὐδὲ τι καθόλου τῶν ὄντων ὄντα; Ibid., 869C, 18-19: θεὸν γινώσκομεν οὐκ ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως; Ibid., 197, 19–20: εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ὁδῶ καὶ τάξει κατὰ δύναμιν ἄνιμεν.

10 Ibid., III, 3, 684B, 12–13.

11 Ibid., III, 3, 684C, 15: αὐτῆ τῶν θείων θεσμῶν ἢ ἀρίστη διάταξις; Ibid., 684C, 143, 1–2: πάντα, ὅσα ἡμῖν ἐφίεταθι καὶ δεδώρηται μαθηθῆναι, ... καὶ ἑτέροις ἀγαθοειδῶς μεταδίδοναι.

Gregory uses the antinomic reasoning of the author of the *Corpus* to strongly emphasize the un-knowability of God and the defective nature of knowledge acquired through the order of creation and experience. In the analyzed paragraph, in support of his thesis about the inadequacy of knowing God by analogy, Palamas cites a significant example of Greek philosophy previously used by Pseudo-Dionysius.¹² If natural, philosophical knowledge were sufficient, then the ancients who knew nature best should be saved and receive much greater favors than Christians. At the same time, such a cognitive model negates the sense of revelation and contradicts the Gospel, where it is written that we know the Father in the Spirit and through the words of the Son. Revelation enables the mind to bypass the trap of knowledge of the similar through the similar, for if we know God through the creatures known to us, we would never know God. The author of the *Triads* gives an example of a marital relationship. According to knowledge by analogy, one who has never experienced marriage will not be able to understand the relationship of the Church's marriage to God because he cannot relate to his own experience. Yet Paul, who was never married, describes the relationship of Christ with the community of believers as the mystery of marriage.¹³ On the one hand, if we take the analogy literally, such knowledge is imperfect and leads to imperfection. On the other hand, if we consider the analogy as a dynamic cognitive process in which a person is permeated with divine energies, then through it we can learn the truth about beings, leading to their creator. And this is how the Doctor of Hesychasm understands the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, because just a few paragraphs later, the Byzantine theologian cites the Areopagite as the one who instructed us about other knowledge, divine and spiritual, available after rejecting sensual beings (μετὰ τὴν ἀφαίρεσιν τῶν ὄντων), enabling a union with God that surpasses all intellectual cognition.¹⁴ This knowledge is primary to the knowledge of creatures, even constitutive knowledge for their proper knowledge. To confirm his arguments, Palamas refers to the words of Pseudo-Dionysius: 'from it (i.e. the schema of natural cognition through intermediaries), according to our strength, by way of and in accordance with order, we rise to that which is beyond all being.'¹⁵

12 Compare G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 67–69.

13 Ef, V, 32.

14 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 69: ἀνακαλύφας γνάσιν ἐτέραν, ὑπερφυᾶ καὶ θείαν καὶ πνευματικὴν, ἥτις μετὰ τὴν ἀφαίρεσιν τῶν ὄντων κατὰ τὴν ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔνωσιν ἡμῖν προσγίγνεται.

15 *Ibid.*, II, 3, 69; compare Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, VII, 3, 872 AB.

The Doctor of Hesychasm quotes another significant fragment from *Divine Names* (DN VII, 3) in which the Areopagite says that we know God through the order of creatures (i.e. hierarchy), because other knowledge (mental or sensory) of His essence is impossible. Palamas sees no contradiction here. He explains that what “the Divine Dionysius” had in mind was our natural knowledge, which must be based on an analogy because it is too weak to achieve true knowledge on its own. After all, in the words of the author of the *Corpus*, cognition by analogy is imperfect anyway. The best we can attain comes from the union experienced by the mind as it turns away from sensual things and from itself, and remains in a special state of ignorance which is essentially the highest kind of knowledge, the state of mind penetrating through divine light:

Denys the great Areopagite indeed asks how we know God “since He is neither intelligible nor sensible,” adding, in a tentative manner, “perhaps it is true to say we know Him not from His own nature but from the dispensation of created things.” But he then goes on to reveal to us that most divine knowledge according to the supernatural union with the superluminous light, which comes to pass in a manner beyond mind and knowledge.¹⁶

Although true knowledge has its source in supernatural and direct cognition, Palamas carefully explains and interprets the meaning of the Dionysian hierarchy and symbols. He concludes that we know divinity through all beings according to their arrangement in the hierarchy. The source of their order is precisely God's wisdom, and therefore the discovery of the divine hierarchy causes that we are included in the pre-established harmony of the world leading to its source.

The proper beginning for the presentation of the structure of the Areopagite's world seems to be the analysis of his works: *De Coelesti Hierarchia* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which is also the first systematic exhibition of liturgical rites in the Christian tradition.¹⁷ The treaties are structured in three parts, repeated in each chapter. In the first part we find a brief explanation of the chapter title,

16 G. Palamas, *Triads*, II, 3, trans. N. Gendle, 69; *Triades*, II, 3, 68: Τοῦ δὲ Ἀρεοπαγίτου μεγάλου Διονυσίου λέγοντος, πῶς ἡμεῖς γινώσκομεν Θεὸν οὔτε νοητὸν ὄντα, οὔτε αἰσθητὸν, καὶ ἐπιφέροντος διαπορευτικῶς μέντοι, μήποτε οὐδ' ἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, ὡς οὐκ ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς τῶν ὄντων διατάξεως γινώσκομεν αὐτὸν, εἴτα πρὸς τὸ ὑπερφαῆς φῶς ὑπερφυᾶ ἔνωσιν ὑπὲρ νοῦν καὶ γνώσιν τελομένην; See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, VII, 3, 872 AB.

17 See R. Roques, *L' Universe Dionysien*, 173–329; A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton 1989), 52–78; S. Roem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York-Oxford 1993), 91–132.

in the second a description of the rite, and in the third its symbolic interpretation. The first part of the third chapter of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (“What is the tradition of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and what is its purpose”) provides a specific context for the understanding and interpretation of liturgical symbols by the author of the *Corpus*. In turn, the third chapter of the *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, entitled “What a hierarchy is and what its benefit is” describes the conceptual structure of the created world. It is based on two principles, the first being hierarchical order, the second being the isomorphic relationship of the higher, noetic world with the world of created and sensual beings, since only such a cognitive structure, from effect to cause, can lead a creation to the Creator. Thanks to divine providence (love and Good), these created phenomena turn into symbols of the mental world and, under the influence of interpretation (i.e. the acquisition knowledge), raise the human mind in accordance with a hierarchical order (i.e. gradually, according to cognitive possibilities) to union with God. The factor that binds this dyadic structure (hierarchy-symbol) is divine enlightenment, which manifests itself in the material world as the interpretation of sensual symbols by hierarchs. In a spiritual sense, cognition is the basis of our salvation, because the analogy made by explaining symbols is the simultaneous action of divine powers, energies, and is itself a process of returning to God. In summary, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, hierarchy is a metaphysical category that describes the created human reality and its purpose. It is also a special gift of love to ensure salvation and deification for man, offered in an immaterial and intellectual way. Thus, created reality is a set of symbols that are arranged into three orders: the hierarchy of law, the church hierarchy, and the heavenly hierarchy. This hierarchical order corresponds to the division of the world into things, people and angels. The highest in the created order is the intelligible world, which includes the purest angelic theophanies or the heavenly hierarchy; being closest to the divine unity, it shows the least degree of distraction,¹⁸ and therefore pure, angelic intellects know the divine essence directly, without the need for mediation and symbols. That having been said, Palamas vehemently contradicts Barlaam, who defends his interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius’ thoughts, talking about the possibility of knowing God only through knowledge gained within hierarchies, through analogies and intermediaries. Such cognition, through its symbolic character, contradicts the reality of the vision of the divinizing light experienced by the hesychasts and negates the universal dimension of energy-grace that

18 Cited in A. Kijewska, *Dionizy Areopagita*, the entry in the internet version of *Encyklopedia KUL*. <http://ptta.pl/pef/pdf/d/dionizyareopagita.pdf>.

enables all believers to a return – i.e. to knowing God. Palamas tries to show that the goal of the Dionysian hierarchy will be knowledge leading to deification – a state which, as I wrote, is what enables a real view of things.¹⁹ In this spirit, Palamas interprets a characteristic passage from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, where Pseudo-Dionysius defines the purpose of the hierarchy as “inspired participation in the one-like perfection and in the one itself, as far as possible” (ἡ τῆς ἐνονειδοῦς τελειώσεως ἔνθεος μέθεξις).²⁰

In the third chapter of the second *Triad*,²¹ the Doctor of Hesychasm openly admits that the Areopagite was right, saying that the beginning of Abraham's knowledge about God was precisely the knowledge of the sacred hierarchy,²² but he also adds that it was a one-off act. Subsequent knowledge of divine things – i.e. divine revelations – took place without the need for mediation, as was the case in the lives of Job and Moses. According to Palamas, the theology of God's law was communicated through symbols to those who were enslaved by sensory knowledge. For those who are imperfect in cognition (τοιοῖς ἀτελέσι τὴν γνῶσιν), getting to know invisible divine matters must be preceded by acquiring knowledge about the world perceivable through the senses. On the other hand, deified people, such as Moses and Paul, no longer need the mediation of symbols to see things truly existent. They also lead us to this knowledge through the interpretation of images that we understand.²³ Meanwhile, Barlaam's interpretation of the fragment of the *De Coelesti Hierarchia* commented on by Palamas developed in a completely different direction.²⁴ Its purpose was to emphasize

19 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 73.

20 *Ibid.*, II, 3, 73; compare Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, I, 3, 376, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 198: “The common goal of every hierarchy consists of the continuous love of God and of things divine, a love which is sacredly worked out in an inspired and unique way, and, before this, the complete and unswerving avoidance of everything contrary to it. It consists of a knowledge of beings as they really are. It consists of both the seeing and the understanding of sacred truth. It consists of an inspired participation in the one-like perfection and in the one itself, as far as possible. It consists of a feast upon that sacred vision which nourishes the intellect and which divinizes everything rising up to it.”

21 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 70.

22 Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, IV, 3. According to the Scriptures, Abraham receives the Laws directly from God, but these words are only intended to emphasize the perfect symbolization of the divine order by these Laws. In fact, people learned about them through the angels.

23 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 70.

24 Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, IV, 1–4, 177C–181D.

the need for intermediaries – angels, at every level of knowledge. Even Christ, according to the Calabrian philosopher, did not communicate with the Father directly, but through divine mediators, because being in the flesh, he was subject to the hierarchy and could not get a direct vision of his Father. Likewise, the love of Christ was communicated to people through angelic revelations. He quotes the Areopagite's words here:

Jesus himself, the transcendent Cause of those beings which live beyond the world, came to take on human form without in any way changing his own essential nature. But I observe that never once did he abandon that human form which he had established and chosen, and he obediently submitted to the wishes of God the Father as arranged by the angels.²⁵

Pseudo-Dionysius categorically rejects the idea that God should appear to any of the saints without intermediaries, because no one can know his inaccessible nature. The visions described in Scripture are theophanies, or revelations of the formless God in a way that enables the human mind to know, but even these divine visions had to be interpreted by the saints through intermediaries, i.e., angelic intelligences. According to the Areopagite, the ability of angelic minds to know God infinitely exceeds the ability of human minds. That is why it is necessary to mediate messengers whose task is fashioned to suit the certain sacred vision to the perceptual abilities of man: "Yet it was the heavenly powers which initiated our venerable ancestors to these divine visions."²⁶

Barlaam, accusing the hesychasts of the heretical claim that they can contemplate (i.e. know and participate) the vision of divine light directly, refers to the arguments of Pseudo-Dionysius.²⁷ Palamas, accusing Barlaam of taking the words of Pseudo-Dionysius out of context, notes that the latter emphasized the primacy of natural cognition and cognition through symbols and intermediaries solely due to the weakness of the human mind. He did not mean knowing by the Spirit and by grace, which is the only one that has the value of directness. After all, man has not only senses and a mind, but most of all the ability to receive spiritual grace that frees him from the cognitive limitations of created nature. After all, Pseudo-Dionysius clearly speaks of the limitations of cognition flowing from the hierarchy, which though it contains divine paradigms – certain images that properly direct us – it also sets epistemological boundaries. So we know according to our abilities, but the most important thing is to go beyond created

25 Ibid., CH, IV, 4, 181C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 158.

26 Ibid., CH, IV, 3, 180C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 157.

27 See G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 59–62.

reality. God, as its cause, is revealed in everything, but at the same time infinitely transcends everything. For divinity speaks of itself in the revealed books that it is the cause, origin, existence and life of everything.²⁸ Using the Areopagite's words, God "is the Source of every source," "the cause of everything, that it is origin, being, and life," through which goodness brings all beings into existence and is kept in it.²⁹ It is none of the things that exist, and it cannot be known through any of them.

Thus, we are dealing here with a typical antinomy: God exists in all things and at the same time is completely unrelated to them; he can be known in part by acquiring knowledge about created beings, but at the same time the most perfect way to get there is ignorance, i.e. leaving the closed circle of natural cognition. The Doctor of Hesychasm still bases his conviction about the need for a cognitive modus, one which enables the achievement of true knowledge about God as such, on the interpretation of the above paragraph from the treatise *Divine Names*. The Bishop of Thessaloniki agrees with Pseudo-Dionysius that all cognition in the world of creatures must be gradual. He also believes that in the order of divine knowledge, this law ceases to apply, because God, as its creator, is above all law.³⁰ Therefore, knowing His true nature takes place in a completely different order, through a direct, unifying vision. He reminds us that He revealed himself directly to Moses, and then emphasizes that it was God himself who saved

- 28 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 3, 589B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem,50: "Source which has told us about itself in the holy words of scripture. We learn, for instance, that it is the cause of everything, that it is origin, being, and life;"11-12: ὡς αὐτὴ περὶ ἑαυτῆς ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς λόγοις παραδέδωκεν; 12-13: οἷον, ὅτι πάντων ἐστὶν αἰτία καὶ ἀρχὴ καὶ οὐσία καὶ ζωὴ.
- 29 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 3, 589B-C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem,50: "It is the Life of the living, the being of beings, it is the Source and the Cause of all life and of all being, for out of its goodness it commands all things to be and it keeps them going," 2-3: ἀρχὴς ἀπάσης ὑπερουσίως ὑπεράρχιος ἀρχη; 4: καὶ, ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν, ἡ τῶν ζώντων ζωὴ καὶ τῶν ὄντων οὐσία; (5): πάσης ζωῆς καὶ οὐσίας ἀρχὴ καὶ αἰτία; 5-6: διὰ τὴν αὐτῆς εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὰ ὄντα παρακτικὴν καὶ συνοχικὴν ἀγαθότητα.
- 30 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 29, author's translation: "He (God) is not only among the angels, but also in us, so that the vision of God may be revealed not through others and through and intermediary, but directly and through himself; that the ability to see God, bestowed on people, would not be passed on to them by angels. For the Lord of Lords is not under the laws of creatures" Οὕτω μὴ μόνον ἐνάγγελοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν, οὐχ ὅπως ἐμμέσως καὶ διέτέρων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄμεσοι καὶ αὐτοφανείς θεοπτεῖται, οὐ διὰ τῶν πρῶ των διαπορθμευτικῶς ἐπὶ τὰ δευτεραίουσα. Ὁ γὰρ Κύριος τῶν κυρίων νόμοις οὐχ ὑπόκειται κτίσεως.

us – not an angel and not a man, while He revealed the whole truth to people directly – through the Spirit.³¹ So we see that according to the Palamite interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, cognition through hierarchies and symbols is necessary, but only in the created world, and is merely the starting point for full participation in the truth. In order to confirm the redundancy of the hierarchy in the intelligible sphere, Palamas cites fragments of the *De Coelesti Hierarchia* concerning the knowledge of divinity by the cherubim's angelic minds. Standing at the highest level in the hierarchy, They get to know God without any symbols or intermediaries, they also most fully participate in the divine light and are perfectly similar to Him.³² Gregory explains that in the same way, worthy people get a vision of light, see Christ and know his nature as it really is. An example is the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, or the mystical vision of St. Paul. Palamas, in order to remain within the framework of orthodoxy, was forced to explain the possibility of such a vision, and thus face the Barlaam interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius' words. The Calabrian brings forth the Dionysian description of the vision of Isaiah, where it is said that the seraphim descended to cleanse the sins of the prophet,³³ and thereby enable his mind to see divine truth, in the measure available to man: "The Angel who shaped (διαπλάσσω) this vision before him, shared this vision with the theologian, as far as possible, with his own knowledge of the sacred mysteries"³⁴

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- 31 Ibid., *Triads*, III, 3, 5, trans. N. Gendle, 103: "Did He not deign to make His dwelling in man, to appear to him and speak to him without intermediary, so that man should be not only righteous, but sanctified and purified in advance in soul and body by keeping the divine commandments, and so be transformed into a vehicle worthy to receive the all-powerful Spirit?"
- 32 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 5; Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, VII, 2. We might accuse Palamas of taking the quote out of context because it is originally woven into a string of Dionysian arguments proving, on the one hand, the inviolability of the hierarchy, and on the other hand, that direct vision is available only to angelic minds due to the cognitive weakness of the human mind. In my opinion, the use of it here shows that Palamas read the *Corpus* in light of Christian dogmatics, and that this is how he interpreted it; see also Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, III, 2.
- 33 See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, XIII, 1, 300B-308B.
- 34 See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, XIII, 4, 305A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 180: "He was also introduced to the mystery of that divine and much honored hymnody, for the angel of his vision taught the theologian, as far as possible, whatever he knew himself of the sacred;" *ibid.*, 300C; See Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 60: Ο τὴν ὄρασιν διαπλάσας ἀγγελος εἰς τὸ μῆσαι τὰ θεῖα τὸν θεολόγον.

Therefore, he believes that prophetic visions are always secondary to the activities of the intellect, because “shaping” means using the imagination (τὸ φανταστικόν), and this comes from the sensual part of the soul. On the other hand, nothing contemplated by the mind, if it is to have a significant cognitive value, can be “shaped,” so only the vision of divinity given directly, without the mediation of angels, is true. And this cannot be experienced by any human being.³⁵ Barlaam interprets Pseudo-Dionysius in the Neoplatonic spirit, where the power of the imagination is only an imperfect link between the material and noetic worlds, and the union with God can only be symbolic or intellectual. Consequently, Palamas' adversary believed that the light of Tabor is a symbol of divinity, and that the vision it evoked, as derived from the imagination, was inferior to intellectual cognition (χείρων νοήσεως). The Doctor of Hesychasm, wishing to prove the erroneous line of reasoning of Barlaam as to the nature of the formation of a prophetic vision, quotes the words of Pseudo-Dionysius relating to angelic minds. The Areopagite writes that the hosts of divine intelligences closest to God shape their natures in his model and likeness.³⁶ Therefore, the term “to shape” (διαπλάσσω) cannot refer to the formation of sense images, as this would exclude the intellectual similarity of these “principles and powers” (αἰκυριότητές τε καὶ δυνάμεις) to the first principle:

Thus, if nothing that the mind contemplates by itself takes shape, and if everything that shapes is imaginary, sensual, and therefore definitely inferior to what we comprehend by the intellect, then principles and powers are not intelligible with respect to God, but conform to the flesh and image, and are inferior to the human intellect as being “fashioned.” And if this is the likeness they have with God, how could they be intellectual by nature?³⁷

The author of the *Triads* follows the path of the correspondence between the visions of angelic intelligences and human minds. Referring to the *De Coelesti*

35 See G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 60–61.

36 Ibid. II, 3, 60; compare Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, VIII, 1, 237C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 167: “Benevolently and in accordance with capacity, it receives—as does its subordinates—the semblance of that domination (πρὸς τὴν αὐτῆς κυρίαν ἐμφέριαν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἑαυτὴν τε καὶ τὰ μεθέαυτὴν ἀγαθοειδῶς διαπλάττουσαν).

37 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 60, author's translation; Εἰ τοίνυν μηδὲν ὄσα ὀνοῦς δι' ἑαυτοῦ θεᾶται διαπέλασται καὶ τὰ διαπλαττόμενα πάντα φανταστά ἐστιν ἢ καὶ αἰσθητὰ καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο πολλῶ χεῖρω τῶν νοουμένων ὑφ' ἡμῶν, οὐ νοητὴν λοιπὸν ἔχουσιν αἰκυριότητές τε καὶ δυνάμεις τὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἐμφέριαν, ἀλλὰ σωματοειδῆ καὶ φαντασιώδη καὶ ἀνθρωπίνης χείρονα νοήσεως, ὡς διαπεπλασμένην οὖσαν. Εἰ δὲ τὴν πρὸς Θεὸν ἐμφέριαν τοιαύτην ἔχουσι, πῶς ἂν εἶεν ἐκεῖνα νοεραὶ τὴν φύσιν.

Hierarchia,³⁸ he writes that since the former can shape themselves, and thus intelligently conform to the divine model and contemplate it, the vision available to prophets, “shaped” in a similar way, leads to true knowledge. Saints and prophets, by purifying their hearts and minds, become like angels (i.e. they reach the state of deification) and can participate in the knowledge of God that He makes available to them:

Purification, making themselves worthy of union like the angels, by striving for God they are united with the angels; therefore they are shaped and modeled by angels, as the latter are modeled and shaped by the higher heavenly hierarchies; they transform their mental insight in the pattern of the divine, and through this sacred transformation they seem to feel in themselves the knowledge of holy things, (knowledge) which comes from on high.³⁹

The conclusion of considerations about the mediation of angels in the process of knowing divine matters is Palamas’ assertion that an angel is the one who explains the vision, but does not communicate it. The grace of understanding the vision can be given through intermediaries, while theophany itself is direct, thus the Doctor of Hesychasm defends the value of the universality of divine revelations. He claims that the mind of every human being, thanks to the ability to transcend itself and, through victory over passions, acquires the form (and therefore properties) of angelic intelligence.⁴⁰ A characteristic sentence from the third chapter of the *Triads* reads: “The human mind also, and not only the angelic, transcends itself, and by victory over the passions acquires an angelic form.”⁴¹ Gregory confirms his interpretation of the thesis of Pseudo-Dionysius, according to which such a change of mind is possible, and quotes extensively from *Divine Names* calling those who experience the knowledge of divinity through light as people resembling God, since they all became spiritual and, modeled on the angels, are united with the light (Καὶ τοὺς θεοειδεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων πάντως γενομένουσ νόας, ἀγγελομιμήτως ἐνοῦσθαι τούτῳ τῷ φωτὶ).⁴² Certainly, the most important

38 *Ibid.*, II, 3, 61; Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, IV, 2, 180A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 156: “Their thinking processes imitate the divine. They look on the divine likeness with a transcendent eye. They model their intellects on him. Hence it is natural for them to enter into a more generous communion with the Deity, because they are forever marching towards the heights.”

39 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 61, author’s translation.

40 *Ibid.*, I, 3, 4.

41 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 4, trans. N. Gendle, 32.

42 Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 32; Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 5, 593A.

change to the words of the Areopagite, introduced by Palamas in the quoted passage, is the reference to the “deified man” (θεοειδεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων), and not – as it is in the case of the “Great Dionysius” – to the unspecified “divinized minds” (ταύταις οἱ θεοειδεῖς ἀγγελομιμήτως, ὡς ἐφικτὸν, ἐνούμενοι νόες).⁴³ This raises the question of what intellects the author of *Divine Names* speaks of: people who apply appropriate prayer practices, or the state that some will achieve “in the next age” – i.e. after death – or maybe he is thinking only of angelic intelligences. The Areopagite seems to offer some interpretive clue in the few lines preceding the passage quoted by Palamas. We read that through his love for people, God hid the incomprehensible knowledge about intelligible things in the form of symbols and liturgy, so that they could, to some extent, come closer to him. This sacred knowledge is passed on in secret, by initiated masters, to members of the hierarchy.⁴⁴ True knowledge of God directly, without the mediation of hierarchy, will be obtained when we are “indestructible” and “immortal,” when our mind is free from the desires and bonds of matter, engulfed and filled with the light of divine contemplation. Then our imitation of angelic intellects will be fully possible.⁴⁵ The “divine Dionysius” seems to think of the perfect state that we will attain after death, and the concept of knowing directly through practice in the flesh seems completely alien to him. According to Palamas, Pseudo-Dionysius, speaking of people who had become immersed in the light-vision of divinity, thought of people practicing silence of the mind and keeping the commandments during their lifetime, spiritual masters, holy old men practicing the

43 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 5, 593 B.

44 Ibid., I, 4, 592 B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 52: “This is the kind of divine enlightenment (theurgical lights) into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers, a tradition at one with scripture. We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils of that love toward humanity with which scripture and hierarchical traditions cover the truths of the mind with things derived from the realm of the senses. And so it is that the Transcendent is clothed in the terms of being, with shape and form on things which have neither, and numerous symbols are employed to convey the varied attributes of what is an imageless and supra-natural simplicity.”

45 See *ibid.*, I, 4, 593 B-C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 54: “Such things can neither be talked about nor grasped except by the angels who in some mysterious fashion have been deemed worthy. Since the union of divinized minds with the Light beyond all deity occurs in the cessation of all intelligent activity, the godlike unified minds who imitate these angels as far as possible praise it most appropriately through the denial of all beings.”

hesychic, whose monastic tradition dates back to the fourth century. They would be the “hierarchs,” the priests elected to guard the Christian rites and the transmission of knowledge, such as Hierotheus, who was deified. According to the Doctor of Hesychasm, the correct reading of the Areopagite’s thoughts is determined by the Dionysian vision of the role of the person of Christ in the process of acquiring true knowledge. According to the author of the *Corpus*, when the Savior was in the flesh, He was able to know the Father through the mediation of Angels, after the Resurrection He transmits the deifying energy directly to those worthy of it – i.e. those who are fully prepared by keeping the commandments and practice, those who have achieved the appropriate level of spiritual and bodily development, standing high in the hierarchy of true knowledge. At the same time, the “Great Dionysius” emphasizes that access to the Father of Light (πατὴρ τῶν φώτων) was obtained through Jesus, whom he calls the Father’s Light (τὸ πατρικὸν φῶς).⁴⁶ The Areopagite assumes that at the root of each order is the person of the Son of God who is the cause and perfect end of the hierarchy (τῆν πασῶν ἱεραρχιῶν ἀρχὴν τε καὶ τελείωσιν Ἰησοῦν ἐπικαλεσάμενος):⁴⁷

Indeed the Word of God teaches those of us who are its disciples that in this fashion—though more clearly and more intellectually—Jesus enlightens our blessed superiors, Jesus who is transcendent mind, utterly divine mind, who is the source and the being underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God (θεουργίας ἀρχή), who is the ultimate in divine power (ὀθειαρχικώτατος νοῦς καὶ ὑπερούσιος). He assimilates them, as much as they are able, to his own light.⁴⁸

The Areopagite goes on to say that with regard to the human hierarchy, the role of the Son of God is similar, except that His actions are appropriate to the nature of the human world. Christ initiates the process of deification with his power, the energy that comes to creatures unites and unifies the divided mental knowledge, reveals the natural aspirations implanted in man that lift him toward God. The first recipients of divine grace are the priests as the worthiest, whose task it is to impart holy and mysterious knowledge to the chosen.⁴⁹ Jesus is the Areopagite’s first Hierarch, the divine priest who transmits the light of

46 Idem, CH, 1, 120B-121A.

47 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, I, 2, 373B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 197: “For the present, therefore, I will only seek to describe our own hierarchy, to discuss its source and its being, and to do so having first called upon Jesus, the source and the perfection of every hierarchy.”

48 Ibid., EH, I, 1, 372A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 195.

49 EH, I, 1-2, 372A-373B.

transforming knowledge through intermediaries. The earthly hierarchy is therefore wholly subordinate to the heavenly hierarchy because of its origin, sovereignty, and the process by which it imparts knowledge. Given that Christ is at the head of the heavenly hierarchy, a central role in the church hierarchy is played by the "hierarchy" (priest, spirit guide) through whom divine acts (theurgy) are communicated to believers. He is the one who knows more than others, who participates in the most holy works, because thanks to the deifying energy of Jesus he has achieved the fullness of true knowledge:

Talk of "hierarchy" and one is referring to a holy and inspired man, someone who understands all sacred knowledge, someone in whom an entire hierarchy is completely perfected and known.⁵⁰

Although divinity is the source of deification, the process of knowledge – i.e., returning to God in the natural order – is possible only within a hierarchy. This sacred transformation is the goal of every hierarchy and action of the hierarchy, that is, of the person lifting believers to a higher reality through the interpretation of symbols. At the top of the established order, the priest is perfected and deified directly by God (his superior) and then communicates his knowledge below:

The first leaders of our hierarchy received their fill of the sacred gift from the transcendent Deity. Then divine goodness sent them to lead others to this same gift. Like gods, they had a burning and generous urge to secure uplifting and divinization for their subordinates. And so, using images derived from the senses they spoke of the transcendent. They passed on something united in a variegation and plurality. Of necessity they made human what was divine. They put material on what was immaterial (καὶ ἐν ἀνθρωπίνους τε τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἐν ἐνύλοις ἄλλα).⁵¹

The analyzed fragment indicates the central role of inspired priests in the process of ascending through natural cognition to divine knowledge. The Dionysian perspective of salvation, or deification, is dominated by the pursuit of spiritual, true knowledge, and only initiated fathers can help in this:

But the inspired hierarchs have transmitted these things not in the common part of the sacred act in undisguised conceptions, but in the sacred symbols. For not everyone is holy and, as scripture affirms, knowledge is not for everyone. (Ἔστι γὰρ οὐ πᾶς ἱερός οὐδὲ πάντων, ὡς τὰ λόγια φησιν, ἡ γνῶσις).⁵²

50 Ibid. EH, I, 3, 373C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 197: οὕτως ἱεραρχὴν ὁ λέγων δελοῖ τὸν ἔνθεόν τε καὶ θεῖον ἄνδρα τὸν πάσης ἱεράς γνῶσεως, ἐν ᾧ καὶ καθαρῶς ἡ κατ' αὐτὸν ἱεραρχία πᾶσα τελεῖται καὶ γινώσκειται.

51 Ibid., EH I, 5, 376D, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 199; see idem, EH, I, 2, 372D-373A.

52 EH I, 4, 376C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 199.

In the quoted passages, it is the exclusivity of hierarchy and knowledge that most distinguishes the thought of the Areopagite from Palamas, according to whom it was the Son of God who, through his incarnation and death, also saved unbelievers:

Yes, and now, after His first coming to earth, although not everyone heard the Gospel of Jesus, it was embraced by everyone [the grace of salvation], without their awareness changing them through the action of the revealed grace.⁵³

The Bishop of Thessaloniki's emphasis on the universal character of the Christian faith, understood as knowledge, is very important also in the context of the experience of hesychast monks. God's message is addressed not only to scholars, but above all to simple people and those who are like children – they have abandoned the philosophical concept of God. In the *Triads*, Palamas vividly states that by the action of grace (energy), the smallest are raised to the greatest, and the world's divine order is once again guarded in a way that inspires admiration and gives confidence.⁵⁴ However, this contradiction between the exclusive knowledge of Pseudo-Dionysius and the universal faith of Palamas disappears upon careful study of the Areopagite's considerations on the liturgy contained in the treatise *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.⁵⁵ First of all, the liturgy is available to all Christians, and thanks to universal participation in the first of the sacraments – baptism – each baptized person, by enlightening grace, takes the path to true knowledge. On the material, sensual level, union with the divine Good takes place thanks to the ascending power of light, understood as the source of knowledge. It is the goal and, at the same time, the beginning of the road. This moment of conversion, of first contact with “intellectual light,” is given to man in the first

53 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 4, author's translation: οὕτω καὶ νῦν τὴν ἐπὶ γῆς αὐτοῦ προτέραν παρουσίαν, εἰ καὶ μὴ πάντες ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ κοινῇ πάντες, τῷ περιόντι τῆς τοῦ παραγενομένου χάριτος ἀνεπιγνώστως μετασκευασθέντες.

54 *Ibid.*, II, 3, 30, author's translation: Μειζόνων δὲ κατὰ τοῦτο τῶν ἐλαττόνων τελουμένων διὰ τῆς χάριτος, πάλιν ἢ τῆς εὐκοσμίας τάξις ἀσφαλῶς ἅμα συντηρεῖται καὶ θαυμασίως.

55 This is precisely why the author's interest in “ascending knowledge” also applies to the interpretation of the Christian liturgy. For Pseudo-Dionysius, the cleansing activities to which Christians are subject are the sacraments properly interpreted by the hierarch so that they can discover their true meaning and transform their recipient. This seems to be the reason why the interpretation of the rites, a third of each chapter of the treatise, is the longest and most exhaustive.

of the sacraments, the sacrament of baptism, hence it derives the name of the sacrament, "enlightenment" (μυστήριον φωτίσματος):

It is the same with regard to that sacred sacrament of the divine birth. It first introduces the light and is the source of all divine illumination.⁵⁶

Pseudo-Dionysius describes the rite of baptism as the moment of "divine birth," the beginning of a journey up the hierarchy, that is, the realization of one's entelechy.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the Areopagite uses this moment to emphasize the hierarchy's main task, which is to impart knowledge to initiates – i.e. "holy light." The "gift of seeing," causing an internal transformation, enables an individual to return to the One. There is an obvious analogy between the light and the Good, which, by pouring out, creates everything and at the same time draws it towards itself, passes from its rest in unity toward multiplicity, and then unites scattered beings in itself. Commenting on the sacrament of baptism, Pseudo-Dionysius says:

It is true of course that all the hierarchic operations have this in common, to pass the light of God on to the initiates [εἰ γὰρ καὶ πᾶσι κοινὸν τοῖς ἱεραρχικοῖς τὸ φῶς τοῦ μεταδίδου τοῖς τελουμένοις], but nevertheless it was this one which first gave me the gift of sight. The light coming first from this led me toward the vision of the other sacred things.⁵⁸

People are dependent on their senses, condemned to perception in time and space. Therefore, divine knowledge must be hidden under the veil of sensual symbols, we should start our journey from them in order to gradually abandon symbols to reach intelligible truths.⁵⁹ According to Palamas, although Pseudo-Dionysius strongly emphasizes the need for symbols in the process of cognition, this is not Neoplatonism, but an explanation of the necessity of liturgical rites celebrated by a priest. Everything that is transcendent, divine and immaterial is communicated to us through symbols gradually interpreted by the hierarch. Pseudo-Dionysius explains it directly:

56 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, III, 1, 425A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 210. Οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὴν ἱεράν τῆς θεογενεσίας τελετὴν, ἐπειδὴ πρώτου φωτὸς μεταδίδωσι καὶ πασῶν ἐστὶν ἀρχὴ τῶν θείων φωταγωγῶν, ἐκ τοῦ τελουμένου τὴν ἀληθῆ του φωτίσματος ἐπωνυμίαν ὑμνοῦμεν.

57 See EH, II.

58 EH, III, 1, 425A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 210.

59 See EH, I, 5, 377A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 199: "as I have already stated, our own hierarchy is itself symbolical and adapted to what we are. In a divine fashion it needs perceptible things to lift us up into the domain of conceptions."

We see our human hierarchy, on the other hand, as our nature allows, pluralized in a great variety of perceptible symbols lifting us upward hierarchically until we are brought as far as we can be into the unity of divinization (ὕφ' ὧν ἱεραρχικῶς ἐπὶ τὴν ἐνοειδῆ θέωσιν ἐν συμμετρῖᾳ τῇ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἀναγόμεθα). . . . For us, on the other hand, it is by way of the perceptible images that we are uplifted as far as we can be to the contemplation of what is divine (ἐπὶ τὰς θείας ὡς δυνατὸν ἀναγόμεθα θεωρίας).⁶⁰

For Pseudo-Dionysius, as for Maximus the Confessor in *Mystagogia*, a rite that holds not only our fragmentary knowledge, but also crowns other sacraments hidden in the form of symbols, the rite of synaxis (σύναξις),⁶¹ In fact, it is the “sacrament of sacraments” (τελετῶν τελετή);⁶² compared to communion they are incomplete because they do not have the power of a unifying ascent to the Divine, and therefore are unable to ensure the ultimate participation in perfect knowledge. Since the task of each sacrament is to bring about a unifying participation in God, communion is at their summit, thanks to which we achieve the fullness of knowledge.⁶³ The Areopagite dedicates the third chapter of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* to the Eucharist, beginning it with a detailed description of the sacrament which, as the most holy one, unites and elevates all parts of the hierarchy.⁶⁴ Also at this stage, the heavenly hierarchy finds its clear representation in the church hierarchy, for sacred knowledge is protected from the profane by deacons, who make sure that the catechumens, the possessed and the penitents, leave the holy place after reading the words of Scripture.⁶⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius emphasizes the hierarchical order of the world, describing the tasks of the “chosen” who fulfill them according to their place.⁶⁶ The main role in celebrating communion belongs to the bishop who sits at the center of the altar, surrounded by priests and appointed deacons. He alone asks God for saving actions, and when gifts are given he proceeds to union with them, then divides them and encourages the faithful to follow him. Pseudo-Dionysius strongly emphasizes the proper order of participation in communion, first describing the bishop

60 EH I, 2, 373A-373B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 197.

61 EH, III, 1, 424C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 209.

62 EH, III, 1, 424C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 209.

63 See *ibid.*, III, 1, 425A.

64 See *Ibid.*, III, 1, 429A and 1, 424D-425A.

65 See *Ibid.*, III, 1, 425C.

66 *Ibid.*: τῶν λειτουργῶν. . . ἐστᾶσι παρὰ τὰς τοῦ ἱεροῦ πύλας, . . ., οἱ δὲ τῆς λειτουργικῆς διακοσμῆσεως ἔκκριτοι σὺν τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν.

who takes it whole, and only then divides it between priests and the faithful.⁶⁷ The hierarch is the only one who understands the sacred meaning of symbols, and although the faithful may gaze at them, only the bishop truly participates in them filled with divine energy – the Spirit.⁶⁸ The most important moment in the analyzed fragment is the statement that the priest performs his activities by acting on symbols: he shows the glorified secrets in the form of sacred symbols covering them (διὰ τῶν ἱερῶς προκειμένων συμβόλων).⁶⁹ This passage is the reason why some *Corpus* scholars believe that the Dionysian interpretation of the Eucharist represents so-called “symbolic sacramentalism” as opposed to “realistic” sacramentalism – that is, true Christian faith in transubstantiation. Lars Thunberg emphasizes that for the Areopagite, the content of the Eucharistic gift (i.e. transformation) has no significance, but rather a demonstrative quality of its distribution, i.e. the ability to divide from one to many, which then unites the divided human nature on the way to God.⁷⁰ He also emphasizes that the symbolism of the Eucharist consists in the multiplication of gifts,⁷¹ as the author of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* himself states:

Then he performs he most divine acts and lifts into view the things praised through the sacredly clothed symbols. The bread which had been covered and undivided is now uncovered and divided into many parts. Similarly, he shares the one cup with all, symbolically multiplying and distributing the One in symbolic fashion (καὶ τὸ ἐνιαῖον τοῦ ποτηρίου πᾶσι καταμερίσας συμβολικῶς τὴν ἐνότητα πληθύνει).⁷²

67 EH, III, 14, 444D – 445A, EH, III, 1, 424C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 223: Having himself partaken of and imparted the divine communion, the hierarch concludes the ceremony with a sacred thanks giving together with the entire sacred assembly. For it is right to [445A] partake before imparting; reception of the mysteries always comes before their mystical distribution. This is the universal order and the harmonious arrangement appropriate to the divine realities. The sacred leader first of all participates in the abundance of the holy gifts which God has commanded him to give to others and in this way he goes on to impart them to others.

68 EH, III, 2, 428A.

69 EH, III, 3, 444A; See also: EH, III, 2, 425D, p. 211: The hierarch speaks in praise of the sacred works of God, sets about the performance of the most divine acts, and lifts into view the things praised through the sacredly displayed symbols.

70 L. Thunberg, “*Symbol and Mystery in St. Maximus the Confessor*,” in *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980* (Fryburg Szwajcarski 1982), 295: “it is not the content of the Eucharistic gifts that is of main importance to him, but the *demonstrative quality* of their distribution.”

71 *Ibid.*, 294: “the symbolism of the communion lies in the fact that the gifts are multiplied.”

72 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, III, 12, 444A; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 221.

The frequency of similar statements has led many scholars to make the argument that for Pseudo-Dionysius, the Eucharistic communion (ἀρχισυμβόλου) has only symbolic meaning,⁷³ and that the sacraments are nothing more than a theurgy – “the theurgies are the consummation of the theologies” (καὶ ἔστι τῆς θεολογίας ἢ θεουργία συγκεφαλαίωσις), as the Areopagite put it.⁷⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius’ use of this overtly Neoplatonic term provided a basis to interpret his view of the sacraments as magical activities, and thus allowed scholars to classify Dionysian thought as a trend purely in line with Iamblichus.⁷⁵ This interpretation of the term “theurgical lights, works” is presented by Henri D. Saffrey, who understands the word “theurgy” in the spirit of Iamblichus – i.e. as the objective genetivus, addressing specific activities to God.⁷⁶ In this context, the presented theurgy places Pseudo-Dionysius at the heart not only of Neoplatonism, but of magic understood as acting on specific objects that those addressed to the supreme deity are able to automatically summon or bring closer.⁷⁷ The translators and commentators of the English edition of the *De Coelesti Hierarchia* present a completely opposite point of view, stressing that its author uses the term “theurgy” as a subjective genetivus, i.e. by attribution: “works, works of God.”⁷⁸ As professor Agnieszka Kijewska notes:

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- 73 R. Roques, *L'Universe Dionysien* (Paris 1954), 269: “Denys ne présente jamais formellement la communion eucharistique comme une participation au corps et au sang de Sauveur;” *ibid.*, 267: “réalité divine sous les symboles;” see J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York 1979), 258; *idem*, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 79–81.
- 74 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, III, 5, 432B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 214, note 82: “The divine works are the consummation of the divine words.”
- 75 Iamblichus devotes his treatise theurgy, theourgia, understood as the magical operations, *De mysteriis*, I, 2, 7: 2–6; Proclus says of theurgical power that it is “better than any human wisdom or knowledge,” in *Platonic Theology* I.25: in H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink’s edition (Paris, 1968), 113. Compare A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition (from Plato to Denys)*, 200.
- 76 H. D. Saffrey, “New Objective Links between the Ps. Dionysius and Proclus,” in D. O’Meara, ed., *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (Norfolk 1982), 11–12.
- 77 See A. Kijewska, *Dionizy Areopagita*, entry in the internet *Encyklopedia KUL*: “The symbolic theology of Dionysius was greatly influenced by the Neoplatonic theurgy, first promoted by Iamblichus and then by Proclus. Theurgy was a field of practical activity that attempted to use, for the invocation of the divine (or demonic), support with the power inherent in objects. This power was a natural force, the bond that held all the orders of the universe together.”
- 78 See *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*, trans. P. Rorem, intro. K. Froehlich, afterword J. Leclercq (Paulist Press 1987), chapter “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,” 52, note

Dionysius formulates the principles of Christian theurgy: the ascension of the soul to God is due to the effectiveness of the rites of the ecclesiastical and heavenly hierarchy; effectiveness does not come from the natural force connecting the different orders of reality, but from God's grace – i.e. divine energy. Symbolic theology is precisely a form of Christian theurgy.⁷⁹

Following Palamas' interpretation, the cited quotation "theurgies are the fulfillment of theology" can be understood as the realization of Old Testament promises in the Gospel, fulfilled through the works of the incarnate Logos. The Dionysian symbolism of the liturgy should also be interpreted in a similar vein. Since its effectiveness is based on God's grace, and not on acting within the framework of the natural order (as theurgy as understood by Iamblichus and Proclus), and reality is a world of symbols constituted as a result divine love, a world that must be read and interpreted, then – as Kijewska emphasizes – a distinguishing feature of symbols is not their material shape, but significant content.⁸⁰ It is this interpretation of the *Corpus* that fully corresponds to Palamas' vision. Let us recall that the Areopagite shows the world as a hierarchical sequence of symbolically understood sacraments, the purpose of which is to act in a way that leads to union with God. Thus, the sacraments have a purifying and uplifting meaning precisely because they are theurgy (θεουργία), or activities of God. Pseudo-Dionysius therefore understands the sacraments as mysteries, a necessary degree in the hierarchy that has a perfecting power. As one expert on this matter, Andrew Louth, writes: "they are vehicles of grace not because of what they are materially, but because of their use in a certain symbolic context."⁸¹

11: "Our author used the term 'theurgy' to mean 'work of God,' not as an objective genitive indicating a work addressed to God (as in Iamblichus, e.g., *de Mysteriis* I, 2, 7: 2–6) but as a subjective genitive meaning God's own work (EH 3 436C 41, 440B 27, 440C 29, 441 D 46, 445BC 22 and 28); idem, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, p. 214, note 82.

79 See A. Kijewska, *Dionizy Areopagita*, entry on the internet *Encyklopedia KUL*.

80 Ibid.

81 A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition (from Plato to Denys)*, 99: "Denys also makes use of the distinction between *theoria* (contemplation) and *theourgia* (theurgy). The ecclesiastical hierarchy fulfills its functions by 'intellectual contemplations and by diverse sensible symbols, and through these it is raised in a sacred manner to the divine' (EH VI, 501 C). These sensible symbols – the sacraments (in a broad sense) – are sometimes referred to by the word *theourgia* and its derivatives. The oil of confirmation is called *theourgikotatos* – literally, 'most theurgical.' The use of the word is interesting, for it indicates that Denys thinks of the sacraments as Christian theurgy– Christian magic, if you like – or, using less loaded words, a Christian use of

8.2 The Moral Aspect of the Dionysian Hierarchy as Interpreted by Gregory Palamas

At the end of the discussion of the Areopagite's hierarchical world, it is worth taking a closer look at its ethical aspect. According to Gregory, Pseudo-Dionysius clearly tells us about the purpose of the hierarchy, which is to abandon all evil and sin, actions and thoughts that may dissuade us from wandering upwards. Thus, a moral and truly Christian life leads to perfect knowledge. It is a truly sacred conduct, since it unites with the divine and is at the same time the best realization of human entelechy:

The common goal of every hierarchy consists of the continuous love of God and of things divine, a love which is sacredly worked out in an inspired and unique way, and, before this, the complete and unswerving avoidance of everything contrary to it.⁸²

A complete break with sin essentially means obeying God's commandments, that is the only way to gain a knowledge of beings as they really are (ἡ τῶν ὄντων ἢ ὄντα γνῶσις).⁸³ Palamas defines this expression not as knowledge about created beings, which is yet to lead us to unifying knowledge, but according to him it is a vision of truth, perfect communion, fulfillment of divine promise given in revelation. The heart can be enlightened by grace, deified in his sensual and intellectual cognition.⁸⁴ For Palamas, contrary to Barlaam's understanding, such an

material things to affect man's relationship with the divine. Here we see the 'Christian Proclus,' using Neo-Platonic language to express his understanding of the Christian sacraments. But, though he uses similar language, his meaning is basically different. For a Neo-Platonist, theurgy – magic – worked because of some occult sympathy between the material elements used and the constitution of the divine. Theurgy, to a Neo-Platonist, is natural – even if rather odd. The use of material elements in the sacraments, however, is a matter of institution, not of occult fitness: they are vehicles of grace not because of what they are materially, but because of their use in a certain symbolic context.”

82 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, I, 3, 376 A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 198: διὰ τοῦτο ἡ τῶν κακῶν ἀποφοίτησις γνῶσις ἔστι τῶν ὄντων ἢ ὄντα ἔστι, πρὸ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐργασίας οὐσα, τῆς ἐνθέου καὶ ἐνιαίης. See Palamas, *Triades* II, 3, 3.

83 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, I, 3, 376 A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 198.

84 G Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 74: Τοῦτο τοίνυν ἐστὶ φησι πάσῃ κοινὸν ἱεραρχία τὸ πέρασ, τὸ μισῆσαι τὰ ἀντικείμενα ταῖς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντολαῖς καὶ ἀγαπήσαι ταύτας καὶ τὸν δόντα Θεὸν καὶ διὰ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀγάπην ὑπὸ ταύταις ζῆν. Τοῦτο ἔστιν ἡ τῶν ὄντων ἢ ὄντα γνῶσις, τοῦτο ἡ τῆς πνευματικῆς ἐνοψίας ἐστίασις, ἀποκαλυπτομένης κατὰ τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν καὶ διὰ τῆς καθαρᾶς καρδίας νοερώς, μᾶλλον δὲ πνευματικῆς, ἐνδιδαιτώμενον αὐτῆ.

interpretation of the Pseudo-Dionysius hierarchy as an increasingly perfect life approaching God seems to be a matter of significant importance. He repeats the cited arguments again in the next paragraph,⁸⁵ this time quoting the Areopagite's statement in the introduction to the rite of the sacrament of baptism:

I have said in solemn fashion that our greatest likeness [ἡ πρὸς Θεὸν ἀφομοίωσις] to and union with God [ἡ πρὸς Θεὸν ἔνωσις] is the goal of our hierarchy. But divine scripture teaches us that we will only obtain this through the most loving observance of the august commandments and by the doing of sacred acts.⁸⁶

Palamas thus tries to emphasize not so much the epistemological dimension of the Dionysian hierarchy as its ethical dimension, which is a consequence of Christian revelation. Gregory wants to present the breaking of the hierarchy in such a way that it appears to be a universal process, i.e. available to every believer. The only if absolutely necessary condition is to keep the commandments and exercise virtue, in the spirit of love for God. The author of the *Triads* explains that the Areopagite, speaking of a "true knowledge of things," meant practicing virtue (τὴν ἐργασίαν τῶν ἀρετῶν), where the goal of the acquired knowledge is assimilation and union with God, called love. Love, in fact, unites all virtues and makes man abandon sin and turn to the path leading toward knowledge of God.⁸⁷ The Doctor of Hesychasm clearly emphasizes the moral character of the Dionysian hierarchy, understood by him as a gradual approach through self-improvement, which, at the same time, is a necessary factor in true Christian cognition. Such an interpretation of the message of the author of the *Corpus* seems fully justified. Palamas sees no need to apply the "Christian correction" expected by contemporary scholars of his thought from the Meyendorff school.

We see, therefore, that real knowledge for Gregory is the knowledge of divine matters, and its highest manifestation is the vision of divine light that enables God's participation in nature (and strictly speaking, its parts, i.e. energies). According to Palamas, this knowledge begins with faith in Christ and is therefore at its foundation the property of all believers. The goal of true faith, which grows

85 Ibid., II, 3, 74.

86 Ibid.; Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, II,1, 392 A; p. 200.

87 G. Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 74. Ὁρᾶς ποίαν λέγει γνώσιν τῶν ὄντων ἀληθῆ; Τὴν ἐργασίαν τῶν ἀρετῶν. Τί δὲ τὸ ταύτης τέλος; Ἡ πρὸς Θεὸν ἔνωσις τε ἀφομοίωσις. Πῶς δὲ ἐκεῖ ἀγάπην εἶπε ταύτην τὴν ἀφομοίωσιν; Ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐστὶ τῶν ἀρετῶν τὸ πλήρωμα καὶ αὐτὴ, τῇ εἰκόνι προσχρωσθεῖσα, τελείαν τὴν πρὸς Θεὸν ἀποσώζει ἐμφέπειαν. Διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἐνθέως καὶ ἐνιαίως καὶ ἱεῤῥᾶς ἐργασίας, τὴν τήρησιν τῶν θείων ἐντολῶν ἠνίξατο τὴν διὰ μόνην τὴν πρὸς Θεὸν καὶ τὰ θεῖα γινομένην διάθεσιν.

through keeping the commandments, is not to know God through creatures, but to gain direct vision and understanding.⁸⁸ The Doctor of Hesychasm notes that true knowledge of God should be that of the angelic minds that see Him without division, except for time, always existing in eternity.⁸⁹ Such knowledge cannot be attained through the world of creatures, but only by participation in the divine, unifying light, when human cognition becomes truthful, because only through participation in its cause can a created being see and understand its true essence. The knowledge about which Pseudo-Dionysius writes, which has its origin in the knowledge of beings, leads to God those who contemplate the entire diversity of the world, not with their senses or intellect, but thanks to the special gift of the mind permeated with divine energies and grace. True knowledge of things, i.e. as they are, is knowing them in God, understood as a vision available only to deified people, to pure-hearted Christians. Here we see a clear focus on practical and ethical learning, and although Pseudo-Dionysius cites the words of the Gospel⁹⁰ about Christ as truth and love available to believers, many of his statements raised serious doubts for Barlaam. It is about knowing through symbols, which, as mentioned above, is for Pseudo-Dionysius a consequence, on the one hand, of God's transcendence and, on the other, of the weakness of the human mind. Symbolism is strongly related to gradualist cognition, the initiators of which can only be initiated masters. Knowledge is passed on through symbols, and the initiated person, introduced into the circle of divine mysteries, is to assume a passive attitude: wait and submit to rituals. These issues are reflected in Palamas' deliberations, primarily because, in his opinion, they are commented incorrectly by Barlaam, and not because of their ambivalent overtone. The author of *Areopagitics* repeatedly emphasized one being "condemned" to analogy and symbol. Even if our mind is able to suspend all activity and surrender to the deifying energies, it remains the passive subject of the ascending hierarchy:

But as for now, what happens is this. We use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward toward the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one (Νῦν δὲ, ὡς ἡμῖν ἐφικτὸν, οἰκείος μὲν εἰς τὰ θεῖα συμβόλοις χρῶμεθα καὶ τούτων αὐθις ἐπὶ τὴν ἀπλήν καὶ ἡνωμένην τῶν νοητῶν ἀλήθειαν ἀναλόγως ἀνατεινόμεθα). We leave behind us all our own notions of

88 See *ibid.*, II, 3, 66.

89 *Ibid.*, II, 3, 72.

90 Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH*, II,1, 392 A; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 200: "He who loves me will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him (J 14,23)."

the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our minds and, to the extent [592D] that is proper, we approach the ray which transcends being (εις τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἀκτίνα κατὰ τὸ θεμιτὸν ἐπιβάλλομεν).⁹¹

This last Dionysian statement allows Palamas to write that the grace-filled man obtains a supernatural and unspeakable union with the divine being; he is directly filled with pure and immaterial light. He sees divinity, and thus participates directly in it, without the mediation of symbols found in Scripture and liturgy.⁹² Presented in this way the thought of the Doctor of Hesychasm does not seem to contradict the Dionysian vision of the world. Gregory's intention was an appropriate presentation of the Areopagite's idea by placing symbolism solely in the sphere of natural cognition. Palamas therefore finds in the Areopagite's thoughts the conviction that it is necessary to acquire knowledge through hierarchy and symbol due to the inadequacy of the human mind, which has to move within the circle of natural cognition. On the other hand, according to the author of the *Corpus*, the mind has the ability to transcend itself. The Doctor of Hesychasm extends this ability to the entire human person, which is the composition of body and soul. The Bishop of Thessaloniki presents Pseudo-Dionysian thought in the perspective of Maximus the Confessor's reflections on nature and its energies, humanity permeated with divine energies. He treats the theandry of the divine-human nature of Christ as the foundation for the possibility for a similar state in man. Thanks to this possibility, man is able to go beyond hierarchy and get to know God directly through the action of the energy that transforms him, the grace of the Spirit.

The author of the *Triads* extensively reflects on the meaning and role of hierarchy, the intricate structure of cognition through symbols and analogies, but as John Meyendorff put it, this is an epistemology of Christian reality, oscillating around the dogma of the Incarnation with its historical (temporal) condition ing.⁹³

91 Idem, DN, I, 4, 5, 592 C- D; trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 53.

92 G. Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 5: οὐχ ὡς αἰσθητῶν συμβόλων ἱερῶν θεωρὸς, οὐδ' ὡς ἱερογραφικῆς ποικιλίας ἐπιγνώμων, ἀλλ' ὡς τῷ καλλοποιῷ καὶ ἀρχικῷ καλλωπιζόμενος κάλλει καὶ τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ λαμπρυνόμενος λαμπρότητι. See Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, I, 5, 376B.

93 See J. Meyendorff, *Introduction*, 257–271.

9 Christ as the Foundation of Knowledge in the Thought of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas

Patristic considerations on the knowledge of God lead inevitably to the problem of deification. In his fundamental work on Palamas, G. Mantzaridis writes: “as Father Kiprian Kern succinctly put it, deification is the religious ideal of Orthodoxy.”¹ In Eastern thought, it is understood as the achievement of the most profound union with the Trinity, and thus it is identified with the most perfect way of knowing God. In the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, Deification is treated in a processual manner, since it constitutes a gradual return of creation to its source. Obviously, it is the goal of the life of man, created in the image of God, which was destroyed by original sin. The possibility of its reconstruction is both a gift and a task, and its implementation is guaranteed by the existence of a hypostatic union of Christ’s divine and human nature. The second hypostasis of the Trinity has spawned the most controversy and discussion, which is reflected in the number of conciliar dogmas that arose, defined as Christological. To better understand Gregory’s thought, we must take a closer look at the Fathers’ meditation on the person of Christ. The presence of this issue, as Vladimir Lossky notes, is a characteristic feature of all dogmatic controversies within Eastern Christianity. Let me quote a longer fragment of the statement of the author of the *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, who, however, in an extremely succinct and clear way, reflects the issues:

So the Church struggled against the gnostics in defense of this same idea of deification as the universal end: ‘God became man that men might become gods.’ She affirmed, against the Arians, the dogma of the consubstantial Trinity; for it is the Word, the Logos, who opens to us the way to union with the Godhead; and if the incarnate Word has not the same substance with the Father, if he be not truly God, our deification is impossible. The Church condemned the Nestorians that she might overthrow the middle wall of partition, whereby, in the person of the Christ himself, they would have separated God from man. She rose up against the Apollinarians and Monophysites to show that, since the fullness of true human nature has been assumed by the Word, it is our whole humanity that must enter into union with God. She warred with the Monothelites because, apart from the union of the two wills, divine and human, there could be no attaining

1 G. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 19.

to deification—'God created man by his will alone, but He cannot save him without the co-operation of the human will.' The Church emerged triumphant from the iconoclastic controversy, affirming the possibility of the expression through a material medium of the divine realities—symbol and pledge of our sanctification. The main preoccupation, the issue at stake, in the questions which successively arise respecting the Holy Spirit, grace and the Church herself—this last the dogmatic question of our own time—is always the possibility, the manner, or the means of our union with God. All the history of Christian dogma unfolds itself about this mystical centre, guarded by different weapons against its many and diverse assailants in the course of successive ages.²

In this concise formula, V. Lossky wrote a history of Christological disputes aimed at establishing the mutual relationship of divine and human nature in Christ. Byzantine theology from the fourth century to the fourteenth century has never been free from the question of Christology. During subsequent councils (from the Council of Ephesian in 431 to the Second Council of Nicaea in 787), which were to put an end to further controversies, emphasis was placed either on the humanity or the divinity of the incarnate Logos.³ The concept emphasizing the truth about Christ as God-Man, the foundation of the Christian doctrine of salvation, won the day; it achieves its effectiveness only when it presupposes the theandricism of the incarnation. Hence, if Christ were not truly man, he would not be able to suffer and die, and thus his sacrifice would not have a soteriological dimension. If he were not God, his death would belong to a purely natural order, thus losing its transforming and saving power for mankind.⁴ The theological basis of the dogma formulated in this way can be found in Maximus' reflections, legitimized by the Sixth Ecumenical Council, provoked by the heresy of Monothelitism. Maximus the Confessor developed the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers, proving that every nature has its inherent energy – will. Therefore, in Christ, next to the divine will at work, there was the human will, constituting the authentic humanity of the Logos.⁵ His human nature adapted to its divine

2 V. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 10–11.

3 See J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, particularly the chapter "Christology in Late Byzantium," 193–209.

4 See W. Hryniewicz, *Znaczenie patrystycznej idei przebóstwienia dla soteriologii chrześcijańskiej*, 23. Here W. Hryniewicz summarizes Athanasius' thoughts from the works *De Incarnatione* and *Contra arianos*, which were the basis for the development of the Christology of the Greek Fathers.

5 See John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa*, PG 94, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *Writings*, trans. F.H. Chase, Jr, New York, 1958, 296: "Since, then, Christ has two natures, we hold that He has also two natural wills and two natural energies

counterpart without being obscured or diminished.⁶ Thus, in Christ, the union of two natures is hypostatic, i.e. it does not divide into two independent beings, divine and human, but is closed in one hypostasis, the form of God incarnate. These decisions found their final shape in the formulations of the council of 843, thus called the “triumph of orthodoxy.” From then on, John of Damascus could write in his textbook of theology:

For Christ is one, and one is His Person, or hypostasis. Nevertheless, He has two natures: that of His divinity and that of His humanity. Consequently the glory which proceeds naturally from the divinity became common to both by reason of the identity of person, while the humble things proceeding from the flesh became common to both.⁷

The theology of the Greek Fathers expresses with extraordinary force the conviction that the incarnation of God was a condition for the deification of man.⁸ For many years in Western literature, the prevailing opinion was that this led to a downgrading of the role of Christ’s death and resurrection, facts that were in turn the core of the Latin Fathers’ thoughts. Such an attitude, which W. Hryniewicz calls “the theology of the incarnation,”⁹ would emphasize above all the redemptive initiative in the very act of incarnation, transforming all humanity in a sense “collectively,” automatically. Such an understanding of the Greek Fathers has no basis in numerous patristic studies, as Hryniewicz shows when he writes:

The deification of Christ’s humanity begins with the Incarnation, takes place throughout his earthly life, and reaches its peak in the mystery of the resurrection. Meanwhile, the

(operations).” See also Maximus the Confessor, *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, PG 91, 344, 345D–348A.

- 6 See John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. F.H.Chase, Jr, 317: “Moreover, by reason of its most unalloyed union with the Word, that is to say, the hypostatic union, the Lord’s flesh was enriches with the divine energies (operations) but no way suffered any impairment of its natural properties (attributes) ... Likewise, we say that the deification of the will was not by a transformation of his natural motion (activity), but by its becoming the will of God made man.”
- 7 *Ibid.*, trans. F.H.Chase, Jr, 310–311.
- 8 For more on the concept of deification in the thought of the Greek Fathers see M. Lot-Borodine, “La doctrine de la déification dans l’Église grecque jusqu’au XI^e siècle,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 105 (Paris 1932), 5–34; Lot-Borodine, 106 (Paris 1932), 525–574; Lot-Borodine, 107 (Paris 1933), 8–55; J. Gross, *La divinisation du chrétien d’après les Pères grecs* (Paris 1938).
- 9 W. Hryniewicz, “Znaczenie patrystycznej idei przeobótwienia dla soteriologii chrześcijańskiej,” *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* (1980), Vol. 27/2, pp. 19–34.

deification of all mankind begins only with the resurrection of Christ. In this context, the word “incarnation” means ... all of his saving work.¹⁰

The interpretation of the dogma of the Incarnation reveals the difference between Pseudo-Dionysius and orthodox thought. This difficulty was noticed by the first commentator of the Areopagite’s works, John of Scythopolis, and later by his successor, Maximus the Confessor. Let us recall that the works of Pseudo-Dionysius were quoted by Monophysites from the circle of Severus of Antioch in AD 533 as an argument confirming the correctness of the heretical doctrine about the exclusively divine nature of Christ. The fact that the *Areopagitics* arose in their milieu is also evidenced by the mention in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* of the sung Creed, as such a form was introduced to the Monophysites liturgy alone in AD 476 by Peter the Fuller.¹¹ Discussing the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, John of Scythopolis tried to defend them against the charges against the doctrine of the Monophysites. John’s effort was undertaken by Maximus the Confessor in *Scholia*,¹² a commentary on the Areopagite’s works, and it was thanks to him that the *Corpus* permanently entered the patristic canon.

The description and interpretation of the sacrament of communion contained in the book *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* says a great deal about the Areopagite’s views on the nature of Christ. The content of the anamnesis (ἀνάμνησις) – that is, memory of Christ’s saving work, the prayer that is part of the anaphora – requires a more detailed analysis.¹³ Traditionally, anamnesis should be highly Christocentric in nature and consist of three parts emphasizing the temporal nature of Redemption: recalling the history of Salvation (the currently existing past), the heavenly liturgy during which Christ intercedes for people to his Father (the currently existing present), and anticipating the coming The Son of God in the Last Judgment (the currently existing future – eschatology). The words of

10 Ibid., 22.

11 See A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007, 156–162.

12 John of Scythopolis, Maximus the Confessor, *Scholia*, PG 4, 527–576.

13 The primordial ancient anaphora is a series of thanksgiving prayers during the celebration of the Eucharist. With time (i.e. after the First Council of Nicaea) it underwent a number of transformations, different types of anaphora were developed depending on the region of origin: Alexandrian, Antiochian and East Syrian. See extensive source material on this topic in H. Paprocki, *Wieczera Mistyczna. Anafory eucharystyczne chrześcijańskiego Wschodu* (Warszawa 1988), 15–37.

anamnesis spoken by the priest are the words of Christ himself,¹⁴ which means that, as C. G. Jung put it, “at this moment the eternal character of the divine sacrifice is made evident: it is experienced at a particular time and a particular place, as if a window or door had been opened upon that which lies beyond space and time.”¹⁵ The anamnesis thus emphasizes the real presence of the history of salvation during the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist, which each time is the revelation of Christ here and now. In this way, the anamnesis excludes any symbolic meaning of this sacrament,¹⁶ because if, under the influence of the priest’s activity, there was merely a transformation of the *corpus imperfectum* into the *perfectum*, and not the presence of Christ, then the rite would be pure theurgy, or even magic.¹⁷ To some extent, the Areopagite’s commentary meets this postulate, because the description of the history of salvation and the two natures in the person of Christ sounds very similar to the text of Basil the Great, and especially to the prayer of John Chrysostom.¹⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius’ text clearly endorses the dogmatic foundations of the church when it describes the history of the fall and rise of sinful human nature towards God through the saving work of Christ. Man from the beginning (i.e. paradise) abandoned all gifts that God gave him (τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν, ἀρχῆθεν ἀπὸ τῶν θείων ἀγαθῶν ἀνοήτως ἐξολισθήσασαν).¹⁹ Due to the fall, mankind plunged into the world of division and destruction, and man, tempted by Satan, wanted his own death.²⁰ The Divine Word, motivated by love for people, incarnated itself in the created sinless nature, thus having two natures, without being divided into any way:

He shows how out of love for humanity Christ emerged from the hiddenness of his divinity to take on human shape, to be utterly incarnate among us while yet remaining unmixed. (ἀσιγχύτω καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐνανθρωπήσει φιλανθρώπως ἐξ ἡμῶν εἰδοποιούμενον).²¹

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- 14 See John Chrysostom: “And this word once uttered in any church, at any altar, makes perfect the sacrifice from that day to this, and till his Second Coming.” In *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung: Complete Digital Edition* (Princeton University Press 2014), Vol. 11: *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, part III, *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass*, trans. G. Adler, R. F. C. Hull, p. 214.
- 15 C. G. Jung, *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass*, 214.
- 16 See B. Botte, “Problèmes de l’anamnèse,” *Journal of Ecclesiastic History* 5 (1964), 16–24.
- 17 See C. G. Jung, *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass*, 215.
- 18 See Basil the Great, *Euchologion sive Rituale Graecorum*, ed. J. Goara, (Graz 1960), 23–24.
- 19 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, III, 11, 440C.
- 20 *Ibid.*, III, 11, 440C–441A.
- 21 *Ibid.*, III, 13, 444C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 222; *ibid.*, III, 11, 441A–441C; *Ibid.*, III, 12, 444A–B.

The Areopagite repeatedly emphasizes that the incarnate Christ has not changed in any way in his divine nature.²² Being clothed with the human figure, he still possesses the attributes of simplicity (ὁ ἀπλοῦς Ἰησοῦς), of immutability, although he descended on our world torn by multiplicity (Ἰησοῦν ... πρὸς τὸ μεριστὸν ἀναλλοιώτως ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν ἐνὸς προϊόντα).²³ However, the radicalism of these statements seems to lead Pseudo-Dionysius to the position taken by the Monophysites, especially since it is difficult to find a systematic treatment of Christian Christology in the *Corpus*. The author does not explain the issue of the unity of the person of Christ; we would search in vain in his works for terms used by orthodox authors to describe this antinomy: ἔνωσις φυσική, ἔνωσις κατὰ φύσιν. Nor do we find clear wording in the *Corpus* regarding the soul and body of Jesus; the terms ψυχή and σῶμα never applied to the incarnate Word. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, how his divine nature is connected with the matter of the body is a mystery revealed to our limited senses in the most secret of ways, and is incomprehensible even to angelic minds.²⁴ Christ transcends all being and knowledge as their cause and supremacy, he is described as the most divine and super-substantial intellect and principle²⁵ (ὑπερούσιας αἰτία, θεαρχικώτατος νοῦς), the source of all the workings of God, all sanctification, the ultimate in divine power (θεουργίας ἀρχή, τελείωσις, θεαρχικωτάτη δύναμις).²⁶ It should be noted, however, that in the *Areopagitics* there are no statements in opposition to formulas adopted by the Council of Chalcedon. It seems that Pseudo-Dionysius' intention was to defend the unity of the divine nature of Christ, which, however,

22 See *Ibid.*, III, 12, 444B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 222: "For because of his goodness and his love for humanity the simple, hidden oneness of Jesus, the most divine Word, has taken the route of incarnation for us and, without undergoing any change;" *Ibid.*, III, 11, 441A-441B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 220: "(Deity) took upon itself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin. It became one with us in our lowliness, losing nothing of its own real condition, suffering no change or loss."

23 *Ibid.*, III, 13, 444C; see R. Roques, *L'univers dionysien*, 311.

24 See Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 9, 648A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 65: "The most evident idea in theology, namely, the sacred incarnation of Jesus for our sakes, is something which cannot be enclosed in words nor grasped by any mind, not even by the leaders among the front ranks of the angels."

25 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH I, 1, 372A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 195: "Jesus who is transcendent mind, utterly divine mind."

26 *Ibid.*, I, 1, 372A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 195-196: "who is the source and the being underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God, who is the ultimate in divine power."

upset the proper balance between the statements about His divine-human nature, the basis and condition of human salvation. In one of the most characteristic statements made by “The Great Dionysius” concerning the mystery of the incarnation of the Word, we can easily see this imbalance in proportion. For although in the first paragraph he emphasizes that the Word appeared among us, suffered in his deeds and passion,²⁷ Dionysius, continuing this theme, definitely emphasizes Jesus’ supernatural qualities over His humanity:

In all this he remains what he is—supernatural, transcendent—and he has come to join us in what we are without himself undergoing change or confusion. His fullness was unaffected by that inexpressible emptying of self, and, most novel of all, amid the things of our nature he remained supernatural and amid the things of being he remained beyond being. From us he took what was of us and yet he surpassed us here too.²⁸

In this context, it seems obvious why the Areopagite’s anamnesis does not contain the last part of the eschatology. Therefore, Pseudo-Dionysius ignores the important consequences of the incarnation, among which the key role is played by the theme of the resurrection of the dead – that is, the salvation of both soul and body. Although, according to the work’s author, the incarnation of Christ initiates the return of fallen nature to God, it allows mankind to participate in His divinity and enables escape from the world of chaos and division,²⁹ though the Areopagite seems to perceive this return in terms of the cyclical movement of the mind described through the Neoplatonic triad: rest (μονή), occurrence (πρόοδος) and return (ἐπιστροφή), within the established order (διάκοσμος).³⁰ Although René Roques, an outstanding researcher of Pseudo-Dionysius’ achievements, is sure of his orthodoxy,³¹ it seems that for the Areopagite’s followers, his

27 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, II, 6, 664C.

28 *Ibid.*, 10, 648D-649A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 66.

29 See Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, III, 11, 441B, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 221: “It filled our shadowed and unshaped minds with a kindly, divine light and adorned them with a loveliness suitable to their divinized state. It saved our nature from almost complete wreckage and delivered the dwelling place of our soul from the most accursed passion and from destructive defilement.”

30 For a fundamental work on the Neoplatonic triad see S. E. Gersh, Κίνησις ἀκίνητος. *A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden 1973), 49–53; L.S. Gerson, “Ἐπιστοφή πρὸς ἑαυτόν. History and Meaning,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997): 21–27.

31 See R. Roques, *L’univers dionysien*, 318: “In conclusion, it can be said that, although Dionysian Christology is essentially orthodox, since it recognizes in Christ fully God and fully man, it seems to assimilate the concepts of Severus and his schools φύσις

Christology was a matter of debate. We can see it, for example, in the aforementioned commentary on the *Corpus*, the *Scholia* by John of Scythopolis, whose aim was to show that the Areopagite's works belong to the orthodox tradition rather than the Monophysist tradition.³² John's effort was undertaken by Maximus the Confessor in the *Scholia*, which was a commentary on the Areopagite's works, and it was thanks to him that the *Corpus* permanently entered the patristic canon. Gregory Palamas undoubtedly read Pseudo-Dionysius' writings through the prism of the Maximus' *Scholia*, *Mystagogia* (to name the most cited), which led J. Meyendorff to a very radical and controversial thesis that the effect was a "Christological correction of the *Corpus* that completely changed the structure of the Dionysian system."³³ Palamas' Christocentrism undoubtedly finds its direct foundation in the doctrine of Maximus the Confessor. Gregory's theological contemporaries were clearly aware of this fact, who treated the Palamite concept of energy announced during the synod of bishops in 1351 as an extension (ἀνάπτυξις) of the decrees of the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680 AD.³⁴ Referring to Maximus' Christology, Palamas differentiates three ways of being: essence (nature), hypostases and energies. Each of these modes of existence includes a corresponding relationship of union: union according to nature is possible only within the persons of the Trinity, which remain unattainable by creation. Palamas uses the Dionysian apophatics here, describing the divine nature as transcendent to any cognition. Hypostatic union, in turn, is only possible in the person of Christ and is understood as the union of Jesus' human nature with the divine nature of the Logos. This antinomian in essence is the basis for union through energies. The actualizing powers inherent in divine

and ὑπόστασις, in order to grant the consequently exceptional nature of φύσις and thus guarantee the unity of the Person of the Word. [The Christology of the Areopagite] does not say outright that it is in opposition to the definition of the Council of Chalcedon, and therefore Dionysius does not seem to deserve in any way the name of Monophysite."

32 See A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 29.

33 J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 189: "He himself made constant use of the Areopagite, applying, as St. Maximus had done, a Christocentric corrective to his thought ...: actually Palamas' Christological corrective completely changes the structure of Dionysius' thought."

34 The Sixth Ecumenical Council was provoked by the heresy of Monothelitism. It was doctrinally opposed by Maximus the Confessor, as a result of which his teaching about two natures and energies (wills) in Christ found dogmatic confirmation in conciliar decrees. See *Tomos Synodikos*, PG 151, 722B.

nature permeate created nature, transforming it. This third way of union, “union according to energy,” is the only way to know the true God for those who are worthy of Him.³⁵ In the entire tradition of the Eastern Church, the meaning of human life is precisely the realization of man’s return to God, the culmination of this transformation is deification – that is, the complete penetration of human nature with divine energies. For the doctor of Hesychasm, the assertion that two natures (divine and human) are not mixed in one person became the basic condition enabling man to meet the unknowable God. Gregory Palamas wrote most about his reflections on the transformation of created nature in the first book of the third part of the *Triads*. According to their author, the necessary factor for deification to occur is the hypostatic union in Christ.³⁶ Although the Logos took on the individual human nature in its incarnation, it nevertheless transformed the nature of all creation, uniting itself with it in its divine hypostasis. As a result, the apostles on Mount Tabor could see the divine energy – light penetrating the mortal body of Christ. For in him, as Palamas says, quoting the words of the Apostle Paul, “In Christ the fullness of divinity dwells bodily.”³⁷ Through the incarnate act, the logos became the first man in whom nature was completely deified: “It is thus that the firstfruit of our human constitution are deified. (Οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἡ ἀπαρχὴ τεθέωται τοῦ ἡμετέρου φτυράματος)”³⁸ This is why Palamas sees Christ as the only mediator, the mysterious place where *humanum* meets *divinum*. God became man in order that man might become god, according to the credo of Athanasius, which is so characteristic of Eastern theology.³⁹ These words have a very significant meaning for Gregory Palamas’ metaphysics of light. Thanks to them, the author of the *Triads* feels the right to say that through his divine nature, Christ acts as a locus of divine light – energy, and thus reveals to people the essence of the deity. In Palamas’ doctrine, the theophany of divine light through the person of Christ therefore has two aspects. First of all, as energy, it transforms man’s nature, making him able to participate in the nature of God (in this way it “leads” to nature, reveals it). At the same time, revealing the divine essence, it is the crowning achievement of the creature’s gradual approach

35 See J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 182–184.

36 See G. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 35–39.

37 Palamas, *Triades*, 3, 1, 33, ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς οἰκεῖ, 2 Col 19; *The Triads*, trans. N. Gendle, 88.

38 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 33, trans. N. Gendle, 88, (1 Cor 15: 20); *Triades*, III, 1, 33: Οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἡ ἀπαρχὴ τεθέωται τοῦ ἡμετέρου φτυράματος.

39 Athanasius *De Incarnatione*, PG 25, 54, 3, 192B, see V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 134.

to its Creator, a process based precisely on change. In the spirit of the patristic tradition, Palamas calls this process deification, and the condition for its existence and universal availability for every Christian is the dogma of the incarnation of Christ:

Through the revelation of Christ in the flesh, we have learned nothing, neither by the prophets nor by the angels, except what was previously recorded [in Scripture] in order to seek the grace of knowledge, which now, having manifested itself, need not manifest everything through intermediaries.⁴⁰

In the order of revelation, we can know in a true way how Christ came to dwell in the human body and died for every believer. In this way, he proved the possibility of a joint existence, in the body, of divine and human nature, which means our cognition, even with corporeal senses, can lead to the divine nature. This applies to all people, because God died for each one individually, and by deifying human nature in His body, He deified human nature as a whole. From that moment on, the experience of seeing divine light ceases to be an individual matter and becomes a general experience that goes beyond individual mysticism.

40 Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 29, author's translation: Πρὸ δὲ τῆς διὰ σαρκὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐπιφανείας, ἐν μὲν ἀγγέλοις οὐδεν τοιοῦτων ἐδιδάχθημεν, κὰν τοῖς προφήταις καταλλήλως, πλὴν τῶν τὴν μέλλουσαν χάριν προὔπογραφόnton, ἧς νῦν ἐπιφανείσης, οὐκ ἀνάγκη πάντα τελεῖσθαι διὰ μεσότητος.

10. The Areopagite's Thought in the Context of Palamite Anthropology

Both Neoplatonic and Christian traditions share the assertion that communion (σύναξις) with the deity is the supreme and necessary goal of human life realized in the process of return. Its culmination is divinization¹ – that is, the most perfect, cognizing union with the One. Pseudo-Dionysius captures this state in the form of a definition repeatedly used in later tradition: “divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God” (Ἡ δὲ θεώσις ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς Θεὸν, ὡς ἐφίκτον ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἕνωσις).²

The Areopagite shows this process within the framework of natural cognition by the hierarchy, which discovers symbols under the care of a spiritual guide and investigates through negation and apophatics towards the mystical cognition of One. Palamas emphasizes the direct path of union through the grace of the Spirit and transformation through the energy of Jesus. It would seem that we are dealing here with a common goal and even mutually exclusive ways of achieving it. Yet the Bishop of Thessaloniki, to defend the hesychasts against the accusations of Barlaam and Akindynos, did not hesitate to resort to Pseudo-Dionysius' authority. Thus, he pointed out that Dionysian thought remained for him in the living current of the patristic tradition, showing the conditions for the possibility of getting to know God by man, understood as psychosomatic unity.

Man is called to meet God, and this meeting is to take place inside the human soul. The Heraclitus exhortation to “know yourself” in the Christian context is a search for God in man, a process which culminates in internal change. The Greek Fathers saw the assurance that such a journey was possible in the original harmony between created being and the Creator, expressed through the image and likeness of God contained in man.³ In the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers, as well as in Maximus' synthesis and Palamas' writings, it is quite difficult

1 See V. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 3: “Unlike gnosticism, in which knowledge for its own sake constitutes the aim of the gnostic, Christian theology is always in the last resort a means: a unity of knowledge subserving an end which transcends all knowledge. This ultimate end is union with God or deification, the *θεώσις* of the Greek Fathers.”

2 Pseudo-Dionysius, EH, I, 3, 376A.

3 See V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York, 1974), chapter “The Theology of the Image,” 125–139; *ibid.*, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London 1957, 100–117.

to find a clear definition of what this image is. Generally speaking, they are ideas that participate in God's existence, energies that permeate our polluted nature. In his work *De hominis opificio* Gregory of Nyssa explains that man made in the image of God is human nature as a whole, and it is this nature that contains God's likeness: "God created man, in the image of God created He him. For the image is not in part of our nature, nor is the grace in any one of the things found in that nature, but this power extends equally to all the race."⁴

The image understood not as part of our nature, but as a complete person, is not limited to one aspect of human existence, e.g. soul or body, but covers the psycho-physical whole. Palamas, continuing the thought of Gregory and Maximus regarding the human-microcosm and the contact between the world of spirit and matter, would say straightforwardly: "The word Man, says St. Gregory Palamas, is not applied to either soul or body separately, but to both together, since together they have been created in the image of God. in the image of God."⁵ Gregory Palamas' anthropology is a continuation of the doctrine of Maximus the Confessor, one of the Greek Fathers who fully took up the problem of man facing God and the world.⁶ Both thinkers present creation as a psycho-physical unity, and the Doctor of Hesychasm made great efforts to emphasize the importance of the body, which is also subject to the act of deification. This process is guaranteed by the hypostatic union of the person of Christ:

The Word became flesh to honour the flesh, even this mortal flesh; therefore, the proud spirits should not consider themselves and should not be considered worthy of greater honours than man nor should they deify themselves on account of their incorporeality and their apparent immortality.⁷

Palamas devoted the second part of the first Triad to a vigorous defense of the relationship of body and soul, which he began by quoting the Apostle Paul's well-known words to the Corinthians: "What? Know ye not that your body is

4 Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* 16, PG 44, 184 AC, *On the Making of Man*, trans. H. A. Wilson, *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 5, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Buffalo, NY 1893, sections 16 and 17. [https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Grigorij_Nisskij/on-the-making-of-man].

5 Palamas, *Prosopopeiae*, PG 150, 1361C, in V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 103.

6 See Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguorum liber*, PG 91. For the most extensive study on the anthropology of Gregory Palamas, see G. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*.

7 Palamas, *Homilia XVI*, PG 151, 201D–204B; cited in J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology, Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 163.

the temple of the Holy Ghost?"⁸ The author of the *Triads* thus wanted to show that there is nothing wrong with the flesh, that the body itself is not evil (ἐν τῷ σώματι δὲ οὐκ᾽ κακόν, ἐπεὶ μηδὲ τὸ σῶμα πονηρόν).⁹ Gregory also notices that the object of the attack of the apostles and saints is not the body itself, but the evil inclinations that have entered it as a result of original sin. And even if Paul says "I am sold to sin,"¹⁰ it does not mean that the human body is by nature a slave to evil. Palamas concludes: "But he who is sold is not a slave by nature" (ὁ πεπραμένος δὲ οὐ φύσι δοῦλος).¹¹ In further deliberations, the Doctor of Hesychasm continues that it is not evil that the mind is in the body, but that man is guided by the desires of the body, not the law of the mind: "what is evil is the law which is in our members, which fights against the law of the mind."¹²

Palamas' reflections on the cause of the soul's evil tendencies bring to mind Dionysian reflections on the nature of evil.¹³ The Areopagite unequivocally admits that neither the body nor matter is the cause of evil, but rather inactivity in the pursuit of good, conscious rejection of it, falling into disbelief, purposelessness and internal chaos:

And there is no evil in our bodies, for ugliness and disease are a defect in form and a lack of due order.¹⁴ ... In short, evil, as I often, so often said, is weakness, impotence, a deficiency of knowledge, of ceaseless knowledge, of belief, of desire, and of activity of the Good.¹⁵

When considering the relationship between soul and body, Palamas emphasizes that the human soul is a very special being with various powers, and uses the body as an instrument that interacts naturally with it.¹⁶ The soul's most

8 1 Corinthians 6: 19.

9 See Palamas, *Triades*, I, 2, 1; *Triads*, trans. N. Gendle, 41: "there is nothing bad in the body, since the body is not evil in itself."

10 Romans 7: 14.

11 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 2, 1; *Triads*, trans. N. Gendle, 41–42: "I am sold to sin," he (the Apostle Paul) says. But he who is sold is not a slave by nature. And again: "I well know that what is good does not dwell in me, that is, in the flesh." (Rom. 7: 18).

12 *Ibid.*, I, 2, 1, trans. N. Gendle, 41–42.

13 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 19–34, particularly 728 CD.

14 *Ibid.*, DN IV, 27, 728D, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 92.

15 *Ibid.*, DN, IV, 35; 736A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 96.

16 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 2, 3: ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ ἐν ἑστί πολυδύναμον πρᾶγμα ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς ψυχή, χρῆται δ' ὡς ὄργανῳ τῷ ζῆν κατ' αὐτήν πεφυκότι σώματι; *Triads* trans. N. Gendle, 42: "Our soul is a unique reality, yet possessing multiple powers, it uses as an instrument the body, which by nature co-exists with it."

important powers, which he calls the mind (νοῦς), uses a specific organ in the body that is both intelligible and material in nature. It is the heart and, as Palamas explains: "Thus our heart is the place of the rational faculty, the first rational organ of the body."¹⁷ It is the center where bad thoughts can arise, and at the same time it is the starting point for grace to transform both body and mind. Palamas also describes the heart as "body most interior in the body" (μάλιστα τῷ ἐν τῷ σώματι ἐνδοτάτῳ σώματι),¹⁸ which means that the deepest curling of the mind into itself ends in the heart. At the same time, he believes that the spirit is prone to error, not by dwelling in the earthly shell, but rather by thoughts that begin in the heart. This is why, according to Gregory, people who indulge in sensual pleasures and desires flowing from the heart lose the soul's true desire and become completely "body."¹⁹ Considering the relationship between the body and the sensual power of the soul, the Doctor of Hesychasm notices that there are many natural activities common to both elements, and which at the same time do not attach the soul to the body in a harmful way. These spiritual activities (αἱ πνευματικαί), Palamas believes, affect the body and give it a qualitatively new dimension: "Such spiritual activities, as we said above, do not enter the mind from the body, but descend into the body from the mind, in order to transform the body into something better and to deify it by these actions and passions."²⁰

While treating the soul and body as a natural composite, Palamas notices that both elements should have their guardian, one who would protect them from evil passions. He assigns this role to the mind, and calls for constant control and vigilance. People whose mind and soul, thanks to this control, are directed toward God can also count on a change of body.²¹ According to Gregory, such a perception of the relationship between spirit and body is justified precisely through the hypostatic union in Christ. The monk from Mount Athos notes: "For just as the divinity of the Word of God incarnate is common to soul and body, since He has

17 Palamas, *Triades* I, 2, 3, *Triads*, trans. N. Gendle, 43.

18 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 2, 3, *Triads*, trans. N. Gendle, 43.

19 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 9.

20 *Ibid.*, II, 2, 12, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ σῶμα διαβαίνουσαι καὶ τοῦτο διὰ τῶν ἐνεργημάτων τε καὶ παθημάτων τούτων ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον μετασκευάζουσαι καὶ θεουργοῦσαι; *Triads*, trans. N. Gendle, 51.

21 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 2, 9; *Triads*, trans. N. Gendle, 51: "the spiritual joy which comes from the mind into the body is in no way corrupted by the communion with the body, but transforms the body and makes it spiritual."

deified the flesh through the mediation of the soul to make it also accomplish the works of God,”²²

For Palamas, therefore, the incarnation of the Logos is a condition for the possibility of a similar transformation in man. Here the author of the *Triads* draws a parallel to the phenomenon that takes place in the soul of a “spiritual man” (ὁ πνευματικός ἄνθρωπος), in which the grace of the second person of the Trinity changes the body through the soul and allows him to experience divine things.²³ Thanks to this transformation, the body loses its attachment to material matters and passions proper to it, turns to its center, i.e. the heart, and rejects all contact with evil.²⁴ Gregory explains that the new being, a spiritual man, is nothing other than human nature permeated with the energies of the Spirit: “A spiritual man contains three elements: the grace of the Holy Spirit, a rational soul and an earthly body”²⁵

Man's gradual discovery in his nature, seen as psychosomatic unity, of the image of God obliterated by sin, that is, the gradual realization of his likeness, is for Palamas the path for unification leading to total deification. Given this aspect of transformation, absent in Pseudo-Dionysius, Palamas supplements the practical part with the tradition of the monks of Athos. In the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, we find a description of deification as an intellectual journey into oneself, a process of gradual cleansing of the mind, but also moral improvement, and keeping the commandments. For Palamas, γνῶθι σεαυτόν would mean an odyssey to return to the source, in which the reward is the transformation of the whole, spiritual and physical nature of man.²⁶ The author of the *Areopagitics* places the successive stages leading to deification on an intellectual plane, identifying inner improvement and enlightenment with the process of acquiring

22 Palamas, *Triades*, II, 2, 12: Καθάπερ γὰρ κοινή ἐστι σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς ἢ τοῦ ἐνανθρωπήσαντος Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ θεότης, διὰ μέσης ψυχῆς θεώσασα τὴν σάρκα ὡς καὶ Θεοῦ ἔργα ἐκτελεῖσται δι' αὐτῆς.

23 Palamas, *Triades*, II, 2, 12: διὰ μέσης ψυχῆς πρὸς τὸ σῶμα διαπορθμεομένη, πάσχειν καὶ αὐτῷ τὰ θεῖα δίδωσι.

24 Palamas uses the phrase “returns to itself” (πρὸς ἑαυτὸ τὸ σῶμα ἐπιστρέφω), which, as we have seen, is an entirely new understanding of this Neoplatonic term. See Palamas, *Triades*, II, 2, 12.

25 *Ibid.*, I, 3, 43: Ὁ πνευματικός ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τριῶν ὑφέστηκε, χάριτος Πνεύματος ἐπουρανίου, ψυχῆς λογικῆς καὶ γήινου σώματος.

26 See J. Meyendorff, “Le thème du ‘retour en soi’ dans la doctrine palamite du XIV^e siècle,” *Byzantine Hesychasm: historical, theological and social problem* (London 1974), 188–206.

knowledge – i.e. gradual transformation by the divinizing light. He adequately describes the degrees of refinement of the mind associated with this process: purification, enlightenment, and unification perfection. And so, the first step is to turn inside (γνώθι σεαυτόν) to get to know your rank in the hierarchy – i.e. the level of knowledge.²⁷ Purification continues through the study of Scripture (God's epiphany), prayer, rapture, and loving ecstasy.²⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius understood the latter as a state of mind that enters mystical darkness (ἀγνοσία) which is the vestibule of true knowledge of God. It is introduced by apophatic theology, which is the most perfect way to detach the mind from the world of senses. This divine ignorance is the moment of stopping all intellectual activity, resulting in the attainment of a mystical contemplation. This is enlightenment, immersion in “rays of shining darkness.” In this state, the mind can grasp an absolutely simple reality that transcends the order of being and be perfectly united with it (θέωσις). When studying the Areopagite's thought in the contexts in which it is quoted in the *Triads*, it is difficult to resist the impression that Palamas consciously wishes to weaken its intellectual tone. It should be remembered, however, that in this work we find the final result of the Doctor of Hesychasm's earlier reflections, which is the synthesis of the broadly understood monastic tradition. This means that Palamas, in defense of hesychast monks, integrates elements of various spiritual practices described and used by his predecessors. The second of the *Triads* is, therefore, a peculiar lecture on the ways of knowing God, in which the methods of exercising the body and mind exist side by side in a harmonious way. We

27 Sin disrupts the hierarchy, God's light is obscured by evil and does not reach the soul. The greatest evil is pride, in that people who do not deserve it are placed at a higher level of the hierarchy.

28 Many researchers believe that this concept shows Proclus' influence through the constant emphasis by Pseudo-Dionysius of the passive nature of the subject experiencing particular changes. Mystical ascension to God should be initiated by those higher in the hierarchy, the purification of the mind is, as it were, done automatically through the influence of the sacraments and their symbolic interpretation, analogy, and finally the highest stage is reached, when the cognitive field is expanded thanks to mystical enlightenment. In our opinion, the author of the *Corpus* uses the passive future tense clearly and frequently (for example: The man who is indeed divine, ... who, to the greatest possible extent, has been lifted up into conformity with God through complete and perfecting divinization, such a man ... will have arrived at the highest possible measure of divinization, EH, I, 3, 433C, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 216) in order to exclude the heresy that man can achieve deification by his own efforts and become a god (views preached by Pseudo-Dionysius' fourth-century contemporary Pelagius).

find here a clear reference to the spiritual masters of the Eastern Church from the fourth century, Macarius of Egypt, Nicephorus the Hesychast and Evagrius Ponticus – i.e. figures much earlier than the *Areopagitics* we have studied. Let us recall that the conclusion of Palamite anthropology is the thought that man can experience divine light in his transformed body, which is achieved by discovering in the soul the divine likeness obscured by sin. This path consists of three stages: repentance and sorrow for sins; prayer and good deeds; and finally, changes in the state of mind. When describing the next stages, Palamas finds their grounding in widely understood tradition, and also extensively reaches back to the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. Especially noteworthy is the Palamite reference to the themes of prayer, obeying the commandments, and good works, which we find in the book *Divine Names*. Palamas describes this last stage in more detail in the dialogue *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*²⁹ and in the second part of the *Triads*, drawing from the thoughts of Pseudo-Dionysius. Elements of the Evagrian doctrine on “prayer of the mind,”³⁰ which in Macarius’ conception becomes “prayer of the heart,” we find in the author of *Areopagitics* in the description of the stages of mind transformation necessary to get to know God. It consists of three successive stages, when the mind turns to inner feelings, then turns to itself, and finally, by rejecting its specific activity in favor of “pure prayer,” it elevates itself to God. According to Palamas, Pseudo-Dionysius’ treatise *Divine Names* is primarily a description of that way of self-knowledge of the mind, self-focus and apophatic rejection of all discourse, culminating in mystical theology – that is, true knowledge, contemplation of the inexpressible essence of God.

In the Dionysian description of the process of “returning to itself,” one can notice verbally the Neoplatonic formula of the soul as the one that has the ability to move by itself, and thus it can implement the process of self-knowledge. These observations appear in the form of very precise theorems in Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*. The famous scholar begins his work by studying the very concept of “returning to itself,” ἐπιστροφή πρὸς ἑαυτόν. In his view, everything that has the power to turn to itself is disembodied³¹ and has a substance that appears

29 *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, *Sygggrammata*, IV, Thessaloniki 1984. The term *προσευχή* means alertness and inner focus.

30 This is a state when the mind, free from all activity stimulated by perceptions and passions, turns to itself. See Evagrius, *De oratione*, PG 79, 84; Macarius of Egypt, *Homilia I, XI, XV, Die 50 geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*, ed. H. Dorries (Leipzig 1961).

31 Proclus, *Elementa theologiae*, 15; ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford 1963), pp. 16, 30: Πάν το πρὸς ἑαυτὸ ἐπιστρεπτικὸν ἀσώματόν ἐστιν.

separately from each body.³² At the same time, he believes that every being that has the power to know itself also has the power to “turn to” itself.³³ Unlike life forms immersed in matter, the soul can know itself because its substance contains both life and knowledge (καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῇ οὐσίᾳ ἡ ζῶη καὶ γνῶσις).³⁴ The soul is an intermediate level in the hierarchy of all beings, because as a cognition with a self-cognitive power (γνῶσις ἑαυτῆς γνωστική) it appears separately from all body, but it is subordinate (καταδεεστέρα) to that which is indivisible.³⁵ Thanks to this ontic status, the soul can learn about different categories of reality, but naturally turns to the One because every existence which has a principle at its root turns (ἐπιστρέφεται) through its nature towards what it comes from.³⁶ The works of Proclus, describing the self-cognizing movement of the soul, exclude any form of cognition, other than the intellectual, and emphasize the need to get rid of all bodily aspects. In *Platonic Theology*, Proclus points out that what is divine is knowable only through the substance of the soul and through it itself. Looking only at oneself (ἑαυτὴν μόνον καθορᾶν), and then plunging into the depths of oneself (χωροῦσαν εἰς τὸ ἔντος αὐτῆς) as if inside a sanctuary, by constantly knowing oneself (τῇ ἑαυτῆς γνώσει), the soul finds the mind itself (Νοῦς). Then it can contemplate the divine reality, the henads of beings, and finally make contact with what is inexpressible, which is beyond all being (καὶ συνάπτεσθαι τῷ ἀρρέτῳ καὶ πάντων ἐπεκεινα τῶν ὄντων).³⁷ The similarity Palamas drew in the second part of the *Triads* between the considerations of Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius and practical advice for adepts who want to practice Hesychasm³⁸ is striking. Here we find descriptions of the stages of self-discovery and the return of the soul, rich in direct quotes from *Divine Names*. It is worth noting that by placing literal borrowings in a new context (as they are combined with the concept of heart prayer and the practice of breathing in the body), the

32 Ibid., *Elementa theologiae*, 16, pp. 18, 7: Πᾶν τὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ ἐπιστρεπτικὸν χωριστῆν οὐσίαν ἔχει παντὸς σώματος.

33 Ibid., *Elementa theologiae*, 83, pp. 76, 29: Πᾶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ γνωστικὸν πρὸς ἑαυτὸ πάντῃ ἐπιστρεπτικὸν ἐστίν.

34 Ibid., *Elementa theologiae*, 197, pp. 172, 15.

35 Ibid., *Elementa theologiae*, 190, pp. 166, 11.

36 Ibid., *Elementa theologiae*, 31, pp. 34, 28.

37 Proclus, *Theologia Platonis*, I, 3; ed. H. D. Saffrey, L. G. Westerink (Paris 1968), pp. 15, 21; see also Plotinus, *Enneady*, VI, 9, 11, 18. One can also note the similarity between Proclus' vision and the description of Augustine's vision in the gardens of Ostia, in *Confessions*, IX, 10, 23–25.

38 See Palamas, *Triades*, I, 2–9.

Areopagite's thought acquires a different dimension. For Palamas returning to itself is, in essence, a return to the physical and spiritual reality proper to man. The Doctor of Hesychasm, considering how the mind can return to itself, uses the concept of the soul as one that, having the ability to move by itself, can realize the process of self-knowledge. However, he complements this thought by introducing a distinction between nature and its energy, thanks to which it can tell about the motionless essence of the mind and its dynamic operation.³⁹ As a result, the mind, unlike the sense of sight, not only sees things, but also perceives itself. Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Palamas calls this first and simplest activity "along a straight line" as opposed to the "circular" which is most characteristic to him.⁴⁰ This action prevents the mind from being distracted and returns to God:

The mind operates in part according to its function of external observation: This is what the great Denys calls the "movement of the mind along a straight line;" and on the other hand, it returns upon itself, when it beholds itself; this movement the same Father calls "circular." This last is the most excellent and most appropriate activity of the mind, by which it comes to transcend itself and be united to God.⁴¹

The author of *Areopagitics*, describing the mind's movement, wishes to reflect its most subtle state, an absolute likeness to formless angelic minds capable of contemplating the divine reality. The purpose of this state is to detach itself from the body and its functions as much as possible:

The soul too has movement. First it moves in a circle, that is, it turns within itself and away from what is outside and there is an inner concentration of its intellectual powers. A sort of fixed revolution causes it to return from the multiplicity of externals, to gather in upon itself and then, in this undispersed condition, to join those who are themselves in a powerful union. From there the revolution brings the soul to the Beautiful and the Good, which is beyond all things, is one and the same, and has neither beginning nor end.⁴²

The analysis of the fragment of the work of Pseudo-Dionysius referred to by Palamas does not unequivocally indicate that the Areopagite made gradations of individual movements of the soul, dividing them into those that are more

39 Palamas *Triads*, I, 2, 5, trans. N. Gendle, 44: "It would seem such people are unaware that the essence of the mind is one thing, its energy another;" see also *Triades*, I, 3, 45.

40 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 9, 705AB.

41 Palamas, *Triads* I, 2, 5, trans. N. Gendle, 44.

42 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 9, 705A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 78.

and less appropriate.⁴³ The author of the *Corpus* lists the other movements of the soul, spiral and simple, describing their properties one by one. It even seems that straight-line movement is by all means appropriate, as it leads the soul from scattered symbols to a single, simple being:

And its movement is in a straight line when, instead of circling in upon its own intelligent unity (for this is the circular), it proceeds to the things around it, and is uplifted from external things, as from certain variegated and pluralized symbols, to the simple and united contemplations.⁴⁴

Setting the mind to inner feelings is, according to the Bishop of Thessaloniki, the most fundamental, but also the most difficult level for those who wish to practice Hesychasm:

... for those newly approaching this struggle find that their mind, when recollected, continually becomes dispersed again. ... but in their inexperience, they fail to grasp that nothing in the world is in fact more difficult to contemplate and more mobile and shifting than the mind.⁴⁵

Palamas advises the young monks that the only way to control the mind so that it does not become distracted by the lust of the senses is to bring it (i.e. roll it up *συνελίξει*) inside, that is, into the heart. The Doctor of Hesychasm contrasts this movement with the concept of ecstasy, which is the mind's going beyond itself to unite with the deity. This is an obvious criticism of the Neoplatonic vision:

On the other hand, to make the mind "go out," not only from fleshly thoughts, but out of the body itself, with the aim of contemplating intelligible visions – that is the greatest of the Hellenic errors, the root and source of all heresies.⁴⁶

That is why Gregory recommends that beginning students link the mind's prayer with the body's function, so that while holding their breath, they would stop the mind at the same time.⁴⁷ Palamas advises that one pray in a sitting position, with eyes focused on the central part of the body, i.e. the navel or sternum, which is to enable "the method to recall or to keep the mind within the body / himself" (*τοῖς ἔξω σχήμασι πέφυκεν*). In this way, they are to achieve the unification of mind

43 Proclus does this in his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*. "Circular movement," in his opinion, is the soul's turn towards itself as the beginning of a life full of reason and understanding of the essence of things.

44 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 9, 705AB, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 78.

45 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 2, 7, trans. N. Gendle, 45.

46 *Ibid.*, I, 2, 4, trans. N. Gendle, 44.

47 See *ibid.*, I, 2, 7.

with heart, because “it is absolutely necessary to recall or keep the mind within the body.”⁴⁸ In this way, adepts will clear their mind of confusion and lead it to “the perfect unity of their powers,” achieving what the Areopagite calls a “unified recollection” (ἡ ἔνοειδῆς συνέλιξις⁴⁹). Pseudo-Dionysius is thinking here about a special state of mind devoid of all activities and energy, while the Doctor of Hesychasm emphasizes that this “perfect unity” is achieved by those who control their life activities in an ideal way, uniting them with the activities of the spirit. The author of the *Triads* goes so far as to say that by maintaining a certain body posture, one can induce a state of mind, consisting in its being inside himself and in the heart at the same time:

How should such a one not gain great profit if, instead of letting his eye roam hither and thither, he should fix it on his breast or on his navel, as a point of concentration? For in this way, he will not only gather himself together externally, conforming as far as possible to the inner movement he seeks for his mind; he will also, by disposing his body in such a position, recall into the interior of the heart a power which is ever flowing outwards through the faculty of sight.⁵⁰

Palamas' claim that a perfect union of mind and body functions is possible seems to come from the Great Dionysius. Gregory teaches that the mind of every human being, thanks to its ability to transcend itself and maintain control over passions, acquires the form (and thus properties) of angelic intelligence.⁵¹ The characteristic first sentence of the first Triad reads: “The human mind also, and not only the angelic, transcends itself, and by victory over the passions acquires an angelic form.”⁵² The Doctor of Hesychasm seems to faithfully continue his master's thought that there are minds capable of imitating angelic minds and thus given the vision of divinity. The Areopagite is talking about minds which, like the angelic ones, will be united with divine light by giving up all mental activity:

Since the union of divinized minds with the Light beyond all deity occurs in the cessation of all intelligent activity, **the godlike unified minds who imitate these angels as far as possible praise it most appropriately through the denial of all beings.** Truly and

48 Ibid., I, 2, 7, trans. N. Gendle, 45.

49 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, IV, 9, 705A.

50 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 2, 8, trans. N. Gendle, 46.

51 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 4.

52 Ibid., I, 3, 4: Ὑπεραναβαίνειν δὲ ἑαυτὸν οὐκ ἀγγέλων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς, ἀγγελοειδῆς δι' ἀπαθείας γεγωνώς; *The Triades*, 32. This passage and the one quoted below have already been considered in this work, but in a different context. See p. 167

supernaturally enlightened after this blessed union, they discover that although it is the cause of everything, it is not a thing since it transcends all things in a manner beyond being.⁵³

Quoting this fragment from the work of Divine Names, Gregory consciously changes it and calls those who experience knowledge of divinity through light as people conformed to God, since they have become entirely spiritual and, following the example of angels, united with the light.⁵⁴ Of course, the most important element in the quoted fragment is the change – it refers to the “deified man” (θεοειδεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων), and not, as in “The Great Dionysius,” to the undefined “godlike unified minds” of divine-shaped intellects or, in other words, deified intellects (οἱ θεοειδεῖς ἐνούμενοι νόες). This allows Palamas to combine the concept of a change of intellect with a change in the properties of the body.⁵⁵ This thought does not seem to deviate too far from the investigations of Pseudo-Dionysius, who is accused of remaining within the circle of Proclus’ deliberations. In the treatise *On Providence and Fate*,⁵⁶ the author believes that, in its perfect knowledge, the soul becomes a deified man (θεῖος ἀνὴρ). However, at the beginning of his considerations, he says that the first step in self-knowledge is the moment when the soul breaks free from the body shell and realizes that it is neither a corporeal nor a divine being.⁵⁷ Then he discovers νοῦς as an intelligent being (νοερόν),⁵⁸ able to control every body reflex (i.e. the external movement of the soul) and his own (i.e. the inner movement of the soul). This possibility is given to him by a special element, the “apex mentis,” which Proclus called the “flower of the intellect” (ἄνθος νοῦ).⁵⁹ This concept, present in the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, was appropriately commented on by Maximus the Confessor,

53 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, I, 5, 593A, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 53: Ταῦταις οἱ θεοειδεῖς ἀγγελομιμέτως, ὡς ἐφικτόν, ἐνούμενοι νόες, ἐπειδὴ κατὰ πάσης νοεῶς ἐνεργείας ἀπόπασιν ἢ τοιαδε γίνεται τῶν ἐκθεουμένων νοῶν πρὸς τὸ ὑπερθεον φῶς ἔνωσις; (bold in original – A.Ś.B.).

54 Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 32: Καὶ τοὺς θεοειδεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων πάντως γενομένους νόας, ἀγγελομιμήτως ἐνοῦσθαι τούτῳ τῷ φωτὶ.

55 This passage has already been quoted and considered in our work, though in a different context. See p. 169

56 Proclus, *De providentia et fato*, ed. H. Böse (Berlin 1960), X.

57 Ibid., *De providentia et fato* 23, 11, p. 133.

58 Ibid., *De providentia et fato* 30, 11, p. 139; trans. Wilhelm z Moerbeke (“cognoscens et seipsum quis est”).

59 Ibid., *De providentia et fato* 31, 9, pp. 140–141.

and it was also used in this spirit by Palamas.⁶⁰ In any case, the author of the *Scholia*, treating man as a spiritual and corporeal compositum, interprets the “climax” as the “common point” of noetic and material reality present in man. By being a microcosm, the human being is capable of transcending himself and being united with God in his psychosomatic complexity. Gregory puts it like this:

Knowing from the great Dionysius and the famous Maximus that the human mind has a capacity to think, through which it looks on conceptual things, and a unity which transcends the nature of the mind, through which it is joined to things beyond itself [Μαθὼν δὲ καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου Διονυσίου καὶ Μαξίμου τοῦ πάνυ, τὸν καθ' ἡμᾶς νοῦν, τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, δι' ἧς τὰ νοητὰ βλέπει, τὴν δὲ ἔνωσιν ὑπεραίρουσαν τὴν τοῦ νοῦ θύσιν, δι' ἧς συνάπτεται πρὸς τὰ ἐπέκεινα ἑαυτοῦ], he seeks the highest capacity in us, that one, perfect, simple being, inseparable from our nature. ... Like the image of images, it divides and collects into one, developing and coiling very similar to living beings [animals] – the movement of our thoughts, on which all certainty of knowledge is based.⁶¹

The emphasized passage is identical to the text found in Pseudo-Dionysius' *Divine Names*: Δέον εἰδέναι καθ' ἡμᾶς νοῦν, τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, δι' ἧς τὰ νοητὰ βλέπει, τὴν δὲ ἔνωσιν ὑπεραίρουσαν τὴν τοῦ νοῦ θύσιν, δι' ἧς συνάπτεται πρὸς τὰ ἐπέκεινα ἑαυτοῦ.⁶²

And although, as Palamas writes, our mind lowers towards material things and is bound by nature to the body (ἄτε φύσι τὴν μετὰ σώματος ἔχων συμπλοκήν⁶³), it is the second part of it (i.e. “higher energy” – τῆς κρείττονος ἐνεργείας) that has the ability to curl up, return to itself. If a person keeps his mind in this state, he will be able to become one with God: “Thus the mind, having acquired this proper energy for itself, which is returning to itself and attention to itself, and having transcended itself, can become one with God.”⁶⁴

60 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 45; Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, VII, I, 865 C; Maximus the Confessor, *Scholia Maximí*, PG 4, 344 A.

61 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 45, author's translation: Μαθὼν δὲ καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου Διονυσίου καὶ Μαξίμου τοῦ πάνυ, τὸν καθ' ἡμᾶς νοῦν, τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, δι' ἧς τὰ νοητὰ βλέπει, τὴν δὲ ἔνωσιν ὑπεραίρουσαν τὴν τοῦ νοῦ θύσιν, δι' ἧς συνάπτεται πρὸς τὰ ἐπέκεινα ἑαυτοῦ, τοῦτο δὲ ζητεῖ τὸ.

62 Pseudo-Dionysius, DN, VII, 1, 865C–D, trans. C. Luibhed & P. Rorem, 106: “The human mind has a capacity to think, through which it looks on conceptual things, and a unity which transcends the nature of the mind, through which it is joined to things beyond itself.”

63 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 45.

64 *Ibid.*, I, 3, 45; Τῆς οὖν καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἐνεργείας γενόμενος ὁ νοῦς, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν στροφή καὶ τήρησις, δι' αὐτῆς ὑπερναβαίων ἑαυτὸν, καὶ Θεῷ συγγένοιτ' ἄν.

11 Unifying Vision

The mind, subjected to the grace of the Spirit and residing within itself and within the body, acquires a new kind of sensation, coming from neither the intellectual faculties or the bodily senses. Gregory describes this state as both “intellectual sensation” and “intellectual sense” (ἡ νοερά αἴσθησις)¹ and he clearly follows the footsteps of Gregory of Nyssa, in whose writings the term intellectual sense appears, along with “divine sense” and “mental” and “divine” sensation.² The Doctor of Hesychasm, commenting on Solomon’s expression “a sensation intellectual and divine” (αἴσθησις νοερά καὶ θεῖα), writes:

By adding those two adjectives, he urges his hearer to consider it neither as a sensation nor as an intellection, for neither is the activity of the intelligence a sensation, nor that of the senses an intellection. The “intellectual sensation” is thus different from both.³

In this way, man gains a new cognitive modus, a state of hesychia that means the suspension of the thought process and the operation of the senses. The mind is in divine darkness – that is, in a state of absolute inner curl, abandoning all activity. At this point, he is completely permeated with divine energy – light, which is tantamount to the grace of the Spirit making him capable of uniting cognition. Thus, when the “holy teachers of Hesychasm” contemplate the divine light within, they see it through deifying communion with the Spirit. The author of the *Triads* explains this point to Barlaam:

Do you not understand that the men who are united to God and deified, who fix their eyes in a divine manner on Him, do not see as we do? Miraculously, they see with a sense

1 See Palamas, *Triads*, I, 2, 4, trans. N. Gendle, 43–44.

2 The term “divine sense” appeared in Origen’s *Κατὰ Κέλσον (Contra Celso)*, I, 48, PG 11, 749 AB. Its most important interpretation is made by Gregory of Nyssa in *In Canticorum Hom. IX*, PG 44, 951C; we also find this term in Maximus the Confessor’s *Quaestiones*, PG 91, 1248B, and in works by Diadochos of Photiki; see J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de s. Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 238–239, Pseudo-Dionysius, DN VII,1, 865C.

3 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 20, trans. N. Gendle, 37; *Triades*, I, 3, 20: Τῆ γὰρ ἀμφοτέρων συζυγία πείθει τὸν ἀκούοντα μηδέτερον νομίσαι ταύτην, μήτ’ αἴσθησιν, μήτε νόησιν. Οὔτε γὰρ ἡ νόησις αἴσθησις ποτε, οὔθ’ ἡ αἴσθησις νόησις. Οὐκοῦν ἡ νοερά αἴσθησις ἄλλο παρ’ ἐκάτερον αὐτῶν;

that exceeds the senses, and with a mind that exceeds mind, for the power of the spirit penetrates their human faculties, and allows them to see things which are beyond us.⁴

According to the doctor of Hesychasm, theology is supposed to lead to knowledge of the Supreme Being, which is important, however, not by seeking positive or negative knowledge about God and the world, but by the personal experience of the seeker. Palamas observes:

Let no one think that these great men are referring here to the ascent through the negative way. For the latter lies within the powers of whoever desires it; and it does not transform the soul so as to bestow on it the angelic dignity. While it liberates the understanding from other beings, it cannot by itself effect union with transcendent things.⁵

The process of negation alone is not enough to transform the consciousness of the knower; it must be accompanied by grace, commandment, and spiritual practice. Gregory explains that contemplation is not simply an abstraction and negation, but a union and deification that, through God's grace, becomes mystically and unspeakably something that transcends abstraction.⁶ Palamas strongly emphasizes the need for divine energy and active operation in the knowing subject himself in order to achieve true cognition. It seems that the author of the *Triads* does this consciously, because the emphasis on the theme of spiritual practice and the need for grace protects both thinkers from being accused of messalianism. In the case of the author of the *Corpus*, it additionally clears him of any suspicions of Neoplatonic theurgy, in which the element of initiatory passivity and a certain automatism of actions is strongly emphasized. For this reason, according to Palamas, Pseudo-Dionysius indicates a special type of mind prayer that has a unifying power.⁷ After all, prayer requires the active awareness

4 Ibid., *Triads*, III, 3, 10, trans. N. Gendle, 107.

5 Ibid., *Triads*, I, 3, 20, trans. N. Gendle, 37.

6 Ibid., *Triades*, I, 3, 17: Οὐκ οὖν ἀφαίρεσις καὶ ἀπόφασις μόνη ἐστὶν ἡ θεωρία, ἀλλ' ἔνωσις καὶ ἐκθέωσις μετὰ τὴν ἀφαίρεσιν πάντων τῶν κάτωθεν τυπούντων τὸν νοῦν, μυστικῶς καὶ ἀπορρήτως χάριτι γινομένη τοῦ Θεοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ μετὰ τὴν ἀπόπασιν ἢ καὶ μείζον ἐστὶ τῆς ἀφαιρέσεως, *Triads*, trans. N. Gendle, 34–35: “Contemplation, then, is not simply abstraction and negation; it is a union and a divinization which occurs mystically and ineffably by the grace of God, after the stripping away of everything from here below which imprints itself on the mind, or rather after the cessation of all intellectual activity; it is something which goes beyond abstraction (which is only the outward mark of the cessation).”

7 Palamas, *Triads*, II, 3, 35, trans. N. Gendle, 65: “This is why the great Denys says that through prayer, we are united to God;” Pseudo-Dionysius, DN IV, 8, 704D.

of the knower, and the preceding moment of grace excludes accusations of Mesalian heresy. This is what the Doctor of Hesychasm means when he writes that contemplation is a gift and union – that is, something that is given to man and which requires his cooperation.

Similarly, beyond the stripping away of beings, or rather after the cessation [of our perceiving or thinking of them] accomplished not only in words, but in reality, there remains an unknowing which is beyond knowledge; though indeed a darkness, it is yet beyond radiance, and, as the great Denys says, it is in this dazzling darkness that the divine things are given to the saints.⁸

Gregory Palamas draws from the Areopagite's thoughts an absolute conviction of divine transcendence, and at the same time points, in his interpretation, to the essential elements of the Dionysian concept of uniting contemplation. He sees the latter as a consequence of learning through negation, necessarily enriched by the action of grace and active cooperation between man and God (synergy). In this way, Palamas wishes to emphasize the necessity of divine intervention and to reject any shadow of suspicion of heresy of which the Bogomils were accused after they proclaimed the possibility of union with God solely through the effort of human will. Of course, this does not mean the rejection of action and passive waiting, because the conditions that must be met for a person to receive the gift of seeing God's glory belong to both the divine and the human order. The Byzantine theologian explains that achieving the capacity for supernatural contemplation becomes possible for people who are purified by keeping the commandments and practicing the "immaterial prayer of mind."⁹ In this way, the perfect state is achieved, the union of the whole person with God (Θεῷ συγγενέσθαι), in the theological tradition such persons are called "a god by grace."¹⁰ The author of the *Triads* describes this mystical experience as highly subjective and dependent, in the end, on divine will: "This experience of the divine is given to each according

8 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 18, author's translation; see Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.* V, 1073 A.

9 See Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 19, trans. N. Gendle, no. 37: "But they can only unite themselves to it and see if they have purified themselves by fulfillment of the commandments and by consecrating their mind to pure and immaterial prayer, so as to receive the supernatural power of contemplation" καὶ ἄλλω προσευχῇ τὸν νοῦν ἀπασχολήσαντες, τὴν ὑπερφύᾳ δύναμιν τῆς θεωρίας δέξωνται.

10 V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 126: "Man is thus reunion by grace two natures in his created hypostasis, to become 'a created god,' a 'god by grace,' in contrast to Christ who being divine person assumed human nature;" Palamas, *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikoter)* 51, 162–163: "the grace of deification is sometimes also called a deity by the Fathers, because those who have this grace are called gods because of it."

to the worthiness, and can be greater or less according to the worthiness of him who experiences it.”¹¹

The personal experience of divine light by the saints, the monks, is for Palamas the foundation of orthodox theology, the manifestation of a true knowledge of God, who remains antinomically secret: “Thus to our human nature He has given the glory of the Godhead, but not the divine nature; for the nature of God is one thing, His glory another, even though they be inseparable one from another.”¹² Gregory does not even try to describe the content of the sanctifying vision. It is absolutely inexpressible, like the Triune God who reveals himself in it, since the divine manifestation, even in the form of a symbol, always remains unfathomable by its transcendence.¹³ Palamas goes on to say that there is no name to call that vision, which is why the angel, when asked by Manoe about the name of God, replied: “It is marvelous.”¹⁴ According to Gregory, this was intended to mean that the vision of divinity is not only beyond discursive cognition, but also beyond all expression. Although man is not able to visualize this vision, he knows immediately that he is experiencing it. Nor will he ever be convinced that he has embraced the whole and that the union is complete. Palamas follows Gregory of Nyssa, for whom the inexhaustible character of the Creator’s vision is a result of the infinite nature of the Divine Being. Even in the “age to come” there will be no end to divine manifestation and the soul will always be on the way “towards,” always thirsting for an even deeper union. Palamas expresses it in the following words: “He understands then that his vision is infinite because it is a vision of the Infinite, and because he does not see the limit of that brilliance; but, all the more, he sees how feeble is his capacity to receive the light.”¹⁵

For the Doctor of Hesychasm divine energy – light is the basis of a unifying vision. The Bishop of Thessaloniki cites the Dionysian terms of light as “superluminous and theurgic ray”¹⁶ and emphasizes that for the “Great Dionysius” it is

11 Palamas, *Homilia in transfigurationem* (Homily on the Transfiguration) PG 151, 448B, trans. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 220.

12 Palamas, *Triads*, II, 3, 15, trans. N. Gendle, 60. See *Obrona szczegółowa (Apologia dieksodikoter)* 11, 136: “it is impious to even think that the essence of God and the saints will someday be one.”

13 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 4.

14 Judg. 13: 17–18; see Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 4, trans. N. Gendle, 33.

15 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 4, trans. N. Gendle, 33.

16 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 29, trans. N. Gendle, 84: “The great Denys, who elsewhere terms this light a “superluminous and theurgic ray,” also calls it a “deifying gift and principle of the Divinity,” that is to say, of deification.”

precisely the “deifying gift and principle of the Divinity.”¹⁷ Palamas tries to show that a sanctifying vision is not a mere invention of monks living in asceticism, and that contemplation is only a logical necessity. To confirm his words, he provides many descriptions of mystical experiences, beginning with the vision of St. Paul. He describes the figure of Adam who was clothed with light before the fall; it was the divine energy that illuminated Moses’ face as he descended Mount Sinai; the figure of Saint Stephen and the Apostle Paul shone with this light at the moment of conversion; it was the light that appeared to human eyes from the tomb of Christ after his resurrection. Finally, divine energies are widely considered the light of Tabor.¹⁸ It is worth noting that among these accounts there is a description of the experience of St. Benedict, whose biography¹⁹ was very popular in Byzantine monasteries. In the quoted passage from *Life of St. Benedict*,²⁰ the Bishop of Thessaloniki confirms the metaphysics of light. Namely, Benedict describes a vision of divine glory – light which was given to him in contemplation. The doctor of Hesychasm identifies this vision with the uncreated, divine light, which – being the Triune God himself – was given to a saint to the extent that it is given to a human being. As Gregory Palamas states, St. Benedict gained the knowledge of God in His energies, while the divine essence remained unavailable. In the light and through the light, he saw the light in order to obtain a cognitive union with it.

At the same time, the Doctor of Hesychasm lists the Areopagite as the one who had the highest spiritual experience beyond natural knowledge. He calls the author of *Mystical Theology* “the elusive contemplator of spiritual things” (ὁ

17 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, 29, trans. N. Gendle, 84. see Pseudo-Dionysius, CH, III, 2; Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.* II, 1068–1069.

18 Palamas believes that the light radiating from Christ on Mount Tabor was a manifestation of His eternal divinity, an uncreated energy visible to humans. See Palamas, *Homiliae*, PG 151, 433B in: V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 224, “The light of our Lord’s Transfiguration had neither beginning nor end; it remained unbounded in time and space and imperceptible to the senses, although seen by bodily eyes... but by a change in their senses the Lord’s disciples passes from the flesh to the Spirit.”

19 Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum libri quattuor* PL 66, 197B., edition: *Dialogorum libri quattuor seu De miraculis patrum italicorum: Grégoire le Grand, Dialogues*, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, 3 vols., Sources chrétiennes 251, 260, 265, Paris, 1978–1980.

20 Palamas, *Triades*, I, 3, 22; see E. Lanne, “L’interprétation palamite de la vision de saint Benoît,” in *Le millénaire du Mont Athos 963–1963*, Vol. II (Venice–Chevetogne 1965), 21–47.

τῶν νοερῶν ἀπλανῆς ἐπόπτης),²¹ he is regarded as an ideal guide in the interpretation of mystical texts, praised as “the most eminent theologian of the divine apostles” (ὁ μετὰ τοὺς θεσπεσίους ἀποστόλους ἐξοχώτατος ἐν θεολόγοις).²² Therefore, for Palamas, he is a theologian in the literal sense – that is, the one who has experienced God (i.e. divine light) and thus can speak about it truthfully. The Doctor of Hesychasm emphasizes this in the second *Triad*, section 23 of which begins with the description of light according to Pseudo-Dionysius.²³ The author of the *Corpus*, in the doctrine of Hesychasm, is a participant in the divine light that he has accessed and communicated, similarly to those intellects from the work of the *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, which “are led” and “lead.”²⁴ Gregory Palamas allowed himself to be led by his master, and he became at the same time an authority not only for the contemporary monks of Athos, but also for the entire tradition of the Eastern Church that followed.

21 Palamas, *De hesychia*, PG 150, 1109A.

22 Palamas, *150 capita*, PG 150, 1181A.

23 Palamas, *Triades*, II, 3, 23, author’s translation: “The great Dionysius calls light simple, image-less, supernatural, that is, existing above all that exists.” Palamas justifies the reference to the authority of “The Great Dionysius” also later, in *Triades* II, 3, 23, author’s translation: “He, wanting to write sacredly about light, as a credible contemplator of light, being initiated to it and being (as the) initiator into it [says];” Μέλλων γὰρ οὗτος περὶ τοῦ φωτὸς ἱερογραφεῖν, ὡς τοῦ φωτὸς ἀσφαλῆς καὶ θεατῆς καὶ μύστης καὶ τελετῆς.

24 Pseudo-Dionysius, CH VII, 3, 209 A. According to Piero Scazzoso, this image shows that the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius’ working on Gregory Palamas goes far beyond conventional praise and general quotes. P. Scazzoso, *Lo Pseudo-Dionigi*, 683: “Quest’ultima immagine ci dà una così esatta interpretazione della figura dello Pseudo-Dionigi e degli influssi che derivano dalle sue opere agli altri, che supra di gran lunga ogni convenzionalismo laudativo ed. ogni genericità di citazione.”

Conclusion

The most important issue in my deliberations on the works of the Doctor of Hesychasm was the correction which, according to many historians, Palamas made to the Dionysian system. In conclusion, I will then refer to the discussion led by Piero Scazzos and John Meyendorff, two contemporary researchers of this issue, not only because of their authority, but also because of a certain similarity to the fourteenth-century polemic that arose between supporters and opponents of the Palamite interpretation of the *Areopagitics*. We are dealing here with authors who are well versed in Byzantine theology, who know the historical and doctrinal context in which Palamas' writings were written. Both Meyendorff and Scazzoso are excellent working with the texts of the Doctor of Hesychasm, being their recognized publishers and translators. And like their historical predecessors, they came to completely opposite positions. Both scholars agree that Palamas starts from assumptions that constituted a basic element for the entire tradition of the Eastern Church and that are indisputably related to the Bible.

According to P. Scazzos, regardless of whether the universe of Pseudo-Dionysius is a counter-position, closely resembling the world of Proclus and generally the Neoplatonic universe (Ivanka), or whether it is a victorious opposition to paganism (Pera) as a whole, it remains obvious to the Italian scholar that his Christian phenomenon, thanks to its original face, went beyond the themes of the dying pagan tradition (Lossky, Clément, Bouyer).¹ Scazzoso considers how to maintain both perspectives (Neoplatonic and Christian) or transform the former into the latter, or overcome the former with the latter, so that the "pagan color," situated in a different chromatic context, completely changes its original hue. In his opinion, it is here that Palamas' genius in relation to Pseudo-Dionysian thought is revealed. Barlaam and other contemporary scholars of the *Areopagitics* reading these works through the prism of Proclus failed to notice that along with the formal synthesis of the Neoplatonic language, there was a fundamental change in the content now determined by the game of antinomy, which is the axis of the Dionysian universe. Contrasting faith with reason, apophatism with logic, they fail to notice that, contrary to their author's ideas, they split the *Corpus* into two opposite parts. As a result of this arbitrary division, they emphasized only the Neo-Platonic aspect, which, however, according to Scazzos, plays

1 P. Scazzoso, *Lo Pseudo-Dionigi*, 679–680.

an instrumental role only as a linguistic expression of a set of reflections with completely different origins. In his opinion, Palamas above all experiences the spirit of the *Corpus*, and with the attitude of a mystic, he discovers within him what is significant and not rationally definable. While many modern interpreters of Areopagites exclude any possibility of supplementing and completing it within the same model, as if pushing towards the Christian world, into the area where it arose and took shape, Palamas managed to save the structural unity of the Areopagite's works by appropriately capturing the main thread that runs through the entire structure. In the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius intellectualism and hierarchy are subordinate to knowing union, as they constitute a preparation for the achievement of "supra-luminous darkness." These elements are a means, not an end. Thus, the ambiguous overtone of *Corpus* thinking that Meyendorff talks about does not mean a lack of clarity, but it testifies to a misunderstanding of Pseudo-Dionysius' intention, which was to maintain a rational and mystical attitude in balance through the ubiquitous antinomy. In the light of the experienced and lived faith, Palamas performed an exegesis corresponding to spiritual values, at the same time synthesizing the works of Pseudo-Dionysius with the Eastern tradition. In conclusion, P. Scazzoso writes that Palamas uses the Areopagite's writings as a source of religious experience, as well as a kind of "diary" of spiritual progress. Contrary to the contemporary researcher, who deals only with the historical reference of ideas, the Doctor of Hesychasm sees the threads of lived and applied theology. As for the method of interpretation used by the Bishop of Thessaloniki, it is obvious that he did not look into the writings of the author of the *Corpus* for what we are looking for today.² As Dondaine wrote in reference to the thirteenth-century theologians who dealt with the *Areopagitics*, theology was not a history of doctrines for him, but a search and a desire to understand and assimilate the eternal truths expressed in it by recognized authorities.³ Palamas thus took over from the *Corpus* the antinomic thread (distinction: inaccessible creature – energy available to knowledge), which is the most important *raison d'être* of all Dionysian considerations, a characteristic attitude of Eastern spirituality in its entire historical development from the earliest centuries. Indeed, all themes from the Trinity to the icon are based on the antinomic connection of opposites running through the angelic and human reality, visible and invisible, darkness and light. He used Dionysian considerations about divine names to put them in the perspective of energies, of the uncreated powers reaching out

2 P. Scazzoso, *Lo Pseudo-Dionigi*, 680–682.

3 See I. H. Dondaine, *Le Corpus dionysien du XII^e siècle*, Roma 1955, 116.

to man. Scazzoso believes that Palamas did not find a basis in the *Corpus* for his metaphysics of light, which he presented in a subjective way and – not adhering to the principles of the Dionysian hierarchy – he interpreted the above problem giving it its own original character.

In the summary, it is also worth re-examining remarks made by J. Meyendorff.⁴ The brilliant scholar, for whom Pseudo-Dionysius is primarily a Neoplatonic author, says that Palamas contrasts the anagogical and closed universe of the Areopagite with the idea of freedom: a mystic, if assisted by grace, can meet God directly, face to face. Then, hierarchical mediation is not needed, and the angelic intelligences also lose their role as mediators. Because the influence of Christology, according to the French scholar, completely changed the structure of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought, where deification is now grace granted freely by the power of God, and not an emanation related to the ontological position of creation in a predetermined hierarchy. Thus, Palamas replaces Pseudo-Dionysius' purely intellectual mysticism with the mysticism of the heart.⁵

According to Scazzos, these are the most serious accusations that Meyendorff made against the *Triads*, because they attribute to their author innovative intentions towards the *Corpus* that Palamas never had or came to unknowingly. On the other hand, these words place the thinking contained in the *Areopagitics* in the wrong perspective, in which its true meaning cannot be discovered or reliably interpreted. First of all, Pseudo-Dionysius' world was not constructed in such a way that there would be no room left in it for personal freedom in the human-God relationship, the freedom shown in the examples of the experiences of Moses and the apostle Paul. Secondly, to speak of deification as a divine emanation means bringing the concept of hierarchy to a Neoplatonic vision, which Pseudo-Dionysius completely overcame, because the divine energy descending into creatures remains invariably itself, and the nature of those who receive it changes.⁶ As we accept what Lossky says about analogy, all of the apparent determinism in the Dionysian universe immediately disappears, because analogies (and in fact "energies") are not passive abilities, but active desires of creatures to return to – i.e. know – their Creator. Deification, therefore, also consists in the fact that the created being becomes a collaborator in God (Θεοῦ συνεργός) and allows God's action to be manifested in himself so that, without exceeding his hierarchical order, draws at the same time, as much as possible, from His deifying

4 See P. Scazzoso, *Lo Pseudo-Dionigi*, 696–699.

5 See J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*, 220–222.

6 E. von Ivanka, *Plato*, 267.

energies.⁷ In this way, Palamas, in the perspective of an experienced and lived faith, exaggerated the *Areopagitics* corresponding to the spiritual tradition of the Greek Fathers, while synthesizing Byzantine thought.

The results of the analyzes carried out here largely coincide with the conclusions of the Italian scholar, but for the most part are based on a different argument than that presented by the Milan professor. The essential thesis in the considerations of P. Scazzos, as well as A. Golitzin, Romanides, and above all V. Lossky, is the spiritual adequacy of the experience of both thinkers, an immersion in a similar monastic tradition that places great emphasis on the aspect of experience, divine experience as a presence beyond description. This is what led Palamas to delight in the *Corpus* language, to understand its mystical content or – in the words of Scazzos – to experience the spirit of the *Corpus*, and not to intellectualize its content.⁸ According to eminent scholars, the spiritual element of Pseudo-Dionysius' writings has been neglected, disregarded, or even rejected by Western historians of philosophy because of their lack of reference to this tradition and the way universities study the *Corpus*, which unnecessarily divides it up, takes parts out of context, compares it with Neoplatonism, destroys the unity absolutely needed to understand the thought of the Areopagite. There is certainly a lot of truth in these statements. However, the perspective adopted here forces us to confront the Pseudo-Dionysius' writings with the same attitude and in the same circumstances in which Gregory Palamas confronted them. And the reason for the debate was not reflection on their hymnographic rhythm, mystical language or depth of spirituality. The Doctor of Hesychasm was forced by the circumstances surrounding Barlaam's misinterpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought. This exegesis concerned a specific issue, namely the description of the method and conditions for the possibility of truly knowing God, the knowledge that a creature can acquire in a natural and supernatural way. Therefore, in his argumentation, Palamas referred to specific, individual passages of *Divine Names*, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *Mystical Theology* and the *Letters*, which he commented on in various ways. Of course, at the root of the Palamite exegesis is a profound and unmistakable belief in the Christian tradition of the texts in question. This certainty is due to the fact that the author of the *Corpus* belonged to the authority of the Fathers, his writings were broadly commented on by John of Scythopolis and Maxim the Confessor, but most of all in the content of the *Areopagitics* that Palamas saw nothing contrary to orthodoxy. I believe that just

7 See V. Lossky, *La notion des analogies*, 308.

8 P. Scazzoso, *Lo Pseudo-Dionigi*, 681.

such λέξις applied to the Dionysian universe allowed the Doctor of Hesychasm to avoid the need to correct or interpret the *Corpus*. If we accept J. Meyendorff's assumption that its author was a Neo-Platonic or Christian thinker, trying in an awkward way to "baptize" Proclus' system, a whole spectrum of problems immediately arises, which Romanides had already noticed with his own controversial eloquence. First of all, this assumption causes us to study Palamas' thought, standing as if "on the other side of the barricade," and we tacitly agree with his opponents Barlaam and Akindynos, because it is clear that it was the Calabrian philosopher who understood the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius well and placed it on Neoplatonic ground and drew appropriate conclusions leading to the conviction that the creator is completely transcendent towards creatures, one which we cannot fully know through the symbols and signs of the world, true knowledge of which is reserved for initiates and passed on in theurgical mysteries to a select few. If we continue to assume that this interpretation of the *Corpus* is correct, nothing explains Maxim the Confessor's willingness to include Pseudo-Dionysius in the recognized tradition, nor Palamas from presenting a long and detailed interpretation of his thoughts. Romanides goes much further in his conclusion, perversely asking whether the Doctor of Hesychasm managed to deceive his contemporaries and their successors, who, thanks to his interpretation, believed in the orthodoxy of a completely heretical thinker. It seems to me that it is enough to stick to Golitzin's argument that neither Barlaam nor Meyendorff read Pseudo-Dionysius properly. This led to the exile of the Calabrian from the borders of Byzantium, and the renowned scholar of Palamas to believe that the latter had made such a cardinal error in accepting the ideas of the *Theological Scriptures* that he had to be defended against himself, using the thesis that Gregory, by making the necessary Christological correction, completely transformed the Pseudo-Dionysius system.

In this book I tried to adopt Palamite optics and analyze individual issues from the *Corpus* in the spirit of maximum coherence, without isolating them from each other and assuming that all Pseudo-Dionysius' theological writings constitute a complementary whole. This approach allowed me to extract from the *Corpus* content to which scholars had not paid attention before, as a result of which detached and incomprehensible threads became coherent. The world of Pseudo-Dionysius opened up to reveal what was indisputable for Palamas, requiring no correction or transformation, to finally see what was silent and to put it in proper perspective.

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When addressing questions about the need for the Christological correction that the author of the *Triads* would apply to Pseudo-Dionysian thinking, it is

obvious, first of all, that we are dealing here with very different works in terms of purpose and meaning. In the writings of the Bishop of Thessaloniki we find the final result of his earlier reflections, which is the synthesis of the broadly understood monastic and theological tradition, which means that Palamas, in defense of hesychast monks, integrates elements of various spiritual practices described and used by his predecessors. The second of the *Triads* is, therefore, a peculiar lecture on the ways of knowing God, in which the methods of exercising the body and mind exist side by side in a harmonious way. We find here a clear reference to the spiritual masters of the fourth century Eastern Church, Macarius of Egypt, Nicephorus the Hesychast and Evagrius Ponticus, who lived much earlier than the *Areopagitics* we studied. Palamas weaves a kind of rug of reflections from various threads, achieving this task so perfectly that it is difficult to distinguish these threads.

With regard to the theme of Christology and anthropology on which the Bishop Thessaloniki in Pseudo-Dionysius does not comment, the dominant line of Maxim the Confessor's conception, with its strict division into nature and the corresponding will – energy, is clearly visible in the writings of the Doctor of Hesychasm. On this basis Maximus develops the aspect of the psychosomatic unity of man, which is obviously missing in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, but not without reason is called the Palamite thought of “the patristic synthesis of the Byzantine tradition.” The Doctor of Hesychasm, on the other hand, uses the Dionysian motif of the granting and transcendence of divinity, though he places it in his own optics, the center of which is the divine being in three hypostases. According to the author of the *Triads*, it is the Trinity, not the One, that remains the core of the considerations, because it is the source of the actions through which God reveals himself to man, while it is at the same time the ultimate goal of knowledge. This action has its origin in the Father, reveals the divine nature through the Son, and makes it possible to know the Trinity through the grace of the Spirit. Thus, the various manifestations of the divine nature, which Gregory calls energies in accordance with Pseudo-Dionysius and Maxim the Confessor, show us the Trinity as the source and destination of mystical experience. For the author of the *Divine Names*, the tri-unity is the source of differentiating names, which, according to Gregory, is tantamount to being the foundation of knowable, revealed powers. According to the bishop of Thessaloniki, the Areopagite Trinity is not only one of the mysterious names revealing some aspect of super-substantial oneness, but also a condition for the possibility of a true knowledge of God in three persons, while remaining hidden at the same time. In the light of these considerations, therefore, we are dealing here not with a Christological

correction, but with an epistemological explanation in which, at the bottom of the Dionysian system, Palamas sees not unity but the Trinity.

J. Meyendorff came to quite different conclusions, since he assumed that the Neoplatonic foundation of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought was, for the author of the *Triads*, an obvious thing that was difficult to accept. In this case, the Christological correction was necessary to incorporate the Dionysian universe into the Christian world of Gregory Palamas. But instead of explaining the problem, this thesis has been a source of new problems and doubts. With this goal, Maxim the Confessor and Palamas commented on the works of the Areopagite, since they both knew he was not a worship-able disciple of Paul, looking for the so-called the silent correction of Pseudo-Dionysius in various works by Palamas, even those not directly related to the interpretation of the Areopagite. Here are some specific examples. According to J. Meyendorff himself,⁹ the conviction that God is unknowable in his essence and that he grants through energies led Pseudo-Dionysius to two diametrically different epistemological models. On the one hand, the Areopagite presents the path of cognition through apophatic and mystical theology, i.e. directly, in an individual way. On the other hand, he holds the view that such cognition can only take place through symbols and within a specific order. In this way he advocates a theurgical and Gnostic system rather than the Christian one. According to Meyendorff, Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas avoided these extreme tendencies through the Christocentric concept of grace in the sacraments and human synergy (cooperation). On the other hand, Adolf Ritter noticed that in his work of *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, Palamas presents man as *imago trinitatis*, composed of intellect, reason and soul.¹⁰ Let us recall that the German scholar believes that this is a *stillschweigende Korrektur* addressed to the Dionysian hierarchy, because such an anthropology presupposes the possibility of direct access to the divine and thus rejects the need for mediation. In response A. Golitzin argued that although Pseudo-Dionysius at no point describes the human being as a symbol of the Trinity, in his opinion the image of the Trinity is the hierarchy itself. It is a dynamic force that is to properly shape the soul and enable it to know God, that is, to find deification. The hierarchy does not restrict access to the divine, but rather is established to facilitate the divine as much as possible; therefore, any correction is unnecessary. Another scholar, Joost van Rossum, in his article "Dionysius the

9 J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, New York 1975, 108–109.

10 A.M. Ritter, *Gregor Palamas als Leser des Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagita*, 565–579; A. Golitzin, *Dionysius*, 185–190.

Areopagite and Gregory Palamas: A ‘Christological Corrective?’” noticed that in the description of the Eucharist we find in one of Palamas’ Homilies, angels are described as merely observers of the meeting between man and God.¹¹ They stand apart to see from a distance (παρακύπτειν), and they rejoice to see that grace is given only to men. In this way, the author of the *Triads* emphasized the superiority of the human being over the angelic being, which, according to Rossum, undermines the necessity of hierarchy and angelic mediation. At the same time, the Doctor of Hesychasm in no way referred to the description of the rite contained in the work *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the content of which is completely different in meaning. In Rossum’s opinion, this is an obvious example of a silent Christo-centric corrective. All the examples have a common denominator. It is the assumption that Palamas read Pseudo-Dionysius with full conviction of the ambivalence of his thoughts, which it was necessary to get rid of. Considering the matter in this way, one can find a huge number of examples in the *Triads* themselves that do not agree with *Corpus* sentences and can assume that they had to be corrected. We can find many counter-proposals just as easily in the writings of the Doctor of Hesychasm which testify to the agreement between the Palamite doctrine and the Areopagite’s thinking. By this I would like to show that the study with the previously adopted assumption of the Christian or Neoplatonic significance of the Dionysian system does not lead to any conclusion and artificially “problematizes” the issue.

The task of the method adopted here was quite different, since I tried to see and read Pseudo-Dionysius’ thought from Palamas’ perspective. Thus, I did not take up the question of whether the Doctor of Hesychasm interpreted Areopagite right or wrong, and who was right, he or Barlaam; because in this way I would only add another voice to the discussion between supporters and opponents of the thesis about the Christological correction. The aim of my considerations was an attempt to isolate correct fragments and to examine the arguments Gregory Palamas made to confront accusations thrown at him by his adversaries, in particular by Barlaam and Akindynos. Reconstructing Palamas’ line of reasoning and distinguishing his position from among the numerous references and passages from the works of Pseudo-Dionysius required some effort and constant comparison of the texts. We are dealing here with a subtly constructed

11 J. v. Rossum, “Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory Palamas: A ‘Christological Corrective?’” *Studia Patristica. Papers Presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford*, Vol. 42, eds. M. Young, M. Edwards, P. Parvis, Leuven 2006, 347–357.

patristic synthesis, where all elements sound extremely harmonious. In the eyes of a Doctor of Hesychasm, the author of the *Areopagitics* was certainly not a suspicious Monophysite with a Neoplatonic vision of the world, since most of the quotes used in the *Triads* come precisely from the *De Coelesti Hierarchia* and *Letters*, the most controversial writings for modern scholars. It should be remembered that the *Corpus*, although it was read directly by the Doctor of Hesychasm, had an orthodox commentary established by seven centuries in the tradition of the East in the form of the *Scholia* of John of Scythopolis and Maxim the Confessor. On the other hand, the spiritual tradition of the *Triads* reached its roots in the works of Macarius of Egypt, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicephorus the Hesychast, and was at the same time a combination of the most important themes in Pseudo-Dionysius' thought presented in a proper way to Palamas. Thus, there was a motif of the unknowable divine being with the simultaneous emphasis on participation in divine energies, elements of apophatic theology with a specific understanding of symbolic theology, mysticism strongly rooted in the Christological context, and finally, a strong emphasis on the elements of practice and experience resulting from Palamite anthropology. Looking further at the consequences of Palamas' re-Christian reconstruction of the *Corpus*, we will see how, through consistency in method and profound understanding, Pseudo-Dionysius was rightly situated in the tradition of the Greek Fathers. Therefore, as pointed out by P. Scazzoso, contemporary research, which aims to comprehensively capture the Areopagite's thoughts, must take into account the interpretation of the *Corpus* by the author of the *Triads* in order to avoid the mutilation and incomplete examination of the Areopagite Scriptures caused by erroneous assumptions.¹² The presented considerations try to fulfill this postulate, and at the same time show Dionysian thought as a natural and inseparable element of the great tradition of Byzantine philosophy, in which, thanks to the exegesis of Gregory Palamas, it takes its rightful place.

12 P. Scazzoso, *Lo Pseudo-Dionigi*, 699.

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Abbreviations

Suger <i>De rebus</i>	<i>Sugerii Abbatis Sancti Dionysii Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis</i>
Suger <i>De consecratione Ecclesiae</i>	<i>Libellus alter de consecratione Ecclesiae Sancti Dionysii</i>
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i>
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graece</i>
DN	<i>De Divinis Nominibus, in Corpus Dionysiacum I</i>
CH	<i>De Coelesti Hierarchia, in Corpus Dionysiacum II</i>
EH	<i>De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia (Ibid.)</i>
Ep.	<i>Epistulae (Ibid.)</i>
Triades	<i>Grégoire Palamas. Défense des saints hésychastes. Introduction, texte critique, trans. J. Meyendorff</i>
Triads	<i>Palamas, The Triads, trans., N. Gendle</i>

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Index of Names

- Abraham 162
Adam 209
Akindynos, 19, 26, 32, 33, 40, 76, 77,
82, 83, 85, 145, 149, 150, 191,
215, 218
Albert the Great 104
Alexios I Komnenos 16
Amann, E. 34
Ammonius Saccas 54
Andia, Y. de, 26, 28, 29, 56
Andrew of Crete 46, 151
Andronikos II Palaiologos 75, 80
Andronikos III 11, 14, 32, 79, 81, 82
Anne of Savoy 82
Antony, patriarch of
Constantinople 81
Aristotle 13, 49, 58, 75, 77
Arius 13
Armstrong, A.H. 58
Athanasius the Great 35, 37, 59-61,
75, 125, 182, 189
Augustine, Saint 47-50, 65, 104, 198

Balthasar, H.U. von, 29, 42-44,
54-56, 62
Barlaam of Calabria 14, 77
Barth, K. 47
Basil the Great 40, 139, 149, 150, 185
Beck, H.-G. 34, 35, 40, 47
Beierwaltes, W. 50, 57
Bekker, I. 14
Benedict, Saint 209
Boiadjiev, T. 33
Bois, J. 46
Bornert, R. 55, 63, 64, 69-71
Böse, H. 202
Botte, B. 185

Bouyer, L. 211
Bradshaw, D. 48, 49
Bréhier, L. 12, 57
Brons, B. 57
Brotinos 158
Bruncz, D. 50
Bucur, B.G. 49

Callistus I 80
Carabine, D. 89, 93, 95, 115
Charmidas 158
Christ 12, 16, 20-25, 29, 31, 41, 43, 53,
55, 60, 62, 63, 65, 66, 68-73, 78-
80, 89, 92, 93, 95, 103, 104, 121,
126-129, 136, 148-153, 155-157,
159, 163, 165, 169, 170, 175, 178-
190, 192, 194, 207, 209, 217
Christou, P. 32, 38, 40
Clement of Alexandria 60, 125
Clément, O. 211
Coakley, A. 44
Congar, Y. 47, 48
Cyril of Alexandria 36, 37, 59, 60, 72

Dalmais, I.H. 43, 55, 63, 69
Damascio 54
Daniélou, J. 43, 60, 69, 205
Darrouzes, J. 74
Demetracopoulos, J.A. 49
Demetrius Kydones 82, 86
Diadochos of Photiki 61, 64, 205
Dionysius the Scholastic 54
Dioscorus 65
Dodds, E.R. 197
Dondaine, I.H. 212
Dorries, H. 197
Duns Scotus 36

- Dušan, Serbian tsar 84
 188, 189, 192, 207, 209, 210, 214,
 217-219
- Eckhart 27
- Edwards, M. 218
- Eliade, M. 10, 103, 104
- Ephrem the Syrian 60
- Epifanowicz, S.L. 42, 43, 54, 55
- Eriugena, see John Scotus Eriugena
- Eunomius 13, 89-92
- Eusebius of Caesarea 53
- Eutyches 65
- Evagrius Ponticus 12, 18, 36, 61, 64,
 197, 216
- Evdokimov, P. 37, 39, 48, 50, 71, 72, 79
- Flogaus, R. 15, 33, 35, 49, 50
- Florovsky, G. 25, 28, 40, 41
- Florowski, G. 28, 37, 38, 39, 41, 59
- Froehlich, K. 175
- Gadacz, T. 51
- Gargan, I. 50
- Garrigues, J.-M. 40, 44, 47
- Gawryla Twerski 37
- Gennadius II Scholarios 46
- Germanus of Constantinople 70
- Gersh, S.E. 57, 187
- Gerson, L.S. 187
- Gilson, E. 91, 92
- Goara, J. 185
- Golitzin, A. 24-29, 49, 56, 214,
 215, 217
- Gouillard, J. 13, 38
- Gregory of Nyssa 30, 37, 40-43, 58,
 60, 62, 89-92, 95, 97, 119, 192,
 205, 208
- Gregory of Sinai 75
- Gregory Palamas, 9, 10, 15, 17-20,
 22, 23, 25-28, 30, 38, 40-45, 48-
 51, 55, 68, 75-85, 91, 120, 124,
 125, 127, 136, 137, 150, 152, 156,
- Gregory Scholarios 36
- Gregory the Theologian 151
- Grondijs, L.H. 41
- Gross, J. 183
- Grosseteste, R. 104
- Grumel, V. 37
- Guichardan, S. 36, 37
- Guillou, M.J. 41
- Habra, G. 41, 55
- Halleux, A. de 41, 47
- Hathaway, R. 54, 57
- Hausherr, I. 26, 39, 55
- Heil, G. 27, 57
- Hierotheus 169
- Honigmann, E. 54
- Hornus, J.-M. 56
- Houdret, J.-P. 40
- Hryniewicz, W. 58, 182, 183
- Hugh of Saint Victor 106
- Isidore, patriarch of
 Constantinople 75
- Ivanka, E. von 26, 34, 35, 40, 56,
 211, 213
- Jaeger, W. 59
- Jeuneau, E. 57, 58
- Jeck, U.R. 72
- Jedin, H. 40
- Jesus Christ 16, 21
- Joasaph (John VI Kantakouzenos) 85
- Job 162
- John Chrysostom, 36, 60, 61, 86,
 89, 185
- John Climacus 71
- John Italus 13
- John of Damascus 13, 17, 18, 21, 36,
 46, 71-73, 89, 119, 125, 126, 138,
 182, 183

- John of Scythopolis 42, 57, 61, 62, 184, 188, 214, 219
- John Paul II 48
- John Scotus Eriugena 104
- John the Grammarian of Caesarea 53
- John V Kantakouzenos 76, 79, 82, 84, 85
- John VI Kantakouzenos 84, 85
- John XIV Calecas 82, 84
- John, Abbot of Raithu 71
- John, Evangelist 103
- Journet, Ch. 47, 48
- Jugie O.M. 19, 34, 37, 38, 46, 47
- Jung, C.G. 185
- Justinian 79, 80, 84
- Kapriev, G. 14, 15, 33, 120
- Kijewska, A. 57, 93, 96, 102, 161, 175, 176
- Kiprian Kern 181
- Klinger, J. 31, 32, 39, 58-60
- Koch, H. 27, 53, 56
- Krivocheine, B. 37-39, 51, 55, 126
- Kuhlmann, J. 47, 48
- Lafrance, J. 16
- Lamoreaux, J. 42, 57
- Lanne, E. 209
- Lawrence, G. 20
- Lebreton, J. 121
- Leclercq, J. 175
- Lecoy, A. 104
- Leloup, J. 16
- Leśniewski, K. 13, 31, 58-60
- Lhoest, F. 70
- Liduchowska, A. 71
- Lossky, V. 10, 11, 29, 37-39, 48, 50, 54-56, 58, 59, 89, 110, 114, 119, 120, 125, 128, 138, 181, 182, 189, 191, 192, 207-209, 211, 213, 214
- Lössl, J. 49
- Lot-Borodine, M. 183
- Louth, A. 29, 42, 44, 50, 54-56, 59, 63, 69, 70, 72-74, 97, 160, 175, 176, 184, 188
- Macarius 18, 36, 61, 62, 64, 80, 151, 197, 216, 219
- Macarius of Egypt 18, 36, 61, 151, 197, 216, 219
- Mangenot, E. 34
- Manoe 208
- Mansi, J. 73
- Mantzaridis, G. 10, 39, 40, 50, 181, 189, 192
- Markus, R.A. 58
- Martin Luther 27, 49
- Mathews, P. 70
- Matsoukas, N.A. 35
- Maximus the Confessor 12, 17, 18, 20, 21, 25, 30, 36-38, 41-44, 51, 55, 61-69, 73, 87, 123, 137, 138, 149, 150, 152, 156, 173, 174, 180, 182-184, 188, 192, 202, 203, 205, 217
- Mazurkiewicz, R. 55, 69
- Mazzucchi, C.M. 54
- McEvoy, J. 57, 58
- Meyendorff, J. 10, 14, 19-26, 28, 30, 33-35, 38, 39, 43, 50, 55, 58, 59, 63, 70, 71, 73, 74, 76-89, 92, 93, 95, 121, 126, 150, 151, 153, 155, 156, 158, 175, 178, 180, 182, 188, 189, 192, 195, 211-215, 217
- Michael 25, 83
- Miklosich, F. 81
- Milerski, B. 51
- Mortley, R. 97
- Moses 97, 152, 162, 164, 209, 213
- Müller, H.F. 56
- Muller, I. 81
- Nadal Canellas, J.S. 26, 32, 33, 40
- Naumowicz, J. 51

- Nicephorus Gregoras 32, 33,
 76, 77, 82
 Nicephorus the Hesychast 78, 197,
 216, 219
 Nichols, A. 37, 46
 Nicodemus of Athos 75
 Niketas Stethatos 74
 Nilos 80
 Nutsubidze, Sh. 54
 Nygren, A. 56

 O'Meara, D. 113
 Obolevitch, T. 50, 97, 114
 Ogórek, P.P. 50
 Orhan, Sultan 84
 Origen 13, 43, 55, 60, 61, 90, 112,
 125, 205
 Ostrogorski, G. 81, 82

 Palmer, G.E.H. 69
 Panaetius of Rhodes 14
 Pantaenetus 158
 Paprocki, H. 69, 70, 184
 Parvis, P. 218
 Paul, Apostle 20, 53, 55, 59, 189,
 192, 209
 Paul, papal legate 85, 86
 Pera 211
 Perl, E.J.D. 56
 Peter the Fuller 53, 54, 184
 Peter the Iberian 54
 Petit, L. 4 6
 Petrarch 79
 Philips, G. 47, 48
 Philo 90, 125
 Philo of Alexandria 90
 Philolaos 158
 Philotheos Kokkinos 86
 Pieszczoeh, Sz. 91, 125
 Plato 13, 26, 35, 40, 54, 58, 89, 97,
 100-102, 175, 176, 184, 200, 213
 Plotinus 13, 57, 101, 102, 198

 Podskalsky, G 26, 35, 40
 Proclus 27, 53, 54, 56, 57, 95, 97, 102,
 113, 175, 176, 177, 187, 196, 197,
 198, 200, 202, 211, 215
 Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite
 9, 11, 12, 14-24, 26-30, 33, 36,
 41-44, 53-64, 66-68, 70-74, 76,
 89-100, 102, 104-106, 108-121,
 123-125, 128, 131-136, 138-151,
 155-169, 171-181, 184-188, 191,
 193, 195-203, 205-207, 209, 210,
 212-219
 Puech, H.-Ch. 35, 56, 114

 Rahner, K. 50
 Rayez, A. 26, 74
 Rist, J.M. 57, 58
 Ritter, A.M. 28, 49, 217
 Romanides, J. 23, 24, 25, 29, 56,
 214, 215
 Roques, R. 9, 29, 56, 71, 93, 114, 115,
 139, 160, 175, 186, 187,
 Rorem, P. 42, 57, 93, 94, 109, 110-114,
 116, 117, 120, 131, 132, 136, 140-
 145, 156, 157, 160, 162-170, 172-
 175, 177, 179, 180, 185-187, 193,
 196, 199, 200, 202, 203
 Rossum, J. van 44, 217, 218
 Runciman, S. 12, 82
 Rutowska, L. 47
 Ryser, F. 47

 Sabbas 76
 Saffrey, H.D. 113, 175, 198
 Scazzoso, P. 19, 29, 30, 33, 34, 35, 40,
 210-214, 219
 Schemann, A. 38
 Schiro, G. 14, 77, 158
 Schoell, R. 80
 Schopen, L. 14
 Schutze, B. 26
 von Semmelroth, O. 9, 56

- Sergius of Reschain 54
 Serr, J. 16
 Severus of Antioch 54, 184
 Sherrad, P. 69
 Sherwood, P. 26, 43, 54, 55, 62, 69, 74
 Sidéridès, X. 46
 Siebert, W. 56
 Siemianowski, A. 46, 48, 49
 Sinkiewicz, R. 15, 26
 Solomon 205
 Spidlik, T. 50
 Spiteris, Y. 10, 32, 35, 40, 45, 47, 48
 Stang, Ch. 44
 Stephen, Saint 209
 Stępień, T. 57
 Sternon, D. 39
 Stiglmayr, J. 27, 53, 55
 Stróżewski, W. 59
 Suchla, B. 42
 Suger 27, 104-106
 Suleiman 85
 Swieżawski, S. 18, 47, 57
 Świtkiewicz-Blandzi, A. 18, 44, 51
 Symeon the New Theologian 25, 36, 74, 219

 Tatakis, B. 12, 13, 16, 31, 34, 39, 42, 46, 50, 51, 57, 59
 Theodore Metochites 33, 75
 Theodore the Studite 17, 72, 73
 Theoleptos 75
 Thomas Aquinas, Saint 9, 11, 26, 47-49, 82, 104

 Thunberg, L. 42, 43, 67, 174
 Timothy 117
 Timothy, Apostle 53, 92
 Titus, Apostle 53
 Tokariew, S. 51
 Tollefsen, T. 41, 42, 44
 Torrance, A. 41

 Umur, Emir 84

 Vacant, A. 34
 Valentinian 87
 Vanneste, J. 26, 57, 93
 Vasily Dmitriyevich 81
 Vladimir, Saint 10, 25, 156

 Ware, K. 39-41
 Wenger, A. 74
 Wesche, P. 25, 26
 Wesoly, M. 13, 51
 Westerink, L.G. 175, 198
 Wilhelm of Moerbeke 202
 Williams, R.D. 26
 Witwicki, W. 101
 Wybrew, H. 63

 Young, M. 218

 Zogas-Osadnik, I. 51, 125, 127, 128, 132, 133, 135, 137, 138
 Żywow, M.W. 55, 64, 69, 74

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