

# 1. Byzantine Hesychasm in the 14th and 15th Centuries

In the last two centuries of its existence, the Byzantine Empire, which was restored after the Latin conquest of Constantinople, was politically and economically weak. Nevertheless, its intellectual and cultural influence had a widespread impact upon religious, literary and artistic development in the Slavic lands and Italy.<sup>1</sup> Economically, the split empire was dependent on Genoese and Venetian interests, which were affected by the relationship between Italian and Ottoman authorities around the Black Sea. Politically, the Byzantine state was reduced to a minimum.<sup>2</sup> Sociologically, a significant number of the Byzantine population died from the Black Death, and the power of the state was reduced due to the constant wars between the emperors Andronicus II and III.<sup>3</sup> Given these circumstances, it is not surprising a resurgence of interest in late antiquity occurred that was associated with a new, specifically ethnic consciousness, marked by nostalgia and longing for the past.<sup>4</sup> Humanist scholars Theodore Metochites and Nikephoros Gregoras often refer to this period as 'pre-Renaissance'.<sup>5</sup> The phase was characterised by an increase of literary editions and commentaries on classical texts, the development of secular treatises and rhetoric, as well as the establishment of a new conception of art, with new motifs and subjects.<sup>6</sup>

While Byzantine intellectuals propagated humanism, a renewed interest in ascetic and mystical theology occurred in the Byzantine Empire, under the influence of the mystical movement of hesychasm. In the 14th century, Gregory Palamas synthesised hesychast teaching<sup>7</sup> and came to its defence against the notorious monk Barlaam of Calabria, the leader of the humanist movement in Byzantium.<sup>8</sup> The Palamite Council of 1351 accepted the doctrine of hesychasm as an official dogma.<sup>9</sup>

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1 L. Chadd, 'From Byzantium to El Greco', MA thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art (2004) 5.

2 *ibid.*, 5.

3 D.M. Nicol, 'The Byzantine Church and Hellenic Learning in the Fourteenth Century', *Studies in Church History* (Leiden 1969).

4 J. Meyendorff, 'Society and Culture in the Fourteenth Century: Religious Problems', in M. Berza & E. Stanescu (eds), *Actes du XIV Congres International des Etudes Byzantines, Bucarest, 6-12 Septembre, 1971* (Bucharest 1974) 111-124, 54.

5 D. Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and the West: Essays On the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and The Byzantine and Roman Churches* (Wisconsin 1989) 3.

6 C.N. Tsirpanlis, 'Byzantine Humanism and Hesychasm in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries' *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, vol. 5, no. 12 (1993) 13-23.

7 I. Ševčenko, 'The Decline of Byzantium Seen through the Eyes of its Intellectuals' *Society and Intellectual Life in Late Byzantium* (London 1981) 171.

8 *ibid.*, 171.

9 *ibid.*, 172.

Even though the Orthodox Church established Palamas's essence–energies distinction as dogma at the 1351 synod under the presidency of Emperor John VI Kantacuzenos,<sup>10</sup> no systemic struggle against the Hellenic heritage of Byzantine civilisation was present in Byzantium. Polarisation between the promoters of the philosophical learning of Hellenes, frequently designated as 'humanists', and the followers of the ascetic tradition of hesychasm, had been a permanent element in the intellectual life of Byzantium since the ninth century. The subject of 'humanism' appeared during the dispute between Barlaam and Palamas because Barlaam attacked the practices of hesychasm.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, from 1351 on, Byzantine humanists could stimulate the revival of Classical Greek literature without interruption. Many scholars and intellectuals, such as Georgios Gemistos Plethon and Basilios Bessarion, were influential in Byzantine society after the Church accepted hesychasm as official dogma.<sup>12</sup> A similar conclusion can be drawn from the fact that the Palamites of the 14th century expressed respect for such authorities as Metochites and Gregory of Cyprus. The brief tension between the two theological and cultural trends resulted in a civic dispute, the hesychast controversy.

Before the historical background of the hesychast controversy is examined, it is necessary to define the meaning of the word 'hesychasm' in the context of the Byzantine tradition.

## The meaning of hesychasm

The issue of hesychasm has concerned scholars in the fields of history, theology and art. The interdisciplinary character of the hesychast debate resulted in important findings, but no proper method for studying the controversy has been developed. In addition, there is no agreement on the meaning of the term 'hesychasm'.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the semantic shifts characterising this term, which cannot be used without reservation in the context of Byzantine history,<sup>14</sup> point to four distinct but interrelated meanings of the word hesychasm.<sup>15</sup>

10 Meyendorff, 'Introduction à l'Etude de Grégoire Palamas', *Patristica Sorbonensia*, vol. 3, no. 38 (Paris 1959) 178.

11 C. Tsirpanlis, 'Byzantine Humanism and Hesychasm in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Synthesis or Antithesis, Reformation or Revolution', *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, vol. 5, no. 12 (1993) 13–23.

12 Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, G. Lawrence (trans.), (London 1964) 27.

13 Meyendorff, 'L'Hésychasme: Problèmes de Sémantique', *Mélanges D'Histoire des Religions Offerts à H.-Ch. Puech* (Paris 1973) 543–47.

14 Meyendorff, 'Introduction', *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems: Collected Studies* (London 1974).

15 Meyendorff, 'О Византийском Исихазме и его Роли в Культурном и Историческом Развитии Восточной Европы в 14в', *Труды Отдела Древнерусской Литературы*, vol. 29 (Moscow 1974).

Christian ascetic treatises emanating from Egypt from the 4th century refer sparingly to the concept of hesychasm, although the *Apophthegmata Patrum* from the 5th century does not contain any clear references to this practice.<sup>16</sup> The Egyptian fathers used the term hesychast to designate the life of solitude and contemplation (*anchoretis*), by differentiating it from the practice of a living in a convent or community (*cenobitism*).<sup>17</sup> For example, Gregory of Nyssa designated the monks who lived isolated from human society for more than 40 years as 'hesychast'.<sup>18</sup>

In the 4th and 5th centuries, the definition of hesychasm broadened in Asia Minor, Egypt and Palestine to incorporate anyone who practised 'prayer of the heart' or 'prayer of the mind'. In this context, the term hesychasm appeared in the writings of Evagrius of Ponticus and Macarius the Great, but each writer focused on a different aspect of hesychast spirituality. Both were responsible for formulating the fundamental doctrine of prayer, which inspired the hesychasts of later centuries.<sup>19</sup> A threefold path of spiritual ascent, involving purification from passions (*praxis*), contemplation of nature as the work of God (*physike theoria*), and the vision of God (*theologia*) as light formed the basis of Evagrius's doctrine of imageless prayer.<sup>20</sup> The later Byzantine fathers transformed his doctrine of the imageless prayer in the context of the Christocentric spirituality; it became closely connected to the practice of the 'Jesus Prayer'.<sup>21</sup>

The writings of the unknown author with the pseudonym of Macarius the Great affected the evolution of the hesychast spirituality away from a neoplatonic scheme into the realms of Christocentrism (which occurred in the late-5th century). He emphasised the place of the heart instead of the 'mind'.<sup>22</sup> Macarius also elaborated a hesychast anthropology that was more in keeping with a Semitic understanding of the body and soul as an integrated whole.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the transfiguration of the entire person—soul and body through the presence of the incarnated God and divine grace, which took possession of the heart, was the main goal of the Macarian prayer.<sup>24</sup> It was a mysticism of the consciousness of grace, of divine sensibility, where gnosis took on the meaning of consciousness, without which the search for union with God would be futile.

16 'Apophthegmata Patrum', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, online version <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01623c.htm> (accessed 18/05/2012).

17 I. Hausherr, 'L'Hesychasm: Etude de Spiritualite', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, vol. 22 (1965) 5–40, 247.

18 Gregory of Nyssa, 'In Psalmos', in J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca (electronic version)* (Stone Mountain, Ga. 2003); *Patrologia Graeca* 44, 298–434; 456B; G.M. Prokhorov, 'Исихазм и Общественная Мысль в Восточной Европе в 14в', *Литературные Связи Древних Славян*, vol. 23 (1968).

19 V. Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Beds 1963) 95; Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London 1957) 201.

20 G. Maloney, *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter* (New York 1992).

21 Evagrius of Pontikus, *The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer*, J.E. Bemberger (trans.), (Spencer 1970) 63–69.

22 Meyendorff, *Orthodox Theology in the Modern World* (New York 1981) 175.

23 Maloney, *Pseudo-Macarius*, 115–16.

24 Macarius the Great, 'Homily' 15, 20, in H. Dorries & E. Klostermann (eds), *Die 50 Geistlichen Homilien des Macarius* (Berlin 1964) 139.

Later writers, such as Diadochos of Photiki, attempted to synthesise both Evagrian and Macarian spiritualism, by equating the nous with the heart (a main locus for the experience of God).<sup>25</sup> Diadochos thought that, through the unceasing invocation of the name of Jesus, the intellect could be purified and illuminated with the light perceived within the heart. The main effect of the illumination of the heart was spiritual transformation, leading to acquisition of the likeness of God (*theosis*).<sup>26</sup>

The influence of John Climacus and his masterpiece *The Ladder of Spiritual Ascent* on the later hesychast tradition has been at once extensive and impressive.<sup>27</sup> Although, in this work, he focused on the practical aspects of spiritual life, mostly avoiding the ascetic's goal of actual transformation as well as his vision of the divine light, his teachings were fully hesychastic. The work illustrates the hierarchical ladder of spiritual progression leading to union with God by grace (*theosis*).<sup>28</sup>

Apart from Climacus, it is necessary to mention the contribution made to the development of hesychasm by the Cappadocian fathers, as well as the later theologians, such as Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, who offered a metaphysical basis for the hesychast 'theology of light'. The Cappadocian distinction between essence and energies provided a corrective to the experience of God in monastic practice.<sup>29</sup> Dionysius's affirmation of the apophatic and kataphatic theology voiced a paradigm for the monastic experience of divine vision.<sup>30</sup> Maximus, on the other hand, clarified the meaning of energy in the context of Christology and Soteriology.<sup>31</sup>

From the 10th to the 14th century, the term hesychasm affirmed the synthesis between the early Christian spirituality of the desert fathers and the hesychast tradition of the middle Byzantine period. It emphasised the acquisition of the knowledge of God through the work (grace) of the Holy Spirit. In the writings of Symeon the New Theologian, there is a more charismatic emphasis on the experimental side of deification, equating the acquired (personal) state of *theosis*

25 Nikiphoros the Monk, 'On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart', *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (Athens 1961) 206.

26 Diadochos of Photiki, 'On Spiritual Knowledge', *The Philokalia*, vol. 1 (London 1983) 288.

27 There are 13 citations from John Climacus's 'Ladder of Divine Ascent' in the writings of Gregory of Sinai and 25 quotations from the treatise in the writings of Palamas; see J. Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (London 2004) 10–11.

28 Mark the Hermit, 'Sermons', *Patrologia Graeca* 65, 893–1140; *Patrologia Graeca* 65, 921D, 1064B; John Climacus, 'Ladder of Divine Ascent', *Patrologia Graeca* 88, 1095–1130; 'Ladder' 27, 17; *Patrologia Graeca* 88, 112A.

29 A. Strezova, 'Knowledge and Vision of God in the Cappadocian Fathers', *Theandros*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2007) <http://www.theandros.com/cappavision.html> (accessed 20/3/2009).

30 B. Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ: Saint Symeon the New Theologian* (Crestwood 1987) 47–48.

31 D. Payne, 'The Revival of Political Hesychasm in Greek Orthodox Thought: A Study of the Hesychast Basis of the Thought of John S. Romanides and Christos Yannaras', PhD thesis, Baylor University (2006) 154.

with that experienced by Christ's disciples during the Transfiguration.<sup>32</sup> Symeon highlighted the importance of obligatory obedience to a spiritual father, and he also provided detailed descriptions of his private visions of the divine light.<sup>33</sup> Above all, he had no interest in discussions concerning the nature of God; rather, his concern was in how an individual may come to know God.<sup>34</sup>

Symeon is often classified as a major representative of the hesychast tradition in Byzantium, despite having made no reference to prayer of the mind or having insisted on a clearly formulated distinction between essence and energies in God. He stood, rather, as a unique exemplar of the personal mysticism of light, a position he shared with his fellow hesychast Nikephoros the Hesychast.<sup>35</sup>

A new stage in the line of visionary mysticism began at the end of the 13th century with Theoleptus, Metropolitan of Philadelphia. While discussing the relationship between the practical and contemplative aspects of monastic spirituality, he placed the practice of unceasing prayer into the context of Christological and ecclesiological frameworks.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, he incorporated the Dionysian description of the apophatic ascent to God into the spiritual experience of *theoria*.

## Hesychasm and Gregory of Sinai

Gregory of Sinai's arrival on Mt Athos at the end of the 13th century initiated a new hesychast revival in Byzantium. He seemingly created 'hesychast international', a universal vocation of asceticism aimed at all people regardless of their ecclesiastical position.<sup>37</sup> He brought the practice of the Jesus Prayer to Athos and later transmitted it to his followers in the Slavic lands.

Gregory of Sinai was born at Koukoulos on the western shores of Asia Minor; during the reign of Andronicus II Palaeologos (1259–1332), the Turks imprisoned him, and sent him to Laodicea on the Syrian coast. After the local Christians had ransomed him, Gregory of Sinai embarked on a lifelong odyssey impelled by his search for God, or by force of circumstances.<sup>38</sup> Later, he became a monk at the Monastery of St Katherine, Sinai, where his ascetic zeal proved to be exemplary,

32 Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, 15.

33 H.G. Beck, *Kirche und Theologisch Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich* (Munich 1959) 360ff.

34 Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*, C.J.D. Catanzaro (ed. & trans.) (Toronto 1980) 245–46 [XXI.4].

35 Symeon the New Theologian, 'Catéchèses', in B. Krivocheine (ed.) *St Symeon the New Theologian* (Crestwood 1986) 358–368.

36 Payne, 'The Revival of Political Hesychasm', 167.

37 Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* (Crestwood 1971) 389; G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick 1986) 512.

38 K. Ware, 'The Jesus Prayer in St Gregory of Sinai', *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. 4 (1972) 4.

and his accomplishments were outstanding. Travelling to Crete in search of a spiritual director, Gregory of Sinai learned the method of pure prayer, the guarding of the mind, and the manner of true vigilance from Arsenius of Crete.<sup>39</sup>

This encounter was of supreme importance, for it turned out to be a milestone in the great hesychast movement, which swept through the monastic world. After learning the hesychast method of prayer and contemplation, Gregory of Sinai embarked on a voyage to Magoula at Mt Athos. On the holy mountain, he encountered monks whose zeal was concentrated on practical asceticism and not on *hesychia* and guarding of the mind. Here, he lived a semi-eremitic life and became the spiritual father of a number of chosen disciples.<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact Nikephoros promulgated this method in the 13th century, when Gregory of Sinai settled on Mt Athos there were only three practitioners of the hesychast method of prayer. Gregory of Sinai and his contemporary, Theoleptus, Metropolitan of Philadelphia changed this situation by initiating a renaissance of hesychast spirituality.<sup>41</sup>

Faced with constant attacks from the Turks, Gregory of Sinai left Athos and, together with his disciples, including the future patriarchs Isidore and Kalistos, he moved to Thessaloniki. Later, he wandered through Chios and Lesbos and contemplated returning to Mt Sinai. He never reached Sinai, however, but journeyed to Mytilene, and thence to Constantinople. At around 1335 he and his disciples settled in the mountains of Thrace, in Paroria, where they were under the protection of Czar John Alexander. Gregory of Sinai dwelt in the mountainous terrain of Bulgaria and took no part in the hesychast controversy. Nevertheless, his followers frequently visited other parts of the Byzantine commonwealth, exerting a greater influence than that of Palamas and his followers in the sphere of spiritual life in the Slavic lands.

Gregory of Sinai's dogmatic system was mainly a theological synthesis of the speculative and intellectual mysticism of Evagrius and Symeon.<sup>42</sup> His doctrine of hesychasm was predominantly practical, with an emphasis on outward exercises, manual labour and ascetic prayer. He often reaffirmed the importance of the hesychast life, not just for monastics and clergy, but for all people, regardless of their status in society. To reaffirm the universal character of the hesychast movement, Gregory of Sinai sent Isidore on a mission to teach the

39 I. Pomyalovskiy, 'Житие Святого Григория Синаита', *Записки Ист.-Филол. Фак* (St Petersburg 1894–1896) Chapter 35, 21.

40 P.A. Sirku, *Житие Григория Синаита, Составленное Константинопольским Патриархом Каллисто: Жития по Рукописи XVI в. и Ист.-Археол. Введ* (St Petersburg 1909); Житие Григория 15 (33, 7–8); Житие Григория 5 (9, 3–4).

41 Gregory of Sinai, 'On Stillness: Fifteen Texts', in G.E.H. Palmer (ed.), *The Philokalia: Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts*, vol. 4 (Athens 2006).

42 Anonymous, *Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, N.Y. 1997) 131–134.



hesychast method to laity.<sup>43</sup> He did, however, limit the visionary experience of light to those more advanced in spiritual matters, and stressed the need for beginners to exercise obedience to a spiritual father.<sup>44</sup>

Gregory of Sinai initiated an ascetic model based on patristic doctrine of the creation of man in the image and likeness of God. By insisting on the cosmological event of Christ's incarnation, he also addressed the deification of man.<sup>45</sup> The Fall and expulsion from Paradise is recounted in Genesis 3, and in New Testament passages such as Romans 5 and 2 Corinthians 15:22. Gregory of Sinai went beyond scripture and added other teachings drawn from tradition and philosophy. The Sinaite insists on the importance of 'spiritual senses', the role of perception in the program of spiritual discipline, and of the faculty of reason in controlling the senses.<sup>46</sup> He taught that the human soul, involved in the Fall through forgetfulness of God's commandments, became corrupt. Its natural and spiritual senses were distorted, inoperative and incapable of their usual function, that is, participation in the mysteries of the Spirit.<sup>47</sup> This defined the principal spiritual goal of humanity in this life: merging of the natural and spiritual powers of the soul into a single perception under the influence of the Holy Ghost. Gregory of Sinai juxtaposed those who achieved this aim with 'the wise in the word' who have succumbed to their rationality.<sup>48</sup> This affirmed the ideal that if human beings were in better exercise of their mental faculties by shouting out their thoughts using hesychast practice, there was a higher probability of acquiring the supernatural knowledge that comes straight from God.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, those who were devoted to worldly wisdom could not proceed to the higher stage of reasoning.<sup>50</sup>

In such a framework, intellectual knowledge was a point of transition, from which one could move in two directions: either towards the wisdom of the world or to the supernatural wisdom of grace. Moreover, the acquisition of abstract knowledge was for the 'wise of the world', who failed to control their desire for knowledge and repeated the same error as Adam and Eve did in Paradise.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, knowledge of God as an effect of divine grace was preserved for those practicing the hesychast method of prayer. The divine simplicity and

43 Ware, *Act out of Stillness: The Influence of Fourteenth-Century Hesychasm on Byzantine and Slavic Civilisation* (Toronto 1995) 9–11.

44 Gregory of Sinai, 'Opera', *Patrologia Graeca* 150, 1240–1345; 1340–1341.

45 Gregory of Sinai, 'On Prayer: Seven Texts', *The Philokalia: The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts*, G.E.H. Palmer (ed.), vol. 4 (Athens 1961) 207–285.

46 *ibid.*, 220.

47 *ibid.*, 223–40.

48 Gregory of Sinai, 'Words', *Patrologia Graeca* 150, 1240; 1240A.

49 *ibid.*, *Patrologia Graeca*, 150, 1245C.

50 *ibid.*, *Patrologia Graeca*, 150, 1262BC.

51 *ibid.*, *Patrologia Graeca*, 150, 1240A.

unity reflected in the brief and repetitive Jesus Prayer permitted the possibility of divine vision, whereas the intellectual pursuits of Christians associated with the demonic spirit of the world, lead to multiplicity and division.<sup>52</sup>

Gregory of Sinai wrote several prayer manuals, which he addressed to various Athonite monks. These manuals are evidence of the spread of hesychasm on Athos. One of his treatises, *On Stillness and Two Methods of Prayer*, gives concrete details about hesychast prayer practices.<sup>53</sup> Here, Gregory of Sinai mentioned the two ways that can be utilised to confirm baptismal grace.<sup>54</sup> The first way in which the grace of baptism and the presence of the indwelling Godhead was achieved, was through fulfilment of the commandments (the active life). The second way was through the enduring divine memory, permanently entrenched in the hesychast practices of the Jesus Prayer combined with constant remembrance of God under the guidance of the spiritual father.<sup>55</sup>

The full version of this prayer is 'Lord, Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner'. In practice, however, hesychasts recite a shorter chant: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.'<sup>56</sup> Other elements are associated with this prayer, such as a low chair on which the monk leaned to concentrate his intellect. The control of breathing involved sitting, the resting of the chin or beard against the chest while the eyes and attention are brought to the centre of the belly, the navel. In addition, a darkened place is required to keep the mind from distractions. The Jesus Prayer contains two parts, and it is repeated either silently or aloud, and the breathing is through the nostrils.<sup>57</sup> Opponents of the hesychasts often criticised this technique and referred to hesychast as 'navel-psychics',<sup>58</sup> with the clear intention of slandering and offending them, as Palamas noted. The psychosomatic technique of inward and outward control of the breath is recommended as a tool to recollect the mind until such a time that the mystic is able to maintain inner quiet.<sup>59</sup> There remained, however, the physical labour, constraint and pain, on which the Sinaite set more store. The kingdom of heaven demanded that violence be suffered, and violence here means the feeling of bodily distress in everything, both physical and spiritual.

Gregory of Sinai introduced a tripartite system of spiritual ascent. Starting in the world of action and ascending to the world of contemplation, it culminated

52 M. Angold, 'Eastern Christianity', *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 5 (Cambridge 2006) 118.

53 Gregory of Sinai, 'Opera', in *Patrologia Graeca* 150, 1240–1345; 1313–1329.

54 Gregory of Sinai, 'On Prayer', 275.

55 Gregory of Sinai, *Opusculum* III, in J. Gouillard, *Petite Philocalie* (Seuil 1978) 241, 244.

56 Gregory Palamas, *The Philokalia: The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts*, G.E.H. Palmer (ed.), vol. 4 (Athens 1961) 337.

57 *ibid.*, 276–77.

58 V. Antonov, *Classics of Spiritual Philosophy and The Present* (Santa Fe, N.M. 2008) 413–415.

59 Gregory Palamas, 'Triads', *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, J. Meyendorff (ed.), (New Jersey 1983); 'Triad' II, 2, 7.



in the stage of union with God. The three steps of spiritual ascent were: *ethike* or *praktike*, *physike* and *theologike*. The first stage was that of the grammarians, or those physically engaged in the world of action, who occupied themselves with the purification of the soul. The second stage was that of divine orators, who applied apodictic logic to the universals in the spirit, and recognised the causes of things through reading the creator's handwriting.<sup>60</sup> This was the so-called 'natural contemplation', understood as a symbolic interpretation of natural phenomena, such as the capacity to perceive traces of God's wisdom and beauty in visible realities.<sup>61</sup> The reading of the divine Logos in created things leads to *theologike*, the state of ultimate contemplation or 'the vision of God', realised through the state of the intellect itself (the soul finds its native land, within itself, by recovering its primitive state).<sup>62</sup> This was the final stage in spiritual development, the moment of inner transformation of the person, resulting in inner divine warmth. In other words, a stage of a philosopher, manifested in a vision of uncreated light, when the human person achieves the state of union with God (*theosis*).<sup>63</sup>

Gregory of Sinai also gave an account of the three stages of spiritual life by elaborating on the symbolic meaning of the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ.<sup>64</sup> His account of the feast clarifies his approach to the theological concepts of *praxis* (struggle to cleanse passions from the soul) and *theoria* (a state of inner concordance between the human soul and God) and adds a new element that was never clearly expressed in the teachings of his predecessors.<sup>65</sup> Following the earlier patristic tradition, Gregory of Sinai claimed that the Transfiguration happened six days after the apostle Peter confessed the divine nature of Christ. This period of six days was a time of silence. No other events of Christ's life were mentioned by the evangelist in relation to either Peter or Christ during this period of six days. After that time had passed, Christ took the three apostles and climbed Mt Tabor and the Transfiguration occurred after a set period of prayer.<sup>66</sup> These are the three periods of the spiritual life, which correspond to the stages of purification, illumination and deification.<sup>67</sup> The first stage begins with the confession, which embodies a complete knowledge of faith and an understanding of the commandments and the meaning of the divine Word.

60 Gregory of Sinai, 'Words', 1292D.

61 Angold, 'Eastern Christianity', 121.

62 Gregory of Sinai, 'On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises'; 'On Thoughts, Passions and Virtues'; 'On Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred and Thirty Seven Texts', in G.E.H. Palmer (ed.), *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (Athens 1961) 57, 39–58, 4; 57, 33–38; 60, 8–9.

63 Gregory of Sinai, *Discourse on the Transfiguration* 1, 18, in D. Balfour (ed.), *St Gregory the Sinaite: Discourse on the Transfiguration* (Athens 1985) 217–218.

64 Gregory of Sinai, *Discourse on the Transfiguration* 1, 98, in Balfour (ed.) *St Gregory the Sinaite*, 275; Palmer, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4; 47, 35–37.

65 E. Hisamatsu, 'The Significance of the Transfiguration for Hesychasm', *Kobe Kaisei Review*, vol. 44 (2005) 129–140.

66 Gregory of Sinai, *Discourse on the Transfiguration* 2, 24; in Balfour (ed.), *St Gregory the Sinaite*, 672, 384.

67 Palamas, 'On Prayer and Purity of Heart', *Patrologia Graeca* 150, 1117D.

The second stage is the knowledge of the mysteries of creation; it incorporates the practising of prayer and commandments. This is essentially an ascent of the body and soul by way of catharsis or purification into the darkness where God resides. It is the period of purifying one's self; a realm of praxis or the struggle for apatheia and love. The third and final stage is when the Christian no longer sees images or concepts, but meets God directly, face to face, in an unmediated union of love. This stage is sanctification or deification, or the time of the vision of God — *theoria*. The apostles perceived this final stage of Transfiguration of Christ on Mt Tabor.<sup>68</sup> In turn, the feast of the Transfiguration is a biblical actualisation of the mystical vision, and the criterion for a legitimate dogma which affirmed the unity of the Trinity and the unity of divine and human nature in Christ.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the Transfiguration on Mt Tabor was a final and complete theophany of what was indicated symbolically in the previous theophanies of Elijah on Mt Horeb (I Kings 19:1–13) and of Moses on Mt Sinai (Exodus 33: 20, 23), 'the pledge of eternal beatitude in the other world'.<sup>70</sup>

## Gregory of Sinai and Gregory Palamas

A number of scholars assert that there was rivalry between the hesychast movements of Palamas and Gregory of Sinai. Others, on the contrary, have affirmed Palamas was a disciple of Gregory of Sinai whom he met while residing on Mt Athos. Both lived in the Monastery of Vatopedi and later transferred to the Great Lavra of St Athanasius.<sup>71</sup> Gregoras, one of the chief exponents of the anti-hesychast movement recorded this fact in his *Romaike Historia*. He claimed that Palamas had as his teacher Gregory the Sharp, who propagated the hesychast teaching on the uncreated light.<sup>72</sup> The historical data was disputed by eminent scholars, such as Meyendorff, who recounted that although Palamas was under the guidance of Gregory the Great, the bibliographical details of that person do not correspond with those of Gregory of Sinai.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Papamichael states that the biographical details of Gregory the Wise do not parallel those of Gregory of Sinai. Staniloae shared the opinion of his predecessors<sup>74</sup> while Mayer presented the famous ascetic Gregory from Byzantium as a teacher to Palamas.

68 J. Touraille, *Philocalie Des Peres Neptiques: Fascicule 7 Thalassius l'African, Jean Damascene, Abbe Philemon, Theognoste, Philothee le Sinaite, Elie l'Ecdicos, Theophane le Climaque* (Kidderminster 1991) 626.

69 Gregory of Sinai, *Discourse on the Transfiguration* 2, 3, in Balfour (ed.), *St Gregory the Sinaite*, 646, 4.

70 Gregory of Sinai, *Discourse on the Transfiguration* 2, 1, in Balfour (ed.), *St Gregory the Sinaite*, 658, 211.

71 Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, A. Fiske (trans), (New York 1974) 52.

72 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Romaike Historia*, L. Schopen & I. Bekker (eds), (Bonn 1829–1830) 19, 1; 2, 10.

73 Meyendorff, *Study of Gregory Palamas*, 33–34.

74 Balfour, 'Was St Gregory Palamas St Gregory the Sinaite's Pupil?', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 28 (1984) 116.

Bones did not exclude the possibility that both Gregorys met on Mt Athos,<sup>75</sup> but Ware declared that the direct contact between Palamas and Gregory of Sinai, while it seems probable, cannot be proven.<sup>76</sup>

Balfour also provided several proofs in support of the claim that 'Gregory the Great' was identical with Gregory of Sinai and that Palamas was formally under his spiritual direction<sup>77</sup> until their arrival in Thessaloniki in 1325, when the two men became, to some extent, estranged. The possible reason was the supposed vision Palamas had in his sleep of Demetrius, patron of Thessaloniki.<sup>78</sup> On the basis of this vision he persuaded many monks to stay with him. Following the patristic tradition of 'imageless prayer', Gregory of Sinai often warned his disciples against visions, and could not stand the company of self-willed men; he preferred to remove himself from that situation and move to a designated place that was suitable for contemplation.<sup>79</sup>

Balfour claimed the personalities of these two hesychasts were different. Palamas became a spiritual leader in own right and began a career as a theological author and a leading champion of hesychasm against Barlaam, whereas Gregory of Sinai embarked on a painful odyssey ending with his second or final establishment in the wilderness of Paroria. While Gregory of Sinai was more cosmologically oriented, Palamas was a Byzantine universalist with a nationalistic Greek orientation. Moreover, the theological system of Gregory of Sinai was for the simple monks and laity, and the theological teaching of Palamas was for the educated monks. Though not a good systematic theologian or an accurate exegete, Gregory of Sinai left a body of spiritual writing, which influenced many of his followers, especially in Slavic lands. He was the prime inaugurator of a mystical renaissance that started in the 3rd century and which Palamas fully systematised during the hesychast controversy.

## The hesychast controversy

In the 14th century an acrimonious controversy erupted in the Byzantine Empire, leading to a redefinition of traditional Trinitarian dogma as formulated in the late antiquity. Beginning in 1330, the debate reached its climax at the church council held in Constantinople in 1351, and reverberated in eddies and echoes until the end of the century. The controversy started when Barlaam, under the influence of Western scholastic theology, attacked the ascetic practices

75 K. Bones, 'Gregory Palamas, der Letzte der Grossen Byzantinischen Theologen 1296–1359', *Theologia* (Athenes 1979).

76 Ware, 'Jesus Prayer', 3.

77 Balfour, 'Was St Gregory Palamas St Gregory the Sinaite's Pupil?', 117.

78 Philotheos, 'Enkomion', in *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 558–717; 151, 569D.

79 Balfour (ed.), *St Gregory the Sinaite: Discourse on the Transfiguration*, 127.

and theological ideas of the hesychast community in Thessaloniki and Mt Athos; in particular, he criticised their claims to have seen the same light that the apostles saw on Mt Tabor during Christ's Transfiguration. Barlaam was bilingual in Latin and Greek and came to Constantinople from South Italy in 1330. He made an impression in the imperial court by challenging many intellectuals in order to demonstrate his knowledge. Barlaam served as a negotiator for the church union with Rome. He also headed the Byzantine embassy to Avignon in 1339.<sup>80</sup>

In the course of a few years, he produced treatises defending the Byzantine position on the Holy Spirit against the question of the *filioque*.<sup>81</sup> The main error of Barlaam was the use of Aristotelian logic to avoid the theological point that divided East and West for years. Palamas found Barlaam's syllogistic method disturbing and wrote several letters to counter these arguments.

Palamas was born to an aristocratic court family in 1296. His education at the University of Thessaloniki provided him with a considerable knowledge of Aristotle. In his *Encomium*, the patriarch Philotheus Kikkinos states that the Grand Logothete [Megas Logothetēs, an official supervising all the sekreta (or the fiscal departments) of the Byzantine Empire] Metochites was so favourably impressed by the skill of Palamas in handling Aristotelian methods of argument that he stated 'Aristotle himself ... would praise Gregory beyond measure'.<sup>82</sup> After an early humanistic education, Palamas was mentored in the use of syllogistic argumentation in theology by his teachers, and he went on 'to develop into a rigorous champion of monastic anti-intellectualism'.<sup>83</sup> When his father died, Palamas decided to follow a monastic vocation and, after spending two decades in study and ascetic labours, he became a monk at Mt Athos, the centre of all Orthodox monasticism in the 14th century. Soon after Turkish raids affected Athos, Palamas went to Thessaloniki, where he entered the priesthood. He stayed there before founding a hermitage at Veroia. Around 1331 Serbian raids were constantly ravaging the area of Veroia, and Palamas returned to Athos. He learned the techniques of the guardian of the heart (*nepsis*) and the noetic prayer from practising hesychasm on Athos, but his teacher par excellence was his personal devotional practice, and the empirical knowledge he procured through this devotion.<sup>84</sup> Palamas engaged in a bitter dispute with opponents of hesychasm, above all with Barlaam and his associate Gregory Akindynos. Other eminent personalities supported the opposition to Palamas, including Eulogia Choumnaina. Although she was related to the imperial family

80 G.V. Gianelli, *Un Progetto di Barlaam per l'Unione delle Chiese* (Vatican 1946) 185–201.

81 *Filioque* is Latin for 'and (from) the Son'; G. Schiro (ed.), *Barlaam Calabro Epistole Greche I Primordi Episodici e Dottrinari delle Lotte Esicaste*, Istituto Siciliano di Studi Bizantini e Neogreci, *Studi e Testi*, vol. 1 (Palermo 1954) 24–26.

82 Philotheos, 'Enkomion', *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 558D–560A.

83 G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz* (Munich 1977) 47.

84 Palamas, *Triad*, 'Homily' 1, 2, 8, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

and was a spiritual daughter of one of the leaders of hesychasm — Theoleptus, she objected to these teachings, together with Manuel Kalekas and Joannes Kyparissiotēs.<sup>85</sup> Palamas, however, had strong support from Patriarch Kalistos of Constantinople and the well-known theologian Joseph Calaothetus.<sup>86</sup> Secular authorities also intervened in the dispute, including emperor Andronicus III (1328–1341) and Emperor John VI Kantacuzenos (1347–1354).<sup>87</sup>

Unhappy with the response he received from Palamas, in 1340 Barlaam went to Constantinople to register his complaint against the monks and Palamas. He came armed with his treatises titled *Against the Messalians* (a derogatory term used for Palamists).<sup>88</sup> Palamas was summoned to Constantinople for an official hearing. In his treatise against Barlaam, Palamas made a distinction between the wisdom of the Greeks, on which Barlaam relied, and Christian grace, which could not be generated by intellectual knowledge. He emphasised the role of experience against the use of intellectual wisdom by developing a doctrinal distinction between the divine essence and divine energies.<sup>89</sup>

The patriarch redirected his summons only after the intervention of Akindynos on behalf of his old friend Palamas. Faced with the shocking charges that Barlaam was making against the hesychast monks with regard to illegal conventicle, ditheism and polytheism, and not wanting the dogmatic issue to surface, the patriarch and the emperor tried to bring Palamas and Barlaam together, in order to get them to settle their dispute quietly. After this attempt had failed, a council was called and met on 10 June 1341, in the Church of Saint Sophia.<sup>90</sup> Barlaam, permitted to explain the reason why he had taken the matter up, produced the book he wrote, before he began to condemn the monks. His first claim against the hesychast was his conclusion about the light of Tabor (the uncreated light), arguing it was not uncreated, but created.<sup>91</sup> The second charge was of Messalianism;<sup>92</sup> he exaggerated the implications of the hesychast use of the unique and special monastic prayer, the Jesus Prayer.<sup>93</sup> After these

85 Meyendorff, 'Is "Hesychasm" the Right Word? Remarks on Religious Ideology in the Fourteenth Century,' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 7 (1983) 447–456.

86 D. Angelov, 'Към Историята на Религиозно-Философската Мисъл в Средновековна България: Исихазъм и Варлаамитство', *Известия на Българското Историческо Дружество*, vol. 25 (1976).

87 V.S. Kiselinkov, 'Житието на Св. Теодосий', *Търновски Като Исторически Паметник* (Sofia 1926) 29–30.

88 Meyendorff, 'Introduction', *Gregorie Palamas, Defense des Saints Hesychastes* (Louvain 1959).

89 Palamas, *Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite* (1999) 3–4; A. Carile, *Η Θεσσαλονίκη ως Κέντρο Ορθόδοξου Θεολογίας-Προοπτικές στη Σημερινή Ευρώπη* (Thessaloniki 2000) 131–140.

90 T. Ouspensky, *Ocerki po Istorii Vizantiskoi Obrazovanosti* (St Petersburg 1892); J. Bois, 'Le Synode Hesychaste de 1341', *Echos D'Orien*, vol. 6 (1903) 50–60.

91 G.D. Dragas, 'The Synodical Procedure followed in the Hesychastic Disputes', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 45 (2000) 631–646.

92 A piedistic mendicant sect which held that, because of Adam's sin, everyone has a devil substantially united to his soul. This demon is partially expelled at baptism, and can be completely driven out only by ceaseless prayer and asceticism.

93 'Conciliar Tome of 1341', *The Philokalia: The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts*, G.E.H. Palmer (ed.), *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (Athens 1961) 418–425.

charges were made, the monks, led by Palamas, were permitted to defend themselves. Palamas refused to employ syllogism as Barlaam did. Instead, Palamas chose clear and reliable arguments against Barlaam, which he borrowed from the treatises of the fathers.<sup>94</sup>

After the council, which convoked in June, supported Palamas's refutation of Barlaam, the *Hagioritic Tome* was produced under its guidance condemning the wicked doctrines of Barlaam.<sup>95</sup> This extraordinary document was the result of a meeting at Mt Athos in August 1341, after Barlaam had written his notorious 'Against the Messalians'. The *Hagioritic Tome* presented a new doctrine of the distinction between essence and energies, as well as a new revelation and a new religious age. In the interests of peaceful necessity, Barlaam was ordered to abandon and even to repudiate his position, and the monks were to be freed from further abuse. Being a sympathiser of the Latins, Barlaam returned to the west after his condemnation at the council of Constantinople in 1341 and immediately converted to Catholicism.<sup>96</sup>

The meaning of the complicated period beginning with the departure of Barlaam cannot be examined on one level alone. With the onset of hostilities between the regency of Kantacuzenos and the Grand Logette (the commander-in-chief of the Byzantine army), the hesychast controversy was swept into the arena of Byzantium's powerful political and socio-economic forces.<sup>97</sup> When the emperor Andronicus I Komnenos died suddenly, his heir John V was only a child. The patriarch John Kalekas became a designated guardian of the dynasty, and its chief authority alongside Anne of Savoy and Alexios Apokaukos, stood against the regency of Kantacuzenos, who used the hesychast controversy for political purposes.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, since Palamas was a supporter of Kantacuzenos, he yoked his religious position to the political position of the emperor. Unsympathetic to the doctrines of Palamas, Kalekas worried about the political significance of their aggressive sponsorship of the Kantacuzenos. Thus, due to Kalekas's policy, 'hesychasm suffered eclipse and disgrace during the regency years'.<sup>99</sup> Popular works often make hesychasm out to be an active ingredient in the Byzantine civil war, but this interpretation is unwarranted, and the lines were not clear-cut. Kantacuzenos's camp was anti-hesychast, whereas Apokaukos, who was the major opponent of Kantacuzenos, showed sympathy for Palamism,

94 John Kantacuzenos, *Historiarum Libri IV* (Nabu Press 2010) I, 551–552.

95 *ibid.*, I, 552.

96 Akindynos, 'Report to the Patriarch', in F. Uspenskii, 'Синодик в Неделю—Православия', *Известия Русского Археологического Института в Константинополе*, (Odessa 1893) 87.

97 L. Clucas, 'The Hesychast Controversy in Byzantium in the Fourteenth Century: A Consideration of the Basic Evidence', PhD thesis, University of California (1975).

98 G. Weiss, *Joannes Kantacuzenos, Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch, in der Gesellschaftsentwicklung von Byzanz im 14* (München 1969) 29.

99 J. Van Antwerp Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century* (Michigan 1994) 437.



in spite of political differences between the two parties. Nevertheless, since Palamas was a political supporter of Kantacuzenos, he could no longer either discuss the issue or write about hesychasm. Although one of the regents, the Empress Anna had sympathy for the ideas of Palamas, she had to succumb to Kalekas's policy.

Kalekas provided support to Akindynos, yet another opponent of Palamas, and elevated him to episcopal rank, whereas Palamas received the support of the regent Kantacuzenos, who wrote a set of Three Antirrhetici against Akindynos and another set of Seven Discourses against Akindynos.<sup>100</sup> Akindynos was an Orthodox monk and theologian. He was critical of the teaching of Palamas on spiritual enlightenment, although he had been his disciple. Akindynos was more inclined towards scholarship, philosophy and scholastic theology and was closer to humanistic ideals of the future renaissance than to Byzantine theology and monastic mysticism.<sup>101</sup> He initially tried to mediate the dispute between Palamas and Barlaam, but later criticised Palamas for abandoning the long-established tradition of the fathers and developing an innovative approach to defining the practices of the hesychast.<sup>102</sup> After Barlaam, the instigator of the dispute, returned to Italy, Akindynos carried on the battle against Palamas's doctrines, showing a willingness to stand by what he considered the orthodox traditions.<sup>103</sup> He wrote approximately 76 letters, which dwelt heavily on the hesychast dispute.<sup>104</sup> Unlike later anti-Palamites, he was not interested in the political aspects of the conflict, did not support the union with West, and regarded Greek philosophy in the truly Byzantine tradition as ancillary to theology, and inferior to the revealed wisdom of God.<sup>105</sup> Palamas often designated Akindynos with the term 'chameleon' because he frequently gave in under pressure and signed agreements of submission that he immediately retracted.<sup>106</sup> If God were absolutely transcendent, but could also be experienced and seen as uncreated, one had to speak of a transcendent divine essence and uncreated energies. This is the teaching that Akindynos refuted. Claiming that God is identical with his essence, he affirmed if any vision of God is to be admitted a possibility, that vision could only be a vision of the divine essence itself and its created manifestation. To make this claim would constitute heresy according to Akindynos.

100 Akindynos, 'Letter' 10.34, in A.C. Hero (ed.), *Letters of Gregory Akindynos* (Washington D.C. 1983) 87.

101 Nicol, 'Thessalonica as a Cultural Centre in the Fourteenth Century', *Studies in Late Byzantine History and Prosopography* (London 1986) 126.

102 J.M. Hussey (trans), *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (New Brunswick 1969) 259.

103 T. Hart, 'Nicephoros Gregoras: Historian of the Hesychast Controversy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 2 (1951) 171.

104 Hero, 'Some Notes on the Letters of Gregory Akindynos', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 36 (1982) 225.

105 Akindynos, 'Letter to a Follower', in Hero (ed.), *Letters*, Letter 19, Marc. 155, fol. 40; H.V. Beyer, 'Nichephoras Gregoras als Theologe und sein Crstes Auftreten Gegen die Hesychasten', *Jahrbuch Ostericichen Byzantinisti*, vol. 20 (1971) 171–188.

106 Hero, 'Some Notes', 226.

When Palamas openly refuted the anti-hesychast sentiments of Akyndinos, Kalekas sent Palamas to jail. A synod was convoked which excommunicated Palamas.<sup>107</sup> He remained in exile until the civil war ended in 1347. Kantacuzenos became a co-emperor, sharing power with the legitimate heir, John Palaeologus. The triumph of Kantacuzenos also led to the revival of the hesychast movement. Serving as a mediator between the two opposing sides in the controversy, Empress Anna released Palamas from jail and appointed him as archbishop of Thessaloniki.<sup>108</sup> Kalekas was deposed, and replaced by Isidore.<sup>109</sup> The Council of 1351 reaffirmed the theological doctrines of Palamas and proclaimed anathemas against Akindynos, Barlaam and Gregoras. The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, which was created once the hesychast controversy concluded, contains these documents.<sup>110</sup>

The theology of Palamas was for a time opposed by Gregoras, the Byzantine patrician and chronicler who published several works, including a commentary on *Synesius* ('On Dreams') and a plan for the reform of the calendar. Gregoras was known as a late-Byzantine Christian humanist. He drew some confidence from the wider support of the Orthodox Church represented by Arsenius, Bishop of Tyre (1351–1366), a vigorous opponent of the new mystical theology of Palamas.<sup>111</sup> Gregoras devoted five books of his *Romaike Historia* (books 30–35) to the hesychast controversy; these are identical in context with his theological 'refutations'. Despite his vast encyclopaedic knowledge, Nikephoros Gregoras had no understanding of the Palamites' theological distinction between the essence and energies of God. He spent at least five years focusing his attention on clarifying two main expressions used by Palamas. The first was the word 'divinities' as an alternative term for the energies of God, which, according to Gregoras, implied polytheism. The second expression was the description of human beings in the state of *theosis* as 'uncreated by grace' which implied Messalianism.<sup>112</sup> Gregoras stressed the negative theology, which implied that the only knowledge of God that can be attained by humanity is awareness of all the supreme qualities we attribute to God, is inappropriate because they

107 *ibid.*, 438.

108 G.T. Dennis, 'The Deposition of the Patriarch Calecas', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, vol. 9 (1960) 51–55.

109 J.S. Nadal, 'La Critique par Akindynos de l'Herméneutique Patristique de Palamas', *Istina*, vol. 19 (1974); J.S. Nadal (ed.), *Gregorii Acindyni Refutationes duae Operis Gregorii Palamae cui Titulus Dialogus inter Orthodoxum et Barlaamitam* (Louvain 1995).

110 R. Mihajlovski, 'A Sermon about the Anti-Palamite Theologian Gregory Akindynos of Prilep', [www.ni.rs/byzantium/doc/zbornik6/PDF-VI/10%20Robert.pdf](http://www.ni.rs/byzantium/doc/zbornik6/PDF-VI/10%20Robert.pdf) (accessed 15/05/2010); *ibid.*, 438.

111 R.E. Sinkewicz, 'Christian Theology and the Renewal of Philosophical and Scientific Studies in the Early Fourteenth Century: The Capita 150 of Gregory Palamas', *Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies*, vol. 48 (1986).

112 Akindynos, 'Letters' 10, 197–99: 33, 47–49; 42, 81; 44, 81–83, in Hero (ed.), *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*; Palamas, *Triads* II, 1.31, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

cannot be attributed to his infinite essence.<sup>113</sup> To believe that anyone could behold the divine, nameable energies to God, distinct from his essence, was not only to exaggerate man's access to the divine, it was to misrepresent Byzantine patristic tradition, the negative theology of the church fathers.<sup>114</sup> Gregoras held actual knowledge of God to be the result of illumination, though, in his case, he interprets this as a mind freeing itself from material images, rather than escaping from a vision of some object other than itself. For Gregoras, the Taboric Light was no more than a symbolic enigmatic manifestation of uncreated light, analogous to the light mentioned in other theophanies.<sup>115</sup> In addition, he often charged Palamas with iconoclasm and accused him of forgetting the importance of the sacred liturgy and the Eucharist.<sup>116</sup>

In the course of a distinguished career, Metochites, who had earlier taken the young Gregoras into his household, warned Gregoras to have nothing to do with the hesychast doctrine. Moreover, because Gregoras upheld the views of some visiting western astronomers, he had fallen into disgrace with the empress Anne of Savoy. In 1351 Gregoras and his supporters were allowed to state their case against the orthodoxy of Palamas, but they did not succeed in convincing the bishops and senators present that Palamas was heretic. Instead, the *Synodical Tome* affirmed the validity of the doctrine of hesychasm, which was in accordance with decisions of synods in 1341 and 1347, and condemned the teachings of Gregoras.<sup>117</sup> Kantacuzenos refused to execute or blind him, as was the customary punishment for such offences, but he went to prison at the Chora church (monastic community at that time) and was forbidden to write and receive letters. At this time, he finished his *Romaike Histora* and dealt with the theological debates of 1351 at considerable length. Gregoras was liberated after the abdication of Kantacuzenos and the assumption of power by Palaeologus.<sup>118</sup> When he died in 1360, however, a mob broke into his house and dragged his body through the streets.<sup>119</sup>

The second phase of hesychast controversy began when Kantacuzenos abdicated in 1354. Another anti-hesychast, Prochoros, raised questions concerning the nature of visions of God and the meaning of participation in the divine essence that subjected them to rational analysis by means of Aristotelian syllogisms.<sup>120</sup> The issues raised were instrumental in bringing the hesychast teaching to its

113 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Antirrhetika*, in B.H. Veit (ed.), (Vienna 1999); *Antirrhetika* I, 1, 8, 23.

114 *ibid.*, 32–35.

115 Nicephoros Gregoras, *Corpus Scriptorum Hist. Byz.*, L. Schopen & I. Bekker (eds.) (Bonn 1829–1830); *Hist. Byz.* 33, 21 (iii, 414).

116 *ibid.*, 25, 1 (ii, 1136).

117 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Hist. Byz.*, 19, I (ii, p. 919).

118 E. Fryde, *The Early Palaeologan Renaissance 1261–1360* (Leiden 2000) 379.

119 John Kyparissiotis, 'Palamiciarium Transgressionum' 4, 10, *Patrologia Graeca* 152, 734D–736A.

120 Patriarch Philotheos, 'Synodical Tome of 1368', *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 693–715, 698B–699B.

full maturity.<sup>121</sup> The first essential difficulty was the temporary nature of the disciples' experience of the Transfiguration. Prochoros claimed that the light shining from the face of Christ was divine only in a manner of speaking.<sup>122</sup> Prochoros's writings also raised the issue of the nature of Christ's glory, seen at the Last Judgment by the unjust and the wicked.<sup>123</sup>

Examining the treatises written by Prochoros, the patriarch Philotheus concluded that they were full of heterodox teaching and, therefore, he initiated legal proceedings against Prochoros.<sup>124</sup> The legal actions against Prochoros resulted in his excommunication and deposition from priesthood.<sup>125</sup> The emperor Kantacuzenos and Theophanes, the metropolitan of Nicaea, refuted his teachings. In the course of this refutation, Kantacuzenos examined the question of how human beings can participate in the divine, as well as the proper understanding of the concept of light and the problem of the eschatological vision of God. Theophanes examined the distinction between participation and communion and the tripartite division of knowledge attained on the level of the senses, the imagination and the intellect.<sup>126</sup> The teachings of Palamas were reaffirmed and, once again, Palamas was acquitted of heresy. The Turks captured Palamas and he spent a year in Asia Minor, but the Serbs ransomed him. Afterwards, he returned to his episcopal see, where he died in 1357. His cult was confirmed in 1368. The Council of Trnovo in 1360 confirmed the decisions from the previous councils, and hesychasm became an official dogma of the Byzantine church. This period of internal struggle of rivals in Byzantium permitted the rise to power of the Serbian ruler Stephan Dushan, who took control of more than half of the old Byzantine territories.

## Hesychasm in the Slavic lands

The takeover of the patriarchate of Constantinople by the Athonite monastic party after 1347 had an undeniable impact upon an area beyond the narrow limits of the Byzantine Empire itself. The ecclesiastical policy sustaining hesychasm and ensuring its influence on Slavic lands came from Constantinople, but the spiritual practice that was widely accepted outside Byzantine borders originated from the monasteries of Mt Athos, where followers of hesychasm, including Gregory of Sinai, Palamas, Philotheus and Kalistos, Nil Sorsky and

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121 N. Russell, 'Prochoros Cydones and the Fourteenth-Century Understanding of Orthodoxy', in A. Louth & A. Casiday (eds), *Byzantine Orthodoxies* (Durham 2006).

122 Patriarch Philotheos, 'Synodical Tome', 706A.

123 *ibid.*, 707B–D.

124 *ibid.*, 705B.

125 *ibid.*, 712D.

126 Theophanes of Nicaea, 'Refutation' I, 6 (9–10); 'Refutation' II, 1 (109–12), in E. Voordeckers & F. Tinnefeld (eds), *Ioannis Cantacuzeni Refutationes Duae* (Turnhout 1987).

St Sava, spent prolonged periods of spiritual practice.<sup>127</sup> When this spiritual movement became available to Slavs, they selected practices and beliefs from among its component elements, accepting, rejecting or transforming them.

Many scholars agree that hesychasm was a part of a pan-Slavic renewal process, but exactly how remains elusive. Through hesychasm, however, different parts of the Byzantine Empire were linked with each other and to its centre.<sup>128</sup> In a way, hesychasm became a cultural tradition common to Greeks, Slavs and Romanians and assumed the role of an intermediary, analogous to the role played by the Cyrillo-Methodian movement of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, Byzantine humanists had neither the means nor the interest to promote their ideals amongst the Slavs, who knew no Greek and were far from sharing Hellenistic ideas and principles.

Adoption of hesychast principles resulted in an interesting collision in the spiritual realm of Bulgarian society that found itself simultaneously under the influence of two opposing ideological currents: hesychasm and humanism.<sup>130</sup>

The beginning of the hesychast revival in Bulgaria has been associated with Gregory of Sinai as previously stated. When he died, his disciples travelled to various places, especially Athos. From Paroria, hesychasm also moved to the rest of the Balkans. Theodosius of Trnovo was one of the most prominent disciples of Gregory of Sinai. He travelled first to Athos, Thessaloniki and Veroia, before establishing a prominent monastic community near Kilifarevo under the patronage of Czar John Alexander of Bulgaria in 1350. Theodosius was fluent in Greek, and he translated the works of Gregory of Sinai into Bulgarian, thus making them accessible in a Slavonic language. This monastery became a new hesychast translation centre. The translations included: liturgical works, writings of the early church fathers, and treatises from contemporary Byzantine theologians. It also contained many vitae of the saints as well as accounts of ecumenical councils. Byzantine chronicles, popular tales such as the *Fall of Troy* and stories of the medieval Alexander were also translated. Moreover, Czar John Alexander commissioned an encyclopaedia and produced the famous *London Gospel*, illustrated with 366 miniatures showing biblical subjects and portraits of the imperial family. Under the patronage of Alexander's daughter-in-law Anna of Savoy (the second wife of Andronikos III Palaiologos), the lives of 13 women were included in *Bdinski (Vidin) Sbornik* (Codex Gandavensis Slavicus 408).

After Theodosius had relocated to Kilifarevo, where he remained for nearly a decade, many of his followers from Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and Romania

127 *ibid.*, 478.

128 Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth*, 390.

129 *ibid.*, 476.

130 Angelov, 'Hesychasm in Medieval Bulgaria', *Bulgarian Historical Review*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1989) 41.

settled around him, creating a monastic establishment.<sup>131</sup> The accepted rule of this monastery was the Sinaitic (brought by Gregory of Sinai from Monastery of St Katherine on Sinai). In addition, the Bulgarian monks who travelled back and forth to Mt Athos introduced hesychast practices to the fellowship of the Kilifarevo monastery. Those proficient in Greek translated important spiritual writings by John Chrysostom and John Climacus into Old Bulgarian.<sup>132</sup> The Slavic version of the *Vita of Theodosius* by Kalistos contains references to the international character of hesychasm.<sup>133</sup>

Theodosius was a zealous fighter for orthodoxy against heretics, such as Theodoret, a known anti-hesychast and a magician. Irene, a nun from Thessaloniki, was another of his opponents. She was a follower of the heresy of Bogomils, which, according to two passages found in the *Life of Saint Theodosius*, was synonymous with Messalianism.<sup>134</sup> Due to the individualistic and mystical nature of her ideas, Irene converted a large portion of the aristocracy and clergy to Bogomilism, which severely affected even the monastic communities on Mt Athos. A church council held in 1344 and 1360, condemned and exiled these heretics. Later on, Theodosius fought the heresy of the Adamites, whose exponents advocated shedding of clothes as a means for the return of humankind to a paradisiacal state. Cyril Bosota, a known Adamite, preached the dissolution of marriage. Lazarus, on the other hand, walked out naked and urged the necessity of castration.

After the condemnation of the Bogomils, Theodosius fought against Judaizing Christians who attacked various aspects of Christian life, such as the practice of image veneration, and the institution of the monks.<sup>135</sup> An important aspect of the hesychast movement in Bulgaria was the close links between its leading members and Byzantine hesychasts, especially those of Constantinople. Theodosius was a strong supporter of the ecclesiastical primacy of Constantinople over the Bulgarian patriarchate. Thus, when the Bulgarian primate discontinued the practice of commemorating the name of the patriarch of Constantinople in the liturgy, Theodosius protested against this action and sought help from his hesychast friend, Kalistos. Sharing a close bond, when Theodosius felt his end was approaching, he went to visit Kalistos in Constantinople accompanied by

131 V.N. Zlatarski, *Житие на Теодосий Търновски* (Sofia 1962) 65–67.

132 K. Konstantinova, 'Някои Моменти на Българо-Византийските Связи', in *Старобългарска Литература* (Sofia 1971) 209–42.

133 Van Antwerp Fine, *Late Medieval Balkans*, 440.

134 The Euchites or Messalians were a sect that was first condemned as heretical in a synod of 383 AD. The sect of Messalians taught that once a person experienced the essence of God he was freed from any moral obligations or ecclesiastical discipline (church); H. Wice & W. Smith, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines* (1880) 258–261; Kiselinkov, 'Житието на св. Теодосий', 1–11, 32.

135 Obolensky, *Bogomils: A Study of Balkans Neo Manichaeism* (Cambridge 2004) 262.



four disciples.<sup>136</sup> Kalistos wrote the biography of Theodosius; the Slavic version of this *Vita* served as a link between the monastic brotherhood in Bulgaria with their fellow hesychasts in the empire.<sup>137</sup>

Euthymius, the last patriarch of Bulgaria, succeeded Theodosius. He was not just one of the outstanding supporters of hesychasm in Bulgaria, but also one of the most prolific writers in the second half of the 14th century, producing eulogies, vitae and epistles in support of this mystical spirituality.<sup>138</sup> Euthymius's spiritual and moral influence was strongly felt amongst his disciples. They regarded him as a 'physician who healed spiritual fevers by his wisdom and most skilfully exorcised other passions and sins right from the depth'.<sup>139</sup> He founded the Trinity monastery near Trnovo, which became a significant literary centre modelled on the Zographou monastery on Athos. Euthymius developed linguistic reforms and established literary standards, modelled on the Old Church Slavonic language of Cyril and Methodius. He replaced the old Slavonic versions of the sacred texts with a corpus of translations from Greek that was new in all matters of style, grammar and orthography.<sup>140</sup> He also introduced new terms into the Slavonic language and subjected translated liturgical and theological texts to rigorous checking. He corrected and revised several Greek texts and banned copies of corrupted translations. Since these translations were not like the spoken Bulgarian of the time, or any other Slavonic dialect, some Slavic hesychasts sensed a tension between the history of Slavic scripture and the new appreciation of scripture that they were gaining from the hesychast teachers. Nonetheless, because Euthymius's changes to literary style were dependent on the Greek liturgical text and syntax, a new sense of universalism arose between Byzantines and Slavs.<sup>141</sup> Euthymius wrote a number of saint's vitae and undertook revisions of liturgical texts.<sup>142</sup> He also engaged in the practice of copying and editing liturgical text, which assisted in the distribution of hesychast practices in Bulgaria.<sup>143</sup>

Euthymius battled against heretics, especially against the representatives of the Barlaamite heresy, such as Piron, who came from Constantinople to Trnovo, and his disciple Fudul. He also refuted other heretics who attacked the

136 Zlatarski, *Житие на Теодосий Търновски*, 12.

137 *ibid.*, 31–33.

138 E. Kałużniacki, 'Werke des Patriarchen von Bulgarien Euthymius (1375–1393)', *Nach den besten Handschriften hrsg* (Munich 1901) 131–150.

139 R. Picchio, 'Hesychastic Components in Gregory Camblak's Eulogy of Patriarch Euthymius of Trnovo', in R. Lenček et al. (eds), *Proceedings of the Symposium on Slavic Cultures, Columbia University, November 14, 1980* (Sofia 1983).

140 P. Rusev et al., Търновска Книжовна Школа 1371–1971, *Международен Симпозиум Велико Търново, 11–14 Октомври 1971* (Sofia 1974); Rusev et al., *Похвално слово за Евтимий от Григорий Цамблак* (Sofia 1973) 140–142.

141 H.R. Cooper, *Slavic Scriptures: The Formation of the Church Slavonic Version* (Boston 1981) 109.

142 P. Sirku, *Литургические Труды Патриарха Евфимия* (St Petersburg 1890) part 2.

143 Sirku, *К Истории Исправления Книг в Болгарии в 14th веке* (St Petersburg 1898) part 1, 416.

ecclesiastical structure of the church and the cult of holy images. Euthymius was a restless figure, moving from one place to another, and entered as many as ten monasteries during his life, including those across borders in Byzantium, Bulgaria and Russia. When Bulgaria fell to the Turks, Euthymius was sentenced to death, but later exiled to the Backovo Monastery, where he formed a new school that continued to function after his death. He died at the beginning of the 14th century.<sup>144</sup>

After the fall of Bulgaria, many intellectuals immigrated to Russia and Slavic lands, bringing with them not only Bulgarian culture, but also hesychast ideas and texts. Scholars often refer to this phenomenon as the 'Second Slavic influence' on Russia. Important figures were Cyprian Tsamblak and Constantine the Philosopher. Cyprian, who became a metropolitan of Lithuania in 1375 and of Kiev and all Russia in 1390, made a significant effort to correct Russian texts and to revise Russian canon law. He was also a prominent hesychast representative of the Trnovo School.<sup>145</sup> He brought with him the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, which was translated into Slavonic by a Serbian monk, Isaac, in 1371.<sup>146</sup> His cousin, Gregory Tsamblak, went to Serbia and became an abbot of the famous monastery Visoki Decani. Gregory Tsamblak presented a biography of Decanski, who erected the monastery and was subsequently canonised. In one of the pages of his *Eulogy*, the names of Gregory of Sinai, Theodosius of Trnovo and Euthymius are mentioned, thus linking Bulgarian and Byzantine hesychasm.<sup>147</sup>

The Trnovo School lost its creative impulse after the passing of Euthymius and Cyprian, and many disciples of Gregory of Sinai and Theodosius eventually immigrated to Serbia, Romania and Russia. Two of them, Constantine and Cyprian were the principal propagators of hesychasm, bringing the spiritual practices of this movement to Slavic Lands.

Constantine was a monk and supporter of hesychasm under the guidance of Euthymius's disciple Andronicus. He immigrated to Serbia in 1411 and established a school in Belgrade. Constantine served Stefan Lazarevic as a diplomat and, in 1430, he wrote the biography of this monarch. Constantine also instituted the linguistic reforms Euthymius proposed and enforced in his work *On Letters*. Cyprian was a Bulgarian by birth and a man of action, deeply involved in ecclesiastical matters and politics. As a diplomat, he was also a mediator between Lithuania and Moscow. He was to administer the Russian metropolis after the death of the incumbent, the Russian Alexei. His appointment was contested

144 Van Antwerp-Fine, *Late Medieval Balkans*, 443.

145 M. Hepell, 'The Hesychast Movement in Bulgaria: The Turnovo School and its Relations with Constantinople', *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. 7, no.1 (1975).

146 Prokhorov, 'Послание Титу Иерарху Дионисия Ареопагита в Славянском Переведе и Иконография Премудрость созда себе Дом', *Труды Отдела Древнерусской Литературы*, vol. 38 (1985) 11–12.

147 Grigorii Camblak, *Похвала Слово за Евтимий [похвала за Евтимий]* (Sofia 1971) 140.

in Moscow by the grand Prince Dmitri, who held a grudge against Cyprian for having opposed Alexei; he accordingly assigned a Russian metropolitan who could be controlled. Dmitri sent his father-confessor Mitiai for consecration, but he died before reaching Constantinople.<sup>148</sup> His companions chose to conduct a forgery by placing the name of abbot Pimen on the petition. Prince Dmitri soon learned about the forgery regarding the placement of Pimen's name on the list and decided to assign the Metropolitan see of Russia to Cyprian. It was not until 1390, however, that Cyprian secured his administrative position as metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia, and he took part in the politics of the Byzantine patriarchate in Lithuania and Muscovy, thus dividing the Russian church. Cyprian ruled over both parts of the Russian Church until his death in 1406. Later on, due to Constantinople's double dealing in the affairs of Russian church, a separation between the churches was inevitable. When Metropolitan Isidore betrayed orthodoxy and submitted himself to the pope, Byzantium and Russia broke all ties.<sup>149</sup> Cyprian spent much energy in translating Greek texts, copying manuscripts and transmitting Byzantine ideas and usage.<sup>150</sup> On his deathbed, he dictated a unique testament, which he was unable to sign, instructing his disciples to follow the hesychast lifestyle.<sup>151</sup>

The extent to which hesychasm influenced Russia is a matter for extended debate, as is its impact on the technique of icon painting and 'word weaving'.<sup>152</sup> It is true, however, that many Russian theologians from the 14th century were unfamiliar with the writings of Palamas. This is even the case with Sorsky, the Russian exponent of the doctrine of *безмолвие* (state of silence).<sup>153</sup> Scholars generally agree, however, that hesychast teachings were accepted in Russia in the middle of the 14th century, influenced by the teachings of Gregory of Sinai, as well as the proliferation of translated patristic sources made available to Russian Christianity from Byzantium. These translations included the works of Climacus, Symeon, Gregory of Sinai, Nicholas Cabasilas, Kalistos and Patriarch Ignatius Xanthopoulos.<sup>154</sup> Also, many Russian monks who were acting as translators and copyists in Constantinople and Mt Athos disseminated *sborniki* (compilation of texts) composed of passages of the works of Isaac the Syrian, Symeon, Climacus, Abba Dorotheus, Peter of Damascus and Philotheus Sinaites,

148 D. Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia* (Crestwood N.Y. 1998) 3.

149 *ibid.*, 44.

150 I. Ivanov, 'Bulgarskoto Българското Книжовно Влияние в Русия при Митрополит Киприан', *Izvestiya na Institut za Bulgarska literature* (Sofia 1958) T.I, C. 56.

151 G.P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington D.C. 1984) 59.

152 Prokhorov, 'Исихазм и Общественная Мысль в Восточной Европе в 14в'.

153 *ibid.*, 106–107.

154 E.J. Thomson, 'Corpus Slavonic Translations Available in Muscovy: The Cause of Old Russia's Intellectual Silence and a Contributory Factor to Muscovite Cultural Autarky', in *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs*, vol. I, B. Gasparov & O. Raevsky-Hughes (eds), *Slavic Cultures in the Middle Ages* (Los Angeles 1993) 184–185.

mixed with writings of the scholars of the Apocrypha and canonical gospels.<sup>155</sup> Several hundred manuscripts containing these texts have survived. A profound change occurred in the content and form of the writings available to Russians in Slavonic Church translations from Greek, under the influence of southern Slavs upon Russia, usually referred to as the 'Second Slavic influence'.<sup>156</sup>

The ideas and patterns of Byzantine civilization poured into Russia through other channels.<sup>157</sup> Mt Athos was a permanent point of encounter between monks and travellers from Constantinople, with an equally strong impact upon Greeks, Slavs, Georgians and Arabs. Furthermore, the patriarchate of Constantinople exercised its administrative powers in immense territories and countries such as Russia, which would certainly not have felt any commitment to the ideas of antique Hellenism, but continued to hold Christian baptism in great esteem.<sup>158</sup>

The elitist character of Byzantine humanism precluded any transmission of secular Greek culture to the Slavs. On the contrary, the mass of translated literature was religious (chiefly hesychastic) and ecclesiastical. The library of the Church of the Trinity at the Monastery of St Sergius contained a number of the classics of hesychast spirituality, as did that of St Kirillo-Belozerskii Monastery.<sup>159</sup> Sergius of Radonezh (St Sergius) began his monastic career at a time when Russian monasticism found itself with few examples of spiritual greatness. At the age of 23, Sergius left the world to live an eremitic life and brought the 'monasticism of the desert' to 14th century Russia. As a boy, he was miraculously taught to read. Later he dedicated his church to the Holy Trinity.<sup>160</sup> Leading a semi-eremitic life of absolute humility, rejection of worldly cares and fasting, Sergius thought that, by praying silently to Christ, one could overcome the limitation of the flesh through the divine energies perceived in the form of the light of Tabor.<sup>161</sup> Sergius's mystical teachings are analogous to Palamas's teachings on the uncreated light (the light of Mount Tabor or the Taboric light),<sup>162</sup> as well as Iosif Volotsky's writings on the spiritual discipline of practicing silence.<sup>163</sup> In fact, a number of Greek manuscripts containing hesychast texts of authors such as Symeon and Gregory of Sinai were found in the library of Holy Trinity. Moreover, two of his disciples, namely, Sergius of

155 Prokhorov, *Памятники Переводной и Русской Литературы XIV–XV века* (St Petersburg 1987) 5.

156 D. Bogdanovic, *Јован Лествичник у Византијској и Старој Српској Књижевности* (Belgrade 1968) 27–30, 194–200.

157 Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century* (Crestwood 1989) 120.

158 *ibid.*, 121.

159 *ibid.*, 105.

160 S. Bulgakov, *Благодатные Заветы Преп. Сергия Русскому Богословствованию* (Moscow 1926) 3–19.

161 G.A. Hosking, *Russia and Russians* (2003) 76.

162 D.M. Goldfrank, *The Monastic Rule of Iosif Volotsky* (Kalamazoo 1983).

163 L. Muller, 'Epiphanius, Die Legenden des Heiligen Sergij von Radonezh', *Slavische Propylaen*, vol. 17 (Munich 1967).

Naroma and Athanasius came from Mt Athos, where hesychasm was flowering. Sergius and two of his contemporaries were proficient in Greek. St Stephen, the missionary of pagans, created the Russian alphabet and afterwards he translated the liturgy into Russian. The Metropolitan Alexis translated the New Testament from Greek into the Slavic language.<sup>164</sup>

This testifies to the fact Sergius and his contemporaries were fully aware of the hesychast movement, had direct connections with Mt Athos and had close connections with Constantinople, in particular with the hesychast Philotheus.<sup>165</sup> In addition, literary evidence found in the *Vitae of Sergius* points to the fact he had visions of the uncreated light. Interestingly, during his life, his disciples Isaac and Simeon saw Sergius surrounded by the divine light during the celebration of the divine liturgy. Hence, Sergius was the first Russian monk to experience visions of light. It is significant to note that visions of light emerged in Russia at precisely the same time hesychasm made inroads onto Russian soil. Soon after Sergius's death, his most dedicated disciples left the Trinity monastery in search of solitude by forming *sketes* (small monastic communities consisting of an elder and a small group of monks). The trans-Volga *starsy* (elders) would also play an important role in the development of Russian hesychast spirituality.

Another prominent hesychast who rose to fame in Russia in the latter half of the 15th century was Nil Sorsky; he learned the practice of inner prayer under the guidance of Paisij Jaroslavov, a monk who was a follower of Athonite monasticism. He immersed himself in spiritual life according to the highest hesychastic ideals. When he returned to Russia in 1478, he noted a decrease in the quality of ascetic life practiced in some monasteries and a lack of monastic observances.<sup>166</sup> He embarked on a journey to the desert, but soon found himself surrounded by monks who wanted to be his disciples. To entrench the *skete* as a permanent feature of Russian spirituality and to govern the monastic community, he developed the *Ustav* (rule), consisting of quotes by such authors as Isaac the Syrian, Climacus, Symeon, and Gregory of Sinai.<sup>167</sup> While he focused much of his rule on practical observances of monastic laws, he considered the practice of the Jesus Prayer as the most advantageous means of achieving union with God. The frequent references to the Taboric light in Sorsky's writings affirm his connection to the hesychastic practice, something he became familiar with through his readings of ascetic fathers and his experiences on Mt Athos.<sup>168</sup>

164 Pospelovsky, *Orthodox Church*, 46.

165 O. Kovalevsky, *Saint Sergius and Russian Spirituality*, E.W. Jones (trans.) (Crestwood 1976) 100–120.

166 Maloney, *Russian Hesychasm: The Spirituality of Nil Sorsky* (Hague 1973) 37.

167 G.P. Fedorov, *The Russian Religious Mind* (Harvard 1946) 269.

168 Nil Sorsky, 'The Tradition to the Disciples', in G.A. Maloney (ed. and trans.), *Nil Sorsky: The Complete Writings* (Paulist Press 2003) 100.

Other notable hesychasts became representative witnesses of Byzantine and south Slavic ideas, and of literary forms adopted in Russia. An immigrant from the Balkans, Pachomius the Serb, who completed translations of the Old and the New Testaments, made frequent references to the hesychast doctrine of the divine light.<sup>169</sup> Stephen of Perm was a scholar and missionary who acquired the reputation of a good copyist, and translated scripture and liturgical books for the benefit of the Slavs.<sup>170</sup> He assembled a collection of Greek books. Stephen also invented the Zyrian alphabet so he could translate essential books for Zyrian people.<sup>171</sup> Philotheus also wrote a special liturgical office in honour of Palamas, whom he canonised in 1368,<sup>172</sup> and David Dishypatos adjudicated the debates between Palamas and his adversaries.<sup>173</sup> Libraries were established, with more than 200 manuscripts in the library of the Kirillo-Belozerskii Monastery, and more than 300 at St Sergius Holy Trinity Monastery Library.<sup>174</sup>

The hesychast teaching concerning the light of Mt Tabor made a profound impact on the doctrine of the image in Russia in the 14th century. This epoch became a golden age for Russian art, an era that gave birth to such artists as Theophanes the Greek, Andrei Rublev and Dionysius, each of them embodying this doctrine in their own way.<sup>175</sup>

The influence of hesychasm on Russia lessened after the victory of the Josephites in 1504; this compromised the reliance of mysticism on the mystical theology promulgated by Sergius and Sorsky. Outward ritualistic monasticism replaced the contemplative mysticism of the hesychast, and invocation of the name of Jesus was abandoned.<sup>176</sup>

Cultural and intellectual development in Serbia occurred at the same time as the hesychast movement spread to Serbian territories. The mystical movement of hesychasm affected monasteries in Serbia through the influence of the Monastery of Chilandar on Mt Athos. In terms of the production of manuscripts, this monastery superseded Zographou, its Bulgarian counterpart.<sup>177</sup> The influence of

169 Prokhorov, 'Pakhomii Serb', in D.S. Lixačev (ed.), *Slovar' Knizhnikov i Knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, vol. 2, (Moscow 1987–1993) 167–177.

170 D. Chizhyevskiy, 'Житие Стефана Пермского, Епископа Пермского', *Apophoreta Slavica* II (Gravenhage 1959) 9.

171 Fedorov, *The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity, the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (Harvard 1966) 230–245.

172 Meyendorff, 'Introduction à l'Etude de Grégoire Palamas', 168–169; Meyendorff, *Study of Gregory Palamas*, 112.

173 Prokhorov, *Памятники Литературы Византийско-Русского Общественного Движения Эпохи Куликовской Битвы* (St Petersburg 1977) 25–26.

174 Pospelovsky, *Orthodox Church*, 49.

175 Prokhorov, 'Гимны на Ратные Темы Эпохи Куликовской Битвы', *Труды Отдела Древнерусской Литературы*, vol. 37 (Moscow 1983).

176 L.V. Betin, 'Митрополит Киприан к Феофан Грек', *Etudes Balkaniques*, vol. 1 (Sofia 1977).

177 V. Moshin, 'О Периодизации Русско-Южнославянских Литературных Связей X–XV вв', *Труды Отдела Древнерусской Литературы* (St Petersburg 1963) 94.



Mt Athos spread to Serbia by other channels. Fostered by Athos, St Sava brought the practice of hesychasm to Serbia. He was a Serbian prince and Orthodox monk, the first archbishop of the Serbian Church, the founder of Serbian law and literature, and a diplomat. His biographer Theodosius stated that St Sava had a strong yearning to live a life of solitude and contemplation, and thus followed a strict routine of psalmology and prayers. He took his monastic vows on Mt Athos, where he resided before returning to Serbia. His gift for writing is mainly apparent in autobiographies and poetical works.<sup>178</sup>

St Sava's earlier works, *Karyes* and *Chilandar Typikon*, were a reference for the hesychastic monastic lifestyle.<sup>179</sup> In addition, when Czar Dushan succeeded to the throne and Athos fell under Serbian rule, the hesychast influence spread to the Serbian state. It was not until Prince Lazar opened the doors to many monks, writers and artists, however, that hesychasm played a decisive role in Serbia, where the writings of Palamas were translated into Slavonic for the first time.<sup>180</sup> The constant wars on Byzantine territories led many monks, artists and writers to seek refuge in Serbia. In the last quarter of the 14th century, a new hesychast colony of so-called Sinaite monks of Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian descent formed in the Kučaj Mountains in central Serbia. One of these monks, Romil of Vidina, who was of mixed Greek and Slav descent, joined the exodus of monks who fled the Turkish raids on Athos, and relocated to the Albanian coast.<sup>181</sup> He retired to the monastery of Ravanica and died there. He was a catalyst for the transmission of hesychasm to medieval Serbian monasteries.<sup>182</sup> When Prince Lazar moved the state and spiritual centre to Moravia, hesychasm influenced this part of Serbia, with centres rising in Ljubostinja, Resava and Lazarica. The so-called Moravian school of painting was a creative and contemporary example of art that was inspired by hesychasm. In his *Life of Gregory*, Kalistos mentioned a disciple of Gregory of Sinai named Jacob who brought hesychast ideology to medieval Serbia.<sup>183</sup> He sent several hesychast writings to the monastery of Mt Sinai in 1360. During Đurađ Branković's reign (1427–1456), the constant wars on the territory of the Byzantine Empire led to a further increase in the number of monks, religious and cultural figures entering Serbia, with the hesychast tradition becoming particularly influential around Zeta, under the auspices of Balsica Helena, the daughter of Prince Lazar.<sup>184</sup>

178 B. Žikić, 'Културни Херој као Морални Трикстер: Свети Сава у Усменом Преда у Срба из БиХ', *Bulletin of the Ethnographical Institute SASA*, vol. 46 (1997) 122–128.

179 N. Velimirović, *The Life of St Sava* (Platina 1989) 41–49.

180 Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth*, 482.

181 M. Barthusis et al., 'Days and Deeds of a Hesychast Saint: A Translation of the Greek Life of Saint Romylos', *Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1982).

182 P. Devos, 'La Version Slave de la Vie de S. Romylos', *Byzantium*, vol. 31 (1961).

183 Palmer, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 210–12.

184 F.R.V. Miklosich, *Monumenta Serbica: Spectantia Historiam Serbiæ Bosnæ Ragusii* (Vienna 1858) 227; L. Tachiaos, 'Le Mouvement Hesychaste Pendant les Dernières Décennies du XIVe Siècle', *Kleronomia*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1974) 122–125.

Hesychasm prevented the formation of a permanent rift in the structure of the Byzantine commonwealth by withstanding the forces of nationalism in Serbia. When Kalistos excommunicated the Serbian tsar and his religious subjects and leaders, the hesychast monk Isaiah mediated between Prince Lazar and the patriarch and managed to repair the broken ties between Constantinople and Serbia.<sup>185</sup> He persuaded the patriarch to lift the excommunication of the Church of Serbia, and Byzantine ecclesiastical primacy was restored under hesychast guidance. When peace was reestablished, Prince Lazar opened the doors to many writers, translators and artists, which contributed to the spread of hesychasm in Serbia. This resulted in the acceptance of Jeremiah, a Bulgarian, as the first Serbian canonical patriarch in 1379. Under the influence of hesychasm, the development of hagiographical literature flourished, more in-depth translations of the liturgical texts were created, and liturgical reforms started with the translation of the *Jerusalem Typika*. The monk and diplomat Isaiah made a translation of works by Dionysius the Areopagite that were the basis of the Byzantine theology. Writings of Palamas and Gregory of Sinai were also translated into Serbian. Despite the gradual weakening and political disintegration of the state after the battle of Kosovo in 1389, hesychasm fortified the Orthodox self-consciousness of the Serbian people and brought to them the spirit of resistance in the Christian philosophy of life, and in universal spirituality.<sup>186</sup> Therefore, the existential spirituality of hesychasm, a spirituality which stressed the importance of experiencing the divine, became widespread throughout Eastern Christendom among monk and laypeople alike.

## Doctrinal positions of Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Palamas<sup>187</sup>

A balanced historical and theological inquiry into the hesychast controversy necessitates an analysis of doctrinal positions of Barlaam, the leader of the humanist movement in Byzantium during the Palaeologan era, as well as of his opponent Palamas, the main expounder of hesychast theology in the 14th century. This study reveals the theological and philosophical standpoints of both authors and finds that they did not differ in principle, as both were followers of the traditional Orthodox dogma. Their respective views on the doctrine of knowledge and vision of God, however, differed significantly. Barlaam insisted

185 Tachiaos, 'Le Mouvement', 123.

186 A. Jevtic, *The Heavenly Kingdom in Serbias Historic Destiny*, B. Dorich & B.W.R. Jenkins (eds), (Kosovo 1992) 63–69.

187 The subchapter 'Doctrinal Positions of Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Palamas' is republished here by permission of St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. An earlier version appears under the heading 'Doctrinal Positions of Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Palamas during Byzantine Hesychast Controversy' in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 2 (2014).

upon the absolute intelligibility of the divine essence. He also argued against the use of demonstrative science (a concept borrowed from Aristotle) in theology. Moreover, Barlaam rejected the possibility of direct vision of God. Contrary to this view, Palamas defended the metaphysical antinomy of the Absolute, both visible and invisible at the same time (essence–energies distinction). On the contrary, Palamas defended the antinomy of the transcendent Christian God, invisible in his essence and visible in his energies. In turn, the distinction between the essence and energies of God was the basis for development of the new Christian humanism founded on the hesychast concept of *theosis* (the attainment of *likeness to or union with God*).

## 1. Knowledge

The different backgrounds and intellectual formations of Palamas<sup>188</sup> and Barlaam led them to assign different values to the subject of natural contemplation. Attacking the ascetic practices of Athonite hesychasts as well as the Palamite theological understanding of the parameters of human knowledge of God, Barlaam proclaimed *physike theoria* (contemplation of the world around us via scripture and the physical universe) as a condition for, and not a consequence of, illumination by grace.<sup>189</sup> He believed the hesychast experience was essentially emotional and irrational; it did not lead to knowledge, but to mental and physical states about which theologically confused conclusions were formed.<sup>190</sup> Fascinated by the divine inspiration of the great pagan philosophers, as well as the apostles and classical theologians, Barlaam reasoned a spiritual ideal that represented the ethical dimension of the life in Christ.

While raising questions concerning the nature of the vision of God and the meaning of participation in the divine, which enters into rational analysis by means of Aristotelian syllogisms, Barlaam equated the philosophical learning of the Hellenes with that of theological revelation. He even proposed Hellenic philosophers might have experienced some type of enlightenment by God and were worthy of high appraisal.<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, he claimed that only those who have entered into communion with Pythagoras, Aristotle and Plato and learned from them the laws of nature could arrive at the truth. Moreover, since every vice and passion had its root and foundation in ignorance, Barlaam believed knowledge of Greek antiquity could expel all evils from the soul and all passions. This view, based on a high evaluation of the rational principle and of the achievements of the scientific thought of antiquity, was clearly charged with

188 Balfour, 'Was St Gregory Palamas St Gregory the Sinaite Pupil?', 116.

189 Ostrogorsky stated that 'Barlaam's Rationalistic and Aristotelian Approach Found no Response with the Byzantine Public' (*History*, 512).

190 Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 220–21.

191 Barlaam, 'First Letter to Palamas', in G. Schiro (ed.), *Barlaam Calabro Epistole Greche*, 262.

marked humanism.<sup>192</sup> Barlaam insisted on the existence of uncreated divine ideas in the essence of God, reflected in created images, and on the analogical method of arriving at knowledge of God based on the existence of those ideas and their reflections.<sup>193</sup> According to Barlaam, knowledge through science — understood as a cleansing of the mind from ignorance — became a mode of access to the divine.<sup>194</sup> In a sense, this *habitus* was a condition for and not a consequence of illumination by grace.

Barlaam also insisted on the use of universal truths against the inferior knowledge of individuals in the quest for knowledge of God. In addition, he taught that static divine ideas or universals had been placed by God within the human soul from birth and were reflected in created images.<sup>195</sup> Moreover, he claimed knowledge of God through philosophical science and through revelation could be regarded as two ways of arriving at a vision of God.<sup>196</sup> Revelation through intellect was superior to that received by created stimuli. It was received through imagination, intellectual work, methods of discrimination, syllogistic reasoning and analysis, all of which served as aids that could raise men to God, confirming them to be in the image and likeness of Jesus.<sup>197</sup> Barlaam criticised the hesychasts for the unique way in which they employed the terms and categories of Hellenistic philosophy, thus adapting them to the context of their theology.

Barlaam thought the *filioque* clause was not a matter of an apodictic demonstration. Because the issue was beyond the reaches of reason and of demonstrative proof in either philosophy or revelation, he relegated it to mere theological speculation.<sup>198</sup> Hence, if it was accepted that the Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son *tanquam ab uno principio* this could perhaps be considered a justifiable consideration. But if these two principles of the Holy Spirit were understood not as opposed to or distinct from one another, but as one principle subordinate to the other, then there was no need for the use of any methods of demonstration.<sup>199</sup> This statement was a simple affirmation of the position of the Latin Church and not an expression of Barlaam's opinion, as Palamas thought.<sup>200</sup> Palamas reacted to Barlaam's attempt to subject divine truths to examination

192 D. Angelov, 'Hesychasm in Medieval Bulgaria', *Bulgarian Historical Review*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1989) 41–61.

193 Meyendorff, 'L'Origine de la Controverse Palamite: La Première Lettre de Palamas à Akindynos', *Theologia*, vol. 25 (1954) 602–630.

194 Palamas, *Triad* I, 1, 5; 469, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

195 Palamas, *Defense*, Tr. II, 3, 34; 455 in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

196 *ibid.*, Tr. II, 1, 26; 277.

197 Palamas, *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia: Capitoli, Scritti Ascetici, Lettere, Omelie Testo Greco a Fronte*, in E. Perella (ed.), *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia* (Rome 2006) 272.

198 J.S. Romanides, 'Notes on Palamite Controversy and Related Topics', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1960/61); vol. 9, no. 2 (Winter 1963/1964).

199 Palamas, 'Akindynos' I, 203, in Hero (ed.), *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, 15–17; Meyendorff, 'Les Débuts de la Controverse Hesychaste', *Byzantion*, vol. 23 (1953) 104–108.

200 Sinkewicz, 'A New Interpretation of the First Episode in the Controversy Between Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Palamas', *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 31 (1980), 489–490.

by Aristotelian logic.<sup>201</sup> Barlaam could not permit the use of demonstrative syllogism in theology because he believed that primordial knowledge could not be applied to God.<sup>202</sup> Instead, Barlaam attempted to prove the highest form of knowledge possible to men in this life is attainable only by leaving the light behind and entering into Dionysian darkness, which is the apophatic form of intellectual knowledge.<sup>203</sup>

In contrast, the major point made by Palamas in his *Triads* was precisely that the darkness of the cloud surrounding God was not an empty darkness. The 'divine unknowability' was a preliminary step for contemplation and transfiguration of man. Further, he argued on the basis of patristic text and scriptures, and wrote a treatise against the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle regarding matters of theological truth. He strongly depreciated the value of intellectual effort, maintaining the primacy of direct illumination over scientific reasoning. He allowed for philosophical work and scientific research within their scope, but believed that when trying to explain elements of faith, this study was perfidious and deceived those who practised it.<sup>204</sup> Indeed, certain passages in the writings of Palamas, also found in the *Conciliar Tomes* of the pro-hesychast councils, which began in 1341, make it obvious that for the hesychasts; their doctrinal argumentation was not so much a rational proof as it was a defence and an act of witness to their experience.<sup>205</sup>

While discussing the use of demonstrative syllogism, Palamas reminded Barlaam that dialectical syllogism, which functions within the four elements of gender, form, term and accident, could not be applied to uncreated God, whose qualities exist only for God's self.<sup>206</sup> Instead, Palamas proposed the use of the demonstrative method in theology. Theological demonstrative syllogism came, however, from the Holy Scriptures and writings of the fathers. It was not in the form of dialectic and did not have as its starting point the principles of possibility and probability, but only pursued truths through proven premises.<sup>207</sup> These premises were always true to their subject.<sup>208</sup> Palamas clarified that the universal axioms and laws of demonstrative syllogism could not be used in regard to divine essence, but they could be applied to things surrounding the divine essence.<sup>209</sup>

201 Barlaam, First Letter to Palamas II, 1–160, 262.

202 Palamas, 'Barlaam', B' 17, 269–70, in Gregory Palamas, *Tomus Contra Barlaam et Acyndinum*, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 679–693, 717–763.

203 Palamas, *Defense*, Tr II, 3, 34; 455 in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

204 Palamas, 'Akindynos' 6, 98; 149V.

205 Palamas, *Triads* I, 3, 34, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

206 Palamas, 'Akindynos' A' 9, 213.

207 *ibid.*, A' 13, 217–18.

208 Palamas, *Triad* III, 2, 18–19, in Perella (ed.), *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia*, 878–882.

209 Palamas, 'Against Akindynos' A 10, 214; 'Against Barlaam' A 52, 255–266.

Palamas opposed Barlaam's contention that human knowledge is of equal or higher value than the knowledge of Holy Scriptures and the patristic writings. He rejected the view that monks need to trust their reason in distinguishing delusional thoughts from the truth.<sup>210</sup> Instead, he claimed only a contemplative commitment to the disciplines of *hesychia*, of solitary contemplation and vision under the guidance of a spiritual father, would result in a Christian religious experience that would transform the whole person.<sup>211</sup> No other knowledge is equal or approximate to this mystical knowledge of God.

Palamas supposed that application of the mind to the higher sphere of knowledge of God or true philosophy is pointless and superfluous. Even if external philosophy could refer to objects of a perfect nature separated from matter and could bring man closer to the truth, it was still far away from seeing God or entering into communion with him.<sup>212</sup> 'He that has in his heart the knowledge of beings,' Palamas stated, 'does not have God inside himself [but] he who believes in the Lord Jesus in his heart, has God enthroned in his heart'.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, since Barlaam simply manipulated the equivalent of geometric corollaries in his theological argumentation, it was obvious that he had 'no experience of the energies of the divine mystery of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>214</sup>

The theological principle presupposed by Palamas was that a vision of God does not depend on human knowledge, and no worthy conception could be attained by intellection. Worldly wisdom, according to Palamas, is not worthy of the name 'human' since it is inconsistent, mindless and foolish.<sup>215</sup> It seems that Palamas preferred to approach the Ancient Greek philosophical tradition as an aid to natural wisdom before Christ's coming required the need for baptismal rebirth, a condition for integration into the tradition of the Church.<sup>216</sup> Palamas rejected the Platonite tendency to undervalue sensory experiences in favour of the intellect and sought knowledge of God not in the metaphysical system of understanding but in the realm of mystical experience.<sup>217</sup> He claimed that

210 Palamas, *Defense* 1 15, 22–30 in Meyendorff, *Defense*; see also, Palamas, *Triads* I, 1, 4, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

211 Palamas, 'Hagioretic Tome', 1228 CD, in Gregory Palamas, 'Hagioretic Tome', *Patrologia Graeca* 150, 1225–1236.

212 Krivocheine, 'Аскетическое и Богословское Учение Святого Григория', *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, vol. 8 (Praga 1931) 102.

213 Palamas, *Defense* 2. 3. 44. 477, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

214 Palamas, *Triads* III, 3, 3, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

215 *ibid.*, I, 1, 18–26.

216 Palamas did not deny the relative achievements of Greek philosophy or the participation of natural human functions such as the body or the heart in perceiving divine presence, but he perceives this presence itself as not the simply result of natural efforts but as a gift of divine communion (*Triads* I, 1, 21, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*).

217 P. Miquel, 'Gregoire Palamas, Docteur de l' Experience', *Irenikon*, vol. 37 (1964).



those who are devoted to worldly wisdom could not proceed to a higher degree of intellection, because such wisdom originates in demons and corrupts the 'discursive and divisible character of thought processes of the soul'.<sup>218</sup>

Taking passages from Holy Scriptures and from Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, Palamas distinguished between 'demonic' knowledge and divinely inspired knowledge that was accessible to both educated and illiterate. These types of wisdom were mutually exclusive, and the engagement of one precluded ascent to the other. So-called profane knowledge was generally knowledge of the creator through his creatures and a true knowledge of God. Divine knowledge was supernatural. It could be attained with the use of man's natural faculties under the guidance of divine grace. Whereas profane knowledge was seen as a gift of God accorded to all, spiritual knowledge was taken to be a supernatural gift accorded only to those who were worthy of it.<sup>219</sup> It surpassed every intellectual expression and intellectual light, and could only begin by a divine act providing direct knowledge of God, which restored divine nature to its original state.<sup>220</sup> When God was approached through symbols, concepts and negations, his incomprehensibility was not readily manifested. When God was approached through the spiritual vision itself, however, his transcendent nature was fully affirmed.<sup>221</sup>

In his monastic stance against the Byzantine humanists, Palamas placed negative theology in its traditional ascetical-mystical context, where negation was part of the ascent to paradoxical contemplation of God as 'hidden light', and the most appropriate language to give an account of the experience.<sup>222</sup> Various commentators have remarked on the possible 'existentialism' of the Palamite theological method.<sup>223</sup> While Palamas's theology was not a model of clarity, Anastos suggests a reason for this, namely his awareness of the inadequacy of theological language when speaking about God.<sup>224</sup>

Palamas's appeal to mystical experience involved a rejection of the Platonic tendency to undervalue sensory experience — and the life of the senses in general — in favour of the life of the intellect.<sup>225</sup> Knowledge acquired through the intellect alone could not lead to any worthy concept of God, because this knowledge was acquired through the contemplation of the natural world or

218 Palamas, *Defense* 1. 243.22–25, in Meyendorff, *Defense; Triad* I, 1, 9, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

219 Palamas, *Triads* II, 1, 25, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

220 *ibid.*, 1, 3, 4.

221 *ibid.*, II, 3, 31.

222 *ibid.*, 141.

223 M. Aghiorgoussis, 'Christian Existentialism of the Greek Fathers: Persons, Essence and Energies in God', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring, 1978).

224 T.L. Anastos, 'Gregory Palamas's Radicalization of the Essence, Energies and the Hypostasis Model of God', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 38, no. 4 (1993) 335.

225 P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie, Delachaux et Niestle* (Paris 1959) 159–161.

general knowledge of the creator through his creatures.<sup>226</sup> Ultimately, however, both apophatic and kataphatic theology were subordinate to the vision of God, because God was beyond both affirmation and negation.<sup>227</sup> This did not mean God was understood to be unknowable to the mind, but the mind acted as an intuitive religious disciple and as the organ of spiritual inspiration. His revelation is also a mystery of a most extraordinary kind, since divine manifestations, even if symbolic, remain unknowable because of their transcendence.<sup>228</sup> Ascent through the negative way did not transform the soul and bestow angelic dignity upon it, but the purity of the passionate part of the soul liberates the mind from all things and unites it through prayer to the grace of God.<sup>229</sup>

Thus, Palamas ascribed only a relative value to negative theology. Once absolutised as the summit of what we know of God, for him, the contemplation of God was not simply an abstraction but also a participation in divine things, which was beyond negation.<sup>230</sup> Apophatic discourse was a preparation for apophatic experience, and the most appropriate language to give an account of that experience.<sup>231</sup> The progress of contemplation was infinite — it had a beginning — but there was no end to revelation.<sup>232</sup>

Palamas reaffirmed that the perception of God only goes as far as the contemplation of created things would allow. Knowledge of God, however, procured by the vision of light according to the receptivity of the sinner, was above all other knowledge, since it elevated one towards the spiritual mysteries.<sup>233</sup> Palamas also drew Barlaam's attention to a major inconsistency of his argument: despite the fact the divine was supposedly beyond demonstration, the Greek philosophers to whom Barlaam refers developed a system of theological concepts that cannot serve as an argument for divine transcendence. These are the self-existing ideas of Platonic *eros*, the golden epic of Pythagoras, the spiritual enlightenment of Proclus.<sup>234</sup>

Confronted with Barlaam's denial of apodictic elements in our knowledge of God, Palamas feared the loss of the efficacy of unmerited illumination ensured by the Incarnation, which was central to the hesychast theory of personal

226 Palamas, *Triads* I, 1.3; II, 2, 3–15, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

227 *ibid.*, I, 3, 4.

228 *ibid.*, I, 3, 4.

229 *ibid.*, I, 3, 20.

230 B.G. Bucur, 'The Theological Reception of Dionysian Apophaticism in the Christian East and West: Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas', *The Downside Review*, vol. 125, no. 439 (April 2007) 140.

231 The hesychast had no need to go out from himself in order to theologise negatively, whereas to enter into union with God he had to go out of himself; *ibid.*, 141.

232 Palamas, *Triads* II, 3, 35, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

233 Palamas, *Defense*, Homily 2, 3, 17, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

234 S. Yangazoglou, 'Philosophy and Theology: The Demonstrative Method in the Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 41, no. 1 (1996).

transcendence.<sup>235</sup> If God had not become incarnate, according to Palamas, we could only contemplate him in his creatures, as argued by Barlaam and Akindynos.<sup>236</sup> The significance of the incarnation was not only that it bridged the gap between man and God, but also it focused and projected the energies of God, so that they were accessible not just through the sacraments but also through the hesychast route.<sup>237</sup> This ontological gap between the creator and creatures is crossed in deification, when humanity is united to God by grace.<sup>238</sup> Transformation or deification, the vision of uncreated light, and the vision of God must be understood only in the context of human salvation, which is a factual and non-symbolic vision of God. John Romanides maintains Barlaams's theological formulation was old-fashioned and entirely Western and Augustan.<sup>239</sup>

## 2. Vision

Palamas spoke about the uncreated light of the Transfiguration on Mt Tabor, whereas Barlaam perceived this light as being created. On the basis of a simplistic understanding of the apophatic theology of Dionysius, Barlaam argued that it was impossible to make any claims with respect to the inner life of the Trinity, and that any revelation — anything that can be seen — must be a creation of God, and not God himself.<sup>240</sup> He also denied the reality of divine energies and claimed anything that was outside the essence had a beginning and was created in time.<sup>241</sup>

Barlaam maintained it was impossible to obtain vision of the Taboric light because it was a temporary phenomenon, like all God's creations. If the hesychast were affirming this phenomenon was permanent, they were supposedly claiming to see the Godhead, which is impossible. His belief 'God makes himself known only through his creatures' predicated that if the apostles on Mt Tabor, through the light of Christ, knew God then that light had to be sensory and created.<sup>242</sup> He also posited that if we love those activities, which are common to the passionate part of the soul, the body thus nails the soul to the body and fills it with darkness.<sup>243</sup> Barlaam believed revelations in the Old and New Testaments were not a vision of divinity, but were rather temporary revelations, which

235 G. D'Onofrio & B. Struder, *The History of Theology: Middle Ages* (2008) 496.

236 Palamas, 'Homily 16', *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 204A, in Gregory Palamas, 'Operum Coninuatio', *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 9–551.

237 *ibid.*, *Defense*, II, 3, 29, 46, 54; III, 1, 10, 16, 17, 19, 20; III, 3, 5; I, 1, *passim*, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

238 Palamas, *Triads* II, 3, 52, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

239 Romanides, 'Palamite Controversy'.

240 Bucur, 'Dionysian Apophaticism', 140.

241 Palamas, *Triad* III, 2, 3, in Perella (ed.), *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia*, 852.

242 Palamas, *Triads* II, 3, 64, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

243 *ibid.*, II, 2, 12.

symbolised divinity. Barlaam stated that the incomprehensible nature of God cannot be recognised in the immediate vision of God, but rather can only be approached and mediated through symbols, abstract concepts and negations.<sup>244</sup>

Barlaam had a different perception of the status of symbols than Palamas; for him the symbol was something other than the reality it represented. He considered any illumination to be a symbolic creation and imaginary illusion, which was inferior to the revelation of truth through the intellect alone.<sup>245</sup> Following the thought of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Barlaam distinguished between created glory, in which the elect had the opportunity to see the divine essence, and uncreated glory, which the divine essence represented.<sup>246</sup> From this premise, he claimed that the lights manifested by God to the saints were only symbolic visions, illusions of immaterial and intelligible realities, which made themselves known through the imagination in particular circumstances. In effect, in each separate case of revelation, a created glory came into existence and passed out of existence. Barlaam even thought the illumination on Tabor at the time of the saviour's Transfiguration, and the one when the Holy Spirit descended, were clearly perceivable by the senses.<sup>247</sup> Both were created and sensible symbols of divinity, visible through the medium of air to the senses of the apostles and later disappearing.<sup>248</sup> Proof of the created nature of the light was the fact that the intellect became aware of the vision of the Transfiguration only after abstraction from the imagination was achieved.<sup>249</sup> Barlaam thought it was impossible for a reality which was immaterial, unchangeable and transcends the senses and the mind not to be the super-essential essence of God, for only the divine nature bears these characteristics.<sup>250</sup>

The term symbol, on the other hand, had a different meaning for Palamas: it could either be derived from the nature of the object of which it was a symbol, or belong to a different nature. A natural symbol always accompanied the nature that manifested it, whereas the symbol that derived from another nature existed before and after the object it symbolised. Finally, the symbol lacking independent existence appeared as soon as the object appeared; it disappeared as soon as the object disappeared.<sup>251</sup> Therefore, if the light of Tabor was a symbol, either it had its own existence or it was a phantom without substance. When Christ was transfigured on Mt Tabor, however, he did not put on a quality that he did not previously possess, rather, he revealed to his disciples who he truly was:

244 *ibid.*, II, 3, 57.

245 Romanides, 'Palamite Controversy', 194.

246 Palamas, *Defense, Triad*, III, 1, 13, 667, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

247 Palamas, *Triads I*, III, 31, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

248 *ibid.*, III, 1, 12.

249 *ibid.*, I, 3; II, 3, 5; 395, 409.

250 *ibid.*, II, 2, 25.

251 *ibid.*, III, 1, 13.

The true light and the radiance of glory. For if this light was an independent reality separate from the nature of Christ, than he would be composed of three natures and three essences: the human, the divine and the nature of the light.<sup>252</sup>

Even though the light of Transfiguration existed from the beginning and will remain in existence for eternity, a transformation of the senses occurred at the time of the event and produced change in the eyes of the apostles. As the need for symbols in one's knowledge of God is done away with only during the supra-rational union with and vision of God by deification, the experience of these men who were taken up into God's glory was expressed by symbolic words and imagery. Those who attain this state of glorification transcend all created words and concepts and experience an ineffable contact with God, who is an indescribable *Hyper-Icon*. When they communicate their revelation to human beings, however, they do use words and concepts.<sup>253</sup>

Palamas tried to prove that the glory revealed to prophets, apostles and saints was identical with the eternal light of God's eschatological glory; hence these lights were uncreated. Moreover, there was no question about this light's visibility in the future age by means of air or any created light. It was only within the uncreated light that one could see the deified and divinised glory.<sup>254</sup> This vision transcended the senses and the intellect, and Barlaams's contention that this glory was directly experienced by the senses alone was utterly wrong.<sup>255</sup> In fact, the revelatory experiences of the saints, that of the apostles on Tabor and all visionary experiences of light before and after the Resurrection, were identical.<sup>256</sup> Yet, all these visions of the glory of God could be seen only by means of grace. The light was not an essence of God, for that was incommunicable; it was not an angel, for visions of angels take place in various ways according to the capacity of those who behold them; nor was it the very essence of the mind under the form of light, because the mind beheld other mystical and supernatural inexpressible ways, and his expressions about God are not conjectures, but are based on having true vision and practical experience of Him.<sup>257</sup> He reaffirmed the Dionysian view that during the super-rational union with and vision of God in *theosis*, the need for created symbols is abolished. This union takes place by virtue of a cessation of all intellectual activity; it is something that goes beyond abstraction.<sup>258</sup>

252 *ibid.*, III, 1, 16.

253 A. Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (New York 1994) 60.

254 Palamas, *Triad* I, 3, 36, in Perella (ed.), *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia*, 189; III, 1, in Perella (ed.), *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia*, 591.

255 *ibid.*, II, 3, 34; 455; 51–52; 491ff.

256 *ibid.*, I, 3, 5; 117.

257 Palamas, *Triads* III, 1, 12, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

258 *ibid.*, I, 3, 17.

Against Barlaam, Palamas demonstrated that Dionysian darkness was another name for the unapproachable light in which God dwells. It was often referred to as both knowing and unknowing, seeing and not seeing, and not a subject of knowledge in general.<sup>259</sup> For Palamas, the Taboric light was not simply an external phenomenon but an *enhypostatic symbol*, that is, it was both a symbol of the divinity and the divine. It had no independent hypostasis or existence of its own and occupied the space between the self-subsistent and the accidental.<sup>260</sup> It was enhypostatic not because it went beyond not having a hypostasis of its own, but because the Spirit sent it into the hypostasis of another in which it was contemplated.<sup>261</sup> He perceived, however, a certain duality in the contemplation of the light: in one aspect, it was the apprehension of the power, wisdom and providence of God (knowledge of God through the creatures), and in another, it was the contemplation of the glory of his nature bestowed on all who have manifested their faith through their works.<sup>262</sup> The second type of contemplation was not a form of 'knowledge', since nothing surpassed the indwelling and manifestation of God in men because of its transcendence.<sup>263</sup>

One of the keys to the vision of God, according to Palamas, was the notion of realised eschatology, which is the link to various aspects of his theology.<sup>264</sup> The light of Mt Tabor, the glory, splendour, power, kingdom and divinity of the Holy Trinity is 'the mystery of the eighth day',<sup>265</sup> the vision of the resurrected and ascended person of Christ in glory and the vision of the kingdom of God having come into its power.<sup>266</sup> The uncreated light was not sensible or intelligible, but spiritual and divine, and far away from all created cognitive faculties in its transcendence.<sup>267</sup>

Palamas distinguishes between three classes of Christians: those who possess direct personal experience of divine energies; those who do not have such experience but trust those who have it; and those who, due to lack of experience of their own, refuse to believe that such knowledge is possible.<sup>268</sup> He also differentiates between the light apprehended by the senses (which shows us objects perceivable by the senses), the light of the intellect (which makes clear the truth about our thinking), and the uncreated light transcending both

259 Palamas, *Triad* II, 3, 34, in Perella (ed.), *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia*, 455; 53, 493.

260 Palamas, *Triads* III, 1, 18, 802, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

261 *ibid.*, III, 1, 9.

262 *ibid.*, II, 3, 15.

263 *ibid.*, II, 3, 18.

264 Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 126.

265 D. Rogich, 'Homily 34 of Gregory Palamas', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1988).

266 *ibid.*, 147.

267 Palamas, *Triads* III, 2, 14, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

268 A.M. Allchin, 'The Appeal to Experience in the *Triads* of St Gregory Palamas', in F.L. Cross (ed.), *Studia Patristica*, vol. 8 (Berlin 1966).



(which was known only to God and those who had experience of this grace). It was only by becoming God by grace that one saw God by means of God, not only in the future age but also in this life, both before and after the Incarnation.<sup>269</sup>

For Palamas, the cessation of all intellectual activity and the resulting union with the light is granted solely to those who have purified their hearts and received grace.<sup>270</sup> The vision is granted, however, in proportion to the practice of what is pleasing to God, assiduity in prayer and the longing of one's soul for God.<sup>271</sup> Palamas upholds the view that the capacity for divine illumination in the faithful is always dependent on the receptivity of the seer, resulting in the illumination of divine grace, a constant vision of light and vision of things in the light.<sup>272</sup> Palamas recognised the restrictions and limitations of theological knowledge about God. He went so far as to state that God so transcends the senses that men cannot possibly model God's characteristics after created beings.<sup>273</sup> Humanity beholds God as light, not in his essence or as He is reflected in created beings. Rather, through purification of the senses, the intellect enters the heart and God is seen noetically through a spiritual facility.<sup>274</sup>

The illumination of this light is less bright for beginners, whereas in those reaching the highest state of mystical contemplation, the light is perceived as brightness by which the mind has been enriched through the grace of God as a deifying gift.<sup>275</sup> *Theosis*, as grace of the Holy Spirit, coincides with the kingdom of God, and the light of Transfiguration on Mt Tabor, along with the light experienced by the saints here on earth, is the light of the future age.<sup>276</sup> It is experienced as the apocalyptic knowledge of righteousness, holiness and freedom, not visible to those who have not transformed their senses.<sup>277</sup> Although divine grace was always present in saints as supernatural and divine participation, this grace is manifested only when it is necessary. Because *theosis* presupposes full union of man with God, it is considered to be far superior to any other vision of light.<sup>278</sup>

Similar arguments were found in the *Five Discourses on the Taboric Light* written by Theophanes, the third bishop of Nicaea during the latter stage of the hesychast

269 Palamas, *Triad* II, 3, 52, in Perella (ed.), *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia*, 491–93.

270 Palamas, *Triad* I, 3, 17 in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad* 35.

271 *ibid.*, I, 3, 22.

272 *ibid.*, I, 3, 17.

273 *ibid.*, *Triad* I, 3, 5.

274 *ibid.*, *Triad* I, 3, 15.

275 Palamas, *Defense*, Homily, 2, 3, 11, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

276 *ibid.*, 2, 2, 14.

277 D. Tselengidis, 'The Contribution of Saint Gregory Palamas to Hesychasm: Theological Pressupposition of the Life in the Holy Spirit', [http://www.saintnicodemos.org/documents/Final\\_Tselengides\\_Word.pdf](http://www.saintnicodemos.org/documents/Final_Tselengides_Word.pdf) (accessed 10/09/2011).

278 Palamas, 'Περὶ Θείας καὶ Θεοποιού Μεθέξωος 7', in P. Chrestou (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: Works*, vol. 3 (Thessaloniki 1962–1972) 212–261.

controversy. These are sophisticated treatises on the nature of our participation in God. Theophanes argues that to deny the reality of the vision of the Taboric light is equivalent to denying the reality of divine communion in the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The second issue Theophanes addresses is the nature of the divine light, which, according to him, is not a symbol of the Godhead but rather a symbol of the incomprehensibility of the Godhead.<sup>279</sup>

### 3. Body

Much of Barlaams's initial attack took the form of *ad hominem diatribes* against the practices and mentalities of the hesychasts, not merely against their views on knowledge and the vision of God. On one occasion, Barlaam encountered a hesychast in Thessaloniki, who claimed a body participating in the hesychast method of prayer could sense divine grace in the form of a vision of uncreated light. Barlaam became indignant with this, and often referred to hesychasts as being '*omphalopsychoi*' — having their soul in their navel — and accused them of trying to see the invisible God by visual means. Barlaam ridiculed hesychasts as people who were trying to get the essence of the intellect into the body, while according to him, the two are not separate.<sup>280</sup> He argued the mind, being that part of man most characteristically made in the image of God, was bodiless.<sup>281</sup> His critique of the visionary mysticism of hesychasm was drawn from patristic sources, which supported the idea that perception of the highest realities is reserved to a higher faculty of the soul (*nous*). Barlaam was scandalised by the idea that the human body could be transfixed by the mind and dismissive of hesychast bows, prostrations, incense and breathing techniques.<sup>282</sup> He had a negative view of both the emotions and the body,<sup>283</sup> which played an important role in the hesychast experience, and accused the hesychasts of believing the essence of God to be a perceivable light.<sup>284</sup> Barlaam believed that human beings must first awaken their dormant rationality through exposing their analytical and logical faculties to all kinds of knowledge before they can transcend the purely human level and ascend to God.<sup>285</sup>

Fully aware of the vulnerability of his position, Palamas visited Constantinople to inform himself of the charges of Messalianism, and responded to the accusation

279 Louth, 'Light, Vision and Religious Experience in Byzantium', *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience* (Chicago 2004) 100.

280 Palamas, *Triad* I, 2, 71–73; II, 2, 25; 373–75, 35, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

281 Barlaam, First Letter to Palamas, 5, 316.

282 R.H. Schmidt, *God Seekers: Twenty Centuries of Christian Spiritualities* (Grand Rapids 2008) 129.

283 Palamas, *Triad* II, 3, 12, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

284 Schiro, Barlaam, 302, 303, 566–570.

285 Barlaam did not accept the hesychast contention that the heart, or the mind in the heart, was the organ for potential perception of the divine light (Sinkewicz, 'The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian', *Mediaeval Studies*, vol. 44 (1982) 210, 238–239).

with the treatises *On Theosis*, making up the third of his *Triads*.<sup>286</sup> Irrespective of their social preferences for 'inner perfection', the Byzantine hesychasts were not Messalians and did not reject the need for ecclesiastical authority or observance of the rites, which made up the cult of the Church.<sup>287</sup>

In comparison to the Greco-Roman dualistic anthropology of division between the body and soul, the Palamite anthropology was characterised as a positive one because, together with the soul, it integrates the body into a holistic transformation of human beings. This system took its substance from the affirmation of Christ being human so that, by grace, human beings might restore the image of God within them; for that image had been sullied by the disobedience of Adam and Eve and this sin was passed on as an 'ancestral curse' to all mankind.<sup>288</sup> When freed from passion and sinful inclinations, body and soul were given great powers according to Palamite theology, for they become the vessel of the *nous*. The *nous* was perceived to be a spiritual intellect that has the potential for direct apprehension of the eternal truths about God and the meaning of the created world (*gnosis*) and not simply a discursive rationality grounded in sense perception.<sup>289</sup> The correct use of the body and the mind allows the soul to acquire divine love.

Palamas strongly objected to Barlaams's conception of the body as the prison of the soul, and that man's salvation is the soul's liberation from the body. He made a new theological observation that the return of the *nous* from the outside world to the heart and its ascent from the heart to God is the only way for man to acquire pure knowledge of God.<sup>290</sup> In addition, he restored the notion of the body as God's created vessel of the Spirit, and thought that human spirituality could be achieved only through harmony between the spirit and the body, which is accomplished through the discipline of subjecting the body to the mind, thus allowing the soul to acquire love.<sup>291</sup> Palamas corrected Barlaam by stating the noetic faculty was energy of the soul, which must be fixed within the body and guarded against the wanderings of contemplation, which are the root of all heresies.<sup>292</sup>

286 Meyendorff, *Gregorie Palamas, Defense des Saints Hesychastes* (Louvain 1959) 30–31.

287 Messalianism held that the persons of the Trinity were visible to the human eye and many of them believed that they had direct experience of God, receiving divine energy as a gift (Angelov, 'Hesychasm', 67).

288 Archbishop Chrysostomos & Hieromonk Patapios, 'Comments on the Transformation of Hellenistic Philosophic Nomenclature in the Byzantine Patristic Tradition', *Glossa: An Ambilingual Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1 (December 2006) 12.

289 M. Bakić-Hayden, 'Two Methods of Contemplation: Yoga and Hesychast Prayer', *Гласник Етнографског Института САНУ*, vol. 56, no. 2 (2008) 4.

290 Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, 'Saint Gregory Palamas as a Hagiorite', [http://www.pelagia.org/html/b16.en.saint\\_gregory\\_palamas\\_as\\_a\\_hagiorite.03.htm](http://www.pelagia.org/html/b16.en.saint_gregory_palamas_as_a_hagiorite.03.htm) (accessed 24/10/2010).

291 Macarios of Corinth and Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (Athens 1977).

292 Palamas, *Triad*, I, 2, 4, 83, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

The question arises: what did Palamas assert as being the part of the body that constitutes the mind? He stated the mind uses one of the bodily organs, the heart, as an instrument in its operation. The heart then directs the entire organism and reigns over all thoughts of the soul and all members of the body. Thus, when the mind is allowed to go out of the body with the aim of contemplating intelligible visions, it falls into error and receives demonic illusions. When the mind is enclosed within the body, however, grace takes possession of the body and inscribes in it the laws of the spirit.<sup>293</sup> In general, however, Barlaam and Palamas had different understandings about the way in which the soul is attached to the body. Palamas saw the heart as a means of attaching the soul to the body, and Barlaam believed that the soul is attached to every part of the body.<sup>294</sup>

Palamas recognised two different movements of the mind: the direct movement that sees and observes visible things, and the circular movement, when the mind returns and operates within God.<sup>295</sup> Contemplation of God in his glory is carried out in a spiritual fashion, for the mind becomes super-celestial and mysteriously united to God, being filled with all immaterial knowledge and supernatural and ineffable visions.<sup>296</sup> Thus, even though Palamas considers the soul to be a unique reality possessing multiple powers, but which uses the body as an instrument that coexists with it, the sanctity of the body too is essential for the return of the intellect to the heart, and the body assumes an active role in prayer and salvation.<sup>297</sup> Palamas was not concerned with the dangers of mystical experience, and eliminated the need for discretion and independent moral judgment when embarking on the journey of spiritual ascent.<sup>298</sup> Palamas also made a link between faith and ignorance, and listed them as preconditions for salvation.<sup>299</sup>

## 4. Hesychast life

In the course of the Hesychast controversy, Barlaam rejected the Palamite conception of purity and dispassion (*apatheia*) as well as the mortification of the passions (*nekrosis*), because he thought that the experience of a vision was simply an exaggerated emotional condition. Nevertheless, he revived that level of mystical ascent known to classical Greek theology and mysticism as *physike theoria*, the contemplation of God through nature. His theology also lacked

293 *ibid.*, II, 2, 4.

294 Palamas, *Defense*, Tr. II, 2, 27; 377, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

295 *ibid.*, I, 2, 5; 85.

296 Palamas, *Triad*, I, 3, 5; 33, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

297 *ibid.*, II, 2, 3.

298 *ibid.*, I, 3, 48–49.

299 *ibid.*, II, 3, 43.

the doctrines of the centrality of Christ and the personal necessity of grace. Having been preoccupied with the intellectual perception of God's essential unknowability, he placed no emphasis on *praxis*.

Palamas structured the hesychast life as a ladder, with the steps going from repentance and conversion (*metanoia*) via 'unseen warfare' or a fight with the passions, to the struggle for *apatheia*, which culminates in the actual transformation of human corporeality or *theosis*. In the first step, the monk was to develop an extreme repugnance for sin, and an aversion to and rejection of worldly cares.<sup>300</sup> A struggle against passions and vices by self-restriction and self-punishment, such as fixing heavy burdens to one's body, weeping and prostrations also formed a part of this step. The second ontological mover of the spiritual process consists of two interrelated practices: attention and prayer (the latter taking the form of the Jesus Prayer). Both were shaped by the rules relating to the postures of prayer and rhythms of the breath, aimed at reorganising all human beings into an integral system that becomes involved in the spiritual process.<sup>301</sup> The main task of the hesychast in this stage is the keeping of commandments that help with the guarding of the *nous*, the spiritual purity achieved through the virtues of temperance, love and sobriety, and participation in the sacramental life.<sup>302</sup> Having separated himself from threads of the world and of his own ego, the hesychast was to enter the stage of passive purification, marking the transition from the human to the divine dimension.<sup>303</sup> The presence of free will was declared by Palamas to be a positive quality of man, a gift bestowed on him by the heavenly creator as a spiritual weapon against the devils. At the same time, attacks were directed against the manifestation of free will, and it was condemned as the original cause for the disobedience, which brought about the tasting of the fruit of the forbidden tree. This peculiar contradiction is inherent in the theory of hesychasm.<sup>304</sup>

Palamas accepted the patristic teaching affirming that even those who have an unclean heart acquire knowledge of God. He affirmed, however, that in order to receive illumination from God, the heart must first be purified, and the passionate part of the soul transformed from the lower to the higher. The heart is the chief intellectual organ of the body and all impulses of the soul are located

300 John Climacus, 'Ladder of Divine Ascent' XV, 17, *Patrologia Graeca*, 88, 1095–1130.

301 Palamas, *Defense*, Homily 1, 3, 12, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

302 *ibid.*, Homily 1, 3, 46.

303 N. Corneanu, 'The Jesus Prayer and Deification', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 39 (1995) 19.

304 In fact, Palamas often stated that only those who have presented to God a mind purified by prayer and made an occasion of virtue from his wishes and desires can acquire knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (Palamas, *Triad* II, 2, 2, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*).

there.<sup>305</sup> Since the mind constantly wanders off once embarked on the spiritual path, the practice of hesychast prayer is utilised to continuously reunite the mind with the heart.<sup>306</sup>

In the highest stage of the ladder, the hesychasts reached *synergia*, in which their uncreated energies enter into contact and collaboration with the divine energy or uncreated grace of God. At this point, one starts to perceive a vision of the divine light with all 'spiritual senses', and one is united to God by grace of the Holy Spirit, who accomplishes man's deification 'not by created means or through the essence of humanity but by means of grace and energy natural to it'.<sup>307</sup> Thus, it was reasonable to say that in the noetic sense the divine light became visible within the monks spiritually, and acted in them without being separated from the Holy Spirit.<sup>308</sup> This was the stage of cognition through deification, which could be reached by the means of love for God and the soul's elevation to God. In the teaching of the hesychasts, the celestial regions and 'Upper Jerusalem' was their home and not their actual country on earth.<sup>309</sup> In the hesychast literature, the first stage is *praxis*, the second stage *theoria* and the final stage is *theologia*.

In spite of his affirmation of the three-stage process of ascent, in reality Palamas placed no decisive value on *praxis* (ethical self-purification) or on *physike theoria* (contemplation of God through nature), but instead, he emphasised the final mystical stage, namely *theologia*.<sup>310</sup> His ultimate concern was the transformation of human nature by the divine energies of God, which, as uncreated light, invisibly filled the world. The most direct way to achieve this experience is through the practice of hesychast prayer and focused concentration.<sup>311</sup>

## 5. Image and likeness

Barlaam did not appreciate the single psychosomatic technique of prayer as a method for re-establishing unity between spirit and body. He had no taste for Biblical anthropology, and preferred Platonic terminology and ideas affirming the opposition between spirit and matter.

Palamas, on the other hand, held a strong Christocentric and sacramental view of the Church, in contrast to the spiritualistic views that had been apparent

305 Palamas, *Defense*, 1, 2, 3, 81, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

306 *ibid.*, 2, 2, 323.

307 Palamas, 'Answer to Akindynos', 5, 24, 96, in Chrestou, *Works*, vol. 3, 359.

308 Palamas, *Defense*, Homily, 2, 3, 37, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

309 Grigorii Camblak, *Похвала Слово за Евтимий*, 140.

310 Palamas, *Triad*, I, 3, 42; II, 3, 52; II, 3, 16; III, I, 37, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

311 Palamas, *Defense*, 1, 2; 1–12; 3, 2, 1–30, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.



in the hesychast tradition in earlier centuries.<sup>312</sup> This approach to the issue of experience of God implied the basic anthropological presupposition that man was capable of transcending his own nature, as well as the main theological principle that God — even when he communicates himself — remains transcendent. Thus, he frequently referred to the doctrine of the image and likeness to God. The claim that Adam and Eve had free will, enabling them to act in accordance with choice and wish, was the starting point in his doctrine of knowledge of God.<sup>313</sup>

Palamas proposed that having been created in the image and likeness of God, in the Fall, humanity lost the likeness but retained the image, which was darkened (Genesis 3:1–24). Since the darkening of the image happened through sin, when man practised the commandments and inner unceasing prayer and attained visions of God, his sin was removed and likeness to God restored.<sup>314</sup> Thus, Palamas conceived of Christian life as a process of restoration of the lost likeness to those redeemed and recreated in Christ.<sup>315</sup> The pre-Lapsarian image of God was restored and renewed in the human person, whose individuality was not only retained but also enhanced.<sup>316</sup>

Palamas emphasised that the aim of humankind was to progress from the image to the likeness through Christ's commandments and the power of the Cross. Created in the image and likeness of God in virtue of his freedom, man had the capacity to transcend his own nature and to know God in love. This could not occur mechanically, but as an opportunity to cooperate with the free grace of God that was bestowed to the person in baptism, and more specifically, during the mystery of Holy Chrism. Through baptism he was offered the opportunity to wash his image and to start his imitation of Christ. Through the Eucharist, he was given the ability to be renewed and deified with the grace of Christ.<sup>317</sup> The keeping of commandments offered not only knowledge of God but also charismatic *theosis* emanating from the mystical vision of God. Those who acquired this state could attain visions in their hearts similar to the apostles' experience of the Transfigured Christ on Mt Tabor, if they followed a prayer routine involving a sitting position, breathing control and invocation of the name of Jesus.<sup>318</sup> This communion was possible through the Holy Spirit, who

312 Clucas, 'Eschatological Theory of Byzantine Hesychasm: A Parallel to Joachim de Fiore', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 70, no. 2 (October 1977).

313 Prokhorov, 'Исихазм и Общественная Мысль в Восточной Европе в 14в', 23, 90.

314 Meyendorff, 'О Византийском Исихазме и его Роли в Культурном и Историческом Развитии Восточной Европы в 14в'.

315 K. Barth, 'The Christian Life', *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 4 (Grand Rapids 1982) 28.

316 C. Cavarnos, *Byzantine Thought and Art* (Belmont 1986) 28.

317 J. Rait et al. (eds). *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 2 (1987) 210.

318 Nicephorus the Italian (Callistus), 'On Sobriety', *Patrologia Graeca* 147, 962A, in Nicephorus the Italian, 'Tractatus de Sobrietate et Cordis Custodia', *Patrologia Graeca* 147, 945–967.

leads human beings to empirical knowledge of Christ as a person, according to the paradigm of synergy (*synergia*).<sup>319</sup> Yet, human cooperation was necessary for the grace of the sacraments to have any effect.<sup>320</sup>

It is clear from this that human beings could not achieve *theosis* through their own efforts, but only if they participated freely in the process through synergy, which is possible only if the body is subordinated to its consciousness.<sup>321</sup> Palamas thought this process of human transformation begins with baptism but reaches fulfilment after the Resurrection of the dead, through which the whole person of man is mysteriously reconstructed and transformed from the state of sin to that of incorruption and glory with the aid of divine energies (*duvnamei*). This was the condition of *hesychia*, an eschatological reality reserved in its fullness for the future life in heaven, when humanity will confine its incorporeal being within the bodily house, paradoxical as this may sound.

## 6. The Jesus Prayer

It is unknown whether Barlaam met hesychasts who made use of the simple breathing technique as a way of acquiring permanent vigilance in prayer, but his stance against this method was unambiguous. He frequently attacked the hesychast practitioners as fixing their mind on the navel, and protested the body could assume any position in prayer. Barlaam believed that Christians pray unceasingly when they acquire conscious knowledge about the important Christian paradigm that 'nothing can be done without the will of God'.<sup>322</sup> He grew indignant at the thought that the mind could dwell in the body, which he considered to be in a subordinate position to the soul.<sup>323</sup>

To counter this hesychastic theological preposition, Barlaam made a clear distinction between unceasing prayer in terms of activating a state of grace, and noetic prayer in terms of mystical non-discursive ecstatic experience. In the latter, according to Barlaam, there was no room either for 'discursive prayer or for those experiences common to the irascible and concupiscent passions'.<sup>324</sup> It is important to note that both Barlaam and Palamas believed that in ecstasy, faculties of body and soul are transcendent; however, whereas Palamas regarded this experience as supra-intellectual, Barlaam understood this experience to be non-discursive and intellectual.<sup>325</sup> In effect, Barlaam claimed those who strove

319 C.S. Calian, *Theology without Boundaries: Encounters of Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Religion* (Louisville 1992) 59.

320 Palamas, 'Against Akindynos' 3.6.13.

321 Palamas, *Triad* I, 2, 9; 47, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

322 Romanides, 'Palamite Controversy', 231.

323 Palamas, *Triad* II, 2, 1, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

324 Palamas, *Defense*, Tr. II, 2, 11, 339, in Meyendorff, *Defense*; Romanides, 'Palamite Controversy', 227.

325 George Mantzaridis, 'Spiritual Life in Palamism', in J. Raitt et al. (eds), *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 17 (New York 1987) 217.

towards God in prayer had to reject the perception of corporeal and intellectual things and had to leave behind the divine lights and elevation towards the summit of God.<sup>326</sup> On the contrary, the supporters of the hesychast spirituality led by Palamas held the view that prayer is an expression of a human existence.<sup>327</sup> Unceasing prayer, in particular, was not only for monks, but for all Christians.<sup>328</sup>

To explain how the concept of hesychasm could be applied to the spiritual life, Palamas divided it into three levels. The first level, the ethical, is primarily purification of the heart. The second is the illumination of the *nous*. Finally, the theological is the vision of uncreated light, and it was believed man could be united to God either through communion with the divine virtues or through supplications during prayer to God.<sup>329</sup> These three stages corresponded to the stages of purification, illumination and deification. A lack of worries (*amerimnia*), attention or guarding of the mind (*nepsis*) and of the heart, and finally, unceasing prayer were the accompanying elements of exterior hesychasm.

Palamas devoted only two short treatises (I, 2; II, 2) to a defence of the psychosomatic methods of prayer. Fixity of physical posture combined with mechanical repetition of the same words of the Jesus Prayer induced a receptive state, in which the mind perceives the divine light.<sup>330</sup> More clearly, this technique involved a progressive self-emptying, in which the mind was stripped of visual images and devised concepts, and so contemplated in purity the realm of God.<sup>331</sup> With the mind centred in the heart, the hesychast repeated the words of the Jesus Prayer aloud, and then unceasingly in thought, until the prayer was no longer initiated by the person but became the vehicle of the Holy Spirit, affecting every conscious and unconscious response. The hesychast was told to restrain the drawing in and out of his breath, to avoid breathing deeply or quickly. Control of breathing was only an accompanying technique to keep the mind from wandering.<sup>332</sup>

Palamas considered the gift of unceasing prayer and noetic prayer as an identical reality, not to be confused with non-discursive ecstatic intuition of ultimate reality. In this state of prayer, the physical and intellectual faculties no longer exercised an influence on the noetic faculty, but were dominated by the noetic

326 Palamas, *Triad* II, 2, 8, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

327 *ibid.*, II, 1.30–31.

328 Palamas affirmed a way of prayer that was free from all visual pictures and intellectual concepts and that had the ability to apprehend the divine through the immediate sense of presence and unintuitive awareness. It was not only an outward and physical condition but state of soul where, with the mind in the heart, the hesychast is standing before God day and night (Philotheos, 'Enkomion', 573–574).

329 Palamas, 'De Hesychasti', *Patrologia Graeca* 150, 1101–1118; 1117D.

330 I. Hausherr (ed.), 'La methode d'Oraison Hesychaste', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Rome 1927) 101–209.

331 Gregory of Sinai, 'On Prayer', 1333B.

332 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 2, 7 (87, 17–18) in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

faculty's unceasing prayer in such a way that they were cleansed and inspired.<sup>333</sup> This experience was characterised neither by sensual emotionalism nor by a transcendent Gnostic exercise independent of liturgical and sacramental life.<sup>334</sup> It was, rather, a ladder connecting the creator with the creatures. In the course of prayer, one became illuminated with the radiance of inexpressible light, which was beyond the senses, words and intellect.<sup>335</sup> This was the stage of ignorance superior to knowledge, when the mind does not pray a definite prayer but finds itself in ecstasy in the midst of incomprehensible realities.<sup>336</sup> As for those not yet arrived to this degree of spiritual contemplation, but seeking to attain it, they had to gain mastery of every sensual pleasure and reject the passions. To mortify the body's inclination to sin, physical suffering in the form of fasting, vigils and prayer had to be imposed; through these disciplines, the stain of past faults was washed away and, above all, divine favour was attracted.<sup>337</sup> For Palamas, the purification of the passionate part of the soul liberated the mind from all things and united it through prayer to the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the entire person became deified through the power of the Spirit.<sup>338</sup>

## 7. Essence and energies

The third issue between hesychasts and anti-hesychasts centred on the distinction made by the hesychasts between essence and energies.<sup>339</sup> In fact, the real issue during the hesychast debates was the notion of *theosis* — deification or participation in the very being of God. If *theosis* was perceived as being participation in the essence of God, then God ceased to be unique in his personal existence and transcendence. If *theosis* was only a paraphrase to designate psychological experience perpetuating the Neoplatonist concept, then the affirmation 'God became man so that man can become God' was lost.<sup>340</sup> The theory of *theosis* revolved around the distinction between essence and energies (essence of God is invisible but he is manifested in his energies), but the hypostatic element used by Palamas's predecessors (especially the Cappadocian

333 Palamas, *Defense*, Tr. II, 2, 9; 335, in Meyendorff, *Defense*.

334 As P. Meyendorff has stated, 'Liturgy is itself a source of theology. Just like Scripture, the liturgy is a revelation, which implies a multiplicity of meanings, and indeed offers the possibility for participation in divine life'; P. Meyendorff, *St Germanus of Constantinople: On the Divine Liturgy, Trans., Introduction And Commentary* (Crestwood 1984) 41.

335 D. Rogich, 'Homily 34 of Gregory Palamas', 143.

336 Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 22, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

337 *ibid.*, II, 2, 6.

338 *ibid.*, F, III; B, I.3, 22:39; F, III. 2.9:106.

339 C. Yannaras, 'The Distinction between Essence and Energies and its Importance for Theology', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 19 (Summer 1975).

340 Meyendorff, 'Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century, Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 42 (1988) 157–165.

fathers) to model God's Trinitarian existence and the union of divine and human nature in Christ were always implicitly present.<sup>341</sup> This in turn provided a mechanism for explaining the vertical movement of man to God and vice versa.

Barlaam objected to the distinction between essence and energies in a philosophical way, unable to grasp the implications of Christological controversies giving clear support to this doctrine. He was prepared to accept the mental distinction between energies and essence, but the hesychasts insisted God's attributes could be detached from God in such a way that they would be perceivable.<sup>342</sup> In fact, Barlaam did not deny the reality of *theosis*, but only the supposed participation in some created reality and not in the divine essence, which is the only uncreated reality.<sup>343</sup>

Followed the teaching of Dionysius, Barlaam accused hesychasts of impiety when they glorified God according to his essence since, he declared, the divine essence transcends all affirmation and all negation. He distinguished between the glory of God that is beyond participation (an eternal reality), and the participatory glory that receives its existence from the principal cause and is not eternal and different from the essence. Consequently, Barlaam concluded the divine powers are not eternal, since God has granted existence to them.<sup>344</sup> He supported this thesis by claiming that because the divine essence is the only unoriginated reality, everything else having a beginning is a creation of God.<sup>345</sup>

Palamas's response to this attack involved a broad discussion of the nature of Christian faith. It affirmed the possibility of direct knowledge of God and the primacy of incarnational, eschatological and sacramental values over secular values. To maintain the basic antinomy of Eastern Christian understanding of the God–man relationship, he established at length the patristic doctrines of 'deification' or communion with God as representing the only acceptable context for a Christian epistemology, and he developed the distinction between 'essence' and 'energies'. Palamas made this distinction to reconcile the reality of mystical experience with traditional theology, which stressed the inaccessibility of God and rejected all claims to a vision of God's being. This is in contrast to Oriental mysticism — the total absorption of the self in union with the divine essence — as it also is anathema to Occidental sensual mysticism. Palamas, on the other hand, often stated that vision and union with the energy of God deifies angels and men and that Christ receives his deification from the divine essence.<sup>346</sup>

341 Palamas, *Triad*, III, 1 in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*, 34, 89.

342 Barlaam, Letter, I, 260–61; Letter III, 290–294.

343 Palamas, *Dialogue*, 7, 1132.

344 Palamas, *Triad* III, 2, 13, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

345 *ibid.*, III, 2, 8.

346 Romanides, 'Palamite Controversy', 231–270.

Palamas linguistically dramatised the inaccessibility of God by replacing the term essence with 'super-essence', that is, the incommunicable, inaccessible, inparticipable aspect of God, which was not to be identified even with those energies that were without a beginning. While the Cappadocian fathers asserted the inaccessibility of the divine essence, Palamas's incorporation of the adjective 'super-essential' designated the radical transcendent essence of God's form as 'identically in-acted by the divine hypostasis of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'.<sup>347</sup> He claimed the term 'essence' was misleading and could not properly be used to indicate the absolute inaccessibility of God. The word 'nature' in relation to God cannot be applied, because it designates one of his divine energies, the substantifying one that came down to humans, creating substance, giving life and bestowing wisdom.<sup>348</sup> If we admit this power of God to be uncreated, then we have to admit that all other powers of God are uncreated, or alternatively accept all powers of God are created.<sup>349</sup>

Palamas claimed the divine attributes were not effects foreign to the divine essence; they were not acts exterior to God and dependent on his will, like the creation of the world or acts of providence, but natural processions of God himself, a mode of existence which was proper to him.<sup>350</sup> They belonged at the same time to the domains of *theologia* and *oikonomia* because, on the one hand, they were eternal — an inseparable force of the Trinity existing independently of the created act — and on the other hand, they manifested the infinite variety of God-loving acts towards creation.<sup>351</sup> If the powers or energies were not eternal realities, as Barlaam claimed, the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit would be created and incapable of deifying the believer. If Barlaam thought the divine energy was necessarily created, he had to admit Christ did not possess, in accord with his two natures, energies both created and uncreated, but only created or single energies, as Monophysites and Monothelites held.<sup>352</sup> According to Palamas, even if divine essence signifies God's absolute transcendence, and humans will never participate in it either in this life or in the age to come, the divine energies by which God comes out of himself and reveals himself to humanity to permeate all of creation are uncreated,<sup>353</sup> and men participate in them through grace.<sup>354</sup> The divine energies act through the deified subject,

347 Anastos, 'Gregory Palaamas's Radicalization of the Essence', 347.

348 Palamas, *Triad* III, 2, 11, in Anastos, 'Gregory Palaamas's Radicalization of the Essence', 335–349; 346.

349 Palamas, *Triad* III, 2, 11, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

350 Aghiorgoussis, 'Christian Existentialism'.

351 In his 'Letter to Amphilochios of Ikonium', Basil the Great synthesises the two aspects when he speaks of the many facets of knowledge of God. This knowledge is at the same time 'understanding of our creator, comprehension of His marvellous things, observance of His commandments, and familiarity with Him'; Basil the Great, *Epistulae* 235, 3; *Patrologia Graeca* 32, 873C, in Basil the Great, *Epistulae*, *Patrologia Graeca* 32, 67–113.

352 Palamas, *Triad* III, 2, 7, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

353 Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London 1989) 90.

354 Palamas, *Triad*, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 723C.



‘energies to energies’, making him, by adoption, all that God is by nature.<sup>355</sup> Palamas affirms the famous patristic dictum that it is impossible to find a name to manifest the nature of the uncreated Trinity, but that names belong to the energies.<sup>356</sup>

Hence, to be in communion with the divine energies means to be united with God in his totality, though one can never know his essence or become identical with either the divine essence or one of the three Divine Persons.<sup>357</sup> The energies of God, Palamas claimed, are active in the world and manifested in many different ways, one of them being the light seen on Tabor. Hesychasm, by providing a means to see the light, was therefore a means to bridge the gulf between man and God.

Although Palamas perceived the Trinitarian divine energies, which proceed from all three divine hypostases at once — as being supernatural, eternal and uncreated — that which the energies affected and produced was in effect created. Through the energies of God, we know the beauty, order and splendour of created beings, and we behold the magnificent names of God: Wisdom, Life, Power, Justice, Love, Being, God, and the infinity of other names unknown to humanity.<sup>358</sup>

The ontology of the divine essence or personhood, or even the energy of the three-in-one God was not affected by the incarnation, and what was seen on Mt Tabor were the uncreated energies, and not the essence of God the Logos. Palamas quickly responded to this opposing argument of Barlaam by introducing Christological doctrine in support of the view that divine energies are uncreated.<sup>359</sup> He attacked his opponents, who claimed the divine light is created to introduce a third nature in Christ — the nature of the divine light, in addition to his divine and human nature.<sup>360</sup> The feast of the Transfiguration on Mt Tabor showed the Word of God deified human nature.<sup>361</sup> The supreme significance of this event was that it focused and projected the energies of God into this world, making it accessible not only through the sacraments but through the ascetic piety of the hesychasts, whose ultimate Scriptural paradigm was the apostles’ vision of the Transfiguration of Christ. This was to become a paradigm for the doctrine of *theosis*.

Palamas affirmed that during the Transfiguration of Christ on the Mount, spiritual grace in the heart of the faithful was not produced by the imagination

355 Palamas, *Triad* III, 1, 33, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

356 *ibid.*, III, 2, 10.

357 Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, G. Lawrence (trans.) (London 1964) 293ff.

358 Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, C.E. Rolt (ed.) (London 1957) 20–191.

359 Palamas, *Triad* III, 2, 10, in Perella (ed.), *Che Cos’è L’Ortodossia*, 1132.

360 Rogich, ‘Homily 34 of Gregory Palamas’, 151.

361 Palamas, ‘On the Transfiguration’, Homily 34, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 433B.

and did not originate with us, nor did it appear only to disappear; rather, it was a permanent energy united to the soul, liberating it from material things.<sup>362</sup> The grace of God transformed the body and made it spiritual. It was not visible through the medium of air, because in the 'age to come', humanity will no longer need air. Instead, this light was visible to the eyes of the heart, and was seen by the apostles after they transcended every sensible and intellectual perception.<sup>363</sup> The grace of God descends from the mind into the body, which it transforms and deifies, by the blessed activities of the passionate aspect of the soul, and makes capable of becoming praiseworthy and divine.

Palamas derived his view on *theosis*, or the acquisition of divine grace, from the clear outline of the doctrine in 2 Peter 1:3–4, where participation in divine power was portrayed as the highest gift of God: a gift which made it possible for the faithful to escape the destructive pleasures and desires of this world, and partake in the divine.<sup>364</sup> It was also perceived as a present possibility and a future hope, based on the restoration of the capacity for grace through the person of Christ and the Holy Spirit, who communicated to us the energies of God himself so that we may become gods by adoption and grace.<sup>365</sup> Moreover, *theosis* was seen as a direct enhypostatic illumination of those worthy of comprehension, manifesting itself in creatures that have acquired the grace of the Spirit. This illumination is achieved through ontological purification in the active acquisition of human virtue, while still acknowledging the potential dominance of sin over the flesh and the fallen world, and humanity's essential imperfections.<sup>366</sup> Participation in God is a gift. It is given to those who live a Christian life according to their spiritual aptitude.<sup>367</sup> Hence, the deifying gift and *theosis* are one and the same, and not something apart from God, for it is the Spirit himself in his mode of self-giving.

The transmission of the Spirit takes place not only during the practice of mental prayer, but at those moments when the body is operating towards the end for which God created it. The light, on the other hand, becomes visible spiritually with noetic sense, but it becomes an effulgence of hypostatic light in the souls of the faithful.<sup>368</sup>

362 Palamas, *Triad*, II, 2, 9, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

363 *ibid.*, II, 2, 23, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

364 P. Bilaniuk, 'The Mystery of Theosis or Divinization', in D. Nieman & M. Schatkin (ed.), *The Heritage of the Early Church. Essays in Honor of the Very Reverend Georges Vasilievich Florovsky*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta, vol. 195 (Rome 1973) 337–359.

365 Palamas, *Triad*, II, 3, 32, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

366 Auxentius of Photiki, 'The Humanist Quest for a Unity of Knowledge and the Orthodox Metaphysics of Light', <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/meycorr.pdf>.14 (accessed 8/09/2011).

367 Palamas, *Theophanes* 15, in Perrella (ed.), *Che Cos'è L'Ortodossia*, 1272.

368 D. Rogich, 'Homily 34 of Gregory Palamas', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1988) 135–166.

## Conclusion

The main arguments brought up by Barlaam against Palamas and his supporters were threefold.

Firstly, Barlaam prohibited the use of demonstrative science in theology. In turn he suggested the use of dialectical syllogism in all matters concerning the transcendent nature of God. Moreover, Barlaam applied only one aspect of the theological–philosophical program, as found in Dionysian writings — namely the *apophatic* theology — while he neglected the value of positive or *kataphatic* theology. Barlaam also made use of Aristotelian logic, particularly concerning the transcendent nature of the divinity.

Secondly, Barlaam considered the acquisition of knowledge of God through baptism and other sacraments as a mere symbolic participation in truths that cannot be reached by reason. Hence, he refuted the central hesychast tenet that humans can acquire vision of God through prayer. Such revelations, he thought, could only be fragments of imagination or demonic illusions.

Finally, Barlaam promoted the neoplatonic dualistic view of the subordinate role of the human body as compared with the soul and the intellect. Instead, he perceived the mind to be inseparable from the soul — but inferior to it — and questioned the possibility of recalling the wondering of the mind within the body. As a consequence, he ridiculed the hesychast psychosomatic technique accompanied by the repetition of the Jesus Prayer, and accused monks of following the practices of Messalianism.

The theological propositions of Palamas, on the other hand, were founded on four important principles. First, he opposed Barlaam's contention that human knowledge was of equal or higher value than knowledge of Holy Scriptures and patristic writings. He rejected the Platonic tendency to undervalue sensory experiences and the life of the senses in general in favour of the intellect, and sought knowledge of God in the realm of mystical experience. Palamas emphasised the role of the *nous* or spiritual understanding, whereas his opponents put their trust in the *διάνοια* or *discursive thinking*. Palamas further distinguished between profane knowledge and divinely inspired wisdom. The two types of wisdom were mutually exclusive, and engagement of one precluded ascent to another. Yet the contemplative commitment to the art of *hesychia* was the way in which one could acquire this spiritual knowledge of God.

Second, one of the key principles governing Palamas's theology was the ineffable distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies. Palamas introduced this doctrine to reconcile mystical experience with traditional theology as well as to defend the antinomy of God, visible and invisible at the

same time. The transcendent essence of God or 'super-essence' (as designated by Palamas) signified the incommunicable, inaccessible, inparticipable aspect of his divinity. On the other hand, the divine attributes were the activities and actions of God. They were his manifold presence, as it were, the way God makes himself to humanity.

Third, the doctrine of immanent energies implied vision of the relationship between God and the world and the divine energies were often experienced in the form of light that, though beheld through bodily eyes, was in itself non-material, 'intelligible' and uncreated. This was the uncreated light manifested to the apostles at the Transfiguration on Mt Tabor, seen during prayer by saints, symbolically represented by the halo in icons and the light of the age to come.

Finally, the main doctrinal difference between Palamas and Barlaam was their respective views on Christian anthropology. Whereas Barlaam defined man as a spiritual mind that acquires knowledge of divine realities through natural contemplation, Palamas affirmed the function of man as a psychosomatic creature capable of direct experience of the divine. Moreover, in contrast to the scholastic dualism and rationalism propagated by his opponent, Palamas instigated a new Christocentric humanism founded on the hesychast concepts of *theosis*, *synergia* and *theologia*. Moreover, Palamas restored the notion of the human body as God's created vessel of the spirit, and considered that the state of union with God could be achieved only through the discipline of subjecting the body to the mind (*nous*), which in turn allowed the soul to acquire love (*agape*). Finally, the new humanistic presuppositions developed by Palamas affirmed three different movements of the mind: the direct movement that sees and observes visible things, the circular movement, when the mind returns and operates within God, and the movement from the ego-centred state (one dominated by senses) to the ego-transcendent consciousness (God-centred state) according to the paradigm of *synergia*. The third movement was the stage of cognition through deification, which could only be reached by means of love for God. Hence, the originality of Palamism towards essentialist conceptions of God does not consist in adding a foreign divine reality, but in relating to God in an existential and agaptic way, while maintaining his absolute transcendence.

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