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ASPECTS OF THE THEORY ON UNIONS AND DISTINCTIONS IN GREGORY PALAMAS: THE RELATION BETWEEN THE DIVINE ESSENCE AND THE DIVINE ENERGIES

Abstract: *In this study, following Gr. Palamas' treatise entitled Περί θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως, our main goal is to examine the objective existence of the divine energies and their relation to the divine essence. The Christian interpretation of the theory on unions and distinctions proves that these are just two different ways of existence, without any ontological difference between each other, as Barlaam and Akindynos suggested. It is remarkable that the understanding of Gr. Palamas' thought allows us to conclude that he is a consistent researcher, who, on the one hand, follows unchanged philosophical foundations for expressing his theories and, on the other hand, corresponds with the previous Christian tradition.*

Key words: *Gr. Palamas, unions, distinctions, divine essence, divine energies*

Introduction

Gr. Palamas is one of the most representative Byzantine thinkers to whom the attempt of the human spirit to enter the higher knowledge, the one that excess any condition of being, leads gradually to the expression of theological principles with philosophical form, without actually violating, not even slightly, their theoretical particularity. His treatise entitled *Περί θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως (On divine union and distinction)*¹, which was written on the occasion of the anti-hesychasts theologian-thinkers' appearance, whose style of expressing their views was extremely rational², is a typical case of the contact between Christianity and Philosophy. And this contact is due to the fact that in order a theological issue to be properly approached, philosophical terminology and methodology are used, which actually constitute a material that is reconstructed and critically interpreted in the light of the Christian teaching-faith. However, it is remarkable that Gr. Palamas never speaks directly about this writing strategy, so it is up to the researcher to find out the way in which this combination is accomplished and the theoretical aims that will be achieved through each application. Furthermore, during this process he will be asked to identify whether and how this theologian-thinker of the late Byzantine period turns his attention to the systematic and the historical field and, by extension, whether and how he aims at their compositional expression.

1 This text is included in the second volume of a Greek critical edition by P. Chrestou under the title *Γρηγορίου του Παλαμά Συγγράμματα*, 69–95. Hereafter Π.θ.ε.δ.

2 For instance, Guillard 1938, 424–460; Meyendorff 1953, 87–120.

The theory on unions and distinctions, which since the time of Areopagite's writings was a basic theological issue of Christian Metaphysics –or more correctly Henology–, was clearly not a new one. Dealing the matter from the ancient Greek tradition's point of view, it was elaborated by some representatives of the Neoplatonic School, such as Proclus (5th cent.)³ and, mainly, Damascius (6th cent.)⁴. In Christian literature, Dionysius the Areopagite, using the principles of particularizations, had systematically included the theory in the context of the teaching about the Holy Trinity⁵. This careful inclusion was not left undetected either by Maximus the Confessor⁶ or George Pachymeres⁷, who certainly were, starting of course from Dionysius the Areopagite, the main inspiration for Gr. Palamas' theology, who generally attempts to capture high ontological conditions of the divine "world" both in themselves and in their relations. At this point, we should underline that Gr. Palamas does not mention G. Pachymeres even once, which is a surprising absence, especially if one considers their proximity in time and their common local origin. Possibly this is because G. Pachymeres had contributed to the renaissance of the ancient Greek spirit and could easily be described as a Hellenist. On the other hand, it is also remarkable that he hardly mentions Nicholas of Methone, who was one of the most systematic anti-Neoplatonic thinkers of the Byzantium, who definitely utilized the traditional views of the Eastern Christianity.

Concerning the content of the abovementioned treatise, we would say that Gr. Palamas' most important goal is to refute Barlaam and Akindynos methodically and relying on strong foundations. His main concern on the existing at that time controversy is whether the divine energies exist or not objectively and, accordingly, what is their relation to the divine

3 Procl., *In Parm.* 742.24–760.17.

4 Dam, *Pr.* III 1.1–46.8. Combés 1975, 33–60

5 We should mention that in Areopagite's writings, the theory about the divine "processions"-energies is also based on the particularly highlighted ontological distinction between unions and distinctions of the supreme Principle, the One-Good. More specifically, this is the distinction between, on one side, the stable permanence in his transcendent unmixed essence and, on the other, his personal appearances and his ad extra volitional manifestations. «Τὰς μὲν ἐνώσεις τὰς θείας, τὰς τῆς ὑπεραρρήτου καὶ ὑπεραγνώστου μονιμότητος, κρυφίας καὶ ἀνεκφωτήτου ὑπεριδρύσεις· τὰς διακρίσεις δὲ, τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεορχίας, προόδους τε καὶ ἐκφάνσεις» [*d.n.* 2, 4 (PG 3, 640D)]. The difference that Pseudo-Dionysius puts forward between unions and distinctions is probably the most important matter of the second chapter of his treatise entitled *De divinis nominibus*. In a broader sense, it is placed in the special introductory content of the first three chapters of this treatise, which aim to determine the necessary theoretical preconditions in order the affirmative theology to be established and the divine names to be expressed. In other words, according to the Neoplatonic explanatory and meta-explanatory schemes, these chapters refer to the way in which the first hypothesis is related to the second hypothesis of the platonic dialogue *Parmenides*, which is found, explicitly or implicitly, in significant moments of the progress of the Christian teaching. It certainly deserves attention whether and to what extent pseudo-Dionysius could be described as Neoplatonic. For instance, cf. Ivánka 1964, 262–289, who also raises significant epistemological issues, which may be applied generally in the relation between Christianity and Neoplatonism.

6 Cf. Töröner 2007. According to our view, this is a study of great importance on this issue, since firstly it extensively deals with both historical and systematical demands, utilizing in a particularly interesting way the Council of Chalcedon and, secondly, it accurately detects the relations between Christian and Neoplatonic approaches

7 Concerning the theory on 'union – distinction' in Pachymeres, one may see mainly the second chapter of his *Paraphrase* of Dionysius the Areopagite's *De divinis nominibus*. Note that his approaches establish literally a system of analyzes and synthetic judgments of great research interest, which is included in the context of the study of Areopagite's treatise in the light of apophatic and affirmative theology. Suggesting studies for this kind of Areopagite's questionings are the following: Lossky 1930, 283; Corsini 1962, 96–97 and 148; Siasos 1984, 114–117 and 148–149.

essence. By studying all of his texts, it becomes clear that there is both relevance and distinctiveness between them, but not hierarchy. From the historical point of view, the issue is included, from the one hand, in the hesychastic controversy of the 14th century and, on the other hand, in the general matter of the Byzantine thinking concerning which should be the contact between philosophy and Christian theology. How in each theoretical case their similarities and their differences are defined, in order their integrity as individual theoretical fields to be kept?

Regarding the present study, our goals are two, according to which we intend to find out whether Gr. Palamas follows the rules of a strict researcher and whether he is consistent with the previous Christian tradition. More specifically, first, we will attempt a conceptual reconstruction of the treatise in relation to an individual theoretical scheme, based on the fact that the Byzantine theologian attempts to support the general Christian argumentation concerning Triadology starting from a specific research concern. I.e. a desideratum of ours is whether Gr. Palamas manages to bring out in an actually established and verifiable way the relation between the individual and the general in the epistemological framework of the tradition to which he belongs. On the other hand, another goal of ours is to find out upon which philosophical foundations the Bishop of Thessaloniki relies in order to formulate the sub-views of the theoretical question we are going to discuss, considering that he had received a wide philosophical education and that he had an excellent knowledge of Aristotle. A further aspect that we will attempt to highlight according to these two details is whether we are able to find in Gr. Palamas a reevaluation of the rational data and methods about the approach of the metaphysical world, without however disregarding that his thinking mainly depends on the empirical ecclesiastical-religious participation, on what one may define as divine service. And note that these are a whole of actions that at that time were the source and the expression of an experience for the hesychast monks.

Keeping the above in mind, we will study in other words whether in his texts the conceptual analysis has a relation to the mystical vision, with our main goal remaining consistent: the evaluative priority of the Christian teaching over any other. Resting upon this ascertainment, we believe that the necessity to examine specifically the degree of the impact that the Christian thinker accepted from the Neoplatonic philosophers will be highlighted even further. Could we claim relying on the general context that this is undoubtedly an indirect effect, mainly regarding the expressions? We know for sure that both the similarities and the differences between Christianity and Neoplatonism are clearly determined on the occasion of Areopagite's writings and from that time and thence they gained further generalizations and specifications. We also keep in mind that some Byzantine thinkers, among them Gr. Palamas, use Neoplatonic teachings and at the same time there is an attempt the conceptional and the semantic orientations of the terms in which they are used to depend on the Christian teaching. I.e. there is an attempt to be included in a strict monotheism. And the latter point is quite necessary to be mentioned, since in Neoplatonism polytheism is the dominant paradigm, with actually established epistemological foundations.

In what will follow, we will discuss based on *Π.θ.ε.δ.* specific issues regarding the divine essence and the divine energies. Our main goal is to approach how according to Gr. Palamas God keeps his essence unchanged, despite his "processional" motion in order to create the natural universe. Furthermore, we will attempt to show how the uncreated character of the divine energies is actually confirmed according to the theory that distinctions correspond to unions and that under no circumstances may they fall into the condition of the createdness, as Barlaam and Akindynos claimed. We have to mention that the order of the following subsections is not found in the same way in Gr. Palamas' treatise. This is a choice of ours made because of the specific theoretical goals of this treatise and its writer's general principles,

through the abstractive and the reconstructive method we use, in order to formulate an individual thought system, which is structured in succession from one subject to another under the light of their logical connection.

The division of God into created and uncreated

Gr. Palamas points out that Barlaam and Akindynos, having as an excuse that God is distinguished according to the common “processions” of the three Persons –i.e. according to what is defined as divine providence or divine economy–, divide him into created and uncreated levels. The result in his opinion is that they distinguish in the divine externalization-provision two deities, the created and the uncreated respectively. And by taking the discussion to the history of ancient Greek philosophy, we would highlight that this is a distinction that occurs in multiple levels of successive hierarchies in polytheistic Neoplatonic systems⁸. In the context of this actual, as Gr. Palamas’ opponents present it, division, they perceive the divine essence as an uncreated and overlying deity, and each common to all three persons “procession” –i.e. the good and divine energy– as a created and subordinate deity. We could say that the parallels here with the Neoplatonic example, regarding the distinction in superior and inferior gods, are clear, even though the starting points are undoubtedly different, since no Christian thinker could ever deny, even to the slightest degree, monotheism. From this point of view, it is highlighted that Barlaam and Akindynos criticize those theologians, who refuse to express their thoughts according to their own interpretations, but consider that God is uncreated as to the essence, the hypostases and the good energies and “processions”. They actually turn against those who claim that metaphysics of transcendence is holistic and that it preserves its principles also during the metaphysics of immanence, without hierarchized levels.

According to Gr. Palamas, these are the theologians who prove that the comparative and “kat’ oekonomia” (with providence, not precisely used) category of the hyper-existing is hardly contradictory in the area of the uncreated and unified divine being, as long as this is not construed in terms of ontological determinations and dependencies, which lead to priorities and relegations. And the complaint expressed by these theologians includes the accusation that their opponents accept two uncreated deities, i.e. the overlying and the subordinate ones. However, with such proposals and critical reconstruction of traditional Christian positions, it is obvious that the question of ontological priority and hierarchy is theoretically really interesting and is actually validated and syllogistically legitimized within the very inside of the Holy Trinity. And this critical or interpretative choice made by Gr. Palamas’ opponents, according to his opinion is because they have not understood the dimension of logical and somehow ontologically forced priority of the divine essence over the divine energy or, in other words, they have not understood that the energy is the perfectly self-founded way in which the personal essence of God manifests⁹. The issue, therefore, of the acceptance of a perfectly pure divine essence is considered to be unacceptable, since it is possible with certain extensions to result in an incomplete or a deficient presence of it, while the risk to be considered in the self-

8 For instance, cf. Procl., *Theol. Plat.*, which is considered to be emblematic regarding the synthetic approach of the ancient Greek metaphysics. This is a treatise in which a coherent and geometrical as to its structure and with various ternary formed hierarchical gradations theogony unfolds. However, at this point we are not talking about divine emanations that could be considered as created, but inferior divine entities, which form exclusively the metaphysical wealth. About the content of this study, we are of the opinion that the collectible volume *Proclus: Théologie Platonicienne*, by Saffrey and Westerink (eds) 1974–2003, provides notably detailed analyzes and established synthetic judgements.

9 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 10.18–11.12. Cf. Hussey 1974, 22–24. For a systematic consideration of the matter of divinity suprenatant in essence and inferior in energy, cf. Boulouvits 1983, 241–362.

founding condition as inactive seems quite obvious. How would the created nature then arise under conditions of ontological otherness? For the same reasons, the case God to be understood as exclusively clear energy, i.e. as devoid of the main and founding ontological factor, which is the essence, is excluded too. Also remarkable is that in Gr. Palamas' reasoning divine energy plays a variety of roles, both in the transcendent and the intra-world area, without its integrity to change or to experience internal differentiations. Such a possibility of change would affect also the divine essence, because of the original similarities that exist between them.

The direct effect of the defined by Barlaam and Akindynos ontological divisions becomes obvious if we pay attention to what results from the tradition that their hesychast opponent follows. By putting forward the idea that any divine revelation of "processions" and energies is created, they ruin the divine unity –and clearly the simplicity–, i.e. whatever absolutely distinguishes the Holy Trinity from the created beings. «Βαρλαάμ δὲ καὶ Ἀκίνδυνος πάσας τὰς θεοπρεπεῖς τῆς τρισυποστάτου θεότητος προόδους τε καὶ ἐνεργείας εἰς κτίσμα κατασπῶσιν»¹⁰. According to Gr. Palamas, the ontological and the logical extension of such views are inevitable. The plurality will abolish the divine unity and will introduce on its inside the terms of the construction of the created substance, which in a sense is the heterogeneous and the later in origin. In opposition, plurality should be construed as a way of direct expression or self-development of the unity, as a condition strictly intimate, as externalization of its infinite ontological wealth based on free will, which also from this point of view is considered to be the self-founded existent and functioning. It should be also emphasized that the relegation of the divine energies causes effects, which are not found even in the created beings. Thus, both the conditions of normality and the actual content of the distinctions are abolished. What arises causes high risks, which include also the relation between a property and its body. So, while in the created beings all conditions are created and thus there is no ontological contradiction in their structure, in the area of the divine contradictory combinations are developed, since the terms of the created are introduced into the uncreated. This revaluation of the createdness is not approved by the Hesychast theologian for many reasons, one of which is pantheism. And we should mention that pantheism here is formed vice versa, like a transportation of the created conditions to the non-created, thus the divine element is from the beginning weakened.

At the same time, Gr. Palamas says that both his opposed theologians refer to everything that is around the essence of God as created, namely the goodness, the wisdom, the power, the deity or the majesty and everything that functions in the same way, i.e. its energetic infinite wealth-pluralism. The reference at this point also concerns all those that, at a later stage of their presence, will be defined as ways of the divine economy concerning how the physical world is formed, which undoubtedly is totally uncreated. His point of view is clear: the later in origin product does not affect the way in which its source exists or acts. The Byzantine theologian notices that, since every property is around the essence, it is not essence, –not even what could be described as pure essence, i.e. the one that could be regarded, compared with the partials produced, as their archetype–, without this view necessarily to lead the reasoning to the formation of new ontological fields into the metaphysical world. One could here say that he speaks about essential properties. Instead, according to Gr. Palamas' words Barlaam and Akindynos claim that God is exclusively essence and that just the divine essence is uncreated. And relying on our last remark it is not possible to characterize goodness, wisdom, power, divinity and majesty as divine attributes. The final conclusion concerning their opinion is that

10 Cf. *ibid.*, 4, 71.14–16. The verb “κατασπῶ” is very narrative and captures precisely the issues that are considered to arise from the positions of the anti-hesychasts, which lead to extreme otherness. Cf. Contos 1967–68, 283–285.

they divide God into created and uncreated areas and that they unwisely dogmatize that the uncreated energy does not differ from the uncreated essence, by proceeding to an unacceptable intermingling of them, which actually means that they mutually refute each other, a view that will be explained more widely immediately¹¹. We would further say that such an intermingling will inevitably lead to pantheism, since between the productive activity of God and his essence won't be any condition that will differentiate them, meaning of course not as to their ontological condition but as to the created beings. I.e. the energy intermediary won't be emerged. Moreover, Barlaam and Akindynos introduce, on the one hand, a substantial monism and, on the other, a metaphysical hierarchical dualism, so the contradiction is obvious. Certainly, we could suppose that in this dualism the second condition is the natural reasons, which are considered to be the everlasting producing sources. The tradition, however, of Eastern Christianity leads to the conclusion that these reasons come from the combinations of the divine energies and develop an archetypal function; such is for instance the case of the self-human.

However, the issue is not limited to ontological confusions. The Byzantine theologian points out that, by considering his opponents that just the divine essence is uncreated and as uncreated is an overlying and superior deity and also that all the surrounding energies, including, indeed, the deity itself, are created, they end up not only in ditheism but also in atheism. The criticism now reaches larger dimensions and penetrates into the very core of theology, in order to derive its arguments. This deviation derives once again, firstly, from the fact that, by devaluating the divine energies to creatures, they also pull along the divine essence, which is considered to be its initial-natural provider, to such an ontological status. This remark continually appears to Gr. Palamas' argumentation. Secondly, by refusing the actual difference that exists between these two divine conditions, they mutually negate them, which can be considered as a parameter that will automatically preclude their distinction at the level of logical wording as well, as far as this complicated method is possible for supernatural conditions. Then, only those tautological proposals will have legitimacy, which will reflect the simplistic –and perhaps inflexible– monism. According to Gr. Palamas, the extensions in the gnoseological field, which in Christianity is completely determined by the ontological one, will be analogous. Specifically, both his theoretical opponents will end up in agnosia of God, not, however, in the sense that God is superior but in the sense that human is deficient, i.e. human is deprived of or has no ability of cognitive reduction in the divine, and so they will drift themselves into a state of cognitive darkness, clearly however under its derogatory version. «Διὰ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν καὶ τὴν θεϊὰν οὐσίαν εἰς κτίσμα κατασπῶσι, τῷ δὲ τὴν διαφορὰν αὐτῶν ἀρνεῖσθαι δι' ἀλλήλων ἀναιροῦσι ταύτας, καὶ οὕτω τῇ κατ' ἔλλειπιν ἀγνωσίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οἰοεῖ τι ζόφον περιπίπτουσιν»¹².

Going further, we would note that the direct consequence, from the gnoseological point of view, is that, on the one side, an unbridgeable gap between God and human is formed, that their dialectical relationship is cancelled and that human being does not capture the actual content of the divine energies, both in themselves and as to their views. And such a separation will definitely cause significant negative effects on the entire existential and eschatological level for human being. The logically resulting theological agnosticism as an extension of philosophical extreme skepticism and the relegation of God are two viewpoints that overturn

11 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 9, 75.13–24. Cf. Max., *schol. d.n.* (PG 4, 204D–205A).

12 Cf. *ibid.*, 9, 75.24–76.1. Cf. Radovic 1991, 205–206. Also, Nisiotis 1986, 108–123. We have to mention that darkness in Christianity may also have a positive meaning, and actually in an absolute degree, since it describes in a narrative way the higher level of the apophatic theology and indicates the mystical for any kind of approaching cognitively the essence of the Holy Trinity.

the authenticity of the soteriological prospect. In the first case, the human being will ignore what he seeks, while in the second he will attempt to resemble an incomplete object/subject or, on the contrary, he will remain on his own levels without transcendent prospects, since he would refer from any point of view to a completely inaccessible hyper-perfection. These are clearly two conditions that do not correspond to the traditional teachings of Eastern Christianity, which sets to human being specific limits for cognitive references to the God. At this point, a second possibility arises. Considering that the divine mingling energies are created, it is possible for human being to enter extensively the divine mystery. He will then communicate with an actuality, from the externalizations of which he won't be ontological different and, thus, finally his salvation may also mean a radical transformation. But this point of view on the ontological change is also not acceptable by the tradition developed in Byzantium.

The relegation of the energies to created beings or their intermingling with the essence

According to Gr. Palamas, the above points indicate clearly Barlaam and Akindynos' syllogistic mistakes. Sometimes they choose the identity or the confusion of the divine substance with the divine energy and other times they speak about their extreme separation, without understanding the condition of distinction, which somehow –and *kat'* expressive *oekonomia*– is an internal differentiation, which does not affect at all the self-founding qualities. That means that the divine essence preserves, if this is the right word, its strict identity compared to anything that expresses its revelation, without which however is not possible to be understood exactly as divine by humans. An inactive substance would be nonexistent and consequently not cognitively understood. Gr. Palamas considers, thinking always in a critical way, that by making these mistakes, his two opponents sometimes end up relegating the energies to created beings and other times introducing them with undifferentiated conditions within the divine essence. In the second case, they actually come to the conclusion that the uncreated energy does not differ at all from the divine essence and thus they disestablish the whole internal and absolutely under his responsibility distinction of God, which is also accomplished through the common energies and “processions” of the three Persons¹³. Undoubtedly, such an insertion would also cause repercussions on the level of logical expressions, which would lead to tautologies. The divine essence would be defined as identical to the divine energy, a view that would logically be contradictory, since the divine essence can only be identical to its indivisible and non-multiplied self. The essence in its absolute version is just essence and nothing else. And, since, according to the regulatory framework that determines apophatism, categorical determinations are radically excluded from the divine essence, the expression “it is essence” becomes completely unnecessary, since it introduces a duality and a relevancy between the subject and the predicate. And God is absolutely independent of any attribute and actually of any self-reference, which works on beings that are deficient and attempt to exceed this condition.

At the same time, Gr. Palamas thinks that the fact that the actual texture of the energy of the acting subject, the presence of which is obvious in a special way at his creatures, is not perceived by someone, it is a feature of a completely foolish man. This characterization is strengthened by the fact that this foolish man either puts the energy on the same ontological level with the energetics or perceives it as non-different from the active essence condition, i.e. he basically excludes it from acting and causing preconditions for products or from existing as energy. This last intermingling is like accepting from this point of view as well that God is only

13 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 4, 71.27–72.3. Cf. Lison 1994, 72–80.

essence and that he does not possess even the minimum amount of energy¹⁴. The Christian thinker is also of the opinion that it is not allowed to put a vertical separating line between the active substance/nature and its corresponding power/energy relying on an incorrect interpretation of the distinction that exists between the created and the uncreated. Such an analogy of separations is not acceptable, since between the two worlds there is no exact relevance, despite the “image” of God creation, which certainly does not lead to absolute similarities. Parenthetically, it is necessary to underline that on every level, especially on that of the uncreated, before anything else the relationship between nature and energy is defined by their unity, which from the beginning exists both in a self-founding condition and without any outside intervention. This distinction undoubtedly is found on any ontological level, but should be exclusively described only with what this level allows to appear according to its capabilities. So, generally speaking, between the essence and the energy there is a direct ontological analogy and a qualitative relevance and, consequently, the created energy characterizes the created substance. If we, therefore, follow the reasoning of Barlaam and Akindynos’ heresy in its extreme consequences, we relegate, by pulling down to the level of creation together with the energy, the divine essence as well. «Ὅθεν δῆλον ὡς καὶ τὴν θεϊὰν φύσιν εἰς τὴν κτίσιν ὁ τῆς Βαρθολαίμ καὶ Ἀκινδύνου αἰρέσεως λόγος κατασπᾷ, καὶ μάτην, μᾶλλον δὲ πρὸς ἀπάτην, ἐν παρ’ αὐτῶν φημίζεται τὸ ἄκτιστον· οὐδὲν γὰρ εἶναι ἄκτιστον παρ’ αὐτῶν κατασκευάζεται»¹⁵. It is now becoming clear that the distance from this viewpoint to the adoption of pantheism is very short, even though such a prospect is not a deliberate intention of any thinker of the two conflicting sides.

According to a similar thought of Gr. Palamas, by naming the “processions”, through which the divine is distinguished not in a separating but in a unified way, as created, his opponents not only transform the Holy Trinity into a creature, but they also express their argumentation with an unreliable as to its internal explanations reasoning. The Byzantine thinker reminds that Dionysius the Areopagite included in one logical shape both the distinction of the united as to their essence substances and the distinction of their transmissions in the creation, i.e. all the divine unions and distinctions. And it is important to know that this inclusion under the terms of one and the same ontological status, the one of the uncreated, happened for one further reason. So that no one would have the opportunity to relegate to the creation—or to hierarchical structures—any of these initially and constantly equivalent and self-founded conditions. Furthermore, it is necessary to completely exclude any exogenous interference from the area or the manifestations of the divine, which would cause to it internal differentiations, i.e. levels of particular ontological texture actually different to one another. The result would be undoubtedly to relegate it as to its hyper-self-sufficiency and its omnipotence. It is actually mentioned that after this hypostatic distinction of the three divine persons, Dionysius the Areopagite showed that on the divine level some other unions and distinctions can be also found, displaying in this way a more extended multitude but yet not destructive of the unity, one could say under somehow the type of the philosophical

14 Cf. *ibid.*, 10, 76.10–14. Cf. Papademetriou 1994, 60–65.

15 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *II.θ.ε.δ.* 10, 76.14–27. We should think critically whether the term “ἀπάτη” has, apart from a cognitive, an ethical meaning too. Cf. Max., *Pyrr.* (PG 91, 341A). According to Radovic 1991, 119–121, the distinction of the divine essence from the divine energy is the doctrinal foundation of the actual nature of each mystical experience. We should mention that this experience is the epistemological process that could be defined as intuition, meaning the process that exceeds the sensible experience and reduces directly to God. And the exclusion of the intermediates intends, from this point onwards, to set aside any influence from the complex and multifarious context of the sensible experiences. Intuition means reduction to the divine simplicity.

relationship: “one/many”¹⁶. And this relationship in the context of the Holy Trinity does not introduce any hierarchy or ontological priority. It exists as an inherent divine condition, with the second term representing the infinite wealth of the first.

Then, Gr. Palamas points out that the Fathers of the Church, by following Areopagite’s reasoning, call union the establishment or the self-configuration and the remaining of God in Himself, excluding in this way from the initial presupposed level any reduction to a superior reality or to a certain exogenous intervention. This exclusion means that as far as the essence and anything that is connected with it is concerned, God remains continuously in Himself and does not proceed at all to a manifestation, since the process of motion or the “procession” are absent from this level of His, but not in the sense of a deficiency or lack¹⁷. This is a traditional theological view, which is intensely also found in the Neo-Platonic School and is mainly associated with the reasoning concerning the superlative theology, i.e. the absolute excellence of the supreme One over any entity, condition or relation¹⁸. From the gnoseological point of view, this is the level of the radical apophatism, which refuses any attribute for describing God. So, by following this reasoning in an extreme degree, Gr. Palamas underlines that the entire abovementioned scheme of the quasi self-reference and obscure character of the Holy Trinity cannot come to human perception and because of this impossibility it is completely incomprehensible and unutterable by human consciousness. «Τουτέστι τὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τοῦ θεοῦ παντάπασιν ἡμῖν ἀπερινόητον ἱδρυσιν τε καὶ μονήν, αὐτὸ τὸ μένειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸν Θεόν καὶ μηδαμῶς πρὸς ἑκφάνσιν προῖέναι καὶ κινεῖσθαι κατ’ οὐσίαν, ἔνωσιν οἱ πατέρες ὀνομάζουσιν»¹⁹. Therefore, the only thing that is gnoseologically accepted is making hypotheses, which are intensely facing the risk of both contingency and –within this dynamic and clearly unpredictable for human perception development of the divine economy– falsifiability. Moreover, the final conclusions on divine are pragmatically and logically included only in the context of the eschatological plenitude, which is not possible to be included, during the historical process, in the framework of the strict humanly expectation. So, the divine union maintains as a non-preconditioning given and thus any specific and definitive remark for its content is avoided, since theological realism requires for human such a cognitive self-control–self-limitation. We should point out that this realism is closely intertwined with the terms of a general or a specialized epistemology and inevitably determines them, at least regarding the limits that it sets for them.

Being more specific, Gr. Palamas mentions that by not keeping these distinctions, Barlaam and Akindynos think as created even the main quality of the Holy Trinity, the divinity. And this restricted categorization is obvious, when they express the view: «ἐν

16 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 18, 81.29–82.17. Dionysius the Areopagite considers at this point as unions all the common idioms of the three Persons, such as the placement of all things and the abstraction of all things, and as distinctions the various ways in which these idioms are present in the created beings [cf. *d.n.* 2, 4, (PG 3, 641A–C)]. Cf. Lison 1994, 157–159, whence: “...the distinctions in God are not divisions, as when we divide the created and physical realities” (158).

17 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 18, 82.17–25. Cf. Dion. Ar., *d.n.* 2, 4 (PG 3, 640D). Undoubtedly, this absence does not introduce a condition that does not initially own its plenitude, but is used to show that God as an essence is present only in the state of self-reference. It should be mentioned that this self-reference is not used accurately, since it is possible to introduce conditions that undermine, even slightly, the divine simplicity and emerge a duality. It has already been obvious that the absolute unity clearly excludes the turn towards the self, since it is deprived of any meaning or purpose.

18 Cf. Procl., in *Parm* 1089.17–1239.21, where superlative theology appears in the light of the analytical commentary of the interpretation of the first hypothesis of the platonic dialogue *Parmenides*, according to which the One is completely separated from any relevancy Cf. Bastid 1969, 66–118.

19 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 19, 82.25–28. Mutatis mutandis, we observe an equivalent relevance also in Neoplatonist Proclus. Cf. Procl., *Theol. Plat.* II 61.11–64.9. Cf. Trouillard 1972, 91–109. About the meaning of “remaining” in Christian theology, cf. Gersh 1978, 217–229.

ἄναρχον καὶ ἀτελεύτητον, ἡ οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὰ δὲ παρὰ ταύτην πάντα γενητῆς ὑπάρχει φύσεως». Also: «μόνη ἄκτιστος θεότης ἡ φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὰ δὲ περὶ αὐτὴν ἅπαντα κτιστά». By refuting the above, Gr. Palamas says that the term ‘deity’ (θεότης) is a name or a specific expression for the divine energy, which comes from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit and is revealed to human beings with its –formed– effects. Under any circumstances, it does not reveal as “procession” the nature itself of the essence of the Holy Trinity. Certainly the above view is defined under the criterion of what are the human possibilities for categorizing as to their entry into the transcendent. A similar relation is also found in the case of the energy, which is a somehow motion of the essence but not the essence itself. That means it expresses a special quality, through which the divine essence manifests itself, but not in its immovable condition²⁰. The conclusion is the same as the previous one: these distinctions are said according to what man logically understands and they do not actually reflect what exactly happens. We are always speaking about limiting the range, which in fact is determined and activated by the divine revelations. And this dialectic remains permanently wide open to reformations.

Expanding his specific details, the Christian theologian says that the acting (ἐνεργεῖν) and the energy refer to the same condition, an identity that also applies in the case of the moving (κινεῖσθαι) and the motion. I.e. he somehow presents the nouns to manifest or to summarize the way and the degree of the manifestation that the infinitives express, which are clearly related to the existing on each occasion factors, which obviously are not always the same. We should however pay attention at this point, in order not to attribute approaches to the parts of speech that would highlight non-authentic presences to realities that at this point are the transcendent persons to which they refer. The noun in the present context is not a product of a subtractive process, but indicates the action, the development, the progress, the presence, the influence, so it is also personally determined. On the other hand, the infinitive does not express the dynamic progress of a static condition, which a noun would express, but signifies its function through an essential person. The meanings included in their corresponding infinitives are imputed to the nouns that are used at this point. The general however perspective of application, and not only the specific one, is mandatory, since the infinitive does not directly reflect-reveal the subject to which it refers. And obviously this detail can be explained by the fact that in each case –except from the strictly hypostatic properties– all three persons of the Holy Trinity are meant. In order to avoid the conceptual confusions, Gr. Palamas explains that there is no doubt that the stasis differs from the standing and the motion differs from moving, with the second term clearly and from the beginning pointing out the individual factor and not leading from the outset to generalizations. Therefore, the relation “noun-infinitive” is different from the relation “noun-participle”. It is also mentioned that, if the proposed difference between stasis and motion is not according to the meaning of opposite qualities and functions, it becomes clear that no condition prevents the terms from involving like a particular pair where appropriate and from belonging to the same ontological level as to the source from which they arise. But such a common source and with no variations regarding the in itself condition and the function only in the area of the supreme Principle is found. «Εἰ δὲ μὴ κατὰ τὸ ἐναντίον ἔχει ταῦτα τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλα διαφορὰν καὶ ἐν εἶναι πάντα οὐδὲν τὸ προσιστάμενον»²¹. In the case, however, of the created area, it is possible an entity to externalize in different to

20 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 22, 85.3–19. Cf. J. Lison 1994, 150–151; Boulovits 1983, 115–116.

21 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 22, 85.19–27. Cf. Contos 1967–68, 290–291. In the supernatural field of the absolute divine integrity terms of contrast and otherness do not exist, since, among other things, they would introduce dualisms or even multiplications. They are exclusively found in unity and in absolute communication of mutuality.

each other ways, depending on the case, i.e. concerning the context in which the entity each time is included or is appeared either naturally or volitionally. And this is an externalization that the entity itself formulates.

The actually important ontological principal for the relations at this point is that the category or the concept that indicates the condition, to which it refers, does not differ qualitatively from the carrier or the validator of this condition. A possible differentiation would lead to hierarchies, which would not ensure established reasonable confirmations. We should also here explain that obviously the categories are construed at least primarily under their ontological and, on a second level, under their logical dimension, since the theological realism is undoubtedly mandatory. We could, indeed, say, by taking the discussion in a secularized level, that the motionless and the moving are terms that refer to those living beings that have added, through their properties, specific qualities to the general essence to which they belong or participate in, simply and just with their particular condition that they themselves present. Or, more moderately, they express specific aspects of the general and presupposed category of the “essence”, which, at least according to the Aristotelian thought, is revealed in various ways. We should however further clarify that in the supernatural area of the Holy Trinity they do not exist in a lower or subsequent level compared to the divine essence, while in the natural level they function as accidents of various origins and types. Therefore, in the supernatural area the abstract concepts indicate conditions as inherent idioms, i.e. as qualities not severed from their body, like somehow primary accidents and not symptomatic. The quality, however, in the natural level is indicative of the specific way in which the general substrate is presented, i.e. of the substantive in each case subject, which differs from the rest, as to the structural way of its form and function, the one of the initial processes and diffusions. A strong possibility is that we are speaking about natural reasons-perpetual cores. And this possibility is able to lead to a discussion about initial genera, which will be specified by their specifications²².

Gr. Palamas removes redirects the above reasoning, *mutatis mutandis*, to the area of the Holy Trinity. So, he says that, though the divine energy is different from the divine essence, this distinction does not prevent from existing only one deity, as an absolutely *per se* metaphysical idiom, the one of the triadic *henad*, both as to the essence and as to the energy. And undoubtedly, since it is one, it is also simple, obviously provided that we refer to absolutely first conditions, which have not come from compositions. Here indeed we have the presuppositions to say that the idioms of the unity and the simplicity function not only as absolute but as well as non-reducing of the authentic integrity—in some way—differences of the Holy Trinity from what a produced substance could cause. Any such substance, regardless of whether is a carrier of the idioms of the divine one as a cause or results from their combination, is determined by others and does not interfere in the over-plenitude of its source. In order to avoid the expression of actually nonexistent ontological contaminations, the Christian theologian repeats that between the moving and the motion, the acting and the energy, the motionless and the stasis there is no composition/assimilation, so an absorptive relevance that would abolish the distinctions does not occur. «Οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ ἐστηκώς σύνθετος διὰ τὴν στάσιν»²³. That means that the carrier of a condition does not contain it as something acquired

22 At this point, we may refer to Gregory of Nyssa, who presents the difference between Adam and Abel as follows: Adam is the first man or the natural-created self-man, who possesses all the qualities of human essence, which gives to Abel, who owns them and utilizes them according to his way. Cf. *Eun.*, (PG 65, 592C–D).

23 Cf. Gr. Palamas, *Π.θ.ε.δ.* 22, 85.28–32. The non-composite character of the supreme Principle is a consistent viewpoint of the representatives of the Neo-platonic School. Cf. *Dam.*, *Pr.* I, 1.4–26.8. Furthermore, they connect this property with the property of unutterable, proceeding in this way from ontology to gnoseology, while transcendence is not violated not even hypothetically but belongs to the

with which it will admix itself, but possess it as a way with which it manifests and through which it is characterized not only as a substance but as well as a function, which certainly presents a variety, since the divine –and the created– world is quantitatively infinite. The above lead us to conclude that the essence –no matter where it belongs– does not participate to certain properties–elemental cores in order to gain a way of being, but contains them as substantive–primary properties with which it also acts. The Aristotelian inspiration regarding the differentiations is too obvious and in this way the substance, as a whole hypostatic shape, is not destroyed during the ontological processes of the formations. All these are totally accepted, provided that the essence is here an absolutely self-sufficient subject. And apart from this, this is also a preparation to identify and to validate the absolute analogies or at least the limiting differences concerning the way of existence between the essence and its energy. It has already, however, become clear that every revelation or presence is substantive, but rigorous in its certain originality and absolutely familiar to its body, reflecting a view of the infinite wealth of its capabilities. And obviously when we speak about supernatural reality, this wealth is considered to be constantly and according to Christians capable of significant interferences with stable effects; furthermore, it is exclusively defined by its volition, in the sense of the volitional function of its power.

Conclusions

1. Gr. Palamas is clearly included in Areopagite's tradition for mainly two reasons: first, he is absolutely consistent with the teaching of the Eastern Christianity regarding ontological issues and their gnoseological approaches and, secondly, he takes into account the previous leading thinkers of the same tradition, such as Maximus the Confessor. Besides the above, it generally comes to the fore that in his writings he moves in both the systematic and the historical level of the Christian theology, a combination we find in most Byzantine thinkers.

2. Although he takes conceptual and syllogistic material from other traditions, Gr. Palamas, aiming at highlight the integrity of the Christian theology, is interested in utilizing to the fullest extent Dionysius the Areopagite's writings, which it is known that have a key role in the formation and the expression of the systematic dogmatic teaching of the Eastern Christianity. Note also that his treatises entitled a) *Περὶ θεῶν ἐνεργειῶν καὶ τῆς κατ' αὐτὰς μεθέξεως* and b) *Περὶ θείας καὶ θεοποιοῦ μεθέξεως*, aim with great care for the same thing.

3. The most important thing that arises from Gr. Palamas' theory, despite the fact that just a few details are highlighted from what we have seen, is the prospect of the interpretation, which is accomplished through the combination of the rational with the mystical element. The hesychast theologian seems to have been fully aware of the fact that Philosophy and Theology are inseparable, in the light however of the given that the first is a preparatory level for the reduction to the second. The way in which the above are approached escapes form secularized analyzes and is based on what we may call as meta-analytic reading.

4. Note that until the end of the treatise, Gr. Palamas deals with the matter of the divine unions and distinctions and his argumentation moves in both the transcendence and the immanence. He even underlines from various viewpoints that the act of creation occurs without the divine essence to change, since it is manifested exclusively through the activation of the divine volitional powers of the supreme Principle.

5. Regarding Barlaam's and Akindynos' argumentation, the fact that we do not use in this study their texts, clearly limits the objectivity of our judgment, which was based only on the way in which Gr. Palamas approached them.

absolutely unchangeable.

6. Furthermore, the fact that Gr. Palamas does not refer to Nicholas of Methone and George Pachymeres, although they both have the same approaches with his own, requires exhaustive readings and it is necessary the historian of theology to think about it, at least as regards the progressive course of Areopagite's treatise. The question broadens if we consider that the first could be described as a great supporter of the traditional Christian teachings.

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**ΏΨΕΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΩΡΙΑΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΕΝΩΣΕΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΑΚΡΙΣΕΩΝ ΣΤΟΝ ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟ
ΠΑΛΑΜΑ: Η ΣΧΕΣΗ ΜΕΤΑΞΥ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΙΑΣ ΟΥΣΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΘΕΙΩΝ
ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΩΝ"**

Στην παρούσα μελέτη, στην οποία κινούμεθα με βάση την πραγματεία του Γρ. Παλαμά με τίτλο *Περί θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως*, ο σκοπός μας είναι να εξετάσουμε την αντικειμενική ύπαρξη των θείων ενεργειών και την σχέση τους με την θεία ουσία. Η χριστιανική ερμηνεία της θεωρίας περί των ενώσεων και των διακρίσεων τεκμηριώνει ότι πρόκειται απλώς για δύο διαφορετικούς τρόπους υπάρξεως, χωρίς οντολογική μεταξύ τους διαφορά, όπως αντιθέτως υποστηρίζουν ο Βαρλαάμ και ο Ακίνδυνος. Αξιοσημείωτο είναι ότι η κατανόηση της συλλογιστικής πορείας του Παλαμά αναδεικνύει ότι πρόκειται για έναν αυστηρό ερευνητή, ο οποίος, από την μία πλευρά, διαθέτει εδραίες φιλοσοφικές βάσεις στην διατύπωση των θεωριών του, αλλά, από την άλλη, σαφώς συμβαδίζει με την προηγηθείσα χριστιανική παράδοση.

