Paul the Hesychast: Gregory Palamas and the Pauline Foundations of Hesychast Theology and Spirituality*

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The thought of Gregory Palamas is marked by an extraordinary appropriation of Pauline theology that has largely escaped scholarly notice. This paper argues that the Hesychast controversy unfolded around rival interpretations of Paul's theology and visionary experiences, especially his vision of the divine light (Acts 9:3–9) and his ascent into the 'third heaven' (2 Cor 12:1–10), which Palamas and his followers identified with their own understanding of the uncreated light of God and with Hesychast spirituality more generally. Palamas' rich and complex handling of Paul's letters is explored through a close reading of the first *Triad,* along with relevant passages from the other works in the trilogy. The analysis suggests that the Hesychast controversy was in many ways a debate about who was the true follower of Paul.

The last fifty years have witnessed an explosion of Palamite studies, along with growing interest in other theological writers of the period, yet almost no attention has been paid to the Palamite (or Hesychast) use of the Pauline corpus or of Scripture more generally. If we take the standard works of reference as our starting point, we will be told that the Hesychast controversy was a debate about the nature of mystical experience, a clash between ascetic spirituality and scholastic methodology, a chapter in the ongoing quarrel between faith and reason (or between theology and philosophy, or Christianity and Hellenism), or simply an ideological screen for the ambitions of warring feudal magnates set against the background of reviving urban life. As true as these interpretations might be, they do not even remotely suggest that the Hesychast controversy can and probably should be seen as a debate about who was the true follower of Paul.

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To be sure, the primary question between Gregory Palamas (b. ca. 1296, d. 14 November 1357) and Barlaam (b. ca. 1290, d. June 1348) concerned the validity of Christian religious experience as a true contact with God and not with some created reality. Despite the sea changes of imperial politics, this question remained the constant undercurrent throughout the successive waves of controversy, which extended from 1335 to 1351.[1] For both sides, the question was in fact a series of questions touching on the nature of human knowledge. Could human reason, on its own initiative, attain accurate knowledge of God? Was nature the objective ground or medium of that knowledge, or did it have some other, supernatural source? What were the proper means and methods, the concrete practices, necessary for the acquisition of that knowledge? And, finally, what was the best way to build, on the basis of that knowledge, a way of life consistent with it?

It should be emphasized that this was not a debate about human knowledge in general. Instead, the controversy began when Barlaam publicly denounced the monks of Mount Athos, arguing that spiritual perfection in the monastic life—including states of dispassion and divinization—could not be attained without the study of pagan Greek philosophy.[2] That Palamas, an Athonite monk, vigorously refuted Barlaam's arguments comes as no surprise, yet he did not reject secular studies altogether, but merely sought to highlight the uselessness of profane Hellenism for the acquisition of divine grace, along with its inability to bring about mystical union with God.[3]

In his struggle against Greek philosophy, which was mounted in defence of the life of prayer, Palamas found a powerful ally in Paul, who himself was no stranger to these questions. Paul had travelled throughout much of the Hellenistic world, spoke Greek fluently, was reasonably well versed in Greek literature,[4] and came into

[1] For an overview of the controversy, see Robert E. Sinkewicz, 'Gregory Palamas,' in *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition* II, eds. Carmello Giuseppe Conticello and Vassa Conticello (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 132–37.

[2] According to reports received by Palamas, *Triad* 1.1.1 (John Meyendorff, ed., *Grégoire Palamas, Défense des saints hésychastes*, 2 vols. [Louvain: Université Catholique, 1973], vol. 1:5–7). For an attempt to reconstruct the theology of Barlaam, see Robert E. Sinkewicz, 'A New Interpretation for the First Episode in the Controversy between Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Palamas,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1980): 489–500; and *id*., 'The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian,' *Medieval Studies* 44 (1982): 181–242.

[3] See, for example, Palamas, *Triad* 1.1.12: 'We do not prevent those who have not chosen the monastic life from occupying themselves with secular studies, but neither do we advise them to do this for their whole life. For we completely reject the idea that through such studies a person can hope to know with precision anything about the divine, since it is not possible to learn from such studies anything certain about God, for "God has made" such studies "foolish" (1 Cor 1:20)' (1:37, lines 6–12); cf. id., *Triad* 2.1.35: 'The Lord did not categorically forbid secular studies, just as he did not forbid marriage, or eating meat… but according to you, since the Lord did not forbid these things, we are required to indulge in them to full measure' (1:295, lines 17–24).

[4] See Photios, *Amphilochia* 151 (eds. Basil Laourdas and L.G. Westerink [Leipzig: Teubner, 1986], 5:193–94), written in response to a question about the number of pagan quotations in the New Testament, all of which are associated with Paul: Acts 27:28 (= Aratus, *Phaenomena*); 1 Cor 15:33 (= Menander, *Thais*); and Titus 1:12 (= Epimenides, *De oraculis*).

conflict with what he called the 'wisdom of the Greeks' (cf. 1 Cor 1:22), that is, with the same philosophical tradition promoted by Barlaam.[5] Consequently, both Paul and his Late Byzantine readers, when confronted with the tradition of Greek philosophy, were situated in more or less the same linguistic and intellectual framework. It was thus that a number of Pauline *loci* quickly moved to the centre of the debate, and that the debate itself became in many ways an elaborate theological exegesis of Paul.[6]

The Triads

Palamas' use of Paul's letters is exemplified in the *Triads,* a collection of nine treatises grouped into three trilogies. Written over a three-year period (1338–1340), these seminal writings established the basic Hesychast position and became the principal point of reference for the ensuing debates. The first two *Triads* have overlapping themes and virtually identical structures, each beginning with an extensive critique of pagan Greek philosophy, followed by a defence of Hesychast prayer, and concluding with a discussion on the knowledge of God. The third *Triad* departs from this pattern, focusing instead on the doctrine of divinization, the uncreated light, and the distinction between God's essence and energies. Of the three *Triads*, the first two make constant reference to Paul, together containing more than one hundred and fifty citations from Paul's letters, whereas the third *Triad* contains only twenty-five citations.[7] In the following analysis, the focus is on the first *Triad*, which presents a fairly complete picture of Palamas' use of Paul. Relevant passages from the other works in the trilogy are also included. I engage in a close reading of this work, since this is the only way to appreciate the richness and complexity of Palamas' handling of Paul's letters.

[5] From the extensive bibliography on Paul and Greek philosophy, cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989); Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); F. Gerald Downing, *Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); and George H. Van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

[6] In describing Palamas' use of Paul in his *First Letter to Barlaam* (scr. 1336), Hans-Veit Beyer, *Nikephoros Gregoras, Antirrhetika I* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976), 88, states that: 'Die biblische Autorität, auf die sich Palamas bei seiner nunmehr entwikkelten Bildungsfeindlichkeit immer wieder stützen sollte, war der Apostel Paulus, zumal dessen Äusserungen zu Beginn des ersten Korintherbriefes'—a correct assessment that is also generally true of Palamas' use of Paul throughout the entire controversy.

[7] The impact of these figures is slightly mitigated by the fact that *Triad* 1 and (especially) 2 are lengthier than *Triad* 3, though it is ultimately the nature of the argument that governs the frequency of citation.

Hebrews 13:9

In response to a question about the place of pagan Greek philosophy in the monastic life, Palamas begins the first *Triad* with a quotation from Hebrews: 'Brother, to speak in the manner of the apostle, "it is well that the heart acquire certainty by grace" (Heb 13:9), but how could someone demonstrate by means of reason the Good that transcends reason?'[8] It can hardly be insignificant that Palamas begins the *Triads* with a reference to Paul.[9] Though Hebrews 13:9 does not figure in the subsequent argument, it serves here to make three important points. It enlists the authority of Paul on the side of the Hesychasts; it foregrounds the notion of divine grace; and it emphasizes the need for the heart to acquire 'certainty' by means of this grace. In this way, Palamas aligns himself with the apostle and adroitly shifts the terms of the debate from 'mind' to 'heart,' and from 'knowledge' to 'grace', which, as the rest of the treatise will make clear, essentially sums up the whole of his response to Barlaam.

When we look more closely at the text of Hebrews, however, it appears that Palamas has taken the verse out of context. At this point in the letter, the argument is about not being concerned with what the law says about unclean foods, which is the reading of Chrysostom and other patristic commentators.[10] Such disregard for context, as well as for the patristic exegetical tradition, is unusual for Palamas, and raises a question. The answer may be that Palamas is following an interpretation of Hebrews 13:9 such as that found in a homily ascribed to St Makarios the Great. This interpretation brackets the reference to food and associates the phrase with the preceding exhortation to doctrinal purity, noting that Orthodox belief is a corollary of the 'spiritual works of the inner man.'[11] The Makarian homilies were popular reading in Byzantine monastic circles, and Palamas cites them frequently.[12] We may therefore have a case in which Palamas is following a spiritual exegesis of this passage and not that of the standard commentaries. But Palamas must have known that this particular interpretation is slightly forced, which may be why he never cites this verse again.[13]

[8] *Triad* 1.1.1 (1:9, lines 8–10).

[9] Consistent with the patristic and Byzantine exegetical tradition, Palamas accepts the Pauline authorship of Hebrews.

[10] Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews 33*.2 (PG 63:226); cf. Theodoret, *Commentary on Hebrews* (PG 82:781B–C).

[11] Makarios, *Homily* 28 (Erich Klostermann and Heinz Berthold, eds., *Neue Homilien des Makarius/Symeon* I [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961], 169, lines 24–26).

[12] Around 50 times in the *Triads* alone, generally from the version by Symeon Metaphrastes.

[13] After Palamas, George Scholarios seems to be the only writer who even so much as alludes to this verse, which he does in his epitome of Aquinas's *Summa,* to highlight the notion that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are established by divine grace (Louis Petit, et al., ed., *Oeuvres complètes de Georges Scholarios* [Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1933], 6:72, line 9).

Romans 11:34

The second passage, Romans 11:34, occurs in the middle of the next paragraph, where Palamas cites it to counter Barlaam's claim that the mind can know God through secular studies. Palamas finds this 'outrageous', insofar as 'the apostle says: "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" (Rom 11:34 = Isa 40:13).'[14] This would seem to be a rather devastating proof text, yet this is the only time it occurs in the *Triads,* perhaps because it takes the form of an unanswered question, or because Palamas will shortly come to rely almost exclusively on passages in which Paul explicitly rejects the 'wisdom of the Greeks'. The verse has a long history of citation, and among Palamas' disciples was used by Theophanes of Nicaea (d. ca. 1380/81), who included it in a dense gathering of Pauline *loci*, summing up in large measure the Hesychast interpretation of Paul.[15] The same verse, however, could cut both ways—it was cited twice by Akindynos, who deployed it to undermine Palamas' claim to possess definitive knowledge about the divine energies.[16]

1–2 Corinthians

The remainder of *Triad* 1.1.2 through the end of 1.1.9 is marked by a large number of citations from 1–2 Corinthians, which are organized into three groups or textual units. These units present us with impressive examples of Palamas' rhetorical and theological skill in handling material from Paul's letters, and are worth looking at closely.

The first unit begins immediately after the citation of Romans 11:34, noted above. Alluding to 1 Timothy 6:20 (*ψευδώνυμος γνῶσις*), Palamas calls the knowledge promoted by Barlaam a 'pseudo-knowledge' (*ψευδογνωσία*), in support of which he cites three passages from the Corinthian letters and one from Colossians:

[14] *Triad* 1.1.2 (1:11, lines 14–15). I follow Meyendorff in identifying this verse as Romans 11:34, even though Paul uses the same phrase in 1 Corinthians 2:16. Given Palamas' heavy reliance on 1 Corinthians (cf. above, n. 6, and below), the Romans citation should probably be emended to include 1 Corinthians 2:16.

[15] Theophanes of Nicaea, *On the Light of Thabor* 2.17 (George Zacharopoulos, ed., *Θεοφάνης Νικαίας. Ὁ Βίος καὶ τὸ συγγραφικὸ του ἔργο* [Θεσσαλονίκη: Κέντρο Βυζαντινών Ἐρευνῶν, 2003], 193–94): 'Wishing to show once and for all that the supernatural mysteries of piety (cf. 1 Titus 3:16) are above all human wisdom and knowledge (cf. 1 Cor 2:13, 13:8), and that one must not seek for them (cf. 1 Cor 1:22) without divine illumination (cf. 2 Cor 4:6), the divine apostle says: "We interpret spiritual things to those who are spiritual, because the unspiritual man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them, because they are discerned spiritually; but the spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one, for who has known the mind of the Lord, as to instruct Him? (Isa 40:13) But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:13–16)". According to the divine fathers, the "mind of Christ" is the Holy Spirit, through which mind "we know the mind of the Lord", that is, the divine purpose, which is the future divinization of the saints.'

[16] Gregory Akindynos, *Antirrhetic* 1.14 (CCSG 31:16, lines 10–11), cites Romans 11:34 to counter Palamas' claim to know that there exists a multiplicity of divine energies, which Palamas had somewhat recklessly described as an 'infinity of lower divinities', and which he believed, according to Akindynos, were 'visible to the eyes of the body'; cf. ibid., 1.50 (60, line 6).

> The soul that possesses the knowledge of secular wisdom is in no way borne thence to the Truth Itself, or even to the truth, which is why those who boast about it do so in vain. Let them listen to Paul,[17] who calls secular wisdom 'fleshly wisdom' (2 Cor 1:12), just as he calls 'knowledge that makes one arrogant' (1 Cor 8:1) the 'mind of the flesh' (Col 2:18). How, then, can the 'wisdom of the flesh' (2 Cor 1:12) endow the soul with likeness to God? 'For consider', he says, 'your call; not many of you were wise according to the flesh, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth' (1 Cor 1:26).[18]

As a bridge to the second unit, Palamas argues that the human mind is marred by sin, and requires purification in order to live with 'the only wise God' (Rom 16:27) (*Triad* 1.1.3). He subsequently counters Barlaam's contention that Christian perfection is achieved through the study of philosophy by citing a passage from Dionysios the Areopagite, in which union with God follows upon 'love and the keeping of the commandments' (*Triad* 1.1.4).[19] This is confirmed by the Lord himself (*Triad* 1.1.5), who did not say, 'If you would be perfect, occupy yourself with secular education', but 'deny yourself, give to the poor, and take up your cross' (cf. Matt 19:21; 16:24). If what Barlaam says is correct, 'why did Christ not teach geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and the natural sciences, if such things indeed have the power to banish the darkness of ignorance from the soul?'[20] Palamas' answer to this question—which calls forth a series of further rhetorical questions—brings us to the second unit, containing five citations from the first chapter of 1 Corinthians:

> Why did Christ call as his disciples men who were illiterates, fishermen, and rustics, but not the wise? Was it not so that he might 'confound the wise', just as Paul says? (1 Cor 1:27). Why did God 'make their wisdom foolish'? (1 Cor 1:20). Why was God pleased to 'save believers by the folly of Paul's preaching'? (cf. 1 Cor 1:21). Was it not because 'the world did not know God through wisdom'? (1 Cor 1:21). And what did those, who you say are wise, do when the Word of God, 'who became our Wisdom' (1 Cor 1:30), and who is 'the light of the World' (John 1:9), was manifested bodily to the world? They

[17] This is the first explicit mention in the *Triads* of the name 'Paul', who is previously referred to by the epithet of 'the apostle'. Palamas' use of Paul's name here may be intended to highlight the argument, although for the Byzantines the epithet was used interchangeably with Paul's proper name.

[18] *Triad* 1.1.2 (1:11, lines 17–27). In this, and in subsequent translations, I frequently condense the expansive rhetoric and syntax.

[19] Dionysios, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 2.1 (Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter, eds., *Corpus Dionysiacum* II [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991], 68, lines 17–20): 'As the Scriptures teach, assimilation to God and union with Him come about only through love and the keeping of the commandments', citing John 14:23: 'If any man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him'.

[20] *Triad* 1.1.5 (1:18–19).

> replaced the Light with a tiny lamp, and now encourage others to abandon the way of inner purification and take up secular studies instead.[21]

After a discussion on the nature of knowledge (*Triads* 1.1.6–8), Palamas concludes that human knowledge by itself is utterly useless for the soul's salvation, a view he will corroborate (in *Triad* 1.1.9) with arguments from Paul. With this we arrive at the third and final unit, which also draws extensivley from 1 Corinthians, but now with a slightly higher concentration of passages from the second chapter:

> What does Paul write to the Corinthians—he who did not wish to 'speak with lofty words' (1 Cor 2:1) 'lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power' (1 Cor 1:17); who did not 'address them in persuasive words of human wisdom' (1 Cor 2:4); who 'knew nothing else among them but Christ crucified' (1 Cor 2:2)—what, I ask, did he write to them? 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up' (1 Cor 8:1).

Describing such knowledge as 'earthly' and suited to 'the old man' (Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), Palamas grants that, whereas it can be 'fortified by secular education', it can never become 'spiritual knowledge', unless it is 'reborn by means of grace and love', becoming 'new and deiform, so that it can be called a heavenly wisdom, indeed the "wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:21, 24, 2:7; Eph 3:10).' Knowledge becomes 'spiritual' insofar as it is 'subject to the wisdom of the Spirit, knowing and receiving the gifts of the Spirit', which is why 'the "unspiritual man cannot know the things of the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:14), but deems them "folly" (1 Cor 2:14; cf. 1:18), and seeks only to refute and destroy them.'[22]

Palamas will now draw these arguments to their conclusion, articulating his celebrated doctrine of 'double knowledge', which we will consider in a moment. At this point, a word about his handling of Paul's Corinthian letters is in order. In the texts presented above, we have three inter-related units, unfolding over nine pages (in Meyendorff's edition), and containing a series of more than twenty Pauline citations, taken mostly from 1–2 Corinthians. The first unit, which introduces the basic lines of the argument, uses Paul's language of 'fleshly wisdom' (2 Cor 1:12) to establish a series of polarities that lend all three units their tremendous rhetorical energy. In the second and third units, the passages from 1 Corinthians are generally

[21] *Triad* 1.1.5 (1:19, lines 5–23); cf. Palamas, *Against Gregoras* 1.16, who, having ridiculed Gregoras for his life-long study of secular subjects, including 'grammar', wonders if he is unaware of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:20, i.e., 'Where is the *γραμματεύς*? Where is the debater of this age?' (in *Ιρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα* [hereafter *Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα*], ed. Panayiotis Chrestou, et al. [Θεσσαλονίκη, 1988], 4:243, lines 22–24).

[22] *Triad* 1.1.9 (1:29–31); cf. Palamas, *Antirrhetics against Akindynos* 3.18.85; 4.16.44; and 5.21.82, where 1 Corinthians 2:14 is considered at length (*Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα* 3:222–23; 273; 350–51). See also Birger Albert Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians* (Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1973).

cited consecutively (i.e., from 1 Cor 1:20–8:1), indicating that Palamas is closely following the argument of Paul's letter. The cited passages are not generated through free association, neither is their use simply literary or ornamental. And whereas they do function, in one sense, as 'proof texts', the larger theological argument in which Palamas introduces them is itself profoundly Pauline, being a virtuosic rhetorical *mimesis* of the apostle's own arguments against the proponents of secular wisdom in the church of Corinth. Even though Palamas did not compose these three textual units in the form of a learned commentary or exegetical homily, they are nonetheless a work of biblical interpretation. Palamas' procedures do not of course follow those of a modern biblical critic, but they are common to the patristic and Byzantine use of Scripture in theological controversy. To a reader unversed in the argument of the Corinthian correspondence, Palamas' citations may appear chaotic, or lacking in structure or criteria, but he follows Paul very closely, and none of the citations are quoted out of context or given isolated or extraneous meanings.[23]

If Paul's letters to the Corinthians figure so prominently in Palamas' argument, it is because Paul himself was challenged by similar problems in the church of Corinth. In response, the apostle found it necessary to impress upon his readers that the message of the Gospel is divisive, signaling the apocalyptic division of humanity into two epistemological camps. The cross of Christ, which is the paradoxical manifestation of God in history, creates a series of polarities between those 'being saved' and those 'perishing' (1 Cor 1:18; cf. 2 Cor 2:15; 2 Thess 2:10); between 'divine weakness' and 'human power' (1 Cor 1:25, 27); between the 'mind of Christ' (1 Cor 2:16) and the 'mind of the flesh' (Rom 8:5–6); between 'divine wisdom' and 'human foolishness' (1 Cor 1:2, 3:18–19); and between the 'wisdom of the world' and the 'Wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1:20–21, 2:6–7, 3:18–19; 2 Cor 1:12). From any merely human perspective, the message of the Gospel can only appear as folly. Yet human wisdom itself is folly in the eyes of God, for it is the 'foolishness' of those 'who consider themselves wise, but in truth are perishing' (Rom 1:22; 1 Cor 1:18).[24] For Paul, God has not simply made wisdom *appear* foolish, but has turned it into its very opposite, namely, foolishness. Palamas' distinction between divine and human wisdom is thoroughly Pauline, and the conclusions he draws from this distinction mark one of his most significant appropriations of the apostle's theology.[25]

[23] Indeed, the doctrinal and polemical use of Scripture generally induces greater fidelity to literary context than is sometimes the case in other genres, such as liturgy, hymnology, hagiography, and works of edification or spiritual instruction, although this is not say that patristic and Byzantine exegetes thought or wrote within narrowly construed generic categories.

[24] Note that one of Paul's key verses, 'I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise' (1 Cor 1:19), is in fact a citation from Isaiah 29:14, which represents, not the speech of the prophet, but of God himself, threatening to annihilate the wisdom of the wise, which is God's judgment against Judah, whose political and religious leaders had abandoned God for their own devices.

[25] On which, see Panayiotis Chrestou, 'Double Knowledge According to Gregory Palamas', *Studia Patristica* 9 (1966): 20–29. Barlaam, *Letter* 5 (320, lines 39–40), cites 1 Corinthians 2:13 (not 1 Cor 1:30, *pace* Schiro) to argue for a similar doctrine of 'two wisdoms', based on the fact that 'all beings are double', by

Deeply rooted in the theology of Paul, Palamas' doctrine of 'double knowledge' brings to the fore a fundamental incommensurability between Christian faith and pagan philosophy:

> This is why Paul, wishing to show us that the form of wisdom is double (*διττὸν τὸ τῆς σοφίας εἶδος*), said, 'in God's wisdom, it was not through wisdom that the world knew God' (1 Cor 1:21). Do you see how he distinguishes the two, and how he calls them by different names? And when the divinely wise Paul says that he 'speaks with the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 2:7), does he agree with them, or they with him? Quite the contrary. This is why he adds: 'To the perfect, we do speak wisdom, but not the wisdom of this world, or of the rulers of this world, who are being abolished' and 'who knew nothing of this wisdom' (1 Cor 2:6, 8), a wisdom which is found within us by the grace of Christ, 'who became our wisdom' (1 Cor 2:8).[26]

The radical transcendence of the divine imposed general limitations on all natural knowledge, creating a strong epistemological skepticism and allowing no place for a perfect likeness between knowledge of contingent creation and knowledge of the creator.[27] The Byzantines had tremendous esteem for the life of the mind, but they also recognized its limits. No amount of philosophical learning was sufficient for a correct understanding of God, which emerged, not from knowledge, but from faith, unfolding in response to the gracious gift of God's voluntary self-disclosure. Following Paul, Palamas affirmed that the 'two wisdoms' were profoundly discontinuous, the one being a matter of natural reasoning and the other the result of supernatural grace. A wisdom that was limited, temporal, and at best analogical could not be identified absolutely with the wisdom that was eternal, perfect, and divine.

which he means objects and their images (*eidola*). Yet Barlaam's doctrine is not an ontological distinction between a thing and its appearance, but between realities and mental illusions that deceptively present themselves to the mind in place of those realities. This is not, therefore, a double 'knowledge', but simply a distinction between reality and illusion, and has little to do with Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 2:13; cf. *Triad* 1.1.17 (1:49, lines 9–12).

[26] *Triad* 1.1.17 (1:49–51). Note that these Pauline citations are framed by a parallel passage from Dionysios, *Letter* 7.2 (166–67).

[27] John A. Demetracopoulos, 'Nicholas Cabasilas' *Quaestio de rationis valore:* An Anti-Palamite Defense of Secular Wisdom', *Byzantina* 19 (1998): 53–93, argues that Kavasilas offers a positive assessment of 'secular wisdom' in direct opposition to the position of Palamas in the *Triads*. Kavasilas's *Quaestio*, however, is not a defense of pagan Greek philosophy, which he explicitly rejects, but of reason (*logos*) itself, and even Demetracopoulos acknowledges that Palamas is not 'anti-rational'. Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2012), 106, provides a more balanced assessment when he states that Kavasilas is 'by no means inconsistent with Palamas' ultimately positive, if tremendously cautious, approach to philosophy and secular learning. One might even detect in it a critique of the theological skepticism of critics of Palamas such as Barlaam and Gregoras. Rather than a straightforward attack on Palamas, this text is perhaps better read as a reaction to obscurantist and anti-logical tendencies in Palamite and anti-Palamite circles alike'.

Paul the Hesychast

Thus far Palamas has not addressed the specific origins of Paul's wisdom, although this question was important to him and touches on a key element in the Hesychast understanding of Paul. How did Paul gain access to 'the secret and hidden wisdom of God'? How had he come to know 'what no eye had seen, nor ear heard, nor ever entered the heart of man'? How, indeed, had he come to know 'the very depths of God'? (1 Cor 2:6–10). Palamas turns to these questions toward the end of the first *Triad*, and finds their answers in Paul's extraordinary visionary experiences. He believes that the apostle's wisdom was imparted to him through his vision of a 'light from heaven' on the day of his conversion (Acts 9:3–7, cf. 22:6–11, 26:12), and especially through the 'visions and revelations' he received in the course of his subsequent 'ascent to the third heaven' (2 Cor 12:1–4). In discussing these events, Palamas underlines the power of the divinizing grace that transformed a 'Saul' into a 'Paul', and it seems clear that this is the point towards which his entire argument has been moving.[28] Palamas sees in Paul's spiritual experiences nothing less than the definitive embodiment of the Hesychast practices attacked by Barlaam. Palamas does not bring these experiences forward simply as proof texts in support of his theological arguments, but he believes that Paul himself was the founder and model of a form of spiritual life identical with that practiced by the Hesychasts.[29]

Paul's Rapture

With this we arrive at the question of Paul's visionary experiences and in particular his ascent or 'rapture' (*ἁρπαγή*) into the third heaven, which many modern scholars find disconcerting, if not a little alarming, inasmuch as the familiar Paul here changes into a believer in celestial wanderings. Accounts of 'visions and revelations' (2 Cor 12:1), and of journeys to 'heaven' and 'paradise' (2 Cor 12:2, 4), make Paul seem more like a medieval Byzantine saint than a modern Protestant pastor, and argue for an image of the apostle as a man of 'mystical' experiences in a way that scholars have found difficult to conceptualize.[30] Yet none of this should be surpris-

[28] *Triad* 1.1.22: 'Our *theosophia* is a gift that transforms "Sauls" into "Pauls", catching them up from earth into the "third heaven", where they "hear ineffable things" (2 Cor 12:2)' (1:61, lines 22–28).

[29] In *Triad* 2.3.24, Paul is described as the 'most divine initiator (*θειότατος ἱεροτελεστής*)…inasmuch as he ascended beyond nature, and saw "invisible things" and "heard what cannot be heard" (cf. 2 Cor 12:4)' (1:435, lines 13–17). Palamas recognizes other models for the divinized life, such as Adam, Melchizedek, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and St Stephen, but the principal archetype is Paul (*Triads* 3.3.8, 1.3.25; 1.3.30–31). Before Palamas, Gregory of Sinai (d. ca. 1337), *On the Signs of Grace and Delusion*, had already grounded the entire Hesychast project, understood as the manifestation of the 'indwelling grace of baptism', on the teaching of Paul in 2 Cor 13:5: 'Do you not know that Jesus Christ dwells within you?' (*Φιλοκαλία,* [Αθήνα: Παπαδημητρίου-Αστήρ, 1961] 4:67).

[30] Pauline 'mysticism' is now generally referred to as 'participation in Christ', on which see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 390–412. Dunn notes that, unlike the 'judicial metaphor of justification', the notion of 'participation in Christ' is the 'more natural extension of Paul's Christology', adding that Paul's language of being 'in Christ' is 'much more pervasive in his writ-

ing, since Paul's letters, as well as the depiction of Paul in the book of Acts, provide ample evidence of visionary experiences, revelations, and ecstasies; of miracles; of the indwelling of Christ and/or the Holy Spirit; of experiences of grace and spiritual transformation; and of personal union with Christ.[31]

Paul's account is the only first-hand description of an ascent to heaven to have survived from the first century.[32] It is tantalizingly brief—around fifty words—little more than an elliptical digression about 'visions and revelations' embedded in a larger argument. In the tradition of ironic boasting, Paul writes of 'a certain man' who was 'caught up' into the 'third heaven', although he afterwards states that this man was 'caught up' into 'paradise', where he heard 'certain ineffable words that cannot be spoken'. To complicate matters still further, the apostle repeatedly notes that he does not know whether this experience took place 'in the body or out of the body'. We are consequently left to wonder about the precise relation of the 'third heaven' to 'paradise', which may perhaps be one and the same destination, unless Paul is speaking of a two-stage ascent, or perhaps of two separate ascents.[33] Further ambiguity arises over whether or not this was a spiritual or a bodily experience; and we are told nothing about the content, meaning, or purpose of the revelation, or why the words that were heard cannot be communicated to others.[34]

Despite these ambiguities—or perhaps because of them—this passage attracted considerable interest throughout the patristic and later Byzantine periods. On the whole, the Church Fathers accepted the account as entirely fitting and natural, recognizing in Paul's rapture a paradigm for their own spiritual experiences, a connection authorized by the influential *Life of Antony.*[35] The connection itself, however, is much older, and appears in highly developed form already in Origen's *Commentary*

ings than his talk of "God's righteousness'" (390–91), and that the 'study of participation in Christ leads more directly into the rest of Paul's theology than justification' (395). Despite these positive assessments, Dunn devotes only twenty pages to this 'pervasive' theme in a book of some eight hundred pages.

[31] Visionary experiences (Gal 2:2; Eph 3:3–5; Acts 9:3–7, 11–12, 16:9–10, 18:9–10, 22:17–21, 23:11, 27:23–24); miracles (Acts 14:3, 8–10, 15:12, 16:25–26, 19:11–12, 20:9–12, 28:3–6); indwelling of Christ (Rom 8:9; cf. Eph 3:17; Col 3:15); of the Spirit (Rom 5:5, 8:9, 11, 15–16, 26–27; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; Acts 9:17, 13:9); grace and transformation (Rom 6:3–11, 6:22, 12:2; 2 Cor 3:17–18, 4:4–6); union with Christ (Gal 2:19–20, 3:26–28; 1 Cor 6:17; Eph 1:10, 2:5–6; Phil 1:21, 2:5, 3:9; Col 1:24, 2:11–13, 3:1–4; 2 Tim 2:11–13).

[32] Paula R. Gooder, *Only the Third Heaven? 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 and Heavenly Ascent* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), helpfully surveys a century of scholarship. Also helpful is James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent in Greco-Roman, Judaic and Early Christian Context* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986); and Riemer Roukema, 'Paul's Rapture to Paradise in Early Christian Literature,' in *The Wisdom of Egypt,* eds. Anthony Hilhorst and George H. van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 267–83.

[33] That Paul experienced (at least) two raptures, one to the third heaven and another to paradise, was a widely held opinion; cf. Photios, *Bibliotheca* 234 (ed. René Henry [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967], 5:85).

[34] Of course, writers of apocryphal works eagerly provided answers to these questions; cf. Gooder, *Third Heaven,* 104–27; and J. Edward Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 148–63.

[35] Athanasios, *Life of Antony* 65.8–9 (SC 400:306); cf. the *Saying* of Abba Silouan, who for hours stood in state of ecstasy, his hands stretched out to heaven; when pressed to reveal what he saw, he replied: 'I was caught up into heaven and saw the glory of God' (PG 65:408).

on the Song of Songs, which conflates the connubial 'inner chamber' with the apostle's 'third heaven'. *The Commentary* survives only in a Latin translation, although the passage linking Paul's ecstasy with Christian mystical experience is extant in Greek in the *Catena on the Song of Songs* compiled by Prokopios of Gaza (ca. 460–526).[36]

From at least the third century, then, spiritual writers interpreted Paul's ascent as an expression of the highest level of mystical experience. Undoubtedly the most elaborate example of such an interpretation is found in Maximos the Confessor, *Ambiguum 20*. Maximos interprets the event in the framework of his theology of divinization. He points out that divinization is not a natural potential of human nature, but rather the activity of divine grace, the reception of which requires a person to 'go outside of himself', that is, to enter a state of ecstasy, after the manner of Paul. Maximos subsequently embarks on a highly Dionysian interpretation of the apostle's ascent to the third heaven, which, he argues, unfolded according to the three stages of purification, illumination, and mystical union.[37]

According to Maximos, that Paul did not know whether he was 'in the body' or 'outside the body' was the natural result of the apostle's temporary loss of sense perception and intellection. Insofar as Paul had gone outside himself in ecstasy, his power of sense perception was inactive, and thus he was not 'in the body'. But neither was he 'outside the body', insofar as 'his intellective power was inactive during the time of his rapture'. Maximos avers that this is also why the words Paul heard cannot be repeated, for having, as it were, sounded in a realm beyond mind, they cannot be grasped by ordinary thought, or uttered through ordinary speech, or received by ordinary human hearing. Maximos concludes this complex interpretation by construing Paul's three-fold ascent as an expression of the spiritual progress that results from a life lived according to the Pauline virtues of 'faith, hope, and love' (1 Cor 13:13).

In Maximos' reading of 2 Corinthians 12:1–4, Paul's rapture is fully identified with ascetic contemplation and the experience of divinization. The 'three heavens' signify—indeed simply *are*—the three stages of the spiritual life and their respective modes of cognition. The movement of 'ascent' is thus a progression from lower to higher modes of cognition as the soul is increasingly abstracted from its bodily senses, passing into a realm beyond intellect. The condition of being 'caught up', of

[36] Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 1 (GCS VIII/33:108–9); cf. Prokopios, *Catena in Canticum canticorum* (PG 17:253; PG 87:1552). See Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, who also describes Paul's ascent into the third heaven as an 'entrance into the innermost sanctuary of intelligible nature' (PG 44:121B).

[37] Maximos is in fact commenting on Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 28.20, which describes Paul's rapture as a threefold 'progress, ascent, or assumption to the third heaven' (SC 250:140, lines 2–3). For *Ambiguum 20*, see Nicholas [Maximos] Constas, ed., *Maximos the Confessor, On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, The Ambigua,* Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1:408–19. See also Maximos' *scholion* on the ecstasy of Paul, in Beate Regina Suchla, ed., *Ioannis Scythopolitani, prologus et scholia in Dionysii Areopagitae librum De divinis nominibus* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 188, lines 9–35 (in the apparatus).

being 'outside oneself', is a signature Dionysian doctrine grounded on the ecstatic transport of Paul to the third heaven.[38] Consistent with this tradition, Maximos allows for an immediate experience of God in ecstasy, so that Paul's rapture, far from being a unique or extraordinary event, coincides with the end for which Christian life is a preparation, namely, divinization. Among the Byzantine Hesychasts, this became the standard interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12:2–4, so that every saint becomes 'another Paul (*ἕτερος Παῦλος*), caught up to the third heaven of theology'.[39]

Palamas' understanding of Paul's rapture falls directly within this tradition of interpretation, being primarily indebted to Maximos and Dionysios. Throughout the *Triads*, Palamas cites Paul's account extensively, for which Gregoras criticized him, although Palamas says little that is new.[40] Novelty, of course, was not his aim, although Palamas supplied a missing piece of the puzzle about whether Paul was 'in the body or outside of it'. Palamas' reading is based on the idea, mentioned a moment ago, that the ecstasy of divinization involves a cessation of sensory and intellective activities:

> Now we see by means of sense perception, created beings, and 'divisible symbols';[41] but then, finding ourselves beyond such things, we shall see the timeless light directly, with no intervening veil, just as the most divine initiator (i.e., Paul) into these things revealed, saying: 'Now (*νῦν*) we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face' (1 Cor 13:12).[42] By the word 'now' he means the mode of contemplation that is accessible and appropriate to our nature, for he himself, having ascended beyond nature, and finding himself beyond sense perception and intellect, saw 'invisible things'[43] and 'heard

[38] See, for example, Dionysios, *On the Divine Names* 2.11; 3.2; 4.3 (ed. Beate Regina Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum* I [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990], 136–37; 141; 159).

[39] Niketas Stethatos, *Gnostic Chapters* 44 (*Φιλοκαλία* 3:336–37); cf. ibid., 38 (334–35); id., *Practical and Theological Chapters* 104 (*Φιλοκαλία* 3:254); Makarios, *On the Freedom of the Intellect* 23 (*Φιλοκαλία* 3:230; PG 34:957B); and Kallistos the Patriarch, *On Prayer* 45, 49 (*Φιλοκαλία* 4:329, 332). See also Neilos of Ancyra, *Discourse on Voluntary Poverty* 27: 'Perfect prayer is the rapture of the mind and the total cessation of sensory perception, and this is why Paul, when he was "caught up into the third heaven, did not know if he was in the body or not" (2 Cor 12:2). The same thing happened to him when he was "praying in the temple and entered a state of ecstasy" (Acts 22:17–18) and heard the divine voice by means of the inner sense of his heart, for the sense of hearing, together with all the other bodily senses, ceases during the experience of ecstasy' (PG 79:1004B), cited by Palamas at *Triad* 1.3.18. See also Anastasius of Sinai, *Question* 3 (CCSG 59:7–9).

[40] Cf. *Triad* 1.1.22; 1.3.5, 16, 18, 24; 2.1.44; 2.2.13, 28; 2.3.24, 26–27, 37, 56; 3.1.38; and the remarks of Gregoras, *Antirrhetic* 1.2.2 (ed. Hans-Veit Beyer [Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976], 245, 251).

[41] A citation from Dionysios, *On the Divine Names* 1.4 (*μεριστῶν συμβόλων*) (114, line 6), which I take to be a Dionysian gloss on Paul's notion that our knowledge, which is 'divisible' (i.e., partial = *ἐκ μέρους*), will be 'abolished' in the unmediated vision of God (1 Cor 13:9–11). This passage from the *Triads* is replete with Dionysian allusions, although full annotation is not possible here.

[42] Here Paul says *ἄρτι* and not *νῦν*, which latter is a rhetorical refinement introduced by Palamas.

[43] In 2 Corinthians 12:4, Paul speaks only of 'hearing', and makes no mention of 'seeing', although he does refer to 'visions' (*ὀπτασίας*) at the beginning of the account (2 Cor 12:1). Psellos, *On the words, "I know a Man in Christ"* (Paul Gautier, ed., *Michaelis Pselli Theologica* I [Leipzig: Teubner, 1989], 111–12),

> things that are beyond hearing' (cf. 2 Cor 12:4), receiving within himself the 'pledge' (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:14) of that 'rebirth' (cf. Titus 3:5) and the vision that accompanies it, which is why he said, 'I knew', and 'I heard', and 'I saw'. These indeed seem to be the activity of perception. But he also said: 'I do not know if it was the intellect or the body that perceived those things'—because this 'perception' is beyond both sensation and intellect, for when one of the two is active, and because it is active, it apprehends and knows. This is why he added: 'God knows' (2 Cor 12:3), for it was God who at that moment was active. Paul himself, however, inasmuch as he had gone beyond what is proper to man by virtue of his union with God, saw invisible realities by means of the invisible, even though those realities, which became visible to him, never departed (*ἐκστάντα*) from their realm beyond perception.[44]

Palamas' interpretation carefully builds on the work of his predecessors, which he deftly intertwines with a range of Pauline themes and images. Paul's ascent to the third heaven is at the heart of Palamas' theological anthropology, with its sophisticated differentiation of human consciousness and complex strategies for uniting the human and the divine. In the ecstatic displacement of the self, the apostle is overtaken by the divine actor, who becomes his centre, as well as the centre of his activity, which is precisely why Paul says: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20).[45]

The Divine Light

In addition to Paul's ascent to the third heaven, his vision of the divine light on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:3–9, 22:6–11, 26:12–18) also figured prominently in the controversy. As described by Luke in the book of Acts, Paul, while traveling to Damascus, was overwhelmed by a 'light from heaven that flashed all around him'.

argues that Paul was caught up first into the third heaven, where, outside of himself, he was overwhelmed by light (as on the day of his conversion), and by the singing of the angels, the sound of whose voices can be received by God alone. It is only in the apostle's subsequent rapture to the earthly paradise that he is able to 'hear certain sounds' and 'see certain things', given the relatively sense-perceptible character of paradise; cf. Frederick Lauritzen, 'Psellos the Hesychast: A Neoplatonic Reading of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor', *Byzantinoslavica* 1–2 (2012): 167–79.

[44] *Triad* 2.3.24 (2:435–37); cf. Gennadios Scholarios, *Responses to the Questions of George, Despot of Serbia* 14 (Petit, ed., *Oeuvres complètes*, 4:209–10): 'Paul is in doubt about whether this happened "with or without the body", not because he suspects that his body was taken up along with his soul into heaven, for he knew that this was not possible at that time, for the body was still corruptible; but when it becomes incorruptible and light and bright, as was the body of Christ after the resurrection, then it will ascend to the heavenly paradise, which is the place of the blessed. But he wonders: "Was the soul separated from the body for a time, leaving the body dead until the soul, by some miracle, should return to it, or did the soul remain within the body?" But he was "caught up to heaven", and he was both naturally in the body and in heaven according to activity (*κατ' ἐνέργειαν*), so that the mysteries of heaven might be revealed for the benefit of the world'.

[45] *Triad* 3.1.38 (2:635, lines 2–3).

Temporarily blinded and falling to the ground, Paul heard the voice of Jesus, who called him to serve as the apostle to the gentiles (Acts 26:18). Palamas directly cites Luke's account of Paul's vision only in the last volume of his trilogy, written around 1340.[46] By that time, the debate had shifted away from the epistemological questions described above, and came to focus increasingly on the nature of the divine light, which according to Palamas' opponents was a mere 'symbol' or 'created phenomenon'.[47] Having already argued for the continuity of experience between Paul and the Hesychasts, Palamas affirmed that what the apostle beheld on the road to Damascus was nothing less than the eternal, uncreated energy of God—in other words, the very same divine light seen by the Hesychasts.

By identifying the light of Paul's conversion with the uncreated light of God, Palamas was able to solidify two key points. In the first place, Paul's gift of divine wisdom (cf. 2 Pet 3:13–16) is revealed to have been communicated to him through the medium of the divine light.[48] It was not the 'light of the mind' that illumined Paul, but the 'power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in his soul, and which revealed to him the true knowledge of God'.[49] Receiving the Spirit of God, which 'knows the depths of God' (1 Cor 2:11), Paul was granted to see what 'no eye had seen, nor ear heard, nor ever entered the heart of man' (1 Cor 2:9). It was through this same light, moreover, that Paul received both the 'eyes of Christ' and 'the mind of Christ' (1 Cor 2:16), by means of which he was able to see and know the invisible God, for God is not 'invisible to himself', but 'only to those who see and think with created eyes and minds'. But to those whom 'God has united himself, becoming, as it were, their mind, how would he not give them his own vision and grace?'[50]

The second point follows from the first. If what Paul saw was the light of God, and if the light of God is the uncreated energy of God, then one had to conclude, Palamas pointed out, that what Paul did *not* see was the divine essence.[51] Palamas' opponents of course did not believe that Paul had seen God's essence, but because they refused to acknowledge the existence of the divine energies, they had no choice but to argue that Paul had seen nothing at all.[52] This is not the place to enter into a

[46] *Triad* 3.1.38; 3.1.40; 3.2.1 (2:633, 637, 642). Note that at *Triad* 3.1.38, and 3.2.1, Palamas cites Makarios, *On the Freedom of the Intellect* (PG 34:957A–B), which conflates Paul's vision of the divine light with his ascent to the third heaven, making the divine light the *cause* of the apostle's transport to heaven. He does the same in his *Antirrhetics against Akindynos* 5.6.23 (*Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα* 4:303, lines 7–14).

[47] *Triad* 3.1.11 (2:577–79); and id., *150 Chapters* 147 (ed. Sinkewicz, 253).

[48] *Triad* 1.3.10–11 (1:129–33).

[49] *Triad* 3.1.38 (2:633, lines 24–30).

[50] *Triad* 1.3.16 (1:143).

[51] *Triad* 2.3.26 (2:439); cf. Palamas, *Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite* 45 (*Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα* 2:208); and, id., *Antirrhetic against Akindynos* 5.2.4–5 (*Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα* 4:289–90), for an extended discussion of this question.

[52] Cf. Palamas, *Against Akindynos* 7.12.41 (*Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα* 3:492–93), where Akindynos's equivocation about the light seen by angels, archangels, and by Paul, implies that such visions were demonic deceptions.

detailed disucssion of the essence-energies distinction, about which much has been written, and this question need not detain us any further.[53]

Though not a series of exegetical homilies or a biblical commentary in the traditional sense, the *Triads* is nonetheless a work of outstanding Pauline interpretation, a massive appropriation of Pauline themes, rhetoric, and theology. In response to the challenge of fallen Greek wisdom, and in defence of the transforming activity of divine grace, Palamas found his argumentative footing in the letters of Paul. Immersed in the patristic exegetical tradition, Palamas was a careful student of Paul's letters, and it is hard to fault him for reading his own ideas into the texts. The cut and thrust of theological controversy called for a powerful command of rhetoric, and prompted Palamas to assume, not simply the arguments, but the very voice of Paul, amplifying and reinforcing the content of Paul's message. In the course of the debates, it was ultimately the voice of Paul that the Byzantines recognized in the voice of Palamas, in whom they saw 'another Paul'. In a liturgical office for Palamas written shortly after his death, the hymnographer astutely captured these resonances, artfully aligning the sainted bishop with the apostle: 'Through your life of prayer, poverty, and virginity, and in the font of your tears, you purified your heart, O Gregory, and being wholly raised aloft, you were united to Christ, becoming "one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:17), and thus like Paul you "heard ineffable words" (2 Cor 12:4), and became a "chosen vessel, bearing the Name of the Lord" (Acts 9:15)'.[54]

The Late Byzantine period, spiritually invigorated by the Hesychast controversy, was marked by an extraordinary appropriation of Pauline theology that has hitherto escaped scholarly notice. This paper has argued that the Hesychast controversy unfolded around competing interpretations of Paul's theology, with both of the opposing parties claiming to be the true follower of the divine apostle. The close reading of Gregory Palamas' *Triads* offered in this study indicates, not that the teachings of Paul were altered or distorted to suit a theological novelty known as 'Palamism', but rather that the edifice of Palamite theology was built upon principles derived directly from Paul's letters and information provided by the book of Acts.

In Paul's systematic separation of the two wisdoms, Palamas found a fixed point from which to launch his response to the vaunted claims of pagan philosophy. As the apostle had made clear, philosophy does not offer true knowledge of God, which is a gift of grace understood as true contact and union with God. Divine, uncreated grace does not originate from a place within creation but from God himself. For

[53] For discussion, see Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Saint Gregory Palamas, The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1988), 40–49; and Constantinos Athanasopoulos and Christoph Schneider, eds., *Divine Essence and Divine Energies: Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2013).

[54] Philotheos Kokkinos, *Ἀκολουθία τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ιρηγορίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Θεσσαλονίκης τοῦ θαυματουργοῦ τοῦ Παλαμᾶ* (Αθήνα, 1980), 102. Palamas died on 14 November 1357, and was proclaimed a saint at an official liturgical ceremony in February or March of 1368. At the time, Kokkinos was patriarch of Constantinople, and presided over the celebration; cf. Antonio Rigo, 'La canonizzazione di Gregorio Palama (1368) ed alcune alter questioni,' *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 30 (1993): 155–202.

the creature to receive the creator, the receiver had to enter a state of prayer, and ultimately be caught up in a state of ecstasy, so that the intellect is increasingly detached, not simply from the 'mind of the flesh' (Rom 8:6–8) but from all created realities. Consistent with the patristic emphasis on the person of Paul, Palamas highlighted the apostle's own spiritual experiences, especially his ecstatic rapture into heaven, which Palamas explicated in light of traditional monastic anthropology. In a defining moment for Hesychast theology, Palamas connected the Dionysian and Maximian notion of ecstasy to the idea of the self as open to the divinizing vision of the divine light understood as the uncreated energy of God. In the life and letters of Paul, Palamas saw what he and other faithful Byzantines had seen in all their saints: a human life overwhelmed by God, transformed by divine grace, and caught up from the present aeon into another beyond it.