

DIVINE ESSENCE, DIVINE PERSONS, AND DIVINE ENERGIES IN GREGORY PALAMAS: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

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In the present study, which is based on Gregory Palamas' work *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως* (On Divine Union and Distinction), it is our aim to present a methodological proposal for an approach to the texts of this Christian theologian, bearing in mind, on the one hand, the preceding tradition and teaching of Eastern Christianity and, on the other, the specific thematic directions taken by the text. The central thrust of our analysis is the question of the union and distinction between the divine essence, the divine persons, and the divine energies. Moreover, through a rational organization of the concepts, we attempt to establish a theory concerning theological metaphysics in order to demonstrate that they all reflect the same ontological reality: that is, the Holy Trinity. As regards the structure of our study, we examine the following categories: 1. the uniform manner of divine creativity and a cognitive approach thereto; 2. created things are not divine 'procession', but the results thereof; 3. God creates without multiplying; 4. the participated exist before the participating; 5. the divine as transcending any number; 6. the divine names are not an empty sound; 7. on the kinds of distinction; 8. on hypostatic distinction; 9. on the uncreated nature of the divine hypostases. These are issues which first touch upon the field of ontology and then that of epistemology.

Introduction

This study lies chiefly within the compass of methodology. In particular, it aims at presenting a methodological proposal for an approach to the texts of the Christian theologian Gregory Palamas. The proposal is concerned with how to locate and

classify into chapters the concepts used by Gregory according to the principle of logical sequence and organic succession. As criteria, we have taken two factors, one general and the other specific. The general factor is the dogmatic teaching of Eastern Christianity, as formed by tradition, and the terms which this imposes on any scholar. The specific factor is the thematic direction of the text under examination. In a general framework of examination, these two criteria are mutually contiguous and function in a complementary manner. The general illumines the course of the specific. In turn, the specific affirms—sometimes axiomatically—the prevailing principles of the general. Therefore, irrespective of whether they appear successively or in composition, the deductive and inductive methods establish a full and cohesive argument or a syllogistic process.

As the text for analysis, we have chosen Palamas' treatise *On Divine Union and Distinction*,¹ which is concerned with the well-known issue of the union and distinction between the divine essence, the divine persons, and the divine energies.² We will not, however, deal exclusively with this issue itself. Employing a quasi-phenomenological approach, our analysis will, to some degree, set this issue to one side; though this, of course, does not mean that its dogmatic foundations and its ramifications will be overlooked. What will also concern us is how—on the basis of the principles of Christianity—we might achieve a rational classification of its concepts, and thus construct and develop a theory of theological Metaphysics. In order to do this, we shall employ a method of genetic emanation. We shall examine how much, according to our classification, each previous concept is the genetic source of that which immediately succeeds it; and, conversely, how far each of the succeeding ones is a genetic product of that which immediately precedes it. Our aim is to demonstrate that all the concepts belong to the same logical unit and that they reflect the same ontological reality—that is, the Holy Trinity—as 'remaining' and as 'procession', to use Neo-Platonic terminology, as transcendence and productivity respectively. It is self-evident that these are concepts which belong to the realm of Dogmatics and are not associated, at least not directly, with Ecclesiology and Ethics.

We wish to note that we have attempted similar approaches in previous studies³ in which we analysed the following general categories: 1. Pseudo-Dionysius as a

¹ The text in question is included in the second volume of the Greek critical edition by P. Christou et al., *Γρηγορίου του Παλαμά Συγγράμματα* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Κυρομάνος, 1994), 69–95.

² This issue is one of the central issues of the Areopagitic tradition, the main axes being Maximus the Confessor and George Pachymeres. See, for example, Melchisedek Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). The same issue was raised by the representatives of Neoplatonism, Proclus (see, for example, *In Platonis Parmenidem*, 742.24–760.17) and Damascius (see, for example *De Principiis* 1.1–46.8). Cf. Joseph Combès, 'Damascius lecteur du Parménide', *Archives de Philosophie* 38 (1975): 33–60.

³ See, for example, Christos Terezis and Lydia Petridou, 'The theory on 'unions – distinctions' as a paradigm of Gr. Palamas' methodology' *ΣΧΟΛΗ: Ancient Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* 11:1 (2017): 117–32; 'Ontological and gnoseological questions in Gregory Palamas according to the Christian theory on unions and distinctions', *Philoteos: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 16 (2016): 85–98.

disciple of the Apostles; 2. Pseudo-Dionysius as inspired by God; 3. faithful adherence to Dionysius' principles; 4. the distortion of Pseudo-Dionysius by Akyndinos; 5. the mystical and evidential element of theology; 6. the division of God into created and uncreated; 7. the reduction of the energies into created phenomena or their admixture with the essence; 8. uncreated essence-uncreated energies; 9. the distinctions correspond to the unions and the uncreated; 10. the energies as providences are without beginning and prefigurations of beings, but not essence; 11. the processions belong to the three divine Persons in common; 12. the volitional character and the polymorphism of the divine 'processions'; 13. the divine distinction as a beneficial 'procession'; 14. the paradoxes that emerge from the notion that the distinction is created; 15. the divine—and not the created—are united and distinguished. The non-union or distinction of the created from God; 16. created things as a source for knowledge of the divine energies.

In the present study, we will examine the following categories: 1. the uniform manner of divine creativity and a cognitive approach to it; 2. created things do not themselves constitute divine procession, but rather the results thereof; 3. God creates without multiplying; 4. the participated exist before the participating; 5. the divine as transcending any number; 6. the divine names are not an empty sound; 7. on the kinds of distinction; 8. on hypostatic distinction; 9. on the uncreated nature of the divine hypostases. These are issues which first touch upon the field of ontology, then that of epistemology.

The Uniform Manner of Divine Creativity and a Cognitive Approach to It

Insisting strictly on the self-founding integrity of the divine hypostasis, Gregory Palamas notes, in the form of an irrefutable conclusion, that, although God produced many essences which differ among themselves—despite any obvious points they may have in common—he himself, in his essence, retains an absolute state of unity, remaining, as regards that which defines its selfhood, entirely undiscernible and un-revealed. In his view, though, the sensible world provides certain specific data related to the predicates in the divine which can be utilized in a cognitive/theoretical manner. The argumentation is particularly careful, and is expressed as follows: the many and varied essences in nature most certainly do not bring us gnoseologically closer to the divine essence, since there is not the slightest parallel between them. We do, however, recognize its specific powers and energies and the—initially internal and, thereafter, productive—distinction of almighty God,⁴ which follows their

⁴ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως* 29, 90.14–22. This is an argument which, from the ontological data, stems from human observation motivated by analogy. In this regard, Jacques Lison observes that Palamas does not specify the particular nature of the distinction between divine essence and divine energy, and that his approach is more rational and epistemological than factual in his analysis (*L'Esprit répandu* [Paris: Cerf, 1994], 153). It is easy to see, however, that this distinction, as part of superlative theology, may not be gnoseologically approached. The state of unutterability is retained and theological realism is domi-

manifestation. On the above terms of the co-existence and circumincession between the unity and the distinction, we can understand sufficiently well the following text from Dionysius the Areopagite: ‘μένοντος (sc. τοῦ Θεοῦ) δὲ οὐδὲν ἦττον ἐκείνου, καὶ ἐνὸς ἐν τῷ πληθυσμῷ, καὶ ἠγνωμένου κατὰ τὴν πρόοδον καὶ πλήρους ἐν τῇ διακρίσει, τῷ πάντων εἶναι τῶν ὄντων ὑπερουσίως ἐξηρημένον’. ‘Given that he (viz. God) remains undiminished, and one in the multiplicity, and unified during the procession, and complete in the distinction, by being supra-essentially exalted above all beings’.⁵ In other words, we observe the emphasis on the locative and qualitative difference of the divine essence from created beings and, by extension, that the created cannot participate therein. It can therefore be understood that the properties of the super-essentiality and its remaining within its ontological boundaries, constitute, under any approach, a hyper-plenitude which, because of the absolute difference of the two ontological levels, is non-transferable. Given that there is no kind of hierarchy in the Holy Trinity, these properties also belong to the divine hypostases, in their common ‘procession’, which is, however, not revealed from the beginning. It is precisely to this property of non-transferability to the first transcendental level that divine distinction also belongs, as, in a sense, a self-regulating mode of existence.

Moreover, according to Palamas, the transcendentality of the Holy Trinity in relation to the totality of created beings is due to the fact that, because of its self-sufficiency, it does not admit any exogenous reception and is entirely independent. This radical, distinct presence is due, by ontological and logical implication, to the structure of the relationships which it has developed—entirely on its own initiative—with everything it produces. It is, therefore, an ontological reality to which nothing is added by the many beings which have derived, and continue to derive, from its creative manifestation. The metaphysical is completely independent of the physical, in the perspective of that strict monism which, on a horizontal and vertical scale, strictly defines the procedures. At the same time, the Holy Trinity remains permanently in its unity, lacking nothing, and, as such, does not move to acquire anything new in essence or energy, not even to gain self-awareness or self-actualization.⁶ Consequently, any being that lacks nothing cannot be other than complete. ‘Τὸ γὰρ ἐκ πολλῶν τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ παρηγμένων ὄντων μηδὲν προσλαμβάνον, ἀλλὰ μένον ἔν, ὡς μηδενὸς προσδεόμενον οὐ προσλαμβάνει. Τὸ δὲ μηδενὸς προσδεόμενον πλήρες

nant. Moreover, it should also be noted that exceptionally advanced scientific efforts are required to clarify the distinction between matter and its energy in the sensible world.

⁵ See *De divinis nominibus*, 2, 11 (PG 3:649B). The Christian and Neoplatonic ‘remaining-procession-reversion’ scheme is quite clear in this passage, with the third term being elaborated in other parts, mainly linked to the teleological/eschatological divine planning, which created beings will assimilate consciously and will willingly activate. On this, see Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), especially on the Neoplatonist angle 55–57 and 225–27 on the Christian scheme. See also, René Roques, *L’Univers dionysien, Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris: Montaigne 1954), 283.

⁶ In connection with the Holy Trinity, see Vladimir Lossky, *Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l’Église d’Orient* (Paris: Cerf, 1944), 43–64.

ἐξ ἀνάγκης'. 'For it has taken nothing from the many beings proceeding from it, but remains one; as being in need of nothing, it adds nothing. What is in need of nothing is necessarily complete.'⁷ And in the broader context, the Godhead possesses the property of completeness from the outset (i.e., in a self-founding mode), without being affected by time at all.

These transcendental situations also apply to the undiminished outpouring of the undiminished transmissions of the Holy Trinity, upon the manifestation of which it experiences no abstraction or diminution, due, once again, to its super self-sufficiency. And on this basis, whatever is not diminished is also not susceptible to abstraction, while, at the same time, whatever is diffused by preserving its transcendence while not suffering diminution is, according to its ontological idiolect, complete. Palamas concludes that the ontological reality whose 'processions' and transmissions have the property of completeness, possesses the properties of being irreducible and without diminution, precisely by ascending to the source which it expresses. Extending the above, Palamas emphasizes that the Holy Trinity is not only absolutely complete, but also, according to the principles of superlative theology, transcends even that which we regarded as complete in its essence.⁸ The differences, then, between the uncreated and the created become broader; therefore, there appear valid research and interpretative data for the definition—insofar as this is possible—of their particular content on the basis of strict epistemological delineations. And the 'processions' make a major contribution to clarifying the ontological particularities.

Created Beings are Not Divine 'Procession' but rather the Effects Thereof

Palamas thus stresses, as he does in other parts of his work, that intellectuals who place the divine 'processions' in the category of created things are making invalid logical extensions and are producing confusion. Their error can be traced to their contention that, in the multiplication of distinctions, God himself is multiplied, since he produces the many created things from his own self. The things of the created world, however, are not 'processions' through which the divine is multiplied. They are entirely located on the level of results, through which, insofar as this is possible, any productive manifestation of God becomes known to human awareness.⁹ The

⁷ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 29, 90.22–91.2. The whole scheme of things here is linked to the non-negotiable concept that God creates by reason of the impulse of his will, not from any necessity. See, merely as an example, Nikos Matsoukas, *Κόσμος, ἄνθρωπος, κοινωνία κατὰ τον Μάξιμο Ομολογητή* (Αθήνα: Γρηγόρη, 1980), 47–67. As regards the way in which theological epistemology is composed also of informed critical observations on the limits of the scope of natural theology as a prerequisite for integrated theological thought, see Nikos Nisiotis, *Προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν θεολογικὴν γνωσιολογίαν* (Αθήνα: Μήνυμα, 1986).

⁸ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 29, 91.2–10. Cf. *De divinis nominibus*, 2, 11 (PG 3:649C). Here we have an initial situation analogous, in absolute integrity, to 'super-self-sufficiency'.

⁹ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 7, 74.7–11. It should be noted that every divine 'procession'

prospect that is expressly rejected is the inclusion of beings in the divine essence and, by extension, its enforced multiplication from the outset, or its subordination to the ontological necessities of its own being. The prospect of an eternal co-existence is explicitly rejected, since pantheism would result, not as an emanation, but rather pre-existing as a ‘remaining’. Therefore, the theoretically legitimate argument which can be sustained is that God is multiplied without being separated together with his energies, which can perpetually and limitlessly intervene *ad extra* under the conditions expressed by his will, as a projection of his absolute freedom.¹⁰ Active causality regulates everything.

In order to imbue the above with a perspective of epistemology and onomatology, the Christian theologian recalls that Dionysius refers to common and unified names for the divine distinction. He understands these names in the sense that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit hold them in a united and self-founding way. Nevertheless, even from his manner of expression, it is clear that the purpose of his words is not to deal with matters related to the divine essence, nor with that union which refers to their absolutely transcendent state, nor with matters related to the Triune hypostatic distinction. His focus—a theoretical choice that flows from the whole structure and perspective of the treatise *On the Divine Names*—is on the divine distinction during the common ‘processions’ and manifestations of the three Persons. And, indeed, to support this reasoning, the Areopagite adds:

Καὶ ἵνα σαφῶς περὶ πάντων τῶν ἐξῆς προσδιορισώμεθα, διάκρισιν θεϊαν φαμέν τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεαρχίας προόδους. Δωρουμένη γὰρ πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι, καὶ ὑπερέχουσα τὰς τῶν ὄλων ἀγαθῶν μετουσίας, ἡνωμένως μὲν διακρίνεται, πληθύνεται δὲ ἐνικῶς καὶ πολλαπλασιάζεται τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνεκφοιτήτως.

And, in order that we may first distinctly define everything that follows, we call divine distinction, as we have said, the beneficial processions of the Godhead. For, given to all beings and surpassing the participation of all good things, it is distinguished as being united, but proliferates singularly, and is multiplied from the One without emergence.¹¹

has an individualized ontological property, while each being is a synthesis of the manifestation of many ‘processions’. See George Pachymeres, *Παράφρασις εἰς τὸ De divinis nominibus*, 2, 11 (PG 3:677B): ‘ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς τὸ ἐναντίον γίνεται. Οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐνὰς κυρίως, ἀλλ’ αἱ διακρίσεις τῶν στοιχείων προὔπουσαι, σύνδρομοι γινόμεναι καὶ ἐνούμεναι δευτέρας τὰς ἐκ τῆς συνθέσεως ἐνώσεις ἐργάζονται’. It should be parenthetically noted that the reference to elements basically concerns those natural reasons which, as everlasting created cores, feed new processes and which have obviously arisen through special combinations of the divine energies. However, unity is dominant in any ontological plane and is understood in its various forms in which it appears, based on the principle of analogy, which results in two or more meanings.

¹⁰ On the divine energies, see V. Lossky, *Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l’Église d’Orient*, 65–86.

¹¹ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 27, 88.12–28. Cf. *De divinis nominibus*, 2, 11 (PG 3:649B). The Areopagitic expressions have a clear narrative tone, which is chosen in order to make more vivid that which cannot be described and categorized by human cognitive centres or by strictly structured scientific discourse. It is a widely-made choice in treatises on metaphysical issues.

This text of the so to say self-constituted dialectical conjunction of opposites provides Palamas with the opportunity to uphold the general belief in the Eastern Christian tradition that, according to the logic of the Areopagitic writings, the terms ‘processions’ and ‘manifestations’ are not given as predicates to created beings but rather exclusively to the divine energies, the result of whose manifestation is every created being, in a particular way based on the creative plan.¹² This difference is the basis for the hesychast theologian’s explicit objection to the fact that, in an inconsistent manner which does not adequately filter the ontological facts, Barlaam and Akindynos identified the energies or ‘processions’ with created things. It is clear that he rejects their reasoning here because they have not grasped that God maintains his unity undiminished, regardless of any development in ‘procession’. This is a unity related to essence, persons, and ‘processions’, a self-founding state that radically excludes any confusion or identification with entities of another ontological nature.¹³ At the same time, it reaffirms that God’s multiplication is beyond any theoretical conception in terms of the products which result from his creative energies. Unless this were so, then pantheism would be, under the conditions of emanation, the dominant ontological state, in the form of a pyramidal development of the divine essence, and with the ontological identities being a fact, despite their successively inferior character.

God Produces without Multiplying

Reinforcing the above, Palamas stresses that the Areopagite’s writings formulate the view that ‘πολλαπλασιάζεται τὸ ἐν ἐκεῖνο ὃν διὰ τῆς ἐξ αὐτοῦ παραγωγῆς τῶν πολλῶν ὄντων’ ‘one thing is multiplied through the production of many things from it’. According to the context of this extract, it follows that the beings that belong to the category of created things, and which God produced from the state of non-being, are many and possess a variety of hypostatic properties. And although God presents a multiplicative production, he himself maintains his unity (i.e., his essence) in a state which is neither manifested nor participated. ‘Αὐτὸς (sc. ὁ Θεός) τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνεκφοιτήτως οἷχεται, δηλονότι κατ’ οὐσίαν’. ‘He (sc., God) departs oneness without going forth, that is, in essence’. And immediately the Christian theologian poses a question which could also, in terms of rhetoric, not be formulated: does the Areopagite’s text maintain that the one is multiplied, in the sense that created beings are added to its existence? Without question, his answer is negative, since the text he is referring to excludes the idea of counting the created among the uncreated, seeing them rather as completely heterogeneous.¹⁴ Moreover, it must not

¹² On created things, see V. Lossky, *Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l’Église d’Orient*, 87–108.

¹³ See, *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 27, 88.28–31. Cf. Pachymeres, *Paraphrasis of De divinis nominibus*, 2, 11 (PG 3:676C–677C).

¹⁴ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 28.89.4–8. Cf. *De divinis nominibus*, 2, 11 (PG 3:649A–B).

be forgotten that only imperfect beings—or those striving to acquire the completeness that corresponds to them—are in need of addition. In such cases, the hypostatic relativism is pervasive and is completely tied to becoming, which, indeed, is interwoven with the particular created field that expresses a particular projection of the divine production.

Palamas then moves on to Maximus, noting how the Confessor focuses with more clarity on divine multiplicity, even utilizing metaphorical expressions in his formulations on the issue when he explains the following: *‘πληθύνεσθαι λέγεται ὁ Θεὸς τῷ καθ’ ἕκαστον εἰς παραγωγὴν τῶν ὄντων βουλήματι προνοητικαῖς προόδοις πολλαπλασιαζόμενος, μένει δὲ ἀμερίστως ἓν, ὥσπερ ἥλιος ἀκτῖνας πολλὰς ἐκπέμπων καὶ μένων ἐν τῇ ἐνότητι’*. ‘God is said to be increased by being multiplied through the providential processions through which he willingly produces each one of the being, but, however, he remains undividedly One, just as the sun emits many rays but remains its unified self’. Palamas considers that, in the context of these discursive descriptions of Maximus, we should examine the relevant concepts in Dionysius, who did not claim that the divine is multiplied by the addition of many beings, but through production and whatever comes from this new ontological action, with the exclusion of an essential or any other mixture. In Dionysian texts, then, it is proposed—if not directly, then at least by the context—that there is a mutual categorization between the providential ‘procession’ and the divine will, with the strict proviso that what has been produced, as forming the structure of natural theology, constitutes the sole ontological and logical starting-point for any human references to the realm of the divine. What is produced, then—on the ontological basis that it is many in number and forms—constitutes the only guarantee (even with the possibility of intellectual and, by extension, cognitive error) of demonstrating the special and specific transcendental, and simultaneously productive presence of the divine powers and ‘processions’ which are distinguished from any other state and are defined exclusively by internal conditions. It is precisely these powers that Dionysius referred to in the plural, introducing at the appropriate point the parameter of divine multitude.¹⁵ According to the broader context, it becomes clear that this multitude represents the infinite richness of the divine essence, which with extremely cautious

Pachymeres, *Paraphrasis of De divinis nominibus*, 2, 11 (PG 3:673D–676B): *‘...καὶ πολλαπλασιάζονται μὲν αἱ δωρεαὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς καθ’ ἕκαστον, μένουσι δὲ ἀνεκφοιτήτως εἰς τὸ ἓν...’* Note that the One-Good or the Holy Trinity may be perceived ‘as a universal’, but not based on pairs of ‘genus-species’ or ‘whole-parts’, in which, if not the identities, at least the similarities are taken as given and therefore refer to a common ontological field. See also R. Roques, *L’Univers dionysien*, 306, 309–10.

¹⁵ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 28, 89.9–20. Cf. *In Librum De divinis nominibus Scholia*, 2, 11 (PG 4:232C). In parentheses, it is important to note that the multitude is, of course, introduced into the divine realm for the additional reason of adequately justifying the multitude in the sensible world, but without introducing a structural parallelism between the two worlds. And this exclusion is due, among other things, to the fact that in the divine world there is a multitude of particularities, while in the sensible world there is a multitude of composites, perpetually increasing in number.

approaches, could also be seen through the prism of the Platonic Academy's 'indefinite dyad'.

Palamas actually recalls that, in the Dionysian corpus, the 'processions'/powers are called participations and paradigms of beings, which, as archetypes, exist from the very beginning in a true manner before they emerge as the active—in an absolute way—state of God. To put it another way, they are, in a distinct and constructive perspective, transcendent and coherent *schemata* which give to creation every ontological element necessary for its composition and structure, as well as—in other terms—divine wills which, through their intentional and benevolent manifestation, produce the created beings and determine their function and their mode of existence. In the context, however, of both the close relation and the difference between the apophatic/inexpressible and cataphatic/apprehensible sides of God, Dionysius gave the term 'processions' to both the undiminished transmissions as well as the divine gifts, thereby preserving the opposing states, despite the inevitable participations that develop. Moreover, he assigned a special name to each in order to make their particularities clearer, as well as the difference between them. With these names, which are numerous due to the fact that the divine gifts are infinite, he demonstrated that each 'procession' is uncreated but also distinct from the divine essence. In particular, he supported his view that the divine essence is uncreated on the fact that it exists before beings (a priority in time, so to say) and that it is their productive cause. In all three cases, each 'procession' possesses elements of absolute or relative preconditionality as regards the created (in the sense of the initiative for communications rather than that of a lack which is to be made complete). However, the Areopagite distinguished the 'procession from the essence', because it is a projection and, at the same time, differs from all the other projections. And because 'processions' are a multitude, they differ from the essence, which is one, in the sense of its infinite inner richness, so unity is in no way reduced. Concluding his reasoning, the Christian theologian formulates the logical principle of difference, stressing that things which are different from one another, obviously meaning the created beings, must necessarily differ when compared to something else. 'Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔστι πρὸς ἓν ἀδιαφόρως ἔχειν τὰ διαφέροντα πρὸς ἄλληλα'. 'For nothing is without difference towards one if it has differences with others'.¹⁶ Obviously, such a situation does not apply to the metaphysical world except in the light of the distinction. The theoretical basis which ultimately emerges, however, is that the priority of the uncreated over the created is not only logical, but also temporal, or more correctly, in starting point, that is to say self-foundation over the above-foundation, and so the internal difference in every world will function in a particular manner in each case. At the same time, it is to be said that every divine 'procession' is not a condition different from an ontological

¹⁶ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 28, 89.20–90.4. Cf. *De divinis nominibus*, 2, 5 (PG 3:644A). See R. Roques, *L'Univers dionysien*, 274.

property of God, since it is the divine energy itself in its exemplification. The term 'procession' is also indicative of the process of God's motion towards beings as an *ad extra* manifestation from himself. It should also be noted, in parentheses, that this is not a 'procession' of beings from God's bosom, because, possibly according to the Origenist model, the opposite would inevitably denote co-eternality between uncreated and created, with pantheism dominating all of the *ontogeneses*, both as 'remaining' and as 'procession'. Priority, therefore, as an expression of the separate—according to Platonic models—is the dominant term of ontology functioning as a relationship.

The Participated Exist before the Participating

As a clarification to the above, Palamas adds that it is ontologically necessary for the participated, as original ontological reasons and prerequisites, to pre-exist the participating, as results, drawing the terms of their being from principles which transcend them. In a similar way, the metaphysical states that declare potential, as an opening of their participation for communication, are participated by all created beings and that is why they exist before them. And, on the basis of the ontological difference that exists between metaphysical and physical, they are also uncreated. Thus, none of the beings produced has an uncreated character, because it does not belong to the realm of the Beyond, not even in an original 'potential state'. 'Αἱ δὲ μετοχαὶ μετέχονται παρὰ τῶν κτισμάτων πάντων... Καὶ μὴν οὐδὲν τῶν κτισμάτων ὑπὲρ τὰ ὄντα ἐστί'. 'And the participations participate in all created things... And none of the created things is above the beings'.¹⁷ Therefore, the Holy Trinity is not defined by any relationship existing in the realm of beings, such as arithmetic, both as a measure and as a quantitative and proportional comparison, or ontic development of a genus in its species.¹⁸

The Divine as Transcending All Numbers

The relationship of 'one-many' in the divine realm is not a state of association and distinction that might be treated strictly numerically, because this would incorporate it into secular patterns of measurement, difference, increase and reduction, supremacy and dependencies. The final result would be the development of polytheism. Palamas observes that the Holy Trinity is above number, more than

¹⁷ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 13, 78.1–5. On the question of the participation of the physical in the metaphysical, see. J. Lison, *L'Esprit répandu*, 133–141 and 161–172.

¹⁸ The issue of 'unparticipated – participated – participating' is found extensively in representatives of the Neoplatonist School particularly in Proclus (412–485) See *Institutio theologica*, pr. 23, 65, 67, 99, 109. Cf. Eric R. Dodds, *Proclus: The elements of theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 233–36. For a more systematic discussion on the fact that the One is unparticipated and the henads participated, see the first six chapters of the third book of Proclus' treatise *Theologia Platonica*.

the monad is, because it is not counted with the multitude, not even as its starting point-source. And vice versa, it is above the monad, more than what a number could be, since, even if it is assumed to be divisible, it does not receive anything other than its existence. If, as epistemologically appropriate, we express ourselves in a literal, not analogical meaning, it is not even one, and clearly transcends that one which is to be found in so many ways among created beings. This absolute superiority is due to the fact that the Supreme Principle is unique and does not depend on something superior to it or something that would complete its mode of existence and the name of the One can be attributed to it, in absolute terms for it does not depend on relationships, solely in the sense that it is super-united in a self-founding manner.¹⁹ This explicit apophaticism certainly does not mean that every name with which human speech describes the presence of the Holy Trinity is empty of content. But it has a relative meaning, because it arises exclusively from how the created mind perceives the divine, so there is no precise accuracy. In any case, the metaphysics of immanence as the source of natural theology is the evidence for any possible ascent to the metaphysics of transcendence, provided that analogy constitutes the valid epistemological method.

The Divine Names are Not an Empty Sound

Subsequently, and following a consistent theological realism, Palamas notes that, with his theonyms, Dionysius does not use terms without any true content, but, rather, what is denoted by these predicates is a particular ontological definition. It is precisely here that the relationship of signifier-signified is based absolutely on an objective basis. *Ὁ δὲ μέγας Διονύσιος ἐν δυσὶ πρὸς τοῖς δέκα βιβλίοις ἐξύμνησας ταύτας* (sc. *τὰς θείας ἐνεργείας*), *οὐ γὰρ ἀπλῶς διάκενον ἦχον ὀνομάτων, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὑπὸ τούτων σημαινόμενα ὕμνει*. ‘The great Dionysius having in two of the ten books hymned them (sc., the divine energies) praises them not through empty noises of names, but by what these mean’.²⁰ The issue here is crucial for what is the correspondence of the thinking to the being and for the meaning of the divine names. It seeks to overturn the initial realism of the name and to give the emphasis to the

¹⁹ *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 26, 87, 23–28. On the relationship between God and numbers and the multitude see Pachymeres, *Paraphrasis of De divinis nominibus*, 13 (PG 3:988B–993).

²⁰ *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 11, 76.30–33. Any discussion developed here must exclude the proposal for the explicit metaphysical reality of names. This quasi-nominalistic suggestion can in no way be viewed as the absolutization of the particular and makes it necessary to deal with two points: a) the metaphysical designation of the names as the possible correspondence of created thinking to uncreated acting; and b) their logical definition (i.e., how far and under what conditions their specific declarative expression is valid, to the extent that their true correspondence can be validated with what exists and is performed in the divine realm). It would be a particularly interesting research project, both for historical and systematic reasons, to examine whether Palamas makes use of the discussion of names and definitions which Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa developed in their dispute with Eunomius.

realism of the metaphysical world before any conceptual or nominal description. The divine names are the most sublime of human constructs; that is, they reveal how deep thinking can penetrate the divine mystery. As initiates, people have their initiatives and do not remain in the position of passive recipients of divine gifts and messages. From this point onwards, the conditions are secured for an in-depth examination of the issue of internal divine distinction in the light of the divine hypostases/persons in their energy possession/projection. It should be noted at the outset that this distinction does not violate in the slightest the absolute unity of the divine substance, which is completely equally possessed by the three hypostases in a self-founding mode.

On the Kinds of Distinction

Palamas, then, makes the point that for Dionysius the prime distinction is not the hypostatic but the energetic one. We would add, as a general overview, that the hypostases function mainly within the Trinity, while the energies are, basically, projections, though this does not in the least affect their self-founding coexistence. According to Areopagitic teaching, divine energies are not identical to the divine essence (because the essence is one and does not come from another entity), nor to the divine hypostases. Even though they (adopting an arithmetical approach) are not more than three, none are derived from any other cause, nor are there elements of productive relationship and hierarchical structures among them. All that has been determined from the outset is that the Son is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, though in terms which do not denote ontological subjection or perpetual dependence. There is, indeed, a cause-and-effect relationship, though not from the point of view of secular relationships or determinations, or of the relationship of the divine with the created worlds. The Christian theologian's emphasis given on the distinction, as regards the energies, reflects a fact based on what actually appears to be the most challenging difference, without the introduction of even the slightest separation. The energies introduce the concept of the multitude as, in a manner of speaking, *a priori* divine self-development, and are the real presences that best denote both the dynamic side of the Holy Trinity and, at the same time, the starting-point for the appearance of something different from what it is.²¹ Indeed, we might note that one form of otherness also occurs with the distinction between the three divine Persons, which, of course, is defined entirely by the categories of thought of the thinking subject, since each Person expresses a divine particularity or the particular way through which the common divine essence exists and through which the absolutely common divine energies are manifested.

²¹ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 31, 92.3–8. Cf. George Papademetriou, *Maimonides and Palamas on God* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), 60–65.

On Hypostatic Distinction

In his next theoretical clarification, Palamas notes that a perceptive reader might observe that divine distinction is threefold as regards the hypostases if he or she approaches with sufficient attention the content of the God-inspired theological science on this subject matter. Without question, the reader will find that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as real supra-essential hypostases and, by extension, transcendental names, are clearly distinct among themselves. Therefore, as regards their hypostatic properties, no change, transmission or commonality in general can be introduced into their realm, since they do not share predicates-names, but only to mutual relations, which, however, are not only of a referential nature but possess ontological content from the outset. On the other hand, the property of each hypostasis, as regards its strictly particular presence, lies in the field of its self-causation. And the above work under two conditions. The first is that, despite the fact that, as regards the commonality of their essence, the three hypostases dwell within and penetrate each other without the slightest variation, they yet retain their properties unmixed and unconfused, which is precisely why they are unique. The second is that, despite the fact that the Father is the cause of the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit (though explicitly not in the secular sense of their 'having been caused'), the hypostatic properties are neither transferable nor receivable. Any transfer or reception would abolish the hypostatic uniqueness and introduce hypostatic duality. So, in the context of their personal or hypostatic relationships, the sole principle, source, and root of the Son and the Holy Spirit is the Father, a relationship that cannot be valid vice versa. It should be noted that, in each case, there is exclusively one relationship and two hypostases with ontological states of equivalence. '... Διακρίνεται γὰρ τὸ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑπερούσιον ὄνομα καὶ χρῆμα, καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, οὐδεμιᾶς ἐν τούτοις ἀντιστροφῆς ἢ ὅλως κοινότητος ἐπεισαγομένης...' '...For the Father is distinct in his supra-essential name and capacity, as are the Son and Holy Spirit in theirs and this cannot in any way be reversed except by saying that they are all alike...' ²² This observation leads us, albeit indirectly, to the fact that the Son and the Holy Spirit are divine by respectively having been born and having proceeded from the Father, since their properties were not acquired but pre-existed. With the above evidence, we feel justified in concluding our present study with reference to the uncreated character of the three divine hypostases, within the context of a non-flexible monism, that is, one which originally demonstrates the internal richness of the divine unity.

²² See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 24, 86.25–35. For the strictly personal definition of the hypostatic properties, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregorio firi de discrimine essentiae et hypostasis* 3–5 (PG 32:328B–336C).

On the Uncreated Nature of the Divine Hypostases

In the development of his arguments, and concerning the thorny issue regarding what belongs to the category of the uncreated, Palamas takes as the starting point for his reasoning the view of his opponents, that only the divine essence is uncreated and that everything else around it belongs to the category of created things. Against this view, he raises the question as to whether the processes of ‘remaining’ and ‘circumincession’ between the three hypostases are essence. The purpose of this question is to define whether states that denote identity and particularity between the hypostases belong to the same ontological category. ‘Remaining’ denotes immobility, a state that belongs to the essence, while ‘circumincession’ corresponds to the manner of the relationship of the hypostases, that is, the reciprocity that they have in spite of their particularity. And it is obvious that circumincession as a personal movement cannot belong to a necessary mode of the presence of the essence, because this latter has specifications as to what it ontologically (though not in terms of hierarchy) determines, and because, before all else, it is common, neither belonging to a particular hypostasis, nor to any of them to a different degree.²³ However, it should be noted that it is not legitimate to claim that there is separation or succession between the divine hypostatic relationships or between the divine hypostases, because this would remove the self-founding unity. The relationship would then be defined as a situation developed later, which would obviously put unity itself at stake.

Extending his reflections, the Christian theologian wonders whether we will place the divine hypostases among things created, given that we accept that they are not themselves the divine essence. Such a position would be justified if our intention was to avoid turning the three hypostases into something composite, or the uncreated into many, and introducing conditions that would ‘threaten’ the divine unity. That case would lead into polytheism even those who consider the divine hypostases and their mutual circumincession to be uncreated, the ultimate consequence of which would be that Christianity and Neoplatonism would be indistinguishable. Indeed, Palamas notes that the reasoning concerning polytheism and its implications constitutes the accusation launched by Barlaam and Akindynos. His view, however, is that, here too, the accusation rebounds on those making it, and he places them in the circles of those who introduce polytheism and, by extension, atheism, since they separate the one God into created and uncreated. It is precisely this confusion which results in the divine states being drawn into the class of created things, even though

²³ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 23, 86.5–8. On the content of the term ‘remaining’ in the Neoplatonic School, see Proclus, *Institutio theologica*, pr. 25–39, 28.21–42.7. Werner Beierwaltes, *Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1979), 118–63. See also Jean Trouillard, *L’Un et l’âme selon Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972), 78–106; idem, *La mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), 53–91; E.R. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*, 212–23.

Barlaam and Akindynos themselves considered them to be uncreated, including first and foremost the divine essence and secondly the divine hypostases.²⁴

Moreover, using as his starting point the arguments of both his opponents, Palamas raises the following question: how is it feasible for the divine hypostases to be uncreated when the manner in which they communicate and interpenetrate is such that it does not have this property? In other words, Barlaam and Akindynos claim that the reciprocal motions of the hypostases must be ontologically separated from themselves as well as from their essence. In his assessment, their error is clear both as regards their ontological starting-points and their reasoning. Their misdirection arises from the fact that it is philosophically, theologically, and scientifically accepted that motion and energy bear absolutely the properties of the essence to which they belong and from which they come. ‘Πῶς γὰρ ἂν εἶεν ὑποστάσεις ἄκτιστοι, ὧν ἡ πρὸς ἀλλήλας περιχώρησις κατ’ αὐτοὺς οὐκ ἄκτιστος; ... Πῶς δ’ ἂν οὐσία εἴη ἄκτιστος, ἥς ἡ ἐνέργεια κτιστὴ τυγχάνει κατ’ αὐτούς;’ ‘For how can there be uncreated hypostases if their interaction is not also uncreated? ... And how can there be an uncreated essence, if, according to them, its energy is created?’²⁵ All in all, therefore, anything that touches upon the divine essence, be it a hypostatic presence or a projection of energy, possesses from its ontological prefiguration the property of being uncreated, which it retains also in those cases that describe relationships. As a whole, though, there is no way at all that these can be subject to terms of priority. If, for example, the relationship of the three Persons was one which arose later, how would the original commonality of their essence and energies be explained? What would be the impulse for them to communicate with each other? The logical implication arises purely and simply from the ontological data: since the divine hypostases possessed the divine essence and divine energies from the beginning and without hierarchical distinction—as well as, obviously, divine will—they have already put into effect their communication, which, in the context of a non-static monism, is implemented in three ways, which represent the qualitative horizontal articulation of spirituality and do not lead to a quantitative sum total. The term ‘three’, tacitly of course, expresses the dynamic self-referencing within the deity which excludes any development towards polytheism and promotes modes of relationships inaccessible to people, entirely beyond anything they can conceive by analogy.

²⁴ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 23, 86.8–17: ‘...Πῶς γὰρ ἂν εἶεν ὑποστάσεις ἄκτιστοι, ὧν ἡ πρὸς ἀλλήλας περιχώρησις κατ’ αὐτοὺς οὐκ ἄκτιστος’. Cf. J. Lison, *L’Esprit repandu*, 148–49. The views mentioned here correspond to those referred to above concerning ditheism and could easily lead to a theory of cosmic gods, as this was developed by the Neoplatonist Proclus (on this, see the sixth book of his treatise *Theologia Platonica*, as well as the countless references in *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*).

²⁵ See *Περὶ θείας ἐνώσεως καὶ διακρίσεως*, 86.17–22. On the relationship between divine essence and divine energies in Palamas, see, for example, G. Papademetriou, *Maimonides and Palamas on God*, 41–48.

Further Remarks

On the basis of what we have examined and taking the entire discussion developed in this particular treatise *On Divine Union and Discrimination* into account, we consider that we can make the following further remarks. We would say that Palamas attempts a rational structuring—and, indirectly, the validation—of Metaphysics, to which he attributes both an ontological/ theological and an epistemological/methodological character. In the first dimension, he attempts to form a set of articulations, though not anything by way of a genetic process, and nothing on the model of ontological dependencies/hierarchies such as those founded by the Neoplatonists. The ontological states of ‘essence’, ‘energies’, ‘movements’, ‘processions’, ‘providences’, and ‘hypostases’ are combined together within a strictly structured pattern within the context of which are maintained the priorities and sequences, defined as logical, which are not to be understood independently of the factor of their mutual reciprocity. They are actually sequences of strict boundaries and, at the same time, of unbreakable syntheses. In the second dimension of Metaphysics, he accepts the Platonic view—and in part that of Aristotle—that the distinction of ontological levels necessarily defines a distinction of epistemological/theoretical methods. We could, therefore, argue that, to a certain extent, he uses logical/mathematical thought in order to describe the divine energies and the proof of *reductio ad absurdum* to refer to the divine essence. In other words, the ontological does not appear in his texts in strictly inelastic terms, an open presence that necessarily also drives the method. Of course, these are not vertical sections, but rather exemplifications capable of articulating a comprehensive and detailed picture of the divine realm. As a result, Ontology maintains its primacy and epistemology acquires meaning and credibility only in so far as it is involved in a strict correspondence with it. In general, essence, as a fixed and given situation, and function, as an expression of a dynamic of interventions, are dominant in succession, not because human thought necessarily assigns them a particular mission, but because this is imposed by a regulatory order of ontological processes. Such suggestions are explicitly excluded from Eastern Christianity. Only what is obvious is related to an arrangement in the contiguity of the various levels of the presence of the Holy Trinity. The above notwithstanding, we believe that we should not also exclude the variation of using the ontological/theological dimension of Metaphysics in such a way as to lay the foundations for the epistemological/methodological one. Within the process of proof, there are organic epistemological needs, such as, for example, the consolidation of ultimate principles, with the result that reference to theology is inevitable as being the authentic and imperishable criterion for the foundation of any issue. In this sense, theological constants provide something that is necessary and inevitable for human thought.