

Archpriest Georges Florovsky (1893-1979)

St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers*

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Quotations in Greek have here been transliterated.

Following the Fathers

“FOLLOWING THE HOLY FATHERS”... It was usual in the Ancient Church to introduce doctrinal statements by phrases like this. The Decree of Chalcedon opens precisely with these very words. The Seventh Ecumenical Council introduces its decision concerning the Holy Icons in a more elaborate way: *“Following the Divinely inspired teaching of the Holy Fathers and the Tradition of the Catholic Church.”* The *didaskalia* of the Fathers is the formal and normative term of reference.

Now, this was much more than just an “appeal to antiquity.” Indeed, the Church always stresses the permanence of her faith through the ages, from the very beginning. This identity, since the Apostolic times, is the most conspicuous sign and token of right faith—always the same. Yet, “antiquity” by itself is not an adequate proof of the true faith. Moreover, the Christian message was obviously a striking novelty” for the “ancient world,” and, indeed, a call to radical “renovation.” The “Old” has passed away, and everything has been “made New.” On the other hand, heresies could also appeal to the past and invoke the authority of

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certain “traditions.” In fact, heresies were often lingering in the past.¹ Archaic formulas can often be dangerously misleading. Vincent of Lerins himself was fully aware of this

* “St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers” appeared in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (Winter, 1959-1960; V, 2.)

¹ It has been recently suggested that Gnostics were actually the first to invoke formally the authority of an “Apostolic Tradition” and that it was their usage which moved St. Irenaeus to elaborate his own

danger. It would suffice to quote this pathetic passage of his: “And now, what an amazing reversal of the situation! The authors of the same opinion are adjudged to be Catholics, but the followers—heretics; the masters are absolved, the disciples are condemned; the writers of the books will be children of the Kingdom, their followers will go to Gehenna” (*Commonitorium*, cap. 6). Vincent had in mind, of course, St. Cyprian and the Donatists. St. Cyprian himself faced the same situation. “Antiquity” as such may happen to be just an inveterate prejudice: *nam antiquitas sine veritate vetustas erroris est* (*Epist.* 74). It is to say—“old customs” as such do not guarantee the truth. “Truth” is not just a “habit.”

The true tradition is only the tradition of truth, *traditio veritatis*. This tradition, according to St. Irenaeus, is grounded in, and secured by, that *charisma veritatis certum* [secure charisma of truth], which has been “deposited” in the Church from the very beginning and has been preserved by the uninterrupted succession of episcopal ministry. “Tradition” in the Church is not a continuity of human memory, or a permanence of rites and habits. It is a living tradition— *depositum juvenescens*, in the phrase of St. Irenaeus. Accordingly, it cannot be counted *inter mortuas regulas* [among dead rules]. Ultimately, tradition is a continuity of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, a continuity of Divine guidance and illumination. The Church is not bound by the “letter.” Rather, she is constantly moved forth by the “Spirit.” The same Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, which “spoke through the Prophets,” which guided the Apostles, is still continuously guiding the Church into the fuller comprehension and understanding of the Divine truth, from glory to glory.

“*Following the Holy Fathers*”... This is not a reference to some abstract tradition, in formulas and propositions. It is primarily an appeal to holy witnesses. Indeed, we appeal to the Apostles, and not just to an abstract “Apostolicity.” In the similar manner do we refer to the Fathers. The witness

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of the Fathers belongs, intrinsically and integrally, to the very structure of Orthodox belief. The Church is equally committed to the *kerygma* of the Apostles and to the *dogma* of the Fathers. We may quote at this point an admirable ancient hymn (probably, from the pen of St. Romanus the Melode). “Preserving the *kerygma* of the Apostles and the dogmas of the Fathers, the Church has sealed the one faith and wearing the tunic of

conception of Tradition. D. B. Reynders, “Paradosis: Le progrès de l’idée de tradition jusqu’à Saint Irénée,” in *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale*, V (1933), Louvain, 155-191. In any case, Gnostics used to refer to “tradition.”

truth she shapes rightly the brocade of heavenly theology and praises the great mystery of piety.”²

The Mind of the Fathers

The Church is “Apostolic” indeed. But the Church is also “Patristic.” She is intrinsically “the Church of the Fathers.” These two “notes” cannot be separated. Only by being “Patristic” is the Church truly “Apostolic.” The witness of the Fathers is much more than simply a historic feature, a voice from the past. Let us quote another hymn from the office of the Three Hierarchs. “By the word of knowledge you have composed the dogmas which the fisher men have established first in simple words, in knowledge by the power of the Spirit, for thus our simple piety had to acquire composition.” There are, as it were, two basic stages in the proclamation of the Christian faith. “Our simple faith had to acquire composition.” There was an inner urge, an inner logic, an internal necessity, in this transition from *kerygma* to *dogma*. Indeed, the teaching of the Fathers, and the dogma of the Church, are still the same “simple message” which has been once delivered and deposited, once for ever, by the Apostles. But now it is, as it were, properly and fully articulated. The Apostolic preaching is kept alive in the Church, not only merely preserved. In this sense, the teaching of the Fathers is a permanent category of Christian existence, a constant and ultimate measure and criterion of right faith. Fathers are not only witnesses of the old faith, *testes antiquitatis*. They are rather witnesses of the true faith, *testes veritatis*. “The mind of the Fathers” is an intrinsic term of reference in Orthodox theology, no less than the word of Holy Scripture, and indeed never separated from it.

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As it has been well said, “the Catholic Church of all ages is not merely a daughter of the Church of the Fathers—*she is and remains the Church of the Fathers.*”³

The Existential Character of Patristic Theology

The main distinctive mark of Patristic theology was its existential” character, if we may use this current neologism. The Fathers theologized, as St. Gregory of Nazianzus put it, “in the manner of the Apostles, not in that of Aristotle— *alieutikôs, ouk aristotelikôs* ([lit. “as fishermen, not as Aristotle”— *ed.*] *Hom.* 23. 12). Their theology was still a “message,” a *kerygma*. Their theology was still “kerygmatic theology,” even if it was often logically arranged and supplied with intellectual arguments. The ultimate reference

² Paul Maas, ed., *Fruhbyzantinische Kirchenpoesie*, I (Bonn, 1910), p. 24.

³ Louis Bouyer, “Le renouveau des etudes patristiques,” in *La Vie Intellectuelle*, XV (Fevrier 1947), 18.

was still to the vision of faith, to spiritual knowledge and experience. Apart from life in Christ theology carries no conviction and, if separated from the life of faith, theology may degenerate into empty dialectics, a vain *polylogia*, without any spiritual consequence. Patristic theology was existentially rooted in the decisive commitment of faith. It was not a self-explanatory “discipline” which could be presented argumentatively, that is *aristotelikôs*, without any prior spiritual engagement. In the age of theological strife and incessant debates, the great Cappadocian Fathers formally protested against the use of dialectics, of “Aristotelian syllogisms,” and endeavoured to refer theology back to the vision of faith. Patristic theology could be only preached” or “proclaimed”—preached from the pulpit, proclaimed also in the words of prayer and in the sacred rites, and indeed manifested in the total structure of Christian life. Theology of this kind can never be separated from the life of prayer and from the exercise of virtue. “The climax of purity is the beginning of theology,” as St. John the Klimakos puts it: *Telos de hagneias hypothesis theologias (Scala Paradisi, grade 30)*.

On the other hand, theology of this type is always, as it were, “propaedeutic,” since its ultimate aim and purpose is to ascertain and to acknowledge the Mystery of the Living God, and indeed to bear witness to it, in word and deed.

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“Theology” is not an end in itself. It is always but a way. Theology, and even the “dogmas,” present no more than an “intellectual contour” of the revealed truth, and a “noetic” testimony to it. Only in the act of faith is this “contour” filled with content. Christological formulas are fully meaningful only for those who have encountered the Living Christ, and have received and acknowledged Him as God and Saviour, and are dwelling by faith in Him, in His body, the Church. In this sense, theology is never a self-explanatory discipline. It is constantly appealing to the *vision of faith*. “What we have seen and have heard we announce to you.” Apart from this “announcement” theological formulas are empty and of no consequence. For the same reason these formulas can never be taken “abstractly,” that is, out of total context of belief. It is misleading to single out particular statements of the Fathers and to detach them from the total perspective in which they have been actually uttered, just as it is misleading to manipulate with detached quotations from the Scripture. It is a dangerous habit “to quote” the Fathers, that is, their isolated sayings and phrases, outside of that concrete setting in which only they have their full and proper meaning and are truly alive. “To follow” the Fathers does not mean just “to quote” them. “To follow” the Fathers means to acquire their “mind,” their *phronema*.

The Meaning of the “Age” of the Fathers

Now, we have reached the crucial point. The name of “Church Fathers” is usually restricted to *the teachers of the Ancient Church*. And it is currently assumed that their authority depends upon their “antiquity,” upon their comparative nearness to the “Primitive Church,” to the initial “Age” of the Church. Already St. Jerome had to contest this idea. Indeed, there was no decrease of “authority,” and no decrease in the immediacy of spiritual competence and knowledge, in the course of Christian history. In fact, however, this idea of “decrease” has strongly affected our modern theological thinking. In fact, it is too often assumed, consciously or unconsciously, that the Early Church was, as it were, closer to

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the spring of truth. As an admission of our own failure and inadequacy, as an act of humble self-criticism, such an assumption is sound and helpful. *But it is dangerous to make of it the starting point or basis of our “theology of Church history,”* or even of our theology of the Church. Indeed, the Age of the Apostles should retain its unique position. Yet, it was just a beginning. It is widely assumed that the “Age of the Fathers” has also ended, and accordingly it is regarded just as an ancient formation, “antiquated” in a sense and “archaic.” The limit of the “Patristic Age” is variously defined. It is usual to regard St. John of Damascus as the “last Father” in the East, and St. Gregory the Dialogos or Isidore of Seville as “the last” in the West. This periodization has been justly contested in recent times. Should not, for instance, St. Theodore of Studium, at least, be included among “the Fathers”? Mabillon has suggested that Bernard of Clairvaux, the Doctor mellifluous, was “the last of the Fathers, and surely not unequal to the earlier ones.”⁴ Actually, it is more than a question of periodization. *From the Western point of view “the Age of the Fathers” has been succeeded, and indeed superseded, by “the Age of the Schoolmen,” which was an essential step forward.* Since the rise of Scholasticism “Patristic theology” has been antiquated, has become actually a “past age,” a kind of archaic prelude. This point of view, legitimate for the West, has been, most unfortunately, accepted also by many in the East, blindly and uncritically. Accordingly, one has to face the alternative. *Either* one has to regret the “backwardness” of the East which never developed any “Scholasticism” of its own. *Or* one should retire into the “Ancient Age,” in a more or less archeological manner, and practice what has been wittily described recently as a “theology of repetition.” The latter, in fact, is just a peculiar form of imitative “scholasticism.”

⁴ Mabillon, *Bernardi Opera, Praefatio generalis*, n. 23 (Migne, P. L., CLXXXII, c. 26).

Now, it is not seldom suggested that, probably, “the Age of the Fathers” has ended much earlier than St. John of Damascus. Very often one does not proceed further than the Age of Justinian, or even already the Council of Chalcedon. Was not Leontius of Byzantium already “the first of the Scholastics”? Psychologically, this attitude is quite com-

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prehensible, although it cannot be theologically justified. Indeed, the Fathers of the Fourth century are much more impressive, and their unique greatness cannot be denied. Yet, the Church remained fully alive also after Nicea and Chalcedon. The current overemphasis on the “first five centuries” dangerously distorts theological vision, and prevents the right understanding of the Chalcedonian dogma itself. The decree of the Sixth Ecumenical Council is often regarded as a kind of an “appendix” to Chalcedon, interesting only for theological specialists, and the great figure of St. Maximus the Confessor is almost completely ignored. Accordingly, the theological significance of the Seventh Ecumenical Council is dangerously obscured, and one is left to wonder, why the Feast of Orthodoxy should be related to the commemoration of the Church’s victory over the Iconoclasts. Was it not just a “ritualistic controversy”? We often forget that the famous formula of the *Consensus quinquesaecularis* [agreement of five centuries], that is, actually, up to Chalcedon, was a Protestant formula, and reflected a peculiar Protestant “theology of history.” It was a *restrictive* formula, as much as it seemed to be too inclusive to those who wanted to be secluded in the Apostolic Age. The point is, however, that the current Eastern formula of “the Seven Ecumenical Councils” is hardly much better, if it tends, as it usually does, *to restrict* or to limit the Church’s spiritual authority to the first eight centuries, as if “the Golden Age” of Christianity has already passed and we are now, probably, already in an Iron Age, much lower on the scale of spiritual vigour and authority. Our theological thinking has been dangerously affected by *the pattern of decay*, adopted for the interpretation of Christian history in the West since the Reformation. The fullness of the Church was then interpreted in a static manner, and the attitude to Antiquity has been accordingly distorted and misconstrued. After all, it does not make much difference, whether we *restrict* the normative authority of the Church to one century, or to five, or to eight. *There should be no restriction at all.* Consequently, there is no room for any “theology of repetition.” The Church is still fully authoritative as she has been in the ages past,

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since the Spirit of Truth quickens her now no less effectively as in the ancient times.

The Legacy of Byzantine Theology

One of the immediate results of our careless periodization is that we simply ignore *the legacy of Byzantine theology*. We are prepared, now more than only a few decades ago, to admit the perennial authority of “the Fathers,” especially since the revival of Patristic studies in the West. But we still tend to limit the scope of admission, and obviously “Byzantine theologians” are not readily counted among the “Fathers.” We are inclined to discriminate rather rigidly between “Patristics”—in a more or less narrow sense—and “Byzantinism.” We are still inclined to regard “Byzantinism” as an inferior sequel to the Patristic Age. We have still doubts about its normative relevance for theological thinking. Now, Byzantine theology was much more than just a “repetition” of Patristic theology, nor was that which was new in it of an inferior quality in comparison with “Christian Antiquity.” Indeed, *Byzantine theology was an organic continuation of the Patristic Age*. Was there any break? Has the *ethos* of the Eastern Orthodox Church been ever changed, at a certain historic point or date, which, however, has never been unanimously identified, so that the “later” development was of lesser authority and importance, if of any? This admission seems to be silently implied in the *restrictive* commitment to the *Seven* Ecumenical Councils. Then, St. Symeon the New Theologian and St. Gregory Palamas are simply left out, and the great Hesychast Councils of the fourteenth century are ignored and forgotten. What is their position and authority in the Church?

Now, in fact, St. Symeon and St. Gregory are still authoritative masters and inspirers of all those who, in the Orthodox Church, are striving after perfection, and are living the life of prayer and contemplation, whether in the surviving monastic communities, or in the solitude of the desert, and even in the world. These faithful people are not aware of any alleged “break” between “Patristics” and

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“Byzantinism.” The *Philokalia*, this great encyclopaedia of Eastern piety, which includes writings of many centuries, is, in our own days, increasingly becoming the manual of guidance and instruction for all those who are eager to *practice Orthodoxy* in our contemporary situation. The authority of its compiler, St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mount, has been recently recognized and enhanced by his formal canonization in the Church. In this sense, we are bound to say, “the Age of the Fathers” still continues in “the Worshipping Church.” Should it not continue also in our theological pursuit and study, research and instruction? Should we not recover “the mind of the Fathers” also in our theological thinking and teaching? To recover it, indeed, not as an archaic manner or pose, and not just as a venerable relic, but as *an existential attitude*, as *a spiritual orientation*. Only in this way can our theology be reintegrated into the fullness of our

Christian existence. It is not enough to keep a “Byzantine Liturgy,” as we do, to restore Byzantine iconography and Byzantine music, as we are still reluctant to do consistently, and to practice certain Byzantine modes of devotion. One has to go to the very roots of this traditional “piety,” and to recover the “Patristic mind . Otherwise we may be in danger of being inwardly split—as many in our midst actually are—between the “traditional” forms of “piety” and a very untraditional habit of theological thinking. It is a real danger. As “worshippers” we are still in “the tradition of the Fathers.” Should we not stand, conscientiously and avowedly, in the same tradition also as “theologians,” as witnesses and teachers of Orthodoxy? Can we retain our integrity in any other way?

St. Gregory Palamas and Theosis

All these preliminary considerations are highly relevant for our immediate purpose. What is the theological legacy of St. Gregory Palamas? St. Gregory was not a speculative theologian. He was a monk and a bishop. He was not concerned about abstract problems of philosophy, although he was well trained in this field too. He was concerned

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solely with problems of Christian existence. As a theologian, he was simply an interpreter of the spiritual experience of the Church. Almost all his writings, except probably his homilies, were occasional writings. He was wrestling with the problems of his own time. And it was a critical time, an age of controversy and anxiety. Indeed, it was also an age of spiritual renewal.

St. Gregory was suspected of subversive innovations by his enemies in his own time. This charge is still maintained against him in the West. In fact, however, St. Gregory was deeply rooted in tradition. It is not difficult to trace most of his views and motives back to the Cappadocian Fathers and to St. Maximus the Confessor, who was, by the way, one of the most popular masters of Byzantine thought and devotion. Indeed, St. Gregory was also intimately acquainted with the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. He was rooted in the tradition. *Yet, in no sense was his theology just a “theology of repetition.” It was a creative extension of ancient tradition. Its starting point was Life in Christ.*

Of all themes of St. Gregory’s theology let us single out but one, the crucial one, and the most controversial. What is the basic character of Christian existence? The ultimate aim and purpose of human life was defined in the Patristic tradition as *theosis* [divinization]. The term is rather offensive for the modern ear. It cannot be adequately rendered in any modern language, nor even in Latin. Even in Greek it is rather heavy and pretentious. Indeed, it is a daring word. The meaning of the word is, however, simple and lucid. It was one of the crucial terms in the Patristic vocabulary. It would suffice to quote at this point but St. Athanasius. *Gegonen gar anthrōpos, hin’ hēmas en heautōi theopoiēsēi.*

[He became man in order to divinize us in Himself (*Ad Adelphium* 4)]. *Autos gar enênthrôpêsen, hina hêmeis theopoiêthômen*. [He became man in order that we might be divinized (*De Incarnatione* 54)]. St. Athanasius actually resumes here the favourite idea of St. Irenaeus: *qui propter immensam dilectionem suam factus est quod sumus nos, uti nos perficeret*

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esse quod est ipse. [Who, through his immense love became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself (*Adv. Haeres. V, Praefatio*)]. It was the common conviction of the Greek Fathers. One can quote at length St. Gregory of Nazianzus. St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Maximus, and indeed St. Symeon the New Theologian. Man ever remains what he is, that is, creature. But he is promised and granted, in Christ Jesus, the Word become man, an intimate sharing in what is Divine: Life Everlasting and incorruptible. The main characteristic of *theosis* is, according to the Fathers, precisely “immortality” or “incorruption.” For God alone “has immortality”—*ho monos echôn athanasian* (I Tim. 6:16). But man now is admitted into an intimate “communion” with God, through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is much more than just a ‘moral’ communion, and much more than just a human perfection. Only the word *theosis* can render adequately the uniqueness of the promise and offer. *The term theosis is indeed quite embarrassing, if we would think in “ontological” categories*. Indeed, man simply cannot “become” god. But the Fathers were thinking in “personal” terms, and the mystery of *personal* communion was involved at this point. *Theosis meant a personal encounter*. It is that intimate intercourse of man with God, in which the whole of human existence is, as it were, permeated by the Divine Presence.⁵

Yet, the problem remains: How can even this intercourse be compatible with the Divine Transcendence? And this is the crucial point. Does man really encounter God, in this present life on earth? Does man encounter God, truly and verily, in his present life of prayer? Or, is there no more than an *actio in distans*? The common claim of the Eastern Fathers was that in his devotional ascent man actually encounters God and beholds His eternal Glory. Now, how is it possible, if God “abides in the light unapproachable”? The paradox was especially sharp in the Eastern theology, which has been always committed to the belief that God was absolutely “incomprehensible”—*akatalêptos*—and unknowable in His nature or essence.

⁵ Cf. M. Lot-Borodine, “La doctrine de la deification dans l’Eglise grecque jusqu’au XI siecle,” in *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, tome CV, Nr I (Janvier-Fevrier 1932), 5-43; tome CVI, Nr 2/3 (Septembre-December 1932), 525-74; tome CVII, Nr I (Janvier-Fevrier 1933), 8-55.

This conviction was powerfully expressed by the Cappadocian Fathers, especially in their struggle against Eunomius, and also by St. John Chrysostom, in his magnificent discourses *Peri Akatalêptou*. Thus, if God is absolutely “unapproachable” in His essence, and accordingly His essence simply cannot be “communicated,” how can theosis be possible at all? “One insults God who seeks to apprehend His essential being,” says Chrysostom. Already in St. Athanasius we find a clear distinction between God’s very “essence” and His powers and bounty: *Kai en pasi men esti kata tèn heautou agathotêta, exô de tòn pantôn palin esti kata tèn idian physin*. [He is in everything by his love, but outside of everything by his own nature (*De Decretis II*)]. The same conception was carefully elaborated by the Cappadocians. The “essence of God” is absolutely inaccessible to man, says St. Basil (*Adv. Eunomium* 1:14). We know God only in His actions, and by His actions: *Hêmeis de ek men tôn energeiôn gnôrizein legomen ton Theon hêmon, têi de ousiâi proseggizein ouch hypischnoumetha hai men gar energeiai autou pros hêmas katabainousin, hê de ousia autou menei aprositos*. [We say that we know our God from his energies (activities), but we do not profess to approach his essence—for his energies descend to us, but his essence remains inaccessible (*Epist.* 234, ad Amphilochium)]. Yet, it is a true knowledge, not just a conjecture or deduction: *hai energeiai autou pros hêmas katabainousin*. In the phrase of St. John of Damascus, these actions or “energies” of God are the true revelation of God Himself: *hê theia ellampsis kai energeia* (*De Fide Orth.* 1: 14). It is a real presence, and not merely a certain *praesentia operativa, sicut agens adest ei in quod agit* [as the actor is present in the thing in which he acts]. This mysterious mode of Divine Presence, in spite of the absolute transcendence of the Divine Essence, passes all understanding. But it is no less certain for that reason.

St. Gregory Palamas stands in an ancient tradition at this point. In His “energies” the Unapproachable God mysteriously approaches man. And this Divine move effects

encounter: *proodos eis ta exô*, in the phrase of St. Maximus (*Scholia in De Div. Nom.*, 1: 5).

St. Gregory begins with the distinction between “grace” and “essence”: *he theia kai theopoios ellampsis kai charis ouk ousia, all’ energeia esti Theou* [the Divine and Divinizing illumination and grace is not the essence, but the energy of God; *Capita Phys., Theol., etc.*, 68-9]. This basic distinction was formally accepted and elaborated at the Great Councils in Constantinople, 1341 and 1351. Those who would deny this distinction were anathematized and excommunicated. The anathematisms of the council of 651 were included in the rite for the Sunday of Orthodoxy, in the Triodion. Orthodox

theologians are bound by this decision. The essence of God is absolutely *amethekté* [incommunicable]. The source and the power of human *theosis* is not the Divine essence, but the “Grace of God”: *theopoiós energeia, hês ta metechonta theountai, theia tis esti charis, all’ ouch hê physis tou Theou* [the divinizing energy, by participation of which one is divinized, is a divine grace, but in no way the essence of God; *ibid.* 92-3]. *Charis* is not identical with the *ousia*. It is *theia kai aktistos charis kai energeia* [Divine and uncreated Grace and Energy; *ibid.*, 69]. This distinction, however, does not imply or effect division or separation. Nor is it just an “accident,” *oute symbebekotos* (*ibid.*, 127). Energies “proceed” from God and manifest His own Being. The term *proienai* [proceed] simply suggests *diakrisin* [distinction], but not a division: *ei kai dienênoche tês physeos, ou diaspatai he tou Pneumatos charis* [the grace of the Spirit is different from the Substance, and yet not separated from it; *Theophanes*, p. 940].

Actually the whole teaching of St. Gregory presupposes the action of the Personal God. God moves toward man and embraces him by His own “grace” and action, without leaving that *phos aprositon* [light unapproachable], in which He eternally abides. The ultimate purpose of St. Gregory’s theological teaching was to defend the reality of Christian experience. *Salvation is more than forgiveness. It is a genuine renewal of man.* And this renewal is effected not by the

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discharge, or release, of certain natural energies implied in man’s own creaturely being, but by the “energies” of God Himself, who thereby encounters and encompasses man, and admits him into communion with Himself. *In fact, the teaching of St. Gregory affects the whole system of theology, the whole body of Christian doctrine. It starts with the clear distinction between “nature” and “will” of God.* This distinction was also characteristic of the Eastern tradition, at least since St. Athanasius. It may be asked at this point: Is this distinction compatible with the “simplicity” of God? Should we not rather regard all these distinctions as merely logical conjectures, necessary for us, but ultimately without any ontological significance? As a matter of fact, St. Gregory Palamas was attacked by his opponents precisely from that point of view. God’s Being is simple, and in Him even all attributes coincide. Already St. Augustine diverged at this point from the Eastern tradition. Under Augustinian presuppositions the teaching of St. Gregory is unacceptable and absurd. St. Gregory himself anticipated the width of implications of his basic distinction. If one does not accept it, he argued, then it would be impossible to discern clearly between the “generation” of the Son and “creation” of the world, both being the acts of essence, and this would lead to utter confusion in the Trinitarian doctrine. St. Gregory was quite formal at that point.

If according to the delirious opponents and those who agree with them, the Divine energy in no way differs from the Divine essence, then the act of creating, which belongs to the will, will in no way differ from generation (*gennân*) and procession (*ekporeuein*), which belong to the essence. If to create is no different from generation and procession, then the creatures will in no way differ from the Begotten (*gennêmatos*) and the Projected (*problêmatos*). If such is the case according to them, then both the Son of God and the Holy Spirit will be no different from creatures, and the creatures will all be both the begotten (*gennêmata*) and the projected (*problêmata*) of God the Father, and creation will be deified and God will be arrayed with the creatures. For this reason the venerable Cyril, showing the difference between God's essence and energy, says that to generate belongs to the Divine nature, whereas to create belongs to His Divine energy. This he shows clearly saying, "nature and energy are not the same." If the Divine essence in no way differs from the Divine energy, then to beget (*gennân*) and to project (*ekporeuein*) will in no way

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differ from creating (*poiein*). God the Father creates by the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Thus He also begets and projects by the Son and in the Holy Spirit, according to the opinion of the opponents and those who agree with them. (*Capita* 96 and 97.)

St. Gregory quotes St. Cyril of Alexandria. But St. Cyril at this point was simply repeating St. Athanasius. St. Athanasius, in his refutation of Arianism, formally stressed the ultimate difference between *ousia* [essence] or *physis* [substance], on the one hand, and the *boulêsis* [will], on the other. God exists, and then He also acts. There is a certain "necessity" in the Divine Being, indeed not a necessity of compulsion, and no *fatum*, but a necessity of being itself. God simply is what He is. But God's will is eminently free. He in no sense is necessitated to do what He does. Thus *gennêsis* [generation] is always *kata physin* [according to essence], but creation is a *boulêseos ergon* [energy of the will] (*Contra Arianos* III. 64-6). These two dimensions, that of being and that of acting, are different, and must be clearly distinguished. Of course, this distinction in no way compromises the "Divine simplicity." Yet, it is a real distinction, and not just a logical device. St. Gregory was fully aware of the crucial importance of this distinction. At this point he was a true successor of the great Athanasius and of the Cappadocian hierarchs.

It has been recently suggested that the theology of St. Gregory, should be described in modern terms as an "existentialist theology." Indeed, it differed radically from modern

conceptions which are currently denoted by this label. Yet, in any case, St. Gregory was definitely opposed to all kinds of “essentialist theologies” which fail to account for God’s freedom, for the dynamism of God’s will, for the reality of Divine action. St. Gregory would trace this trend back to Origen. It was the predicament of the Greek impersonalist metaphysics. If there is any room for Christian metaphysics at all, it must be a metaphysics of persons. The starting point of St. Gregory’s theology was *the history of salvation*: on the larger scale, the Biblical story, which consisted of Divine acts, culminating in the Incarnation of the Word and His glorification through the Cross and Resurrection; on the smaller

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scale, the story of the Christian man, striving after perfection, and ascending step by step, till he encounters God in the vision of His glory. It was usual to describe the theology of St. Irenaeus as a “theology of facts.” With no lesser justification we may describe also the theology of St. Gregory Palamas as a “theology of facts.”

In our own time, we are coming more and more to the conviction that “theology of facts” is the only sound Orthodox theology. It is Biblical. It is Patristic. It is in complete conformity with the mind of the Church.

In this connection we may regard St. Gregory Palamas as our guide and teacher, in our endeavour to theologize from the heart of the Church.