

THE THEORY ON ‘UNIONS – DISTINCTIONS’ AS A PARADIGM OF GR. PALAMAS’ METHODOLOGY

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ABSTRACT. The issue concerning the real existence of the divine energies and consequently their relation to the divine essence is remarkably important for Christian Metaphysics. This study deals with the way in which Gr. Palamas included in this perspective the theory on unions and distinctions, which derives from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s works, who is considered to be one of the main founders of Christian theology. It is also important to mention that the study deals with matters that, on the one side, have formed a tradition in the history of Christianity and, on the other, are subsumed in the context of the hesychastic controversy of the fourteenth-century, during which the specification of both the similarities and the differences between philosophy and theology was decisively raised.

KEYWORDS: Gregorius Palamas, union, distinction, pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, theology, philosophy.

Introduction

Gregorius Palamas’ concise treatise *On Divine Union and Distinction*¹ is a typical, and up to a certain point paradigmatic, case of how a theological and strictly doctrinal issue is analyzed with philosophical terminology and argumentation, without announcing this combination at the start or over its course. This non-statement, however, is not a research method that surprises, but appertains to the

¹ The original title of this work is *Περὶ θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως*. This is a text that is included in the second volume of a Greek edition by Panagiotis Christou entitled *Γρηγορίου του Παλαμά Συγγράμματα* (1994) 69-95.

ordinary writing practice of the Christian theologian, who exclusively sets the specialized support of the tradition that he represents as a non-negotiable goal. And in order to strengthen this goal, he takes material – both theoretical and methodological – from other traditions, even incompatible with Christianity. These are traditions found in Ancient Greek Philosophy. However, here comes to the fore a purely historical reason for writing this treatise. Specifically, according to Palamas' point of view, Christian tradition was threatened at that time, because of the anti-Hesychasts' involvement in the theological discussions, in an actually argumentative or even a polemical way against certain theoretical views and religious choices that had emerged in the area of Eastern Christianity.² Yet, from the philological – literary point of view, it is necessary to underline from the beginning that the theory on 'unions' and 'distinctions' has also obvious philosophical standards; it systematically unfolds by the two famous representatives of the Neoplatonic School, Proclus (fifth-century)³ and Damascius (sixth-century).⁴ It also concerns a basic theological issue of Christian Metaphysics (or, more correctly, Henology) at least since Areopagite's writings (fifth-century). We should further mention that Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite places this theory in a functionally and realistically applicable, as to the methodological accuracy, way in the context of the Christian teaching, which leads on superlative, apophatic and affirmative theology.⁵ This careful inclusion is also confirmed by Maximus the Confessor's highly detailed commentaries⁶ and George Pachymeres' systema-

² For instance: J. Guillard (1938) 424-460. J. Meyendorff (1953) 87-120.

³ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 742.24-760.17.

⁴ Damascius, *De Principiis* III 1.1-46.8. Cf. J. Combés (1975) 33-60.

⁵ We should mention that in Areopagite's works, the theory concerning divine 'processions' – energies systematically develops and definitely occurs from the particularly highlighted ontological distinction between unions and distinctions of the supreme Principle, the One – Good. More specifically, this is the distinction between, from one side, the stable permanence in his transcendent unmixed essence and, on the other, his personal appearances and his ad extra volitional manifestations. *Τὰς μὲν ἐνώσεις τὰς θείας, τὰς τῆς ὑπεραρρήτου καὶ ὑπεραγνώστου μονιμότητος, κρυφίας καὶ ἀνεκφοιτήτους ὑπεριδρύσεις· τὰς διακρίσεις δὲ, τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεαρχίας, προόδους τε καὶ ἐκφάνσεις* (*De divinis nominibus*, 640d). The difference that Pseudo-Dionysius puts forward between unions and distinctions is probably the most important matter of the second chapter of his treatise entitled *De divinis nominibus*. In a broader sense, it is placed in the special introductory content of the first three chapters of this treatise, which aim to determine the necessary theoretical preconditions in order the affirmative theology to be established. In other words, according to the Neoplatonic thinking, these chapters refer to the way that the first hypothesis is related to the second hypothesis of the platonic dialogue *Parmenides*.

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

tically formed *Paraphrase* (thirteenth-century).⁷ It is about a theory, which, on the one side, captures very high ontological conditions both in themselves and to their relations and, on the other, highlights the systematic epistemological achievements of Christian teaching. And these achievements, at least in the writings of Leontius of Byzantium (sixth-century), were particularly impressive. This theory somehow decodes key points concerning the theory of the Holy Trinity, which Christian theologians had already formed since the second century. Gr. Palamas conceives this reasoning almost unchanged by the two main sources of his theology (Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus), and he has probably read Pachymeres' attempt. We should however underline that he does not mention Pachymeres' commentaries even once, a surprising absence considering at least their proximity in time as well as their common local origin, since they were both spiritually raised in Constantinople. At the same time, this great representative of the Byzantine humanism kept with great consistency the entire theory concerning the Holy Trinity that the tradition of the Church had defined; therefore we would expect extensive references to his writings. His commentary on Areopagite's *De divinis nominibus* – as well as on all the others – not only strictly follows the theological tradition but also broadens it with critical remarks.

Remaining in his text, it is clear, as Gr Palamas himself admits, that he attempts, with the conceptual supplies the content of this theory offers, to refute Barlaam and Akindynos methodically and reliably. Specifically, his criticism concerns the extremely important issue on the objective or non-objective texture of the divine energies, while there is also a parallel discussion about their relation to the divine essence. And the base, from which he starts, is that between these two conditions there is both relevance and distinctness, but in no way hierarchy. In general, this is a conflict the theoretical points of which we meet, more or less, at all of Gr. Palamas' treatises and historically is included into what is defined as hesychastic and ecclesiastical controversy, which took place mainly in the fourteenth century and strongly influenced the subsequent theological developments. At the same time, this was a conflict that highlighted the major question concerning the role of philosophy in the constitution of the theological teaching.⁸

⁷ Concerning the theory on 'union – distinction' in Pachymeres, we refer once again mainly to the second chapter of his *Paraphrase of De divinis nominibus* of Dionysius the Areopagite. Note that the presence of this issue after an extensive period of time brings to the fore the great research interest that it causes and obviously is a part of the further understanding of Areopagite's writings. Suggesting for this issue studies are the following: Vl. Lossky (1930) 283; E. Corsini (1962) 96-97 and 148; L. Siasou (1984) 114-117 and 148-149.

⁸ For a general approach of this issue, see for instance the study – discussion of J.-Claude Piguet and Gabriel-Ph. Widmer (1991).

In this study, our goals are mainly two and they will both fall under the demands of a strict epistemological example, both from its general aspect as a methodological system of a rational presentation of views that belong to the same theoretical axis and under the specific conditions set by the worldview of Eastern Christianity. The first detail will set the criteria concerning whether Gr. Palamas obeys the rules of a rigorous researcher. The second will explore his relevance to the previous Christian tradition. More specifically, on one side, we will attempt a conceptual as regards to the structure –but not concerning the specific meanings that since they are considered to be unchanging doctrinal constants it is not possible for them to change– reconstruction of Gr. Palamas' treatise. We believe that, although it is concise, the Christian theologian undertakes within its context the responsibility to support the firmly established general argumentation that he adopts, in fact under alternate aspects, which are reflected in a variety of conceptual material. These are exactly the aspects that we will attempt to bring to the surface, as far as this is possible, together with their conceptual connection and their logical unfolding. In other words, we are not going to follow the text itself, but we intend to present it as if it were a strict, regarding its scientific approach, theological guide, into which limited extendedly thematic areas would be analyzed in a mutual way. Obviously, these areas belong together in one more general. And clearly, this is not an encyclopedic dictionary with special entries, since we are not interested in the autonomous presence of the concepts, but rather in the communicative function that arises between them, i.e. within a theoretical framework, which develops with coherently structured alternations. On the other hand, we will take the responsibility to prove that the philosophical bases of Palamas' thinking are actually existent, despite being indirectly detected, since he neither clearly reveals nor explicitly declares such a goal. The philosophical education that he had obtained was wide and he had a good knowledge of Aristotle. We believe that this relevance between theological faith and philosophical methodology, within the appropriate syllogisms, is identifiable throughout the whole treatise, despite the frequent repetitions of the theological argumentative material. Actually, behind this material we find many times the Aristotelian *Organon*, which, on one side, may be considered as the birth certificate of the typical logic and, on the other, has formed a remarkable tradition.

Therefore, we confidently believe that even a non-specialized reader could point out Gr. Palamas' implicit philosophical methodology, which is so wide that is not far from the scientific one, regarding at least its external type. In this sense, we are facing an increase of the importance both of rational knowledge and methods, which actually is found to lots of theologians of both the East and the West. Considering the obvious strengthening of the empirical religious participa-

tion for any Christian, there is also at the same time an attempt for a rational approach of the metaphysical world, as accurately as this is possible for a thinker with specific and real goals. This latter version should be undoubtedly approached carefully, since it is the interpretative key in order to determine in Palamas' work the degree – and, consequently, the legitimacy for its support – of the relevance between the evidential and strictly conceptual analysis with definite confirmations and the mystical intuition. It is also necessary to determine the quantitative analogies of this co-expression, taking into account that Gr. Palamas' main goal is constantly to support the evaluative priority of the Christian teaching over any other that is actually exclusively structured in a secularized scientific way. This fact makes the attempt to find in his work mathematical-logical or any other similar information that would hold a main and important role intensely risky. No doubt we find them, but clearly only as a way to make easier the research.

Despite the fact that the above requirement is highlighted, we consider necessary to further detect in some cases also the potential degree of the influence that Gr. Palamas has accepted by the Neoplatonic philosophers. It is important however to keep in mind that such an effect is mainly indirect and external, since the issue on the limits of relevance between these two traditions had broadly come to the fore –and had been solved– in an analogous way on the occasion of the cosmotheoretical orientation of the Areopagitic writings, which had much in common with those of Proclus. The relation actually between Christianity and Neoplatonism numbered many centuries and formed prolific theoretical accomplishments concerning the progress both of philosophy and theology. Despite however the existing conclusions, under the various historical conditions the issue is permanently placed under new aspects, since several Byzantine thinkers “flirt” with the Neoplatonic doctrines. This is a research rule that the hesychast theologian follows with the terminology that he uses. However, we will remain on this insightful comment provided that whenever the Bishop of Thessalonica writes a treatise, both the specific conceptual and the semantic orientation of the terms that he uses, undoubtedly depend on the worldview that he embraces. The final approach is certainly Christian. And he never ignores this epistemological basis. Even a superficial reading of his reasoning would be enough for us to say that Palamas' worldview is based mainly on Areopagite's texts as well as on the extensive tradition that includes commentaries that have formed the above mentioned worldview. For example, this tradition is far from a discussion, even superficially, on issues concerning polytheism, which in Neoplatonism are the most important part for developing the theories. Actually, systematic read-

ings of Areopagite's texts are also found in West Christianity, such as in Albert the Great and in Thomas Aquinas.

In what will follow, we will study which is Palamas' view toward Pseudo-Dionysius, while in forthcoming studies we commit ourselves to discuss more specific issues that are related to the content of the treatise entitled *Περί Θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως*. For reasons that we are going to bring to the fore below, we will explain the reason why we use the name "Pseudo-Dionysius", which is absolutely missing from both Palamas' texts and the entire previous tradition. This is however an issue that is mainly historically important rather than theoretically.

Pseudo-Dionysius as a disciple of the Apostles

According to Gr. Palamas, Pseudo-Dionysius is historically placed in the age of the Apostles. In fact, he is considered to be one of their disciples. *Διονύσιος ὁ μέγας αὐτήκοος γεγονώς τῆς τῶν ἀποστόλων τοῦ Χριστοῦ φωνῆς*.⁹ This incorrect – as has already been scientifically proven – story is initially of no interest for Theology, mainly of the Eastern Christianity, since its attention does not concern the time that Pseudo-Dionysius took action, but is about what truths he delivered through the texts that bear his name. And these are truths in which the founders of the Christian faith were involved. The questioning refers to those qualitative – theoretical and broadly existential– features that formed the Christian teachings and not to historical-grammatical parameters, which in many cases it is possible that they also highlight conventional contents. Besides, the philological – literary problem of dating Areopagite's writings did not exist until that time, at least not clearly.¹⁰ The conclusion, however, in which a researcher can end up, by further studying what follows the above quotation, is that Gr. Palamas conceives the theory on 'unions/distinctions' as highly, and without historical presuppositions that would be added from outside, authentically Christian, since he places it in a time that thought is directly inspired by the presence of Jesus Christ and the descent of

⁹ Cf. *Περί Θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως* 1, 69.1-2.

¹⁰ Cf. H. Koch (1895) 438-454; J. Stiglmayr (1895) 253-273 and 721-748. The explanation of the conclusions of both researchers depends, apart from the various individual comparisons between Areopagite's and Proclus' works, on the detailed comparison of the fourth chapter of Areopagite's treatise *De divinis nominibus* with Proclus' treatise entitled *De Malorum Subsistentia*, which exists only in Latin. The conclusions of Koch and Stiglmayr are quite the same since they both claim that Pseudo-Dionysius' views depend on Proclus' views in a remarkably intense degree. Since 1895 and thence research moves toward the above direction, with variations concerning only the extent to which Areopagite's works are determined by those of Proclus. Generally approaching Gr. Palamas, it seems that it is very interesting first the question on theology, which primarily is considered to be the divine statements to humans, and secondarily human's empirical and scientific description of the divine revelations. Cf. R. Roques (1962) 136-150.

the Holy Spirit and definitely does not work autonomously. Under this condition, it is obvious that the possibility to consider this theory as a simple result relying exclusively on human explanations is for him excluded. That means he does not strictly include it in a secularized research perspective, in which he obviously gives secondary interference – function concerning the divine descent. In Christian teaching the priority is clear: human is invited to utilize a posteriori what above has been given to him a priori. And concerning that use, human's personal contribution to the dialectic relation that will emerge between him and God is positively evaluated. Therefore, in terms of historical sources, i.e. since the directly first postapostolic period, this theory was formed as to its statements and meanings without preconditions and without explanations; it is a theory of the foundational or self-convincing sentences that are considered to be absolute and not open to critical examination. Accordingly, it can easily fall into the category of the common concepts, meaning those logical shapes that in Christian teaching reflect the direct communications of God with human beings.¹¹ It should be mentioned, however, that the divine signs are not approachable in a mechanistic way or by automatisms, but require from human a high level of faith and a high level of research, in order to be included in his cognition in an actually objective way. It is obvious that we cannot speak about assimilation without personal participation, since human is not defined as a typical repetition of God. The matter concerning the dialectical relation between God and human is clearly and definitely mandatory, as in all other cases, and requires from human, who is involved, the activation of all his spiritual forces. From the anthropological point of view, this dialectical relation remains deficient.

On the other side, the historically founded parameter that Proclus was well known and sometimes was a subject offered for teaching in Byzantium is not insignificant. Two facts are extremely important evidence for his penetration to Christian intelligentsia of the East. Firstly, Nicholas of Methone's¹² evaluation of his views and after a while the way in which George Pachymeres¹³ used him. Therefore, we could claim that Proclus' (and Damascius') theories on unions and distinctions were reachable –and, why not, potentially utilizable – by Gr. Palamas. The most likely view, however, in his opinion is that Neoplatonic thinkers had received these theories by Areopagite's texts. Admittedly, this latter aspect may contain the intention to exclude the Neoplatonic intervention from the Christian doctrines and, hence, to prove, on one hand, that Areopagite was their source and, on the other, that they were actually authentic. Moreover, we should

¹¹ Regarding the issue of the common concepts, cf. L. Siasos (1984) 161-170.

¹² Regarding Nicholas of Methone's work, see for instance G. Podskalsky (1974) 509-523.

¹³ See H. D. Saffrey – L. G. Westerink (1978) LVII-LXIX.

keep in mind that Gregory of Nyssa had already brought to the fore this theory, without, however, a specific purpose.¹⁴ Thus, in what is being discussed here we can also detect a strategy for a strict and independent delimitation of Christianity against its contemporary theoretical trends, which is a desideratum – demand that has already systematically and with epistemological confirmations arisen since the fourth century. In any case, however, we can easily include Gregory Palamas in the tradition that Nicholas of Methone tried to form who, on the one side, made really good use of Areopagite's tradition and, on the other, combined realism with nominalism to a significant degree. This is a choice of great ontological interest, since particularity is included in its real context, without being autonomous. We should mention, however, that Gr. Palamas does not clearly refer to Nicholas, who had gained considerable reputation, at least because of his controversial writings. And the fact that he does not mention him is a surprise.

Pseudo-Dionysius is inspired by God

According to the above historical specification, an extremely important parameter follows: in order Pseudo-Dionysius to express his thoughts is directly and without theoretical intermediates inspired by the divine revelations, which define their presence according to the intentionality of the Holy Trinity to have a key role in the history of mankind. In philosophical terms, he is guided by the metaphysics of immanence.¹⁵ In this sense, Gr. Palamas believes that Areopagite's writings are completely included, especially in an initial – prefatory level of time, in the tradition of the Church Fathers, who followed the holy Words and not their subjective, and possibly arbitrary, thoughts. Obviously, at this point, he refers to some of the reasons that caused the heresies, which in his time had begun to return, actually with considerable scientific and philosophical support. Concerning this normativity that is defined by traditional Christian principles, he believes that Pseudo-Dionysius' thoughts are authentic and valid and that they do not affect the theological truths that have been revealed by Jesus Christ. *Οὐδ' αὐτοί (sc. οἱ πατέρες) παρ' ἑαυτῶν λέγοντες, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἱεροῖς λόγοις ἐπομένοι.*¹⁶

The epistemological result that apparently stems from the above quotation is once again that theologizing contains legitimacy, when the independent, mean-

¹⁴ For instance, see Gregorius' treatise entitled *Κατά Εὐνομίου του τρίτου λόγου*, 13-32.

¹⁵ Parenthetically, we should mention that this immanence is highly presented by Proclus, mainly in his commentaries on the platonic dialogue *Timaeus*. In Christianity, however, it is presented as a condition that is intensively handled by the personal God.

¹⁶ Cf. *Περὶ θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως* 19, 83.4-5; 1, 69.4-5. On the issue of non-self-definition of those standpoints which are expressed about theology, cf. G. Pachymeres' *Paraphrase of De divinis nominibus*, 608a-613b.

ing the one without metaphysical reductions, anthropocentric thought is excluded. Here too the conclusion is formed by the same thought process: the conforming to Words –i.e. to the divinely inspired texts of tradition– cancels the validity of any final standpoint that would reflect the interpretative considerations of a limited group of thinkers. It is not acceptable for authentic knowledge of God a School that would act independently and with internal self-formations. Either way, Christianity defines the truth, at least primarily, in an ecclesiological way, meaning that the truth is detected through communication, which is defined centered on God and is specialized centered on human. And we should mention that not only the historical starting point of the Church was defined by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, but its history is permanently fed by these two divine Persons, to which it is constantly invited to refer. Therefore, it is the most decisive criterion to ensure the perfect objectivity, which, however, in order human to capture it to the maximum achievable extent, requires the historical continuum to occur aiming at improving. The divine absoluteness is gradually captured by human, certainly up to a certain degree. Moreover, the above mentioned exclusion of autonomy, as an inauthentic criterion for truth, means that Barlaam and Akindynos have set up such a detached from the body of ecclesiastical and theological tradition group and that they support views that do not conform to the acceptable and highly detailed method of approach of the divine appearances – communications. In strictly ecclesiological terms, they have denied the universality of truth that is experienced and emerges from collective forms, which have a common reason for searching, prolonged in time and directed to anthropologically speaking end times, which philosophically correspond to teleology. Certainly the above are also included into the perspective on how the dialectical relationship between God and human is structured, which on the basis of the teleological regularity is considered to be eternally renewed, with the second term of this relation undertaking wide initiatives.

The adherence to Dionysius' principles

Using as a criterion the historical and theological authenticity of Areopagite's writings, Gr. Palamas announces in advance that during the discussion of his matters he will follow them consistently and without reasoning deviations or skepticisms. He sets this theoretical point of view as necessary, in order to manage to bring back to the truth those who have deviated from its divine founded sources.¹⁷ That means he puts it into a perspective of specific purposes, which we

¹⁷ Cf. *Περί θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως* 1, 69,8-14. Gr. Palamas' comment is theologically successful as regards to what he aims to achieve, since it brings the issue not to a theoretical conflict, but mainly to a confrontational mood of his opponents against the validity of the tradition that in

may describe them as pastoral. The most important of them is his dogmatic opponents to critically rethink all these they argue for. In other words, he does not consider his criticism – advice as a personal conflict. Moreover, also at this point, he considers Areopagite's words to be axiomatic and self-convincing theological gnoseological principles, which means without preconditions, without the need of reduction and as self-substantiated. According to his opinion, the above in some way independence means that these words work without external theoretical specifications and that they are the preconditions for any final standpoint or evidential process. As the direct scientific reflections of the divine revelations, it is inevitable for them not to have both ontologically and logically further reducing character, but to be the reference source for any theological discussion that would try to obtain its validity and strong applications. Καὶ αὐτὰ σχεδὸν τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς θεολογίας ἢ ἐκκλησία μεμύηται, ὡς καὶ στοιχειώδεις θεολογίας ἔστιν ἃ τούτων ἐπιγεγράφθαι.¹⁸ The usage of the term 'στοιχεῖον' suggests that Areopagite's theories work like initial cores of formation and seminal forces or historical and gnoseological starting points, which compose the valid preconditions for the specialized development of the theological tradition. It is also important to realize that he speaks about initiation, which is an excess or a widening of the rational criteria – processes. This is a condition that puts human (collective) consciousness into the divine mystery, which (sc. consciousness) is connected with intuition and faith, through which is achieved.

Therefore, for Gr. Palamas, Pseudo-Dionysius' reasoning testimonies are an undeniable and internally substantiated epistemological criterion, as regards both the description of the ontological relationships and the methodological processes that will be selected in order to describe them. And this is a description

other themes is connected with the spirit of the Ecumenical Councils. From the philosophical point of view, it is certainly axiomatic and approaches a somehow dogmatism. A reduction, however, in the revealed truth cannot be achieved in other terms. This issue is firmly demonstrated also by Neoplatonic thinkers. For instance see the first book of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*, in which, apart from other theological references, comes to the fore Plato's philosophy both as inspired by the divine mysteries and as inspiring for the following thinkers – researchers. Consequently, it is considered to be a philosophy-theology with its own validity, while Proclus presents its factor as a participant in the divine revelations.

¹⁸ Cf. *Περὶ θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως* 5, 72.11-18. The terms that are used here, bring back to memory Proclus' work *The Elements of Theology*, where a systematic, through geometrically structured theorems, collection of the real and arranged in order of rank principles, which compose the metaphysical and physical world (Ontology) and up to a certain extent of the rational ones, which are found all over the philosophical – theological thought (Epistemology) is attempted, provided that in the Christian cosmological example multi-causality has no position. Do note that Nicholas of Methone in his controversial treatise *Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology* (1984) has taken over the attempt to refute Proclus' reasoning on multi-causality.

that for human always comes up to a certain point. Thereby, their validity also preconceives the strict usage of their terminology, which, however, just like in all the related cases of human inventions, is considered to reach up to a certain point of theological accuracy. The possibility of falsifiability is not excluded and thus theological realism preserves its integrity, since it defines the way in which human consciousness will be prepared for self-adjustments and reconstructions. Here, a crucial view of Christian tradition arises: any theological term that is expressed is clearly a product of the human consciousness, but mainly draws its definition from divine irradiations. And the related method of its descriptive – cognitive extent is determined by the fact that human perceives these irradiations or participates to their manifestations to a limited extend. Moreover, they should also pass through the processes both of experience and the ecclesiastic life. So, here, the relevance of human capabilities, which are asked also in deep interpretation to limit themselves, is highlighted. It is also considered that they are highly utilized only when human highly understands their content. This awareness is believed that should be continuous and therefore excludes –useless and pessimistic– agnosticism. It permanently activates for new attempts, but on the same ontological and gnoseological scale. The Christian theologian believes, indeed, that the opposite happens with Barlaam and Akindynos. Actually he denounces them for misrepresentation Areopagite's words and for redirection the doctrinal issues to a different conceptual and semantic context of the one that the Christian tradition has formed. Obviously what he means is that these two theologians believe that their views are absolute accurate and their criterion is that they themselves utilize human logic ability broadly. I.e. he indirectly accuses them of being arrogance, or at least of exceeding the proper measures, which changes the dialectical relation between God and human. And measures means understanding the range of human research and reasoning formations, both per se and in relation to the realities to which they refer.

The misrepresentation of Pseudo-Dionysius by Akindynos

In order to confirm his previous thoughts with a specific example, Gr. Palamas points out that Akindynos in a simple reasoning and without self-control criteria misinterprets Pseudo-Dionysius in many cases. For instance, he highlights the case in which his opponent claims that in Areopagite's works is not mentioned the expression *ένώσεις και διακρίσεις θείας*, but *ήνωσθαι και διακεκρίσθαι τὰ θεία*. At this point, the usage of the wording receives an extremely important orientation and reflects how the obscure nature of the nouns differs from the specific one of the verbs, which declares special choices – actions. In the same way, Akindynos also argues that God acts, but he has no energy. Obviously, his intention is not to

double him. The result however for the hesychast theologian is inevitable regarding the ontological formations: those who believe or argue for the same thing, in fact they believe that the divine energies are created beings.¹⁹ Therefore, by extending his view we would underline that under such an aspect the energies lose their divine ontological idiom or at least they are relegated regarding its possession. They are not considered to be ways of expression/appearance of the divine essence, but they are defined by its energy manifestation. Meaning, they appear like products of the action of the energy. And actually, such dependence emerges, although according to the Christian teaching they are not hierarchically inferior to the essence. From any point of view, this is God himself, as an internal non-static condition and as a perspective for an *ad extra* direction, without even the slightest differentiation as regards to what he has brought to the fore in its area from his self-founding condition. This falsification is obviously regarded by Gr. Palamas to be deliberate and it is based on Akindynos' intention to strengthen the views with which he argues, without taking into consideration the challenges that he causes. By making this choice, however, he is excluded once again from the Eastern Christian tradition and moves toward epistemological principles that he himself formed at will.

We should underline that the difference between the two expressions is ontologically significant and Gr. Palamas is going to deal with it in his forthcoming critical argumentation. Akindynos' expression puts God, directly regarding the energy and indirectly regarding the essence, also in the place of an inferior and not only of an energetic factor. That means a part of God is obliged, on one side, to obey a certain necessity, which comes from him, and, on the other, he is asked to complete it. The verb forms *ἠνώσθαι* and *διακεκρίσθαι* bring to the fore a God who, despite the fact that he is an active reality, receives the conditions that they signify and which refer to mandatory internal accidents of the essence. Expanding this reasoning, it is not possible for God to manifest himself. He can only manifest what he possesses *a priori* and, therefore, he constantly faces the normativity that he himself sets. Nouns are more precise concerning the necessary and initial nature that they define, while verbs, since they represent energy, refer to a somehow development within God.²⁰

¹⁹ Cf. *Περὶ θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως* 6, 73.6-14: *Και τοῖς τοιούτοις λήροις παρασύρων τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑπεξάγει καταβραχὺ τοὺς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ παραγομένους εἰς τὰ κτίσματα νομίζεις τὰς θείας ἐνεργείας.* Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, 644c-d.

²⁰ We have to further mention that at this point a broader syntactic-grammatical issue emerges regarding the relation between a common noun, which has a clear priority, and an attribute. Origen writes the following: *Ἐν τοῖς τόποις τοῖς ἔχουσι συζυγίαν προσηγοριῶν και κατηγορημάτων, προϋφίστασθαι τὰ τυγχάνοντα τῶν προσηγοριῶν, και ἐπιγίνεσθαι τὰ κατηγορήματα παρὰ τὰς προσηγορίας· και προσηγορίαν μὲν ἔχουσαν κατηγορημὰ φασιν, οἷον τὴν φρόνησιν, κατηγορημα δὲ εἶναι*

The mystical and the evidential feature of theology

According to the previous thoughts about Pseudo-Dionysius, it is clear that Gr. Palamas accepts –or for methodological reasons, seems to accept– all the views of his furthest predecessor in key points of theology. Thus, considering a careful reading of his phraseology, he removes from his own point of view the possibility of originality. Consistent with the above, he accepts without question the ontologically real and the methodologically obligatory distinction regarding the two types of theology proposed by Areopagite. In its content, he meets precise delimitations regarding gnoseology and, consequently, ontology. Based on this distinction, it is pointed out that some theological issues are mystical and esoteric and some others are evidential and can be rational confirmed. This is analogous to the distinction that exists between apophatic and affirmative theologies, which are formed by the same body and refer to the same reality in a different way. The first is found at the level of the unknown and regarding the human consciousness functions mystagogically, i.e. in a somehow intuitive and with vision manner, which exceeds, both qualitatively and regarding their extent, even the greatest mental schemata with worldly orientation. It is located in a perpetual detection of the divine mystery, which is revealed as the unmeasured that permanently needs to be captured, continually beyond the upper limits of its capabilities. This is however a kind of agnosia that does not lead to absolute agnosticism, which is confirmed by the second theological view. More specifically, the affirmative is gnostically expressed and has the ability to use philosophical material or the rules and the processes of both the independent and the applied typical and dialectical logic. Obviously here the philosophical method, which transforms into theological, is really important to the argumentation regarding God's creative manifestations, without however abolishing the boundaries between the two worlds. In other words, this is physical theology, which takes its theoretical reasons exclusively from the divine immanence.

We should mention that between these two theoretical levels, there is no contradiction but difference and complementarity concerning, however, exclusively human's approach and understanding of God's presence. Furthermore, this dis-

τὸ φρονεῖν ὁμοίως προσηγορίαν τὴν σωφροσύνην, κατηγορήμα τὸ σωφρονεῖν καὶ προϋφίστασθαι φασὶ τὴν φρόνησιν, εἴτ' ἐπιγίνεσθαι κατηγορήμα, ἀπὸ φρονήσεως τὸ φρονεῖν (see *Ἐκ τοῦ Γ' τόμου τῶν εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν*, 88b-c). Under this reasoning, we would say that God, since he has energy, he acts, since he has unity, he is united and since he has distinction, he is distinguished. The common noun (in this case the noun) by its expression clearly excludes the development. The attribute as a verb that shows a specific condition of its factor, only shows the way of the externalization of an already existing property. Finally, we should mention that common noun, energy, union, distinction –as well as any other belongs to their category– belong all together and without hierarchy to all three persons of the Holy Trinity.

inction brings directly to the fore the issue of the strict cognitive impressions, i.e. the range of human consciousness during its metaphysical references, precluding in this way a rational construction and, basically re-construction of the self-founded divine world of the Holy Trinity.²¹ Any constructions or reconstructions made are related to the (self-) reconstructions of human consciousness, since there is a reduction to intangible, on which it permanently keeps a state of waiting. It has to move exclusively with assumptions and probabilities, and not certainties. So, it has to define itself based on the skeptical criterion. From this point onwards the matter is necessary to be redirected to the processing of the concepts *κτιστόν* and *ἄκτιστον*, in order the cognitive delimitations to get their causes from the necessary ontological guarantees, which are their requirements and acceptable exactly as such. This is a priority that is inviolable in Christian teaching and sets aside any potential idealism, absolutization or at least priority of the concepts that the human consciousness forms toward the metaphysical and the physical reality. The Christian example of the East is clearly stated: the divine and the natural 'being' do not stay on the limits of the abilities of the human intellect. Reality exceeds the conceptual expressions and we are not able to determine to what extent this is happening. It is not limited to what human can capture. However, since man is considered to have a dynamic direction toward improving, we would support the view that both his cognitive limits and the system of concepts that he forms are constantly increasing. And this system is actually permanently open to new perspectives and not complete. If we study Areopagite's treatise *De divinis nominibus*, we will easily confirm this openness.

Conclusion

According to what we studied, we come to the following views:

A] Gr. Palamas forms his argumentation both as a theologian and as a historian of theology. In both cases, he moves toward the direction that Eastern Christianity has formulated, referring selectively to some of its greatest personalities. The fact that he does not mention not even by name his previous and known for their Christian quality thinkers, such as Nicholas of Methone and George

²¹ Cf. *Περί θείας ενώσεως και διακρίσεως* 5, 72.6-11. Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *Επιστολή 9 Τίτω ιεράρχη*, 1105d. N. Nisiotis (1986) 93-107. We should mention that in mystical theology the term 'Metaphysics' is not absolutely right and is used instead of 'Henology', a term that describes a superlative singular state, which is not accessible to any kind of human reference. This term is also used for the relevant theories of the Neoplatonic School, which refer both to the supreme Principle, i.e. One – Good, and his appearances – powers, i.e. the henads. See for instance the third book of Proclus' treatise *Platonic Theology*, the "gospel" of Neoplatonic polytheism. Cf. R. Schürmann (1982) 331-350.

Pachymeres, raises questions. Either way, they are both 'legally' included in what we could define as Areopagite's tradition.

B] Regarding the field of gnoseology, we believe that the Byzantine theologian has some similarities to Plato and, especially, the Neoplatonic philosophers, with the emphasis focused on the determination of human intellectual activities by the divine irradiations. Certainly the starting points between Christian and ethnic theology – philosophy differ, since for the first the permanent criterion for absolutely valid references is the person of Jesus Christ.

C] Just like in other of his treatises, the hesychast theologian, by bringing to the fore Areopagite's writings, highlights their diachronically important role in the formation of Christian theology. Further examples can be considered his treatises: a) *Περὶ Θείων ενεργειῶν και της κατ' αυτὰς μεθέξεως* and b) *Περὶ Θείας και Θεοποιού μεθέξεως*, which are included in his combined attempt regarding the understanding – utilization of Pseudo-Dionysius in new theological times. In our view, the reference to these writings of the fifth century aims to highlight how the integrity of Christian teaching maintains inviolable, despite resorting to the selection of the expressive ways or even syllogistic forms from other worldviews.

D] Although few details are presented to our previous study, Gr. Palamas seems to have good awareness of what describes the meeting between theology and the criteria of the philosophical logic, regarding how the teaching of Eastern Christianity is formed.

E] We should finally mention that in the rest of his treatise, Gr. Palamas attempts, using a very extensive argumentation, to highlight both the common ground and the particularities that compose the divine unions and distinctions, in order, on the one side, to keep divine transcendence undiminished and, on the other, to make possible the creation of natural world to happen.

F] Highly necessary would be to have Barlaam's and Akindynos' full texts, in order to ensure more objective readings regarding their argumentation.

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