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Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century: Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy

JOHN MEYENDORFF

The increasingly numerous, and often excellent, studies of Eastern Christian monastic spirituality seldom refer to any significant Athonite authors before the last decades of the thirteenth century. It appears that, since the time when the first hermits settled on the Holy Mountain and, in spite of the creation of the first great cenobitic monasteries in the tenth century, Athonite monks remained rather uninvolved in literary activities. Together with the vast majority of their brothers and sisters in other monastic centers of the Byzantine world, they accepted, as permanent criterion of asceticism and spirituality, the legacy received from the early Christian monastic traditions of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and the Constantinopolitan Stoudios. The predominantly rural recruitment of the Athonite communities and their remoteness from major urban centers were not conducive to intellectual creativity. Their isolation was, in fact, deliberately sought and was protected by the imperially approved status of the Holy Mountain.

Several factors contributed to the sudden and much greater visibility acquired by Mount Athos in the late thirteenth century and its central role in events of the fourteenth. First of all, the Athonite republic was the only major Byzantine monastic center that survived, practically untouched, the Turkish conquest of Asia Minor, the Latin occupation of many Byzantine territories in Europe, and the Slavic advances in the Balkans. As a result, it acquired the prestige of uniqueness and began attracting numerous monks not only from the capital but also from the South Slavic countries (St. Sava of Serbia, Cyprian of Kiev), the Middle East (St. Gregory of Sinai), and particularly from Thes-

salonica, which had become politically, socially, and intellectually a center rivaling the importance of Constantinople.

The presence on Mount Athos of so many influential figures was in itself sufficient to raise its social prestige. Furthermore, such events as the Union of Lyons and its aftermath, in which Athonite communities were directly involved, the conquests of the Serbian tsar Stephen Dušan, the social upheavals in Thessalonica, or the civil wars opposing members of the Palaiologan family made it impossible for the Holy Mountain to maintain its former aloofness from the world around it. Its relative independence, its influence with the people, its prestige among the Orthodox Slavs, and the economic leverage provided by its landholdings made it inevitable for the monastic community to assume an important role in shaping the social and intellectual issues of the day.

My purpose here, however, is not to give a history of Mount Athos in the fourteenth century but to discuss briefly the movement which, at the time, was certainly the most influential expression of Athonite spirituality: the movement known as "hesychasm" or "Palamism." Publications on the subject are not lacking,¹ but opinions continue to

¹For the period 1959–72, D. Stiernon lists 303 titles of scholarly publications related to Palamism ("Bulletin sur le Palamisme," *REB* 30 [1972], 231–341). Their number has more than doubled since. Most valuable are publications of texts. In the last decades, the principal writings of the major protagonists of the Palamite controversy have been published, including most writings of Gregory Palamas himself (J. Meyendorff, ed., *Défense des saints hésychastes: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*, 2nd ed. [Louvain, 1971], 2 vols.; P. Khrestou et al., eds., *Παλαμά Συγγράμματα*, 3 vols. [Thessaloniki, 1962–70]); of his disciples, Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (*Λόγοι και όμιλάι*, ed. P. Pseutogas [Thessaloniki, 1981]; *Δογματικά έργα*, ed. D. Kaimakes [Thessaloniki, 1983]; *Άγιολογικά έργα*, ed. D. Tsames [Thessaloniki, 1985]), Joseph Kalothetos (*Συγγράμματα*, ed. D.

differ as to the movement's true significance, relation to patristic theology, place in the Byzantine intellectual tradition, and legacy to the subsequent history of Eastern Europe. Whether or not a consensus can be reached, it is useful to discuss the subject once more, during a symposium on Mount Athos.

In order to initiate such a discussion, a few observations must be made in two distinct spheres: the historical and cultural importance of the Palamite victory in 1347–51, and the more technical issue of the "originality," or "novelty," of Palamite theology itself.

I. THE PALAMITE VICTORY: SIGNIFICANCE AND CONSEQUENCES

Acute, and sometimes passionate, interest in the controversies that occurred in Byzantium in the fourteenth century is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is connected with better acquaintance with the content of manuscript libraries and the discovery that a large proportion of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts contain documents connected with those controversies. Historians have recognized that important issues were involved—important at least in terms of what that particular period of Byzantine intellectual history actually left to posterity.

What is rather unfortunate, however, is that the discovery was made within the context of confessional polemics. The entire "dossier palamite" was studied for the first time by the late French Assumptionist Martin Jugie.² But Jugie's scholarship was coupled with avowed and unabashed polemical concerns, a combination that was quite usual

Tsames [Thessaloniki, 1980]), and David Dishypatos (Λόγος κατὰ Βασιλαῖμ και Ἀκινδύνου, ed. D. Tsames [Thessaloniki, 1973]); and of the anti-Palamites Barlaam the Calabrian (cf. particularly G. Schirò, ed., *Barlaam Epistole greche* [Palermo, 1954] and R. E. Sinkewicz, "The Solutions Addressed to George Lapithes by Barlaam the Calabrian," *MedSt* 43 [1981], 151–217), Gregory Akindynos (A. C. Hero, ed., *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, DOT 7/CFHB 21 [Washington, D.C., 1983]), and Nikephoros Gregoras (H. V. Beyer, ed., *Nikephoros Gregoras Antirrhētika I. Einleitung, Textausgabe, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen*, WByzSt 12 [Vienna, 1976]). This listing of major publications does not include shorter texts, sometimes quite important historically.

²Cf. particularly vols. 1–2 of Jugie's monumental work, written in beautiful and heavily "gallicized" Latin: *Theologia dogmatica christianorum orientaliū ab Ecclesia catholica dissidentium* (Paris, 1926–33). His more easily accessible articles "Palamas, Grégoire" and "Palamite, controverse" are in *DTC* 11 (1932), cols. 1735–1818. Jugie's documentation was assembled earlier under the direction of that other "father" of 20th-century Byzantine studies, Msgr. Louis Petit.

among ecclesiastics in the Post-Reformation period. His goal was to show that a "schismatic" church, deprived of the guidance of the Roman magisterium and subjected to imperial caesaropapism, could only lead to doctrinal incoherence. The approval of Palamite doctrines by a series of councils was clear proof of that.

Although all historians profited from the lists of unpublished materials and other evidence provided in Jugie's work, his polemical attitude has been largely abandoned. Nevertheless, criticism of Palamite theology remains strong among those who accept as self-evident some basic presuppositions of medieval Latin scholasticism.³ This criticism, on the other hand, provokes a defensive reaction on the part of convinced Palamites, not always aware of problems that might, at least in the minds of honest critics, have some legitimacy and require articulate answers. Even those historians who would normally not take sides in technical theological debates find themselves somehow conditioned by the continuous polemics, because so much of the secondary literature on the issue is already influenced by it.

In order to make progress, the debate must transcend slogans and terminological ambiguities, so that the personalities and events of the fourteenth century might be understood in their proper context and not in the light of later ideological options.

(a) The first of such ambiguities concerns the very term *hesychasm*, which is so often used in connection with the events of the fourteenth century and is taken to signify, exclusively, the supposedly novel form of spirituality introduced by Athosite monks and defended by Palamas and his disciples. In reality, the terms *hesychia* (ἡσυχία) and *hesychasts* (ἡσυχασταί) were part of the standard terminology used to designate the life of contemplative hermits.⁴ The idea that a *new* movement called "hesychasm" had begun on Mount Athos in the fourteenth century may have originated from one of the first hagiographic documents of that period to be studied by modern historians: the *Vita* of St. Gregory the Sinaite (d. 1346) by Patriarch Kallistos (1350–53, 1354–63). According to Kallistos, Gregory, upon arriving on Athos from Sinai, found no

³See, e.g., the authors who contributed the editorial and several articles to *Istina* 19 (1974), 257–349.

⁴See J. Meyendorff, "Is 'Hesychasm' the Right Word? Remarks on Religious Ideology in the Fourteenth Century," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983) (= *Okeanos, Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko*), 447–48.

help in his search for “*hesychia*, or the guarding of the intellect and contemplation.” As a result, he pursued his goal on his own, and eventually revived the tradition on Mount Athos.⁵ The text allowed many authors to describe fourteenth-century Byzantine hesychasm as a “Sinaite spirituality.”⁶ Indeed, both the terminology and the essence of hesychasm were known on Sinai since the great St. John Klimakos, abbot of Sinai (seventh century),⁷ and must have been preserved in later centuries. But the statement of Kallistos, according to which hesychasm was unknown on Athos in the fourteenth century, is certainly a hagiographic cliché intended to enhance the Sinaite’s role as a leader of spirituality in his time. In any case, neither Gregory Palamas nor any other author supported the contention of Kallistos that hesychasm came to Athos from Sinai through the exclusive mediation of Gregory.⁸ On the contrary, Palamas specifically mentions other names as the great masters of hesychast tradition in the contemporary Byzantine world: Patriarch Athanasios (1289–93, 1303–9), Theoleptos of Philadelphia (d. before 1327) and his Athonite teacher Nikephoros the Hesychast, as well as several other eminent monks of the fourteenth century, who lived not on Sinai but on the Mount of St. Auxentios⁹ near Chalcedon, across the Bosphoros from Constantinople.

Therefore, when Palamas defended the “hesychasts,” his aim was not to defend an imported novelty but to justify what he understood to be well-known and revered tradition, accepted within the mainstream of the Byzantine Church and society. It was his theological formulations—not hesychasm as such—that provoked some opposition. Indeed, the main adversary of Palamas, Gregory Akindynos, wrote about “divine hesy-

chasts,”¹⁰ and some of the disciples of Theoleptos of Philadelphia, whom Palamas considered as his master, became anti-Palamites, although they too claimed to represent the hesychast tradition.¹¹

It is true, of course, that the adversaries of Palamas—Barlaam the Calabrian, Akindynos, and Nikephoros Gregoras—occasionally identified, if not hesychasm in general, at least the ideology defended by Palamas, with sectarian Messalianism or Bogomilism. These were actually attempts at establishing guilt by association¹²—attempts made easier by the fact that Messalian or Bogomil groups did exist within unsophisticated, popular Athonite monasticism and in popular circles in general. These were “charismatic” groups, claiming to see the essence of God with their physical eyes, but also rejecting the sacraments, the institutional church, and the veneration of icons, and preaching extreme asceticism. That Palamas had discussions with such people, particularly on Mount Papikion in Macedonia, is mentioned by his biographer Philotheos.¹³ But it is clear that the contacts between Messalians and hesychasts were very much a matter of direct competition between Orthodox traditionalists and “Bogomil” leaders. Both groups were moving and preaching in similar popular circles. Be that as it may, Palamas and the Palamites were not esoteric or anti-institutional sectarians. On the contrary, the very “institutional,” leading role within the Church and within society that they assumed in Byzantium, and much beyond the limits of the empire, was the real result of their victory.

(b) Another major issue raised in connection with the role of the Athonite monks in the events of the fourteenth century is their political alliance with John Kantakouzenos, whose continued support assured the victory of Palamas and his disciples. This created another simplified scheme to explain the events. It was assumed that there was common interest between the landowning aristoc-

⁵*Vita*, ed. I. Pomjalovski, *St. Petersburg, Istoriko-filologicheskij fakul'tet, Zapiski* 35 (1896), 1–64; here para. 7.

⁶This was apparently started by J. Bois, “Grégoire le Sinaïte et l'hésychasme à l'Athos au XIV^e siècle,” *EO* 5 (1901), 68–75.

⁷Ἰησοῦ μνήμη κολληθῆτω τῇ πνοῇ σου καὶ τότε γνώση ἡσυχίας ὀφέλειαν (Step 27, PG 88, col. 1112C, etc.).

⁸In his *Vita* of Palamas, Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos mentions a “Gregory the Great” (Γρηγόριος ὁ πᾶν) among the spiritual directors of Palamas at the Skete of Glossia on Mount Athos (PG 151, col. 568B; ed. Tsames, *Ἀγιολογικὰ ἔργα*, 450). Attempts have been made to identify this Gregory with St. Gregory of Sinai; see lately D. Balfour, “Was St. Gregory Palamas St. Gregory the Sinaïte’s Pupil?” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 28 (1984), 115–30. This would not imply, however, an exclusive role of the Sinaïte in restoring hesychasm on Mount Athos.

⁹Cf. J. Meyendorff, *Défense*, xli–xlii; idem, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 2nd ed. (London–New York, 1974), 17–26.

¹⁰Letter 8 to Barlaam, ed. Hero, 26–27.

¹¹This is particularly the case of the abbess Eulogia Choumnaina, whose correspondence with her father confessor was published by A. Hero, *A Woman’s Quest for Spiritual Guidance: The Correspondence of Princess Irene Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina* (Brookline, Mass., 1987).

¹²Barlaam even wrote a treatise “Against Messalians” (Κατὰ Μασσαλιανῶν), meaning the Palamites, which is not preserved but is quoted profusely in its refutation by Palamas. For Gregoras, see his *Antirrhētika I* (ed. Beyer, 145–49). Akindynos accuses Palamas (and Isidore Boukheiras, future patriarch) of having venerated a Bogomil woman named Porinè as a prophetess (Letter 52, ed. Hero, 222–24, 402–3).

¹³PG 151, col. 562D; ed. Tsames, 441–42.

racy, represented by Kantakouzenos, and the monks, defenders of monastic properties. It appears, however, that in order to substantiate such a scheme fully one would have to establish all the dimensions of the so-called "Zealot" rebellion in Thessalonica. The rebellion was anti-Kantakouzenist, but did it have religious implications as well? Did the "Zealots" support Hyakinthos, the anti-Kantakouzenist Cypriot, who became metropolitan of Thessalonica in 1345, for theological reasons? That the political and religious conflicts of the time were closely intertwined is, of course, beyond dispute. However, it also remains clear that there were anti-Palamites in the camp of Kantakouzenos,¹⁴ whereas Alexis Apokaukos, the *meḡas doux*, who, together with Patriarch John Kalekas, was the major opponent of Kantakouzenos, showed sympathy for Palamas, in spite of their political differences.¹⁵

The theological controversy between Palamites and anti-Palamites therefore cannot be reduced to a social conflict. Most of the participants, on both sides, were members of the aristocratic and intellectual elite, within which John Kantakouzenos enjoyed much prestige and to which he distributed favors. Once he took power in 1347, only isolated individuals like Nikephoros Gregoras or deliberate "latinophrones" like Demetrios Kydones remained opposed to Palamism. This opposition did not prevent some of them, particularly Kydones, from continuing to play an important political role at the imperial court.

The alliance between Kantakouzenos and the monks did have a clear ideological and practical basis in the area of foreign policy. As the Turks continued their advance, as the Serbians and Bulgarians practically dominated the Balkans, and as the Venetians and Genoese controlled navigation and commerce within Constantinople itself, the power of the emperor was gradually becoming nominal. It was further weakened by the internal struggles between members of the dynasty. The patriarchate, however, was able to keep its prestige and influence, particularly throughout the Orthodox world. The patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, heading small minorities of Orthodox "Melkites" in the Middle East, were practically

dependent on Constantinople, both intellectually and materially. The ecumenical patriarchate continued to be respected by the Balkan churches, within the independent patriarchates of Bulgaria and Serbia, but particularly in Russia, where the metropolitan of "Kiev and all the Rus" continued to be appointed from Constantinople.

A trend that began in the late thirteenth century was leading to a sort of monastic monopoly in the patriarchate. Whereas John Kalekas, the patriarch who opposed Palamas in 1341–47, had apparently no monastic past or strong monastic connections, the end of the civil war and the victory of the Palamites marked the beginning of an uninterrupted series of monastic, almost exclusively Athonite, personalities on the patriarchal throne: Isidoros (1347–50), Philotheos Kokkinos (1353–54, 1364–76), Kallistos (1350–53, 1354–63), Neilos (1379–88), Anthony (1389–90, 1391–97).¹⁶ The conflict between Philotheos and Kallistos, both Athonites and Palamites, on the still continuing political issue of loyalty to the Palaiologan dynasty, did not prevent all those patriarchs from sharing with Kantakouzenos an overall ecclesiastical and political ideology, which included at least the following three aspects:

(a) Constantinople, the "New Rome," was to maintain its position as the universal center of Orthodox christendom. In the past this tradition of Roman universality was, most explicitly, maintained by the empire itself. With the desperate weakening of imperial political structures, the mission had to be picked up by the Church. This trend, which would continue later in the form of an "ethnarchy" under centuries of Ottoman rule, can, in a broad sense, be compared with the consequences of the imperial disintegration in the West after the fifth century, when the papacy gradually assumed the function of preserving a perennial *Romanitas*.

Writing in 1370 and quoting almost verbatim from the *Epanagoge* of the ninth century, but emphasizing even more the universality of the patriarchate, Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos defined the functions of the see of Constantinople in terms that no pope would disavow:

Since God has appointed Our Humility as leader (προστάτην) of all Christians found anywhere in the inhabited earth, as solicitor and guardian of their souls, all of them depend on me (πάντες εἰς ἐμὲ ἀνά-

¹⁴Cf. G. Weiss, *Joannes Kantakouzenos, Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch, in der Gesellschaftsentwicklung von Byzanz im 14. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 121 and passim.

¹⁵The attitude of Apokaukos is clearly shown in the correspondence of Akindynos (cf. Letter 24, ed. Hero, and comm., p. 346). In all his writings, Palamas mentions Apokaukos with respect and considers Patriarch John Kalekas as his real enemy.

¹⁶For the backgrounds of patriarchs in this period, see F. Tinnefeld, "Faktoren des Aufstieges zur Patriarchenwürde im späten Byzanz," *JÖB* 36 (1986), 89–114.

κείνται),¹⁷ the father and teacher of them all. If it were possible, therefore, it would have been my duty to walk everywhere on earth through the cities and countries and to teach there the Word of God. I would have had to do so unflinchingly, since this is my duty. However, since it is beyond the possibility of one weak and mightless man to walk around the entire inhabited earth, Our Humility chooses the best among men, the most eminent in virtue, establishes and ordains them as pastors, teachers, and high priests, and sends them to the ends of the universe . . . so that each one, in the country and place that was appointed for him, enjoys territorial rights, an episcopal chair, and all the rights of Our Humility.¹⁸

Similarly, Kallistos, the colleague and competitor of Philotheos, wrote in equally strong terms to St. Theodosios of Trnovo and other Bulgarian hesychast monks. The ecumenical patriarch, according to Kallistos, “judges, straightens out, confirms, and authenticates” the judgments of the other ancient patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem; so much more is he the “lord” (κύριος) of the younger church of Bulgaria.¹⁹

Of course, such claims could not be supported in the case of Constantinople—as they were in the case of Rome—by scriptural references such as the words addressed by Jesus to the apostle Peter. There is no hesitation in the minds of Byzantine patriarchs of the fourteenth century as to the real basis of Constantinople’s primacy: it is the old imperial idea, for which they want to be responsible now that no really credible claim could be uttered by the emperors themselves. In his famous, and frequently quoted, reply to the grand prince Vasily Dimitrievich of Moscow (1393), Patriarch Anthony proclaims that the liturgical commemoration of the Byzantine emperor must continue in Russia, because “he is elected emperor (χειροτονεῖται βασιλεύς) and autocrat of the *Romans*, that is, of *all Christians*; and in every place and by every patriarch, metropolitan, and bishop, the name of the emperor is commemorated wherever there are Christians. . . . For Christians, it is not possible to have a Church and not to have an emperor.”²⁰

There is no doubt that such ideas were cherished and cultivated most decidedly and explicitly

in the circle of Kantakouzenos, who personally took an active part in settling ecclesiastical affairs in as distant areas as Russia,²¹ and was always careful in approaching the issue of church union within the context of universality, demanding the participation of all regional churches in an eventual ecumenical council.²²

Was this insistence on universality inherent also in the spirit that prevailed in the circle of Palamas and his Athonite disciples? All one can say is that Mount Athos had become a major meeting point of cultures, from where ideas traveled throughout the Orthodox world, and where major figures like St. Sava of Serbia, like Theodosios and Euthymios of Trnovo, as well as Cyprian, metropolitan of Kiev, had received their spiritual and intellectual training. It is, therefore, through an extended network of monastic contacts that a new solidarity of a religious and ideological nature was tying together an Eastern Christian *oikoumene*. The network was ideologically united: it was promoting monastic revivals both among Southern Slavs and Russians, and giving context and reality to what is generally called “the second,” South Slavic (or actually Byzantine) period of intensive influence in Eastern Europe.²³ It appears that, on this point, the takeover of the patriarchate of Constantinople by the Athonite monastic party after 1347 left an indelible impact upon an area much larger than the narrow limits of the Byzantine Empire itself.

(b) The second, and related, element in the ideology that prevailed in the monastic party was its resistance to the political schemes, which, since the reign of Michael VIII, conditioned church union negotiations with the Latin West. This resistance was used by opponents to create for the monks a reputation of obscurantism, as if they were opposed not only to church union but also to all forms of free thought and progressive civilization. This image was cultivated first in the heat of polemics by some intellectuals like Nikephoros Gregoras and, in a more subtle and sophisticated way, by Demetrios Kydones. It was further enhanced after the fall of Byzantium, when a dramatic interruption of culture and learning led Athonite mo-

¹⁷The *Epanagoge*, in a parallel text, describes the “pentarchy” of patriarchs: regional bishops “depend on their patriarch” (τῷ οἰκείῳ πατριάρχει ἀνάκεινται), while the patriarch of Constantinople possesses a right of hearing appeals on issues unresolved locally (II, 9–10; Zepos, *Jus*, IV, p. 183). For Philotheos, the ecumenical patriarch possesses a universal jurisdiction in a direct way.

¹⁸F. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi*, 6 vols. (Vienna, 1860–90) (hereafter MM), I, 521.

¹⁹Ibid., 436–39.

²⁰Ibid., II, 188–92.

²¹Cf. his correspondence with Russian princes, discussed in J. Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia* (London-New York, 1981), 155, 280–82.

²²Cf. below, note 25.

²³It is impossible to cite here all the relevant secondary literature. But see especially the work of G. M. Prokhorov (particularly *Povesť o Mityae, Rus’ i Vizantiya v epokhu Kulikovskoi bitvy* [Leningrad, 1978], with earlier bibliography); cf. also Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, 96–118.

nasticism to a defensive, and frequently unenlightened, struggle for identity and survival.

However, as often happens in history, disciples tend to simplify and vulgarize the teachings of their masters. Not all Augustinians are faithful to Augustine in every way, and not all Calvinists are consistent with Calvin. The same can be said of Palamas and the later Palamites.

In the fourteenth century neither Palamas himself, nor his immediate friends, were opposed to serious attempts at bridging the gap between eastern and western christendom, and they even proposed a concrete plan to achieve that goal: convening an ecumenical council of union. The proposal was made by Kantakouzenos, almost immediately after his assuming power in 1347, through an ambassador, Nicholas Sigeros, who traveled to Avignon,²⁴ and presented in an even more solemn way at a special meeting with the papal legate Paul twenty years later in 1367.²⁵ The project had serious implications in terms of recognizing the ecclesial reality of the contemporary West. Normally, in strict Orthodox (or Roman Catholic) ecclesiology, one does not hold a council with heretics on an equal footing. Heretics are called in only as defendants. Kantakouzenos, meanwhile, with the full approval of Patriarch Philotheos, was thinking of a council aiming to “unite the church” (ἐνωθῆναι τὴν ἐκκλησίαν) at which East and West would meet “in friendship and brotherhood” (φιλικῶς καὶ ἀδελφικῶς).²⁶ He did not doubt the full orthodoxy of the Greek position and was persuaded that a free debate would establish this. In his mind the debate required full representation of all Orthodox churches, even the “distant ones” (Russia, Trebizond, Alania, Zecchia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Serbia . . .).²⁷ This project was not only followed up by Philotheos, who sent appropriate invitations to the churches,²⁸ but remained on the program of the hesychast “network.” Metropolitan Cyprian of Kiev, a close collaborator of Philotheos (οἰκειῶς καλόγηρος), acting as a “friend” of the Polish king Jagiello,²⁹ would reiterate the proposal for an ecumenical council as late as 1397.

²⁴ Kantakouzenos, *Hist.* IV, 9, Bonn ed., III, 58–60.

²⁵ On this episode, see J. Meyendorff, “Projets de concile oecuménique en 1367: Un dialogue inédit entre Jean Cantacuzène et le légat Paul,” *DOP* 14 (1960), 149–77 (rpr. in idem, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* [London, 1974]).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20, 25, lines 258, 315.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10, lines 129–33.

²⁸ See his letter of invitation addressed to the archbishop of Ohrid: *MM*, I, 491–93.

²⁹ Φίλος σου πολὺς ἔστιν ὁ κράλης, writes Patriarch Anthony to Cyprian (*MM*, II, 283). A former grand prince of Lithuania,

Such projects were in no way inconsistent with the attitude of Palamas himself who, even during the hard times of the civil war of 1341–47, attempted contacts with the Hospitalers of Rhodes and the Genoese of Galata.³⁰ It would be quite wrong, therefore, to caricaturize the Palamites as systematic and fanatical anti-Latins, and their adversaries as enlightened ecumenists. Some anti-Palamites did indeed become “latinophrones,” but more often they were known as anti-Latin polemicists. This is the case of Akindynos, the Cypriot George Lapithes, and Nikephoros Gregoras. Meanwhile, the Palamite leadership seems to have been ready for honest dialogue in conditions of fairness and mutual respect. Their idea of a council of union, initially rejected by the popes, would be revived following the victory of the Western “conciliarists” at the Council of Constance (1414–18).

(c) Did the monastic ideology include a prescription, or at least a prescribed attitude, toward the overwhelming reality of the day: the Ottoman advance and progressive takeover of the remnants of the empire? This does not seem to have been the case. All Byzantines were fearful of what was to come and were looking for ways to avoid it. However, the various antagonistic groups had developed somewhat different priorities. There were intellectuals who, in spite of their patriotism and cultural roots in Hellenism, found it preferable to emigrate to Italy. There were politicians, particularly around the throne of the Palaiologi, with plans aimed at obtaining Western help, and who were ready to pay the price in terms of religious compromise or even capitulation before the Latin and papal positions. We have noted earlier how committed the hesychast patriarchate of the fourteenth century had become to the old Byzantine imperial idea. Of course, the idea was already utopian, but it had a strongly religious basis: the *oikoumene* of Philotheos Kokkinos was an Orthodox *oikoumene*, and it deserved being defended against the Turks only as long as it was Orthodox. No one, of course, would explicitly foretell its ultimate collapse, but some implicit recognition that the future might actually bring about the Ottoman conquest and, therefore, the task of Christian survival

Jagiello had become the Roman Catholic king of Poland in 1386. On Cyprian, see particularly D. Obolensky, “A *philorhomaïos anthropos*: Metropolitan Cyprian of Kiev and All Russia,” *DOP* 32 (1979), 79–88, and Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, 245–60.

³⁰ Akindynos, Letter 44, lines 70–72, ed. Hero, p. 192; comm., p. 384.

under Islamic rule, was certainly present in some minds. Kantakouzenos himself may have thought about it when he accepted his rather ill-fated alliance with Orkhan. Gregory Palamas, who, already as archbishop of Thessalonica, went through the curious episode of being taken prisoner by the Turks and spending an entire year in occupied Asia Minor, must have conceived the possibility when he wrote back to his flock, describing in relatively detached and optimistic colors the survival of Orthodox Christianity among infidels and apostates.³¹ A purely cultural or patriotic attachment of some to a moribund empire could envisage no future under the Turks at all, but such a future could be envisaged by those whose ultimate priority was the Kingdom of God.

II. PALAMITE THEOLOGY: IS IT A SERIOUS OPTION?

Having written a book on Palamas almost thirty years ago, which has been described (approvingly or disapprovingly) by critics as an apology of Palamism, the present author is not ready to go back upon his basic views expressed at that time. Indeed, the book was a justified reaction against the fact that western historians and theologians were almost universally accepting, in their judgment of Palamism, a criterion foreign to the tradition represented by him, that is, intellectual patterns taken from medieval Latin scholasticism, or, on a slightly different level, a "Gibbonian" misunderstanding of the spiritual dimensions of Byzantine society as a whole.

Of course, in order to understand the substance of Palamism, one must somewhat transcend the polemics of the fourteenth century, when the protagonists were mercilessly hurling patristic proof-texts at each other and trying to show that their adversaries were in no way different from the worst heretics of the past. The theological problems raised in the controversy cannot be solved by simply deciding that it was Akindynos who deliberately misquoted the third letter received by him from Palamas, or, on the contrary, that it was Palamas who later published his letter in an edited form.³² It is clear that the meaning of any termi-

nology depends on its context, and the history of Christian theology is too full of terminological misunderstandings—as well as of deliberate polemical distortions of an adversary's meaning—for one to be surprised by the excesses that occurred in fourteenth-century Byzantium. To his credit, Palamas himself recognized publicly, during the second session of the council of 1351, that, in his polemical writings, he may have used objectionable sentences and expressions, which are to be understood not in themselves but in the context of his formal confession of faith.³³ "Our orthodoxy is in realities, not in words," he once wrote, quoting St. Gregory of Nazianzus.³⁴

The "reality" of Palamism can actually be summarized quite simply: the Greek patristic tradition understands the Christian message as a message of "deification" (θέωσις). The assumption of humanity by the Son of God was aimed at allowing humans to "participate in divinity." However, this basic affirmation had to be compatible with the belief in an absolute transcendence of God's essence: only the three divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—possess the essence (οὐσία) of God. What "divinity," then, can be accessible to humans, who are "deified" in Christ? Since it could not be the divine essence itself, this accessible divine life is defined in Palamism by the terms "energy" or "grace." But, for Palamas, the divine energy is, indeed, real, "uncreated" divinity—not a human concept, nor a result of human subjective emotion, nor a symbolic figure of speech, but a gift by God of his own life and his own eternity to his creatures.

Such terminology is generally foreign to the Latin theological tradition, which understands salvation in more legalistic terms as "justification," as the "imputation" of the merits of Christ's sacrifice to the sinners. Medieval Latin theology speaks of a "beatific vision" of the very essence of God—but only in the afterworld—whereas the visions granted to saints and mystics in this world tend to be understood within the framework of human emotional psychology, or as "created grace."

The two traditions are different. The difference can be approached in a variety of ways. Some would say that the two models for understanding salvation-in-Christ are actually complementary, and that they began to be opposed to one another

³¹ Cf. J. Meyendorff, "Grecs, Turcs et Juifs en Asie Mineure au XIV^e siècle," *BF* 1 (1966), 211–17; and A. Philippidis-Brat, "La captivité de Palamas chez les Turcs: Dossier et commentaire," *TM* 7 (1979), 109–221.

³² On this see J. Meyendorff, "Une lettre inédite de Grégoire Palamas à Akindynos," *Theologia* 24 (1953), 3–28, rpr. in idem, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological, and Social Problems* (London, 1974); and J. S. Nadal, "La critique par Akindynos de l'herméneutique patristique de Palamas," *Istina* 19 (1974), 297–328.

³³ PG 151, col. 723C.

³⁴ Οὐ γὰρ ἐν ὀήμασιν ἡμῖν, ἀλλ' ἐν πράγμασιν ἡ εὐσέβεια: letter to Philotheos, ed. Khrestou, *Συγγράμματα*, II, 521. Other similar statements by Palamas in J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959), 143 note 79.

only as a result of the long theological and spiritual estrangement between East and West during the Middle Ages.³⁵ Others would insist that their incompatibility is total and that the controversies of the fourteenth century were about the very nature of the Christian faith, where no compromise is possible.

Be that as it may, the real issue in the debates was indeed the notion of *theōsis*, or deification, or “participation” (κοινωνία) in God’s very Being. If that participation is a participation in the *essence* of God, God ceases to be unique in his personal existence and transcendent vis-à-vis creatures. If *theōsis* is only a paraphrase to designate a psychological experience, or a figure of speech perpetuating a neo-Platonic concept within Christianity, the very significance of the famous phrase of St. Athanasios of Alexandria, affirming that “God became man, so that man might become God,” is lost. The Palamite affirmation is an antinomy. God is not limited by his transcendent essence but is also fully and personally existing *ad extra* in his energies. It is a way of affirming both divine transcendence and divine immanence (in creation, but particularly in the Incarnation and its consequences), which—in the case of God—must be held as *both true*.

It appears that today the definition of the issue in terms of a debate about *theōsis*, and not simply a terminological imbroglio, is being more widely recognized than when the literature on the subject was dominated by purely confessional considerations.³⁶

CONCLUSION

The takeover of the patriarchate of Constantinople by active and ideologically motivated leaders of Athonite monasticism, at the middle of the fourteenth century, was indeed an important event, particularly in terms of giving a greater universality to the Byzantine legacy on the eve of the fall of Byzantium itself, and also providing Byz-

antine Orthodox Christianity with stronger spiritual motivation for its survival under Ottoman rule.

One of the most positive results of the increased scholarly interest in this event in the past decades has been the publication of a large number of texts, coming from both the Palamite and the anti-Palamite camps. Actually, few of the really important writings of the period remain in manuscript.³⁷ The ready availability of those texts should help scholars to avoid quite unnecessary generalizations, such as theories about a direct influence of what is called “hesychasm” on iconography, that is, that the Palamite victory was at the origin of the entire development of what had been rather improperly called the Palaiologan “Renaissance,”³⁸ or, on the contrary, that the victory of “hesychasm” and monastic rigorism had a stifling effect on art.³⁹ Equally unconvincing is the view that Palamite theology, by supposedly reducing the Christian experience to a direct “contemplation of divine light,” destroyed the main christological basis of the veneration of icons—“the *humanity* of Christ is depictable”—and thus introduced a de facto iconoclasm.⁴⁰ Indeed, the historical manifestation of the Son of God as the man Jesus is the very foundation of Palamas’ thought about “deified” humanity. What can be said for sure, however, is that the existence of the Athonite “network” throughout the Orthodox world favored contacts and influences that resulted in remarkable works of art, closely dependent upon Constantinopolitan traditions, being commissioned in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Russia, where the wealth of local patrons allowed sometimes for more lavish spending and more daring projects than in impoverished Byzantium. In Russia such major projects and the work of artists like Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev were certainly connected with the monastic lead-

³⁷ A forthcoming fourth volume of the *Συγγράμματα* of Palamas will contain his treatises against Gregoras and, quite importantly, his homilies, of which only the second half appears in Migne, the first half being accessible exclusively in a rare edition by Sophokles Oikonomos, *Γρηγορίου Παλαμά ὁμιλίας κβ'* (Athens 1861).

³⁸ Originated by M. M. Vasič, “L’ hésychasme dans l’église et l’art des Serbes du Moyen Age,” *Recueil Th. Uspensky*, I (Paris, 1930), 110–23. This view is strongly reaffirmed in reference to the art of Theophanes the Greek (Feofan Grek) by N. K. Golizovskiy, “Zametki o Feofane Greke,” *VizVrem* 24 (1964), 139–49; “Isikhazm i russkaya zhivopis' XIV–XV vv,” *VizVrem* 29 (1968), 196–210.

³⁹ Cf., for instance, V. N. Lazarev, *Istoriya vizantiiskoy zhivopisi*, I (Moscow, 1947), 225.

⁴⁰ H. G. Beck, “Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Ikone,” *SB Münch, phil.-hist. Kl.* 7 (Munich, 1975), 40–44.

³⁵ Cf., for instance, M. A. Fahey, “Trinitarian Theology in Thomas Aquinas: One Latin Medieval Pursuit of Word and Silence,” in M. A. Fahey and J. Meyendorff, *Trinitarian Theology, East and West: St. Thomas Aquinas—St. Gregory Palamas* (Brookline, Mass., 1977), 5–23.

³⁶ Cf., for instance, A. de Halleux, “Palamisme et scolastique,” in *Revue théologique de Louvain* 4 (1973), 409–42; idem, “Palamisme et tradition,” *Irénikon* 48 (1975), 479–93; G. Barrois, “Palamism Revisited,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 19 (1975), 211–31; J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. 2. *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago, 1974), 261–70, etc.

ership, particularly Metropolitan Cyprian, as can be ascertained from contemporary texts.⁴¹

Among the many problems that still require the attention of investigative research, two issues stand out:

(a) The theological background of anti-Palamite figures like Akindynos and Nikephoros Gregoras. Indeed, the recent attention given to Barlaam the Calabrian⁴² has produced quite illuminating results. The very different background of the two other major adversaries of Palamas (Akindynos, a self-made, honest theological conservative; Gregoras, a member of the aristocratic, intellectual coterie) deserves a close look by scholars well-versed in Greek patristic thought as well as in late Byzantine intellectual history.⁴³

(b) The consequences of the Palamite victory for what can be broadly called "ecclesiology." We have discussed earlier the problem of the relationship between Athonite hesychasm and the anti-institutional and antisacramental movement known in the fourteenth century as Bogomilism or Messalianism. Clearly opposed to the latter, the Palamites were nevertheless carriers of a long-standing tradition of Eastern monasticism, which recognized that the charismatic leadership of saints enjoyed a certain spiritual autonomy, even vis-à-vis the bishops—a prophetic ministry, somewhat parallel to the established institutions of the Church.⁴⁴ The so-called "Haghioretic Tome"

(Τόμος ἁγιωρειτικὸς) of 1340, signed by the leaders of Athonite monasticism in defense of Palamas, who at that moment was accused by Barlaam before the patriarchal synod, is something of a manifesto of this monastic propheticism.⁴⁵ Of course, the practical attitude of the monks might have changed as they themselves took over the government of the Church, as happened, for instance, in the West, when the monastic reformers of Cluny turned into the "Gregorian" reformers of the papacy. Nevertheless, all the consequences of the monastic victory in the Byzantine Orthodox world deserve to be understood better than they usually are.

As witnesses to a faith understood as a personal and living experience, the monks always remembered the relative and instrumental character of institutions. This somewhat detached attitude proved useful at a time when institutions were crumbling. The empire was soon to fall. The patriarchate was to be placed in a ghetto and humiliated within the new Ottoman order. But the Holy Mountain of Athos remained, for many more centuries, a symbol of continuity and survival. Even today it seems to meet, with relative success, the more subtle and more pervading challenge of modernity. This Athonite longevity alone, clearly linked to the Palamite victory of the fourteenth century, is significant enough to show the historical importance of that victory.

⁴¹ On this issue see J. Meyendorff, "Spiritual Trends in Byzantium in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries," in P. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, IV (Princeton, 1975), 93–106; and Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, 138–44.

⁴² Cf. G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz: Der Streit um die theologische Methodik in der spätbyzantinischen Geistesgeschichte (14/15 Jh.)*, seine systematischen Grundlagen und seine historische Entwicklung (Munich, 1977), 126–50; and particularly R. E. Sinkewicz, "The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian," *MedSt* 44 (1982), 181–242.

⁴³ The recent publication of the correspondence of Akindynos and the first *Antirrhetics* of Gregoras (above, note 1) makes such inquiry possible, even while the major treatises of Akindynos against Palamas, found in the single and partly damaged Monacensis 223, await publication.

⁴⁴ Early Christian monasticism produced numerous examples of spiritual personalities claiming a "charism" of this sort. On the very nuanced attitude of St. Basil of Caesarea in the face of this phenomenon, see P. Fedwick, *The Church and the Charisma of*

Leadership (Toronto, 1979) and J. Meyendorff, "St. Basil, the Church and Charismatic Leadership" in *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1982), 197–215. The most challenging and thought-provoking example of this trend is, of course, the case of Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1022); cf. particularly Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ: St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022). Life, Spirituality, Doctrine* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1986). The existence of this trend in Eastern monasticism makes it rather unnecessary to speculate about possible Western connections, such as the one suggested by the late L. M. Clucas ("Eschatological Theory in Byzantine Hesychasm: A Parallel to Joachim da Fiore," *BZ* 70 [1977], 324–46). Obvious parallels can, of course, be established between all charismatic and eschatologic trends in Judaism and Christianity.

⁴⁵ Cf. my comments on the text of the "Tome" (PG 150, cols. 1225–36) in *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, 273–74, 350–51; Eng. trans. *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London-Crestwood, N.Y., 1974), 198–99.