



The Antinomic Method of Gregory Palamas: Between Transcendence and Immanence, God's Essence and Energy, Single and Multiple Trinity

VIKTOR ZHUKOVSKYY 

Ukrainian Catholic University, viktor@ucu.edu.ua

Abstract: The article examines the theological method of antinomy and the conceptual solution to the problem of the ontological “gap” between transcendence and immanence of the Holy Trinity in the theological thought of the outstanding Byzantine theologian of the 14th century Gregory Palamas. The article analyzes how Palamas, in his patristic teaching on the distinction between the essence and energy of the Holy Trinity, substantiates the unity, trinity, and multiplicity of divine action in the world, and how he interprets this distinction in God's nature. Particular attention is paid to biblical and patristic analysis and the significance of Palama's methodological “triangle”: apophatic, cataphatic, antinomy; his understanding of the personal dimension of the energies of the hypostases of the Trinity, and the problem of the “simplicity” of the Triune God.

Keywords: Gregory Palamas, antinomy, essence, energy, apophatic, cataphatic

In theological thought, the problem of the ontological relationship between the transcendence of the consubstantial Holy Trinity and the immanence of the multiple world created by God, which is filled with His presence, occupies an exceptional place. The correct interpretation and conceptual solution of this problem has the pivotal importance for substantiating the fundamental truths about the creation of the world and the omnipresence of God in whole world, about the nature of God's Revelation and His Providence, the importance of spiritual life for human being, and the possibility of vital communication with God. This topic is very important for understanding the ecclesiological and sacramentological truth about the Church, the anthropological and epistemological foundations of the ontology of the spiritual and ascetic Christian life, a knowledge of God, participation in God's nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4) and adoption (cf. John 1:12; Gal 3:26; 2 Cor 6:18) by the Heavenly Father. “Tension” between the absolute otherness of intratrinitarian relationships of divine hypostases in divine essence (*God in Se, ad intra, theologia*)¹ and, at the same

¹ The sphere of *theologia* considers the nature of God in the “hiddenness” of His intratrinitarian, essential being (*in Se*), beyond time, cause and purpose. The sphere of *oikonomia* is the existence of God in His “energetic” revelation (*ad extra*), actions or dynamic presence in created reality, in time and space, for a certain reason and purpose. On the apophatic dimension of God's existence in the theological thought of Gregory Palamas, see Жуковський, “Святий – ‘еретик’ Григорій Палама,” 569–592. About apophatic

time, the ontological familiarity of God in His revelation and providential presence in the world (God *pro nobis, ad extra, oikonomia*) thanks to divine grace, power and energy, is one of the central themes of theology.²

The theological explanation of the ontological “bridge” between the infinite ontological distance and, at the same time, the most intimate closeness of the Holy Trinity and a human being, between the transcendent and primordial God and the immanent and temporal reality that He fills. This is the key to understanding divine and worldly existence as an effective openness to dialogue, of mutual giving and acceptance, as opposed to the static and self-contained existence of God, the humankind and the world. Understanding these two dimensions of God’s nature is also the basis for understanding creation as dynamic harmony, mutual exchange, synergetic unity.

One of the most famous theologians of the Eastern Church, who contributed most to the solution of this fundamental problem, was Gregory Palamas³ (1296–1359). His theology of the distinction between divine essence and energy of the Holy Trinity took shape in the polemic known as the Hesychast debates.⁴ Palamas substantiated the patristic soteriology, according to which the main vocation of a human being consists in communion with the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) and personal participation in the Holy Trinity. Based on the patristic tradition regarding the distinction between God’s inner life and His revelation to the world,⁵ Palamas substantiated the reality of the knowledge of God and the deification⁶ of the human person. In his teaching, we trace a clear distinction between the sphere of *theologia* and *oikonomia*, God *in Se* and *ad extra*, between divine essence and energy,⁷ which reveals the Trinity in

theology in the Eastern Church see Begzos, “Apotheism in the Theology,” 327–357; Harrison, “The Relation,” 318–332.

- 2 Cf. Гренц – Слоун, *Богословие и богословы*, 9. On the problem of “reconciliation” of transcendence and immanence in the context of the decisions of the seven ecumenical councils, see Mousalimas, “Immanence and Transcendence,” 375–380.
- 3 About the life of St. Gregory of Palamas, and the main aspects of his theological teaching see Meyendorff, *A Study*; Papademetriou, *Introduction*; Sinkewicz, “Gregory Palamas,” 131–188; Stiennon, “Bulletin sur le Palamisme,” 231–337; Barrois, “Palamism Revisited,” 211–231.
- 4 On the historical and theological canvas of the Hesychast controversy, see Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm*; Flogaus, “Palamas and Barlaam Revisited,” 1–32; Romanides, “Notes on the Palamite Controversy,” 186–205, 225–270; Ware, “The Debate about Palamism,” 45–63.
- 5 More about the conception of divine energies in Palamas’ theology see Жуковський, “Богослов’я енергій Григорія Палами,” 163–205; Maloney, *A Theology of “Uncreated Energies”*; Anastos, “Gregory Palamas,” 335–349; Coffey, “The Palamite Doctrine of God,” 329–358; Hussey, “The Persons-Energy Structure,” 22–43; Zimany, “The Divine Energies,” 281–285; van Rossum, “The λόγοι of Creation,” 213–217; Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 125–136.
- 6 About the knowledge of the Holy Trinity and the deification of the human being in the theology of Gregory Palamas see Tsirpanlis, “Epistemology, Theognosis,” 5–27.
- 7 More about the meaning of these concepts and their use in patristic theology see Жуковський, “Апофатична віддаленість і катафатична всюдисущність,” 40–60; Жуковський, “Творець і творіння,” 743–765; Жуковський, “Неосяжність Бога,” 783–800; Zhukovskyy, “Antiochia i Aleksandria,” 91–106; van Rossum, *Palamism and Church Tradition*; Aghiorgoussis, “Christian Existentialism,” 15–41; Contos, “The Essence-Energies Structure,” 283–294; Damian, “A Few Considerations,” 101–112; de Halleux,

the world. Such a distinction in God's nature, on the one hand, does not add the complexity to God's being, and on the other hand, it is characterized by different ontological dimensions of creative divine energies, the nature of which Palamas considers thanks to the antinomic methodology of the apophatic and cataphatic approach. The purpose of this article is to consider the main aspects of the antinomic method of Gregory Palamas in his teaching on the distinction between the essence and energy of the Holy Trinity. In this context, we will pay attention to the three main dimensions of the energetic revelation of the Triune God: unity, trinity and multiplicity; to Palama's teaching about the simultaneous essence-energy distinction and simplicity of the consubstantial Trinity; the importance and meaning of the methodological "triangle" of Gregory's doctrine about the hidden and revealed God, where the main sides are: antinomy, apophatic and kataphatic.

1. The Unity of the Divine Energy of the Holy Trinity

In his Triadology, Palamas emphasizes the unity of the Holy Trinity, and, at the same time, he highlights the three levels of God's nature, saying that there are "three realities in God, namely, substance, energy and a Trinity of divine hypostases."⁸ That is, in the divine being we distinguish not only essence and energy, but also energy and hypostasis.⁹ At all these levels we are dealing with the one and triune God both in the integrity of His inner-hypostatic being and in the energetic manifestation in creation. The central point of this teaching is the unity of the divine hypostases in their action *ad extra*, according to which "divine energy is shared by three hypostases. Their interpenetration ensures that one and the same energy is at work, unfolding from the Father and manifesting through the mediation of the Son in the Holy Spirit. The eternal "circulation" of divine energy is concretized in the *oikonomia* through the specific activity of each hypostasis, which performs the common work of creation and restoration of the universe. Such unity in action has no equivalent in the created world. When the Spirit comes and dwells in the hearts of the faithful, then it is God in all its fullness, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are present and renew them."¹⁰

Palamas, considering the nature of divine providence, creative and preserving power, and various dimensions of divine energy that completes, animates, and supports all creation, notes that each of these powers "is common to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And according to each good and divine volition in our

"Palamisme et Tradition," 479–493; Grondijs, "The Patristic Origins," 323–328; Habra, "The Sources of the Doctrine," 244–252; Patacsi, "Palamism before Palamas," 64–71.

⁸ Palamas, *Capita* 75, 171.

⁹ Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed," 133–134.

¹⁰ Lison, *L'Esprit Répandu*, 99.

regard the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are identical with the energy and power which bestows substance, life and wisdom.”¹¹ The mysterious, inner-divine existence is revealed as the common life of each person of the Holy Trinity. The Divine life, on the one hand, remains absolutely hidden, in the depth of the essential mystery of hypostatic relationships, and on the other hand, it is revealed as the concrete personal life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each God’s hypostasis reveals himself to the world as a common divine energy for the Holy Trinity.¹²

The source of energy is not one of the hypostases, but the three-hypostatic and one-essence nature of God. Therefore, Palamas also calls energy natural and essential.¹³ The Triune God in his fullness and integrity acts through energies. “God is in Himself, and at the same time, the three divine hypostases are essentially, integrally, substantially contained in each other, without any mixing or division, and therefore their energy is common.”¹⁴ Palamas warns against a false rational approach in the interpretation of energetic unity, according to which the commonality of energy is understood exclusively in the sense of “similarity.” This approach is wrong, given the fact that even in numerical terms, uncreated energy is common to the three hypostases of God.¹⁵ That is why in each person of the Holy Trinity there is “one motion and energy, the life or power which the Father possesses within himself is not other than the Son since he possesses a life and power identical with the Father, and similarly in the case of the Son and the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶ The Triune God is life in itself, absolutely possesses of His own energy. The divine hypostases are life-giving life for a human person “by reason and by energy.” Life is given to a human being by common, for three hypostases, energy.¹⁷ Using only two of the ten Aristotelian categories, namely: “essence” and “relatives,” Palamas interprets the divine being not only as a single and abstract essence of the Trinity, but also as an energetic relation to all creation, without which God “neither is he principle, Creator and master, nor is he our Father.” “Relationship” (which is impossible without energy) becomes one of Palama’s fundamental concepts in his interpretation of the divine “energetic” phenomenon, creative and life-giving presence in the world.¹⁸ Thanks to the common energy of the persons of the Trinity, a human person can know who God is.¹⁹ Therefore, God energetically presents himself as Father, Son, and Spirit not through an inaccessible essence, but through a single and common energy of the three hypostases.²⁰

11 Palamas, *Capita* 91, 191.

12 Palamas, *De processione* II, 19–21, 95–97.

13 Cf. Palamas, *De processione* II, 69, 141.

14 Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 141.

15 Cf. Palamas, *Capita* 137–138, 243, 245.

16 Palamas, *Capita* 113, 213.

17 Cf. Palamas, *Capita* 114, 213, 215.

18 Cf. Palamas, *Capita* 134, 239, 241.

19 Cf. Palamas, *Dialogue*, 41, 80.

20 Cf. Palamas, *Dialogue*, 40, 79.

Palamas, considering the issue of the unity and commonality of the three hypostases and their divine energy, notes that unlike created beings, in which each has its own “energy” and “acts on its own,” for the divine hypostases “the energy is truly one and the same, for the motion of the divine will is unique in its origin from the primary cause in the Father, in its procession through the Son and in its manifestation in the Holy Spirit. This is clear from the created effects, for every natural energy is known in this way.”²¹ In this text, in addition to the unity of natural or essential energy, Palamas also emphasizes another characteristic feature of divine energy, which means precisely the personal nature of the activity of the Holy Trinity in the world. The energy of God is the personal (ἐνυπόστατος) energy of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The unity of God’s energy is personal.²² Therefore, another dimension of the nature of the energy of the Triune God is precisely its personal presence in the world, which reveals God not as an abstract and impersonal entity, but as a personal living God who opens himself to a human person and is in a dialogic relationship with his.

2. Personal Dimension of Divine Energy

Along with the trinity of theophanies, the personal nature of divine energy is one of the most essential characteristics of the revelation and omnipresence of the Holy Trinity in the world. God’s energetic manifestations have a personal character, they are not impersonal and faceless emanations of essence. Energy represents the person of the Father, the person of the Son, and the person of the Holy Spirit, which are different from the substance that does not possess an independent personal being.²³

The Triune God in his fullness and integrity resides in every divine hypostasis. The energies of God are the energies of each hypostasis, which are in the unity of the perichoretic relationships of the Holy Trinity. Speaking antinomically, the energy of the Triune God is the only energy of the three consubstantial persons.²⁴ Developing the concept of the relationship between the uncreated energies and the hypostases of the Trinity, Palamas borrows from Leontius of Byzantium the concept of “ἐνυπόστατος” (to be in the person, personal).²⁵ Gregory, considering the enhypostatic characteristic of divine energies, proceeds from the real spiritual experience of

²¹ Palamas, *Capita* 112, 211.

²² Palamas, *Capita* 112, 211.

²³ Palamas, *Capita* 137, 242.

²⁴ Lison, *L'Esprit Répandu*, 99.

²⁵ About the concept of “ἐνυπόστατος” see Daley, “A Richer Union,” 239–265; Ferrara, “Hypostatized in the Logos,” 311–327; Gleede, *The Development*; Lang, “Anhypostatos–Enhypostatos,” 630–657; Zhyrkova, “Leontius of Byzantium,” 193–218.

Christian ascetics, who in their spiritual feat contemplated the light of divine glory precisely in the “enhypostatic way.”²⁶ Palamas integrates the widespread patristic approach of the early Church to the understanding of the manifestation of the triune God’s nature in the world (according to which the Son and the Holy Spirit are accessible dimensions of the divine nature, while the Father remained unreachable) with the already developed doctrine of consubstantial Trinity, where the intra-divine relationships of the divine persons are interpreted as mutual participation of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the inaccessible essence of the Father.²⁷ Moreover, Palamas calls the Son and the Spirit “hypostatic energies” of God, which are distinct from the enhypostatic energies of the Holy Trinity, and through which God manifests Himself in the world.²⁸ “Not solely the Only-Begotten of God but also the Holy Spirit is called energy and power by the saints, just as they possess the same powers and energies in exactly the same way as the Father, since [...] God is called power.”²⁹ Emphasizing the enhypostatic dimension of the power and wisdom of God, Palamas does not forget to remind about the other side of the truth, namely the unity and community of enhypostatic power and wisdom for the three persons of the Holy Trinity.³⁰ “Anhypostasis (ἀνυπόστατον)” of energies does not mean that they are impersonal, but rather that they must be distinguished from the hypostatic dimension of the divine being of the Trinity. These energies are not the fourth person of the Triune God. The Trinity is their source of origin. The term “ἐνυπόστατος” expresses the dependence of energies on the God-Trinity, who in his completeness, integrity and simplicity energetically appears in every hypostasis.³¹

Developing the idea of the enhypostatic energy of the Holy Trinity, Palamas substantiates the possibility of the intimate personal communication between a human being and God, since the Trinity is revealed through energies on a personal level. The light of divine glory, as the energy of God, a Christian can contemplate not in its own hypostasis, which this light does not have, but in God’s hypostasis.³² This light is hypostatic not because “it has its own hypostasis, but because the Spirit sends this [divine and heavenly] life into the hypostasis of another, where it is contemplated. Such is, in a proper sense, that which is contemplated enhypostatic, [that is] ... not in itself and not in essence, but in hypostasis.”³³ This term refers not only to the persons of the Holy Trinity and the divine energies but also to the human person, since it is through the energies of the persons of the Trinity that the human being participates

²⁶ Hussey, “The Persons-Energy Structure,” 24.

²⁷ Coffey, “The Palamite Doctrine of God,” 336.

²⁸ Meyendorff, *A Study*, 219.

²⁹ Palamas, *Capita* 122, 225.

³⁰ Palamas, *Dialogue*, 25, 65–66.

³¹ Meyendorff, *A Study*, 220.

³² Cf. Palamas, *Pro sanctis* III, 1, 17–19, 591–595.

³³ Palamas, *Pro sanctis* III, 1, 9, 573, 575.

in God's nature.³⁴ Thus, thanks to the enhypostatic energies, the dynamic process of human participation in the life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit takes place on the personal level: God's hypostases – the enhypostatic energies of the Holy Trinity – the personal energy of a human being – the human person. The human being, energetically participating in the nature of God and deifying, is really and directly uniting with the personal being of the Triune God. Common theurgical power and grace are enhypostatic, and this does not mean the independence. The light of deifying grace is enhypostatic. It remains with the persons from whom it originates.³⁵ Distinguishing between the unity of the Holy Trinity's energy and hypostatic nature of God, Palamas also emphasizes the diverse and multiform wisdom of God in His *oikonomia* toward the humankind.³⁶

3. The Multiplicity of Energies of the Holy Trinity

The third characteristic of the energetic dimension of the triune nature of God is the multifacetedness of the omnipresent, all-pervading, creative, sustaining, saving, and adoring the presence of divine energy. Given the multidimensionality of God's activity in the world, and His life-giving gifts, we can speak of the multiplicity of energies of the triune God. Considering the variety of energetic charisms, Palamas constantly uses the plural when he writes about the energetic spiritual gifts that “flow” from God.³⁷ Gregory emphasizes the difference between the unity of the transcendent trinitarian divine being and the multiplicity of God's “energetic” dynamics. He uses a comparison often used in patristic theology with the image of one and indivisible sun and its many rays:

The divine transcendent being is never named in the plural. But the divine and uncreated grace and energy of God is divided indivisibly according to the image of the sun's ray which gives warmth, light, life, and increase, and sends its own radiance to those who are illuminated and manifests itself to the eyes of those who see. In this way, in the manner of an obscure image, the divine energy of God is called not only one but also many ... they are innumerable in their multitude. ... Therefore, the powers and energies of the divine Spirit are uncreated and because theology speaks of them in the plural they are indivisibly distinct from the one and altogether indivisible substance of the Spirit.³⁸

³⁴ Hussey, “The Persons-Energy Structure,” 26.

³⁵ Palamas, *Dialogue*, 26, 66.

³⁶ Palamas, *De processione* II, 62, 134.

³⁷ Cf. Palamas, *De processione* II, 11, 87–88.

³⁸ Palamas, *Capita* 68, 163.

Emphasizing the multiplicity of divine energies, Palamas at the same time clarifies that such an understanding of God's penetration into the world should not be understood as the existence of many gods or spirits. To describe the variety of divine energetic manifestations in the world, we can use such words as "processions, manifestations and natural energies of the one Spirit and in each case the agent is one."³⁹ God is one, and His manifestations in the diversity of creation are many. One of the most important proofs of the divinity of these energetic "performances" is their eternal and uncreated nature. Emphasizing this characteristic of energies, Palamas also refers to the book of the prophet Micah, which speaks of divine origins from ancient times, from the eternity (cf. Mic 5:1). Turning to the patristic tradition, Gregory notes that these "origins" of God are before and beyond the ages: "His goings forth have been from the beginning, from an eternity of days. The divine Fathers explained that these 'going forth' are the energies of the Godhead, as the powers and energies are identical for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."⁴⁰ These diverse, kataphatic characteristics of the Triune God are the multiplicity of His energetic manifestations.⁴¹ Palamas notes that "there is another distinction alongside that of the hypostases and a distinction belonging to the Godhead, for the distinction of the hypostases is not a distinction belonging to the Godhead. ... According to the divine processions and energies God is multiplied and enters multiplicity. ... The same procession is also processions; but at another point, the Divinity does not enter multiplicity – certainly not! – nor as God is he subject to distinction."⁴²

The multiplicity of energies "that are around God" in no way leads to the existence of many divine beings. A great many energies originate from one and simple essence, each of which is uncreated.⁴³

As we can see, the defining methodological tool of Gregory Palamas' approach to substantiating the theology of energies, and, at the same time, the "criterion of piety" is the method of antinomies. The entire problematic of the essential-energetic distinction in the single and triune nature of the personal God is unthinkable without this methodological key, which makes it possible to adequately interpret Gregory's patristic way to the simultaneous essential inaccessibility and energetic presence of God. The theological method of antinomies serves as the only adequate way of expressing the simple nature of God's triune existence and His multifaceted and personal presence in the created world. This Palamas' methodology helps to substantiate not only the preservation of the simplicity and unity of the personal existence and activity of God *ad extra*, with the simultaneous two-dimensionality of His nature, as well as to reconcile the simultaneous oneness of the Holy Trinity with the multiplicity

³⁹ Palamas, *Capita* 71, 167.

⁴⁰ Palamas, *Capita* 72, 167.

⁴¹ Palamas, *Capita* 117–118, 219.

⁴² Palamas, *Capita* 85, 183.

⁴³ Palamas, *Dialogue*, 35, 74.

of everything that, thanks to His energies, the Lord created and providentially fills with love and good.

4. The Essence and Energy vs the Problem of “Simplicity” of the Holy Trinity

Some modern critics of Palamas’ theological doctrine accuse him of teaching God’s energy as distinct from His essence, which violates the simplicity of the Holy Trinity by dividing God into two parts, leading to ditheism. Similar criticisms were also heard from Palama’s main opponent, theologian and humanistic scholar Barlaam of Calabria (c. 1290–1348).⁴⁴ In view of the multiplicity of divine energies, the criticism of the opponents goes as far as accusing Gregory of polytheism. This is one of the main criticisms of Palamas that have been made in the past and continue to be made by modern critics of his theology.⁴⁵ The correct interpretation of this question is important for an adequate perception of the holistic teaching of Gregory. The Council in Constantinople in 1351 adopted a separate resolution in which it confirmed the inviolability of divine simplicity, stressing that “the distinction between uncreated essence and energies in no way violates divine simplicity, there is no synthesis (*synthesis*) in God.”⁴⁶ This distinction is not only conceptual. It, being independent from our view, is a “real distinction (πραγματικὴ διάκρισις)” and exists “in the very natural order, that is, in the being of God.”⁴⁷ The “Synodal Tomos” also affirms that between God’s essence and energy there is “unity without confusion, distinction without division.” At the same time, God’s energies “remain always inseparable from the divine essence, eternally coexisting and inseparably united with it.”⁴⁸

According to the teachings of Palamas, God does not lose his simplicity either because of the distinction of hypostases or because of the multiplicity of energies.⁴⁹ As God is fully present in each of the three hypostases without division, so He is completely and indivisible in each of His divine energies.⁵⁰ Energies are not some original and autonomous existence in themselves. They do not exist apart from God. Energies are God Himself, who manifests Himself through various activities in the world.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 135.

⁴⁵ More about criticism of Palamas’ theology see Barrois, “Palamism Revisited,” 211–231.

⁴⁶ Barrois, “Palamism Revisited,” 130.

⁴⁷ Ware, “The Debate about Palamism,” 54.

⁴⁸ Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 135.

⁴⁹ Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 148.

⁵⁰ Cf. Palamas, *Pro sanctis* III, 2, 7, 655, 657.

⁵¹ Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 135.

According to the theological concept of Gregory Palamas, uncreated essence and uncreated energy are inseparable from each other. None of them is ever considered separately from the other. And this means, that there is one uncreated Deity in essence and energy.⁵² At the same time, “even if we call the energy inseparable from the divine essence, still, God’s supersubstance will not become composite; otherwise, there would be no simple essence, since you will not see any natural essence without energy.”⁵³ This inseparability of God’s substance from His non-hypostatic and non-autonomous energy explains the absence of complexity in God.⁵⁴ The simplicity of the divine being of the Holy Trinity is not an abstract possession of the essence, which means a simple absence of complexity. God’s simplicity has a positive and dynamic meaning. As we have already seen above, one cannot use the Aristotelian term “accident” for energies, since it refers to a changing nature. Divine actions remain completely unchanged and do not introduce any complexity, regardless of their multiplicity and difference from one another.⁵⁵ Kallistos Ware, summarizing his reflections on the issue of the simplicity of the Triune God, notes that “one, only, living and active God is fully and completely present: on the level of ousia – in the complete simplicity of his divine being; at the level of hypostasis – in the triune distinction of divine persons; at the level of *energeia* – in the indivisible multiplicity of His creative and saving work.”⁵⁶

In Palamas’ theology, God’s essence and energy, as God’s deifying grace, or, in other words, His emanations, manifestations, powers, and actions belong to one and indivisible divine nature, which is called the Godhead (*theotes*). The unity of the triune Godhead is not destroyed by His various activities in the world. Palamas, insisting on the simultaneous existence of a variety of eternal realities “around” God and the simplicity of the divine nature, notes that there are many things that “are essentially contemplated near God, but they in no way harm His unity and simplicity.”⁵⁷ Despite the multiplicity of energetic manifestations of the Holy Trinity, Palamas clearly emphasizes that Christians worship one, single and indivisible God who surpasses all complexity. The deifying grace of God and His other energies are one, one and the same Deity.

Accusing the defender of the hesychasts of ditheism or even polytheism, his opponents insisted that the essence-energy distinction “inevitably introduces complexity into God and makes Him composed of elements or parts, which contradicts His perfection.”⁵⁸ Instead, Gregory, in accordance with the patristic tradition, insists on

52 Palamas, *Dialogue*, 16, 57.

53 Palamas, *Pro sanctis* III, 1, 24, 603.

54 Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 149.

55 Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 149.

56 Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 136.

57 Palamas, *Pro sanctis* III, 1, 19, 595.

58 Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 147.

the simplicity and uncomplicated nature of God. Clement Lialine notes that “the most important property of distinction ... is that it does not destroy the divine simplicity and does not introduce any complexity. This fact is so fundamental to Palamism and was so strongly attacked by anti-Palamites that the Council of Constantinople in 1351 excommunicated anyone who held the opposite.”⁵⁹ For the main opponents of Palamas such a distinction violates the simplicity of God, and that is why they accused Palamas of dualism and polytheism.⁶⁰ Instead, the essential-energetic distinction in the nature of the Holy Trinity is not the result of any complexity or synthesis in the being of God. Nor does the distinction between the energies themselves add any complexity to His nature. Palamas rejects as baseless the accusations of confessing ditheism or polytheism.⁶¹ The nature of God is not defined simply by comparing it with another being. He is not just single and simple, but simplicity itself.⁶² Moreover, Gregory, in response to the objections of his opponents, accuses them of ditheism in view of the fact that they defend the creation of divine energy, and thereby distinguish between the uncreated God “in essence” and the created God “in energy.” Palamas emphasizes the difference between his position and the approach of Barlaam and his supporters, who call uncreated divine grace created.⁶³ If the energetic revelation of God in the world is created, then we come to a contradiction, namely: God is more than one nature, that is, He is simultaneously created and uncreated, pre-eternal and time-based. This leads to the risk of worshiping two Gods: the created and the uncreated.⁶⁴ Gregory refutes this contradiction in God’s nature with arguments, noting that the energies are inseparable from the essence of the immutably simple and single Holy Trinity. Kallistos Ware emphasizes that the issue of God’s simplicity and, at the same time, essential-energetic distinction is the most difficult polemical point in Palamas’ discussion with his opponents. Moreover, for patristic thought the preservation of divine simplicity is no less important than for Palamas’ opponents. Between essence and energy there is “unity without fusion, distinction without division,” and in the one God this distinction is inexpressibly “*sui generis*, that which befits God.”⁶⁵

As we can see, for Gregory Palamas, the real distinction between essence and energy, on the one hand, and energetic multifaceted manifestations in the world of divine being, on the other hand, do not contradict the simplicity of the Holy Trinity. There are two essential elements of Palamas’ approach to solving this fundamental problem of Christian theological thought. On the one hand, this is his clear

⁵⁹ Lialine, “The Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas,” 275–276.

⁶⁰ Cf. Contos, “The Essence-Energies Structure,” 287.

⁶¹ Cf. Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 147.

⁶² Palamas, *Dialogue*, 55, 90.

⁶³ Cf. Palamas, *Dialogue*, 9, 51–52.

⁶⁴ Cf. Palamas, *Dialogue*, 12, 54.

⁶⁵ Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 135.

distinction between kataphatic and apophatic methods of theology, and on the other hand, the question of traditional patristic antinomism in theology occupies a fundamental place. These two planes of Gregory's theological thought are decisive for a correct understanding of his teaching on the simplicity of the nature of the God-Trinity.

5. Palamas' Methodological Triangle: Apophatic, Kataphatic, Antinomy

Considering Palamas' teaching about the divine nature of the Holy Trinity, which was formed and justified in a polemical context, two different approaches to the interpretation of the question of the simplicity of God's nature can be distinguished. First, the understanding of simplicity through the prism of the kataphatic method of theology. This method of interpretation uses positive definitions, terms, and analogies that, as far as possible, characterize who God is, depicting His nature through the highest degrees of affirmative verbal or symbolic expression. For this theological method, God is perfect and absolute Being, Goodness, Wisdom, Unity, Simplicity, Beauty, etc. In this case, all possible means of logic and language are used, with the help of which one can simply and unambiguously apply the method of analogical comparison between the imperfect, created being and the eternal, perfect divine being of the Trinity. For this theological way of interpreting the nature of God, it is essentially identical with the concept of a perfect and absolutized being. Accordingly, God's attributes and perfections, such as the unity and absolute simplicity of the Holy Trinity, analytically follow from the concept of perfect being. In turn, perfect being is tied to the field of logic. The main logical laws are understood as ontological and extend their effect to the interpretation of the existence of God. As a result, the one-sided kataphatic approach is characterized by the fact that any distinction in God's nature is perceived as a distinction in parts that are ontologically different from the whole God. And this is incompatible with the absolute perfection of God, since, logically thinking, each part is less perfect than the whole, and by its very existence violates the absolute perfection of the divinity of the Holy Trinity.⁶⁶ Obviously, this approach, on which the opponents of Palamas based their entire understanding of God's simplicity, is difficult to reconcile with the classical antinomic model of the patristic teaching about the nature of God, which has a clearly allogical, or, more precisely, supra-logical character. The antinomic method is alien to such a one-sided kataphatic and limited approach in theology.

Another approach belongs to the patristic understanding of the apophatic way of thinking about God, the importance of which is difficult to overestimate. Conscious

⁶⁶ Krivoshein, "The Ascetic and Theological Teaching," 150.

ignoring of this method in the theological thought of Gregory, which he inherited from his predecessors, is one of the main reasons for the misunderstanding of Palamas' interpretation of the nature of the Holy Trinity by most opponents.⁶⁷ For Gregory Palamas, the apophatic way of understanding God's being does not contradict the kataphatic way. He criticizes those who try to deny the existence of an uncreated essence and energy in the nature of God through the apophatic method.⁶⁸ John Zizioulas, examining the apophatic way of thinking in Greek patristics, notes that this approach announced

the need to destroy and overcome the closed Greek ontology, because we cannot apply the concept of human mind or creation to denote God-Truth. The absolute otherness of God's being, which belongs to the very essence of biblical theology, is affirmed in such a way that the biblical approach to God is fundamentally different from the Greek one. Apophatism rejects the Greek view of truth, emphasizing that everything we know about being – that is, about creation – does not have to be ontologically identified with God. God has a simple, unknowable existence, which is unattainable for all things and absolutely ineffable, because He is beyond assertion and denial.⁶⁹

According to the apophatic way of thinking about God, the description of God by concepts such as being and essence is imprecise and conditional, and does not describe God as He is in Himself. The Triune God, as the Creator, surpasses any being created by Him. Therefore, the characteristics of different dimensions of being cannot be one-sidedly, cataphatically, transferred to God, and considered as His characteristic properties. In the same way, the main logical laws can be extended to Him, cautiously and only to a limited extent. Essence and energy are only conditionally “parts” of the whole deity, since the whole of God in his creative activity is present in energy.⁷⁰

Therefore, the divine being of the Holy Trinity is completely different from various created types of being, and that is why it is incorrect to use both logical and rational tools, which are usually used for the analysis of various phenomena of created reality, and the results of the synthesis of the main approaches in their understanding. It is undoubtedly absurd to use discursive thinking and rational judgments regarding the mystery of divine simplicity. The essence-energy distinction is not a compromise with respect to the unity, wholeness, and simplicity of God. “Essence and energy are not ‘two parts’ of God, but rather two ‘modes’ or dimensions of divine existence. The simplicity of God is completely different from the concept of simplicity that is

⁶⁷ Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 151.

⁶⁸ Cf. Palamas, *Capita* 122–124, 225, 227.

⁶⁹ Зізіулас, *Буття як спілкування*, 90–91.

⁷⁰ Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 150–151.

inherent in our conceptual thinking, because God is more than existence, and therefore He is beyond any concept. Its simplicity is antinomian.”⁷¹

Divine energy does not exist outside of God. It is God Himself in His action and self-manifestation in time-space reality. Energy is full-fledged Deity, God in his wholeness. Kallistos Ware comments on it this way: “As God is fully present without diminution or division in each of the three persons, so is He, integrally and indivisible, present in each, in particular, and in all divine energies, in general.”⁷² Palamas is clear and categorical when he insists on this very essential aspect in the doctrine of the energy of the Holy Trinity. He constantly emphasized that each power or energy of the Holy Trinity is not something original, hypostatic, and separately existing outside God, but it is God himself, the whole of God, in his action and openness to the world, which is completely and inseparably present in each of energies in which He can be contemplated in integrity.⁷³

The method of antinomy in Palamas’ theological thought is a traditional patristic alternative to logical-discursive thinking. Such an expression as the “inseparably divided” being of the Holy Trinity is an appropriate way of verbalizing what the nature of God is. With the help of such over-logical language, Gregory depicts two sides of the same truth about the ineffability of the mystery of divine life. Instead of the essence-energy binary, we speak of one and indivisible Deity as the cause of all creation. Moreover, a real and even radical distinction between God’s concealed essence and His energetic manifestations in no way leads to ditheism or polytheism. God, at the same time – invisible and visible, nameless and the One who has names, it is impossible and possible to participate in Him.⁷⁴ Therefore, it is better to talk about divine indivisibility than about his simplicity. Because the God of Christians is “not the indistinguishable monad of the Platonists, but the unity and mutual communication of three persons who are in each other through the continuous movement of mutual love. His unity is [...] interpersonal unity.”⁷⁵ Palamas unequivocally emphasizes that “God does not lose his simplicity, both in view of the division and distinction of hypostases, and in view of the division and multiplicity of forces and energies.”⁷⁶

We have already noted that the type of essence-energy distinction cannot be rationally compared with the multiplicity and diversity of created things and beings. The classification of the latter is carried out in accordance with the laws of logic and is completely inappropriate for the assessment of divine unity and multiplicity, since the distinction between the single essence and the multiplicity of God’s

71 Ryk, “The Holy Spirit’s Role,” 28.

72 Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 135.

73 Palamas, *Pro sanctis* III, 2, 7, 657.

74 Palamas, *Dialogue*, 19, 60.

75 Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 135.

76 Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 135.

energies “must be understood in a manner peculiar to God,” and that this distinction is “proper to God” and ineffable in the same way that the divine unity is supernatural. Therefore, the expression “distinction according to God” is the best way of expressing the doctrine of the divine being of the Holy Trinity.⁷⁷

6. Essence-Energy: Ontological or Epistemological Distinction?

The essential-energetic distinction in the theological thought of Gregory Palamas does not affect only the subjective epistemological level of the process of knowing God. It is not only the view of a human being and the product of weak and limited mind that conceptually distinguishes between these two levels in the nature of God. Rather, it is the reality of the ontological and objective level, which reveals the true distinction in the divine being of the Holy Trinity. At the same time, Palamas categorically asserts that this real distinction (πραγματική διάκρισις) is in no way a true separation.⁷⁸ As noted by Leonidas Contos, the essence-energy distinction is not an intellectual, but an ontological distinction, “which reveals the reality of ontological unity.”⁷⁹ It is based on the determinative relations analogous to those existing in the divine essence between the three hypostases. However, the relations that concern God’s nature cannot be interpreted in the way that is usually done in relation to the liaison between created things. That is, on the basis of any cause-and-effect distinctions between earthly objects, it is impossible to model distinctions in the nature of God by analogy.⁸⁰ Although the essence-energy distinction does not exist only in human understanding, nevertheless, to a certain extent, it can also be considered epistemological, as a derivative consequence of the real distinction in the nature of God. Palamas notes that in the patristic tradition it is not about the fact that essence and energy are one and the same thing, but rather that these two dimensions belong to one and triune God.⁸¹

Each energy of the Holy Trinity really means a different divine property, but they do not form different realities, being for all, the actions of one, single and living God.⁸² In addition, divine simplicity is not an abstract characteristic of the essence, with the negative sign of the absence of complexity. “This is the primary attribute

⁷⁷ Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching,” 152.

⁷⁸ About the use of these terms and their meanings see Guichardan, *Le problème de la Simplicité Divine*, 41–49; Grumel, “Grégoire Palamas,” 84–90.

⁷⁹ Contos, “The Essence-Energies Structure,” 286.

⁸⁰ Lialine, “The Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas,” 275.

⁸¹ Cf. Meyendorff, *A Study*, 215.

⁸² Meyendorff, *A Study*, 215.

of the supreme existence of the One Who is.”⁸³ The divine property of simplicity is the highest positive dimension of the existence of the Holy Trinity, the image of which man is unable to adequately express. The distinction between essence and energy in the nature of God, in contrast to the antipalamite criticism, reveals divine simplicity, depicting the divine being as one and simple, both in inner divine hiddenness and in energetic manifestation. This distinction does not threaten the absolute simplicity of God, but rather protects it.⁸⁴ Amphiloque Radović holds the same opinion when he notes that “the existence of energies in which the Deity is present everywhere does not destroy the simplicity of the divine being, but reveals it.”⁸⁵ God’s activity remains simple, because the Holy Trinity is the only Worker in all the multiplicity of His energies, the energies of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Closing Remarks

The theological synthesis of Gregory Palamas is the culmination of the gradual development of the interpretation of the problem of the ontological “gap” between the transcendence and immanence of the Holy Trinity. Gregory clearly distinguishes between the apophatic sphere of theology, which considers the nature of God in its intratrinitarian, essential being *in Se*, beyond time, cause and purpose; and the cataphatic sphere of economy, the being of God in His energetic revelation *ad extra*, dynamic creative presence in time and space, with a view to a certain reason and for a specific purpose.

Palamas substantiated the theological sense of the need to distinguish between God’s essence and energy, and emphasized the personal dimension of the revelation of the Holy Trinity, which in its inner being is completely inaccessible and hidden. The meaning and significance of the epiphany derives from the very nature of God, who does not close himself in his self-sufficiency, but personally “going outside,” creates, supports and leads to the fullness of being a world that is completely different from himself. The God-Trinity reveals himself to man, allowing himself to be known, to participate in his nature and to be adored. The “energetic” substantiation of the cataphatic view of God shows Him not only as infinitely distant from the world and humankind, but also essentially present, penetrating and filling every element of the universe with deep meaning. Energy is the connecting link between the triune Creator and the multifaceted creation, through which everything created communicates with its Author in the measure, established by God, and not with some

⁸³ Barrois, “Palamism Revisited,” 221–222.

⁸⁴ Barrois, “Palamism Revisited,” 221.

⁸⁵ Radović, *Le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité*, 168.

inferior manifestation of Him, but with the fullness of His Divinity. The “energetic” theological problematic developed by Palamas is unthinkable without a methodological key that enables an adequate interpretation of Gregory’s patristic approach to the simultaneous essential inaccessibility and multifaceted energetic presence of God in creation. It is the antinomian way of thinking, as the “criterion of piety,” that serves as the only appropriate way of expressing the one-essence of God’s being of the Holy Trinity, both in inner mystery and in a single, personal and multiple revelation in the world. This method helps to substantiate not only the preservation of the simplicity and unity of God with the simultaneous two-dimensionality of His nature, but also to reconcile the unity of the Holy Trinity with the multiplicity of creative and providential activity of His energies in a world where God is in all places and fillest all things with his love: triune, personal and multifaceted.

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