

# St. Gregory Palamas and the Metaphysics of Creation<sup>1</sup>

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In the continuing debate between Palamism and Thomism, the principal philosophical argument against St. Gregory's doctrine of the divine energies is that it is a return to the ontology of Proclus. In attempting to explain how the manifold creation can derive from the absolutely simple God, this argument runs, Palamas resorted to the Procline scheme of positing the energies as a multiplicity of intermediate entities between God and the world. As a result, the pre-eminently Christian dichotomy between God and creation is lost in a series of Neoplatonic gradations. This case has been made most clearly and thoroughly by Endre von Ivanka<sup>2</sup> and Rowan Williams.<sup>3</sup> The modern supporters of Palamism have generally replied that this philosophical approach to the issue is inappropriate. St. Gregory was a bishop, a monk, and a mystic, not a speculative metaphysician; he developed his theories to defend hesychast spirituality, not to expound a philosophical ontology.<sup>4</sup> But this response, true as it is, leaves the strictly philosophical objection unanswered. Ultimately it is self-defeating, since a sound spirituality can hardly be based on a bad metaphysics which misunderstands the fundamental relation between God and the world. What I propose to undertake, therefore, is a more thorough *metaphysical* examination of the entire issue. This will involve clarifying the nature and grounds of the Neoplatonic theory as well as the strictly metaphysical aspects of Palamas' teaching in order properly to understand their connection. In the process, important points will emerge which illuminate the relation between Palamism and Thomist thought about the ontology of creation.

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2. "Hellenisches im Hesychasmus: das Antinomische der Energienlehre," in *Epectasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Beauchesne, 1972) 491-500.

3. "The Philosophical Structures of Palamism," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977) 27-44.

4. See e.g. Kallistos Ware, "The Debate about Palamism," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977) p. 58.

### I. The Neoplatonic Problem

The Platonic and Neoplatonic theory of a multiplicity of real and distinct divine ideas is problematic because it makes the ideas incompatible with the necessary absolute simplicity of the First Cause.<sup>5</sup> The ideas are multiple because they are related to the world of particulars in that they account for it. Whether this be by formal causality, as Plato usually implies, or both formal and efficient causality, as in Neoplatonism, real Being, the realm of the Forms, must be multiple in order to perform its metaphysical function. There is no difficulty as to how it can produce manifold effects, for it is itself already a complex unity. Since it is intelligible, it must therefore be "an organized whole of distinct and hierarchically arranged Forms."<sup>6</sup> The mode by which Being causes beings is participation, which requires that it be, as Plotinus calls it, a "one-many."<sup>7</sup> For as formal (and, in Neoplatonism, efficient) cause, the participated Form must be present to each participant, and therefore many, while also remaining whole, the same, and apart from all, and therefore one.

But since Being, in order to account for beings, is not only one but also many, it must in turn depend on a higher principle for its unity. The Neoplatonic way of dealing with this is to separate the ultimate Cause from the first level of multiplicity. Plotinus exalts the One above Being and intelligibility for precisely this reason.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the ideas, Intellect or Being, become intermediaries between the First Cause and beings. This makes their own ontological status problematic. As pure intelligibles, they are eternal, immutable, and have their existence *per se*, not by participation in Being. But as multiple, they are derivative and below the First. Thus "in a Christian world they can be neither God nor creatures. . . . [T]hey hovered somewhere on the horizon between God and creatures, strange aliens both from heaven and from earth. . . ."<sup>9</sup> This is the untenable position that Palamas is supposed to attribute to the divine energies.

5. For a classic though unsympathetic exposition of why Platonism is forced to exalt the One above the intelligible realm of Being, see Anton Pegis, "The Dilemma of Being and Unity," in R. Brennan, ed., *Essays in Thomism* (New York, 1942) 151-183. See also W. Norris Clarke, "The Problem of the Reality and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas in Christian Neoplatonism," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. D.J. O'Meara (New York, 1982) 109-127.

6. Pegis, art. cit. p. 156. Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* V,3,10, on the necessity of diversity for intelligibility.

7. *Ennead* V,3,15.

8. Cf. Pegis, art. cit. p. 158.

9. *Ibid.* p. 158.

Proclus systematizes this approach to the problem of multiplicity in the doctrine of the henads. The first cause in any procession, including the procession of all from the One, is imparticipable in order that it may remain absolutely one. Participation, and therefore procession, is possible because the first cause generates a multiplicity of participable terms, which are participated or possessed by the effects. Like Plotinus' Being, they constitute a one-many intermediate between the one cause and its many effects.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the One, these are the henads. As the first multiplicity, it is they, and not the One itself, which stand at the heads of the *σειραί* which descend from them and eventually include all things. Again, there is no difficulty in deriving the many from them because they are themselves already many. Thus participation in Proclus is not a dyadic relation between participated and participant, but a triadic one of imparticipable, participable, and participant. Much more clearly than in Plotinus, the unity of the First Cause is preserved from all contamination by the multiplicity of its effects through the device of mean terms.

The weakness of such theories is obvious. In attempting to account for the production of the many from the One, they offer no explanation of the origin of the first multiplicity and thus leave the fundamental problem unsolved. In Plotinus, Being can cause beings because it is multiple. But the same principle requires that the One must be multiple in order to produce Being. Again, Being is unified, and thus is, by participating in the One. But if the One is participated, then it too must be a one-many, infected with multiplicity by its effects and in need of a yet higher principle. Proclus tries to avoid this difficulty by proclaiming the One imparticipable. But how then does it produce the henads? If they are truly multiple, as they must be to perform their function, then they must participate in the One: Πάν πλῆθος μετέχει πη τοῦ ἐνός.<sup>11</sup> This compels us to posit a further series of mean terms between the One and the henads, and so *ad infinitum*.

The fact is that the theory of participation simply does not allow for mean terms. On the one hand, the entire Form, whole and the same, must be present to each and every participant in order to fulfil its role as a one-over-many. The original purpose of the theory, as developed by Plato and extended by the Neoplatonists, was to explain how many different things could be the same in some respect. Many things can be truly labeled beautiful,

10. *Elements of Theology*, ed. and tr. E. R. Dodds, 2nd ed. revised (Oxford, 1963), proposition 24 (p. 29): "[T]he first is a unity prior to the many; the participated is within the many, and is one yet not-one; while all that participates is not-one yet one."

11. *Ibid.*, proposition 1 (p. 2).

for instance, because they all share in a common Beauty. As Plato himself argues in the *Parmenides*, if each of them has a different part of the Form, or if each has its own form distinct from the universal, then they do not participate in the same thing and the entire theory collapses. Thus Williams inaccurately describes Neoplatonic participation as "a sharing in some circumscribable aspect or attribute of a superior reality."<sup>12</sup> Participation can be nothing less than the possession of the whole higher reality. On the other hand, in order that it may be independent of its participants, the Form must be apart from them all. Precisely because it is the same and undivided in all its diverse participations, it must be separate from all the things which participate in it.<sup>13</sup>

Proclus himself thoroughly understands this twofold demand of the theory of participation:

Every cause which is separate from its effects exists at once everywhere and nowhere. For by the communication of its proper potency . . . it is everywhere. . . . But by its mode of being, which has no admixture of the spatial, and by its transcendent purity it is nowhere. . . . If it were merely everywhere, this would not hinder it from being a cause and present in all the participants; but it would not exist separately prior to them all. Were it nowhere without being everywhere . . . it would not be omnipresent in that sense in which causes are capable of immanence in their effects. . . . It is not in part everywhere and in some other part nowhere. . . . It is entire everywhere, and likewise nowhere. Whatsoever can participate it at all attains it in its entirety and finds it present as a whole: yet it is also transcendent as a whole. . . .<sup>14</sup>

His theory of henads, however, compromises this doctrine. For in that theory, it is the participable mean terms that are "everywhere" and the imparticipable cause that is "nowhere." It is no longer one and the same principle that is both diversely present in all the participants and prior to and apart from them all. Yet this is the strict requirement of the metaphysics of participation. As the solution to the problem of the One and the many, the theory of

12. Art. cit. p. 35.

13. Dodds has expressed this problem with characteristic clarity, op. cit. pp. 210-11: "If participation is to be real, the Form must be immanent, and therefore divided; if it is to be participation of one undivided principle, the Form must be transcendent, and therefore not directly participated. Pr[oclus] accepts both necessities. . . . What is directly participated is an immanent universal. . . . The transcendent . . . universal must exist, in order to give unity to the many immanent universals . . . and must be distinct from any of them. . . . The solution of the antinomy by a multiplication of entities is typical of Pr.'s method."

14. Ibid. proposition 98 (pp. 87-89).

participation can have no place for intermediaries between these terms.

Commentators on the problem of the divine ideas as it relates to Christian thought have tended to focus on the unacceptability of such mean terms in Christian doctrine rather than on their purely philosophical incoherence within Neoplatonism itself. Philosophically speaking, perhaps the most astonishing of Williams' statements is his remark about the doctrine of henads: "In a pagan context, none of this presents any difficulty."<sup>15</sup> This ignores the philosophical nature of the problem. The difficulty of finding an ontological place for the divine ideas, or the first multiplicity, does not arise only when the doctrine is transposed into Christianity. It is not simply Christian dogma, but plain philosophical reason, which declares that there can be no intermediaries between the First Principle and its effects, God and creatures, but that absolutely everything must be identified as one or the other.

## II. Palamas' Doctrine of Participation

No one was more aware than St. Gregory that there can be no such intermediaries. It is ironic, to say the least, that having devoted all his zeal to demonstrating that the divine energies are God himself and nothing else, he should be accused of regarding them as mean terms, neither God nor creatures. In his theory, they are indeed the divine ideas, the Forms of creatures, the paradigms according to which the world is made.<sup>16</sup> They are "the Being of beings, the Life of the living, the Wisdom of the wise,"<sup>17</sup> "the Beauty of the beautiful,"<sup>18</sup> all the Forms down to the ideas (λόγοι) of particulars.<sup>19</sup> As such they fill the same metaphysical role as the first multiplicity in Neoplatonism, mediating between the One and beings. But they do not *exist* in such a metaphysical limbo.<sup>20</sup> Palamas is very clear that he disagrees with the ancient philosophers not as to the reality or function of the energies, but only as to

15. Art. cit. p. 36.

16. See e.g. *Capita* 87, PG 150.1184A; *Triads* (*Défense des saints hésychastes*, ed. J. Meyendorff [Louvain, 1959]), III,2,24, p. 685. "On Union and Distinction," *Syngrammata*, ed. P. Christou, 3 v. (Thessalonica, 1966) 2.78.

17. *Triads* III,2,25, p. 689.

18. "Letter to Daniel," *Syngrammata* 2.389.

19. *Triads* III,2,25, p. 687.

20. *Ibid.* III,2,25, p. 687: "There is then something between creatures and that imparticipable superessentiality. . . . But these things, the mean terms, do not exist by themselves; for they are powers of the superessentiality . . . through which, without going out of being imparticipable and one, it is multiplied and participated by all things according to the processions."

their ontological status: "Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates, basely . . . considered these paradigms as . . . other self-existent beings between the superessentiality and creatures . . . but we do not consider any of them self-existent . . . wherefore we say that they are the pre-determinations and foreknowledges and wills of God, existing in him before creatures."<sup>21</sup>

The energies function as intermediaries because they are the participations of God, who in his essence remains imparticipable. But Gregory is explicit that they do not therefore constitute a lower level within the divine realm or a participable "part" of God. "Do not the wise know that what is revealed and intelligible and participated is not a part of God, so that God, according to us, undergoes division; but the whole is somehow revealed and not, and is thought and not thought, and is participated and imparticipable?"<sup>22</sup> He always insists that "the same God is imparticipable and participable."<sup>23</sup> In Plotinian terms, this means that God is both the One and Being. This identification may seem inconsistent with the Neoplatonic arguments for separating the One from the first multiplicity, but such an antinomic conflation of the two levels into one is strictly required by the metaphysics of participation.

More important than such assertions, however, are the passages where Palamas shows that he makes this identification because he thoroughly understands the necessary nature of participation. On the one hand, the energies cannot be mean terms, because this, as in Proclus, leads to an infinite regress: "The participations, or impartations, do not have being by participation, for then they would not be participations, but participants. But if they do not have being by participation, they are not creatures;<sup>24</sup> and not being creatures, neither are they outside of God, but from him and in him. . . . For if the participation has being by participation, then this again has it by another participation, and this by another again, and so to infinity."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the divine essence

21. *Triads* III,2,26, pp. 689-91.

22. "On Deifying Participation," *Syngrammata* 2.142.

23. *Triads* III,2,25, p. 689. Cf. also "On Deifying Participation," *Syngrammata* 2.161; "Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite," *Syngrammata* 2.174; *ibid.* 2.200.

24. The identification of existence by participation and creatureliness goes back at least to the fourth century and early became a universally accepted feature of patristic ontology. It is found in Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Ps.-Dionysius, and Maximus Confessor among others. Most fundamentally, it means existing by possessing or receiving being (and any other perfections) *ab extra* as a gift or impartation from God, who is not a creature because he does not have but *is* Being, Goodness, Life, etc.

25. "On Union and Distinction," *Syngrammata* 2.77.

must be imparticipable precisely in order that God may be wholly present to all things in every participation or energy: "For how, since the divine energies are many, could [God] be whole in each, altogether without division, and how could he be seen and named, whole, from each . . . if he did not surpass them all?"<sup>26</sup> This is the demand made from Plato's *Parmenides* on and accepted by Proclus but not fulfilled by his doctrine of henads. For the same reason, Palamas insists that each of the energies is the whole participated God: "Goodness is not one part of him, Wisdom a part, Majesty or Providence another part. But the whole is Goodness, and the whole Wisdom and the whole Providence and the whole Majesty . . . and through each the whole is altogether recognized, being present and acting, uniquely, simply, and indivisibly."<sup>27</sup> Again this is no mere assertion, but a purely philosophical consequence of the theory of participation. If each participation were not the whole of the participated, then the different creatures would no longer participate in the same Principle, and participation would no longer answer the problem of creation.

It is true that Palamas does occasionally argue that to participate is to have a "part" of the participated, and that the participated energies are therefore divisible and hence other than the indivisible essence.<sup>28</sup> These passages, taken in isolation from the rest of his work, have formed the basis for the charge that he introduces division into God, vividly expressed by Polycarp Sherwood: "It has seemed that he at times has a very crass notion of participation (my image for it is the sharing of a pie)."<sup>29</sup> In view of Palamas' many statements elsewhere that each energy is not a part but the whole God, this little polemical argument should not be pressed. Moreover, the context of both passages shows that the "partial" nature of participation is due not to a division in the self-impartment of God but to the creature's limited receptivity. In the *Theophanes* passage, Palamas cites St. Maximus to argue for this "divisibility" on the ground that "it is the property of divine grace . . . to grant deification proportionately to beings,"<sup>30</sup> i.e. in proportion to their

26. *Triads* III,2,7, p. 657.

27. "Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite," *Syngrammata* 2.209. This point is repeatedly emphasized by the Palamists, e.g. J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, tr. George Lawrence (London, 1964) p. 224; Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed," *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1975) pp. 135-36, and largely ignored by Palamas' critics (e.g. Ivanka, Williams); but neither side has observed its strictly metaphysical necessity.

28. *Theophanes*, PG 150.944A; *Capita* 110 1106C.

29. "Debate on Palamism," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 10 (1966) p. 201. For full accounts of this objection, based on these passages, see Ivanka, art. cit., p. 493, and Williams, art. cit., p. 28.

30. *Theophanes*, 944AB.

worthiness or capacity to receive. All the "partialness," then, is on the side of the participant, not of the participated God. We shall return, however, to the problematic issue of the origin of the differentiation which participation involves.

Because the energies are not, either individually or as a whole, participable "parts" of God, Palamas' doctrine does not introduce a pernicious division or composition into God. There is a real distinction between essence and energies, but as the scholastics have made abundantly clear in other contexts, a *distinctio realis* is not necessarily a *distinctio inter rem et rem*.<sup>31</sup> Since both the essence and the energies are the whole God, Palamas can even say that they are the same as well as distinct.<sup>32</sup> Again this is simply the necessary metaphysics of participation. In fact Palamas always maintains that the energies are not existent things (ὑποστάσεις) or substances (οὐσίαι) at all.<sup>33</sup> In this he agrees with Ps.-Dionysius' revision of Proclus. Ps.-Dionysius argues, against Proclus, that the divine powers or names are not "creative substances and hypostases" below the Supreme God, but rather that ὀρχικῶς, in their source, they are the superessential Cause, while μεθεκτῶς, as participated, they are the powers such as Being and Life which inform creatures.<sup>34</sup> In his refusal to hypostasize the energies as mean terms and his insistence that on the one hand they are simply God and that on the other they are the very perfections in which creatures participate, Palamas reproduces this doctrine.<sup>35</sup> It is not simply an adaptation of Proclus, but a correction which is needed to make participation metaphysically coherent.

If the divine energies are real but are not "things," what then are they? As their name suggests, they are the activities of God,

31. See e.g. Louis de Raeymaeker, *The Philosophy of Being*, tr. E.H. Ziegelmeier (St. Louis and London, 1954) pp. 62-69.

32. Essence and energies are "one . . . but not without difference, that is the same and not the same according to different modes." ("Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite," *Syngammata* 2.194.) Cf. also "Letter to Daniel," *Syngammata* 2.377, and 378: "It is necessary, then, to confess both, the difference and the identity . . ." Meyendorff, op. cit. p. 225, has called attention to this important aspect of the theory.

33. See e.g. *Triads* III,2,5, p. 651; "On the Divine Energies," *Syngammata* 2.103; "On Deifying Participation," *Syngammata* 2.157. See also Meyendorff, op. cit., p. 224, and Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed," p. 135. Williams (art. cit. p. 38, n. 75) argues that although the energies are not supposed to be "things" they are treated as such in that they are subjects of predication. But it would be more accurate to call them predicates, that is, perfections which can be predicated of, or participated by, creatures.

34. *On the Divine Names* XI.6, PG 3.953C-956A.

35. Ivanka, art. cit. pp. 494-95, presents the Dionysian doctrine with approval. He argues that Palamas differs from it by "hypostasizing" the energies (pp. 495-96), disregarding the many places where Palamas specifically says that the energies are not hypostases.



God acting in and for creation. (It would indeed be desirable to replace the conventional translation 'energies' with 'activities', which more accurately conveys Palamas' meaning in English and makes the entire doctrine sound rather less exotic. I propose therefore to use the latter term henceforward.) This is why they do not introduce composition into God, for "nothing is ever said to be compounded with its own activity."<sup>36</sup> To say that God's essence and activity make up two things would, St. Gregory argues, be like saying that a man has two minds because we speak of "mind" and "understanding."<sup>37</sup> Understanding is not another substance, or a part, but is what the mind *does*. Activity cannot be co-numerated with or added to substance. To say that God "has activities" is simply to say that he acts: "As he who calls [God] voluntative makes clear that he has a will, so also he who calls him active (ἐνεργῆ) shows that he has activity."<sup>38</sup>

Here again Palamas is following Ps.-Dionysius, who understands the participations as the causal powers of God in creation. "If we name the superessential hiddenness God, or Life, or Being, or Light, or Word, we understand nothing other than the powers coming forth from it to us, deific, or being-making, or life-generating, or wisdom-giving."<sup>39</sup> They are in God, are God, prior to creation,<sup>40</sup> but they are revealed and known only in their created effects. Thus Palamas explains that "the divine activity . . . is the pre-eternal power of God, revealed through the things that are made. As regards being revealed, it begins; but the power does not begin."<sup>41</sup> God is named as his activities from their participating effects: "He is . . . the Goodness of good things, as essence and source of all virtue, and the Beingness (ὄντότης) of absolutely all beings, as cause of beings." He is called good and so forth "not . . . through himself . . . but on account of the participants, as their good-making power."<sup>42</sup>

Thus God truly is Good, Being, Life, Beauty, and so on, but he is all of these not in his own essence but in his activities *ad extra*, that is, in relation to creatures. The divine activities, as has often

36. "On Deifying Participation," *Syngrammata* 2.158.

37. E.g. "Letter to Daniel," *Syngrammata* 2.391. The relation between the mind and its faculties is one of Palamas' favorite illustrations of the essence-activities distinction. But cf. Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed," p. 135, on Palamas' awareness of the inadequacy of any creaturely parallel.

38. "On the Divine Energies," *Syngrammata* 2.98.

39. *Divine Names* II.7, 645A.

40. E.g. *ibid.*, V.7, 821AB; V.8, 824C.

41. "Letter to Daniel," *Syngrammata* 2.379.

42. *Ibid.*, 389-90.

been observed, are God-for-us.<sup>43</sup> And since God is not essentially related to creatures, the activities or relations must be distinct from the essence: "There is no acting without activity. . . . But the activity enacts something other, which the agent is not. For God acts and makes creatures, but he is uncreated. And the relative (τὸ πρὸς τι) is always said relative to an other. . . . Just as it is impossible, then, that the relative not differ from the essence, nor be contemplated in the essence, but be the essence, so neither is it at all possible that the activity not differ from the essence. . . ."<sup>44</sup> Here again we see that the activities are not distinct things, but simply God in his creative relation to the world. The whole God is Life, but only for living things; Beauty, but only for beautiful things. Hence, in the traditional Neoplatonic way, God is the Creator, the efficient cause or cause of being to creatures, by being their formal cause. He causes them to be by causing them to be *what* they are, by giving himself to them as their whatness. "And thus he is the Beingness of beings, and Form in forms (εἶδος ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσιν) as source of form . . ."<sup>45</sup> Gregory is almost shockingly explicit about the formal causality of God: "Therefore our life itself, by which, as cause of living things, we are made alive, is nothing other than the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>46</sup>

This is why Palamists have always insisted that the creature's participation in God must be understood in an emphatically realist, ontological, or "entitative" sense.<sup>47</sup> Such participation does not mean, and cannot mean, possessing a *part* of the participated reality.<sup>48</sup> If it did it would not be participation at all, as understood not only by Palamas, but by Plato, Plotinus, or Proclus. Rather it necessarily means possessing the whole of the participated, although in a differentiated manner according to the receptivity of the participant. Entitative participation, therefore, does not involve any breaking-up of God into parts or postulation of intermediary beings between God and creatures. But the very wholeness and identity of God in all the participants also demands that he be not

43. Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 217; Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed," p. 134; Jürgen Kuhlmann, *Die Taten des einfachen Gottes* (Würzburg, 1968) p. 56.

44. *Capita* 142, 1220CD.

45. *Ibid.* 78, 1176C.

46. *Ibid.* 114, 1200AB.

47. Cf. Ware, "Debate," p. 60. But neither he nor other Palamists present the metaphysical grounds for this doctrine.

48. Contrast Juan-Miguel Garrigues, "L'énergie divine et la grâce chez Maxime le Confesseur," *Istina* 19 (1974) pp. 275-76: "Participer [entitativement] c'est avoir part à, faire sien une *partie de l'autre*. Cette conception néoplatonicienne . . . frise dans certains textes la représentation physiciiste. . . ."

confined to them but absolutely apart from all. In short, it entails that the whole God be both essence and activity, that his essence be distinct from his creative activities.

The essence-activities distinction thus allows Palamas to say that God is "being and not being, everywhere and nowhere, many-named and unnameable, ever-moved and unmoved, and simply, all things and none of them all."<sup>49</sup> There is merely an expansion of Ps.-Dionysius' succinct statement, "He is all things in all things and nothing in any."<sup>50</sup> Both Ps.-Dionysius and Palamas would concur with the Almarician assertion that as universal formal cause God is "lapis in lapide," though they would at once add that in his essence he is neither this nor anything else.

This understanding of the metaphysical reasoning behind the Palamite distinction sheds new light on the debate between Palamism and Thomism. Aquinas, of course, disagrees with the Almarician doctrine on the ground that it leads to pantheism. "If the divine being were the formal being of all things, all things would necessarily be simply one. . . . If God is the being of all things, it is no more true to say 'A stone is a being' than 'A stone is God.'"<sup>51</sup> Within his own system he is quite right, precisely because he is working without the essence-activities distinction. Since his essence is all there is to God, and it is absolutely undifferentiated, then if God is the being of creatures, all things are the same; and since the essence of creatures is the essence of God, they are simply God. Alternatively, if we accept the diversity of creatures but hold that God is their being, then the essence of God must be differentiated according to creatures. This is an equally pantheist theology of the process type. In either case, the attempt to preserve ontological participation without the Palamite distinction leads to an unmitigated immanentism in which God and creation are ultimately identified.

Aquinas' solution is to deny such participation. The divine ideas are only the exemplary causes, not the formal causes, of creatures. The being and all the perfections of creatures are not God, but are rather created similitudes of the divine being and perfections.<sup>52</sup> "From this, which [Dionysius] says, that 'the Divin-

49. "On the Divine Energies," *Syngrammata* 2.97. See also the continuation of the passage cited above, n. 45: "Form in forms as source of form, and Wisdom of those made wise, and, simply, all things of all things; . . . and he is not a being, as above all beings; and he neither is nor has form, as being above form."

50. *Divine Names* VII.3, 872A. Cf. also *ibid.* I.6, 596C: God is "all beings and none of beings."

51. *Summa contra gentiles* I.26.

52. See Kuhlmann, *op. cit.* pp. 31-69, for an extended and neutral expo-

ity is the being of all things,<sup>53</sup> he shows that in all things a certain similitude of the divine being is found from God."<sup>54</sup> Of course this is not what Ps.-Dionysius says at all, and Thomists are usually glad to find that Thomas does not really agree with him. Consequently they argue that there can be no real, ontological union of creatures with God, but only an "intentional participation," which apparently means no more than an agreement of will.<sup>55</sup> As a result creation comes to be seen as autonomous. To be sure, it is still radically dependent on God for its origin and continuance; but it can be considered in and by itself, apart from God, because it has its own being instead of having God as its being. The outcome of this is the theory of "pure nature," creation in a state of existing but not yet having received divine grace, and the concomitant idea of an intrinsic or "natural" finality of the creature, alongside its "supernatural" end in God.

Palamism, of course, rejects all these theories. Creation has no being but God. He is indeed *lapis in lapide*, all things in all things. But this is not pantheism because the "all in all" is not only always accompanied by the "nothing in any" but is grounded in it and made possible by it.<sup>56</sup> God can be wholly present in all things only because he is apart from all. Creation has absolutely no autonomy because the being which God imparts to it in creating is not a created similitude, but is nothing other than himself.<sup>57</sup> This is the meaning of the doctrine of the divine activities as the causal powers of God, or God-for-us. Hence, as Vladimir Lossky says, "The Eastern tradition knows nothing of 'pure' nature to which grace is added as a supernatural gift. For it, there is no natural

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sition of the difference between Palamas and Aquinas on this issue. Cf. also Clarke, art. cit. pp. 121-23, for Aquinas' difference from Neoplatonism in this respect.

53. *On the Celestial Hierarchy* V.1, PG 3.177D.

54. *Summa contra gentiles* 1.26.

55. Williams, art. cit. pp. 41-42, and Garrigues, art. cit. pp. 276, 288-96. Cf. also Williams, p. 44, where he says that Palamas has "an excessively realist view of *theosis*." Garrigues insists that intentional participation is no less "real" than entitative (p. 294), but it is hard to see how this can be if it is not an ontological presence of God at the heart of the creature. Williams gives a better account of the non-realist implications of intentional participation.

56. Cf. Kuhlmann, op. cit., p. 60: "Palamas vermeidet den Pantheismus, indem er nicht Gott in sich, sondern Gottes freie Tat das sein läßt, woran wir teilhaben; Thomas sieht auf das Überwesen und lockert dafür die Verbindung: nur 'urbildlich' ist Gott unser Sein."

57. Palamas argues in precisely the opposite direction from Aquinas. Since the being (*ὄντοτης, τὸ εἶναι*) of all things is God, this activity must be distinct from the divine essence, or the essence would be participated (*Triads* III,2,23, p. 685).

or 'normal' state, since grace is implied in the act of creation itself . . . . [T]here is no 'natural beatitude' for the creation, which can have no other end than deification."<sup>58</sup>

At this point the debate has tended to become a mere war of assertion. The Thomists are content with intentional participation and autonomous creation, the Palamists with entitative participation and no autonomy. The latter say, "Ontological participation must be real, therefore the Palamite distinction is necessary." The former accept the inference but turn it into a *reductio*: "The Palamite distinction is incoherent, therefore there can be no ontological participation." This is no help toward discovering the truth of the matter. However, our exposition of the metaphysical underpinnings of the issue allows us to go a step further.

By arguing that the creature's *esse formale* is not God but a created similitude, Aquinas has established both God and the creature as things, each having its own being. God is an *ens* or *res existens*, as Aquinas says in the same chapter,<sup>59</sup> and creatures are *entia*. In Palamism, on the other hand, where God is the being which the creature has, the strict rule applies: If he is, we are not; if we are, he is not. In Gregory's words, "He is not a being (ὄν) if other things are beings (ὄντα). If he is a being (ὄν), other things are not beings (ὄντα)."<sup>60</sup> But only the latter doctrine adequately preserves the ontological difference, God's absolute "otherness" from creation. By giving up the divine immanence ("all things in all things"), Aquinas has lost as well the divine transcendence ("nothing in any"). God becomes a "something," one being among other beings, and creation must be considered, in an unacceptable manner, as additional to God.<sup>61</sup> The only way to avoid this is to regard the act of creation not as the positing of an autonomous, created act-of-being, but as ontological participation, that is, the *self*-impartment of God so as to be the being of creatures. And this entails the distinction, not of two parts or levels of God, but of the whole and same God as imparticipable essence and participated activities.

58. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London, 1957) p. 101. Cf. Palamas, *Capita* 92, 1188AB: "All other things are effects of the creative activity, brought out of non-being by grace (χάρτι)."

59. *Summa contra gentiles* I.26.

60. *Capita* 78, 1176B.

61. This problem is usually answered by reference to the doctrine of analogy. If this is understood as "causal analogy" or "analogy of participation," it is the same as the Palamist theory. But Thomism accepts as well an "analogy of proportionality" in which both God and the creature have their own being. This must make the creature into a being other than God, so that they can be added together as two beings.

### III. *The Act of Creation*

The idea of the divine activities as nothing but causal powers at once raises the problem of the source of their diversity. If each activity is the whole God, how are they differentiated? So far, we have said that they are differentiated according to the differences of creatures. Indeed this is implied in the very idea that they are "God-for-us," for this means that they are real only in relation to us. If they have no separate subsistence but are only causes, then they are necessarily relative to their effects. Thus they cannot exist by themselves prior to the created world. On the other hand, in order to account for the production of the diverse multiplicity of creation from the absolutely simple God, they must themselves already be multiple and diverse. As causes, they cannot be posterior to their effects. This is the problem of the reality and multiplicity of the divine ideas which caused such difficulties for the Neoplatonists and led them to separate the ideas from the One. To avoid this philosophical dead end, Palamas must find a way to retain both the divinity and eternity of the activities, their identity with God, and their multiplicity and intrinsic relation to creatures. For both sets of attributes are necessary to their role as creative causes.

St. Gregory understands very clearly that there can be no plurality or differentiation of the divine activities apart from creation. In God, he asserts, "there is no difference among Life, and Wisdom, and Goodness, and such things."<sup>62</sup> This vital point has been somewhat neglected by both supporters and opponents of Palamas, with unfortunate consequences. He has been presented as teaching that God generates or multiplies himself into the activities prior to his act of creation, and that this is why he is able to produce a diverse cosmos.<sup>63</sup> If this were the case, the objection that this is a return to the Procline theory in which the mean terms have their own subsistence would be quite valid. In fact, however, the differentiation comes exclusively from the creature: "The illuminations [i.e. activities] are many, going into the partici-

62. *Capita* 34, 1141D.

63. E.g. Lossky, *op. cit.* p. 74: ". . . [T]he energy is not a divine function which exists *on account* of creatures, despite the fact that it is through His energies, which penetrate everything that exists, that God creates. . . . Even if creatures did not exist, God would none the less manifest Himself beyond His essence. . . . Indeed, expressions, such as 'manifest Himself' and 'beyond' are really inappropriate, for the 'beyond' in question only begins to exist with the creation . . . . In using such defective expressions . . . we acknowledge the absolute, non-relative character of the natural and eternal expansive energy, proper to God." E.L. Mascall, whose critique of Palamism in *Existence and Analogy* (London, 1949) pp. 148-54 is based exclusively on Lossky's work rather than on Palamas himself, was led astray by this presentation of St. Gregory's thought.

pants proportionately and in a way proper to them, and multiplied by the difference of their receptive power."<sup>64</sup> Therefore Palamas specifically tells us that the activities are not "absolute": "Not everything which is said about God refers to the essence. For the 'toward something' (τὸ πρὸς τι) is also said; which is relative (ἀναφορικόν), and is indicative not of the essence but of a relation to an other. Such is the divine activity in God."<sup>65</sup> We could hardly ask him to be more explicit.

But this does not mean that Palamas accepts instead the notion that the activities are subsequent to creation. The real multiplicity and pre-existence of the activities, of course, is a much more widely recognized aspect of his thought. He argues that this pre-existence is necessary for creation to occur: "Was there not need of the work of providence even before creation, so as to bring each of the created beings out of non-being at the proper time?"<sup>66</sup> This is simply the theory of participation once more. "The participated necessarily pre-exists the participants. But the participations are participated by all creatures; therefore they also pre-exist all creatures, which is to say they are uncreated."<sup>67</sup> Since the activities are God, the Creator, they are eternal. Thus Palamas always insists that unlike their created effects, they never began.<sup>68</sup> We saw earlier that according to him, in creation they begin to take effect and be revealed, but not to exist. Now, what can it possibly mean to say of what is nothing but an activity, that it can exist without acting? Of what is nothing but a cause, that it is eternal but its effects are not? Of what is relative, that it pre-exists its correlative? This is the question that we must now pursue.

The only answer is that the multiple divine activities are neither prior nor posterior to creation, but are themselves God's act of creating. "For the activity which is being-making and life-making and wise-making, and, simply, creative and preservative (ποιητικὴ καὶ συνεκτικὴ) of things which exist as creatures, is these divine wills and the divine gifts of the Goodness, Cause of all . . . ."<sup>69</sup> God as the Creator, that is, acting to create, is conditioned by or relative to the world in the sense that to speak of a Creator without a creation is meaningless. But this act is the will of God; and whatever is in God, is God, and is therefore eternal and immutable. All competent theistic metaphysicians understand that God does not first exist and then "decide" to create, since temporal and even

64. *Triads* III,2,13, p. 669.

65. *Capita* 127, 1209C.

66. *Triads* III,2,6, p. 653.

67. "On Union and Distinction," *Syngrammata* 2.78.

68. E.g. *Triads*, III,2,6, pp. 653-55; III,2,20, P. 679.

69. "On Union and Distinction," *Syngrammata* 2.78.

ontological succession belong only to the created world. God's act of creation takes place outside of time, it is eternal, although its effects, which are realized or unfolded in the temporal order, are not. Here at any rate the Thomists are right. An eternal creative will need not be a necessary will, and we must distinguish "the eternal willing of the universe from the willing of an eternal universe."<sup>70</sup> As long as we understand that the divine activities are not prior to the act of creation but are that act, there is no difficulty in saying that they are eternal in God but revealed only in their created effects.

In the same way, it is not hard to see that the act of creation must be one in God and many in its effects. Thus Palamas frequently says that the activity of God is "indivisibly divided."<sup>71</sup> This is the necessary condition for, or rather is simply identical with, its being participated. "We participate in the divine activity, but not in the essence, and the activity in which we participate is indivisibly divided."<sup>72</sup> The divine activity, like Plotinus' Being, is a "one-many." Hence God's creative act, his making himself to be participated, is his self-multiplication:

How the Thearchy is uniquely multiplied and becomes multi-form without going out of the One, [Dionysius] makes clear: "That One being is said to be multiplied by the production of the many beings from him." . . . Dionysius does not say that the divine is multiplied by the addition of many beings but by the production, calling the providential power and the divine will in this way from the things produced. From which things, since they are many and different, what is distinguished and different of the divine processions and powers is revealed. . . . He calls these participations and paradigms of beings, pre-existing in God, . . . and divine wills determinative and creative of beings. . . .<sup>73</sup>

Palamas goes on to explain that the activities are uncreated as pre-existent creative causes, but are not the divine essence because they are many and differ from each other. The entire passage makes it clear that the differentiation occurs only in accordance with the created effects. He does not say that God is multiplied before or after creating, but in or by the production of creatures. Elsewhere he says, "How is he the Creator unless he has a creative will and activity? According to these, then, he is divided and

70. Williams, art. cit. p. 38, n. 73. Since the divine activities are eternal but not essential, the contingency of the world is not compromised.

71. E.g. *Capita* 68-69, 1169AB; "On Union and Distinction," *Syngrammata* 2.80; "On the Divine Energies," *Syngrammata* 2.110.

72. "Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite," *Syngrammata* 2.211.

73. "On Union and Distinction," *Syngrammata* 2.89.



multiplied, remaining in essence one, as the divine Maximus says, writing, 'God is said to be multiplied by the particular will for the production of beings (τῷ καθ' ἕκαστον εἰς παραγωγήν τῶν ὄντων βουλήματι). . . .'<sup>74</sup> Again we see that the multiplication is only in the creative will. For God to act *ad extra*, to impart himself, to become multiple by being diversely participated, and to create, are all the same.

This lets us understand what St. Gregory means by the pre-existence of the divine activities. He does not mean, as some Palamists have suggested, that God first, eternally, generates his multiple activities, and then, in an additional act of will, creates the world by means of them.<sup>75</sup> As Williams rightly argues, "[T]his is gross: it involves us in supposing that God is subject to some form of temporal succession, that his 'decision' to create is comparable to human choice, that he has unfulfilled or unrealized potencies — in short, that he is mutable."<sup>76</sup> St. Gregory knows better, for as we have seen he says that the divine activities *are* the creative will or wills of God.<sup>77</sup> This is why he insists that they are eternal but do not exist *per se*: "None of them ever began: not as regards acting, but as regards existing; although they do not exist by themselves

74. "Letter to Damian," *Syngrammata* 2.476.

75. Cf. e.g. Lossky, *op. cit.* pp. 74-75: "The existence of the energies implies no necessity in the act of creation, which is freely effected by the divine energy but determined by a decision of the common will of the three Persons." Cf. also Meyendorff, *op. cit.* pp. 223-24.

76. *Art. cit.* p. 38.

77. Lossky displays a certain confusion on this point. He rightly locates God's will in the energies and identifies it with the divine ideas (*op. cit.* pp. 94-95). But in the same paragraph he says that the ideas are "as it were separated from the essence by the will," which apparently makes them into products of God's will, not the will itself. Accordingly he proceeds to give a distressingly voluntarist account of creation which seems to make its intelligible structure the arbitrary result of a non-rational divine will (p. 95). Yet elsewhere again, as we have seen, he apparently puts the creative will *after* the divine energies. Palamas himself is entirely unambiguous: 'will' and 'activity' are simply two of the many terms he uses for the same divine reality. The will of God cannot itself be the product of an antecedent will or choice, but is rather the immediate procession of the divine essence. This is why the activities, Being, Life, Goodness, etc., are true revelations of God. The doctrine is therefore radically anti-voluntarist. The divine activities are God's "thought-wills" (Lossky, p. 94). His will neither determines nor is determined by, but simply is, his reason. His acts of will are (not cause) the divine ideas. Reason itself, the intelligible structure of reality, is not an arbitrary product of God's will such that it "might have been" different had he chosen differently. But neither is it a super-divine principle by which even God's will is bound. Rather, Reason is God's creative activity, God-for-us, God the Creator. God is Reason, and therefore neither makes it (voluntarism) nor is bound by it as by an external condition.

(καθ' ἑαυτάς), for they are participable, as pre-existent in God."<sup>78</sup> What can it mean to say of what is nothing but an activity that it can exist but not "yet" be active? Just this: that the activities pre-exist eternally, uniformly, without differentiation,<sup>79</sup> as God's one will or power, but take effect and are manifested diversely in creatures as their participated causes.

This becomes even clearer when we consider the passage where Palamas, apparently contradicting himself, says that some of the activities do begin and end: "There are some activities of God which have a beginning and end. . . . We know that all the activities of God are uncreated, but not all are without beginning. For there was a beginning and end, not indeed of the creative power, but of the act (πράξεως) according to it, that is of the activity according to the created things."<sup>80</sup> This text (which scandalizes Williams<sup>81</sup>) shows that it is only according to the effect, not in God, that the activity begins or ends. For example, the divine activity according to which I am created, my paradigm or λόγος, takes effect, is revealed, and in that sense "acts," only when, at a particular moment in history, I come into being. But this does not mean that God, at that point in time, exercises a new activity. Rather, that activity is pre-contained in the one eternal act of creation by which God, in his eternal present, creates the entire expanse of time and all things in it. When Palamas says that the divine activities pre-exist in God, he means not that they constitute a real multiplicity without reference to creatures, but that what is revealed diversely in creatures is nothing other than God's one creative act, which is itself not created but eternal.

The opponents of Palamas, then, have to some extent been attacking a straw man, set up for them by a certain lack of metaphysical subtlety on the part of his modern exponents. St. Gregory would completely agree with these words of Mascall: there is "no room for any semi-divine intermediaries between God and the world . . . , nothing whatever to bridge the gulf between Being that is self-existent and being that is altogether dependent, except the sheer omnipotent fiat of God himself. *Ipsē jussit et creata, / Dixit ipse et facta sunt.*"<sup>82</sup> Yes; and this eternal fiat is exactly what the divine activities are.

78. *Triads* III,2,20, p. 679.

79. See e.g. *Capita* 87, 1184A; *Triads* III,2,25, pp. 687-89. In the latter passage he uses the image, derived from Neoplatonism through Ps.-Dionysius, of the containment of the radii of a circle in the center.

80. *Triads* III,2,28, p. 659.

81. Art. cit. p. 37.

82. Op. cit. p. 124.

But this does not mean that Palamism is after all identical with the well-known Thomist theory, in which the divine ideas have no real pre-existence, but are only possible modes in which the divine essence is imitable by creatures.<sup>83</sup> They are said to pre-exist in God in that he knows his essence "not only as it is in itself, but also as it is participable according to some manner of similitude by creatures."<sup>84</sup> But this leads to a dilemma. If there is in God a real multiplicity of possible modes of imitation, then the very content of God's essence and self-knowledge is differentiated in relation to creatures. What God is is determined by what he can create. To avoid this, we must say that there is in God only a possible multiplicity of modes of imitation.<sup>85</sup> "The relations which multiply the ideas are not in created things but in God. Yet they are not real relations, . . . but relations understood by God."<sup>86</sup> But the multiplicity is then actual only when creatures already exist. In that case, the multiple divine ideas, having no reality in God, cannot be causes of the differentiated multiplicity of creatures until creation is already there, and therefore the creatures cannot be brought into being. There is no way, as it were, of getting the multiplicity started, and since there can be no creatures, it is not truly possible for God to be diversely imitated after all. In short, if the plurality of ideas is to be truly possible, it must be actual; and if it is not actual, it is not possible.

This insufficiently realist theory of the divine ideas is the inevitable outcome of the principle that everything in God is his essence. Given this, to admit a real differentiation of ideas in God would imply that his essence is differentiated in accordance with creatures. Thomism cannot admit that God is really related to the world even by the act of creation, for this would mean that the divine essence itself is conditioned by such a relation. "Creatures are really related to God himself; but in God there is not any real relation of him to creatures, but only a notional one [*secundum rationem*], in so far as creatures are related to him . . . . The relations which are said of God from time [including 'Creator'] are not in God except notionally."<sup>87</sup> The metaphysical lengths to which Thomists are willing to go to preserve the principle that everything in God is his essence are striking. Pursuing the understanding of

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83. For brief accounts of this theory in relation to Palamism, see Ivanka, art. cit. p. 498, and Williams, art. cit. p. 37. For more extended treatments in the context of the One-many problem and Neoplatonism, see Clarke, art. cit. pp. 121-25, and above all Pegis, art. cit. pp. 176-78.

84. *Summa theologiae* Ia, 15, 2, *resp.*

85. Cf. Mascall, op. cit. p. 152.

86. *Summa theologiae* Ia, 15, 2, *ad* 4.

87. *Ibid.*, Ia, 13, 7, *resp.* and *ad* 2.

creation as a one-way relation on the side of the creature, Sertillanges concludes that the created world is ontologically prior to the act of creation.<sup>88</sup> Mascall summarizes this theory: "Just as the creative act, while it is the efficient cause of the existence of creatures, comes, in the order of being, after the creatures and not before, so the ideas, in their multiplicity and distinction, while they are the formal [sic; *read* exemplary] cause of the creatures, come in the order of being after the creatures, and not before."<sup>89</sup> This is indeed the only possible result of denying the Palamite distinction; but is it an acceptable account of creation?

We should not place too much stress on the apparent incoherence of this theory. "*Mystère, toujours,*" says Sertillanges,<sup>90</sup> quite rightly. The real objection is that it is not a theory of creation at all. If the existence of the creature is ontologically prior to the act of creation, if the act of creating is not a real relation in God, then the creature cannot be the product of that act. That the production of the creature is entirely opaque is perhaps simply the mystery of creation. But here, the one thing we know about this production is that it is *not* a divine act. "In the last resort it is not the creative act or the ideas that give existence to the creature, but God, who operates according to the ideas by the creative act."<sup>91</sup> But if the creative act and the ideas are subsequent to the creature, then God cannot cause the creature by operating according to them. If the divine ideas are multiple only after creation, then they cannot be exemplary causes according to which God creates. If the creative act is posterior to the created world, God cannot "operate" (is this not just a synonym for 'act', concealing the start of an infinite regress?) by it in causing that world. If everything in God, including his activity, is his essence, then he cannot really act to create at all lest his essence be conditioned by a relation to creatures and the world be necessary to his being. Palamism says just the reverse: "For his will is the origin for beings."<sup>92</sup> Not the divine essence (which is what a Thomist means by 'God'), but the creative act, is the cause of creatures.<sup>93</sup> It is true that this act cannot be prior to creation, but neither can it be subsequent to it. In a single ontological moment, God creates, acts, multiplies

88. A.D. Sertillanges, *L'idée de création et ses retentissements en philosophie* (Paris, 1945) p. 44. Sertillanges even says (p. 47) that the created world is *temporally* prior, but we need not press this crowning absurdity or attribute it to other Thomists, as it is necessary neither for their theory nor for its refutation.

89. Op. cit. p. 152.

90. Op. cit. p. 56.

91. Mascall, op. cit. p. 152.

92. *Capita* 91, 1185C.

93. Cf. Meyendorff, op. cit. p. 223.

himself, and creatures come to be. Neither can have priority over the other, and it is precisely this ontological simultaneity which constitutes the mystery of creation. "He commanded and they were created."

The Thomist theory tends in a dualist direction, because it says that creatures "first" unaccountably exist, and only then are dependent on God. This is in effect to deny that the created world is the product of God's real act *ad extra*. Aquinas says that some relational terms are applied to God "according to actions which proceed, according to the mode of understanding, to external effects . . . such as 'Creator' and 'Savior'."<sup>94</sup> But he has already explained that this "mode of understanding" does not refer to anything real in God. Locating the existence of the world ontologically prior to the divine ideas or God's causal act is entirely of a piece with the Thomistic autonomy of creation and rejection of ontological participation. Indeed it is precisely the same problem. For in both cases the difficulty results from denying that God creates by making himself, without change, present to and in the world as its being.<sup>95</sup> This denial, of course, arises from the legitimate fear that such a presence undercuts God's absolute transcendence and makes God and the world interdependent. In this doctrine, says Williams, "God and the world appear to be bound up in a kind of organic unity."<sup>96</sup> Palamism, with its ontological understanding of participation and realist view of the divine ideas, does indeed see such an "organic unity."<sup>97</sup> God in his creative activity is really related to the world, *πρὸς τι, ἀναφορικὸν πρὸς ἕτερον*. In Palamas' words, "Therefore, as Creator and Cause of these things, God is known and is named from them and according to them, and is seen in a certain relation (*σχέσει*) according to them."<sup>98</sup> But this relation does not lead to mere immanentism or make creation necessary to God because it pertains not to the divine essence but to the eternal yet gratuitous causal activity of God, the creative procession of the divine activities.<sup>99</sup> Once again

94. *Summa theologiae* Ia,13, 7, ad 3.

95. Clarke, art. cit. p. 122, makes this connection extremely clear: "The divine ideas are no longer the very forms, the true being, of creatures, but their intentional similitudes." Therefore creatures have "their own intrinsic act of existence, which is not their intelligible essence."

96. Art. cit. p. 37.

97. Cf. Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed," p. 129: "The whole cosmos is a vast burning bush, permeated but not consumed by the uncreated fire of the divine energies."

98. "On Union and Distinction," *Syngrammata* 2.83.

99. For the same reason it does not compromise the divine impassibility or pander to the modern taste for a mutable or emotive God, because God initiates the relation. God's relation to creatures is *sui generis*, because it

the Palamite distinction appears as a metaphysical necessity for a coherent theory of creation.

#### IV. *The Mystery of Creation*

The Palamite distinction is a true antinomy because instead of dividing the imparticipable and the participable into separate metaphysical levels or hypostases, it declares that the whole and same God is both participable and imparticipable, comprehensible and incomprehensible, and so forth.<sup>100</sup> In this way it preserves the mystery of creation. If the divine activities were conceived as a real multiplicity proceeding from God prior to and independent of the existence of creation, then this would indeed be an attempt, although a futile one, to represent the production of the many from the One as a discursively explicable metaphysical process.<sup>101</sup> But the theory that the participants exist before the multiple participations equally does away with the mystery by in effect denying that the One is the cause of the many at all. In Palamism, the origin of diversity is a genuine mystery, because it is prior neither in God nor in creatures. God cannot act *ad extra* until there is an "outside" towards which he can act, but the "outside" cannot exist until he has acted. Creation is thus the unconditioned and therefore mysterious act of God's self-impartation, whereby God becomes participated and creatures come to participate, and so to exist, in a single ontological moment.

But to say that the distinction is an antinomy is not to say that it is not ontologically real or that it is only an "epistemological" distinction necessary for our thought but not objectively true of God. Ivanka, using this definition of 'antinomy', draws a sharp contrast between modern Palamists such as Lossky and Meyendorff who say that the distinction is antinomic, which on Ivanka's view means that it has a "purely relative validity" or that its ground lies in the nature of our thought rather than in God's being, and "historical" Palamism in which "the energies-theory is simply an on-

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causes the *existence* of its correlative. It is a relation of action, not passion, and the action is eternal. The act of creation is not a change in God.

100. E.g. "On Deifying Participation," *Syngammata* 2.161; "Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite," *Syngammata* 2.174; *ibid.* 2.200; *Capita* 81, 1180A. Ivanka, on the other hand, insists that it is not antinomic because Palamas treats the activities as a multiplicity in God independent of creation, "a sphere of the divine below the essence of God" (art. cit. pp. 494-95). As we have seen, this is not in fact Palamas' teaching.

101. Ivanka, *ibid.* pp. 494-95, takes the doctrine in just this way, and therefore concludes that it tries "das Hervorgehen des Endlichen aus dem Unendlichen, des Vielfältigen aus dem Einen als geistigen Hervorgang, als ontologischen Prozess im denkenden Geist nachzuvollziehen und so zu begreifen. . . ." (p. 496; cf. p. 493.)

tological, indeed a dogmatic, expression about God."<sup>102</sup> This opposition misses the point of an antinomy, which is that both sides of the antithesis are ontologically necessary. There is no contrast between 'antinomic' and 'ontologically valid'; the Palamite distinction is an *ontologically valid antinomy*.<sup>103</sup> We have by now seen both that historical Palamism, the Palamism of Palamas, is genuinely antinomic, as its modern exponents have claimed; and that this antinomy is ontologically necessary for a coherent metaphysics of creation. Any attempt to avoid it, whether by separating the first multiplicity from the One as in Neoplatonism, or by absorbing the divine ideas into the divine essence as in Thomism, results not in a more philosophically acceptable theory of creation, but in the collapse of the theory at a purely rational, philosophical level. Creation is a mystery not because there can be no metaphysics of it, but because the only philosophically possible metaphysics is necessarily antinomic.

The same reading of Palamism as not truly antinomic has led to the objection that despite its claim to be a radically apophatic theology, it is in fact thoroughly cataphatic in that it understands the essence-activities distinction as a positive ontological truth about God's being.<sup>104</sup> This would be true, of course, if Palamas were so crude as to think of God as an "object," a thing subject to metaphysical dissection which discovers that he consists of both essence and activity. But we have seen that this is not what Gregory means at all. The divine activities are not a separate "level" or even "aspects" of God. They are, quite simply, God: God the Creator, God the Lord, God relative to us. "And God has what is relative, and relative to creation, as its Origin and Master."<sup>105</sup> For such terms, necessarily implying their correlatives 'creation' and 'servant', cannot possibly describe God as he is independent of all relation. The changeless and absolute God, without changing or abandoning his absoluteness, has made himself relative to creation by acting to create; and this, not a division into parts or levels, is the ontological truth which St. Gregory wishes to convey by the real distinction between essence and activities.

102. *Ibid.* p. 495.

103. Ware, "Debate," p. 46: "By an 'antinomy' in theology I mean the affirmation of two contrasting or opposed truths, which cannot be reconciled on the level of the discursive reason although a reconciliation is possible on the higher level of contemplative experience." Cf. also Sergius Bulgakov, *The Wisdom of God*, tr. Frank Gavin (New York and London, 1937) p. 116, n. 1: "An antinomy simultaneously admits the truth of two contradictory, logically incompatible, but ontologically equally necessary assertions."

104. See e.g. Ivanka, art. cit. p. 499, n. 37.

105. *Capita* 145, 1221C.

But if the divine activities are not separate things, neither is the divine essence. Williams, following Ivanka's interpretation, castigates Palamas for separating the essence from the activities and treating it as "a core of essential life," an "isolable core of pure unmoving interiority, an 'inner substance', a further subject of predication."<sup>106</sup> But this is precisely how St. Gregory refuses to treat the divine essence. It is true that his language sometimes suggests such a reification. But his more careful precisions show that he is far above such a gross error. He cannot be said to treat the essence as a subject of predication when he repeatedly asserts that it is "beyond all affirmation and negation,"<sup>107</sup> inexpressible by absolutely any word or thought. "The superessential and super-living and super-God and super-good nature . . . is neither spoken nor thought nor contemplated in any way whatsoever, because, transcending all things, it is super-unknowable . . . and always altogether incomprehensible and ineffable to all; for there is no name of it in this age, nor is it named in the age to come. . . ."<sup>108</sup> Absolutely every name, without exception, belongs to the activities, not the essence. Following the Cappadocians and Ps.-Dionysius, Palamas points out that even the words 'God' and 'Godhead' refer only to activities.<sup>109</sup>

Above all, however, he recognizes that the very term 'essence' does not designate the divine essence, but only God's being-making activity. "Even this name 'essence' means one of these powers about God."<sup>110</sup> All names are applied to God only by causal analogy from creatures, not "properly." The divine nature "is therefore called 'essence' and 'nature' but properly [these refer to] the being-making procession and activity of God."<sup>111</sup> The "real essence," which we must again insist is not an inner "part" of God but God in his radical independence of creation, simply cannot be referred to at all, even as essence, God, Godhead, or 'Urgottheit'. Nothing could be farther than this from treating it as an "isolable core," a metaphysical substance. And this is the necessary outcome of the theory of creation. For anything that we can refer to is shown by that very fact to be related to us and therefore cannot be God in himself, absolutely unrelated.<sup>112</sup> In Bulgakov's

106. Art. cit. pp. 34, 40.

107. *Triads* III,2,11, p. 663; III,3,14, p. 723.

108. *Capita* 106, 1192CD.

109. *Ibid.* 84, 1181A; *Triads* III,2,10, p. 661.

110. *Ibid.* III,2,11, p. 663.

111. *Capita* 106, 1193A; cf. *Theophanes*, 937B. This vital point, without which the entire doctrine would be utter nonsense, seems to have been observed only by Kuhlmann (op. cit. pp. 28, 30), and even he does not attribute to it its real importance.

112. Williams, art. cit. p. 40, presents a similar theory as an alternative to



words, "God transcends the world . . . to such an extent that even the purely negative theology which denies all possibility of knowing anything about God, has nevertheless already gone too far in affirming so much as that." But God has revealed himself by creating, and therefore we can speak of him. "It is only in relation to [creaturely] being that he can be called God. . . . This state in which the absoluteness of the Absolute is combined with the relationship joining the world to God . . . constitutes the ultimate antinomy for our reason . . . . In practice this antinomy can be expressed for us in the following proposition: the Absolute reveals itself to us as God."<sup>113</sup> This is precisely what Palamas means by the essence-activities distinction; except, of course, that 'the Absolute' is merely another name and implies a relation in its very assertion of unrelatedness. When we come to That (another name) which is not even "the divine essence," it is the time for silence. There is simply nothing that can be said.

The purpose of this paper has been twofold. First, to clarify certain metaphysical aspects of Palamas' doctrine which have been neglected by his critics and even to some extent by his supporters. Secondly, to show that even when these issues are properly understood, Palamism remains significantly different from the dominant metaphysics of creation in western theology. Not only is it free from the incoherencies which have been attributed to it, but it is in fact far more coherent, as a metaphysical account of what creation must mean, than the received Thomist doctrine.

As regards the relation of Palamism to Neoplatonism, the prevailing views have been rather polarized. It has been universally assumed that there is a struggle between Christianity and Neoplatonism in which Palamas either successfully resists Neoplatonic influence (Lossky, Meyendorff) or succumbs to it (Ivanka, Williams). The issue is not so simple. Palamas' doctrine is genuinely Neoplatonic, far more so than Thomism, in two vital and inseparable

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the supposed Palamist view of the essence as "a quasi-object." ". . . [T]o say . . . that knowledge is of *energeia* rather than *ousia* is to state the obvious. . . . Clearly we know God only in so far as he acts upon us, as he is 'present' to us, never as he is 'present' to himself; but this is not peculiar to our knowledge of God." But when Williams says that these activities "are simply the diverse ways in which [God's] *actus essendi* is present to us," we must differ. For this makes the essence of God present and hence related to us, so that creation is essential to God. What is peculiar to God's incomprehensibility is that his relation to us, although real, is not necessary to or constitutive of his being, of what he is. "He is the ground (*ὑποστάτης*) of [the activities], but he is not grounded by them; for the things about God are not the essence of God, but he is the essence of the things about him." (*Triads* III,2,25, p. 689.)

113. Op. cit. pp. 94-95.

points: the realist understanding of the divine ideas, and the view of them, and therefore of God, as "the very forms, the true being, of creatures."<sup>114</sup> But St. Gregory maintains this position not by adopting a theory of mean terms but by working out the intrinsic requirements of the idea of participation. His doctrine is thus a real philosophical development of Neoplatonism, on internally necessary lines. It brings to full prominence the antinomy which was already implicit in the Neoplatonic theory of participation. This development was carried out by Ps.-Dionysius, and it is his doctrine that St. Gregory reiterates and expounds.

This examination has not brought to light any new features of Palamism on the purely spiritual side. Indeed, it has confirmed what the Palamists have long been saying about such issues as the rejection of creaturely autonomy, the dialectic of transcendence and immanence, the ontological deification of man. The difference is that St. Gregory grasped the metaphysical grounds of these teachings more thoroughly than some of his modern interpreters. He was, in fact, a more astute metaphysician than either side in the modern controversy has allowed. But this integration of spirituality and metaphysics should not trouble or surprise us. Truth is one; and if a doctrine is spiritually true, it must be able to stand up to metaphysical scrutiny. When we allow St. Gregory to speak for himself as a metaphysician, we find that his doctrine not only meets this demand but reveals its full philosophical coherence and strength.

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114. Clarke, art. cit. p. 122.