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# THE CONCEPT OF 'BEING' IN AQUINAS AND PALAMAS

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MA by Research

Durham University

Department of Theology and Religion

2010

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*THE CONCEPT OF 'BEING' IN AQUINAS AND PALAMAS*

**Abstract**

The aim of the present dissertation is a comparative analysis of the issue of *being* as found in the writings of St. Gregory Palamas and St. Thomas Aquinas. Primarily, I set two main focuses for my research: firstly, an overview of the life and work of the great Byzantine theologian and, secondly, a comparative analysis with St. Thomas Aquinas on the issue of *being*.

Although the present dissertation deals with both theological and philosophical issues, my research remains mainly a theological one. I am not interested in a merely theoretical evaluation of the history of *being*, but rather in how this notion is applied in the dynamics of the relation between God and man.

I structured my thesis around the evaluation of the concept of *being* in its applicability on God, on man, and on the way in which the two are linked. Therefore, I developed my analysis on each of the two authors, discussing in separate sections on: the divine being, the created being, the issue of grace and the views on deification. Before commencing the examination of the proposed issue, I found relevant to include an introduction dealing with the historical matters concerning each of the two theologians and their 'dialogue' within Eastern and Western theological framework. A final section concluded this study tracing the reception of their thought within the twentieth century Theology.

*This dissertation is the product of my own work, and the work of others has been properly acknowledged throughout.*

*The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.*

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## INTRODUCTION

My thesis proceeds from a primary interest on a detailed analysis of Gregory Palamas' doctrine: its origins in previous patristic writings and its effects on the Orthodox theological tradition. There are two main points of my research: firstly, an overview of the life and work of the great Byzantine theologian and, secondly, a comparative analysis with Thomas Aquinas on the issue of *being*.

The purpose of my research is to find divergent and convergent points in the two Christian traditions, in the way these were considered in the fourteenth century Byzantine theological scene and the circumstances in which the two theologians later became representative for East and West.

History has preserved a somewhat antagonistic image of the two authors whose doctrines I am proposing to analyse in more depth. The Palamite and Thomist doctrines are considered by most modern critiques as irreconcilable in certain points. They are the expression of an extremely divergent development in the Eastern and Western Christian tradition.

In the Orthodox world, the twentieth century represented a significant re-evaluation of the works and thought of Gregory Palamas (from Dumitru Stăniloae's first translation in a modern language and monograph in the early 30's, to Panayotis Christou's editions in Greek and the multitude of studies published in the West). Nonetheless, a considerable part of his writings still remains un-translated into modern languages. The evaluations on this theme still allow for substantial research effort, which can be developed beyond the simple analysis of the monastic treaties and hesychast spirituality, to a deeper systematic evaluation.

The problem of *being* can be considered a sensible interference point between church doctrine and Greek philosophy and also between Eastern and Western theological traditions.

I shall be attempting to provide a detailed analysis of the theological and patristic resources on this matter, and also of its philosophical background, considering that the distinctions disputed in fourteenth century Byzantium presupposed a metaphysical and

linguistic background which was interpreted differently by the two traditions. From the Eastern point of view, the assimilation of Aristotle's philosophy by Thomist theology looked excessive, whereas from the Western perspective, the development of Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas led Eastern spirituality to an excessive mysticism. The Greek philosophical term of *being* seems to have been understood differently in the development of these two traditions. Also, the discovery of *hypostasis* in fourth-century Christian theology was a revolutionary step in conceiving God and Man and the possibility of relationships between the two. In the different accounts of grace and the process of *theosis*, there are significant differences between East and West. The roots of the twentieth century problems regarding personhood, for example, can probably be found here (in Orthodox theology, these problems were given a lot of attention in the works of theologians such as Lossky, Stăniloae, Zizioulas and Yannaras – to give just a few names).

Although it concerns both theological and philosophical issues, my research remains mainly a theological one, for I am not interested in a purely theoretical evaluation of the history of *being*, but rather in how this notion is applied in the dynamics of the relation between God and man. On the other hand, I set myself to discover Aquinas here, as in Eastern universities he is rarely studied and, if so, mainly in the departments of Philosophy. As far as Theological Faculties are concerned, he provokes no active interest. And I can now say that discovering Aquinas is not an easy task, and definitely not one that can be done in a small period of time.

I structured my thesis around the evaluation of the concept of *being* in its applicability to God, to man, and to linking the two. Therefore, there will be separate chapters on the divine being, the created being, the issue of grace and the views on deification. Before the main study, I chose to develop an introduction regarding the historical matters concerning each of the two authors and their 'dialogue' within the framework of Eastern and Western Theology, taking into account that they meet not only in the past, but also in our referential attempt to discover God in the present.



## ***1. Gregory Palamas and his Writings***

The main source regarding the life of St. Gregory Palamas is the extensive biographic-hagiographic *Enkomion* written by Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (1300-1379), and edited in 1857 in Jerusalem, an edition that can be found in *PG* 150, 551-656.

As extended works regarding the life and theological activity of St. Gregory Palamas, the main scientific monographs remain those written by Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Teaching of St. Gregory Palamas* (Sibiu, 1938), and John Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregory Palamas* (Patristics Sobornensia 3, Paris, 1959).

According to the information in the sources mentioned above, St. Gregory Palamas was born in Constantinople in 1296<sup>1</sup>. He died at the age of 63, in November 1359<sup>2</sup>, after more than 12 years of archiepiscopate. In Robert Sinkewicz's view, the life and theological work of Gregory Palamas can be divided into four periods: his early life and formative period (1296-1335), the controversy with Barlaam the Calabrian (1335-1341), the controversy with Gregory Akindynos (+1348) and the civil war period (1341-1347), and, finally, the triumph of Palamite theology (1347-1357)<sup>3</sup>.

Gregory Palamas' parents had moved from Asia Minor to Constantinople before they had children, and they were of a wealthy family. His father, Constantine, was a member of the Senate and an adviser to the Emperor Andronikos II (1282-1328). A man with an exemplarily moral life, he was chosen by the emperor as a teacher for his nephew, Andronikos III. Before his death he entered monasticism taking the name of Constantios. At the time of his death, Gregory was only 7 years old.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Sinkewicz indicates 1296 as year of birth, and 1357 as year of death. 'Gregory Palamas', in *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, coord. C. Conticello & V. Conticello, vol. 2, Turnhout: Brepols, 2002, p. 131. The Romanian theologian Ioan I. Ică jr. considers 1294 as Palamas' date of birth. According to him, the date of death, November 1359, is infirmed by the notes of the so-called small 'Byzantine chronicles' (ed. Schreiner, 1975), and by scholars such as N.A. Bees (1904, 1906), H.V. Beyer (1978), and A. Rigo (1994), and opts for the more likely date of 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1357. 'Violență și dialog inter-religios în captivitatea otomană a Sfântului Grigorie Palama' (Violence and Inter-religious Dialogue in the Ottoman Captivity of St. Gregory Palamas), in vol. *Violența 'în numele lui Dumnezeu' – un răspuns creștin*. Edit. Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2002, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> According to Dumitru Stăniloae, the day of death is November 13<sup>th</sup> – *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigore Palama (The Life and Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas)*, Sibiu, 1938, p. 9. According to J. Meyendorff, it is November 27<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> 'Gregory Palamas', p. 131.

Gregory was sent to study secular sciences, activities which he very well accomplished. Theodore Metochites, the famous writer and scholar of the time, once engaged in a conversation with the young Palamas about Aristotle, in front of the emperor, and, amazed by his answers, he exclaimed toward the emperor: 'If Aristotle himself would have heard him, would have praised him, I think, a lot.'<sup>4</sup>

Even since his adolescence, Gregory kept a close relationship with the monks of Mount Athos and he later decided to join them as a monk, around the year 1316<sup>5</sup>. A long period of time he practiced asceticism and withdrawn in contemplation. At the age of 30 he was ordained as priest in Thessalonica.

The main episode of Gregory Palamas' activity is related to the famous hesychastic disputes<sup>6</sup>. The starting date of the theological controversies around hesychasm and the theology of the uncreated energies is around 1335<sup>7</sup>. The first episode is generated by Barlaam of Calabria<sup>8</sup>, who considered St. Gregory's thesis of the uncreated energies as a falling into ditheism<sup>9</sup>. He will be condemned as heretic by the Constantinopolitan synod of 1341.

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<sup>4</sup> D. Stăniloae, *The Life and Teaching...*, p. 10. In this dispute Barlaam calls Gregory 'stupid and ignorant'. Cf. John Meyendorff, until he turned twenty years old, Gregory 'was engaged in secular studies, the basic classical *trivium* and *quadrivium*, which gave him a considerable knowledge of Aristotle. The *Metaphysics* of Plato were considered by the traditionalists Byzantine world to be incompatible with Christianity and therefore were not allowed in the ordinary curriculum of secular studies' - *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1998, p. 71. The same information is summarised by Katerina Ierodiakonou, 'The Anti-Logical Movement' in *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, edited by Katerina Ierodiakonou, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 226.

<sup>5</sup> J. Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, p. 72. D. Stăniloae places this event one year later.

<sup>6</sup> In Donald Nicol's view, one of the majors disputes of the last centuries of Byzantium, 'a controversy that was to divide the Empire'. *Church and society in the last centuries of Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> This is the date proposed by Meyendorff, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, XII, 86. D. Stăniloae considers 1337 as the date of Balaam's first writings against hesychasts and also of Palamas' first Triad. *The Life and Teaching...*, p. 21, 25. Vladimir Lossky mentions 1339 as the moment of Barlaam's attacks. *The Vision of God*, trans. Asheleigh Moorhouse, The Faith Press, 1963, p. 124. According to Joseph Gill, it was Palamas who started the War of the written word by his Triads, in 1338. *Byzantium and the Papacy 1198-1400*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 1979, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> Barlaam's origin and life before coming to East are veiled in mystery. Palamas called him a 'Latin Greek'. He was either a Catholic who, coming in the East converted to Orthodoxy, or an Orthodox from Calabria, where there were many Orthodox Greeks. Cf. D. Stăniloae *The Life and Teaching...*, p. 14, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Barlaam's works were destroyed almost entirely after the council in 1341. Still, some of his letters survived. Andrew Louth remarked, in his review on *Dalla controversia palamitica all polemica esicastica (con un'edizione critica delle Epistole greche di Barlaam)*, by Antonis Phyrigos, Rome: Antonianum, 2005, that 'for the most part, editions of Palamas and his supporters have been prepared by Orthodox scholars, whereas Barlaam and others who opposed Palamas have been edited (and generally rather better) by western scholars'. - in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 58 (2007), 553.

The next six years will represent a very difficult period for St. Gregory Palamas and his followers, as the theological disputes evolved during the dramatic events of the Byzantine civil war of 1341-1347, between Anne of Savoy, John Apokaukos and Patriarch John XIV Calecas, who reigned in Constantinople, and the great domestikos John Cantacuzenos, who proclaimed himself co-emperor in 1341.<sup>10</sup> As a hostile reaction to John Cantacuzenos, who agreed and supported the hesychast movement and Gregory Palamas, the patriarch John Calecas and Anne of Savoy assisted Gregory Akindynos, who became the main opponent of Palamas. Akindynos, though initially a friend and disciple of Gregory Palamas and opponent to Barlaam of Calabria, became in 1341 the main opponent of the theology of the uncreated energies<sup>11</sup>, after the condemnation of Barlaam and his departure to Italy. In Constantinople, the monk Gregory Palamas was arrested in May 1343<sup>12</sup>, and even excommunicated in November 1344. His opponent, Gregory Akindynos, is ordained priest by the Patriarch John XIV Calecas, who even wanted to elevate him as bishop. Meanwhile, following some disagreements with Empress Anne, the patriarch is dethroned by the Constantinopolitan Council, initially in late 1346 and then, again, in February 1347, this time by a council organised by John VI Cantacuzenos who victoriously entered Constantinople.

The latter council (February 1347) reconfirmed the Tomos of the Synod in 1341, and excommunicated Akindynos (who died in exile several months later) and his followers. The new ecumenical Patriarch, Isidore (May 1347 – December 1349), will celebrate the triumph of *palamism* by replacing the ecclesial hierarchy with 32 monks, loyal friends of St. Gregory Palamas. Patriarch Isidore also ordained Gregory Palamas as Archbishop of Thessalonica, and his close friend, Philotheos Kokkinos, as Metropolitan of Heracleas.

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<sup>10</sup> ‘In the six years of civil war that followed, the question of the orthodoxy of Palamas, who was a personal friend of Cantacuzenus, and of his supporters, became a political issue’. Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, Yuri Stoyanov, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c.650–c.1405*, Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 278.

<sup>11</sup> Some of his writings have been preserved. In the same way as Barlaam, Akindynos starts from accusations of ditheism, only to eventually center the whole polemic on the distinction between God's essence and energies and on the nature of the divine light. Further details beyond this simplified presentation can be found in Juan Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas: enquête historique, avec traduction et commentaire de quatre traités édités récemment* (Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense. Etudes et documents; fasc. 50-51), Leuven: Peeters, 2006. In English, we have Angela Constantinides Hero's edition, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos* (Greek text and English), Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, Research Library and Collection, 1983. Palamas started writing against Akindynos in 1342.

<sup>12</sup> D. Stăniloae *The Life and Teaching...*, p. 117.

Following his enthronement as archbishop of the second city of the Empire, which in fact took place only later in 1350, Gregory Palamas was absorbed by an intense pastoral, liturgical and social activity. He left Thessalonica only in May–July 1351<sup>13</sup>, to take part to the great synod of Constantinople, the third council that confirmed the cause of hesychasm and, this time, condemned Nicephorus Gregoras<sup>14</sup> and his followers. The synod, in its Tomos, definitively approves from a dogmatic point of view the theology of the uncreated energies as an official teaching of the Byzantine Church<sup>15</sup>. One of the last significant events of Gregory Palamas' life is the one-year captivity in 1355, caught by the Ottomans and forced to a regime of detention.

After his death in 1357/1359, the controversies around hesychasm and the uncreated energies continued until 1368 when the patriarch of Constantinople, Philotheos, convened a last council on this matter, the council which canonized Gregory Palamas as a saint.<sup>16</sup>

According to John Meyendorff's description of St. Gregory Palamas in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* XII (1983), col. 81-107, the works of the fourteenth century Byzantine theologian are divided as follows:

- a) Writings on Spirituality (7 titles);
- b) Personal Theology and Apologetics; central section represented by the dogmatic and polemic treaties (20 titles);
- c) 63 Homilies, written during Palamas' last years, while being Archbishop of Thessalonica.

More recently, Robert Sinkewicz's classification<sup>17</sup> surpassed Meyendorff's. Thus, the works are divided in:

- a) Theological Works (20 titles)

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<sup>13</sup> 1351 is the year in which the Hesychast controversy reaches its climax, after almost twenty years of disputes and with echoes until the end of the century. For a detailed evolution of this debate see: Lowell Clucas, *The Hesychast Controversy in Byzantium in the Fourteenth Century: A Consideration of the Basic Evidence*, PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975.

<sup>14</sup> Gregoras' criticism starts in 1346. Basically, the polemic with Gregoras (who will continue writing after the council in 1351) is the third and final stage of the disputes regarding hesychasm.

<sup>15</sup> J. Gill notices that 'already before the synod of 1351, Palamism had been introduced into the profession of faith required of bishops before their consecration. The year after the synod, Patriarch Callistus added to the *Synodicon* recited from the pulpit each year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy a series of anathemas against Barlaam, Akindynos and their followers, and of acclamations in honour of Palamas and his doctrines. Palamism was now triumphant'. *Byzantium and the Papacy 1198-1400*, p. 203.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding the events between 1351 and 1368, see Antonio Rigo, 'Il Monte Athos e la controversia palamitica dal Concilio del 1351 al Tomo Sinodale del 1368', in *Gregorio Palamas e oltre: studi e documenti sulle controversie teologiche del XIV secolo bizantino*, Firenze, 2004, p. 1-177.

<sup>17</sup> 'Gregory Palamas', p. 138-155.

b) Letters (23)

c) Spiritual and Pastoral Works (7 titles including the *Homilies*)

Of all these texts, only a minority have been reedited with a Latin translation in the volumes 150-151 of the *Patrologiae Graecae* series, volumes published in Paris (1865-1868) by Abbe J.P. Migne. In 1959 – the year in which in Thessalonica six hundred years since Palamas' death were celebrated – the Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies in Thessalonica, led by Professor Panayotis Christou (died 1994), started the project of compiling a critical edition in six volumes of Palamas' complete works. Their publication was extended for over more than three decades: *Gregoriou tou Palama Syngrammata*, Thessalonica, vol. I: *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit, and the Triads in Defending the Hesychasts against Barlaam*, 1962, 743 p.; vol. II: *Writings and Letters against Akindynos*, 1966, 702 p.; vol. III: *Treaties against Akindynos*, 1970, 531 p.; vol. IV: *The Epistles of Captivity, and Treaties against Gregoras*, 1988, 406 p.; vol. V: *The 150 Chapters, and Spiritual Writings*, 1992, 298 p.; vol. VI: *The Homilies*.

Regarding the issue of categorising St. Gregory Palamas' works, Ioan I. Ică Jr. writes that 'between all three sections of the Palamite works there is an organic and unbreakable unity, even if not always explicitly stated, and a mutual illumination of the various aspects of the same reasons and themes, from different angles and in different genres.'<sup>18</sup>

The history of the manuscripts and their translation to date presents a rather tortuous evolution. Almost all his writings remained in manuscript, except two apodictic treaties on the procession of the Holy Spirit published in Constantinople in 1627, six spiritual writings which Nicodemos the Hagiorite included in his first edition of the *Greek Philokalia*, Venice (1782), and 41 homilies (Jerusalem, 1857 – the remaining 22 will be published in Athens in 1861), texts included in the volumes 150-151 of the series *Patrologiae Graecae*, and accompanied by a Latin translation.

The historians and theologians who dealt with the study of St. Gregory Palamas in the first half of the twentieth century – G. Papamichail (1911), M. Jugie (1932), B.

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<sup>18</sup> Ioan I. Ică jr., 'Morala și spiritualitatea ortodoxă în viziunea Sfântului Grigorie Palama' (Orthodox Morality and Spirituality in the Vision of St. Gregory Palamas), in *Revista Teologică*, 1994, no. 3, p. 15. Regarding his theology, 'Gregory Palamas was not a systematic theologian in the modern sense'. Alexis Torrance, 'Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers', in *Vigiliae Christianae*, 63 (2009), 48.

Krivosheine (1936), D. Stăniloae (1938) and J. Meyendorff (1959) – had to work mainly on photocopies of the Byzantine manuscripts.<sup>19</sup>

In English, we have the following writings translated:

- *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, edited with an introduction by John Meyendorff, translation by Nicholas Gendle, Preface by Jaroslav Pelikan, Paulist Press, 1983.
- *Saint Gregory Palamas: The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, translation and study by Robert E. Sinkewicz, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 1988.
- *Gregory Palamas: Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, translated, introduction and notes by Daniel M. Rogich, Life and Light, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1995.
- *Gregory Palamas: Dialogue between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite*, translated by Sara J. Denning-Balle, Global Publications CEMERS, Binghamton, New York 1999.
- *The Homilies of St. Gregory Palamas*, vols. 1 and 2, edited with an introduction and notes by Christopher Veniamin, St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, Pennsylvania 2002/4. *Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies*, Mount Thabor Publishing, 2009.

Of all these works, I shall consider for my research mainly *The Triads* and *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*.

## **2. Thomas Aquinas and his Writings**

The main source for St. Thomas Aquinas' life is the *Fontes vitae S. Thomas Aquinatis notis historicis et criticis illustrati*<sup>20</sup>. The oldest three biographies are those of William of Tocco, Bernard Gui, and Peter Calo.<sup>21</sup> In the beginning of his detailed exposition of Thomas Aquinas' life and works, J-P Torrell draws the following synthetic image of St. Thomas: 'He has too often been presented as a timeless thinker; but in fact he was situated in a specific time and place, marked by precise historical contingencies. Travelling the roads of Europe under religious obedience – from Naples to Cologne by

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<sup>19</sup> Ioan I. Ică jr., 'St. Gregory Palamas – hesychast spiritual writer', in vol. *Patristică și actualitate. Omagiu în onoarea P. C. Arhid. Prof. Univ. Dr. Constantin Voicu, la împlinirea a 75 de ani de viață*, Edit Andreiană, Sibiu, 2008, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> Ed. D. Prümmer and M.H. Laurent, Toulouse.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and his Works*, trans Robert. Royal, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 1996, p. XV.

way of Paris, then Cologne to Rome after another stay in Paris and one in Orvieto, back to Paris for a third time, finally Naples for several months / he died on the road while travelling to the Council of Lyon. He had to travel in haste, plagued by a thousands different tasks, leaving many unfinished. His search for eternal Truth, among almost all the philosophers and theologians known in his time (whose works he tirelessly scrutinised and commented on) was thus carried out under conditions of urgency and precariousness.’<sup>22</sup>

St. Thomas was born in the late 1224 or early 1225, at the castle of Roccasecca, not far from the small town of Aquino, where his father was a count. His parents took him to the neighbouring Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino in 1230, when he was five years old.

At Monte Cassino he received his first education: based on Latin letters, he had to deepen the Bible and the writings of St. Gregory the Great. He remained there, living by the Benedictine rules until the age of twelve. This first monastic education left undeletable traces upon him: he would never cease to be, firstly, a monk.

In 1239, Frederick II expelled the monks of Monte Cassino. As a result, Thomas returned to his family, where he remained until the autumn of that year, when he was sent to the recently founded University of Naples, established by the Emperor Frederick II (the first university founded independently of the Church). Very early on, in a thriving environment for all various sciences, Thomas became acquainted with Aristotle’s natural philosophy and the writings of the Arab Commentator Averroës.<sup>23</sup> Around this time Thomas comes in contact with the Dominican monks.

Thomas’ father died on 24 December 1243. In 1244, the young man decided to enter the Order of Brethren preachers, founded by St. Dominic. Following the opposition put by Thomas’ brothers, the general magister of the order, Ioannes Teutonicus, decided to take him to Bologna, and afterwards to send him to the University of Paris. His brothers caught up with them during this trip and they held him for almost a year.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XX. According to Thomas O’Meara, ‘some have estimated that on his trips across Europe he walked over 9000 miles’. *Thomas Aquinas Theologian*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1997, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Thus, by the time he was 20, Thomas had been exposed to two radically different cultures: the age-old tradition of Latin monasticism, richly indebted to Augustine and Christian neo-Platonism, and, on the other hand, the pagan philosophy of Aristotle, brought to the West by Jewish and especially Muslim scholars. The tension between what seemed at the time two apparently incommensurable traditions was to dominate Thomas’s intellectual work’. Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, Blackwell, 2002, p. 4.

After his brothers released him, in the autumn of 1245 he was sent to Paris, where he studied until the summer of 1248. Here, for three years, he had Albert the Great as his master. Under the direction of Albert the Great, Thomas became more familiar with the ethics of Aristotle and the works of Dionysius<sup>24</sup>. When his master left Paris to go to organize a *studium generale* in Cologne, Thomas accompanied him, and worked as his assistant from 1248 to 1252.

In 1252, he returned to Paris, becoming a Bachelor of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, finishing in 1254 his second step required for the Master's degree in Theology. In the spring of 1256, Thomas completes his final step for his Master's degree, receiving the *licentia docendi*, and being admitted into the ranks of the professors by the Bishop of Paris. Thomas took the inaugural lesson of his course of theology in 1256; he will continue teaching here without interruption until the summer of 1259.

At the end of the 1258 / 1259 academic year, Thomas left Paris, probably for Naples.<sup>25</sup> Starting 1261, he was assigned to Orvieto. From 1265 he continued his teaching activity in Rome, where he was entrusted with establishing a special House of Studies, until 1268.

From the autumn of 1268 until November 1272, he was again in Paris, as the town had become a doctrinal battlefield between the Averroists and the defenders of traditional theology.<sup>26</sup>

In November 1272, St. Thomas was recalled from Paris, and he returned to teach theology in Naples. But at the end of 1273, on 6<sup>th</sup> of December, something changed in his way of working: Thomas stopped teaching and writing completely.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas...*, p. 20-21.

<sup>25</sup> Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 8. The details of Aquinas's movements from around 1259 to 1269 are a matter of dispute.

<sup>26</sup> 'Three reasons seem to have played a role in Thomas's being sent back to Paris by his superiors. At the faculty of Theology he had to confront the extreme conservatives who saw in Aristotle a danger to the Christian faith. On the opposite front, he had to deal with what would later be called monopsychism: the belief, based on Averroes, that there was only one thinking intellect for all humanity. Lastly, he also had to defend the mendicant orders against the secular masters who wished to exclude them from university teaching'. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa. Background, Structure, & Reception*, trans. Benedict M. Guevin, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2005, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> 'Historians have speculated much about what might have happened during these last months. It is possible that overwork might have caused a physical and nervous breakdown. But we cannot disregard a series of mystical experiences, mentioned by biographers, that might have led to his desire to leave this life. The accident on the road was no doubt the proximate cause of death, but Thomas remained fully in control of his intellectual faculties.' J.-P. Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa...*, p. 16. There is, still, a mention in William of Tocco's biography of a commentary on the *Canticle of Canticles* written in this period. But such a manuscript was never found. James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1975, p. 326-327.



At the invitation of Pope Gregory X, Thomas left the city for the last time and went to Lyon, where he had to attend the General Council. During this trip, he fell ill and died on 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1274, at the Cistercian monastery of Fossanova near Terracina. He hadn't yet reached 50 years old.

Thomas Aquinas's work is massive<sup>28</sup>. Only in the four years between 1268 and 1271, if we assume the conclusions on which historians generally agree, we find that St. Thomas must have written, in addition to an indeterminate parts of the *Summa theologiae*, the *Comments on Aristotle's Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, the work *De anima*, the treatises *De unitate intellectus*, *De substantiis separatis*, *Quaestiones de quodlibet I-IV*, and finally, *Quaestiones disputatae de spiritualibus creaturis*, *De anima*, *De unione Verbi incarnati*, *De malo*, and, perhaps, *De virtutibus*.

The classification of Thomas Aquinas' works differs, slightly, from one researcher to another. In G. Emery's evaluation, adapted for the English edition<sup>29</sup>, the following order can be found:

- Theological Syntheses
- Disputed Questions
- Biblical Commentaries
- Commentaries on Aristotle
- Other Commentaries
- Polemical Writings
- Treatises
- Letters and Requests for expert Opinion
- Liturgical Work, Sermons, Prayers

To the list of 89 titles, as counted by I.T. Eschmann, a number of inauthentic works that have been assigned to Thomas Aquinas can be added.

Of all these works, I shall consider for my research mainly *De ente et essentia* and *Summa theologiae*.

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<sup>28</sup> In terms of quantity, 'more than eight million words in a working life of thirty years'. Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, Clarendon Press, 2002, p. 193.

<sup>29</sup> J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas...*, p. 330-361. Similar versions can be found in: J.A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, p. 355-405; I.T. Eschmann, 'A Catalogue of St. Thomas's Works', in E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L.K. Shook, New York, 1956, p. 381-437.

### ***3. Gregory Palamas – from East to West***

The succession of events since the fourteenth century until now is fairly interesting for the reception of St. Gregory Palamas. If today he is considered as emblematic for the Eastern tradition, things have not always been like that. His leading role, for the present theology, is stressed repeatedly by many critics to the point that ‘as much as St. Gregory Palamas’ doctrine is raised out from the Eastern religious environment, theoretically and practically, on as much it specifies and formulates the characteristic notes for this environment, to the extent that today we cannot say anything seriously and concrete about Orthodoxy without regards to the doctrine of this profound Eastern thinker.’<sup>30</sup>

If according to John Meyendorff ‘the influence of the hesychast monasticism, which went across linguistic, national and political boundaries, was able to re-establish a new sense of Orthodox unity and, thus, to limit the impact of Western influence’<sup>31</sup>, still, after the fourteenth century, for a long period of time, the works of St. Gregory Palamas were almost forgotten. After the official synodal recognition received from the Byzantine Church (1341, 1347, 1351 and 1368) following the controversy of the mid-fourteenth century, Hesychasm and the figure of St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) ‘have experienced a period of decline and neglect during the long centuries of the so-called *turkokratia* in South-eastern Europe.’<sup>32</sup> A spectacular revival of interest in these critical landmarks of the spiritual and theological tradition of Orthodoxy is recorded only in the last two and a half centuries. Hesychasm was reactivated through the late eighteenth century spiritual movements related to St. Paisius Velichkovski’s (1722-1794) *Dobrotolyubie*, and St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite (1749-1809) and St. Makarios of Corinth’s (1731-1805) *Philokalia*, with considerable extensions in nineteenth-century Russia and twentieth-century Romania and Greece. This spiritual interest ‘was not doubled by a symmetrical interest from the behalf of the historians and theologians, until the twentieth century’; and that was due largely to the absence of an edition of the writings of Gregory Palamas – except the two attempts in this regard taken in 1693 in

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<sup>30</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Foreword to The Life and Teaching...*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems*, London, 1974, p. VIII-61.

<sup>32</sup> Ioan I. Ică Jr, ‘St. Gregory Palamas – hesychast spiritual writer’, p. 95.

Moscow by Patriarch of Dositheus of Jerusalem and in Venice 1798 by the monk Nicodemos the Hagiorite.<sup>33</sup>

The synods of the fourteenth century have, for some theologians, an authority almost equal with the ecumenical synods. For others, these are strictly local councils, and by consequence, like in the case of the Serbian theologian Dimitrije Dimitrijevic, Palamism cannot be considered as a binding teaching of the entire Orthodox Church.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, this is definitely not the dominant view.

Still, for the official synthesis or *Confessions* of the seventeenth century, for example, the elements stressed during the fourteenth century debates are almost entirely absent. Metropolitan Petru Movilă was for this reason the subject of consistent criticism in the works of newer theologians, like Georges Florovsky, who spoke about a ‘pseudomorphosis’ of Orthodox theology in its so-called ‘scholastic’ period.

For later synthesis, like those in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, things are not much different. Hristou Androustos’ and Zicos Rosis’ dogmatic theology are totally lacking any references of St. Gregory Palamas, considering other forms more appropriate and better focused to express scientifically the current state of the Church and its theology.

The three volumes of Panagiotis Trembelas’ *Dogmatics*, although intended to be a traditionalist summary, mention St. Gregory only a few times, and not regarding major topics. The same is the case of Makari Bulgakov’s dogmatic theology synthesis.<sup>35</sup>

In the early twentieth century, in the Orthodox academic theology St. Gregory Palamas was predominantly seen ‘first as one of the prominent saints of the Orthodox Church, on the other hand, the representative of a strange movement of the fourteenth century’.<sup>36</sup>

The new neo-Patristic group would focus all weapons against the so-called ‘scholastic captivity’ of the Orthodox theology.

The Theology of St. Gregory Palamas was recovered<sup>37</sup> mainly in the very large context of the neo-Patristic movement<sup>38</sup>. Symptomatic for the revival of Patristics is the

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Christian Felmy, *Die orthodoxe theologie der gegenwart. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990, p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Gheorghe Holbea, ‘Teologia Sfântului Grigore Palama’ (The Theology of St. Gregory Palamas), in *Almanah Bisericesc*, Edit. Episcopiei Buzăului și Vrancei, 2003-2004, p. 156.

<sup>37</sup> In 1941, Martin Jugie wrote about Palamas’s place in the Eastern tradition: ‘Palamism, as the dogma of the Graeco-Russian church, is truly dead, and neither its few proponents among the Greeks who have

predilection for ‘recovering’ apophaticism. This requirement was seen as arising from the very essence of Orthodoxy, in which the concrete spiritual and liturgical experience, as well as the experience of God’s mystery, are the structural points of the entire theology.

Not accidentally, the theological analysis insists on the theology of St. Gregory Palamas, on the apophatic knowledge and on the distinctions between God’s being and the divine energies. Starting with theologians like Stăniloae, continuing with Vladimir Lossky’s analysis and with Meyendorff’s detailed monographs, St. Gregory Palamas’ case is highlighted as representative for the Eastern understanding of theology. Andreas Andreopoulos emphasises that ‘through the continued attempts of Russian and Greek immigrants and the publication of relevant books in English and French, the Western world has started to rediscover what amounts to a lost tradition. Hesychasm, which was never anything close to a scholar’s pursuit, is now studied by Western theologians who are astounded by the profound thought and spirituality of late Byzantium’.<sup>39</sup>

For most of the Eastern theologians who dealt with St. Gregory Palamas’ works, his writings were considered a synthesis of the entire patristic literature.<sup>40</sup> In their attempt to recover the patristic spirituality, some radical considerations regarding the opposition of Palamas to the ‘scholastic’ Western theology are exaggerated and imply the risk of corrupting even the achievements of the eastern ascetical and mystical views. The reception of Palamas becomes sometime stereotypical. But for the main critics, as K.C. Felmy described, ‘the newer Orthodox theology stands against unilateral intellectualism, not against the use made of the intellect itself. Thus this wants to go back to the thinking of the Fathers, whose orientation towards the experience is as

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always maintained it, nor the recent sympathy for it on the part of several Russian émigrés, will be able to resuscitate it.’ *Le Schisme Byzantin*, p. 383, apud A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union. Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> For Georges Florovsky, in his attempt to recover ‘the mind of the Fathers’, Palamas serves as a perfect example as the opposite of a speculative theologian: ‘he was concerned solely with problems of Christian existence. As a theologian, he was simply an interpreter of the spiritual experience of the Church’. Therefore, he considers Palamas as ‘our guide and teacher, in our endeavour to theologize from the heart of the Church’. *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Nordland Publishing, 1972, p. 114, 120.

<sup>39</sup> Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005, p. 216.

<sup>40</sup> For John Meyendorff, the Greek patristic tradition finds its fulfilment in St. Gregory Palamas’ theology.

undeniable as their high intellectual level and their attempt to penetrate and describe the intellectual experience of the Christian faith'<sup>41</sup>.

In the vision of Christos Yannaras, the distinction between essence and energies, clarified by the fourteenth-century councils, constitutes the specific difference between the Orthodox East and the Latin West. The different doctrine regarding the knowledge of God synthesises all the theological difficulties of the Western Church, down to the 'theology of the death of God'<sup>42</sup>. 'Transferring the knowledge of God from the space of the personal and direct manifestation, through the natural energies, to the level of an intellectual and syllogistic approach, limiting the possibilities of God's knowledge to the capacities of the human intellect, inevitably depletes the truth of God in abstract, rational schemes and in reductions to the cause, that are denying the very reality of the personal existence of God'<sup>43</sup>. Although he raises some interesting questions, Yannaras' critique is excessively polemic, and has some unilateral tendencies.

Although criticised for centuries, St. Gregory Palamas' rediscovery was, paradoxically, an effect of his encounter with the West. And if initially for Western theologians it seemed to be clear heresy<sup>44</sup>, in more recent times, David Bradshaw asserts that the main arguments of Gregory Palamas' critique must be reconsidered. Following this, Bradshaw substantiates that, in a larger context, 'we may find that Nietzsche was wrong – that the sun still rises, the horizon still stretches before us, and we have not yet managed to drink up the sea'.<sup>45</sup>

St. Gregory Palamas remained for the Eastern Church's memory as one of the fundamental milestones of Orthodoxy. This is especially so since the last century, when theological interest in Hesychasm and, particularly, in the works of St. Gregory Palamas was revived. The neo-Patristic movement insisted on the recovery of this doctrine, which was presented as one of the most valuable for the entire edifice of patristic

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<sup>41</sup> K.C. Felmy, *Die orthodoxe theologie...*, p. 17. D. Stăniloae described his university studies at the beginning of the last century: 'Theology was a science that had precise metaphysical definitions: the immutable God, the mutable man... There was something unsatisfactory: where was there left the religious life of the people? How can I come out in front of the people with these definitions of God?' M.A. Costa de Beauregard, *Dumitru Stăniloae: Mică dogmatică vorbită, dialoguri la Cernica*, Edit. Deisis, Sibiu, 1995, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, Anastasia, 2000, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78.

<sup>44</sup> Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity. A study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the eve of the Turkish conquest to the Greek War of Independence*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 101.

<sup>45</sup> David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 277.

theology, and also as a vital issue – to the extent that, as Dumitru Stăniloae wrote in 1993 (a few months before his death), ‘today we cannot say anything seriously and concrete about Orthodoxy without regards to the doctrine of this profound eastern thinker’.<sup>46</sup>

#### ***4. Thomas Aquinas – From West to East***

Thomas Aquinas, just like his Greek counterpart in the East, had an oscillating destiny in later Western history. Between the role of a heretic and that of Doctor of the Church, through a climate of confusion some times, after being condemned, recognised, raised at the highest rank of consideration by the council of Trent, forgotten then, rehabilitated by the council of Vatican I, and left to the research of “philosophers” afterwards, probably a new revival approaches. Following an eight-hundred-year tradition, although not of a ‘unified school of thought’, according to R. Cessario ‘at the start of the twenty-first century, Thomism remains an active intellectual tradition in both secular and religious circles’.<sup>47</sup>

Three years after St. Thomas’s death, a number of theories were condemned by the theology faculty in Oxford at the request of the archbishop of Canterbury, ‘not of course involving Thomas by name, but plainly alluding to some of his ‘Aristotelian’ positions.’<sup>48</sup>

Previously, on 7 March 1277, the anniversary of St. Thomas’s death, the bishop of Paris censured a list of 219 theses, ‘allegedly being taught in the university and ‘prejudicial to faith’, a list cobbled together in a hurry, at the behest of Pope John XXI.’<sup>49</sup>

For half a century ‘almost nobody did read him except his own brethren’<sup>50</sup>. Afterward, he was rehabilitated and also canonized. ‘At the first session of the Council of Trent, which was dominated by Dominicans, it is said that the *Summa* was placed on the altar beside the Bible.’<sup>51</sup> Then nobody read him again for a long time because the

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<sup>46</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Foreword to The Life and Teaching...*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2005, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas. Versions of Thomism*, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>50</sup> Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas*, ed. by Brian Davies, Continuum, 2008, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

Renaissance had happened and European thinking began to be based on that other devout Catholic, Rene Descartes. Then, in the nineteenth century<sup>52</sup>, the Roman Catholic Church, ‘terrified by the Enlightenment, went back and dug up St. Thomas because they thought he might provide the intellectual framework they needed to hold the crumbling fabric of Christianity together. They invented Thomism, a specially conservative version of his thought insufficiently liberated from Cartesian questions... This led to a new critical historical study of Aquinas. Thomas, it emerged, took the Fathers of the Church seriously and took scripture seriously and had a disturbing view of the Church and the sacraments that had been forgotten for centuries or dismissed as Protestant’<sup>53</sup>. Vatican II, amongst other things, put an end to what Thomism had meant.

Fergus Kerr, writing about the versions of Thomism, summarises the multitude of interpretations of Thomas Aquinas’s works. From the 1850s to the 1960s, ‘Thomas’s work, particularly his *Summa Theologiae*, was regarded as the high point of medieval Christianity, either a unique balance of faith and reason, a harmonizing of revealed theology and natural theology, an incomparable synthesis, or (by adversaries) as a singularly vicious corruption of Christian doctrine by Hellenistic paganism.’<sup>54</sup>

Serge-Thomas Bonino speaks of a ‘hermeneutic conflict, more or less hidden’, in recent interpretations of Thomas’s work: medievalists, philosophers and theologians focus on aspects of his work that give rise to somewhat divergent readings.<sup>55</sup>

Although ‘an exceptional moment in the chain of the Tradition’<sup>56</sup> and “Like Dante,... a landmark universally recognized in the history of western culture”<sup>57</sup>, Thomas Aquinas was sometimes seen to have broken the continuity with the Fathers, using philosophical methods that reduced Christian thought to an exclusively rational mechanism. On the other side, it was considered that, ‘ironically, instead of almost replacing Christian doctrine by Aristotelianism, as critics sometimes say, Thomas was out, historically, to

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<sup>52</sup> In 1879, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical generically called *Aeterni Patris*. Thomas was now presented as ‘a personal *summa* of all that had gone before, and thus a model of what must be done in order to provide an intellectual alternative to those tenets of modernity which were at odds with Christian faith’. Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas*, Polity Press, 2004, p. 146.

<sup>53</sup> Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas*, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas...*, p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Yves Congar, *Thomas D’Aquin: sa vision de théologie et de l’Eglise*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1984, p. i.

<sup>57</sup> Etienne Gilson, ‘Foreword’ to *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974. Commemorative Studies*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1974, p. 9.

resist the ‘wisdom-lovers’ – the *philosophi* – in the arts faculty, by trying to transpose and integrate key Aristotelian terms into traditional Christianity.’<sup>58</sup>

But of a special interest is, perhaps, the evolution of St. Thomas Aquinas’s reception in the East. The first translations of Thomas Aquinas’s works into Greek were completed in the fourteenth century by the Kydones brothers, Demetrios and Prochoros, the emperor Cantacuzenos<sup>59</sup> himself granting them support<sup>60</sup>. Demetrios Kydones translated, in the same period when the hesychast debates were taking place, the entire *Summa contra Gentiles*, as well as most of *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>61</sup> ‘His conviction was that Thomism was actually more ‘Greek’ than Palamism.’<sup>62</sup> Despite the fact that these translations were made before Palamas’ death, there seem to be no evidences that Palamas knew Thomas Aquinas’ texts<sup>63</sup>.

After Patriarch Kyril Lukaris’s actions, the East felt the need of some corrective ideas, and the seventeenth century *Confessions*, without mentioning Aquinas’s name, developed a sort of approach towards his theology. Paradoxically, in several of these texts it is the spirit of Aquinas that seems to be present, rather than that of Palamas, who is almost absent. And this can also be seen in the later dogmatic syntheses, in the chapters regarding the arguments for God’s existence, God’s attributes, and the knowledge of God, while a chapter regarding the distinction between essence and energies is almost inexistent, and the apophatical knowledge is described strictly in terms of the ‘negative theology’, as developed in the West. These issues were seen as

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<sup>58</sup> Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas...*, p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> John VI Cantacuzenos, who ‘sincerely’ (according to John Meyendorff) supported the hesychast movement and Gregory Palamas, is often presented as ‘Emperor and Aristotelian’. Klaus Oehler, ‘Aristotle in Byzantium’, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 5:2 (1964), p. 145.

<sup>60</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 104.

<sup>61</sup> Helped by his brother, Prochoros, who translated from Aquinas the opusculum *De mundi aeternitate*, the preface to the commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and eighty-two articles from Part III of the *Summa Theologiae*. For further details about Prochoros’ activity and thought, see Norman Russell, ‘Prochoros Cydones and the Fourteenth-Century Understanding of Orthodoxy’, in Andrew Louth – Augustine Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies. Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham, 23-25 March 2002*, Ashgate Variorum, 2006, p. 75-91.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 105-106. This definitely doesn’t fit, over the centuries, with Yannaras’ view: Demetrios Kydones’ fourteenth-century translations marked a dramatic turning, and ‘from the point of view of the development of Greek culture, ..., the starting-point of the *modern* period is not 1453 but 1354, when Demetrios Kydones, at the invitation of the Emperor John Kantakouzenos, translated into Greek the *Summa contra Gentiles* of Thomas Aquinas’. *Orthodoxy and the West*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006, p. 3, 45.

<sup>63</sup> According to Kallistos Ware (‘Scholasticism and Orthodoxy’, p. 26), ‘while Palamas’s own estimation of philosophy is complex, he evidences no attitude that would indicate a systematic rejection of Western theology.’ A.N. Williams notes that ‘it is therefore not in the exchange between Barlaam and Palamas that we find an alignment of pro-Thomist and anti-Palamite sentiment; this polarization occurs not around the main protagonists, but around their supporters.’ *The Ground of Union...*, p. 9.



major minuses by the neo-patristic theologians, who intended to de-construct and re-construct a theology considered to have been under the influence of the ‘scholastic’ West. For some of them, the critique became radical, and the so-called ‘scholastic’ theology had been found guilty not only for the difficulties of Orthodox theology but, as we can see in the examples of Justin Popovich, Christos Yannaras and sometimes John Meyendorff, also for the entire process of secularization and for the very ‘death of God’. For a lot of theologians the opposition between Aquinas and Palamas goes far from their historical and doctrinal places.<sup>64</sup> Western ‘scholasticism’, whose creator was identified with Thomas Aquinas, became often a cliché.<sup>65</sup> But do these theologians, when referring to ‘scholasticism’, really mean Thomas Aquinas? Can his thought be identified with the content of this notion, in the described context of two opposed ‘ontologies’, one in continuity with the Tradition, and the other lacking an authentic Christian substance?

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I presented, briefly, the central events of the life of both authors, starting from the premise that between a person and his works there is a deep link, making the works difficult to be properly understood when separated from the person who not only wrote them, but also ‘lived’ them. In the situation of a saint’s life, it is difficult to select only the historical events, the chronology itself. The history of such a life is always extended to a level that can be incorporated rather into a generic ‘hagiography’, whereas the elements of holiness go beyond the secularly thought of the history. Unlike history, hagiography rather keeps the dimension of the ‘legend’, which for history becomes incredible, and needs to be ‘de-mythologized’<sup>66</sup>. Excluding the risk to reduce the life of

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<sup>64</sup> ‘They possess a further Significance in that as Aquinas is suspect in the East, so is Palamas in the West, not only on the grounds of questionable continuity with the patristic tradition but also precisely because of his relation to the Western Augustinian and Thomist tradition. Even on controversies such as the Filioque, which quite clearly date from well before the time of Aquinas, the opposition of East and West has been interpreted as existing directly between Aquinas and Palamas’. A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union...*, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Bruce Marshall considers that the polemic against Aquinas in the twentieth century Orthodox Theology ‘owes something to the situation of Russian Orthodoxy in the Paris emigration, as a displaced minority in a traditionally Catholic country, whose theological life was dominated at the time by competing neo-Thomistic interpretations of the common doctor. But it led, in any event, to the formation of objections against Aquinas which have become ecumenically commonplace’. ‘*Ex Occidente Lux? Aquinas and Eastern Orthodox Theology*’, in *Modern Theology* 20:1 (2004), p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Regarding Thomas Aquinas’ life, most of what we know ‘comes from the reports of others, especially from the hagiographical and legendary stories told about him after his death (1274) and before his canonization (1323). Thus, in contrast to other major theologians, there is an extreme paucity of information on Thomas’ personal characteristics. And this means that while one may love or detest Thomas’s theology, it is very difficult to love or detest Thomas as a person’. Denis R. Janz, *Luther on*

a saint to a mere myth, Hippolyte Delehaye warned: ‘do not mistake the personality of a saint for the portrait imagined by the hagiographers’.<sup>67</sup>

The time between St. Thomas’ death and his canonization was rather short. In a period when ‘men expected interior sanctity to be marked by external signs and wonders’<sup>68</sup>, Bernard Gui, one of his main biographers, complained that the collection of evidences in view of canonization had been no easy task, and that ‘Preachers through negligence had failed to record many miracles’<sup>69</sup>. Although this collection of miracles succeeded, due to the biographers’ determination to find in every event traces of wonders<sup>70</sup>, in an age of suspicions toward this kind of *legends*, ‘Thomas’s holiness transcends all this; nor can it be dissociated from his learning. His entire life was a singleminded and prayerful pursuit of divine truth; and his legend, in its mediaeval fashion, tells us how richly he was given what he had sought’.<sup>71</sup>

The Reformers had doubts regarding Thomas’s consideration as a saint<sup>72</sup>, as well as they had doubts regarding the legitimacy of his methodology in pursuing the authentic Christian thought. His image as a philosopher risks eclipsing the theological-mystical dimension of his thought. Probably this is a point of difference between Thomas Aquinas and his Eastern counterpart. Some critiques may say that, although Gregory Palamas was familiar with Aristotle’s philosophy, did not rejected the use of Aristotle in Theology, but the method of separating theological thought from its practical, mystical or ascetical dimension<sup>73</sup>.

But considering St. Thomas Aquinas to be rather a philosopher than a theologian is maybe just the product of a preponderantly philosophical critique (especially in the last century). For E. Gilson he can be both, as an expression of the perfect harmony between Reason and Revelation – harmony lost in the radical divorce that followed the

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*Thomas Aquinas. The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> ‘La légende de la bienheureuse Ida de Toggenburg’, repr from *Nova et Vetera* 4, 1929, in *Mélanges d’hagiographie grecque et latine* (Brussels 1966) 347-352. Apud Edmund Colledge, *The Legend of St. Thomas Aquinas*, in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974. Commemorative Studies*, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Edmund Colledge, *The Legend of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p.18.

<sup>70</sup> According to William of Tocco there were no less than 145 miracles. *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino de Guillaume de Tocco (1323)*, ed. Claire le Brun-Gouanvic, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996, p. 46-60.

<sup>71</sup> Edmund Colledge, *The Legend of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> Luther acknowledges ‘vehement doubts’ on the question because ‘one smells nothing spiritual in him’. Denis R. Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas. The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer*, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> It is interesting that Palamas’ life, as described by his contemporary biographer, lacks in presenting miraculous events, wonders and other elements of a so called ‘legenda’.

Renaissance.<sup>74</sup> Though, in what concerns the appropriation of the Christian Tradition, Jaroslav Pelikan, for example, subscribed to the initiative of rediscovering the patristic background of Thomas Aquinas's thought, as he considered that his theological research had been neglected, by comparison to his Aristotelian consideration.<sup>75</sup> Although he cites Aristotle 'even when commenting on Scripture'<sup>76</sup>, yet the patristic sources represent an important element for St. Thomas<sup>77</sup>. And this is obvious since he is familiar not only with Latin patristic writers such Augustine, but, although he 'did not know enough Greek to read Greek texts', still 'he uses a great number of works of Greek ecclesiastical authors in Latin translations', and – as Leo Elders notices – 'these works are far more numerous than those known by any of his Latin predecessors or contemporaries'<sup>78</sup>.

In such a context, of a maximum encounter between Philosophy, Scripture and the rich Patristic heritage, discussing a topic such as 'being' in Thomas Aquinas is a very difficult task. And, in the context of having to compare him to his Eastern correspondent, the quest becomes even provocative. I'm proceeding, though, in this study, trying to find out what separates and what unites the two traditions of Christendom which they represent.

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<sup>74</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939, p. 94-95. And probably the best example for this harmony is the *Summa Theologiae*, which is 'rightly seen as a source book for his philosophy as well as his theology', being in itself 'a monument to the Christian wisdom which builds on philosophy and soars far beyond it.' Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas*, p. 128.

<sup>75</sup> He is quoting Ceslaus Velecky: 'It is strange that the research into these [patristic] sources still remains a Cinderella of Thomist studies, neglected by comparison with studies on St. Thomas as an Aristotelian.' 'Appendix 3' to Volume 6 of Blackfriars edition of *Summa Theologiae* (London 1965) p. 131, apud Jaroslav Pelikan, 'The Doctrine of Filioque in Thomas Aquinas and its Patristic Antecedents', in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974. Commemorative Studies*, p. 315.

<sup>76</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas*, Routledge, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Quoting Henri de Lubac, Andrew Louth considers that it 'makes a good deal of sense to see the original unity of the Patristic vision not collapsing with the rise of scholasticism, but finding there its final flowering. ...For such a view the divide comes after St. Thomas, in later medieval scholasticism beginning with Scotus and Ockham'. *Discerning the Mystery. Essay on the Nature of Theology*, Oxford, 1983, p. 6. André de Halleux, in a compared study on 'Palamisme et Scolastique' (*Revue Théologique de Louvain*, 4:4, p. 409-442), considers that: 'Il serait donc bien excessif d'opposer palamisme et scholastique comme la théologie des Pères à celle des disciples chrétiens d'Aristote. Certes, Palamas est plus patristique que Thomas d'Aquin, mais celui-ci connaissait mieux les Pères grecs que Palamas ne connaissait les latins, et son aristotélisme est parfaitement christianisé'. p. 433.

<sup>78</sup> Leo J. Elders, 'Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church', in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, vol. 1, ed. By Irena Backus, E.J.Brill, 1997, p. 344. According to the same author, 'occurrences of 20 patristic authors in 26 works have been listed', and although 'Thomas does not use the expression *patres Ecclesiae*', the expression *sancti doctores*, occurring 50 times, 'is quite close to our *the Fathers of the Church*'. p. 338-348.

# I. AQUINAS ON BEING

## I.1. Being, Essence and Existence

For St. Thomas, the starting point in conceiving ‘being’, both on the ground of Theology and Metaphysics, consists in a ‘real’<sup>79</sup> distinction between essence and existence.

The term ‘being’, in its full sense, can only be associated with God. But what exists in the world is also, mainly, defined by being. The Revelation tells us that God is pure being, while the world, as a created being, only ‘participates’ in being. But from the point of view of natural theology, although God can be easily associated with being, his existence can become problematic.

In order to understand the content of *being*, we need, first, to search for God’s existence. The first step in this questioning process consists in defining the possibilities of natural theology. The theology of revelation will be a continuation of natural theology. And natural theology will start its way toward God from the demonstration of his existence looking into his effects on the created, or into the creation as a general effect of the divine action.

A first problem in this process will be the existence of God. What St. Thomas is trying to do is not to demonstrate that God *is*, but that God *exists*. Presupposing that God is not would be not only an error, but quite a heresy<sup>80</sup>. But his effects, observable in the world, are not always indicating him that clear. Therefore, ‘that God exists is not self-evident’.<sup>81</sup>

As long as God’s essence remains hidden, his existence remains to be demonstrated. The obstacle consists in that whatever God’s essence may be, it is unknowable from the

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<sup>79</sup> Regarding the discussions on this qualification see Joseph Owens, ‘Aquinas’ Distinction at *De ente et essentia* 4.119-123’, in *Mediaeval Studies*, XLVIII (1986), p. 264-277.

<sup>80</sup> Aimé Forest, *Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris, 1923, p. 30.

<sup>81</sup> *ST*, I, 2, 1.

perspective of our limited mind. The ontological distance requires a long way in knowledge.

‘Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature – namely, by effects’<sup>82</sup>

The demonstrability of God’s existence is not only a possible process, but even a necessary one<sup>83</sup>. St. Thomas underlines that ‘if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us’.<sup>84</sup>

Natural theology can conduct to the conclusion of God’s existence. The effects are leading to the cause. But although these effects indicate the *existence*, they still tell us almost nothing about the essence of that who exists in this way.

‘Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects; though from them we cannot perfectly know God as He is in His essence’.<sup>85</sup>

From these effects we can know certain aspects of their cause. They are telling us something about the essence, but in a distant manner. The access to the essence of the cause is offered by its existence, ‘for the question of its essence follows on the question of its existence’ and ‘the names given to God are derived from His effects’.<sup>86</sup> We can approach God starting from considering his existence. The demonstrable existence becomes the only way of access to the unknowable essence.

‘Existence is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence existence is that which actuates all things, even their forms. Therefore it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received; but rather as the received to the receiver. When therefore I speak of the existence of man, or horse, or anything else,

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<sup>82</sup> *ST*, I, 2, 1.

<sup>83</sup> As Leo Elders synthesises, ‘Although God is present in our mind, we cannot directly touch him, because our intellect is not adapted to spiritual reality which it can only come to know through the medium of sensible things. Arguments are needed to pass from the material world to its hidden cause’. *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, E.J.Brill, 1990, p. 61.

<sup>84</sup> *ST*, I, 2, 2.

<sup>85</sup> *ST*, I, 2, 2.

<sup>86</sup> *ST*, I, 2, 2.

existence is considered a formal principle, and as something received; and not as that which exists'.<sup>87</sup>

In the case of the created things, their existence cannot be identical with their essence. 'It is against the nature of a made thing for its essence to be its existence; because subsisting being is not a created being; hence it is against the nature of a made thing to be absolutely infinite.'<sup>88</sup> Only God can be infinite – and with infinite power; though, through his infinite power cannot make something infinite and therefore 'cannot make a thing to be not made (for this would imply that two contradictories are true at the same time), so likewise He cannot make anything to be absolutely infinite'.<sup>89</sup>

In this context, of an absolute distinction between the Uncreated and the Created, essence and existence can only be identical in God.

The conclusion of Natural Theology is for St. Thomas that 'there is a reality, God, whose essence is his very being'<sup>90</sup>; and this is true to the point that 'we find some philosophers who claim that God does not have a quiddity or essence, because his essence is not other than his being'.<sup>91</sup> In this last instance, the unity of essence and existence in God must not lead to the conclusion of the universality of God's being in the created, in the sense that 'God is that universal being by which everything formally exists. Because of its purity, therefore, it is being distinct from all other being'.<sup>92</sup> For St. Thomas, between God's being and the created being there is an infinite distance, as long as God's being is infinite pure and perfect. The principle of simplicity safeguards God's transcendence, and underlines the fundamental ontological difference between Him and the Created.

Opposed to the world, God 'is called absolutely perfect'. In the next text St. Thomas synthesises this perfection of being through the unity of essence and existence in God, opposed to the real distinction found in the world:

'1. If the existence of a thing differs from its essence, this existence must be caused either by some exterior agent or by its essential principles. Now it is impossible for a thing's existence to be caused by its essential constituent principles, for nothing can be

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<sup>87</sup> *ST*, I, 4, 1.

<sup>88</sup> *ST*, I, 7, 2.

<sup>89</sup> *ST*, I, 7, 2.

<sup>90</sup> *EE*, 5, 1.

<sup>91</sup> *EE*, 5, 1.

<sup>92</sup> *EE*, 5, 2.

the sufficient cause of its own existence, if its existence is caused. Therefore that thing, whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another. But this cannot be true of God; because we call God the first efficient cause. Therefore it is impossible that in God His existence should differ from His essence.

2. Secondly, existence is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as existing. Therefore existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality. Therefore, since in God there is no potentiality..., it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence. Therefore His essence is His existence.

3. If, therefore, He is not His own existence He will be not essential, but participated being. He will not therefore be the first being – which is absurd. Therefore God is His own existence, and not merely His own essence.’<sup>93</sup>

Everything created implies in its being a primary difference between essence and existence. This succession in being takes place on different levels. And here we can find a first model of classification of the created, as being closer to or farther from the pure being. These passages can become problematic, although they are not claiming a hierarchy in the sense of emanation from the primary being.

Considering the created intellectual substances, their being ‘is other than their essence, though their essence is without matter.’<sup>94</sup> Everything that is created is limited in its being. But not in the same way. In the case of ‘intelligences’, these ‘are unlimited from below and limited from above. They are, in fact, limited as to their being, which they receive from a higher reality, but they are not limited from below, because their forms are not limited to the capacity of a matter that receives them.’<sup>95</sup>

At a second level, matter is the higher principle of limitation, and in the sensible world the material structure implies its own hierarchy in receiving and participating in being. In substances composed of matter and form ‘being is received and limited, because they have being from another. Their nature or quiddity, moreover, is received in designated matter. Thus they are limited both from above and from below.’<sup>96</sup> The problem of

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<sup>93</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 4.

<sup>94</sup> *EE*, 5, 4.

<sup>95</sup> *EE*, 5, 4.

<sup>96</sup> *EE*, 5, 10.

participation needs a separate discussion, St. Thomas's view being extremely complex on this matter.

Distinct from the caused things, the first cause implies simultaneity of essence and existence, in order to be pure being. And pure being means pure act. Therefore, the conclusion drawn by St. Thomas is that 'since God is the first efficient cause, to act belongs to Him primarily and essentially'<sup>97</sup>. The reverse of the negative expression that 'God has nothing in Him of potentiality' is that God is 'pure act'<sup>98</sup>.

This notion of 'pure act' is nothing but a conclusion of the fact that being is good as long as it has actuality, and that having actuality is to be perfect: 'Every being, as being, is good. For all being, as being, has actuality and is in some way perfect; since every act implies some sort of perfection; and perfection implies desirability and goodness.'<sup>99</sup>

But in this context, of the perfection of being as actuality, only God can be a perfection of goodness by being pure act.<sup>100</sup>

'God alone is good essentially. For everything is called good according to its perfection. Now perfection of a thing is threefold: first, according to the constitution of its own being; secondly, in respect of any accidents being added as necessary for its perfect operation; thirdly, perfection consists in the attaining to something else as the end. ... This triple perfection belongs to no creature by its own essence; it belongs to God only, in Whom alone essence is existence; in Whom there are no accidents; since whatever belongs to others accidentally belongs to Him essentially; ...; and He is not directed to anything else as to an end, but is Himself the last end of all things. Hence it is manifest that God alone has every kind of perfection by His own essence; therefore He Himself alone is good essentially.'<sup>101</sup>

So, we can discuss about 'being' on different levels. On one side, there is the perfect being, namely God. On the other side we have the created being with its own levels in

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<sup>97</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 8.

<sup>98</sup> *ST*, I, 14, 2.

<sup>99</sup> *ST*, I, 5, 3.

<sup>100</sup> In W. Norris Clarke's interpretation of Aquinas' view on being, 'looking at all beings from the perspective of the act of existence as the central perfection of all things, diversely participated in by limiting essences ... helps to clarify the relations between God as the unique ultimate Source of all being and the world of finite creatures. On the one hand, it is clear how God, as pure Subsistent Act of Existence (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*) with no limiting essence, transcends all his creatures as composed of existence and limiting essences, and yet, on the other, why there is a deep similarity to God running through all creatures as all participations in the one central perfection of God himself, so that they can all be truly called *images of God*'. *The One and the Many. A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2001, p. 89.

<sup>101</sup> *ST*, I, 6, 3.



its reference to God. The final task would be the way of union, considering that Theology is not only a descriptive system of the reality, but implies the ontological act of salvation.

## I.2. The Divine Being

### I.2.1. The Simplicity of God

The conclusion that God is pure act leads us to a primary principle in considering God's being. While our knowledge lacks in terms of its ability to name God, the negative form of considering God's essence takes the form of simplicity. In this notion we can find God's essence described both positively and negatively. Starting from this principle we can conceive both God's being and his relation with the created.

This notion seems the most reasonable for St. Thomas. He starts his view on simplicity observing that 'we use the term *a being* absolutely and primarily of substances.'<sup>102</sup> But substances by their definition and origin are composed, and simplicity would be a path to go to the first cause.

'Some substances are simple and some composite, and essence is in both; but it is present in simple substances more truly and perfectly because they also have being more perfectly. Simple substances are also the cause of those that are composite; at least this is true of the primary and simple substance, which is God.'<sup>103</sup>

Observing the composite structure of the created, when concluding on the essence of the first cause we can only know that 'God is supremely simple'<sup>104</sup>, and St. Thomas remarks that 'everyone admits the simplicity of the first cause'<sup>105</sup>.

God in no way can be composite, in God cannot exist any composition. His absolute simplicity can be described negatively in relation with the structure of the world. In this manner we can say that 'there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of matter and form; nor does His nature differ from His *suppositum*; nor His essence from His existence; neither is there in Him

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<sup>102</sup> *EE*, 1, 5.

<sup>103</sup> *EE*, 1, 6.

<sup>104</sup> *ST*, I, 6, 2.

<sup>105</sup> *EE*, 4, 1.

composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple.’<sup>106</sup>

Following these distinctions, St. Thomas will try to answer to the following issues:

- (1) Whether God is a body;
- (2) Whether He is composed of matter and form;
- (3) Whether in Him there is composition of quiddity, essence or nature, and subject;
- (4) Whether He is composed of essence and existence;
- (5) Whether He is composed of genus and difference;
- (6) Whether He is composed of subject and accident;
- (7) Whether He is in any way composite, or wholly simple;
- (8) Whether He enters into composition with other things;

The first question can have the simplest answer, as it is evident that God doesn’t have a body in the sense in which we understand the body. Although one could read some scriptural passages as arguments for the idea that God does have a body, St. Thomas underlines that ‘it is impossible that matter should exist in God. First, because matter is in potentiality. But... God is pure act, without any potentiality’<sup>107</sup>

The second question is drawn on the possibility of God’s similitude to the things existing in the world, under the aspect of the distinction between form and matter which is common to sensible created being. But the impossibility of matter to exist in God also excludes the distinction of form and matter. ‘That form which cannot be received in matter, but is self-subsisting, is individualized precisely because it cannot be received in a subject; and such a form is God. Hence it does not follow that matter exists in God’<sup>108</sup>

The composition of quiddity and subject must be considered with regards to both the things composed of matter and form, and to the forms without matter. In the first case, we oppose God to the structure of a human being, for example, in which matter is the principle of individualization. Comparatively, ‘God is the same as His essence or nature. To understand this, it must be noted that in things composed of matter and form, the nature or essence must differ from the *suppositum*, because the essence or nature connotes only what is included in the definition of the species; as, humanity connotes all that is included in the definition of man... Now individual matter, with all the

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<sup>106</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 7.

<sup>107</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 2.

<sup>108</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 2.

individualizing accidents, is not included in the definition of the species. ... On the other hand, in things not composed of matter and form, in which individualization is not due to individual matter – that is to say, to *this* matter – the very forms being individualized of themselves – it is necessary the forms themselves should be subsisting *supposita*. Therefore *suppositum* and nature in them are identified. Since God then is not composed of matter and form, He must be His own Godhead, His own Life, and whatever else is thus predicated of Him.’<sup>109</sup>

The simplicity of God excludes not only any composition, but also any definition.<sup>110</sup> This leads to the point that simplicity is a pure negative name applied to the unknowable essence of God. Opposed to the structure of the created, God ‘has no genus nor difference, nor can there be any definition of Him; nor, save through His effects, a demonstration of Him: for a definition is from genus and difference; and the mean of a demonstration is a definition. That God is not in a genus, as reducible to it as its principle, is clear from this, that a principle reducible to any genus does not extend beyond that genus... But God is the principle of all being. Therefore He is not contained in any genus as its principle.’<sup>111</sup>

This simplicity also excludes any composition of subject and accidents. ‘Every accident is in a subject. But God cannot be a subject, for *no simple form can be a subject*, as Boethius says (De Trin.). Therefore in God there cannot be any accident’<sup>112</sup>

Beyond all these distinctions found in the limited being, God, as the cause of all beings, must be absolutely simple. No sort of composition can possibly exist in him. In order to be absolute being, he must be absolutely simple. In the created order, ‘every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them.’ But God is ‘the first being’ and he is ‘uncaused’<sup>113</sup>. Also, ‘since God is absolute form, or rather absolute being, He can be in no way composite.’<sup>114</sup>

Perfection in being, as opposed to the structure of the world, means absolute simplicity. The only problem for the absolute simplicity of an absolute being that creates the world, is the very existence of this composed world. The final aspect that St. Thomas discusses

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<sup>109</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 3.

<sup>110</sup> David Burrell remarks that ‘Aquinas is concerned to *show* what we cannot use our language to *say*, yet there is no medium of exposition available other than language itself’. *Aquinas: God and Action*, Routledge, 1979, p. 6.

<sup>111</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 5.

<sup>112</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 6.

<sup>113</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 7.

<sup>114</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 7.

regarding God's simplicity is whether God enters into composition with other things. This aspect seems very important in a double direction: the possibility of the creation, and the finality of this creation. In the composite structure of things, each thing has its own perfection. St. Thomas notes that 'the perfections of things are opposed to each other, for each thing is perfected by its specific difference'<sup>115</sup>. In this context, creation doesn't endanger God's simplicity: 'things diverse and in themselves opposed to each other, pre-exist in God as one, without injury to His simplicity'<sup>116</sup>. Regarding the finality of the creation, whose communion with God will not exclude the principle of simplicity, salvation means a move toward the union with God.

But until the final part of the history of creation comes to its end, simplicity indicates the oneness of God. Not in a quantitative way, but in a somehow qualitative one. Simplicity is considered in such an absolute way, that even talking about God as One may become a problem. For St. Thomas, '*One* does not add any reality to *being*; but is only a negation of division; for *one* means undivided *being*. This is the very reason why *one* is the same as *being*.'<sup>117</sup>

At this point, *One* may reduce God's simplicity, if understood in its positive meaning. Only with its negative corrective counterpart *One* truly indicates the nature of divine being. '*One* which is the principle of number is not predicated of God, but only of material things. For *one* the principle of number belongs to the *genus* of mathematics, which are material in being, and abstracted from matter only in idea. But *one* which is convertible with being is a metaphysical entity and does not depend on matter in its being. And although in God there is no privation, still, according to the mode of our apprehension, He is known to us by way only of privation and remotion. Thus there is no reason why a certain kind of privation should not be predicated of God; for instance, that He is incorporeal and infinite; and in the same way it is said of God that He is one.'<sup>118</sup>

'God is a pure simple being' is equal with God being considered as One. By means of observing the world, natural theology concludes that God can only be One. Being and One are identified with God. The conclusion of this reasoning is that 'God is *one* in the supreme degree'<sup>119</sup>. 'God as *one*' will represent for St. Thomas the first part of a

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<sup>115</sup> *ST*, I, 4, 2.

<sup>116</sup> *ST*, I, 4, 2.

<sup>117</sup> *ST*, I, 11, 1.

<sup>118</sup> *ST*, I, 11, 3.

<sup>119</sup> *ST*, I, 11, 4.

theological *Summa*. Only after achieving this conclusion we can discuss about the revelational truth of God as Three Persons. The simplicity of God will have to be conciliated with the paradoxical image of the tri-unity of God revealed by the Scripture. The identification between being, simplicity and one must be underlined, under the circumstances in which ‘because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not.’<sup>120</sup> The notion of simplicity will play a central role in St. Thomas’ entire theological system. But the premises from which he starts his discourse on simplicity are those of negative theology: ‘Now it can be shown how God is not, by denying Him whatever is opposed to the idea of Him, viz. composition, motion, and the like. Therefore we must discuss His simplicity’<sup>121</sup>. The positive consideration of the divine simplicity will later imply certain details vital in the process of salvation.

### ***1.2.2. Essence and Persons***

After having discussed God’s unity, ‘what belongs to the unity of the divine essence’, St. Thomas moves forward to what is a pure revelational aspect of God’s being, namely the Trinity of Persons in God<sup>122</sup>. This order seems natural for St. Thomas<sup>123</sup>, and becomes classical after him<sup>124</sup>. Unity is an aspect of nature, while trinity is an aspect of

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<sup>120</sup> *ST*, I, 3.

<sup>121</sup> *ST*, I, 3.

<sup>122</sup> *ST*, I, 27.

<sup>123</sup> As a response to the critique on this order, Gilles Emery stresses that ‘this approach was not invented by St. Thomas, or by the *Augustinian* West. It is effectively present in Cappadocian theology, particularly in Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory’s reflections on the Trinity also take their departure from the nature of God, going on to the distinct persons, after a clear conceptual support has been set up for grasping the nature common to the three persons’. *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 47.

<sup>124</sup> In her critique, following Karl Rahner, Catherine Mowry LaCugna considers that ‘one of the fruits of Thomas’ theology was the marginalization of the doctrine of the Trinity, something Thomas himself assuredly would have protested vigorously as contrary to his intention and to his own religious experience. ...Neo-scholasticism, particularly its embodiment in Roman Catholic manuals of theology, made the division between the treatises rigid. *De Deo Uno* became a philosophical treatise on the divine nature and attributes. This enterprise, known as natural theology, was presented as that which reason alone, apart from revelation, could determine about God. The treatise on the Trinity then assumed not just second place but became of quite diminished importance except as a formal treatment of processions, persons, relations’. *God for Us. The Trinity and the Christian Life*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991, p. 167.

Revelation. The order seems to have its reasons only in the methodology used by the author, and not in a pre-eminence of the unity over the trinity.<sup>125</sup>

The first obstacle in developing a trinitarian theology would be God's very essence, the simplicity. And that is because being and one are identical.

The first task will be to explain how simplicity and Trinity are simultaneous.

To the objection that 'in God there is no diversity; but supreme simplicity. Therefore in God there is no procession' Thomas answers that 'the more perfectly it proceeds, the more closely it is one with the source whence it proceeds.'<sup>126</sup>

The first step is to clarify that in God no 'generation', in the created sense, is possible – 'generation cannot exist in God'<sup>127</sup>. This would be opposed to the simplicity of the perfect being, and therefore a contradiction in God. In the case of the divine persons, the communication of nature can be generally designated by *procession*. And this procession is not outward, but inward: 'the divine nature is communicated by every procession which is not outward, and this does not apply to other natures'.<sup>128</sup>

The processions do not part the divine unity because they are taking place in the same nature. In the case of the second Person, 'the Word proceeding therefore proceeds as subsisting in the same nature; and so is properly called begotten, and Son'.<sup>129</sup>

Nothing can break the unity of the divine nature. The oneness of God is an absolute principle, and everything else in God is secondary to this principle. God is primarily and absolutely one.

'All that exists in God is one with the divine nature'<sup>130</sup>. All processions must therefore be considered not in reference with the divine unity, but in their reciprocal reference.

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<sup>125</sup> For a detailed exposition of this issue, see Timothy L. Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, p. 3-11. In a different order, Mark McIntosh considers that 'Thomas has two sequences in mind in devising the order of the *Summa Theologiae*: the order of salvation history, in which the people of God do actually find themselves encountered by God before they realize, through Christ and the Spirit, that God is the Trinity, and secondly, the order of learning that Thomas intends, in which, gradually, the learner is enabled to apprehend the higher, or more nearly the first principles of divine life by which the learner's knowledge of truth must be caused in the mind. So learning about God as actually existing and as good and so forth is a kind of training or theological formation, fitting the learner for the ascent to the ultimate principles of divine life, the Trinity and its processions and relations, which will be seen not only as the *ratio* of all existence, but also become the *ratio* of the learner's own thinking and understanding.' *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Blackwell, 2008, p. 239.

<sup>126</sup> *ST*, I, 27, 1.

<sup>127</sup> *ST*, I, 27, 2.

<sup>128</sup> *ST*, I, 27, 3.

<sup>129</sup> *ST*, I, 27, 2.

<sup>130</sup> *ST*, I, 27, 4.

And the proper names of the processions can be found in analogy with the order of the will and the intellect. ‘Hence the proper notion of this or that procession, by which one procession is distinguished from another, cannot be on the part of this unity: but the proper notion of this or that procession must be taken from the order of one procession to another; which order is derived from the nature of the will and intellect. Hence, each procession in God takes its name from the proper notion of will and intellect; the name being imposed to signify what its nature really is; and so it is that the Person proceeding as love receives the divine nature, but is not said to be born.’<sup>131</sup>

The entire discourse about the Trinity remains though totally in the sphere of Revelation, and, therefore, a mystery for the human mind. The simultaneity of unity and trinity can only be approximated, and remains to be discovered as a paradoxical truth. Even the words to describe this mystery become a problem. ‘As in creatures generation is the only principle of communication of nature, procession in God has no proper or special name, except that of generation. Hence the procession which is not generation has remained without a special name; but it can be called spiration, as it is the procession of the Spirit’.<sup>132</sup>

If the processions in the divine do not harm the simplicity and the unity of the nature, it remains to be indicated, as long as it is possible, the complex of the relations that are making possible the truth of Three Persons in One Being.

### **I.2.2.1. Relation and Opposition**

So far, we have seen that processions imply relations. But are these relations possible in God’s being, in the context of the divine simple unity? St. Thomas answers that ‘relations exist in God really’<sup>133</sup>, but not according to our understanding of what a relation is.

Looking toward the created, a relation can be considered as having an accidental existence. But in the case of God, ‘since all in Him is His essence’, ‘relation really existing in God has the existence of the divine essence in no way distinct therefrom’<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>131</sup> *ST*, I, 27, 4.

<sup>132</sup> *ST*, I, 27, 4.

<sup>133</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 1.

<sup>134</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 2.



After stating that processions are possible without contradicting the unity, it must be mentioned that there can only be two processions: one derived from the action of the intellect, the procession of the Word; and the other from the action of the will, the procession of love<sup>135</sup>. The relations implied by these processions make possible the identification of the Three Divine Persons. ‘In respect of each of these processions two opposite relations arise; one of which is the relation of the person proceeding from the principle; the other is the relation of the principle Himself. The procession of the Word is called generation in the proper sense of the term, whereby it is applied to living things. Now the relation of the principle of generation in perfect living beings is called paternity; and the relation of the one proceeding from the principle is called filiation. But the procession of Love has no proper name of its own; and so neither have the ensuing relations a proper name of their own. The relation of the principle of this procession is called spiration; and the relation of the person proceeding is called procession: although these two names belong to the processions or origins themselves, and not to the relations.’<sup>136</sup>

A relation means the existence of something else, referring to another. In this context, St. Thomas writes that ‘in so far as relation implies respect to something else, no respect to the essence is signified, but rather to its opposite term’<sup>137</sup>. In this way, the possibility of relations in the unity of being is explained through the idea of opposition. ‘...Relation really existing in God is really the same as His essence and only differs in its mode of intelligibility; as in relation is meant that regard to its opposite which is not expressed in the name of essence. Thus it is clear that in God relation and essence do not differ from each other, but are one and the same.’<sup>138</sup>

Through the notion of *pure opposition of relation*, the simplicity and unity of the divine being can be kept intact. Relation and essence are distinct but do not differ from each other. ‘Although paternity, just as filiation, is really the same as the divine essence; nevertheless these two in their own proper idea and definitions import opposite respects. Hence they are distinguished from each other’<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>135</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 4. Sergius Bulgakov considers this representation as a ‘fundamental defect’ of Thomism. According to him, ‘this theology is characterized by an anthropomorphism that distinguishes intellect and will in the one life of God and defines them in terms of completely opposite features’. *The Bride of the Lamb*, Edinburgh, 2002, p. 32.

<sup>136</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 4.

<sup>137</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 2.

<sup>138</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 2.

<sup>139</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 3.

The relations existing in God must be real, in order for the Trinity to be real. Also, these must be distinguished from each other. Otherwise, there would be only ‘an ideal trinity, which is the error of Sabellius’.<sup>140</sup>

If the principle of simplicity excluded any essential distinction in God, it didn’t though exclude also a relative distinction, a distinction between the inward relations<sup>141</sup>. The unity and the relations are simultaneous. Saint Thomas’s conclusion is that ‘there must be real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute – namely, essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity – but according to that which is relative’.<sup>142</sup>

#### **I.2.2.2. What is a Person**

If relations are possible in the unity of the absolute simplicity, and if they define the Three Persons, the next issue has to be a proper description and definition of the notion of *person*.

The first difficulty would be the absence of this term in the Scripture. St. Thomas notices from the beginning that ‘although the word *person* is not found applied to God in Scripture, either in the Old or New Testament, nevertheless what the word signifies is found to be affirmed of God in many places of Scripture; as that He is the supreme self-subsisting being, and the most perfectly intelligent being.’<sup>143</sup>

*Person* is probably the most problematic concept developed by Christian theology. With its starting point in the Trinitarian controversies, the concept of *person* was later developed in a Christological context, and often used in anthropological treaties. The difficulty consists in the fact that it cannot find its proper equivalent in the Greek philosophy, and its later development was directed differently in the two linguistic grounds of the Christian world, Greek and Latin (besides Syrian developments).

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<sup>140</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 3.

<sup>141</sup> In terms of action as the source of relations, ‘Thomas appropriated Aristotle’s distinction between two kinds of actions: *immanent* action, which remains within the acting subject (such as knowing, willing, and feeling), and *transitive* action which passes over (transit) to a reality external to itself (such as heating, constructing, and making). In both cases, the action gives rise to a procession: procession of an interior reality, for the immanent action, and procession of an external reality, for the transitive action. One must recognize two analogous kinds of actions in God: the Trinitarian processions, in the one case, and the actions of creation and government in the other.’ Giles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 55-56.

<sup>142</sup> *ST*, I, 28, 3.

<sup>143</sup> *ST*, I, 29, 3.

Transposed in the thirteenth century, this notion accumulated a certain complexity<sup>144</sup> that St. Thomas feels the need to summarize in order to reveal its full functionality in his exposition of the Trinitarian dogma.

He starts by quoting Boethius' classical synthesis – which may seem insufficient – that 'a person is an individual substance of a rational nature.' (De Duab. Nat.)<sup>145</sup>

But can this notion of *person* be applied both to God and to the created individuals? In both cases, we talk about a principle of individuation, and not about a fragmentation of a unity. This principle of individuation functions differently in the two types of being. Boethius' definition better fits the created being.

Starting from the individual, this 'belongs to the genus of substance. For substance is individualized by itself; whereas the accidents are individualized by the subject, which is the substance'<sup>146</sup>.

But the particular and the individual become more clearly evident in rational substances. As St. Thomas puts it, 'in a more special and perfect way, the particular and the individual are found in the rational substances which have dominion over their own actions; and which are not only made to act, like others; but which can act of themselves; for actions belong to singulars. Therefore also the individuals of the rational nature have a special name even among other substances; and this name is *person*.'<sup>147</sup>

In any case, the notion of *person* seems related with that of *substance*. The converging usage of these two notions leads to multiple considerations:

'According to the Philosopher (Metaph. V), substance is twofold. In one sense it means the quiddity of a thing, signified by its definition, and thus we say that the definition means the substance of a thing; in which sense substance is called by the Greeks *ousia*, what we may call *essence*. In another sense substance means a subject or *suppositum*, which subsists in the genus of substance. To this, taken in a general sense, can be applied a name expressive of an intention; and thus it is called *suppositum*. It is also called by three names signifying a reality – that is, *a thing of nature*, *subsistence*, and *hypostasis*, according to a threefold consideration of the substance thus named. For, as it

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<sup>144</sup> For a development of this concept from the first oecumenical council until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, see Stephen A. Hipp, 'Person' in *Christian Tradition and the Conception of Saint Albert the Great: A Systematic Study of its Concept as Illuminated by the Mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation*, Munster: Aschendorff, 2001, p. 27-176.

<sup>145</sup> ST, I, 29, 1.

<sup>146</sup> ST, I, 29, 1.

<sup>147</sup> ST, I, 29, 1.

exists in itself and not in another, it is called *subsistence*; as we say that those things subsist which exist in themselves, and not in another. As it underlies some common nature, it is called *a thing of nature*; as, for instance, this particular man is a human natural thing. As it underlies the accidents, it is called *hypostasis*, or *substance*. What these three names signify in common to the whole genus of substances, this name *person* signifies in the genus of rational substances.’<sup>148</sup>

This way, Boethius’ definition can be accepted and applied in all instances of rational substances. Although its Greek equivalent, *hypostasis*, is also synonym with *substance*, both terms, hypostasis and person, ‘add the individual principles to the idea of essence’<sup>149</sup>.

Taking into account this last identification, *person* can be attributed both to created rational substances and to God<sup>150</sup>. In Saint Thomas’s conclusion:

‘*Person* signifies what is most perfect in all nature – that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature. Hence, since everything that is perfect must be attributed to God, forasmuch as His essence contains every perfection, this name *person* is fittingly applied to God; not, however, as it is applied to creatures, but in a more excellent way’<sup>151</sup>

If *person* is to be applied both to creatures and to God, a certain difference must be underlined. First, *rational* doesn’t indicate discursive thought, but what can be generally considered as intelligent nature. Also, if, as far as the created is concerned *matter* is the principle of individuation, in the case of God *individual* implies *incommunicability*. And finally, *substance* must be taken in the sense of self-subsistence. All these three corrective meanings can complete the definition mentioned above. Boethius’ formula must be continued, in St. Thomas view, with Richard of St. Victor’s amendment: ‘there are some, however, who say that the definition of Boethius is not a definition of person in the sense we use when speaking of persons in God. Therefore Richard of St. Victor

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<sup>148</sup> *ST*, I, 29, 2.

<sup>149</sup> *ST*, I, 29, 2.

<sup>150</sup> ‘The notion of person... is an analogous one, ranging over several different levels of being, determined by the kind of intellectual nature which the person possesses as its own. The three that we know of – they may in principle be more – are the human, the angelic (...), and the divine.’ W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being*, Marquette University Press, 1998, p. 32.

<sup>151</sup> *ST*, I, 29, 3.

amends this definition by adding that *Person* in God is *the incommunicable existence of the divine nature.*'<sup>152</sup>

### **I.2.2.3. Persons and Relations**

If we do apply to God the notion of *person*, and we can talk about Divine Persons, these Divine Persons are persons in relation. By underlining the character of person in relation, the unity of the divine being can be kept without risks. More than that, St. Thomas prefers the term person instead of that of hypostasis not only due to the synonymy of the latter with substance, but because, more clearly than hypostasis, '*person* signifies relation'<sup>153</sup>.

Person signifies relation directly and essence indirectly, while hypostasis signifies more the essence than the relation. But the relation is 'posterior' to essence. The relations are secondary to the unity of essence. God is absolutely One and relatively Three. St. Thomas is following the historical development of a concept born on the ground of revelation but constructed with the instruments of reason. And the process of defining the person as relation, after having already defined the unity of being, can be seen as a better option in the attempt to adapt a terminology to a truth that is beyond our rational possibilities.

Thomas Aquinas explains the *divine person* in this way: '...a divine person signifies a relation as subsisting. And this is to signify relation by way of substance, and such a relation is a hypostasis subsisting in the divine nature, although in truth that which subsists in the divine nature is the divine nature itself. Thus it is true to say that the name *person* signifies relation directly, and the essence indirectly; not, however, the relation as such, but as expressed by way of a hypostasis. So likewise it signifies directly the essence, and indirectly the relation, inasmuch as the essence is the same as the hypostasis: while in God the hypostasis is expressed as distinct by the relation: and thus relation, as such, enters into the notion of the person indirectly. Thus we can say that this signification of the word *person* was not clearly perceived before it was attacked by heretics. Hence, this word *person* was used just as any other absolute term. But afterwards it was applied to express relation, as it lent itself to that signification, so

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<sup>152</sup> *ST*, I, 29, 3.

<sup>153</sup> *ST*, I, 29, 4.

that this word *person* means relation not only by use and custom, according to the first opinion, but also by force of its own proper signification.’<sup>154</sup>

St. Thomas underlines that, when referring to God, a *person* signifies ‘a relation as subsisting in the divine nature’<sup>155</sup>, and that ‘the several persons are the several subsisting relations really distinct from each other’<sup>156</sup>. The persons are really distinct as long as the relations are subsisting in the divine nature, contradicting neither its unity, nor its simplicity.<sup>157</sup> And the Three Persons are perfectly distinguishable in as much as we are talking about a ‘real Trinity’ and not about an ‘ideal Trinity’, and, most importantly, about a ‘living’ God.<sup>158</sup>

And how are the three persons distinguishable if they are subsisting in the same nature? St. Thomas answers that by means of relations rather than by origin: ‘It is therefore better to say that the persons or hypostases are distinguished rather by relations than by origin. For, although in both ways they are distinguished, nevertheless in our mode of understanding they are distinguished chiefly and firstly by relations.’<sup>159</sup>

He stresses that this description fits better our mode of understanding. The persons are firstly distinguished by relation, and only afterwards by ‘origin’ (in terms of ‘generation’, the Trinitarian doctrine would risk the colour of both Arianism and Sabellianism). In any situation we can only refer negatively to the Trinity, having no other instruments to express the concomitance / simultaneousness of the one and three (unity and Trinity in the same time). ‘The divine persons are not distinguished as regards being, in which they subsist, nor in anything absolute, but only as regards something relative. Hence relation suffices for their distinction.’<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *ST*, I, 29, 4.

<sup>155</sup> *ST*, I, 30, 1.

<sup>156</sup> *ST*, I, 30, 2.

<sup>157</sup> As Matthew Levering points out, ‘a plurality of relations does not destroy the divine unity and simplicity. The relations, while they subsist in the divine being, do not *derive* from the divine being’. *Scripture and Metaphysics. Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, Blackwell, 2004, p. 217.

<sup>158</sup> In Michael J. Dodds’ description, ‘viewed in terms of immanent motion, the three divine persons are not a static triad but a dynamic life, a never-ceasing yet ever-unchanging activity of knowledge and love. The Trinity involves the perfect reflection of the divine knowledge of the Father in the procession of the Son, the impulse of divine love of Father and Son in the procession of the Spirit, and the complete and continuous self-communication and interpenetration of Father, Son and Spirit. The Christian God proclaimed by Aquinas is no stagnant, solitary self-contemplator, but a most blessed Trinity of unbounded wisdom, love, and life’. *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2008, p. 163.

<sup>159</sup> *ST*, I, 40, 3.

<sup>160</sup> *ST*, I, 40, 3.

The Trinitarian dogma bears the most difficult task for a theologian. Nevertheless it is a vital truth regarding the salvation. The discourse about the Trinity must be conducted, as St. Thomas says, with ‘befitting modesty’<sup>161</sup>, because we are unable to express this mystery completely, but only to keep intact the trinity of persons in the unity of nature. *Being* is paradoxical, and unknown. And a fully rational way of expressing it is nothing but a failure.

There are two main opposite errors regarding this matter: ‘in treating of the Trinity, we must beware of two opposite errors, and proceed cautiously between them – namely, the error of Arius, who placed a Trinity of substance with the Trinity of persons; and the error of Sabellius, who placed unity of person with the unity of essence.’<sup>162</sup> Terminology is therefore a key element in keeping both the unity and the Trinity.

‘Various languages have diverse modes of expression. So as by reason of the plurality of *supposita* the Greeks said *three hypostases*, so also in Hebrew *Elohim* is in the plural. We, however, do not apply the plural either to *God* or to *substance*, lest plurality be referred to the substance.’<sup>163</sup>

But however we are applying this terminology, we must keep in mind that the knowledge of the Trinity is attained only by means of revelation, and not by natural reason.

‘It is impossible to attain to the knowledge of the Trinity by natural reason. For... man cannot obtain the knowledge of God by natural reason except from creatures. Now creatures lead us to the knowledge of God, as effects do to their cause. Accordingly, by natural reason we can know of God that only which of necessity belongs to Him as the principle of things... Therefore, by natural reason we can know what belongs to the unity of the essence, but not what belongs to the distinction of the persons. Whoever, then, tries to prove the trinity of persons by natural reason, derogates from faith’<sup>164</sup>

Through natural theology we can only know that God exists and that he is one. The trinity of persons can neither be reached, nor proved. That is exclusively a matter of faith. And the truth of the Trinity becomes relevant in the context of salvation. ‘There are two reasons why the knowledge of the divine persons was necessary for us. It was necessary for the right idea of creation. The fact of saying that God made all things by

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<sup>161</sup> *ST*, I, 31, 2.

<sup>162</sup> *ST*, I, 31, 2.

<sup>163</sup> *ST*, I, 39, 3.

<sup>164</sup> *ST*, I, 32, 1.

His Word excludes the error of those who say that God produced things by necessity. ... In another way, and chiefly, that we may think rightly concerning the salvation of the human race, accomplished by the Incarnate Son, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost'.<sup>165</sup>

In his *Summa*, St. Thomas deals with the exposition of the Trinitarian dogma after having already discussed God's Unity and the possibilities of natural Theology, but before describing the creation and the human being. The reason is probably that we cannot understand the created being unless we have in mind the description of the perfect being in whose image creation comes into existence and human nature finds its most inner definition.

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<sup>165</sup> *ST*, I, 32, 1.



## I.3. The Created Being

### *I.3.1. The Essential Structure of the Created*

The world is the result of God's work. All things are caused in their being by the uncaused being. When speaking of the world, the term *creation* best describes its origin and its definition. Because it is created, the world has its origin in the uncreated being, and its being is limited and composed. If God is the perfect being, the world can only be understood as limited being. Primarily and purely, only God can be considered as being, while the world receives its being from the Creator. And so, 'it is absolutely true that there is first something which is essentially being and essentially good, which we call God... Hence from the first being, essentially such, and good, everything can be called good and a being, inasmuch as it participates in it by way of a certain assimilation which is far removed and defective'.<sup>166</sup>

After having reached to the conclusion regarding the existence of an absolute being through an analysis of its effects in the created, St. Thomas proceeds in describing the world from the point of view of the creation. The process of observing the world leads us to deduct that there must exist a first cause for the world, which the Revelation identifies with the Trinity, a plenitude of life and being.

A first question address the way in which the design of the finite being can pre-exist in the absolute being. For St. Thomas, the perfection of all things can be found in God, and not in themselves.

'Since therefore God is the first effective cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way.'<sup>167</sup>

God is not simply the cause of all things, but the exemplar cause of the created.

'It is manifest that things made by nature receive determinate forms. This determination of forms must be reduced to the divine wisdom as its first principle, for divine wisdom devised the order of the universe, which order consists in the variety of things. And

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<sup>166</sup> *ST*, I, 6, 4.

<sup>167</sup> *ST*, I, 4, 2.

therefore we must say that in the divine wisdom are the types of all things, which types we have called ideas... And these ideas, though multiplied by their relations to things, in reality are not apart from the divine essence, according as the likeness to that essence can be shared diversely by different things. In this manner therefore God Himself is the first exemplar of all things'.<sup>168</sup>

Although He is an absolutely simple being, in God pre-exists the entire order of the composed universe.

The divine plan does not affect the simplicity of the divine being. As long as God is a trinity of Persons, his act of creation is purely free and not determined by any sort of limitation – probably only by the impossibility of creating an unlimited being. The action of creating the world is outwards orientated, and not an emanation of the divine essence.

Although the finite being has the infinite being as its cause and origin, this act of coming into being is not properly an emanation but a creation. Therefore, 'we must consider not only the emanation of a particular being from a particular agent, but also the emanation of all being from the universal cause, which is God; and this emanation we designate by the name of creation'.<sup>169</sup> The created is not an emanation, but its coming into being is out of nothing. Properly, God is the origin of its being, but without identifying the two realities in one essence.

This creation must be understood as 'out of nothing', therefore not an action of organizing a pre-existing reality. What is composite by its definition is created, and not a single element can pre-exist. 'Creation does not mean the building up of a composite thing from pre-existing principles; but it means that the *composite* is created so that it is brought into being at the same time with all its principles.'<sup>170</sup>

Creation is understood in an absolute sense, with no preceding elements and no self-creating successions. The finite being has its only cause in God's action, otherwise it would not be. 'Creation is the production of the whole being'<sup>171</sup>. In other words, 'nothing can be, unless it is from God, Who is the universal cause of all being'<sup>172</sup>.

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<sup>168</sup> *ST*, I, 44, 3.

<sup>169</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 1.

<sup>170</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 4.

<sup>171</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 4.

<sup>172</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 2.

The act of producing the limited being is unlimited from the perspective of the absolute being who creates. This act is timeless, as long as it coincides with time itself. Time and the world are simultaneous in God's creative act, or we can say that time itself is created in this way. 'Nothing is made except as it exists. But nothing exists of time except *now*. Hence time cannot be made except according to some *now*; not because in the first *now* is time, but because from it time begins.'<sup>173</sup>

But for what reason does the absolute being create the finite being? The theology of creation explains the divine act in connexion with the Trinitarian teaching. The 'production' of the world is not an act of emanation from the divine essence, but an act of the will of the Trinity. As St. Thomas explains, 'to create belongs to God according to His being, that is, His essence, which is common to the three Persons. Hence to create is not proper to any one Person, but is common to the whole Trinity.'<sup>174</sup>

Creating the world is an absolutely free act, which involves a continuous creating action as long as the being of the world depends on God's will – 'it is not necessary that God should will anything except Himself. It is not therefore necessary for God to will that the world should always exist; but the world exists forasmuch as God wills it to exist, since the being of the world depends on the will of God, as on its cause. It is not therefore necessary for the world to be always; and hence it cannot be proved by demonstration.'<sup>175</sup>

These reasons for God's creating act also explain the perspective or the finality of the created being. Finite being recalls infinite being. Things have a natural desire toward being. The plenitude of all limited things can be found only in the plenitude of God's infinite life. God is not only the origin or the first cause of the world, but also the final cause of all things.

'All things desire God as their end, when they desire some good thing, whether this desire be intellectual or sensible, or natural, i.e. without knowledge; because nothing is good and desirable except forasmuch as it participates in the likeness to God'.<sup>176</sup>

Creation is described by the Scripture as being good not only inasmuch as it participates in being, but as long as it desires the plenitude of being. Both the motive and the scope of the creation can be found in God's infinite goodness.

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<sup>173</sup> *ST*, I, 46, 3.

<sup>174</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 6.

<sup>175</sup> *ST*, I, 46, 1.

<sup>176</sup> *ST*, I, 44, 4.

God ‘brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever’.<sup>177</sup>

This goodness that is the reason of creation also explains the diversity of the composed things. This complexity of the created reflects somehow the simplicity of God’s being. Paradoxically, we can say that if the perfection of God is to be simple, the perfection of a created universe must be diversely composed. And so, the diversity of the created is not an impediment for its origins in God. ‘The perfection of the universe requires that there should be inequality in things, so that every grade of goodness may be realized’.<sup>178</sup>

### **I.3.1.1. The Trinitarian Model of Creation**

The finite being has its starting point in the creative act of God. But this act would be almost impossible unless God is conceived as Trinity. It is not simply God who creates, but precisely the Trinity. This implies a certain order of relations and actions.

‘God the Father made the creature through His Word, which is His Son; and through His Love, which is the Holy Ghost. And so the processions of the Persons are the type of the productions of creatures inasmuch as they include the essential attributes, knowledge and will. ... The processions of the divine Persons are the cause of creation’<sup>179</sup>

In this manner, St. Thomas highlights a particular functionality of the world following its creation in the image of the Trinity. Analogous with the Trinitarian being, where the Son proceeds as the word from the intellect, and the Holy Spirit proceeds as love from the will, ‘in rational creatures, possessing intellect and will, there is found the

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<sup>177</sup> *ST*, I, 47, 1.

<sup>178</sup> *ST*, I, 48, 2.

<sup>179</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 6. The procession of the creatures has as its exemplar cause the procession of the divine persons, both having ‘en quelque sorte une source commune’. L.-B. Geiger, *La participation dans la Philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris, 1953, p. 225.

representation of the Trinity by way of image, inasmuch as there is found in them the word conceived, and the love proceeding'.<sup>180</sup>

But not only in rational creatures is the image of the Trinity to be found. The entire creation somehow reflects the Trinitarian structure of being. This reflection takes place at different degrees of intensity and on different levels. As St. Thomas describes it, 'in all creatures there is found the trace of the Trinity, inasmuch as in every creature are found some things which are necessarily reduced to the divine Persons as to their cause.'<sup>181</sup> Traces of the Trinity are rooted in every creature, for every component of the created, as St. Thomas notes, subsists in its own being, has a form and species, and a relation to something else. These three primary aspects indicate, one by one, the Persons of the Trinity as supreme image of the existing being: 'Therefore as it is a created substance, it represents the cause and principle; and so in that manner it shows the Person of the Father, Who is the *principle from no principle*. According as it has a form and species, it represents the Word as the form of the thing made by art is from the conception of the craftsman. According as it has relation of order, it represents the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as He is love, because the order of the effect to something else is from the will of the Creator... For a thing exists by its substance, is distinct by its form, and agrees by its order.'<sup>182</sup> The entire creation and every creature in itself have a certain reflection of the Creator, and *traces* of the Trinity are to be found in the very definition of every being.

### **I.3.1.2. Essence in Composite Substances**

Unlike the Trinity, the created being implies limited essence and composite substance. No creature can be infinite, and so the created means an entire structure of finite things. Starting from the observation that 'no creature is infinite in essence'<sup>183</sup>, St. Thomas is drawing a complex picture of the distinctions that can be found in the structure of the created being, in order to find a conceptual functionality of the rational or logical instruments in view of a theological finality.

Before moving on to describe the created being in case of the material universe, first it must be mentioned that the act of creation produced both composite and simple

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<sup>180</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 7.

<sup>181</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 7.

<sup>182</sup> *ST*, I, 45, 7.

<sup>183</sup> *ST*, I, 7, 3.

substances. The first type of substances indicates a composite of matter and form. Simple substances indicate only form, and although named simple, their simplicity differs from the divine simplicity, being rather simple in reference to the first type of substances<sup>184</sup>.

According to St. Thomas, 'in the case of composite substances the term *an essence* signifies the composite of matter and form'.<sup>185</sup>

In this first type of substances, matter becomes the basic principle of individuation.

Here intervenes the corrective idea that 'the matter which is the principle of individuation is not just any matter, but only designated matter. By designated matter I mean that which is considered under determined dimensions. This kind of matter is not part of the definition of man as man, but it would enter into the definition of Socrates if Socrates could be defined. The definition of man, on the contrary, does include undesigned matter'.<sup>186</sup>

Individual things are grouped in species and genres. 'The individual is designated with respect to its species through matter determined by dimensions, whereas the species is designated with respect to the genus through the constitutive difference, which is derived from the form of the thing'.<sup>187</sup>

Although the individual matter is the reality that constructs all these levels, the definitions are applied to the individual as a whole and not to the matter alone.

'The genus, then, signifies indeterminately everything in the species and not the matter alone. Similarly, the difference designates the whole and not the form alone, and the definition also signifies the whole, as does the species too, though in a different way. The genus signifies the whole as a name designating what is material in the thing without the determination of the specific form'.<sup>188</sup>

The individuals are grouped in species, in which nature is 'indeterminate with regard to the individual, as the nature of the genus with regard to the species'.<sup>189</sup> The species is

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<sup>184</sup> David Bradshaw considers that 'Aquinas, unlike Augustine, believes that angels too are not composites of matter and form, so that they too must be identical with their own essences. This means that the kind of simplicity so far identified is not unique to God alone'. *Aristotle East and West*, p. 243.

<sup>185</sup> *EE*, 2, 3

<sup>186</sup> *EE*, 2, 4.

<sup>187</sup> *EE*, 2, 5.

<sup>188</sup> *EE*, 2, 8.

<sup>189</sup> *EE*, 2, 11.

‘determined relative to the genus through form, while the individual is determined relative to the species through matter.’<sup>190</sup>

Between the whole and the individual there is a double relation. The individual is part of the whole, and the whole is determined by the individual. Composition and unity coexist in a way that probably reflects the unity and the diversity in the Trinity.

When we talk about the created being, *finite* indicates individuation, while the fragmentation of the essence is reflected in the individual concomitant with the unity of the whole being.

### **I.3.1.3. Essence in Non-Composite Substances**

A special status, though, hold the second type of substances, the non-composite or simple ones. For these types of substances the principle of individuation is no longer matter.<sup>191</sup> Their essence is simple form, without any matter. In fact, although essence refers both to matter and form, even in composed substances the simple form is determinative for the whole individual at the level of being. In this case, ‘the intellect is a form not in matter, but either wholly separated from matter, as is the angelic substance, or at least an intellectual power, which is not the act of any organ, in the intellectual soul joined to a body’<sup>192</sup>. And this is due to the very order of being.

The character of being simple in these essences indicates rather the negative character of being non-composite with matter, or being form alone<sup>193</sup>. But being and form are not simultaneous. Being created, they are still composed. ‘In a soul or intelligence, therefore, there is no composition of matter and form, understanding matter in them as it

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<sup>190</sup> *EE*, 2, 12.

<sup>191</sup> According to Lawrence Dewan, ‘there is a *global* theory of the individual in St. Thomas's doctrine, viz. that something does not have a nature such as to be received in something. In corporeal things, this derives from the matter. In subsisting forms, the form itself (not the *esse*) has the requisite nature. In God, the *esse* itself is of such a nature as to subsist. *The individual is analogically common, or is divided into modes*’. *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2006, p. 246.

<sup>192</sup> *ST*, I, 7, 2.

<sup>193</sup> Anthony Kenny observes that ‘Aquinas divides the subsistent entities, which alone really have being and are created, into two classes: complex material substances on the one hand, and separated substances on the other. But separated substances – angelic spirits and the like – are, as understood by Aquinas, forms that are not forms *of* anything, and his way of conceiving them seems open to all the objections an Aristotelian would make against a Platonist. It seems difficult to render Aquinas' teaching coherent in passages such as this, save by saying that he is an Aristotelian on earth, but a Platonist in heaven.’ *Aquinas on Being*, Clarendon Press, 2002, p. 165.

is in corporeal substances. But there is in them a composition of form and being.’<sup>194</sup> And, ‘because the quiddity of an intelligence is the intelligence itself, its quiddity or essence is identical with that which it is, while its being, which is received from God, is that by which it subsists in reality’<sup>195</sup>.

There is a certain autonomy of the form compared to matter. Although in the case of the corporeal things form doesn’t exist before matter, it can exist without matter. As far as matter is concerned, form is the principle of being, and thus, matter can’t exist without form. For St. Thomas, ‘matter and form are so related that form gives being to matter. Matter, then, cannot exist without some form, but there can be a form without matter: form as such does not depend on matter. If we find some forms that can exist only in matter, this happens to them because they are far removed from the first principle, which is the primary and pure act. It follows that those forms closest to the first principle are forms subsisting in themselves without matter’.<sup>196</sup>

At this level there is a complex hierarchy of being. Closer to the pure being are the simple substances, followed by the corporeal rational substances. Between these two there is an essential difference, and therefore, angels and souls are not essentially the same. ‘The essence of a composite substance accordingly differs from that of a simple substance because the essence of a composite substance is not only form but embraces both form and matter, whereas the essence of a simple substance is form alone.’<sup>197</sup> When it comes to human being, the inner link between matter and form would require a separate discussion with complex implications.

The fact that these spiritual substances are not identical with God in their simplicity is evident from the following passage, where St. Thomas indicates the separation of essence and existence in these simple substances. Their being is received; they are not pure acts like God. The reality whose essence is identical with its being must be unique and primary. All other things aren’t identical with their being, and this includes the so-called simple beings.

‘Substances of this kind, though pure forms without matter, are not absolutely simple; they are not pure act but have a mixture of potentiality. The following consideration makes this evident. Everything that does not belong to the concept of an essence or

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<sup>194</sup> *EE*, 4, 2.

<sup>195</sup> *EE*, 4, 9.

<sup>196</sup> *EE*, 4, 3.

<sup>197</sup> *EE*, 4, 4.



quiddity comes to it from outside and enters into composition with the essence, because no essence can be understood without its parts. Now, every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being. I can know, for instance, what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it has being in reality. From this it is clear that being is other than essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there is a reality whose quiddity is its being. This reality, moreover, must be unique and primary... there can be only one reality that is identical with its being. In everything else, then, its being must be other than its quiddity, nature, or form.<sup>198</sup>

Receiving their being from another being implies that these non-composed substances are, in fact, composed but, if that is possible, in a purer mode; compared to the material universe they are simple. But in all this complexity of being, only God is ‘pure being’<sup>199</sup> and the cause of being for all other things in which there is a mixture of potential and act. Created things are participating in being to different degrees. And the hierarchy of this participation in being is the following:

‘separate substances ... are distinct from one another according to their degree of potency and act, a superior intelligence, being closer to the primary being, having more act and less potency, and so with the others. This gradation ends with the human soul, which holds the lowest place among intellectual substances. ... Having more potentiality than other intellectual substances, the human soul is so close to matter that a material reality is induced to share its own being, so that from soul and body there results one being in the one composite, though this being, as belonging to the soul, does not depend on the body. After this form, which is the soul, there are found other forms which have more potentiality and are even closer to matter, to such a point that they do not have being without matter. Among these forms, too, we find an order and a gradation, ending in the primary forms of the elements, which are closest to matter’.<sup>200</sup>

### ***1.3.2. Deiformity and Deformity***

The simple forms are closer to the primary being, while the material elements are the most distant. ‘All beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation. Therefore it must be that all things which are diversified by the diverse

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<sup>198</sup> *EE*, 4, 6.

<sup>199</sup> *EE*, 4, 7.

<sup>200</sup> *EE*, 4, 10.

participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly.<sup>201</sup>

We can distinguish two main categories of created beings in existence: the spiritual world and the composed world individuated by matter. Nevertheless, some *traces* of the Trinity are to be found not only in the world as a whole, but in every component that participates in being. But a central role in this entire created picture is held by the human being, as that which unites the two worlds and partakes in being at a personal rational level. What makes the human being so special are its characteristics of being created upon God's image.

### **I.3.2.1. The *Likeness* of Creation**

But until the exposition of the special creation of man, St. Thomas stresses the general character of the creation as being *like to God*. According to the principles of negative theology, God is totally different from creation. Nothing from the created order can describe his essence, because nothing can be like him. But some things can be said about God starting from the created, and positive theology doesn't indicate something contrary to God. St. Thomas is following St. Dionysius, who writes that, if nothing is like God, that doesn't mean denying all likeness to Him. So the content of the notion of likeness applied here is that 'the same things can be like and unlike to God: like, according as they imitate Him, as far as He, Who is not perfectly imitable, can be imitated; unlike according as they fall short of their cause', and that 'because they are not in agreement, specifically or generically'.<sup>202</sup>

The likeness of creation excludes any essential identity, and implies a complete ontological distance. But, in the same way, a world totally unlike God is inconceivable<sup>203</sup>. As long as it is created by God, the world keeps something of God's likeness. 'Likeness of creatures to God is not affirmed on account of agreement in form

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<sup>201</sup> *ST*, I, 44, 1.

<sup>202</sup> *ST*, I, 4, 3.

<sup>203</sup> For Rudi A. TeVelde, the *likeness* indicates that creatures do not participate in the divine essence but in its similitude: 'divine cause expresses itself in its effect *as distinguished from itself* and in each distinct creature the divine cause is distinguished from itself in a distinct way in accordance with the appropriate idea of this creature. So the negation in the effect of the identity of essence and *esse* in God is included in the likeness each creature has of God. This is exactly the reason of calling the likeness between God and creatures *analogous*: since it is not in spite of their difference that they are similar in a certain respect. They are different from one another in what they have in common, the one has *being* in identity with its essence, the other has *being* as distinct from its essence'. *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Brill, 1995, p. 116.

according to the formality of the same genus or species, but solely according to analogy, inasmuch as God is essential being, whereas other things are beings by participation'.<sup>204</sup>

The status of 'beings by participation' makes the created things possess in their very definition a sort of likeness to God. Yet, the reverse is not possible. 'Although it may be admitted that creatures are in some sort like God, it must nowise be admitted that God is like creatures'.<sup>205</sup>

Somehow, the world keeps this likeness to God by God's own presence in the world. God is totally different to the world, and yet he is permanently and everywhere present. The continuous presence of God makes possible the *being* of the created. Without God, everything would return to nothing. And so, 'since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect' and 'God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being'.<sup>206</sup>

This continuous presence that makes possible the existence of the world cannot be an essential presence in the sense of an ontological identification. God is essentially present in the world as its first and continuous cause. 'God is said to be in all things by essence, not indeed by the essence of the things themselves, as if He were of their essence; but by His own essence; because His substance is present to all things as the cause of their being'.<sup>207</sup>

Opposed to this presence there is nothingness: the impossibility, the total death, the inconceivable nothingness. The world can't exist by its own power, and can't be totally unlike God. If God can be unlike the creation, the creation can't *be* unless it keeps some sort of likeness to God. Although stating a radical distinction between God and the world, Christian theology seems to be radical in sustaining God's presence in the world. 'Thus, as the production of a thing into existence depends on the will of God, so likewise it depends on His will that things should be preserved; for He does not preserve them otherwise than by ever giving them existence; hence if He took away His action

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<sup>204</sup> *ST*, I, 4, 3.

<sup>205</sup> *ST*, I, 4, 3.

<sup>206</sup> *ST*, I, 8, 1.

<sup>207</sup> *ST*, I, 8, 3.

from them, all things would be reduced to nothing, as appears from Augustine (Gen. ad lit. iv, 12)'.<sup>208</sup>

For St. Thomas this paradoxical view of the world, as positioned somewhere between its creation out of nothing and the likeness to God by participating in being, manages to reject any dualist interpretation of the reality, and also to explain the content of *evil*. Being is the desire and the fulfilment of every nature. Goodness and being are identical in the perspective of the finality of the creation.<sup>209</sup> Evil is therefore opposed to being, although it can be found in existence. In St. Thomas' words, 'since every nature desires its own being and its own perfection, it must be said also that the being and the perfection of any nature is good. Hence it cannot be that evil signifies being, or any form or nature. Therefore it must be that by the name of evil is signified the absence of good. And this is what is meant by saying that *evil is neither a being nor a good*. For since being, as such, is good, the absence of one implies the absence of the other.'<sup>210</sup>

In this situation, the demons are not evil by the creative act of God or by their created nature. Although they keep the presence of God by the simple fact that they are beings, their likeness is deformed by their own sin. And so, 'in the demons there is their nature which is from God, and also the deformity of sin which is not from Him; therefore, it is not to be absolutely conceded that God is in the demons, except with the addition, *inasmuch as they are beings*. But in things not deformed in their nature, we must say absolutely that God is'.<sup>211</sup>

### **I.3.2.2. The Likeness of Man**

Beyond the general presence of God in the created, there is stated a special presence of God at the level of the human being – or, shall we say, at the level of the intellectual creature.

Extensively, the universe reflects more the likeness to God, but intensively the intellectual creature has this attribute to a higher extent. 'The universe is more perfect in goodness than the intellectual creature as regards extension and diffusion; but

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<sup>208</sup> ST, I, 9, 2.

<sup>209</sup> As Stephen Wang notices, Aquinas' choice is 'not between *being and not being*, but between *being and more being*'. *Aquinas and Sartre on Freedom, Personal Identity, and The Possibility of Happiness*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2009, p. 77.

<sup>210</sup> ST, I, 48, 1.

<sup>211</sup> ST, I, 8, 1.

intensively and collectively the likeness to the Divine goodness is found rather in the intellectual creature, which has a capacity for the highest good.’<sup>212</sup>

In a particular sense, man is described as being the image of God. The act of creating man is a special one, and this implies man’s special role in relation with the entire creation. A certain question is raised by the Scriptural description of God breathing the breath of life into the face of the first man. For some interpreters this ‘breath of life’ signified not only the soul, but also the Holy Spirit as a vital principle of the primary being of man. Before any evaluation of the Holy Spirit’s role in the creation, the basic message is that man is composed of matter and soul. According to St. Thomas, ‘by breath of life we must understand the soul, so that the words, *He breathed into his face the breath of life*, are a sort of exposition of what goes before; for the soul is the form of the body’<sup>213</sup>. And in what concerns man’s special likeness to God, this can be restricted to the soul only. For St. Thomas, ‘man is like to God in his soul’<sup>214</sup>, and ‘to be to the image of God belongs to the mind only’<sup>215</sup>.

The general likeness in the creation as a whole has a special functionality in man. Man is supposed to be created upon ‘the image’ of God – by image referring to human mind alone, while the rest of his being having only the same ‘trace’ of God that can be identified in all other created things. ‘So we find in man a likeness to God by way of an *image* in his mind; but in the other parts of his being by way of a *trace*.’<sup>216</sup>

The body is not then part of the content of the image of God. It is not through the body that man is different than other animals. ‘Man is said to be after the image of God, not as regards his body, but as regards that whereby he excels other animals... Now man excels all animals by his reason and intelligence; hence it is according to his intelligence and reason, which are incorporeal, that man is said to be according to the image of God.’<sup>217</sup>

The image of God as intellectual nature can be found in any human being – both in man and in woman. Although, ‘in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and

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<sup>212</sup> *ST*, I, 93, 2.

<sup>213</sup> *ST*, I, 91, 4.

<sup>214</sup> *ST*, I, 90, 2.

<sup>215</sup> *ST*, I, 93, 6.

<sup>216</sup> *ST*, I, 93, 6.

<sup>217</sup> *ST*, I, 3, 2.

not in woman: for man is the beginning and end of woman; as God is the beginning and end of every creature.’<sup>218</sup>

But if this final remark on the identity of both man and woman as ‘image’ of God would need some discussion, more important than the receiver of the image is the image itself. And on this matter Thomas’s conclusion is that ‘to be to the image of God by imitation of the Divine Nature does not exclude being to the same image by the representation of the Divine Persons: but rather one follows from the other. We must, therefore, say that in man there exists the image of God, both as regards the Divine Nature and as regards the Trinity of Persons.’<sup>219</sup>

Referring both to the Nature and to the Persons, the likeness is though imperfect. This element is underlined by the Scripture in mentioning that ‘man was made *to* God's likeness; for the preposition *to* signifies a certain approach, as of something at a distance.’<sup>220</sup>

Between the uncreated and the created there is an infinite distance. In this situation, what approach does this image implies? Is man the only *being* created upon God’s image? As long as the Scripture mentions the angelic beings, the existence of these spiritual realities must be placed closer to God than the composed nature of the human being. St. Thomas’ answer to the question concerning whether angels are closer to the image of God than man is that man has some complexity of being that better reflects the character of *image* but, in fact, angels are more to the image of God.

‘We may speak of God's image in two ways. First, we may consider in it that in which the image chiefly consists, that is, the intellectual nature. Thus the image of God is more perfect in the angels than in man, because their intellectual nature is more perfect... Secondly, we may consider the image of God in man as regards its accidental qualities, so far as to observe in man a certain imitation of God, consisting in the fact that man proceeds from man, as God from God; and also in the fact that the whole human soul is in the whole body, as God from God; and also in the fact that the whole human soul is in the whole body, and again, in every part, as God is in regard to the whole world. In these and the like things the image of God is more perfect in man than it is in the angels. But these do not of themselves belong to the nature of the Divine image in man, unless we presuppose the first likeness, which is in the intellectual nature; otherwise even brute

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<sup>218</sup> *ST*, I, 93, 4.

<sup>219</sup> *ST*, I, 93, 5.

<sup>220</sup> *ST*, I, 93, 1.

animals would be to God's image. Therefore, as in their intellectual nature, the angels are more to the image of God than man is, we must grant that, absolutely speaking, the angels are more to the image of God than man is, but that in some respects man is more like to God.<sup>221</sup>

### **I.3.2.3. *Image, Likeness, and the Fall***

If the notion of *image* has a clear content, *likeness* seems to have a double significance. First, the entire finite being is created *to God's likeness*. But likeness means also a perfection to achieve, after pursuing goodness. '*Likeness* is not distinct from *image* in the general notion of *likeness* (for thus it is included in *image*); but so far as any *likeness* falls short of *image*, or again, as it perfects the idea of *image*.'<sup>222</sup> *Likeness* can reflect God more or less. As perfection to be achieved, *likeness* can be identified with the vision of the divine essence. The divine image in man reaches its full clarity in this full state of beatitude, which involves the vision of God in his essence. This was the finality of the created. But the first man didn't reach this state, and this explains why he could sin. As St. Thomas describes, 'since in the Divine Essence is beatitude itself, the intellect of a man who sees the Divine Essence has the same relation to God as a man has to beatitude. ... No one who sees the Essence of God can willingly turn away from God, which means to sin. Hence all who see God through His Essence are so firmly established in the love of God, that for eternity they can never sin. Therefore, as Adam did sin, it is clear that he did not see God through His Essence'.<sup>223</sup>

Adam had to grow toward the state of seeing God through his essence, and he had all the instruments in order to attain that. His knowledge didn't imply the beatific vision, but in the same time it wasn't identical with the knowledge possible for the fallen man. For Adam 'there was no need for the first man to attain to the knowledge of God by demonstration drawn from an effect, such as we need; since he knew God simultaneously in His effects, especially in the intelligible effects, according to His capacity'.<sup>224</sup> Sin has the significance of a failure in knowledge. Refusing the vision of the perfect being, man can no longer see his own being or the created being, except in a deformed manner.

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<sup>221</sup> *ST*, I, 93, 3.

<sup>222</sup> *ST*, I, 93, 9.

<sup>223</sup> *ST*, I, 94, 1.

<sup>224</sup> *ST*, I, 94, 1.

The fact that the first man didn't reach the state of seeing God's essence explains his possibilities of sin. In fact, his creation implied for him the possibility of sin. In a paradoxical manner, 'the perfection of the universe requires that there should be not only beings incorruptible, but also corruptible beings; so the perfection of the universe requires that there should be some which can fail in goodness, and thence it follows that sometimes they do fail. Now it is in this that evil consists, namely, in the fact that a thing fails in goodness.'<sup>225</sup>

Every rational being is created in this context with the possibility of failing. This explains both the sin of the first man, but also the sin of the demons. While the other angels have reached the vision of God's essence, and they can't sin anymore, the primal sin of the demons must have happened in the very first moments of their existence.

For the demons, though, the problem consists not only in their possibility to sin, but in the very possibility of their existence in a deformed manner. St. Thomas notices that 'evil is distant both from simple being and from simple *not-being*, because it is neither a habit nor a pure negation, but a privation'.<sup>226</sup> Evil is described as a privation, and as a tendency towards not-being which is impossible to reach. According to Augustine, 'God is not the author of evil because He is not the cause of tending to not-being. (QQ. 83, qu. 21)'<sup>227</sup> Therefore, as St. Thomas says, 'no being is called evil by participation, but by privation of participation.'<sup>228</sup> In this way, evil implies a fundamental self contradiction: 'every actual being is a good; and likewise every potential being, as such, is a good, as having a relation to good. For as it has being in potentiality, so has it goodness in potentiality. Therefore, the subject of evil is good.'<sup>229</sup>

On the one side, we have the basic definition of the created as *likeness to God*, and there can be found a certain *deiformity* in the entire creation called to participate in being. At the opposite end of the spectrum we find the possibility of evil as deformed existence tending toward not-being, in the context in which 'no being can be spoken of as evil, formally as being, but only so far as it lacks being.'<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> *ST*, I, 48, 2.

<sup>226</sup> *ST*, I, 48, 2.

<sup>227</sup> *ST*, I, 49, 2.

<sup>228</sup> *ST*, I, 49, 3.

<sup>229</sup> *ST*, I, 48, 2.

<sup>230</sup> *ST*, I, 5, 3.



## I.4. The Meaning of Divine Grace

According to St. Thomas, there are distinct levels of God's presence in the created being. And Theology finds its reason in describing a particular way of God's presence in linking the created with God.

'No other perfection, except grace, added to substance, renders God present in anything as the object known and loved; therefore only grace constitutes a special mode of God's existence in things. There is, however, another special mode of God's existence in man by union, which will be treated of in its own place'<sup>231</sup>.

The created participates in being, but between God's essence and the essence of the created can be no identity, no confusion, and no unity. In the context of 'participation', the two essences remain absolutely distinct. Between God's simple essence and the composed essence of the finite beings there is an absolute distance. How can they meet without losing their definitions, or how can the created go beyond its natural condition in its 'special' relation with God?

Therefore, grace holds an extremely important role in the dynamics of being. It indicates a special relation with God, characteristic to rational creatures. St. Thomas observes that 'the love of God to the creature is looked at differently. For one is common, whereby *He loves all things that are* (Wis. 11:25), and thereby gives things their natural being. But the second is a special love, whereby He draws the rational creature above the condition of its nature to a participation of the Divine good; and according to this love He is said to love anyone simply, since it is by this love that God simply wishes the eternal good, which is Himself, for the creature.'<sup>232</sup> The dynamics of this special relation, in which a rational creature can participate in the 'divine good', are expressed through a reality that can make possible for the natural to go above its conditions. This access of supernatural in the direction of God's being is mainly described as *grace*. And its understanding can be decisive in picturing the possibilities of the created being to share the life of the infinite being – or even picturing the possibilities of relation between the two.

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<sup>231</sup> *ST*, I, 8, 3.

<sup>232</sup> *ST*, I-II, 110, 1.

Although, God is the perfect simplicity, grace may be a complex reality with no simple understanding. While the nature of grace may become a problem, it represents a necessity, especially in the context of salvation.

But until the process of salvation, the understanding of grace in the primary state of the created being is vitally important.

In describing the creation of man, St. Thomas says that ‘man also was created in grace; man possessed grace in the state of innocence.’<sup>233</sup> This presence of grace allowed him to have a special relation with God, while his existence was destined to last in a continuous communion with God. ‘Man was immortal before sin’.<sup>234</sup>

Immortality, for example, was possible through a special way of sharing God’s being. Once grace is lost, mortality becomes an irreversible process, and immortality cannot be achieved even in the context of justification in which man recovers grace through the acts of Christ. As far as the first man is concerned, ‘his power of preserving the body was not natural to the soul, but was the gift of grace. And though man recovered grace as regards remission of guilt and the merit of glory; yet he did not recover immortality, the loss of which was an effect of sin; for this was reserved for Christ to accomplish, by Whom the defect of nature was to be restored into something better’.<sup>235</sup>

The state of grace is reflected in man’s soul as an order of being which morally can be described as rectitude. Grace made possible the correct functionality of the human being. In the hierarchy implied by this functionality, ‘this rectitude consisted in his reason being subject to God, the lower powers to reason, and the body to the soul: and the first subjection was the cause of both the second and the third; since while reason was subject to God, the lower powers remained subject to reason... such a subjection ... was not from nature; otherwise it would have remained after sin... Hence it is clear that also the primitive subjection by virtue of which reason was subject to God, was not a merely natural gift, but a supernatural endowment of grace; ... Hence if the loss of grace dissolved the obedience of the flesh to the soul, we may gather that the inferior powers were subjected to the soul through grace existing therein.’<sup>236</sup>

By losing grace, the equilibrium of the composed being is lost, and man, separated by his source (or by his *image*), cannot find but death in a world of naturally limitedness

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<sup>233</sup> *ST*, I, 95, 1.

<sup>234</sup> *ST*, I, 97, 1.

<sup>235</sup> *ST*, I, 97, 1.

<sup>236</sup> *ST*, I, 95, 1.

when it comes to being. More than that, the loss of grace has produced in the created being a disorder that cannot be fixed by a simple return of the grace.

St. Thomas distinguishes between two stages of the human nature: its condition before sin, characterised by integrity, and its condition after sin, characterised by corruption. The difference between these stages consists in the presence or absence of grace, while in its essential characteristics this nature is the same in both stages. 'Man's nature may be looked at in two ways: first, in its integrity, as it was in our first parent before sin; secondly, as it is corrupted in us after the sin of our first parent. Now in both states human nature needs the help of God as First Mover, to do or wish any good whatsoever'.<sup>237</sup>

We find a certain inability of this nature in its corrupted state, unequal in its desire for good and knowledge of truth. For St. Thomas, 'human nature is more corrupt by sin in regard to the desire for good, than in regard to the knowledge of truth'.<sup>238</sup> This corruption also affects man's ability to warrant everlasting life. Without God's help he cannot be otherwise than corrupted and he cannot find his salvation only by himself. 'Man, by his natural endowments, cannot produce meritorious works proportionate to everlasting life; and for this a higher force is needed... And thus without grace man cannot merit everlasting life; yet he can perform works conducing to a good which is natural to man'.<sup>239</sup>

Compared to this corrupted state, the salvation offered by God is a totally free gift. All the process of salvation is accomplished by God, inasmuch as man is moved by God toward the acquisition of a supernatural good. There are several ways of categorising the meaning of Grace:

'Man is aided by God's gratuitous will in two ways: first, inasmuch as man's soul is moved by God to know or will or do something, and in this way the gratuitous effect in man is not a quality, but a movement of the soul... Secondly, man is helped by God's gratuitous will, inasmuch as a habitual gift is infused by God into the soul; and for this reason, that it is not fitting that God should provide less for those He loves, that they may acquire supernatural good, than for creatures, whom He loves that they may acquire natural good. Now He so provides for natural creatures, that not merely does He move them to their natural acts, but He bestows upon them certain forms and powers,

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<sup>237</sup> *ST*, I-II, 109, 2.

<sup>238</sup> *ST*, I-II, 109, 2.

<sup>239</sup> *ST*, I-II, 109, 5.

which are the principles of acts, in order that they may of themselves be inclined to these movements, and thus the movements whereby they are moved by God become natural and easy to creatures... Much more therefore does He infuse into such as He moves towards the acquisition of supernatural good, certain forms or supernatural qualities, whereby they may be moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good; and thus the gift of grace is a quality.’<sup>240</sup>

The nature of grace is described in relation with its receiver. It can be neither uncreated nor identical with the divine essence. Still, it makes possible for man to participate into the Divine goodness. ‘Because grace is above human nature, it cannot be a substance or a substantial form, but is an accidental form of the soul’, and ‘what is substantially in God, becomes accidental in the soul participating the Divine goodness, as is clear in the case of knowledge. And thus because the soul participates in the Divine goodness imperfectly, the participation of the Divine goodness, which is grace, has its being in the soul in a less perfect way than the soul subsists in itself. Nevertheless, inasmuch as it is the expression or participation of the Divine goodness, it is nobler than the nature of the soul, though not in its mode of being.’<sup>241</sup>

For St. Thomas, ‘grace is said to be created inasmuch as men are created with reference to it’<sup>242</sup>. Also, ‘grace signifies a temporal effect, which can precede and follow another; and thus grace may be both prevenient and subsequent.’<sup>243</sup> Actually, Grace adapts the human being to God’s love, making the human nature capable of ‘participation’. Nature is lifted to the state of supernatural. This reality can repair human inability to grow toward virtues. In this sense, grace is a ‘certain disposition which is presupposed to the infused virtues, as their principle and root.’<sup>244</sup> This gift makes possible for the rational beings to attain the primary scope of creation, the vision of God’s essence. Properly, the gift of grace is the middle term that can make possible this final act of the created being. In all situations it is a created effect, which fits the created being as a habitual gift, both ‘operating’ and ‘cooperating’.<sup>245</sup>

Man cannot return by his own powers from the state of corruption. Grace can only be achieved if God offers it. Or, grace signifies the act of salvation itself. ‘However much a

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<sup>240</sup> *ST*, I-II, 110, 2.

<sup>241</sup> *ST*, I-II, 110, 2.

<sup>242</sup> *ST*, I-II, 110, 2.

<sup>243</sup> *ST*, I-II, 111, 3.

<sup>244</sup> *ST*, I-II, 110, 3.

<sup>245</sup> *ST*, I-II, 111, 2.

man prepares himself, he does not necessarily receive grace from God<sup>246</sup>. Man and God cannot be equal partners in the dialogue of salvation. Grace indicates both God's free movement of salvation and his continuous action of moving the justified soul. Everything is offered by God. And so, 'we merit glory by an act of grace; but we do not merit grace by an act of nature'<sup>247</sup>. In corruption and without grace, man can only fall; he cannot rise unless God raises him. 'The first cause of the defect of grace is on our part; but the first cause of the bestowal of grace is on God's'<sup>248</sup>.

St. Thomas' view on grace seems clear from the point of view of its necessity for the corrupted created being. But its functionality in linking the created rational being to God suffers as long as a created reality is supposed to offer access to the divine nature. St. Thomas description suffers by its own complexity<sup>249</sup>, as long as he is talking in the same time about 'uncreated grace'<sup>250</sup> and about grace as of 'a partaking of the Divine Nature'.

'The gift of grace surpasses every capability of created nature, since it is nothing short of a partaking of the Divine Nature, which exceeds every other nature. And thus it is impossible that any creature should cause grace. For it is as necessary that God alone should deify, bestowing a partaking of the Divine Nature by a participated likeness, as it is impossible that anything save fire should enkindle.'<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> *ST*, I-II, 112, 3.

<sup>247</sup> *ST*, I, 95, 1.

<sup>248</sup> *ST*, I-II, 112, 3.

<sup>249</sup> Anthony Kenny, for example, considers that 'Aquinas was a victim of his own virtues. One of the attractive features of his writing is the ecumenical approach he takes to other philosophers.' In the question of 'being', A.Kenny identifies in Aquinas' works 'twelve types of being', and draws the conclusion that Aquinas is 'confused' on this topic, 'failing' to 'bring into a consistent whole the insights he displayed in identifying these different types of being'. *Aquinas on being*, p. 192-194.

<sup>250</sup> In the context of the hypostatical union, 'Thomas réserve le term de gratia increata à la volonté divine qui est le principe efficient de l'union'. Antoine Lévi, *Le créé et l'incrée. Maxime le Confesseur et Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris, 2006, p. 353.

<sup>251</sup> *ST*, I-II, 112, 1.

## I.5. The Limits of Knowledge and Participation

The revelation indicates a certain simultaneity between the plenitude of being and the vision of God. Man, created upon God's image in his mind, in order to 'partake of the Divine Nature' must become capable of 'seeing' the divine essence. And this ultimate knowledge, inexhaustible and endless, is identical with eternal life, in its duration and consistence. St. Thomas writes plainly that, according to Jn. 17:3, eternal life consists in the vision of God.<sup>252</sup>

But first, concerning the knowledge of God, one can distinguish between two levels of 'theology'. And St. Thomas remarks that 'theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of Philosophy.'<sup>253</sup>

In both cases theology is understood as 'science', perhaps even the highest science, if one considers its finality. Though, only theology that is included in philosophy makes exclusive use of reason. To the objection that 'knowledge can be concerned only with being, for nothing can be known, save what is true; and all that is, is true. But everything that is, is treated of in philosophical science – even God Himself', St. Thomas answers that 'Scripture, inspired of God, is no part of philosophical science, which has been built up by human reason. Therefore it is useful that besides philosophical science, there should be other knowledge, i.e. inspired of God'. And that is 'necessary for man's salvation'.<sup>254</sup>

The object of Theology is God<sup>255</sup> and, on a secondary level, His creation. Mainly dealing with God, and having Him as its object, Theology is concerned with the entire created reality, as well; the world can also become the object of theology, only to the extent to which its components 'have reference to God.'<sup>256</sup>

There is a clear distinction between natural knowledge and the 'supernatural' knowledge offered through revelation. Without the second type of knowledge, God remains reachable but unknowable. Yet, natural knowledge is necessary as the frame in

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<sup>252</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 6.

<sup>253</sup> *ST*, I, 1, 1.

<sup>254</sup> *ST*, I, 1, 1.

<sup>255</sup> *ST*, I, 1, 7.

<sup>256</sup> *ST*, I, 1, 7.

which the second kind of knowledge can be received. The first one is limited, while the second goes beyond natural limits through the light of grace. So, ‘our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things. But our mind cannot be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because the sensible effects of God do not equal the power of God as their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen’<sup>257</sup>. This doesn’t mean that this type of knowledge is futile. Being rather a necessary step, its functionality consists in realising, at its end, that, as long as God as primary cause exceeds everything, we need a higher type of knowledge in order to go further and see the divine essence, and for that a special power as gift from God. And so, ‘because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God *whether He exists*, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him’<sup>258</sup>. The relation with God, through natural knowledge, goes so far as to understand that he is the cause of all things.

It is impossible for reason to know *who* God is, but only whether he *is*. The images offered by the effects found in the creation cannot reveal the divine essence, as, ontologically, they are totally different from God. The vision of God’s essence by the created reason alone remains an impossibility. Therefore, ‘the knowledge of God’s essence is by grace’, and ‘it belongs only to the good’, while ‘the knowledge of Him by natural reason can belong to both good and bad.’<sup>259</sup>

The natural intelligible light enables us to abstract from the sensible objects intelligible concepts. But a deeper knowledge requires for the intellect’s natural light to be ‘strengthened by the infusion of gratuitous light.’<sup>260</sup> In both situations, reason can be used, and we must follow it as far as it can take us.’<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 12.

<sup>258</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 12.

<sup>259</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 12. An interesting remark co-related with these distinctions can be found in John D. Caputo’s comments on the mystical approach of St. Thomas in his ‘last days’: ‘Metaphysics attempts to encase the Being (*esse*) of God, the world, and the soul within concepts of its own making. Thomas has been admitted into the very *Sache* of metaphysics, which metaphysics itself is unable to name without distortion. The clearing is the sphere which can be entered by the saint, whereas the sphere of the *Summa*, of *ratio*, may be entered by any *magister* (by the *Privatdozenten!*). If the *magister* speaks in the language of the onto-theo-logician, the saint has entered an altogether different sphere’. *Heidegger and Aquinas. An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics*, Fordham University Press, 1982, p. 254.

<sup>260</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 13.

<sup>261</sup> According to A. M. Fairweather, in Aquinas’ Theology ‘grace and revelation are aids which do not negate reason. Here as everywhere nature itself demands supernature for its completion, and the provision

Reason and faith can complete each other and imply a unique way of knowledge. For St. Thomas, reason becomes a necessity in order to ‘make clear other things’ that are put forward in the doctrine, and this is possible because ‘grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the natural bent of the will ministers to charity.’<sup>262</sup>

And, as a result of the complementarity of natural and supernatural, ‘sacred doctrine makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason’<sup>263</sup>.

But natural reason can also be considered an obstacle in the search for the vision of God, or as implying the risk of failure in this attempt. Although grace makes possible the vision of God’s essence, it doesn’t make it possible in the context of the bodily existence. Therefore, theology remains a complex of reason and grace in front of an unknown object. For St. Thomas, ‘although we cannot know in what consists the essence of God, nevertheless in this science we make use of His effects, either of nature or of grace, in place of a definition, in regard to whatever is treated of in this science concerning God’<sup>264</sup>. In what concerns God, either by reason or by grace, ‘what He is not is clearer to us than what He is. Therefore similitudes drawn from things farthest away from God form within us a truer estimate that God is above whatsoever we may say or think of Him.’<sup>265</sup>

### ***1.5.1. Negative Theology and the Vision of the Divine Essence***

In a pure sense, for St. Thomas, Theology implies that God, as Supreme Being, is supremely knowable; but that is only to Himself. For the created intellects this is a natural impossibility, like an excess of light that ends in being perceived as darkness. In this situation, ‘what is supremely knowable in itself, may not be knowable to a particular intellect, on account of the excess of the intelligible object above the intellect;

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of divine grace meets the striving of human nature in its search for the ultimate good, this quest being itself due to the gracious moving of God’. *Aquinas on Nature and Grace*, SCM Press, 1954, p. 22.

<sup>262</sup> *ST*, I, 1, 8.

<sup>263</sup> *ST*, I, 1, 8.

<sup>264</sup> *ST*, I, 1, 7.

<sup>265</sup> *ST*, I, 1, 9.



as, for example, the sun, which is supremely visible, cannot be seen by the bat by reason of its excess of light.<sup>266</sup>

Knowledge becomes rather negative than positive.<sup>267</sup> All we can know about God is that he exceeds everything. And so, for example, ‘God is not said to be not existing as if He did not exist at all, but because He exists above all that exists; inasmuch as He is His own existence. Hence it does not follow that He cannot be known at all, but that He exceeds every kind of knowledge; which means that He is not comprehended.’<sup>268</sup>

Negative names are not much different than the positive ones. Rather, they express a corrective attitude, as blocking the attempt of identifying God with the world.<sup>269</sup> While the positive attributes are abstracting the reflection of the first cause in its effects, the negative names have the functionality of underlining the primary distance between the cause and the effects. ‘Negative names applied to God, or signifying His relation to creatures manifestly do not at all signify His substance, but rather express the distance of the creature from Him, or His relation to something else, or rather, the relation of creatures to Himself’.<sup>270</sup>

All names applied to God, both positively and negatively, express God ‘so far as our intellects know Him’.<sup>271</sup> In His essence, God remains totally unknown for the created being, although the finality of the creation is expressed in the terms of His essential vision. This dimension of ‘unknowable’ is applied only to the possibilities of man and in the context of his fallen capacities. For the state of corruption, ‘salvation’ at the level

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<sup>266</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 1.

<sup>267</sup> Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht remarks that the expression ‘negative theology’ is absent in Thomas Aquinas’ works: ‘aucune *negative theologia*, aucune latinisation d’*apophatisme*’. ‘Chez saint Thomas, pour désigner l’absente, restent un certain nombre de tournures, d’un emploi parcimonieux. *Via negativa* ne s’y trouve pas, mais *via negationis* (3 emplois seulement); à peine davantage, mais de façon topique, *via remotionis* (8 emplois). La rareté de la désignation, même sous forme de *via*, est peut-être due au même hasard historique que celle de «théologie négative»; mais peut-être aussi en raison de la chose même: en christianisme, ce n’est pas la théologie *comme telle* qui est négative, mais l’une de ses modalités. Cette modalité trouve alors sa place, ou non, selon les auteurs, et elle la trouve chez Thomas d’Aquin. Cependant, la manière même de poser le problème semble autre: si c’est dans les noms divins que cette voie négative se trouve, c’est à eux qu’il faut s’adresser. Son identité semble dépendre de la leur.’ *Théologie négative et noms divins chez Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris: J. Vrin, 2005, p. 39-43.

<sup>268</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 1.

<sup>269</sup> At the beginning of one of his main works, Jean-Luc Marion makes the following argument: ‘But if God causes Being, wouldn’t we have to admit that, for Saint Thomas himself, God can be expressed without Being? At the very least, we should have to grant that Thomism does not amount to the identification of the *esse commune* with God, and that, if *esse* characterizes God in Thomism, *esse* itself must be understood divinely, thus having no common measure with what Being can signify in metaphysics – and especially in the onto-theo-logy of modern metaphysics.’ *God without Being*, The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. xxiv.

<sup>270</sup> *ST*, I, 13, 2.

<sup>271</sup> *ST*, I, 13, 2.

of knowledge is accomplished through the means of revelation and grace, by which God becomes less unknown. ‘Although by the revelation of grace in this life we cannot know of God *what He is*, and thus are united to Him as to one unknown; still we know Him more fully according as many and more excellent of His effects are demonstrated to us, and according as we attribute to Him some things known by divine revelation, to which natural reason cannot reach, as, for instance, that God is Three and One’.<sup>272</sup>

Revelation discovers something about God that is neither his essence, nor contrary to his being. The perfections of creatures represent God in an imperfect manner<sup>273</sup>. ‘In this life we cannot see the essence of God; but we know God from creatures as their principle, and also by way of excellence and remotion. In this way therefore He can be named by us from creatures, yet not so that the name which signifies Him expresses the divine essence in itself.’<sup>274</sup>

In this life, the process of knowing God can only take place by ways of eminence, causality and negation. ‘Now from the divine effects we cannot know the divine nature in itself, so as to know what it is; but only by way of eminence, and by way of causality, and of negation... Thus the name *God* signifies the divine nature, for this name was imposed to signify something existing above all things, the principle of all things and removed from all things; for those who name God intend to signify all this’.<sup>275</sup>

The possibility of naming God is included in the natural knowledge and becomes a necessary action in the context of revelation. ‘And as God is simple, and subsisting, we attribute to Him abstract names to signify His simplicity, and concrete names to signify His substance and perfection, although both these kinds of names fail to express His mode of being’.<sup>276</sup>

But seeing the essence of God only becomes possible in the future life. Commenting on the text from Ex. 32:20, ‘Man shall not see Me, and live’, St. Thomas draw the conclusion that ‘God cannot be seen in His essence by a mere human being, except he be separated from this mortal life. The reason is because ...the mode of knowledge follows the mode of the nature of the knower. But our soul, as long as we live in this life, has its being in corporeal matter; hence naturally it knows only what has a form in

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<sup>272</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 13.

<sup>273</sup> *ST*, I, 13, 2.

<sup>274</sup> *ST*, I, 13, 1.

<sup>275</sup> *ST*, I, 13, 8.

<sup>276</sup> *ST*, I, 13, 1.

matter, or what can be known by such a form. Now it is evident that the Divine essence cannot be known through the nature of material things'.<sup>277</sup>

Negative theology is therefore necessary as a corrective to the material state of being. And this limitative context no longer applies to the souls separated from the bodies, because, through grace, they have access to the beatific vision of God's essence.

### ***1.5.2. The Light of Glory and the Eternity of Being***

To see the essence of God, and thus, the eternal life, only becomes possible by grace<sup>278</sup> and not in this present life.

A vision by nature is excluded both in present and in the eternal life. For the final step in knowledge the necessary grace is indicated as 'light of illumination'. As St. Thomas explains, 'it is necessary that some supernatural disposition should be added to the intellect in order that it may be raised up to such a great and sublime height. Now since the natural power of the created intellect does not avail to enable it to see the essence of God..., it is necessary that the power of understanding should be added by divine grace. Now this increase of the intellectual powers is called the illumination of the intellect, as we also call the intelligible object itself by the name of light of illumination.'<sup>279</sup>

Through this illumination, or light of the illumination, the created intellect can be 'proportioned to know God'<sup>280</sup>. This becomes possible through 'some similitude in the visual faculty, namely, the light of glory strengthening the intellect to see God'<sup>281</sup>, like in the image indicated in the Ps. 35:10: 'In Thy light we shall see light'. Also, it must be noted that the essence of God 'cannot be seen by any created similitude representing the divine essence itself as it really is.'<sup>282</sup>

This knowledge requires the mediating factor of the illuminating grace; nevertheless, it is the intellect<sup>283</sup> that actively sees God<sup>284</sup>. 'This light is required to see the divine

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<sup>277</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 11.

<sup>278</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 4.

<sup>279</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 5.

<sup>280</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 1.

<sup>281</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 2.

<sup>282</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 2.

<sup>283</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 3.

essence, not as a similitude in which God is seen, but as a perfection of the intellect, strengthening it to see God. Therefore it may be said that this light is to be described not as a medium in which God is seen, but as one by which He is seen; and such a medium does not take away the immediate vision of God.’<sup>285</sup>

Although this entire discussion reaches the limits of mystery as long as it concerns realities inaccessible in this life, it manages to express a finality that would otherwise be impossible to depict. The intellect sees the essence of God, not by its nature, but only through the light of grace, remaining totally distinct from the simple being of God and without knowing Him infinitely, but still reaching *deification*.<sup>286</sup>

All these details are presented in a positive language but without limiting the content of the mystery. As far as grace is concerned, ‘the created light is necessary to see the essence of God, not in order to make the essence of God intelligible, which is of itself intelligible, but in order to enable the intellect to understand in the same way as a habit makes a power abler to act. Even so corporeal light is necessary as regards external sight, inasmuch as it makes the medium actually transparent, and susceptible of colour.’<sup>287</sup>

As well, the vision of God doesn’t mean a total comprehension of His essence. For St. Thomas there is a clear border between knowledge and comprehension. To the question referring to whether those who see the essence of God also comprehend Him, he answers that ‘no created intellect can know God infinitely. For the created intellect knows the Divine essence more or less perfectly in proportion as it receives a greater or lesser light of glory. Since therefore the created light of glory received into any created intellect cannot be infinite, it is clearly impossible for any created intellect to know God in an infinite degree. Hence it is impossible that it should comprehend God’.<sup>288</sup> And this

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<sup>284</sup> As W.J. Hankey remarks, ‘instead of inferring that the created never knows God’s essence, Thomas concludes rather that it must be known directly, without a similitude. What both nature and grace require is not to be frustrated. Instead, created intellect is *a certain participated likeness of first intellect* and demands that its vision be perfected. It will be raised up and strengthened to know directly God’s essence. The adaptation of nature will take place on the subjective rather than the objective side. Yet the integrity of the subject must then be respected and so the basis of the doctrine of created grace is developed.’ *God In Himself. Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 84.

<sup>285</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 5.

<sup>286</sup> Still, any participation of the finite beings remains a participation of the unparticipated (self-subsisting *esse*). John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2000, p. 591.

<sup>287</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 5.

<sup>288</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 7.

impossibility of comprehension applies also to simple substances, therefore ‘the angels see the essence of God; and yet do not know all things’.<sup>289</sup>

But beyond the limits between knowledge and comprehension, the light of glory offers to the created its maximum degree in being<sup>290</sup>: ‘by this light the rational creature is made deiform’.<sup>291</sup> This way, the light of glory ‘establishes the intellect in a kind of *deiformity*’<sup>292</sup>. It accomplishes the very union between the created and the uncreated, describing the final participation possible for the created being. ‘The created intellect of one who sees God is assimilated to what is seen in God, inasmuch as it is united to the Divine essence, in which the similitudes of all things pre-exist.’<sup>293</sup>

But how is this final knowledge identical with eternal life and simultaneous with a ‘union’ with God? While eternity is nothing else but God Himself<sup>294</sup>, in the situation of the temporal being ‘some receive immutability from God in the way of never ceasing to exist; in that sense it is said of the earth, *it standeth for ever* (Eccles. 1:4). Again, some things are called eternal in Scripture because of the length of their duration, although they are in nature corruptible; thus (Ps. 75:5) the hills are called *eternal* and we read of *the fruits of the eternal hills* (Dt. 33:15). Some again, share more fully than others in the nature of eternity, inasmuch as they possess unchangeableness either in being or further still in operation; like the angels, and the blessed, who enjoy the Word, because *as regards that vision of the Word, no changing thoughts exist in the Saints*, as Augustine says (De Trin. xv). Hence those who see God are said to have eternal life; according to that text, *This is eternal life, that they may know Thee the only true God*, etc. (Jn. 17:3).<sup>295</sup> And so, St. Thomas’ conclusion is that the eternal life is synonym with the vision of God, and that in this state the human never ceases to see the divine essence, this being the finality of his existence.

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<sup>289</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 8.

<sup>290</sup> Or, ‘the end of man is the *visio dei*’. J. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas...*, p. 272.

<sup>291</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 5.

<sup>292</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 6.

<sup>293</sup> *ST*, I, 12, 9.

<sup>294</sup> *ST*, I, 10, 2.

<sup>295</sup> *ST*, I, 10, 3.

## II. PALAMAS ON BEING

### II.1. Being, Essence and Energies

The main doctrinal point of St. Gregory Palamas' theology is the distinction between the divine essence and the uncreated energies in God's being. This central focus is evident throughout his entire writing. Except for a good part of his *Homilies*, the apology of the uncreated character of the energies is the very scope of his theological activity.

There are several differences concerning his approach to theology, when compared to St. Thomas Aquinas. First of all, St. Gregory's writings are excessively polemical. This leads to a certain difficulty in recognizing a unitary system of thought. Probably the only systematic approach is represented by the *One hundred and fifty Chapters*, but here also appear a lot of polemical references that direct the entire work toward the disputes he was actively part of. If St. Thomas (while being himself sporadically embroiled in controversies) is preoccupied with offering a complete exposition of the Christian doctrine, most evidently so in his *Summa*, St. Gregory, with but a few exceptions, is mainly taken with refuting the views of his adversaries and with defending what he considers to be the experience of the Christian theology as reflected in the hesychast spirituality.

Synthesising his thought on *being* may be difficult due to this lack of a systematic structure. Several elements can be collected though from the huge corpus of his defence of hesychasm. Still, references on the uncreated energies will appear almost inevitably in every chapter of his doctrine. I shall present, as in the case of St. Thomas Aquinas, the itinerary of *being* first in the case of God, followed by a brief exposition of the anthropological vision of St. Gregory, while the final issues will concern the main topics of St. Gregory's work, the doctrine of the uncreated energies and the process of deification.

Before exposing St. Gregory's theology on the mentioned levels of *being*, probably a preliminary discussion regarding his 'methodology' would be necessary, as this is one of the central aspects that differentiate the two authors I'm analysing. Unlike St.

Thomas, St. Gregory expresses a distant position toward the use of philosophy in theological issues. But, like St. Thomas, he uses several elements adopted and/or developed from the different philosophical systems of antiquity.

He first underlines the limits of natural knowledge when compared to the superior knowledge in the divine light. The distinction becomes fundamental in its implications on the meaning and means of salvation: ‘not every man who possesses the knowledge of created things, or who sees through the mediation of such knowledge has God dwelling in him; but he merely possesses knowledge of creatures, and from this by means of analogy he infers the existence of God. As to him who mysteriously possesses and sees this light, he knows and possesses God in himself, no longer by analogy, but by a true contemplation, transcendent to all creatures, for he is never separated from the eternal glory.’<sup>296</sup>

Still, through what we can describe as *natural theology* man can reach to the conclusion of God’s existence. And the use of philosophy is a positive one. The risks are that ‘to use’ can easily slide toward ‘to abuse’, and St. Gregory’s criticism of the use of philosophy is precisely directed toward those ‘who abuse philosophy and pervert it to an unnatural end.’<sup>297</sup>

In this context, he considers that ‘the intellect of pagan philosophers is likewise a divine gift insofar as it naturally possesses a wisdom endowed with reason.’<sup>298</sup> The problem is not this kind of knowledge per se, but the *end* to which it is used. From the perspective of its finality, St. Gregory describes the ‘Greek wisdom’ as truly ‘*demonic*, on the grounds that it arouses quarrels and contains almost every kind of false teaching, and is alienated from its proper end, that is, the knowledge of God; but at the same time recognise that it may have some participation in the good in a remote and inchoate manner. It should be remembered that no evil thing is evil insofar as it exists, but insofar as it is turned aside from the activity appropriate to it, and thus from the end assigned to this activity.’<sup>299</sup>

For St. Gregory, the most suitable image of philosophy is that of the *serpents*: ‘For just as there is much therapeutic value even in substances obtained from the flesh of serpents, and the doctors consider there is no better and more useful medicine than that

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<sup>296</sup> T, II, 3, 16.

<sup>297</sup> T, I, 1, 19.

<sup>298</sup> T, I, 1, 19.

<sup>299</sup> T, I, 1, 19.

derived from this source, so there is something of benefit to be had even from the profane philosophers’, although ‘you would see that all or most of the harmful heresies derive their origin from this source’.<sup>300</sup> In conclusion, in the case of secular wisdom, ‘you must first kill the serpent, in other words overcome the pride that arises from this philosophy. How difficult that is!’<sup>301</sup>

To remain in the order of nature and not to gain access in the sphere of God can lead to a profound failure in being. The one who falls prey to it remains in the order of nature and therefore, the knowledge that comes from ‘profane education’, even if well used, ‘is a gift of nature, and not of grace.’<sup>302</sup> Its use must end in front of the higher knowledge that is the ‘gift of God’. What is ‘beyond all intellect’ cannot be called intelligible, and in this situation, ‘the natural knowledge might better be called ignorance than knowledge. It cannot be a part or aspect of knowledge, just as the Superessential is not an aspect of the essential.’<sup>303</sup> The philosophical description of being must be placed in its historical context: ‘profane philosophy existed as an aid to this natural wisdom before the advent of Him who came to recall the soul to its ancient beauty.’<sup>304</sup> From the event of Incarnation on, knowledge reaches its true dimension and for the one who is witnessing Christ words cannot express the richness of the mystery: ‘struck with admiration, deepens its understanding, persists in the glorification of the Creator, and through this sense of wonder is led forward to what is greater... and using prayer as a key, it penetrates thereby into the mysteries which *eye has not seen, ear has not heard and which have not entered into the heart of man*’.<sup>305</sup>

It is not for philosophy to intermedate the access to *being*, as ‘it is not the study of profane sciences which brings salvation, which purifies the cognitive faculty of the soul, and conforms it to the divine Archetype’<sup>306</sup>. This can be used as an instrument in natural knowledge. In this point, St. Gregory’s understanding of ‘natural theology’ will be totally different from its meaning in the West. In its classical sense, natural theology can’t be properly called ‘theology’, as far as St. Gregory is concerned. The knowledge thus acquired does not direct toward an ‘encounter’ with *being*, but it has the potential

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<sup>300</sup> T, I, 1, 20.

<sup>301</sup> T, I, 1, 21.

<sup>302</sup> T, I, 1, 22.

<sup>303</sup> T, II, 3, 33.

<sup>304</sup> T, I, 1, 22.

<sup>305</sup> T, I, 1, 20.

<sup>306</sup> T, I, 1, 22.



to do so. The finality of knowledge will imply a transcending action impossible through natural powers alone, and not only at the level of the intellect.

But, after all, the use of philosophy is not a negative mark that endangers a theological vision. It is rather its excessive use that is a matter of concern. Therefore theology must be anchored in the experience of the Saints, or in the living experience of the Church. Moreover, the Church must be permanently concerned with keeping alive the images of the saints, lest the existential evidence of the *superessential* God should risk to be diminished to the level of theology constructed exclusively on a theoretical level.

The *Superessence* can be better envisioned by the experiences of the saints than by the philosophical systems. In Palamas' view, the concept of *being* represents a pure difficulty for Barlaam, whose primary question is 'how can it be that a Reality that transcends the senses and mind, which is Being *par excellence*, eternal, immaterial, unchangeable – what you call *en hypostatic* – is not the Superessential essence of God, since it bears the characteristics of the Master, and transcends every visible and invisible creature? Why do you say the essence of God transcends this light?'<sup>307</sup> The main accusation brought to St. Gregory Palamas' thought will remain that of *ditheism*. This reproach will be repeated, after Barlaam, by both Akindynos and Nicephorus Gregoras. On the contrary, for St. Gregory, to deny the distinction leads to the limits of atheism. Exclusively in terms of superessence, God Himself would not be called God.

From his perspective, 'since the deifying gift of the Spirit is an energy of God, and since the divine names derive from the energies (for the Superessential is nameless), God could not be called *God*, if deification consists only in virtue and wisdom! But He is called *God* on the basis of His deifying energy, while wisdom and virtue only manifest this energy. He could no longer be called *More-than-God* by reason of His transcendence in respect of this divinity; it would have to suffice to call Him *more-than-wise*, *more-than-good*, and so forth. So the grace and energy of deification are different from virtue and wisdom.'<sup>308</sup>

The 'superessential' would have no existential relevance unless it became participated into. In Palamas' view, to theoretically reduce God to the primary *cause* and *being* risks to create an abstract understanding of God, emptying the world of his real presence.

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<sup>307</sup> T, III, 1, 24.

<sup>308</sup> T, III, 1, 31.

In general terms, the distinctiveness of the *energy* must not simply follow upon the simplicity of the essence, but if the essence is one, the energies should be multiple. And this apparently contradictory status of the divine essence has the finality of attesting God's presence into the created in the most intimate and various ways. And so, 'that essence is one, even though the rays are many, and are sent out in a manner appropriate to those participating in them, being multiplied according to the varying capacity of those receiving them.' Furthermore, 'the essence is superessential, and I believe no one would deny that these rays are its energies or energy, and that one may participate in them, even though the essence remains beyond participation.'<sup>309</sup>

St. Gregory seems to attempt to surpass a 'system' using the very instruments of that system. Inside the system he departs from, this distinction would contradict the divine simplicity. But it wouldn't contradict the 'experience' of God and the possibilities of 'revelation' – which is more important and constitutes the content of theology. At this point, Palamas understands the process of revelation as rather an 'ontological' dialogue than a corpus of information needed for a proper knowledge of the divine. In this process, 'the energy is what reveals, whereas the substance is that which is thereby revealed with respect to the fact of existence.'<sup>310</sup> The goal of revelation is not knowledge as such, but the *deification* of the entire human being. In this situation, without the reality of the uncreated energies, the possibilities of revelation would be diminished both at the level of the divine and at the level of the human being. And the content of revelation would be reduced to an appendix of the natural theology. For St. Gregory, the content of revelation concerning God is not that God is the supreme being as an absolutely essence, but that he is the tri-hypostatical being who communicates his energies to the created being, with whom he entered in a dialog of union.

But beyond the risk of transforming the reality of God into a pure abstract concept, to state that God has no natural and essential energies, in St. Gregory's view 'amounts to openly denying the existence of God – for the saints clearly state, in conformity with St. Maximus, that no nature can exist or be known, unless it possesses an essential energy. Alternatively, it follows that there are divine energies, but that these, although natural and essential, are yet created; and in consequence, the essence of God which possesses them is itself created.'<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> T, III, 2, 13.

<sup>310</sup> C, 141.

<sup>311</sup> T, III, 3, 6.

These risks will be given a lot of importance, and some theologians saw in the critique of the uncreated energies a kind of prologue for the death of God. Emphasising a total distinction between the Created and the uncreated must be followed by a second distinction that can allow for God and men to actually meet. Transcendence and participation must be both affirmed:

‘Every nature is utterly remote and absolutely estranged from the divine nature. For if God is nature, other things are not nature, but if each of the other things is nature, he is not nature: just as he is not a being, if others are beings; and if he is a being, the others are not beings. If you accept this as true also for wisdom and goodness and generally all the things around God or said about God, then your theology will be correct and in accord with the saints. But God is the nature of all beings and is referred to as such, since all participate in him and receive their constitution by this participation, not by participation in his nature, far from it, but by participation in his energy. Thus is he the very being of beings and the form in the forms as the primal form and wisdom of the wise and generally all things of all things. He is not nature because he is beyond all nature, and he is not being because he is beyond all beings, and he is not nor does he possess form because he is beyond form.’<sup>312</sup>

The energies allow for the presence of God in His creation. Otherwise, neither the divine being nor the created being can be conceived of and linked. ‘God is within the universe and the universe is within God, the one sustaining, the other being sustained by him. Therefore, all things participate in the sustaining energy but not in the substance of God. Thus, the theologians maintain that these constitute an energy of God, namely, his omnipresence.’<sup>313</sup>

For St. Gregory, as far as created beings are concerned, the ten categories of Aristotle remain functional in describing their finite reality. On the other hand, in God as transcendent substance nothing can be observed except for *relation* and *creation*. *Relation* reveals his internal essence to be tri-hypostatical, while *creation* manifests his relation outwards; finite realities are thus brought into being by his act and/or energies. God’s essence remains ‘simple’ in reference to both internal and external relations, and creation doesn’t change anything in God. He remains totally transcendent to this. But also, he remains for the world not only a distant ‘first cause’. His revelation as Trinity implies his presence in the world through the ‘energies’. And so, as St. Gregory notes,

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<sup>312</sup> C, 78.

<sup>313</sup> C, 104.

God is not simply the Creator, but ‘he is also our Father because he grants us rebirth by grace. He is Father, too, in relation to the Son who has no temporal origin whatever, and Son in relation to the Father, and the Spirit as one sent forth from the Father, coeternal with the Father and the Son, belonging to one and the same substance. Those who assert that God is substance alone with nothing observed in him are representing God as having neither creation and operation nor relation’. This leads to a radical conclusion, yet a vital warning: ‘...one who is not trihypostatic nor master of the universe is not even God’<sup>314</sup>. Therefore, in Palamas’ view, the final development of the visions of Barlaam and Akindynos marks nothing less than atheism.

In front of this risk St. Gregory feels the need to underline that a theology thus conceived loses its very object, and between this view and effective atheism there is but a small step. God as a distant substance is no longer God. ‘If the substance does not possess an energy distinct from itself, it will be completely without actual subsistence and will be only a concept in the mind. For what we call the universal *man* does not think, does not hold opinions, does not see, does not smell, does not speak, does not hear, does not walk, does not breathe, does not eat-and, to put it simply, does not have an energy which is distinct from the substance and shows that he has individual subsistence. And so the universal *man* is entirely lacking actual subsistence’<sup>315</sup>

The access to *being* takes place not at a metaphysical level, but at a personal level of experience. *Being* will imply a mystery of the personal encounter.

But this access can be described in a certain context, indicated by revelation and – as St. Gregory permanently recalls – confirmed by the ‘Fathers’ in their theological descriptions:

- In its fallen reality, the human being is unable to rise alone, without God’s help.
- Only Christ, as divine Logos who assumed the human nature and entered in a real dialogue with the created human beings can re-open in the human nature the possibilities of receptivity towards God’s life.
- The ‘encounter’ presupposes ontological transformation, and the ‘vision’ is simultaneous with a participation as union.

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<sup>314</sup> C, 134.

<sup>315</sup> C, 136.

## **II.2. The Divine Being**

### ***II.2.1. Essence***

In the systematic approach to Orthodox doctrine that he employs in his *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, St. Gregory orders his discourse in similar way to St. Thomas, starting with what can be called ‘natural theology’ and heading on to the image of the divine as unity of being.

In fact, St. Gregory writes less about the essence, and only addresses the question in relation with the divine energies. In the ‘absence’ of its energies there is nothing that can be said about the divine essence itself. Therefore, almost every theological discourse is related directly or indirectly to the issue of the energies – which also makes it difficult to depict his element in itself.

Although the divine being is understood to be absolutely distinct from the created one, St. Gregory underlines both this absolute distance and the almost complete closeness between the two, to the limit that he ends up discussing the paradoxical status of creation ‘becoming uncreated’.

The apophaticism of essence is complete and radical: never, and under no circumstance, can the created being reach the state of seeing, knowing, or being united with the divine essence. Practically, we cannot even talk about an apophaticism of the essence – rather about expressing the absolute distance of God considered in his essence.

And the formulas to describe this radical apophaticism are more categorical and restrictive than those used by St. Thomas. While something can be said about God, nothing can be said about his essence – neither now, and nor in the future life. Every discourse concerning the divine essence is useless and thus, the problem of the essence is not even a problem.

The discourse on the divine unapproachable essence is mainly structured in relation to the issues of apophatic knowledge, the process of deification, and the general topic of the participation of the created to the uncreated. The Trinitarian dogma remains a matter of experience and not of speculation. And regarding this approach, the underlining of the distinction between the essence and the energies expresses the paradoxical idea that

in order to be perfectly known, the divine being must remain totally unknown. Only this alternation permits the access of the created into the mystery of the uncreated.

Concerning the created, it can generically be observed that ‘God alone is true being, eternal being and immutable being, that he neither received being out of non-being nor returns to non-being, and that he is trihypostatic and omnipotent’<sup>316</sup>. Against the visions that considered that matter pre-existed of itself, St. Gregory underlines that creation is synonymous with coming into being out of nothing: everything is created, and nothing pre-exists. God is therefore the Creator in a complete sense. He is the cause of all being. But his creative action has its roots in the internal life of God seen as Trinity of Persons. ‘Therefore, our very life, from which we receive life as cause of living beings, is none other than the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for it is by cause that our trihypostatic God is said to be our life.’<sup>317</sup>

Compared with the created world, it can be said that the divine essence is unoriginated. And, again, a distinction must be drawn. If God’s essence is the only unoriginated essence, this does not also mean that essence is the only unoriginated reality in God. Although simple, this essence must be internally distinct by its powers that inhere in it. Otherwise, if not unoriginated, this would be created, as the uncreated essence must be only one. But the energies are not essences, therefore their unoriginated presence in the divine essence does not affect the divine simplicity. As St. Gregory puts it: ‘there is only one unoriginate essence, the essence of God; none of the powers that inhere in it is an essence, so that all necessarily and always are *in* the divine essence. To use an obscure image, they exist in the divine essence as do the powers of the senses in what is called the common spiritual sense of the soul. Here is the manifest, sure and recognised teaching of the Church! For just as there is only one single essence without beginning, the essence of God, and the essences other than it are seen to be of a created nature, and come to be through this sole unoriginate essence, the unique maker of essences – in the same way, there is only one single providential power without beginning, namely that of God whereas all other powers apart from it are of a created nature; and it is the same with all the other natural powers of God. It is thus not true that the essence of God is the only unoriginate reality, and that all realities other than it are of a created nature.’<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> C, 21.

<sup>317</sup> C, 114.

<sup>318</sup> T, III, 2, 5.

The energies are distinct from the world: while these are without beginning and unoriginated, the world has a beginning and will have an end. The ontological definition of the world is *to be created* and the participation in God's energies doesn't contradict this permanent status. There can be no mixture at the level of essences between the created and the uncreated. The encounter and the union takes place at the level of the energies. Everything in God is uncreated, and not only the essence. St. Gregory adds that 'not only the divine powers (which the Fathers often call *natural energies*), but also some works of God are without beginning, as the Fathers also rightly affirm. For was it not needful for the work of providence to exist before Creation, so as to cause each of the created things to come to be in time, out of nonbeing? Was it not necessary for a divine knowledge to know before choosing, even outside time?'<sup>319</sup>

Everything else is thus created, and can only participate in being. But in order for this participation to be real, the one being participated to must be uncreated. Without contradicting his simplicity, the 'works of God' must be 'manifestly unoriginate and pretemporal' in order for the providence to be considered unoriginated and not determined by a temporal or pretemporal circumstance. There is, therefore 'a single unoriginate providence, that of God, and it is a work of God. Providences other than it are of a created nature'.<sup>320</sup>

Acting does not imply multiplicity and change in the case of God as the first being. Without identifying the internal properties and relations within God with his external actions, St. Gregory can presuppose that the creative act of the Trinity can only be explained through the notion of energies as distinct from those of essence and hypostases<sup>321</sup>. Keeping both the simplicity of being and the Trinitarian mark of the creation becomes possible through these energies. The simplicity and the unchangeable character of God's being will remain thus intact. And so, 'God acts without being acted upon and without undergoing change. Therefore, he will not be composite on account of

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<sup>319</sup> T, III, 2, 6.

<sup>320</sup> T, III, 2, 6.

<sup>321</sup> The main relation of these three terms (essence, hypostases, energies) can be shortly expressed through the formula, most frequently found in the orthodox dogmatic syntheses, that the uncreated energies are different from the divine essence, emerging from the being of the three hypostases, but remaining inseparable from the essence or from these hypostases, common to the three hypostases but economically associated, in the sanctifying process within the Church, to the third person. The relation between the divine being and the created being can be neither essential, nor hypostatical, but through the energies. For example, see Dumitru Stăniloae's analysis in *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, 2nd vol., București: IBMBOR, 1997, p. 199-217.

the energy. God is also described in terms of relation and is related to creation as its principle and master, but he is not numbered among creatures on this account.’<sup>322</sup>

But St. Gregory does not attempt to explain exhaustively the way in which the energies remain distinct from the essence without composing it and without becoming a created reality in the context of them being ‘addressed’ to the world. This is not a suitable task, as long as language cannot but fail in describing these realities, and as long as the mystery of *being* is a ‘salvational’ one and not a simple curiosity of knowledge. The only language that allows for an approach to God’s being is the language of the energies. And the central argument of St. Gregory’s theology is that there cannot be an essence without energies, and that ‘the natural energy is the power which manifests every essence, and only nonbeing is deprived of this power; for the being which participates in an essence will also surely participate in the power which naturally manifests that essence.’<sup>323</sup>

This way, God, although unapproachable in his essence, becomes accessible and revealed. We can therefore name God only through what ‘surrounds’ him. No name can be ascribed to his essence. The divine attributes are thus entirely pointing not to the divine essence, but to the divine energies. This doesn’t deny, however, the functions of the cataphatic theology, because, while stating that the divine essence is totally unknown and unapproachable, St. Gregory still holds that God is entirely present in each of the divine energies. For this reason, ‘we name Him from each of them, although it is clear that He transcends all of them. For, given the multitude of divine energies, how could God subsist entirely in each without any division at all; and how could each provide Him with a name and manifest Him entirely, thanks to indivisible and supernatural simplicity, if He did not transcend all these energies?’<sup>324</sup>

Most importantly, these energies can be participated to, without conducting to a unity of essence, and through this notion St. Gregory builds the conceptual frame in which he can express the simultaneous distinctiveness and total union between God and humanity. In this direction, of the participation into the divine on account of the energies, he often quotes from St. Maximus. According to both, God transcends his own revelation. Although they do not write about a created gift, but of a real participation, ‘*God infinitely transcends these participable virtues an infinite number of times*. In

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<sup>322</sup> C, 145.

<sup>323</sup> T, III, 2, 7.

<sup>324</sup> T, III, 2, 7.



other words, He infinitely transcends that goodness, holiness and virtue which are unoriginate, that is, uncreated.<sup>325</sup>

Although the attributes apparently indicate the divine essence, none of them, and not even their amount, tells us what the divine essence is. Although these are applied as attributes, they are making reference to God not on the essential level. They don't indicate the essence, but they do indicate God, nevertheless. As St. Gregory puts it, 'none of these things is the essence of God – neither the uncreated goodness, nor the unoriginate eternal life; all these exist not in Him, but around Him.'<sup>326</sup>

The attributes are indicating God at the level of the uncreated energies in which God is 'entirely present'. 'Essence and energy are thus not totally identical in God, even though He is entirely manifest in every energy, His essence being indivisible.'<sup>327</sup> In fact, there is not a single name that can be applied to the divine essence, and 'even this name *essence* designates one of the powers in God. Denys the Areopagite says, *If we call the superessential Mystery 'God' or 'Life' or 'Essence' or 'Light' or 'Word', we are referring to nothing other than the deifying powers which proceed from God and come down to us, creating substance, giving life, and granting wisdom.*<sup>328</sup>

The negative forms that are being used are exceeding every created sense, both positive and negative. God's transcendence involves that his essence is totally different from what we can conceive as essence. Any discourse and knowledge stops here, and not even in the case of angels a vision of the divine essence can be possible. In its finality, as united with God, the created can't reach what is somehow pure transcendence.

In expressing this total impossibility in seeing the divine essence, St. Gregory often uses the texts of St. Denys the Areopagite, 'the most prominent of theologians next to the divine apostles'<sup>329</sup>, as he calls him. In this case, of an ultimate apophaticism, God's essence is positioned even beyond transcendence. 'When Denys said that *God possesses the superessential in a superessential manner*, what else does he affirm except precisely this? Since that which is non being by virtue of transcendence *is* superessential, God is even beyond that, for He possesses the superessential superessentially.'<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> T, III, 2, 7.

<sup>326</sup> T, III, 2, 9.

<sup>327</sup> T, III, 2, 9.

<sup>328</sup> T, III, 2, 11.

<sup>329</sup> C, 85.

<sup>330</sup> T, III, 3, 14.

God's being is beyond being, while he 'contains' all being, and his essence is beyond essence. In one sense, the insistence on this statement indicates a total impossibility in knowledge. On the other hand, it allows for the existential evidence of God in his revelational manifestation. The 'living God' discovers Himself not as 'essence', but as 'the One who is', and he transcends his own transcendence toward a personal dialogue with the created. Confronted with an 'essentialist' vision, St. Gregory observes that 'Perhaps he will say that it is *through the essence* that God is said to possess all these powers in Himself in a unique and unifying manner. But, in the first place, it would be necessary to call this reality *God*, for such is the term for it which we have received from the Church. When God was conversing with Moses, He did not say, *I am the essence*, but *I am the One Who is*. Thus it is not the One Who is who derives from the essence, but essence which derives from Him, for it is He who contains all being in Himself'.<sup>331</sup>

Thus, the content of God's manifestation and revelation is not the divine essence. In this context, St. Gregory does never discuss about the divine essence taken in itself, but only in the frame of the distinction between this and the energies. The concept of 'divine essence' doesn't have a positive functionality in the theological discourse. We simply cannot discuss about an abstract divine essence, without its revelation as Trinity through the energies.

In this situation, almost every time he speaks of God, St. Gregory in fact refers to the Holy Trinity. If the apophatic theology arrives to the limit when even the words *God* and *Divinity* cannot be used except when ascribed to the energies, nevertheless, the Hypostases remain an undeniable essential aspect of the 'living God', as an essential mode of God's being. If everything else is subject to negation, the character of Trinity holds to its revelational evidence, as something already revealed while inaccessible to the capacities of the human reason.

### ***II.2.2. Hypostasis***

According to St. Gregory's description, the name God is not applied to the divine essence, but to the Holy Trinity. In his essence God remains totally hidden, and the only possibility of revelation is through his energies. The maximum point of revelation

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<sup>331</sup> T, III, 2, 12.

is the evidence of God as Trinity of Persons, and this is accomplished in Christ. The image of the Trinity becomes in fact the only image of God's *being*. At the same time, this is the climax not only of revelation, but, from the perspective of the possibilities of the created, also the climax of apophatical expressions. The reality of the Trinity is a pure revelational truth, which by no means can be understood rationally. Yet, it remains a truth to be experienced – both through union with Christ and in by achieving the Holy Spirit's energies<sup>332</sup>.

The revelation of the Trinity was necessary for salvation not only in order to explain the free act of creation and later on, as an auxiliary for the doctrine of justification; more than this clarifying functionality, it is a vital truth for the entire process of salvation. The Trinity not only offers an image of God's *being*, but also involves an archetypal image of being for the created existence, which is possible to attain through the divine energies<sup>333</sup>.

Concerning the emphasis on the personal character of God, it can be said that, in a larger frame, only a person can reveal, and only a perfect communion of persons can achieve the plenitude of being and revelation. The Trinity reveals itself gradually, to the point of hypostatical union with the human – the maximum state of union possible<sup>334</sup>.

The communicational model of the tri-hypostatical unity, together with the real condition of the hypostatical union in Christ, are transferring at the level of the human existence the possibilities of a maximum personal communion, and thus a plenitude of being. In this order, it is the Holy Spirit who actively extends through the energies the richness of the divine life<sup>335</sup>, accomplishing for the saints the state of permanent witnesses of Christ.<sup>336</sup>

This access to the perfect communion will be a matter of experience through purification, illumination and union. But until this final state, the image of the Trinity is revelatory in what concerns the content of *being*. In fact, it is the only image of *being*, and the only reality that makes *being* possible for the created. In St. Gregory's

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<sup>332</sup> The orthodox dogmatic syntheses incorporate indistinctiveness between 'Spirit's energies' and 'the energies of the Trinity'. Though, following the above mentioned formula (see note 321) in the economic order, the energies common to the three hypostases are associated in the process of sanctification / deification, primarily with the third hypostasis.

<sup>333</sup> C, 40.

<sup>334</sup> C, 75.

<sup>335</sup> C, 75.

<sup>336</sup> C, 146.

description, the supreme being can only be identified with the image of the Trinity. ‘For goodness is not something threefold nor a triad of goodnesses; rather, the supreme goodness is a holy, august and venerable Trinity flowing forth from itself into itself without change and abiding with itself before the ages in divinely fitting manner, being both unbounded and bounded by itself alone, while setting bounds for all things, transcending all things and allowing no beings independent of itself.’<sup>337</sup>

Still, the internal life of the Trinity hardly finds any analogy into the created. The Trinitarian structure imprints a reflection in the creation, and a special image on the level of the personal human being. The mode in which the trinity and the unity coincide in God can only be approximated analogically. Surprisingly, the image offered by St. Gregory seems to lead us rather to Augustine than to the Greek Fathers – although this image is close to that used by the Alexandrian tradition, as well<sup>338</sup>:

‘Since the transcendentally and absolutely perfect goodness is mind, what else but a word could ever proceed from it as from a source? ... It is in the sense of the word naturally stored up within our mind, whereby we have come into being from the one who created us according to his own image, namely, that knowledge which is always coexistent with the mind. The knowledge also present there in a special way in the supreme mind of the absolutely and transcendentally perfect goodness, in which there is nothing imperfect except that this knowledge is derived from it, is indistinguishably all things that goodness is. Therefore, the supreme Word is also the Son and is so named by us, in order that we may recognize him as being perfect in a perfect and proper hypostasis, since he is derived from the Father and is in no way inferior to the Father’s substance but is indistinguishably identical with him, though not in hypostasis, which indicates that the Word is derived from him by generation in a divinely fitting manner.’<sup>339</sup>

The Son’s ‘generation’ from the Father is reflected in the analogy with the Word proceeded from the Mind. But this applies only for the understanding of ‘word’ as knowledge latently present in the mind, or coexisting with the mind. Therefore, the Son cannot be inferior to the Father, nor post-descendent in any way to the First Person, although he is ‘derived’ from the Father. The analogy with the elements of mind and word doesn’t seem to indicate an image similar with that of the mental acts used by

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<sup>337</sup> C, 37.

<sup>338</sup> Sinkewicz, ‘Introduction’ to C.

<sup>339</sup> C, 35.

Augustine (though not implying a subordinatianist outlook), and in a later version by St. Thomas.

St. Gregory extends the aforementioned analogy to also describe Holy Spirit's procession from the Father. 'Since the goodness which proceeds by generation from intellectual goodness as from a source is the Word, and since no intelligent person could conceive of a word without spirit, for this reason the Word, God from God, possesses also the Holy Spirit proceeding together with him from the Father. ... That Spirit of the supreme Word is like an ineffable love of the Begetter towards the ineffably begotten Word himself. The beloved Word and Son of the Father also experiences this love towards the Begetter, but he does so inasmuch as he possesses this love as proceeding from the Father together with him and as resting connaturally in him.'<sup>340</sup>

Thus, the Spirit proceeds in a different mode from the Father. He is not, like the Son, begotten, but he proceeds from the Father, although he belongs also to the Son, as the relation of love between the Father and the Son. In the context of the divine relations, the Spirit has his origin only in the Father, but in what concerns the actions toward the created, he is sent into the world from both the Father and the Son<sup>341</sup>.

But, in the frame of *history*, it is through Christ that both the maximum revelation of God and salvation itself became possible. And so, the salvation accomplished by Christ consists not only in the justification necessary after Adam's fall and the subsequent corruption of the human nature, but also coincides with the revelation of the Trinity – that is, the true mode of God's being. Thus, the revelation of the Trinity in Christ is, in its existential relevance and finality for the created being, an act of salvation.

For patristic authors like the Cappadocians, a classical case regarding the vision of God was Moses on Mount Sinai insisting to see God's 'face'. God's refusal at this point is categorical and this indicates the 'darkness' of God's being, whose 'face' is impossible to see or to define. Still, when transposed on Mount Thabor, in the context of Transfiguration, Moses finally sees the 'face' of God, in the divine light of the Incarnate Son of God. Therefore, God cannot be known or encountered as *essence*, but as Person, or trinity of Persons, in the light of Christ. This episode of the Transfiguration becomes the central scriptural motive in St. Gregory's apology of the uncreated character of the energies. These are not independent realities, but unseparable from the act of revelation of the Second Person, Incarnated, who brings human nature in the state of being adapted

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<sup>340</sup> C, 36.

<sup>341</sup> C, 36.

to God's life. And the revelation of Christ is not a 'simulacrum of divinity'. In underlining this aspect, St. Gregory turns again against those opponents that considered the energies as created: 'If then the unapproachable is true and this light was unapproachable, the light was not a simulacrum of divinity, but truly the light of the true divinity, not only the divinity of the Son, but that of the Father and the Spirit too. This is why we sing together to the Lord when we celebrate the annual Feast of the Transfiguration: *In Your light which appeared today on Thabor, we have seen the Father as light and also the Spirit as light, for You have unveiled an indistinct ray of Your divinity.* ...So, when all the saints agree in calling this light true divinity, how do you dare to consider it alien to the divinity, calling it *a created reality, and a symbol of divinity, and claiming that it is inferior to our intellection?*'<sup>342</sup>

The tri-hypostatical being of God is revealed in Christ, but becomes accessible to the created being through the Holy Spirit, or through the energies of the Spirit. The third Person holds the role of *deifying* the human. The energies, or the divine grace, are inseparable from him. From the point of view of his 'exterior' action, the main acts of the Spirit are to link human nature with Christ's own human nature and to offer to the created person access to the perfect communion of Persons. Therefore, in the personal process of salvation, the one who reaches the level of union is 'participating in the inseparable life of the Spirit, such as Paul himself lived, *the divine and eternal life of Him Who indwelt him*, as St. Maximus puts it. Such a life always exists, subsisting in the very nature of the Spirit, Who by nature deifies from all eternity. It is properly called *Spirit and divinity* by the saints, in-so-much as the deifying gift is never separate from the Spirit Who gives it.'<sup>343</sup>

There is a deep correspondence between grace, or the deifying energies, and the Spirit. Sometimes these seem to be identical, and this would subsequently mean that the Spirit actually substitutes his own energy. In this context St. Gregory explains that the energies are neither hypostases, nor anhypostatic, but *enhypostatic*: 'It is *enhypostatic*, not because it possesses a hypostasis of its own, but because the Spirit *sends it out into the hypostasis of another* in which it is indeed contemplated. It is then properly called *enhypostatic*, in that it is not contemplated by itself, nor in essence, but in hypostasis. ... But the Holy Spirit transcends the deifying life which is in Him and proceeds from Him, for it is its own natural energy, which is akin to Him, even if not exactly so. ...The

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<sup>342</sup> T, III, 1, 12.

<sup>343</sup> T, III, 1, 9.

Spirit does not only transcend it as Cause, but also in the measure to which what is received is only a part of what is given, for he who receives the divine energy cannot contain it entirely. Thus there are diverse ways in which God transcends such a light, such an uncreated illumination and such a life which is similar to them.<sup>344</sup>

The Holy Spirit has, in this way, a prominent role in the life of the Church and in the experience of the Saints who become ‘instruments of the Holy Spirit’. Ultimately, the Spirit is the one who both reveals the Trinity on the interior level of the human being, and also accomplishes the union between them. He remains, though, totally distinct from the energy that proceeds from him. ‘Thus when we consider the proper dignity of the Spirit, we see it to be equal to that of the Father and the Son; but when we think of the grace that works in those who partake of the Spirit, we say that the Spirit is in us’<sup>345</sup>

The uncreated energies are thus inseparable of the divine persons. In fact, these are opening the possibilities of dialogue and communion between the uncreated and the created persons. The energies are inseparable from the Holy Spirit, and, in this situation, the experience of a saint will be for St. Gregory, as also for St. Seraphim of Sarov later on, a continuous attempt to acquire the Holy Spirit, and thus, to enter the Holy Trinity’s communion of love and plenitude of being.

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<sup>344</sup> *T*, III, 1, 9.

<sup>345</sup> *T*, III, 1, 33.

## II.3. The Created Being

### *II.3.1. Creation and the Image of God*

The act of creation is described by St. Gregory by the same characteristics pointed out by St. Thomas. This is not just an action of ordering a pre-existent matter, although it consists of creating an order, as indicated by the word *cosmos*. God ‘established these things and their proportion to one another in due order so that the all may truly be called Cosmos’.<sup>346</sup>

Again, the image of the first cause is used to describe the creation and the possibilities of its existence. Thus, from the perspective of the beginning of the world, God is seen as the ‘underived, self-existent primordial cause’. And, just like for St. Thomas, the Creator not only causes the world to exist in the moment of its beginning, but also continuously sustains the created being by providence. In the limits of the ‘natural theology’, the conclusion is that ‘since the nature of this world is such that it always requires a new cause in each instance and since without this cause it cannot exist at all, we have in these facts proof for an underived, self-existent primordial cause.’<sup>347</sup>

The conclusion that the created has its cause in God’s action, and that the world has a beginning, is inseparable from the consequence regarding the ‘end’ of the created being. If the world has a beginning, it cannot be endless. Still, although being created implies that the world will also have an end, this end will not presuppose a return into non-being. In St. Gregory’s words, the Christian cosmological view states ‘not only that the world has had a beginning but also that it will have an end ... this world will not in its entirety return to utter non-being, but, like our bodies and in a manner that might be considered analogous, the world at the moment of its dissolution and transformation will be changed into something more divine by the power of the Spirit.’<sup>348</sup> What is created, although it receives being from God, possesses this being in a limited manner

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<sup>346</sup> C, 23.

<sup>347</sup> C, 1.

<sup>348</sup> C, 2.



and is totally distinct from God; its only destined end consists in a simultaneity of its dissolution and transfiguration.

But God's creative action concerning the world is never treated separately from the act of the special creation of man. The entire world is created for the human being, and cannot be understood in the absence of the human existence. The special place that the human being holds in the created universe is underlined through its quality of being created *upon the image* of God. The notion of 'image' is generously depicted by the patristic literature, each author trying to identify differently the content of this special characteristic, but all stating that this is the common definition of the created rational being which enables an openness to God not from the outside but from inside the human being. For St. Gregory, man is the only component of the complex created universe that possesses this special characteristic. And so, 'for of all earthly and heavenly things man alone was created in the image of his Maker, so that he might look to him and love him, and that he might be an initiate and worshipper of God alone and might preserve his proper beauty by faith in him and inclination and disposition towards him, and that he might know that all other things which this heaven and earth bear are inferior to himself and completely devoid of intelligence.'<sup>349</sup>

In the context in which the *image* is the core element of the human being, the most relevant detail in this anthropological structure is to identify what exactly this *image* consists of.

The mind holds a special place in the constitution of the human being, and it could be seen as a privileged place for the *image* of God. Just as, previously, it was used as an analogical image of the Trinitarian relations, the mind also possesses 'the image of this highest love in the relation of the mind to the knowledge which exists perpetually from it and in it, in that this love is from it and in it and proceeds from it together with the innermost word.'<sup>350</sup> Although St. Gregory locates the image in this special, central element of the human being, still, he insists that it is not only a part of the human that is created upon the image, but the entire human nature or the human as a whole. Moreover, this does not refer exclusively to the soul alone, but also to the body. 'The soul therefore as it sustains the body together with which it was created is everywhere in

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<sup>349</sup> C, 26.

<sup>350</sup> C, 37.

the body, not as in a place, nor as if it were encompassed, but as sustaining, encompassing and giving life to it because it possesses this too in the image of God.<sup>351</sup>

This emphasis goes far beyond considering human nature as a whole; in St. Gregory's vision, the body not only participates in the quality of *image* but, due to this material part, humanity is more upon the image of God than the angels.

In previous patristic writings, the *image* was described particularly in relation with the soul, or with one of the soul's qualities; this is also true in the later case of St. Thomas. Comparatively, St. Gregory extends the *image* to the entire human being, including his corporeal part, in virtue of the inseparability of the soul and body in the act of being. In this view, the entire order of creation looks different: man is more upon the image of God than the angels, and this is due, surprisingly, to its composed nature.

But firstly, St. Gregory states that both angels and humans are created *upon the image* to the extent to which they are rational and intellectual natures and they possess life 'essentially', thus being 'incapable of destruction'. Unlike angels, human beings also possess life as an 'activity' in reference with the body. 'Every rational and intellectual nature, whether you should call it angelic or human, possesses life essentially, whereby it subsequently perdures as immortal in its existence and incapable of destruction. But our rational and intellectual nature possesses life not only essentially but also as an activity, for it gives life even to the body joined to it. And so, life might be predicated of the body as well. ...The intellectual nature of the angels, on the other hand, does not possess life as an activity of this sort, for it did not receive from God an earthly body joined to it, so as to receive in addition a life-giving power for this purpose.'<sup>352</sup>

From this perspective, as long as it is deeply conjunct with the body, the human being is not inferior, but superior to the angels who possess a 'simple' substance, non-composed with matter. In St. Gregory's words, 'the angelic nature does not possess this spirit as life-giving, for it has not received from God an earthly body joined with it in order that it might receive also a life-giving and conserving power for this purpose. But, on the other hand, the intellectual and rational nature of the soul, since it was created in conjunction with an earthly body, received this spirit from God as also life-giving, through which it conserves and gives life to the body joined to it.'<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> C, 61.

<sup>352</sup> C, 30.

<sup>353</sup> C, 38.

Through these qualities, because it simultaneously possesses mind, word and life-giving spirit, the rational nature of the soul can be considered to have been created *upon the image* in a higher degree than the angels. To this qualities that posit human nature on the highest level in the order of the created being, St. Gregory later adds, as a consequence of being in the corporeal world and in concordance with the biblical conclusion of the creation of man, the faculty of ‘dominion’ and ‘lordship over all the earth’<sup>354</sup> given by God. ‘The intellectual and rational nature of the soul, alone possessing mind and word and life-giving spirit, has alone been created more in the image of God than the incorporeal angels. It possesses this indefectibly even though it may not recognize its own dignity nor think or act in a manner worthy of the one who created him in his own image. Therefore, we did not destroy the image even though after our ancestor's transgression through a tree in paradise we underwent the death of the soul which is prior to bodily death, that is, separation of the soul from God, and we rejected the divine likeness.’<sup>355</sup>

Further still, man has remained more *upon the image* than the angels not only in his primordial state, but even after the fall. Separated from his source of life, he enters the state of corruption and decomposition, but he is not losing the *image*, although he ‘rejected the likeness’. Drawing a clear distinction between the concepts of *image* and *likeness*, St. Gregory concludes that ‘even though we possess the image of God to a greater degree than the angels, even till the present we are inferior by far with respect to God’s likeness and especially now in relation to the good angels.’<sup>356</sup>

The created intellectual natures, angels and humans, are thus created with a special role of dialogue with God. They keep not only a relation of causality with God, but also an ‘intellectual and rational’ relation of deepening their communion with God. The process of continuously going into a higher state of union is applicable to both man and angels. And to both, the scenario of refusing God, of choosing the opposite side of being remains an option: not to return into non-being, but to live contrary to their ontological definition. Even the angels are thus ‘susceptible of opposites, namely, good and evil. The evil angels confirm this in that they experienced a fall because of their pride. Thus, in a sense, even the angels are composite on the basis of their own substance and one of

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<sup>354</sup> C, 62.

<sup>355</sup> C, 39.

<sup>356</sup> C, 64.

the opposing qualities, I mean virtue and vice. And so, not even these are shown to possess goodness essentially.<sup>357</sup>

### ***II.3.2. The Fall***

The fall first occurred outside the historical conditions of the sensible world. But this event will not be described in the limits of an ‘origenist’ scenario of understanding the nature of the souls. Quite opposed to the temptation of ascribing the possibility of eternal life to the spiritual intellectual natures alone, St. Gregory insists that as long as the light of the eternal contemplation doesn’t consist in knowledge alone, but has a more profound content, the separation in the essential order of the creation cannot be done at the level of the categories of sensible and intelligible. In the moment of their turn from God, the fallen angels haven’t ceased to be, nor did they fall into matter. They are losing the ‘light’, but not their knowledge. The light made possible their natural way of being. But it was distinct and not part of their essence. And so, for St. Gregory, ‘this light and power of vision does not inhere by nature in the supracosmic angels. The race of demons, which has fallen away from them, has been deprived of the light and power of vision, but not of those faculties natural to it. This light and vision are thus not natural to the angels. The demonic race has certainly not been deprived of intellection, for the demons are intelligences and have not lost their being.’<sup>358</sup> Again, like in the image drawn by St. Thomas, the fall of these angels must have happen ‘shortly’ after their creation, with the distinction that it is not the *knowledge* that rends permanence to the union with God, but the reality of ‘light’: ‘This light, then, is not a knowledge, neither does one acquire it by any affirmation or negation. Each evil angel is an intelligence, but... which makes a bad use of knowledge. Indeed, it is impossible to make a bad use of *this* light, for it instantly quits anyone who leans towards evil, and leaves bereft of God any man who gives himself over to depravity.’<sup>359</sup>

But St. Gregory doesn’t manifest the same curiosity on the issues of angels and their hierarchy, as some of his contemporaries in Byzantium. The only explanations brought into the discussions are pointing, again, to his theological purpose, which was to make

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<sup>357</sup> C, 30.

<sup>358</sup> T, III, 2, 16.

<sup>359</sup> T, III, 2, 17.

evident the ‘functionality’ of light and of the divine energies. If angels were described as possessing the state of *likeness*, and, even so, not being in an passive and final state but continuously deepening their eternal contemplation, the reality of the fall is depicted as a lack of grace, not a total one but certainly indicating an un-natural existence. There is a certain similarity between the fallen angles and the fallen human being: ‘Stripped of the luminous and living raiment of the supernal radiance, they too – alas ! – became dead in spirit like Satan. Since Satan is not only a deathly spirit but also brings death upon those who draw near to him and since those who shared in his deathliness also possessed a body through which the fell counsel was realized, they communicate those deathly and fell spirits of deathliness to their own bodies. This is the case whenever the human body is dissolved, returning forthwith to the earth from which it was taken’<sup>360</sup>. And so, death is a consequence of sin in the sense that it is a logical and ontological consequence of being separated from the source of being and from the *image* upon which the created exists. Both in the case of angels and in the case of man, ‘God did not make death, neither for the soul nor for the body.’<sup>361</sup>

There is, though, a deep difference between the fallen angels and the fallen man. While the first are unable to turn back to God, and they have irreversibly deformed their *image*, the fallen man lost the *likeness*, but not the *image*. The *image* is kept, but in the absence of grace it cannot function normally or naturally. For St. Gregory, corruption consists in a deep tension in the human being between its status as *image* and its temporality toward death which marks its unnatural existence. And so, ‘we come into being in corruption and while coming to be we are passing away until we cease both passing away and coming to be. We are never truly the same even though to the inattentive we may seem to be. Just as with the flame of a thin reed held at the end – for that too changes from one moment to the next – the length of the reed is the measure of its existence, similarly with us too in our transience the span of life given to each man is the measure of his existence’<sup>362</sup>.

The state of mortality which affects the body is not a natural one, but a consequence of losing grace. It is not only the soul which is the beneficiary of light, but also the body. And if this is not evident in man’s primordial state, it definitively becomes evident in the fallen one.

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<sup>360</sup> C, 46.

<sup>361</sup> C, 51.

<sup>362</sup> C, 52.

In its constitution, human nature presents an unequal rapport between the soul and the body, in which the soul represents the superior part. ‘Our soul is a unique reality, yet possessing multiple powers. It uses as an instrument the body, which by nature co-exists with it. But as for that power of the soul we call mind’ (*nous*)<sup>363</sup>. In their reciprocal reference, it is the soul which possesses life ‘not only as an activity but also essentially, since it lives in its own right, for it is seen to possess a rational and intellectual life which is manifestly distinct from that of the body and its corporeal phenomena’, and for that reason ‘when the body passes away, the soul does not perish with it.’<sup>364</sup> But the body can affect the soul by its sensible desires and draw the entire reality of the human existence in an inferior state of a limited life. The disorder resulted after the sin requires a rehabilitation of the initial order, but also a rehabilitation of the body along with its senses. In its natural order, the body must become again obedient to the soul, while the soul must reattach itself to God, so that the life thus received can be also transmitted to the body. But in the state of ‘alienation’ and ‘estrangement’ from the life of God, the body decomposes in an inevitably state of mortality. ‘Thus, on the one hand, if the soul rejects attachment to inferior things and cleaves in love to one who is superior by submitting to him through the works and the ways of virtue, it receives from him illumination, adornment and betterment, and it obeys his counsels and exhortations from which it receives true and eternal life. Through this life it receives also immortality for the body joined to it, for at the proper time the body attains to the promised resurrection and participates in eternal glory. But, on the other hand, if it does not reject attachment and submission to inferior things whereby it inflicts shameful dishonour upon the image of God, it becomes alienated and estranged from the true and truly blessed life of God, since if it has first abandoned the one who is superior, it is justly abandoned by him.’<sup>365</sup>

### ***II.3.3. The Unity of the Human Being***

The profound union between the body and the soul becomes in St. Gregory’s vision the basis on which the validity of ascetic and mystical experiences is argued for. It is not only the soul that returns to God, but also the body. Or, rather, man as a whole, in his

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<sup>363</sup> T, I, 2, 3.

<sup>364</sup> C, 32.

<sup>365</sup> C, 39.

un-composed personal being, becomes subject to God's dialogue and partakes to the vision of the divine light.

This follows those scriptural references that point to the possibility of man becoming entirely *flesh*. In the opposite direction, 'in the case of those who have elevated their minds to God and exalted their souls with divine longing, their flesh also is being transformed and elevated, participating together with the soul in the divine communion, and becoming itself a dwelling and possession of God.'<sup>366</sup> The process of salvation consists then in a continuous transformation not only of the soul, but also of the body. In the restored order of the human being, 'the spiritual joy which comes from the mind into the body is in no way corrupted by the communion with the body, but transforms the body and makes it spiritual, because it then rejects all the evil appetites of the body; it no longer drags the soul downwards, but is elevated together with it. Thus it is that the whole man becomes spirit...'<sup>367</sup>

This anthropological view, combined with his emphasis on the reality of the Transfiguration, leads St. Gregory to the conclusion that the body too goes through a complex transformation in the process of deification. The central model remains that of Christ's, in which salvation consisted not only in a formal act of justification, but in a deep ontological vindication of the human nature, which was risen from the state of mortality and completely readapted to the conditions of the unaltered life. 'For just as the divinity of the Word of God incarnate is common to soul and body, since He has deified the flesh through the mediation of the soul to make it also accomplish the works of God; so similarly, in spiritual man, the grace of the Spirit, transmitted to the body through the soul, grants to the body also the experience of things divine, and allows it the same blessed experiences as the soul undergoes.'<sup>368</sup> The example of Christ is thus followed, and the ascetical-mystical experiences of the hesychasts are directed toward a state of deification that includes the transformation of the body, to the degree that it becomes possible to 'see' the divine light with the body. Although the ultimate transformation of the body will only take place at the general resurrection at the end of the history, still, present existence is marked by an eschatological tension that for the body becomes evident in the case of the saints: the light experienced through the body

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<sup>366</sup> T, I, 2, 9.

<sup>367</sup> T, II, 2, 9.

<sup>368</sup> T, II, 2, 12.

‘inspires its own sanctification and inalienable divinisation, as the miracle – working relics of the saints clearly demonstrate.’<sup>369</sup>

The participation of the body in the state of deification is fundamental for St. Gregory, and based rather on a consideration of the human being as a whole. In this vision, the body and the soul are conceived as a unity not of no-distinction, but of a reciprocal internal penetration that makes it difficult to understand either of them when taken separately from each other. Rather, the evident and central distinction in the *human* is not between soul and body, but between nature and person. This allows for the conclusion that man entirely participates in God by means of energies, and the entire human reality can become a medium for the divine light until the final, eschatological transfiguration of the entire created being.

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<sup>369</sup> *T*, II, 2, 12.



## II.4. The Uncreated Energies

The central focus of St. Gregory's theology will remain on the reality of the uncreated energies. Developing this doctrinal point will enable, in his vision, a proper understanding of the relations between the created and the uncreated. He considers this point of doctrine as vital for a correct understanding of the whole theological system, as long as it describes the ways of access to the divine being that are possible for the created being. The achievement will consist in the possibility of envisioning the participation of the human being in the divine. The risks are, in his adversary's opinion, mainly the dissolution of the concept of absolute being, which loses its main essential characteristic, namely its simplicity.

The theological critique often underlined the 'novelty' of St. Gregory's theological vision. Although he frequently quotes from the Greek Fathers, he still goes far beyond the elements that were present in previous literature. This has become a common observation to both his contemporaries and to present-day theological scholarship, especially in its Western exegesis (such as M. Jugie, S. Runciman, etc.).

Still, for St. Gregory, continuity with Tradition was his main argument in defending his position as being in accordance with both the life of the Church and with theological definitions. The most frequent references are from the works of St. Denys the Pseudo-Areopagite and St. Maximus the Confessor.

And one of the premises is that, in God, the distinction between the hypostases is not the only distinction possible. He offers the example of St. Denys, who, 'after clarifying the distinction of the hypostases in God', states 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. And he says that according to the divine processions and energies God is multiplied and enters multiplicity and at this point he says that 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. For us God is a Trinity but he is not threefold.'<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> C, 85.

From the perspective of revelation, the distinction goes between God and his 'glory'. Although God is a transcendent reality, his glory becomes accessible and points to a paradoxical mode of presence of the transcendent into the created. As St. Gregory draws this distinction, 'the nature of God is one thing, His glory another, even though they be inseparable one from another. However, even though this glory is different from the divine nature, it cannot be classified amongst the things subject to time, for in its transcendence *it is not*, because it belongs to the divine nature in an ineffable manner.'<sup>371</sup>

The glory cannot thus, be classified as a created reality. Although it is not God's essence, still it can be neither subject to time, nor a created medium. In St. Gregory's expression, it possesses immutable being: 'For how could this light, so radiant and divine, eternal, supereminently possessing immutable being, have anything in common with all those symbols and allusions which are adapted to particular circumstances, which come into existence only to disappear again, which at one time exist and at another do not exist, or rather, sometimes appear, yet without possessing any true existence?'<sup>372</sup>

The immutable character of God's Glory revealed into the created becomes most obvious for St. Gregory in the case of the Transfiguration on the Mount Thabor. This event holds the central place in his argumentation, as an evident example for both the nature of the light and for the receptive possibilities of the human. Quoting St. John Damascene, '*Christ is transfigured, not by putting on some quality He did not possess previously, nor by changing into something He never was before, but by revealing to His disciples what He truly was, in opening their eyes and in giving sight to those who were blind. For while remaining identical to what He had been before, He appeared to the disciples in His splendour; He is indeed the true light, the radiance of glory.*'<sup>373</sup> In this point, it can be said that the entire discourse on the uncreated energies is inseparable from the Christological doctrine. From an ontological perspective, the human nature assumed by the divine Logos was transformed gradually, until when it became transparent for the divine energies. Even corporality reflects the uncreated light in a way that became possible to witness for the eyes of the apostles. In this way, the human nature is lifted gradually, starting from the point of incarnation, and goes in the end

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<sup>371</sup> T, II, 3, 15.

<sup>372</sup> T, II, 3, 20.

<sup>373</sup> T, III, 1, 15.

beyond the condition of mortality, becoming adapted for *partaking* into the divine eternal life.

In the moment of Transfiguration, the human nature of Christ was thus seen by the apostles, in its transfigured state. But the Transfiguration was not properly speaking that of the nature of Christ. In St. Gregory's exegesis, it was rather a transformation of the receptive possibilities of the apostles. 'Thus He was divine before, but He bestowed at the time of His Transfiguration a divine power upon the eyes of the apostles and enabled them to look up and see for themselves'<sup>374</sup>. This was not a temporary effect, but the normal state of the human nature assumed by Christ. And the apostles not only saw the human nature in its proper splendour, but this deified state becomes possible for those who, through purification and illumination, are opening themselves to the deifying energies. Starting from the transfiguration of the human nature in Christ, St. Gregory can defend the reality of the vision of the divine light, and also a reality of the union with God. None of this would be possible, he says, if the light had only a created temporal effect. 'Can this be the divinity which (without ever being the true divinity) triumphed over that venerable flesh akin to God? One should not say it triumphed for one minute, but does so continually, for Gregory (Nazianzen) did not say *having triumphed*, but *triumphing*, that is, not only in the present but also in the Age to Come.'<sup>375</sup>

Through the energies thus understood to be uncreated, the reality of the encounter between God and man is much better expressed. In St. Gregory's vision, it is the only possible way to keep both the transcendence of the divine and the participation of the created together. Under its existential circumstances, it can be said that the Living God really vivifies the human in its entire limited being, enlightening it to see and to partake. God becomes intimately present in those who are experiencing his light, and he is no longer seen as the distant cause and unapproachable essence. But, when it comes to expressing this, the biggest obstacle for this vision is to explain how it can be possible for the energies to be identical and at the same time totally distinct from God's essence. St. Gregory tries to explain in the following manner: 'the essential characteristic is not the essence which possesses the essential characteristics. As the great Denys says, *When we call the superessential Mystery 'God' or 'life' or 'essence', we have in mind only the providential powers produced from the imparticipable God.* These, then, are the

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<sup>374</sup> T, III, 1, 15.

<sup>375</sup> T, III, 1, 11.

essential powers; as to the Superessential ... that is the Reality which possesses these powers and gathers them into unity in itself. Similarly, the deifying light is also essential, but is not itself the essence of God.<sup>376</sup> In relation with the divine essence, the energy is considered ‘neither an independent reality, nor something alien to the divinity.’<sup>377</sup>

At the same time, the energy is distinct from the hypostases. It is not a hypostatical reality, nor an ‘an-hypostatical’ one. In relation with the hypostases, the energy is defined as ‘en-hypostatical’. This classification explains its distinctiveness from essence and hypostases, and also its permanence as uncreated. As St. Gregory describes it, ‘by contrast, one calls "*an* hypostatic" not only nonbeing or hallucination, but also everything which quickly disintegrates and runs away, which disappears and straightway ceases to be, such as, for example, thunder and lightning, and our own words and thoughts. The Fathers have done well, then, to call this light *enhypostatic*, in order to show its permanence and stability, because it remains in being, and does not elude the gaze, as does lightning, or words, or thoughts...’<sup>378</sup> These observations are subsequent to the idea that a hypostasis cannot exist without energies. These energies are neither self-subsistent beings, nor existent without a reference to a hypostasis: they do not exist independently, but in the hypostasis of another. They are permanent realities in God, inseparable from essence and hypostases as *enhypostatic*.

Distinct from essence, the energies are common to the three divine hypostases. As St. Gregory describes it, ‘we have been instructed by the Fathers to consider the divine energy as one and the same for the three revered persons and not as a similar energy allotted to each.’<sup>379</sup> This conception accompanies not only the definition of the hypostases as being relational and substantial at the same time, but also the revelational condition of dialogue between the uncreated and the created. In his essence, God remains an inexhaustible reality, but this doesn’t block his revelation as trinity of Persons. Again, the inexhaustible character of God is not a restrictive one, because, in the case of the Holy Spirit, his deifying gift ‘cannot be equated with the superessential essence of God. It is the deifying energy of this divine essence, yet not the totality of

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<sup>376</sup> T, III, 1, 23.

<sup>377</sup> T, III, 1, 17.

<sup>378</sup> T, III, 1, 18.

<sup>379</sup> C, 112.

this energy, even though it is indivisible in itself.<sup>380</sup> God shares himself without diminishing his transcendence.

The energies are rather described in terms of personal openness. It is not in the context of essences that the encounter and the union take place. Knowledge and union are impossible in what concerns the divine essence. But, again, the apophatical component of the language requires corrections. The realities of man and God are envisioned at the level of personal relationship. And in this context, grace is ‘in fact a relationship, albeit not a natural one; yet it is at the same time beyond relationship, not only by virtue of being supernatural, but also *qua* relationship. For how would a relationship have a relationship? But as to the essence of God, that is unrelated, not *qua* relationship, but because it transcends the supernatural relationships themselves. Grace is communicated to all worthy of it, in a way proper and peculiar to each one, while the divine essence transcends all that is participable.’<sup>381</sup>

The en-hypostatic status of the energies becomes clear also in the case of the receiver. It is according to the capacity of those who receive it that it ‘instills the divinizing radiance to a greater or lesser degree.’<sup>382</sup> And the intensity of the relationship or the degree of participation will require a separate discussion, as the practical extension within the hesychast spirituality defended by St. Gregory.

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<sup>380</sup> *T*, III, 1, 34.

<sup>381</sup> *T*, III, 1, 29.

<sup>382</sup> *C*, 69.

## II. 5. The Vision of the Divine Light and the Union with God

The finality of St. Gregory's theological vision consists in 'describing' the state of deification, while the discourse upon the uncreated character of the energies is nothing but a defence of the idea of real participation of the created being in God. The theological and anthropological premises will allow him to depict this final state of the human being in totally paradoxical terms. Just like in St. Thomas' theology, the mystery of being becomes accessible, but in a different manner. Participation, as described by St. Gregory, on the one hand excludes the vision of the divine essence, while, on the other, it states that deification of the created human being goes as far as 'becoming uncreated' through the uncreated grace.

The main characteristics of this final image are drawn in specific frameworks. Negative expressions reach their climax, and language remains totally apophatic. The vision of God is entirely dependent on the divine light, and it goes beyond the human natural capacities. In the process of knowledge, a simultaneity of unity and multiplicity can be observed regarding the names of God. Images can only be analogical, and in St. Gregory's view, they are related exclusively to the energies, to what 'surrounds' God, without diminishing his presence. '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 by the theologians.'<sup>383</sup> Although accessible for knowledge, and this is evident in the names we can apply to God, the energies become relevant in describing God's being at a different level than that of natural knowledge. For St. Gregory, as for almost all spiritual writers, a distinction must be underlined: 'the one is the apprehension of the power, wisdom and providence of God, and in general, knowledge of the Creator through the creatures; the other is contemplation, not of the divine nature ... but of the *glory* of His nature, which the Saviour has bestowed on His

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<sup>383</sup> C, 68.

disciples, and through them, on all who believe in Him and have manifested their faith through their works.’<sup>384</sup> The only manner of reaching the vision of God goes beyond the possibilities of knowledge. Apophaticism in this situation goes beyond the so-called ‘negative theology’. The vision goes certainly beyond natural theology, but also beyond negative theology. Apophaticism is understood, thus, not as a correction of cataphatic theology, but rather as knowledge through experience. Although referred to as entering the ‘darkness’ of God, this consists in fact, of accessing a different type of knowledge: ‘an intellectual illumination, visible to those whose hearts have been purified, and utterly different from knowledge, though productive of it.’<sup>385</sup>

The vision of the divine light, as the finality of the created being in the eternal life, can also be experienced in the present state, by means of contemplation. Opposed to the idea that during his earthy life man is condemned to ignorance when it comes to the knowledge of God, or to a simple lecture of the written revelation, which would enable only the intellectuals to access this knowledge, the emphasis falls on the idea of spiritual experience. According to St. Gregory’s differentiation between knowledge and contemplation, the later ‘is not simply abstraction and negation; it is a union and a divinisation which occurs mystically and ineffably by the grace of God, after the stripping away of everything from here below which imprints itself on the mind, or rather after the cessation of all intellectual activity; it is something which goes beyond abstraction (which is only the outward mark of the cessation).’<sup>386</sup>

The characteristics of this process are focusing the attention on a type of knowledge that is considered in its existential content. The access to this knowledge is not restricted to the practicing hesychast; in most cases, saints envisage an ascetical ideal, but not one that is restricted to the limits of the monastery. The differences of accessibility to God are determinative: ‘the ascent through the negative way ...lies within the powers of whoever desires it; and it does not transform the soul so as to bestow on it the angelic dignity. While it liberates the understanding from other beings, it cannot by itself effect union with transcendent things. But purity of the passionate part of the soul effectively liberates the mind from all things through impassibility, and unites it through prayer to

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<sup>384</sup> *T*, II, 3, 35.

<sup>385</sup> *T*, I, 3, 5.

<sup>386</sup> *T*, I, 3, 17.

the grace of the Spirit; and through this grace the mind comes to enjoy the divine effulgence, and acquires an angelic and godlike form.<sup>387</sup>

In man's pursuit to see God, St. Gregory prefers to point out, following St. Denys, that 'one should perhaps call it union and not knowledge.'<sup>388</sup> The vision of God coincides with a process of deification, as long as it presupposes the divine light as its source. Different from the light of knowledge, this reality opens in the created the capacity to see God on the level of profundity of being. In St. Gregory's description, light 'is not only *divinity*, but *deification-in-itself*, and thearchy. While it appears to produce a distinction and multiplication within the one God, yet it is nonetheless the Divine Principle, more-than-God, and more-than-Principle.'<sup>389</sup>

While this knowledge becomes describable through the experiences of Saints, one of the scriptural examples identified by St. Gregory is that of St. Paul. In his exegesis, St. Paul couldn't participate in God's essence, which remains impossible. Yet, 'he had received the capacity of union, having gone out from all beings, and become light by grace, and non being by transcendence, that is by exceeding created things.'<sup>390</sup> One of the principal effects observed in these descriptions is that of becoming 'light by grace'. The one who sees the uncreated light of God becomes himself light. This experience points to a certain transformation of the human nature that reaches the limits of its entire being. And so, the process of deification can start in this life and, moreover, the effects of the light can be extended to the entire human nature, including the body. St. Gregory finds this extension of the effects of grace to have been stated by previous patristic authors, and he offers the example of St. Maximus, in whose expression 'deified men are united to God – a union akin to that of the soul and the body, so that the whole man should be entirely deified, divinised by the grace of the incarnate God.'<sup>391</sup>

This apology of participation extended even to the body has a special context determined by the disputes around hesychasm. Practically, this was one of the most shocking details that fuelled the entire controversy. It was not as much the possibility of thinking of the light of Transfiguration as being uncreated that produced the effective scandal, but rather the ways in which this visual image was perceived by the Apostles. St. Gregory entirely argues for the possibility of seeing the light of God even in our

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<sup>387</sup> T, I, 3, 20.

<sup>388</sup> T, I, 3, 20.

<sup>389</sup> T, I, 3, 23.

<sup>390</sup> T, II, 3, 37.

<sup>391</sup> T, III, 3, 13.



bodily condition: ‘it transforms the body, and communicates its own splendour to it when, miraculously, the light which deifies the body becomes accessible to the bodily eyes.’<sup>392</sup> Although surprising, this statement is nothing but a consequence of the Christological doctrine regarding the transformation of the human nature in Christ. From an anthropological perspective, it marks a return of the human nature from its state of sickness, while grace is nothing but a condition for the normal functioning of this nature, inclusively for the body. And given the centrality of Christ, the effects grace had on the human deified nature of Christ are also transferred to the human nature of those who are united with Christ. Based on this image, the gradual deification of the entire human nature has as a paradoxical finality: ‘Those who attain it become thereby uncreated, unoriginate and indescribable, although in their own nature, they derive from nothingness.’<sup>393</sup> Referring to concrete created persons, it can be said that ‘they have become entirely God, and know God in God’<sup>394</sup>, and that ‘they know God in God, that they are united to Him and so have already acquired the form of God.’<sup>395</sup> These expressions are applied upon the salvational example of Christ, and only on the level of the personal nature: as a reverse of the hypostatical union and only in the limits of the participation in the divine energies, it is not the humanity that becomes divinity, but it is the man that becomes God.

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<sup>392</sup> *T*, II, 3, 9.

<sup>393</sup> *T*, III, 1, 31.

<sup>394</sup> *T*, II, 3, 68.

<sup>395</sup> *T*, III, 3, 12.

## CONCLUSIONS

Both authors, taken separately or together, strictly regarding their works or examined in their historical contexts, were, in the course of time, subject to contradictory evaluations. While some critics considered them totally opposed, others tried to identify a common ground to make possible a conciliation between the two sides of Christendom.

Orthodox theologians, in their majority, accused the West of losing the content of Tradition which was betrayed in metaphysical schemes that eventually led to the deep spiritual crisis of the modern world. St. Thomas Aquinas' case became representative for the whole scholastic tradition and symptomatic for a rationalistic approach in theological matters. In a certain context, during twentieth century, it was emphasised that this kind of theology corrupted the theological research even in the Orthodox schools, where a deep breach between theological speculation and mystical experience was thus inserted on the level of doctrinal synthesis. In their entire critique of the scholastic system, almost the only name effectively mentioned is that of St. Thomas Aquinas. And so, in some of these expositions, St. Thomas Aquinas becomes synonymous with a theology that is estranged from the roots of patristic tradition, alienated by the Aristotelian influences, and which has transferred the mystery of the living God into an essentialist scheme that is no longer relevant for the spiritual necessities of the present. St. Thomas is recognised as the great enemy, emblematic for the Western theology, most often opposed to St. Gregory Palamas.

For Western theology at the beginning of the twentieth century, St. Gregory Palamas was seen as the representative of a strange theological system, contradictory in its structure, a mixture of mysticism, philosophy and incoherent theological visions, and whose survival in contemporary theology seemed impossible. At times, one of the reproaches addressed to palamism was the same patristic inconsistency which Orthodox theologians rejected in reference to St. Thomas Aquinas. And although Palamas' insistence to defend the reality of spiritual experiences may be looked upon as a positive

achievement, it loses its value because of the risks to compromise logic and theological coherence.

In both critiques, the two authors were often taken out of their historical contexts, judged in terms of polemics and controversies, and outside an ecumenical framework. Out of their precise contexts, they seemed the perfect enemies. But for a different type of critique, their differences seemed smaller than their common elements, and the opposition is in fact not between Aquinas and Palamas themselves, but between their disciples.

In this last evaluation, the patristic heritage can be identified in both corpuses of works, although in St. Thomas' case philosophical references do seem excessive. At the same time, though, while St. Gregory quotes from the Greek Fathers almost on every page of his works, yet almost never from the Latin Fathers, St. Thomas tries to collect as many Greek texts as it was possible at the time, but in their Latin translations. This explains why they could use common sources like the writings of St. Denys, St. John Damascene, the Cappadocian Fathers and St. John Chrysostom.

Moreover, they not only share their knowledge of patristic literature, but also that of Greek Philosophy. It is well known, for example, that St. Thomas made extensive use of Aristotle; it is, though, less known that St. Gregory himself was also instructed on the subject and, although he did not make that much use of it, some of his apologies are constructed on an Aristotelian grammar. It is also interesting to note that, although Aristotelian philosophy is mostly linked with his adversaries, Emperor John Cantacuzenos himself, one of St. Gregory's sincere supporters, was one of the leading Aristotelians of the fourteenth century Byzantium society; even more remarkable is that John Cantacuzenos is also the one who initiated the first translation of St. Thomas Aquinas' works into Greek.

Differences do exist, but they do not refer to the strict use of Philosophy, but rather to its validity when theological matters are concerned. Methodologically, St. Thomas constructs an entire theological system based on various philosophical concepts, whereas St. Gregory denies the relevance and applicability of metaphysics to theological knowledge. The limits of usage of the philosophical apparatus thus differ for the two theologians, and this may lead to the main difficulty: is it possible or not to assert that, in spite of employing a different, even opposing terminology, both of them

expressed, in the end, the same common vision, only by means of different methodological grammars.

One should not forget, also, the very different contexts they lived and worked in. In a different reading of the situation, St. Thomas, for example, may be looked at not as the one who authored Aristotle's intrusion into the Theology, but in fact as the one who adapted Aristotelianism to Christian theology in an attempt to defend theology by the over-use of Philosophy manifested by some of his contemporaries. In the real context of his age, the activity St. Thomas developed attempted rather to work as equilibrium between reason and tradition, an equilibrium that is extremely difficult to achieve and to hold to.

Composed mainly in the context of the university debates that made up his life, the treatises St. Thomas wrote were addressed to a scholarly audience and were intended primarily for practical, academic use. Their systematic structure implies the effort of separating the methodology from the order of the theological issues. One of the examples consisted in the manner of treating the Trinitarian dogma. If one of the main reproaches to his theology concerned the separation between the unity and the trinity in God, St. Gregory is tempted to apply the same order when proceeding to this exposition. If later developments are rooted in this works, the results belong to another exegesis. Different from St. Thomas, the activity of St. Gregory does not take place in the academic environment; instead, his works are rather apologetic in manner and concern issues of ascetical experiences. This imposes on his writing a certain intransigence, and thus, if looking for ecumenical openness, one can find it definitely easier in St. Thomas' works. While St. Thomas collects all available views, both philosophical and theological, in an attempt to integrate them into a unitary system, St. Gregory mainly rejects everything that exceeds Greek patristic literature. Still, his adversary is not Western theology. On the matter of *Filioque*, for example, he cannot but refute the doctrinal point in discussion. Regarding the controversy around the uncreated energies, his counterpart is rather of Byzantine expression, and when describing the experience of the divine light, one of the examples he offers is that of St. Benedict, 'one of the most perfect saints'.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> T, I, 3, 22. 'Another saint, one of the most perfect, saw the whole universe contained in a single ray of this intelligible sun – even though he himself did not see this light as it is in itself, in its full extent, but only to that extent that he was capable of receiving it. By this contemplation and by his supra-intelligible union with this light, he did not learn what it is by nature, but he learnt that it really exists, is supernatural and superessential, different from all things; that its being is absolute and unique, and that it mysteriously

The evidence of their common points is extremely clear. Although sometimes interpreted differently, they both insist on the living reality of God as Trinity, and they both conceive the absolute being not as a pure abstract concept. If the mark of essentialism is associated with St. Thomas, this doesn't exclude the reality of personal mystery opened for experience and vision. In fact, the finality of theology goes beyond nature, and the vision of God is required as a fulfilment of the human existence. The modalities of expressing this ultimate state of the created being are totally different from those used by St. Gregory.

The anthropological premises are mainly identical. With the difference that for St. Gregory the divine grace in the primordial state of man created *upon the image* becomes in a more functional manner part of the unity of the human being, while for St. Thomas this component is attached as an exterior one.

These anthropological premises are in a certain degree introductive for the biggest difference, and the main motive of opposition between the two. The modalities of linking the created with the uncreated being, reflected in the content of *grace*, are expressed differently by the two authors. While St. Gregory insists on the reality of *deification* by means of the uncreated energies, for St. Thomas the participation becomes possible through an intermediary created reality, and thus the biggest problem would be to explain the mode of a real participation. Although he uses this concept as being inevitable and inherent to the very theological finality, this must be restricted to the possibilities of the intellect, while the rest of the human nature remains in some sort of silence.

Underlining a perspective in which the reality of person holds a central role in explaining the participation of the created being in the uncreated energies, led to St. Gregory's image of an existentialist theologian opposed to St. Thomas' essentialist view. But this is a contextualization that deserves a separate discussion. As a certain fact, both of them lived in a complex conjunction, and another common mark consists in their destiny in later history. The image of St. Thomas seems to diminish behind later scholastics, in the context of their separation from the patristic tradition and of a radical divorce between mystics and theology.

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comprehends all in itself. This vision of the Infinite cannot permanently belong to any individual or to all men.'

Comparatively, Palamas' figure diminishes somehow in the background of the hesychast movement – and this explains why his revival in the twentieth century took place in the context of East's encounter with the West, while the Orthodox academic theology in the East focused its research rather on exploring the hesychast movement than on St. Gregory Palamas' theology. But this revival becomes symptomatic for another context. If at the beginning of the twentieth century the neo-Thomism was a productive movement, the hesychast theology seemed a good alternative for the theological discourse in front of the continuous process of secularization and superfluous rationalism. At this point, perhaps St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Gregory Palamas, if taken together, can offer the perfect synthesis and the necessary solution in front of the present dilemmas.

If it is correct that Palamas' rediscovery was determined in the context of the Orthodox émigrés who activated on a theological scene dominated by neo-Thomists, under the increasing influence of an existentialist movement contesting the essentialist model of theology, it is also true then, that, paradoxically, St. Gregory Palamas' revival is due, to some extent, to St. Thomas Aquinas himself. Reiterating history, just like it happened in the fourteenth century, St. Gregory returned to the scene of theological debate to contest the 'scholastic' influences that some of his own cotemporaries had hastily attributed to St. Thomas.

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