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God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence-Energies Distinction

KALLISTOS WARE

‘Unknown yet well-known’

In any discussion of divine revelation, it is necessary to consider not only such matters as the authority of Scripture and its place within Holy Tradition, but also the fundamental issue: In what sense is God revealed? How far has his inner nature been disclosed to men? In what ways is he knowable to the human mind or intellect, and in what ways does he remain for ever incomprehensible? What kind of union is possible between Creator and creature?

In its doctrine of God, the Orthodox Church has always tried to safeguard a basic antinomy. What St Paul said of the Christian may also be affirmed, on a different level, of God himself: he is ‘unknown, and yet well-known’ (2 Co 6:9). God is the ‘Wholly Other’, above and beyond creation, transcendent and unapproachable. Yet by virtue of his creative self-revelation, this same God is immanent in the world and accessible to man – in the words of Nicolas Cabasilas, ‘more a part of us than our own limbs, more necessary to us than our own heart’. Such is the paradox at the heart of all Christian experience: God is the mysterium tremendum, and yet it man’s vocation to meet him face to face; God is unknowable, and yet the saints know him personally. Evelyn Underhill has expressed the point in her book Worship by speaking of ‘the nearness yet otherness of the Eternal’.

This paradox of God hidden yet revealed is clearly enunciated in the New Testament. In the same Epistle, St John states both that ‘no man has seen God at any time’ (1 Jn 4:12), and that ‘we shall see him as he is’ (1 Jn 3:2). The two affirmations are even combined by the Apostle in a single sentence when he says: ‘No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared him’ (Jn 1:18). Similarly, the Pastoral Epistles speak of God as ‘dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man has seen or can see’ (1 Tm 6:16); yet St Paul says to the Corinthians, ‘Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known’ (1 Co 13:12).

Various attempts have been made to mitigate the paradox. It has been argued that, whereas God the Father cannot be directly known, yet in God the Son the divine nature has been fully and entirely revealed; or else that, whereas God’s essence remains unknown to us in this present age, yet in the beatific vision of the Age to Come it will be truly known.

by the saints. But the antinomy cannot be so easily resolved. Jesus Christ, as Logos incarnate, has indeed revealed the Godhead to mankind; yet this revelation is not exhaustive, for even in the very act of self-manifestation God is hidden as well as disclosed. We affirm, in the words of the fourth Ecumenical Council, that the incarnate Christ is 'perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, true God and true man'; but which of us can explain in psychological terms how a single and undivided person can be God and man at once—can know, feel and will simultaneously in a completely divine and a completely human way? Must we not admit that there is a mystery here beyond our comprehension? Nor is the antinomy eliminated by a simple contrast between the present and the future Age. Even in the Age to Come—which is also in some measure already present—the radical disparity between the created and the Uncreated is not abolished; there still exists, and there must always exist, an ontological and epistemological gap between Creator and creature. Though united to God and 'deified', man remains man, and so there is still an all-important sense in which the inner essence of the Deity is for ever unknown to him, even in the Age to Come.

This recognition of the radical unknowability of God, while present from the start in the Christian tradition, came to be more explicitly emphasized during the later 4th century, in reaction against the rationalism of the extreme Arian party of the Anomoeans. One of their leaders, Aëtius, is credited with saying, 'I understand and know God so clearly that I do not know myself as well as I understand God';4 and Eunomius is alleged to have maintained, 'God does not know his own being any better than we do.'7 God, in effect, is treated by these thinkers as a simple philosophical concept, wholly comprehensible to human reason.

In opposition to this arid and arrogant approach, the Cappadocians insisted upon the element of mystery in the Christian faith. Their attitude is succinctly expressed in a phrase attributed to St Athanasius: 'A God who is comprehensible is not God.' In the words of a disciple of the Cappadocians, Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399): 'God cannot be grasped by the intellect; for if he could be grasped, he would not be God. '5 'He who makes his own intellect the measure of reality', observes St Basil the Great, 'does not reflect that it is easier to measure the whole ocean with a little cup than to grasp the ineffable greatness of God with the human intellect';5 and to those who place too great a reliance upon human speech, he gives the advice: 'Let things ineffable be honoured with silence.' Likewise St Gregory of Nazianzus teaches: 'What God is in his nature and essence no man ever has discovered or ever will discover.'7

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1 Epiphanius, Haer., LXXVI, iv, 2.
2 Socrates, Hist. Eccles., iv, 7 (MPG, lvii, col. 473a).
3 Ps. 84.—Athanasius, Ad Autichum, resp. 1 (MPG, xxviii, col. 597a).
4 De oculo visionis cogniti., 9 (MPG, xi, col. 1275c).
5 In Ps. 115, §2 (MPG, xxx, col. 105b).
6 De spir. acto, xviii [44].
7 Or. xxviii (Theol. li), 17.
Commenting on Psalm 8:1, 'How wonderful is thy name in all the world!' St Gregory of Nyssa points out that God's name or nature cannot be the object of our human knowledge but only of our wonder and reverent awe: 'God's name is not known, it is wondered at.'

Henceforward this belief in the unknowability of God remains standard teaching in the Christian East. 'God is infinite and incomprehensible,' states St John of Damascus (d. 749), 'and the only thing that is comprehensible about him is his infinity and incomprehensibility. . . . God does not belong to the class of existing things; not because he has no existence, but because he is superior to all existing things, and even to existence itself.' St Gregory Palamas (d. 1359) is no less uncompromising: 'All natures are in the highest degree distant from and foreign to the divine nature. For if God is a nature, then no other thing is a nature; but if all others are natures, then God is not a nature. Likewise he is not a being if other things are beings; but if he is being, then other things are not beings. . . . How can we come close to God? By drawing near to his nature? But no single thing of all that is created has or ever will have any communion with the supreme nature or nearness to it.'

The Two Levels of the Via Negativa

To safeguard this awareness of the divine Mystery, it is necessary to negate our affirmations about God; to say, with Charles Williams in his play The Seed of Adam, 'This also is Thou; neither is this Thou'. To prevent our verbal formulae or mental concepts from becoming idols that keep us from the living God, we must continually employ the apophatic way. But 'apophaticism' can be used to denote two profoundly different things; and so it is vital to know, in any given context, on which level it is being employed. If it signifies simply the negating of all positive statements about God, this need not in itself be more than a verbal exercise, a piece of philosophical or 'natural' theology; it does not necessarily involve any passing beyond the normal use of language and the discursive reason. For the Greek Fathers, however, apophaticism signifies much more than this. In their writings, the process of negating is not just a verbal exercise but the basis or springboard for a leap beyond all language and discursive thinking. Through their negations they seek to surpass words and concepts, to reach out towards the transcendent, and so to

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9 De fid. orth., 1, 4 (MPG, xiv, col. 800a).
10 Capita 150 physica, theologica, moralia et practica, 78 (MPG, cl, col. 1176ac). This and similar passages in the Fathers are in seeming contradiction with the words of 2 Peter 1:4, '... that through these promises you might be partakers of the divine nature (theias koinonion physias). The Greek patristic tradition has always attached great importance to this statement in 2 Peter, as indicating the possibility of a genuine and immediate union between God and man; but at the same time it is clear that the term physia, as employed in 2 Peter, does not bear the more restricted and technical sense which it came to assume in later discussions about energies and essence. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is frequently affirmed that man can share in the life or glory of God (see especially the Fourth Gospel), but it is nowhere said that man participates in God's inner being or essence. Thus in 2 Peter 1:4, physia should be interpreted as denoting the life or energies of God, not his transcendent essence.

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attain an unmediated, supra-rational experience of the Divine. On this
deeper or 'mystical' level, the apophatic way is no mere philosophical
theory, but is inseparable from the practice of 'imageless' prayer.

Though negative in its outward form, the apophatic approach—interpreted
in this deeper sense—is supremely affirmative in its ultimate aim.
The way of negation is in reality the way of super-affirmation. In the
words of Radhakrishnan, 'Something is not, means—something is'; and
it is precisely because this 'something' is so overwhelmingly positive that
its true character can only be conveyed through negations. To emphasize
the positive nature of the *via negativa*, St Dionysius Areopagita (? c.
480–500) uses the analogy of a sculptor and a block of marble.\(^{11}\) The sculptor
chips away at the stone—in itself a 'negative' action, like the denial
of verbal formulae—but his purpose is positive: not to reduce his block
of marble to a heap of dust, but slowly to reveal the image latent within
it. (Contrast the action of someone peeling away the successive skins of
an onion until finally nothing remains.) The theologian, then, must first
negate or 'chip away' his man-made notions of divine reality; but these
negations lead him, not to a blank void, but to an immediate realization
of God's presence. It is in this spirit of affirmative negation that writers
such as St Dionysius or the Welsh poet Henry Vaughan speak of the
Divinity as 'dazzling darkness'. As Jacob Boehme remarks, the darkness
signifies not the absence of illumination but the terror that comes from
the blinding light.

**Essence and Energies**

Apophaticism, then, has both a negative and an affirmative aspect. It
underlines, on the one hand, the transcendence and incomprehensibility
of God, 'whom no man has seen or can see'; it proclaims, on the other
hand, the possibility of an encounter face to face with this unknowable
God, of an unmediated union with the Inaccessible. To express this
double truth that God is both hidden and revealed, both transcendent
and immanent, Orthodox theology makes a distinction between the divine
essence (*ousia*) and the divine energies or operations (*energeiai*). This
latter term, while possessing a philosophical flavour, is in fact also scriptural.
Whereas the term *ousia* is used in only one passage of the New
Testament (Lk 15:12-13)—and here it does not refer to God, but means
'property' or 'wealth'—the term *energeia*, applied to God, is found several
times in the Epistles (Ep 1:19, 3:7; Ph 3:21; Co 1:29, 2:12).

*Ousia* or essence means God as he is in himself, the *energeiai* or energies
signify God in action and self-revelation. According to the Orthodox
apophatic tradition, the divine essence remains for ever above and beyond
all participation and all knowledge on the part of any creature, both in
this age and in the Age to Come; the essence of God can be apprehended
neither by men nor by angels, but only by the three divine persons them-

\(^{11}\)De myst. theol., 2.

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selves. But God's energies, which are God himself, fill the whole world, and by grace all may come to participate in them. The God who is 'essentially' unknowable is thus 'existentially' or 'energetically' revealed.

This doctrine of the immanent energies implies an intensely dynamic vision of the relationship between God and the world. The whole cosmos is a vast burning bush, permeated but not consumed by the uncreated fire of the divine energies. These energies are 'God with us'. They are the power of God at work within man, the life of God in which he shares. Because of the omnipresence of the divine energies, each of us can know himself as made in the image of God. Through the divine energies, Jesus Christ ceases to be for us an historical figure from the distant past, with whose story we are familiar from books, and he becomes an immediate presence, our personal Saviour. Through the divine energies we know him not merely as a human teacher but as the pre-eternal Logos.

This distinction between the essence and the energies—for which certain parallels can be found in classical philosophy—\(^\text{12}\) is stated in emphatic terms by St Basil the Great: 'We know our God from his energies, but we do not claim to draw near to his essence. For his energies come down to us, but his essence remains unapproachable.'\(^\text{11}\) As St Gregory of Nyssa puts it, 'He who by nature is invisible becomes visible in his energies.'\(^\text{14}\) The essence-energies distinction is applied to Christology by St Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) and by the Fathers of the sixth Ecumenical Council (680–7). Every physis has its own characteristic energeia, they teach, and so there are in the incarnate Christ two 'natural energies' and two wills, the one human and the other divine, eternal and uncreated. The essence-energies distinction is further clarified by St Gregory Palamas and by the Councils held at Constantinople during his lifetime and shortly after his death (1341, 1347, 1351, 1368); of these the most important doctrinally is the Council of 1351.\(^\text{15}\) After centuries of neglect, during the period when Orthodox theology was dominated by Western models, the Palamite teaching has now been rediscovered by Orthodox theologians in our own day and rightly restored to a central position.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{12}\) See, for example, Xenophon, Memorabilia, IV, iii, 13; and compare Philo, De post. Caii, 13–16, and De spec. leg., i, 52–36.

\(^{13}\) Ep. ccxxiv, 1 (MPG, xxxii, col. 869a).

\(^{14}\) Hom. vi de Beat. (MPG, xlv, col. 1269a).


The 1351 Council summed up the Orthodox teaching concerning the
divine energies in seven main points: 17

(1) There is in God a distinction (diakrisis) between the essence and
the energies or energy. (It is equally legitimate to refer to the latter either
in the singular or in the plural.)

(2) The energy of God is not created but uncreated (aktistos).

(3) This distinction between the uncreated essence and the uncreated
energies does not in any way impair the divine simplicity; there is no
‘compositeness’ (synthesis) in God.

(4) The term ‘deity’ (theotis) may be applied not only to the essence of
God but to the energies.

(5) The essence enjoys a certain priority or superiority in relation to
the energies, in the sense that the energies proceed from the essence.

(6) Man can participate in God’s energies but not in his essence.

(7) The divine energies may be experienced by men in the form of
light—a light which, though beheld through men’s bodily eyes, is in itself
non-material, ‘intelligible’ (noerōn) and uncreated. This is the uncreated
light that was manifested to the apostles at the Transfiguration on Mount
Tabor, that is seen during prayer by the saints in our own time, and that
will shine upon and from the righteous at their resurrection on the Last
Day. 18 It thus possesses an eschatological character: it is ‘the Light of
the Age to Come’. 19

Though not included in this list of seven, there is a further point stated
several times in the acts of the 1351 Council: no energy is to be associated
with one divine person to the exclusion of the other two, but the energies
are shared in common by all three persons of the Trinity. This is, of
course, a reaffirmation of the basic Cappadocian principle that, in their
operations ad extra, the three persons of the Godhead always act together.
As St Gregory Palamas states in his Confession of Faith submitted to the
1351 Council and formally endorsed by it:

[God] is not revealed in his essence (ousia), for no one has ever seen or
described God’s nature (physis); but he is revealed in the grace (charis), power
(dynamis) and energy (energeia) which is common to Father, Son and Spirit.
Distinctive to each of the three is the person (hypostasis) of each, and whatever
belongs to the person. Shared in common by all three are not only the transcen-
dent essence—which is altogether nameless, unmanifested and imparticipable,

17 Synodical Tome of 1351, §§ 18, 46 (Karmiris, pp. 385, 460).
18 See Palamas, Triads, I, iii, 43.
19 Synodical Tome of 1347, §2 (ed. Meyendorff, lines 44–46).

continued from p. 129
1973). See also, in Romanian, the pioneer study of Fr Dumitru Staniloae; in Russian, the essay
of Fr Kiprian Kern; and in Greek, the writings of Professors Christou and Mantzaridis of Thessa-
lonika.
since it is beyond all names, manifestation and participation ... but also the divine grace, power, energy, radiance, kingdom and incorruption whereby God enters through grace into communion and union with the holy angels and the saints.\textsuperscript{20}

It will be noted that in this passage St Gregory treats the term \textit{energeia} as equivalent to certain words found frequently in the New Testament. The energy of God is his power, grace or kingdom. Thus the terms \textit{energeia} and \textit{dynamis} are not to be contrasted, as in the Aristotelian usage, but should be equated, as indeed they seem to be in several scriptural texts (Ep 3:7; Ph 3:21; Col 1:29). The identification of \textit{energeia} with \textit{charis} is of particular importance, and shows that the Orthodox teaching on the divine energies embodies a theology of grace. In thus equating grace with the uncreated energy of God, St Gregory and the 14th-century Councils seem to exclude the notion of 'created grace' that is found in Western Scholastic theology. Careful investigation would be needed in order to establish whether the discrepancy here is merely verbal or involves a matter of doctrinal significance.\textsuperscript{21}

The 1351 Council, following St Anastasius of Sinai and St John of Damascus, defines \textit{energeia} as 'the proper power and movement of each \textit{ousia}' and as that which 'proclaims the hidden \textit{ousia}'.\textsuperscript{22} Quoting the Damascene, the Council makes a careful distinction between four related terms:

It should be known that the energy (\textit{energeia}) is one thing, that which energizes (\textit{to energitikon}) is another, that which is energized (\textit{to energima}) is another, and he who energizes (\textit{ho energon}) is yet another. Thus the energy is the active and essential movement that proceeds from a nature (\textit{physis}); that which energizes is the nature from which the energy proceeds; that which is energized is the consequence (\textit{apotelesma}) of the energy; he who energizes is the person (\textit{hypostasis}) that uses the energy.\textsuperscript{23}

In the case of God, the nature or \textit{physis} from which the divine energy proceeds is the essence (\textit{ousia}) of God, while the \textit{hypostasis} using the energy is in this instance threefold, since the persons of the Trinity act always together. The 'consequence' of the energy, the \textit{energima}, is the effect of God's activity in the created world. Thus there is a significant difference between the \textit{energeia} and the \textit{energima}: the \textit{energima}, as the consequence of God's action, forms part of the created order, but the energy which brings that consequence to pass is itself uncreated and eternal. It is possible that earlier Greek Fathers, in certain passages where they speak about God's energies, mean simply the created effects of the divine activity; but in later Patristic theology a clear distinction is drawn

\textsuperscript{20}Karmiris, op. cit., p. 408.
\textsuperscript{22}Synodical Tome of 1351, §5 22, 26 (Karmiris, pp. 387, 389).
\textsuperscript{23}Synodical Tome of 1351, §11 (Karmiris, p. 381), citing John of Damascus, \textit{De fdi. orth.}, iii, 15 (MPG, xcv, col. 1048a). John adds that some authors \textit{energeia} and \textit{energima} are used interchangeably.

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between the created effect and the uncreated *energeia* that causes it and maintains it in being.\textsuperscript{24}

On the basis of the three terms 'essence', 'hypostasis' and 'energy', it is possible to mark out three different levels of union within or with God. First, there exists a *henosis kat ousian*, a union in essence, between the three divine persons of the Trinity, each of whom is *homoousios*, 'one in essence' or 'consubstantial', with the other two. Secondly, there exists a *henosis kath hypostasin*, a hypostatic union, between the two natures of the incarnate Christ. Thirdly, there exists a *henosis kat energeian*, a union 'according to energy', between God and the saints. In the first union, three distinct persons are united so as to form one single *ousia*. In the second union, the reverse takes place: two distinct *ousiai* or natures are united within a single person. The third type of union, whereby a multiplicity of human persons is united with God, is in its turn different from the two preceding. It does not bring about either a single *ousia* or a single hypostasis, since each of the human persons united with God retains his or her *ousia* as a human being and his or her hypostatic distinctiveness. Yet there is none the less a direct and unmediated union, since the deified human creature participates fully and entirely in the uncreated energy of the Trinity.

In making this distinction between the 'essential', the 'hypostatic' and the 'energetic' forms of union, St Gregory Palamas and the spiritual tradition for which he is the spokesman are seeking to affirm the possibility of true mystical union between God and man, while avoiding pantheism and safeguarding the full personhood of each human being. Although deified by the uncreated energies, the saint retains his own essence as a created being. His created *ousia* is permeated and transfigured by the fire of the Divinity; yet, though 'a god by grace', he does not become God by essence and nature. Equally he retains his *hypostasis* or distinctive personal identity, which grows transparent but is not swallowed up in the abyss of God's omnipotence. The mystical experience is a union without confusion – a meeting of 'I' and 'Thou', an encounter between persons, not an annihilation of the human partner; and this continues to be the case, however close the 'I' draws to the 'Thou', however much a part of the 'Thou' the 'I' is known to be. In the words of the Macarian Homilies, 'Peter remains Peter, Paul remains Paul, and Philip remains Philip; each continues in his own nature and person, although filled with the Spirit.'\textsuperscript{26}

All this, and much more besides, the Orthodox Church affirms through its teaching on the divine energies. Man participates in God's energies but never in his essence, and so the vital distinction between Creator and creature is preserved; yet these energies are God himself, and so man is indeed meeting his Creator face to face, in unmediated communion,

\textsuperscript{24}On the heretical consequences that can follow from a refusal to allow for this distinction, see the Synodical Tome of 1351, §26 (Karmiris, p. 389).
\textsuperscript{26}Hom. xv, 10.
so far as this is possible for the creature to do. To quote St Gregory Palamas once more:

He manifests himself in a sense, and yet he does not manifest himself; we grasp him with our intellect, and yet we do not grasp him; we participate in him, and yet he remains beyond all participation.  
Those who are worthy enjoy union with God the cause of all . . . He remains wholly within himself and yet dwells wholly within us, making us share, not in his nature, but in his glory and radiance.  

The Divine Energies and the Holy Trinity

Thus we distinguish in God his essence, which is one; and the divine persons or hypostases, which are three; and the uncreated energy or energies, which are both one and many, proceeding from and manifesting the essence from which they are inseparable. Our doctrine of the Trinity must be worked out always in the context of these three levels or terms of reference, and great care must be taken to ensure that the different levels are not confused. If, for example, we overlook the distinction between essence and energy, we shall not be able to fix any clear line of demarcation between the procession of the three persons and the creation of the world; both will be regarded equally as acts of the divine nature.

Two points in particular call for clarification, the one relating to the Incarnation and the other to the Holy Spirit:

(i) It is sometimes asked: On Palamite principles, was it the divine energies that became incarnate? Indeed not. The incarnate Christ transmits to us the life, glory or energies of God; yet it was neither the divine energies nor the divine essence that became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, but the second person of the Trinity, the hypostasis of the pre-eternal Logos. The incarnate Christ possesses as God a divine energy and will, and as man he possesses a human energy and will, but in neither case is the energy to be identified with his hypostasis.

(ii) Again, it is objected: Why speak of energies at all? Cannot everything that St Gregory Palamas seeks to express through the abstract and non-personal term ‘energy’ be expressed more effectively in concrete and personal terms by talking about the Holy Spirit? If the energies indicate God with us, God immanent in the world and entering into direct contact with man, is this not precisely the role ascribed traditionally to the Spirit? To this it can be answered that St Gregory does indeed envisage a special bond between the divine energies and the Paraclete, for he speaks repeatedly of the energies as ‘the grace of the Holy Spirit’. But at the same time it is necessary to differentiate between the hypostasis of the Spirit and the charismata or gifts of grace that he bestows; that is, between his personal existence, which is distinctive to himself, and the energy or

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28 On participation in God, quoted in Meyendorff, Introduction, p. 294.
29 Triads, I, iii, 23.
activity that he shares with the other two divine persons. Statements about grace or energy cannot simply be translated, without further adaptation, into statements about the Spirit.

The Problem of the Divine Simplicity

The Orthodox theology of the divine energies is often viewed with reserve in the West, more especially by Thomist thinkers. In the first place, it has been argued that the essence–energies distinction, while possessing some validity on the level of epistemology, should not be projected onto that of metaphysics. According to this line of thought, St. Gregory and the 14th-century Councils of Constantinople were right to insist, in common with earlier Patristic tradition, that our knowledge of God remains always incomplete, and that there is an aspect of God’s being that remains for ever inaccessible to our human understanding, even in the Age to Come; but they were wrong to externalize this limitation in man’s understanding and to treat it as a distinction within God himself. To this it must be answered that the Orthodox tradition does indeed regard the distinction in objective and not merely subjective terms. The distinction is a real one, a primatiki diakrisis, and not merely a notional one, a diakrisis kat’ epinoian. The 1351 Council openly asserts that the taxis or distinction of essence and energies exists, ‘not only from our viewpoint’, but ‘in the natural order itself’, that is, in the being of God. At the same time, it is of course axiomatic for Orthodox theology that we have no direct knowledge of God’s inner being or ousia. All that we can dimly comprehend is his action and self-revelation ad extra, and so when speaking about things divine we can never really pass beyond the level of epistemology to that of pure metaphysics; we are speaking always of God as he discloses himself to us, not of God as he is in himself. Nevertheless, we believe that this self-disclosure is a true indication of God’s eternal being, in so far as any indication can ever be given. If we did not believe this, how could we pass from an ‘economic’ doctrine of the Trinity to a doctrine of eternal personal distinctions within the Trinity? We are doing no more and no less than this when we affirm, on the basis of our knowledge of God—that is, of God’s self-revelation—that there is also within His being an eternal distinction between essence and energy. All human language about God is inadequate, but it is certainly less misleading to affirm the distinction than to deny it.

A second and more fundamental objection concerns the question of the divine simplicity—the third of the seven points formulated at the 1351 Council. It has been argued that the essence–energies distinction turns God into a composite being. At the very outset of the 14th-century Hesychast controversy, this charge was brought against St. Gregory...

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38 This line of thought is ably developed by Dr. Rowan Williams, in his unpublished Oxford D.Phil. thesis on the theology of Vladimir Lossky.
39 See Krivosheine, *The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas*, p. 32.
40 Synodical Tome of 1351, §28 (Karmiris, p. 390), citing St. Basil.
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Palamas by his chief critic, Barlaam the Calabrian, who accused him of 'dithesism'.\textsuperscript{41} This is a delicate and obscure question, which cannot be discussed here with any fullness. But the following should be noted:

(1) St Gregory Palamas and the 14th-century Councils were well aware of their obligation to uphold the doctrine of divine simplicity, and they specifically repudiate all suggestion that God's nature could be 'composite' (\textit{synthetos}). They insist that the divine essence and the divine energies, while distinct, are altogether inseparable. There is between them 'a union without confusion, a distinction without division'.\textsuperscript{42} The energies 'remain always inseparable from the divine essence, coexisting with it from all eternity and indivisibly united to it'.\textsuperscript{43} The essence-energies distinction is similar to that between, for example, the soul and its faculties: here a differentiation is made within an object, without thereby destroying its unity. But Palamas is uneasy about this and any other analogy taken from the created order; God is unique, and therefore the essence-energies distinction is \textit{sui generis}, 'God-befitting' and ineffable.

(2) As Christians we believe not just in one God but in God who is one in three. It is perhaps helpful to speak rather of his 'indivisibility' than of his 'simplicity'. Our God is not the undifferentiated monad of the Platonists, but a union and communion of three persons, dwelling in each other through an unceasing movement of mutual love. His unity is an organic or organized unity, an inter-personal unity. The distinction between the divine essence and the three divine persons does not overthrow the simplicity of God; equally this simplicity is not destroyed by the essence-energies distinction. As St Gregory Palamas writes in his Confession of Faith, accepted at the 1351 Council: 'God does not lose his simplicity either because of the division and distinction of the hypostases, or because of the division and multiplicity of the powers and energies.'\textsuperscript{44}

(3) The energies are not an intermediary between God and man, not a 'thing' that exists apart from God. They are, on the contrary, \textit{God himself}, God in action, God in his self-revelation, God as he enters into unmediated communion with his creatures. Furthermore, the energies are not a part or division of God, but they are severally and individually the whole God, \textit{God in his entirety}. Just as the whole God is present without diminution or subdivision in each of the three persons, so he is present entire and undivided in each and all of the divine energies. On this point St Gregory Palamas could not be more explicit and categorical. 'Each power or energy is God himself', he writes;\textsuperscript{45} 'God is wholly present in each of his divine energies';\textsuperscript{46} 'that which is made manifest and accessible to man's intellect

\textsuperscript{41}Synodical Tome of 1351, §2 (Karmiris, p. 375).
\textsuperscript{42}See the second anathema against Barlaam and Akindynos in the \textit{Synodikon} of the Sunday of Orthodoxy (Karmiris, p. 411).
\textsuperscript{43}Synodical Tome of 1351, §26 (Karmiris, p. 386).
\textsuperscript{44}Karmiris, pp. 408-9.
\textsuperscript{45}Letter to Calpars, quoted in Meyendorf, \textit{Introduction}, p. 294.
\textsuperscript{46}Triads, III, ii, 7.
and in which he participates is not a part of God, for if that were so God would suffer division because of us."

There is, then, no synthesis or ‘compositeness’ in the Divinity. One single, living and acting God is present wholly and entirely:

—on the level of ousia, in the total simplicity of his divine being;
—on the level of hypostasis, in the threefold diversity of the divine persons;
—on the level of energieia, in the indivisible multiplicity of his creative and redemptive work.

In the words of the 1351 Council, ‘When speaking of God, we distinguish while uniting and unite while distinguishing.’

Theologoumenon or Dogma?

Is this teaching on the distinction between essence and energies regarded by Orthodoxy as no more than a theologoumenon or private theological opinion, or is it a dogma, an integral part of Holy Tradition?

The Councils of Constantinople which affirmed the distinction were local, not universal, in their external character. Although a particular one among them, and even all of them collectively, are occasionally styled ‘the ninth Ecumenical Council,’ it is normal in Orthodoxy to speak of no more than seven Ecumenical Councils. But at the same time, by a gradual process of ‘reception’, the teaching of these local Councils of Constantinople has come to be accepted by the Orthodox Catholic Church as a whole, and so has acquired an ecumenical authority. As Professor Karmiris justly observes, ‘In general it can be said that the Synod of 1351 elevated the teaching of Gregory Palamas and more widely of Hesychasm into a dogma.’ The decisions of 1351 were incorporated into the Synodikon of Orthodoxy, the solemn statement of faith appointed to be read each year on the first Sunday in Lent.

For Orthodox Christendom, therefore, the distinction between essence and energies is not merely a private speculation or an ‘optional extra’, but an indispensable part of the faith. This distinction is fundamental alike to the doctrine of the Trinity, to Christology, and to the theology of man’s sanctification and ‘divinization’ (theosis), and it is presupposed in the spiritual experience of Orthodox saints both in the past and during our own time. Since all the different parts of Holy Tradition cohere in a single whole, it is impossible to understand any aspect of Orthodox theology or spirituality without taking into account the dogma of the distinction-in-unity between the essence of God and his uncreated energies.

\(^{37}\)On participation in God, quoted in Meyendorff, Introduction, p. 294.

\(^{38}\) Synodical Tome of 1351, §29 (Karmiris, p. 391). On the problem of divine simplicity, see the brief but perceptive treatment by Krivosheine, op. cit., pp. 27–32.

\(^{39}\) For example, by Neilos of Rhodes: see Karmiris, op. cit., p. 351, note 1. The eighth Ecumenical Council, on this reckoning, is the Photian Council of 879–80.

\(^{40}\) op. cit., p. 352.