

***Inscape* October 2016**

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

GOD'S UNCREATED ENERGIES OF LOVE

Eastern Christian Theologians developed the distinction between the divine essence and God's uncreated energies. This distinction is a means of explaining how God's being is unknowable to us in his essence, and yet God does truly communicate himself to us in a new knowledge and a new participation through his uncreated energies. The *energies* are God's **mode** of existing in relationship to his created world, especially to us. Such a distinction is not often made use of in Western Christianity, where God also is believed to be absolute and essentially unknowable in his divine nature. Nevertheless, he does relate himself to the created order and so is knowable to us through his uncreated energies of love.

Eastern Christian theologians from earliest times appealed to Holy Scripture to substantiate their claims for the distinction between God's essence and his energies. They appeal to the prophet Habakkuk (approximate 600 BC) to describe God's glory, brightness, light, rays, and power that are manifested to human beings: "Eloah is coming from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His majesty veils the heavens, the earth is filled with his glory. His brightness is like the day, rays flash from his hands, that is where his power lies hidden" (Habakkuk 3:3-4).

Other references in Holy Scripture are quoted "For with Thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light" (Psalms 36:9); "Who alone has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach, and whom no man has seen, nor can see; to him be honor and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 6:16); "Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). The Logos is spoken of by the early Fathers as the divine idea and energy, showing itself in creation. As has been pointed out, the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, in their polemical writings against the Eunomians, wrote a great deal in an attempt to maintain the absolute transcendence of the unknowable essence of God and also the relationships of God to his creatures.

In their writings, the origin of their doctrine on the energies of God is evidently Trinitarian. In defense of the mystery of the Trinity and in their elucidation of it, these Cappadocians insisted on the distinction between the divine essence and the energies. Jesus Christ (against Eunomius, who denied his divinity) and the Holy Spirit truly are a part of the divine essence. All three, having a common nature, produce identical divine energies *ad extra*, outside of the Trinitarian nature of the one Godhead.

Saint Basil shows how the unapproachable and unknowable essence of God can be, however, experienced through the energies of the divine nature: "If it were possible to contemplate the divine nature itself and find out what is proper to it and what is foreign through what appears, we would be in no need at all of words or other signs for the comprehension of what is sought. But because it is higher than the understanding of the things sought, and we reason, parting from certain signs about things that evade our memory, it is of all necessity that we be conducted by the *energies* to the research of the divine nature."

Saint Basil also says: "For his (God's) energies descend down to us while his essence remains inaccessible."

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, the theologian who greatly influenced the thinking of Saint Gregory Palamas, wrote less in the context of polemics than the other two Cappadocians did and gave us a clearer doctrine of the energies of God. In using the image of Moses going up to Mount Sinai and being clothed in the cloud, Gregory writes: "I was running, as if to seize God, and thus I ascended to the mountain, and penetrated the cloud. Having got inside far from matter and material things, I gathered up into myself, as much as possible. And when I looked, with difficulty, I saw the backside of God, and this while concealed in the stone, in the Word Incarnate for our cause; and looking a little further on, not upon the first and pure nature known to itself, I mean to the Trinity and that which lies inside the first veil and is concealed by the Cherubim, but the last one, which reaches us."

Here is the basis for the favorite image of the sun emitting its rays to the earth used by Saint Gregory of Nyssa, which would be repeated by all the succeeding Eastern theologians, especially Palamas: "As the sun, according to the divine dispensation, tempering the vigor and sincerity of its rays by the intermediate air, emits to those receiving it a proportionate splendor and heat, remaining by itself unapproachable to the weakness of our nature, thus also the divine power, by a similarity to the given example, infinitely surpassing our nature and inaccessible to participation...gives to the human nature what is in her power to receive."

THE FORTHGOING OF GOD

What Palamas would simply call "energy," Pseudo-Dionysius would call by various attributes, showing how God goes forth toward his created world to share his being or unlimited perfections. Some of the Areopagite's expressions indicating God's energies are the following: God's "forthgoing" (*proodos*) or manifestations of light, moved by the Father, the "manifestation" of God, given harmoniously, the divine "illumination," or the "ray" of God (*aktina*) or the "supersubstantial ray," and finally, the "distribution" (*metadosis*).

With such language Pseudo-Dionysius preserves the distinction between God's simplicity in essence and his "manifestations" in sharing his being in uncreated love toward us human beings and the created world. This is clearly seen in his statement: "Providence and goodness are participated in by human beings, which gifts go forth from God who is in his essence outside all participation yet overflowing with liberal profusion in his uncreated energies."

The end of our human lives is to attain "mystical knowledge," the summit of God's sharing himself with us. Here we see Dionysius's understanding that God's energetic action toward us is completely gratuitous on his part. It is not we who raise ourselves to such a state, but God's freely given energies which work in us. We must offer NO obstacle to this action. In one of the most famous passages in the Dionysian corpus, we see how holy minds come to enjoy a union devoid of confusion, yet enter into a true participation with God's action as illuminator: "Leave behind the sense and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that thou mayest arise, by unknowing, toward the union, as far as is attainable, with him who transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and of all things, thou mayest be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness."

This union by participation is a mystery. How can God share his being with us human beings in such a way that we really participate in God's divinity without at the same time becoming God? This is the mystery of *theosis*, the divinization process of grace (the **Gift** of God Himself) whereby the Christian is brought into a loving union with God through the divine

energies, and still God retains his complete superessential being. Part of this mystery of how individual human persons do really experience the full divinity and yet each person experiences God in his energies according to different proportions is stated by Dionysius: "It is all the divinity completely which is participated by each participator, and by none in any part."

To maintain such an antinomy Dionysius gives us a principle repeated often by Palamas whenever he seeks to reconcile apparent contradictions, at least that which seems to be such to the human mind: "Divine things should be understood in a God-fitting manner." It is this which theologians must ever keep in mind that alone will resolve all apparent contradictions and justify all antinomies in divine things.

No distinction humanly made can adequately describe the distinction between God's simplicity and essence and his participable self-giving in his energies. Let us look more closely at the system that Saint Gregory Palamas developed from his writings of the Greek Fathers as mentioned above, especially from the writings of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus and Pseudo-Dionysius.

PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S LIFE

We have already pointed out how Gregory Palamas insisted with all his predecessors on the unknowability of God in regard to his essence. Yet he strongly asserts that we do indeed know and participate in God through Jesus Christ. "But there is one fact which stands distinct with reference to this transcendence: the complete and unadulterated existence in us of Jesus."

We are at a crucial node of Palamas's thought when we approach the question of the knowability and participability of God in and through his energies. The intensity of his concern for this problem of the possibility of the Christian's having a share in God's nature by participation in his energies is shown by the vigorous manner in which he tackles the question: "Since a human person can participate in God and since the superessential essence of God is absolutely unparticipable, there is a certain something between the unparticipable essence and the participants which permits them to participate in God. And if you suppress that which is between the unparticipable God and the participants...oh, what a void!—you separate us from God by destroying the bond and establishing a great uncrossable abyss between God on the one hand and creation and the governing creatures on the other.

We must then seek another God who possesses not only his own proper end within himself, his own proper energy and his own proper Godhead, but one who is a good God—for thus it will no longer suffice for him to exist only for the contemplation of himself—not only perfect, but surpassing all fullness; thus, in effect, when, in his goodness, he will wish to do good, he will be able to do it; he will be not only immobile, but he will put himself into motion; he will thus be present for all with his manifestations and his creative and providential energies; in a word, we must seek a God in whom we can have a share in one way or another, so that by participating in him, each one of us may receive, in the manner proper to him and according to the analogy of participation, being, life and deification."

Every "essence" has to have an "energy" if it is to be more than merely "possible." Palamas combined both meanings and applied the term to God's manifestations in the created order: "God has real existence in the world insofar as he is manifested to the world. This is another way of saying that God has real existence in the world insofar as he creates the world, i.e., gives it existence by giving it a share in his own real existence in and through the "energies."

The energies are manifestations of God. Still, even though they are many and diverse, they are *one* in God. Hence God's simplicity is maintained, but not at the price of isolating him from contact with his creation. These manifestations are "God coming forth"—God insofar as he

does not hide in his unknowable essence, but shows himself to us human beings. The Eastern Orthodox greeting—“Christ is among us! He is and ever shall be!”

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace not evil, to give you a good hope at the end. Then you shall call upon me and pray to me. And when you shall seek me with all your heart, you shall find me, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

Palamas, as has been said above, works out a doctrine of God’s essence and his uncreated energies in order to preserve the basic truth of Christian revelation, that we human beings have been in God’s eternal act of love ordered to participate in his very own being.

For Eastern Christian thought, the energies signify an exterior manifestation of the Trinity. God is not determined by any of his attributes and all determinations are logically posterior to his essence. When God is described as love, life, truth, etc., we understand the energies as subsequent to the very being of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the energies, as distinct from the essence, is the basis of all mystical experience. God, who is inaccessible in his essence, is present in his energies “as a mirror,” according to Palamas’s saying, remaining invisible in that which he is. He is wholly unknowable in his essence, yet he is revealed in his energies.

This doctrine makes it possible to understand how the Trinity can remain incommunicable in essence, and yet dwelling within us according to the promise of Christ. When one receives the deifying energies, one receives the indwelling of the Holy Trinity, which is inseparable from its natural energies. The distinction made between the essence and energies makes it possible to preserve the real meaning of the words “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

In the divinization process, we are by grace made participators of what God is by nature, except that we remain creatures. Saint Symeon the New Theologian (+1022) insists in his writings, which greatly influenced Saint Gregory Palamas, what we are made gods by participation, by the total gift of grace.

The energies of God are uncreated divine activity. The divine essence, as has been said repeatedly, is inaccessible to us human beings. God, however, does communicate himself. He can be known experientially and we can reach him in true union or divinization. Palamas’s distinction between the essence of God and the energies or divine operations which are forces proper to and inseparable from God’s essence in which he goes forth from himself, manifests and communicated himself, is a recognition of the fact that God is both totally inaccessible and at the same time accessible.

We must open ourselves to God’s uncreated energies that are always “gracing” us at every moment in each event. This is the mystery of the *synergy* (a working together) that the Eastern Fathers stressed in their development of *praxis*, or the ascetical life. Orthodoxy is the right or proper belief and worship, while Orthopraxis is the right or proper way of life that expresses the Orthodox faith and worship.

Orthodoxia: From Greek *orthos*, “right,” “correct,” and *doxa*, “praise,” “glory,” It means specifically “right teaching” that brings right glory to God since it corresponds to God’s revealed truth.

Orthopraxis: From Greek *orthos*, “right,” “correct,” and *praxis*, “living.” For Eastern Christians right teaching must also be lived out. There can be no intellectual assent given in faith to a revealed truth together with a style of living that does not admit of a faithful response to live according to God’s truth. TRUTH IS A PERSON! “I AM the Way...the Truth...and the Life!”

We may be tainted by sin and our fallen state inherited from our ancestors, yet we have total freedom locked within our consciousness. This is the same freedom that exists within the Trinitarian Community of Love.

We can arise and go back to our Father (through Jesus Christ and his risen Spirit) in a *metanoia*, in a conversion and surrender of ourselves to God. When we do cooperate, the result is a divine state produced within our inner being. “It is when you have in your soul the divined state that you really possess God within yourself; and the true divine state is love toward God, and it survives only by practice of all the divine commandments.”

DIVINIZED THROUGH ENERGIES

We are divinized and reach our fulfillment of being a child of God through the divine energies or grace. “God in his completeness deifies those who are worthy by uniting himself with them, not through the hypostasis—that belonged to Christ alone—not through the essence, but through the uncreated energies.” Thus, although Palamas uses the term “grace” with the same flexibility and richness as did the other Greek Fathers, his primary definition of grace would probably be: God, pouring himself out to us by his divine energies in order that he might unite us with him by making us true children of God.

The primary meaning of grace (which admits of an infinity of growth) centers around God’s energetic process of divinizing us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, the image of the Father and yet the image according to whom we have all been created.

This process of purification and sanctification through which we grow in participating in the nature of the Trinitarian life admits of a continual growth into infinity. The very nature of grace as God’s Trinitarian life within us presupposes continued growth. To accept the divine energies as grace, therefore, is to accept the necessity of constantly moving toward the Trinity. Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote: “**The grace of the Holy Spirit is given to everyone with the understanding that there is to be an augmenting and increase of what is received.**”

Palamas’s holistic approach is refreshing in the light of biblical research and modern theological approaches to an Incarnational view of grace as **God-for-us** humans in all relationships, not merely God toward a human being as a mind. We are, therefore, according to Palamas, made according to God’s image and likeness precisely in our entire make-up: body, soul and spirit. In our total openness to God in his “graceful” energies on all our levels of being, we fulfill the image and likeness as the crown of all God’s works, as the rulers and faithful stewards and royal priests of the cosmos. “But you are a chosen people, ministers to the kingdom, a holy people, a congregation redeemed to proclaim the glories of him who has called you out of darkness to his marvelous light. You who in the past were not considered a people, but who are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but who now have mercy poured out upon you” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Because we are opened to God’s grace on all levels, including our bodily relationships to God and the cosmos, we are considered by Palamas as superior even to the angels: “Whereas the angels are appointed to serve the Creator and have as their only mission to be under authority (it is not being given to them to rule over inferior beings unless they are sent to do this by the Preserver of all things), we are preordained, not only to be ruled, but to rule over all that which is on the earth.”

If God’s grace operates also on body relationships, then the body also can experience repercussions of God’s activities. This is precisely what Palamas insisted upon as he defended the ancient Eastern Christian form of mysticism called *hesychasm*, with its holistic approach to prayer, including the use of bodily postures and breathing techniques to aid the contemplative to meet the indwelling Trinity in the deification process.

Hesychasm: This refers to the type of “desert” spirituality that started in the fourth century with the development in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian deserts of various forms of monasticism. Men and women lived a way of life made up of intense ascetical practices of solitude, the guarding (nepsis) of one’s thoughts, and purification of the “heart” by fasting, vigils, and incessant prayer which included synchronizing one’s breath with the name of Jesus. The goal was to attain transformation by the uncreated energies of God-Trinity into their divinized true selves as in their humanity they fulfilled God’s eternal plan to make all of us in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:26).

Hesychasm is a form of Eastern Christian mysticism that has its roots in the spirituality of the Fathers of the desert, especially that which developed from the Macarian school of the heart, as further developed on Mount Sinai and in the fourteenth century on Mount Athos. It places great stress on ascetical practices and an interior attentiveness in controlling the movements of the “heart” so as to reach a state of inner tranquility called *hesychia*, which in Greek means rest or tranquility. With all of our human being integrated, body, soul, and spirit, we are able to be attentive to God’s commands and wishes as we become freed and integrated by the divinizing power of the Holy Spirit to do always what most pleases God.

THE TABORIC LIGHT

Christ always shone during his earthly life with the Trinitarian energy, the Taboric light, yet generally it remained invisible for most persons who saw him. The Transfiguration was not a phenomenon limited in time and space. No change took place at the moment as far as Christ was concerned, not even in his human nature, but a change took place in the consciousness of the three apostles (Peter, James, John) who suddenly for some measure of limited time had the ability to see the Master as he was (as much as they could bear), always resplendent in eternal light “This then is the good news which we have heard from him and declare to you, that GOD IS LIGHT...” (1 John 1:5). The Holy Spirit remains invisible to us, yet is constantly manifesting himself in light through his sanctifying, deifying powers.

We become divinized as we become filled with the light of Tabor of the Holy Spirit in the degree that we make ourselves open to what is always present in the Trinitarian, uncreated energies through asceticism. Divinization is not a one-sided act of God but rather an intimate, personalized relationship between the human individual person and the Trinitarian persons. This is brought through a mutual cooperation between God and us human beings. The goal of the ascetical life is not to deaden the bodily passions, but rather to dispose ourselves to acquire God’s gift of a new energy which will allow both body and mind to share in the life of God’s divinizing grace.

As we have said above, the Fathers made the distinction between the knowable and unknowable in God that seems somehow to be overcome in the mystical union that is called “deification” by grace in which “man transcends his nature. Being mortal, he becomes immortal, being corruptible, he becomes incorruptible; having a short life, he receives life eternal; being man, he becomes God,” as Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote.

It is Jesus Christ alone who has united divinity and humanity in his *hypostasis*, or one-personhood. Thus in his glorified human-divine life he communicates to all baptized in his name the Divine Energy or Sanctifying Grace. For Saint Gregory Palamas, there is no other grace worthy of the name; all else is natural. The glorified hypostasis of Christ becomes prolonged through his Church (He is the Head and we are the Members of his mystical body). Thus Christ becomes the divine and uncreated life of the individual Christian. The Church is a

real, visible, divinized community. One member living in Christ lives also with one's fellow Christians in whom Christ also lives.

Palamas insists upon a true knowledge of God in his energies: "He who contemplates God, not through the medium of a foreign symbol, but through a natural symbol, has seen God." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

In Palamas's use of the Taboric Light as a symbol of the highest transforming power of the Trinitarian energies working on the whole human person, we can see his reliance on the writings of Saint Symeon the New Theologian. Both Palamas and Symeon taught that such an immersion into the Trinitarian life admits of ecstatic moments in which God is seen as brilliant light within the human darkness. The two areas, although separate, namely, God's ineffable beauty and glory and our sinfulness that still needs healing, coexist in such an experience, as we read (actual we should pray through these words) one of Saint Symeon's mystical hymns (#25). "But, O what intoxication of light, O what movements of fire! O what swirlings of the flame in me, miserable one that I am, coming from you and your glory! The glory I know it and I say it is your Holy Spirit, who has the same nature with you and the same honor, O Word;...I thank you that you have made me worthy to know, however little it may be, the power of your divinity. I thank you that you, even when I was sitting in darkness, revealed yourself to me, you enlightened me, you granted me to see the light of your countenance that is unbearable to all...You appeared as light, illuminating me completely from your total light. And I became light in the night, I was found in the midst of darkness. Neither the darkness extinguished your light completely, nor did the light dissipate the visible darkness, but they were together, yet completely separate, without confusion, far from each other, surely, not at all mixed. So I am in the light, yet I am found in the middle of the darkness. So I am in the darkness, yet still I am in the middle of the light."

[I have retyped both manuscripts of Father Maloney's books, *The Mystic of Fire and Light* and *Saint Symeon's Hymns of Divine Love*. These are available in one volume from Stillpoint Contemplative Ministries]

For Eastern Christian mystics there was a real vision of the Taboric light that occurred at various times, dependent upon one's growth in compunction and humility. But even when the vision of such a light was not present, the light presence of the Trinity still shone in the strong, spiritual awareness of the indwelling Trinity. It is a contemplation that allows the intelligence to remain completely simple, totally integrated into God, stripped of all thoughts and bathed in the light of God. Symeon describes this inner light: "The intelligence cannot find any other object, but the light on which it has been fixed...It rests then in the abyss of the divine light which allows it to perceive nothing outside of itself. Indeed, this is what is meant: 'God is light' and the supreme light. For those who reach this, it is the repose of all contemplation."

Such a light to the intellect is a prelude to the full glory that awaits Christians with perpetual joy and drives out all passionate, disturbing thoughts and gives them the vision, even now, that the Saviour in the Sermon of the Mount promised when **He said**: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

We progressively become more transformed through the knowledge and contemplative experience of knowing God and of being known and loved by him. Jesus Christ renders us already through his Spirit to be risen from the dead. He vivifies us and gives himself to us in the most intimate union that will know no end of growth.

Such is the meaning of the ultimate stages of theology in which the contemplative, purified of all self-love, enters into a living relationship of continued communion with the Holy Trinity. We receive knowledge in the most apophatic sense: knowledge not by our own knowing, but knowledge infused by a mystical union with the indwelling Trinity.

In a word, to be invaded by God is to allow God to invade the world by our being present to him, who is everywhere present as loving, personalized, uncreated energies of love. It is to become so emptied of our nothingness and sinfulness and brokenness that the Trinity may

pour out its richness of life upon the whole universe through our intimate union with the Trinity. It is not only to find the Trinity living within us, but it is to make the world around us present to that same immanently present and loving Trinity.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian expresses in Hymn 27, the absolute necessity of living a life in the Risen Spirit of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ:

Do not say that it is impossible to receive the Divine Spirit.
 Do not say without Him you can be saved.
 Do not say, therefore, that one can possess Him without knowing it!
 Do not say that God is not able to be seen by men.
 Do not say that men do not see the divine light
 or that this is impossible in these present times!
 This is a thing never impossible, friends,
 but on the contrary it is very possible to those who desire it,
 but only to those who lead a life purified of passions
 and have purified, spiritual eyes.

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but he shall find for himself the light of life” (John 8: 12).

In the Light of our Transfigured Lord and the Trinitarian Uncreated Energies of Love,
Father John Michael Zboyovski