

Introduction: The Two Versions of Palamas' *Epistula* III to Akindynos

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ABSTRACT

A very brief introduction to the historical context, the twofold transmission and the theological relevance of Palamas' *Epistula* III to Akindynos is given as well as an overview over the current state of research, thus sketching the background of the questions the following articles deal with.

The doctrine of the uncreated divine energies and the Palamitic distinction of essence (οὐσία) and energy (ἐνέργεια) in God is one of the main controversial subjects between Orthodox and Western Christianity until today.¹ Some theologian call it 'the hidden stumbling block of ecumenical encounters',² because the question of divine energies has a great impact on classical theological issues such as soteriology and ecclesiology.

From the historical point of view, this discussion leads into the 14th century and into the environment of the hesychast controversy.³ To legitimate the

¹ See John P. Manoussakis, 'Theophany and indication: reconciling Augustinian and Palamite aesthetics', *Modern Theology* 26 (2010), 76-89; Norman Russel, 'Theosis and Gregory Palamas: continuity or doctrinal change?', *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006), 357-79; Anna M. Williams, 'Light from Byzantium: The Significance of Palamas' Doctrine of Theosis', *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994), 483-96, 483; Britta Müller-Schauenburg, *Religiöse Erfahrung, Spiritualität und theologische Argumentation. Gotteslehre und Gottebenbildlichkeit bei Gregorios Palamas*, Forum Systematik 43 (Stuttgart, 2011), 161-282; Reinhard Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie 78 (Göttingen, 1997); Dorothea Wendebourg, *Geist oder Energie. Zur Frage der inner-göttlichen Verankerung des christlichen Lebens in der byzantinischen Theologie*, Münchener Monographien zur historischen und systematischen Theologie 4 (München, 1980); Sebastia Janeras, 'San Gregorio Palamas y el hesicasmo', *Dialogo ecumenico* 43 (2008), 253-76.

² Nikolai Krokosch, *Ekklesiologie und Palamismus. Der verborgene Stolperstein der katholisch-orthodoxen Ökumene* (unpublished doctoral thesis; Munich, 2004).

³ For an overview over the Palamite controversy see Duncan Reid, 'Hesychasm and theological method in fourteenth century Byzantium', *OS* 46 (1997), 15-24; Jean Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, Patristica Sorbonensia 3 (Paris, 1959), 65-155. A detailed reconstruction of the events is given by Juan Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas. Enquête historique, avec traduction et commentaire de quatre traités édités récemment. Volume II: Commentaire historique*, Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense. Études et documents 51 (Leuven, 2006).

assertion that hesychast monks could actually participate in the divine reality, Gregory Palamas, as the head of the movement, spoke of the uncreated divine energies that cause the divinisation (θέωσις) of human beings without affecting, however, the intangible essence of God.⁴

Among the opponents of Palamas, Gregory Akindynos is less known. But just as Barlaam of Calabria⁵ and Nikephoros Gregoras⁶, he is a very interesting personality as well, particularly because he mutated from a pupil and friend into a fierce adversary of Palamas.⁷ Thus, for a detailed reconstruction of the historical and theological aspects of the hesychast controversy, Akindynos deserves closer attention.⁸ It is therefore the purpose of a recently established research group at the university of Berne to shed some more light on Akindynos and his work, on his relationship to Palamas and, particularly, on his theology.⁹

⁴ On the essence-energy-distinction within the thought of Palamas, see J. Meyendorff, *Introduction* (1959), 279-310; *id.*, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox spirituality* (Crestwood, 1974); Robert E. Sinkewicz, 'Gregory Palamas', in Carmelo Giuseppe Conticello, Vassa Conticello (eds), *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition II*, Corpus Christianorum (Turnhout, 2002), 131-88; Thomas L. Anastos, 'Gregory Palamas's Radicalization of the Essence, Energies and Hypostasis Model of God', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38 (1993), 335-49. Marie E. Cazabonne, 'Grégoire Palamas (1296-1359) moine, théologien, pasteur (2): les grands axes de sa pensée (suite)', *Coll-Cis* 62 (2000), 85-99; Jacques Lison, 'L'énergie des trois hypostases divines selon Grégoire Palamas', *Science et esprit* 44 (1992), 67-77; Gerhard Richter, 'Ansätze und Motive für die Lehre des Gregorios Palamas von den göttlichen Energien', *OS* 31 (1982), 281-96; Eugenia Toni, 'Gregorio Palamas, elementi di liturgia e teologia in una lettura tipologica, mistica e allegorica delle omelie del "dottore dell'esperienza"', *Nicolaus* 37 (2010), 313-37; A. Torrance, 'Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers', *VigChr* 63 (2009), 47-70; Daniel Vigne, 'La théologie apophatique de Saint Grégoire Palamas', *BLE* 106 (2005), 349-64; Jeremy D. Wilkins, "'The image of this highest love": the trinitarian analogy in Gregory Palamas's "Capita 150"', *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 47 (2003), 383-412.

⁵ On the controversy between Palamas and Barlaam, see Antonis Fyrgos (ed.), *Barlaam Calabro: l'uomo, l'opera, il pensiero: atti del Convegno internazionale, Reggio Calabria, Seminara 10-12 dicembre* (Rome, 2001); Antonis Fyrgos, *Barlaam Calabro, Opere contro i latini. Introduzione, storia e testi. Edizione critica, traduzione e indici*, Studi e Testi 347/8 (Rome, 1998); *id.*, *Dalla controversia palamitica alla polemica esicastica (con un'edizione critica delle Epistole greche di Barlaam)* (Rome, 2005), 67-97; Robert E. Sinkewicz, 'A new interpretation for the first episode in the controversy between Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Palamas', *JTS* 31 (1980), 489-500; Reinhard Flogaus, 'Palamas and Barlaam revisited: a reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast controversy of 14th century Byzantium', *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998), 1-32.

⁶ On Gregoras, see Edmund Fryde, *The Early Palaeologian Renaissance (1261- c.1360)*, The Medieval Mediterranean 27 (Leiden, 2000), 357-73; and the article of Dimitris Moschos below, pp. 547-554.

⁷ Juan Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas. Enquête historique, avec traduction et commentaire de quatre traités édités récemment. Volume II: Commentaire historique*, Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense. Études et documents 51 (Leuven, 2006); *id.*, 'Gregorio Akindynos', in C.G. Conticello and V. Conticello, *La théologie byzantine II* (2002), 189-256.

⁸ See Katharina Heyden, 'Gregorios Akindynos: Der verkannte Vermittler im Streit um die göttliche Energie (nicht nur) im 14. Jahrhundert', *OS* 62 (2013), 193-218.

⁹ For more detailed information see <www.akindynos.unibe.ch>. One purpose of this research project will be to establish a synoptic edition of both versions of *Epistula* III that includes also

Being a pupil and friend of both, Barlaam and Palamas, Akindynos acted as an intermediary in the first phase of the Palamitic controversy. Although he was attracted by the thinking of Barlaam who used Aristotelian logic to justify orthodox theology towards the Latins, in his letters and works Akindynos defended the hesychasts against Barlaam's accusation of Messalianism.¹⁰ It is important to bear in mind that Akindynos defined himself as a hesychast¹¹ and therefore argued for Palamas and the hesychast movement at the court of Constantinople. But then, in the year 1341 things changed. Two synods were held in Constantinople in the summer of that year.¹² On June 10th a synod presided by the emperor Andronikos III condemned Barlaam, resolving, however, just the personal question, but not the theological debate. This was held off at a later moment. But only few days after the synod the emperor died unexpectedly, and the dispute obviously did not come off. After some turbulent weeks Barlaam left the city. Then, a second synod was held in July or August of the same year 1341¹³ which condemned Akindynos as a Barlaamite. What has happened in the meantime? When and why did Akindynos change allegiance and become the leader of the anti-Palamite party?

The crucial document in this regard is the *Epistula* III of Palamas to Akindynos. In this letter, written in the spring of 1341 from Thessaloniki, Palamas exposes his doctrine of divine energies and tries to demonstrate that the accusations of Barlaam are absolutely unjustified. But obviously, the letter could not satisfy Akindynos. On the contrary: in a report to the patriarch Kalekas, written two years later, Akindynos admits that just this letter was the flashpoint for him to turn away from Palamas and to criticize his doctrine of divine energies which, according to Akindynos, were not in harmony with the teachings of the fathers.¹⁴ The content and the arguments of *Epistula* III seem to be therefore the key to our understanding of the disruption between Akindynos and Palamas in the summer of 1341.

the refutation-commentary of Akindynos. We hope that this synopsis will facilitate a detailed reconstruction of the letter's transmission and the theological differences between Palamas and Akindynos.

¹⁰ See esp. Akindynos, *Epistulae* 8, 10, ed. Angela Constantinides Hero, CFHB 21 (Washington, 1983), 27-9.37-55; K. Heyden, 'Gregorios Akindynos' (2013), 193-218; J. Meyendorff, *Introduction* (1959), 68-74.

¹¹ See Akindynos, *Epistula* 10, ed. A. Constantinides Hero (Washington, 1983), 39-55, Report § 4, ed. Juan S. Nadal Cañellas, in C.G. Conticello and V. Conticello (eds), *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition II*, Corpus Christianorum (Turnhout, 2002), 257-313, 260. On the question of Akindynos' hesychasm see J. Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance* (2006), 89-103.

¹² See J. Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance* (2006), 177-232; J. Meyendorff, *Introduction* (1959), 65-94.

¹³ The exact date of this second synod is not sure, see the discussion in J. Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance* (2006), 205 with footnote 648.

¹⁴ Edition and Spanish translation of this report by Juan S. Nadal Cañellas, in C.G. Conticello and V. Conticello (eds), *La théologie byzantine* (2002), 257-314.

The problem, however, is that *Epistula* III exists in two versions which differ substantially in length, content and tone. On the one hand, we have a well-established version that was transmitted together with other works of Palamas and was thus edited by Meyendorff and Chrestou.¹⁵ The less known version, on the other hand, we find in the 14th century Codex Monacensis 223 together with a refutation of Akindynos.¹⁶ This version is much shorter and emphasizes other points than the other.

The following articles discuss the question: Which of the letter's two versions is the one Akindynos read in the spring of 1341? Or in other words: Which version was the reason für Akindynos to turn away from Palamas and his hesychast theology? Until now, researchers have formulated two alternative theories to solve the problem of the two versions of *Epistula* III: Chrestou/Meyendorff considered the longer version to be the original one and accused Akindynos of falsifying the authentic document.¹⁷ Nadal, on the contrary, declared the Monacensus-version to be the authentic one and suspected, on his part, Palamas to have published afterwards a revised and therefore falsified version.¹⁸

These theories will be discussed in the following articles: Theodoros Alexopoulos presents the version edited by Chrestou arguing in favour of the authenticity of this version defending thus in the main the theory of Meyendorff. Renate Burri examines the problem of the two versions from a codicological point of view, focussing mainly on Monacensis graecus 223. Katharina Heyden responds to Theodoros Alexopoulos' arguments proposing however another, new approach to solve the problem of *Epistula* III, that takes into account Renate Burri's considerations as well as the difference between authenticity and originality. Finally, Dimitrios Moschos deals with Nikephoros Gregoras, the successor of Akindynos as the leader of the anti-Palamites compared to whom Akindynos appears as a very traditional and conservative thinker.

¹⁵ Palamas, *Epistula* III ad Acindynum, ed. Iohannes Meyendorff and Panhagios Chrestou, *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα τόμος Α'* (Thessalonici, 1962), 296-312.

¹⁶ Edition and French translation of the letter (without Akindynos' refutation): J.S. Nadal, 'La rédaction première de la Troisième lettre de Palamas à Akindynos', *OCP* 40 (1974), 233-85.

¹⁷ J. Meyendorff and P. Chrestou, *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα τόμος Α'* (1962), 196-9; J. Meyendorff, *Introduction* (1959), 92-4.

¹⁸ J. Nadal Cañellas, 'La rédaction première' (1974), 234-7 and 280-5.