



**Our Father among the Saints Gregory Palamas
Whose Life and Work the Holy Church Celebrates November 14
and the Second Sunday of the Fast as the
Triumph of Orthodoxy.**

The Life of Saint Gregory Palamas

Foreword

Saint Gregory Palamas stands as a Confessor and Defender of “the holy and blameless Faith of the pious and Orthodox Christians.” The modern authors and commentators on the life and work of Saint Gregory, regardless of their professed interest in sources, have neglected the service in The Menaion on November 14th to the Saint composed by Patriarch Philotheus, which he prepared for the Saint’s glorification in 1368. The same can be said for the Patriarch’s Life of the Saint. The Patriarch had been with the Saint Gregory even before he drafted the Hagioritic Tome. The Patriarch himself wrote the acts of the Council held in 1351 in the Blachernae Palace of Constantinople, where the final blow was struck against those whom Saint Gregory termed “enemies of the light.” Thus he was familiar with all the personages and doctrines surrounding the decisions which led to the rightly acclaimed title of the Victory of Orthodoxy to the work of this tireless advocate of deification, holy Tradition, and the purity of the Apostolic Faith of the Church of Christ. Does not Patriarch Philotheus stand as an eyewitness to the events themselves? Assuredly, he offers us a firsthand account of Saint Gregory’s signal undertaking. Who would not recognize in the Patriarch’s writings concerning Saint Gregory Palamas a unique monument not only to history but also to the truth of the holy Orthodox Faith?

As for ourselves, do we not stand awestruck in wonder when, in the Aposticha of the Feast, we hear the Holy Spirit address our Saint as “the very mouth of the Lord God.”



Saint Gregory Palamas “the very mouth of the Lord God.”

Saint Gregory Palamas, may his prayers be with us, was born in Constantinople around 1296, the firstborn of a large family. From childhood, his noble and pious parents taught him both human and divine wisdom and every virtue. Family life was centered around a piety characterized by “pure prayer.” His father, Constantine Palamas, became a prominent dignitary at the Court of Andronicus II Paleologus (1282-1328). His father was a man of prayer. In meetings with the Senate, St. Gregory’s father would immerse himself in prayer to such an extent that he did not hear the words addressed to him by the Emperor. The Emperor was not concerned since everyone knew that he was occupied in being watchful in the inner life of prayer. Andronicus II, a pious prince, held him in great esteem, and even allowed him to intervene in the affairs of the Imperial family.

Patriarch Philotheus,¹ writing in the biography of Saint Gregory, records the following: Constantine once “took his whole family once on a boat to a place above Galatas, to pay a visit to a hermit who lived in stillness there, and get his blessing. On the way, he asked his servants if they had any food to take to that Abba, so that they

¹ Philotheus Kokkinos served as Patriarch of Constantinople for three periods; 1353-1354, 1354, and 1364-1376. During his last period of service, he opposed Emperor John V who intended to negotiate with Popes Urban V and Gregory XI. He glorified Saint Gregory Palamas in 1368, wrote his Life and composed the Service in the Menaion for Saint Gregory who reposed on November 14, 1359. *Please see n. 24.*

might eat with him. The servants said that in the rush they had forgotten to bring any. The blessed man was saddened a bit, but said nothing. As they continued on in the boat, he simply put his hand into the sea, and with silent and noetic prayer he asked God, the Master of the sea, to let him catch something. After a short time (how wonderful are Thy works, O Christ King, by which thou dost marvelously glorify Thy servants!), he brought up his hand from the sea holding a large sea bass. Tossing it into the boat in front of his servants, he said, 'Look here how our Lord provided for his servant the Abba and has sent him something to eat.' Do you see, my brethren, with what sort of glory Jesus Christ glorifies those servants who are always with Him and who constantly invoke His sweetest name?"

We have a special testimony to this because, seeing his departure from time to eternity, he relinquished his government post to become a monk and, shortly afterwards, with the name of Constantine, passed peacefully to the Lord.

St. Gregory's father reposed in 1303, during the boy's early years. His mother took great care to give him, as well as all his brothers and sisters, a good education in the spirit of Divine Law and Holy Scripture. The Emperor Andronicus himself also took part in the raising and educating of the fatherless lad. Endowed with fine abilities and great diligence, Saint Gregory mastered all the subjects which then comprised the full course of higher education. He did not trust in his own memory. He made it a rule before every lesson to make three prostrations with prayer before an icon of our Lady, the Mother of God. The Holy Virgin did help the pious youth whose steady progress, especially in the philosophy of Aristotle, attracted everyone's attention. The youngster was the joy of the Emperor's heart. Andronicus had hopes that Saint Gregory would devote himself to government work.

Such was his degree of proficiency in the Aristotelian corpus when at the age of seventeen he delivered a speech on this subject to Andronicus II and Theodore Metiochites, a philosopher himself, at the end of the address everyone left in awe of the youngster, and Metiochites was heard to exclaim that "even if Aristotle were present today, he would undoubtedly have praised him also."

The monk Constantine, however, had left behind a son who, abhorring everything worldly as an illusive dream and filled with an ardent love for God, rose above his earthly position at court with all its temporal advantages, and strove with all his soul to cling to the only God, the Source of all wisdom and the bestower of every gift. He sought out the monks of Mount Athos, met with them frequently, and asked for their advice as to what his next steps in life should be. These conversations, by exposing him to the traditions of the monastic and ascetic life, opened his inner vision to the perception of the vain glory of this world. Following the counsel of the monastics, he

decided to leave the court and his classical studies in order to test his strength to see if he could really be a monk.

Saint Gregory's next step was to exchange his expensive clothes for worthless rags, and then to alter his habits and the manner of his outward life. He simply abandoned all the rules of social convention in order to adopt an ascetic lifestyle. Many of his friends thought that he had gone mad. He had foreseen this, and, being aware of it, he did not alter his course, but accepted the scoffing and general scorn with pleasure. The result of having embarked on this strict way of life for several years was that neither Andronicus' offers, nor the kindness of friends, nor even the ties of kinship availed to turn him away from the way of the cross which leads to heaven.

At the same time his edifying life and persuasive, grace filled, powerful conversations had their effect on certain members of his household. Consequently, several of his servants abandoned the world and entered the Monastic life. Close behind them followed Saint Gregory himself, accompanied by his mother, his brothers and his sisters. He was twenty years old when he finally decided to become a monk and told his devout mother about it. At first she was rather grieved at the idea, but afterwards she not only agreed with what he was doing, but she also rejoiced in the Lord and, with God's help, she even persuaded her other children to embrace the monastic life so that she could say with the Prophet: "Behold, I and the children whom God has given me" (Esaias 8: 18 LXX).

Following the commandment of the Gospel, St. Gregory distributed all his property among the poor and, despising with all his heart the beauty, sweetness and glory of this world, he followed Christ. He left his mother and his sisters in a women's convent. He took his brothers with him in 1316 to the Holy Mountain of Athos and together with them settled down in a lonely monastery called Vatopedi, where he put himself under obedience to a holy and gifted Father, Saint Nicodemus of Vatopedi (11 July), may his prayers be with us, from whom he later received the angelic monastic habit.

After he had been two years with Saint Nicodemus, Saint Gregory was granted a divine visitation. During mental prayer there appeared before him a radiant and magnificent man, whom he recognized to be the holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, may his prayers be with us. Looking at Gregory lovingly, the Apostle asked him: "Why when you pray to God do you each time repeat: 'Enlighten my darkness, enlighten my darkness'?"

Gregory answered: "What else should I ask but this, that I may be enlightened and know how to do His holy will?"

The holy Evangelist replied: "By the will of the Sovereign Lady of all, the Mother of God, henceforth I shall be with you always."

After three years of unwavering obedience and ascetic life under the wise direction of his spiritual father Saint Nicodemus, Saint Gregory suffered his loss: In profound old age, Saint Nicodemus reposed in the Lord.

Saint Gregory's next step took him to the Great Lavra, the monastery of Saint Athanasius. The Fathers there received him with great honor, as they had for some years been aware of the fame of his virtuous life. He stayed there for three years, amazing all by his wisdom and austerity. This was a time of testing for Saint Gregory and when it came to an end, the Abbot entrusted him with the duty of serving the brethren in the common refectory and also with chanting in church. Here too the wonderful Saint Gregory was a striking model of monastic achievement. He not only royally tamed and subdued the senseless movements of carnal passion, but he also strictly limited even the essential demands of nature, as if he had no need of anything earthly. He stood as a consoling example of angelic dispassion and divine purity.

His biographer, Philotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople, writes, "Living in stillness, he was found worthy of acquiring many spiritual gifts from God, which it is not even possible to name. Nevertheless, to understand somewhat the value of those gifts, he was clothed with such soberness and with streaming tears—the guardians of all virtues—that until the end of his life he never ceased to weep for his sins, or rather the sins of the world."

Along with all the rest of his endeavors, Saint Gregory shouldered the burden of curtailing sleep, without which no one can continue to live. He overcame sleep for three months without giving himself respite at night. For a short time in the afternoon he allowed himself a light nap and that as a mere precaution against the harmful consequences of such long and exhausting periods of deprivation of sleep.

Having spent several years at the Lavra of Athanasius in obedience to all and in the fear of God, his humility, meekness and industry won for him the general love and respect of the brotherhood. It became evident, however, that with such a way of life, his fellowship with the brethren prevented him from perfectly satisfying the demands of his immortal spirit. Hence, to avoid glory, and to nourish his longing for a more austere life, he departed from that community.

Saint Gregory arrived at the Skete called 'Glossia' where a number of hermits lived under the direction of a Father Gregory, who was also from Constantinople. To this wonderful Elder, so renowned at the time for his experiences of divine vision and mental prayer, Saint Gregory committed himself, and from him learned the mysteries of divine vision and mental purity. It is impossible to describe in human language these ineffable mysteries, in which the mind together with the heart and the whole substance

of a man are fused in a single desire of the will and strength to please God, to love Him and, by constant prayer as with a shield, to protect oneself from every tendency to carnal thinking and from the hostile actions of satan; but the very fruits of the life of divine vision uncover the mysteries of the gifts of grace with which God endows His saints. Saint Gregory, deeply immersed in the spirit of prayer and illuminated by it, reached such a degree of compunction and weeping that tears flowed from his eyes in constant streams.

Through divine permission, this stillness or silence, ἡ ἡσυχία, was soon disturbed by the Hagarenes, who in those days attacked the monks (i.e. hermits) living in stillness outside the monasteries. So Saint Gregory, with some other monks, was obliged to leave his desert and depart to Thessalonica in 1326. From here, the Saint decided to go to Jerusalem to worship the holy places, and also, if God willed, to end his days somewhere there in the stillness of the desert. Wishing to know whether this intention was pleasing to the Lord, he prayed to God about it. Afterwards, in a dream, there appeared to him Saint Demetrius, the Great Martyr, (Oct. 26), may his prayers be with us, whose relics repose in Thessalonica. The martyr persuaded him not to leave Thessalonica.

Following a rigorous period of fasting and prayer, Saint Gregory received the order of priesthood in Thessalonica. Then, in the company of a few monks, they departed to the nearest monastery, Vereia, a place suitable for the solitary life where they began to labor afresh. St. Gregory's manner of life was as follows: five days in the week he never went out anywhere himself and never used to receive anybody; but on Saturdays and Sundays, after performing the offices of a priest and receiving the Holy Mysteries, he used to enter into spiritual fellowship with the brethren, edifying and comforting them with his touching and instructive conversation. During these hours following the solitude, and especially after the Liturgy, there could be seen on the Saint's face a

wonderful divine light.² During the celebration of the divine services, he brought everyone to tears and compunction. Many of the great holy men were astonished at his virtuous life, for which he was deemed worthy to receive from God the gift of miracle-working and prophesying, and he was called God-bearer and prophet. He was at this time not more than thirty years old.

At this time Saint Gregory's virtuous mother departed to the Lord. Her daughters and fellow-nuns, Gregory's sisters, asked him to come and comfort them in their orphanhood and give them spiritual instructions. Submitting to the call of kindred love, Saint Gregory arrived in Constantinople, went to his sisters, and then hurried back to his beloved desert. But after five years of life in the Vereia hermitage, he was again obliged to move due to the frequent attacks of the Albanian Hagarenes.

The Holy Mountain of Athos beckoned him once again. Saint Gregory was received in 1331 by the Fathers toiling in the Lavra of Saint Athanasius with great love. He lived in the solitary cave of Saint Sabbas, may his prayers be with us, which was outside the monastery. Except for Saturdays and Sundays, he never went out anywhere, was never seen with anyone, and could be seen by no one except for the necessary services of a priest. Saint Gregory taught that the life of prayer is for all Christians, not just for monastics. All the rest of his days were spent in prayer and, as we chant in praise of the Athonite Fathers, "in the honey of stillness".

Once, during his prayers in his cell before the Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, the Saint was asking her to keep away all hindrances to complete stillness from himself and his companions and that she would graciously take upon herself the care and

² The man who loves God shall arrive at such excellency as even to see God, and hear His word and from the hearing of His discourse be glorified to such an extent that others cannot behold the glory of his countenance, as was said by the Prophet Daniel: "And the wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and some of the many righteous as the stars unto the ages and more" (Dan. 12: 3 LXX). *Against Heresies*: Book 4:26.1 (Edinburg p. 461, 2), may his prayers be with us.

In second century Gaul St. Irenaeus knew of Christians who became radiant with the uncreated light of God. Such incidents are rooted in the Transfiguration of our Christ on Mount Tabor (Aug. 6), the stoning of the Archdeacon and Protomartyr Saint Stephen (Dec. 9), and the Light in which Christ met Saint Paul, His "Chosen Vessel" (Acts. 9:15) on the Road to Damascus, may their prayers be with us.

Furthermore, Orthodox Christians have been called to become gods by grace (Ps. 82:6; Jn. 10:34). This means that we receive in Holy Baptism that which we are called to sustain forever, that is, the ineffable gift of life-giving union with the Holy Trinity through the uncreated divine energies of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. "The person who has been deified by grace will be in every respect as God is, except for identity of essence" (Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Letters to Thalassius XXII* (PG 90:320), may his prayers be with us.

provision of all their worldly needs. In answer to his fervent prayer, the most merciful our Panagia Theotokos appeared to him herself, in company with many light-bearing men. Our Lady said, addressing herself to the light-bearing men in her company, "Henceforth and forever, be the guardians of the needs of Gregory and his brotherhood" may our Despina's prayers ever be with us. From that time, as Saint Gregory himself said, he really did feel that wherever he went, God's special care for him went with him.

Another time, in a state of prayer, Saint Gregory fell into a light sleep. It appeared to him that in his hands there was a vessel of pure milk which was so full that it was flowing over the brim, then this milk took the form of wine, which, flowing over the vessel's brim, wetted his hands and clothes, spreading a wonderful fragrance everywhere. As soon as Gregory perceived it, he was filled with holy joy. Then there appeared to him a radiant youth who said:

"Why do you not pass on this wonderful drink, to which you do not pay the proper attention? This is the ever-inexhaustible gift of God."

"To whom should I pass on this drink, when there is no one in need of it?" asked Saint Gregory.

"Even if at the present moment there is no one actually thirsting for the drink," answered the youth, "yet nevertheless you should do your duty and not neglect the gift of God, for the proper use of which you will have to answer before God," may the angel's prayers be with us.

With these words the wonderful vision came to an end. Saint Gregory interpreted it in this way: the milk stood for the ordinary gift of the word, which is, understandably, for very simple hearts looking for spiritual instruction, and the turning of the milk into wine meant that, when the time comes, the Supreme Will would ask him for deeper instruction in the highest truths of the Christian Faith.

The *Apodictic Treatises* appeared around 1336. Writing from Saint Sabbas monastery, Saint Gregory in these Treatises is concerned with the purity of the Orthodox Faith as regards the procession of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 15:26 "Which proceedeth from the Father."), as well as our ability to grasp and to demonstrate from holy Tradition what we know about God. In 1330 Barlaam had arrived on Mount Athos claiming that we can say nothing about the unknowable deity.

On Mt. Athos Saint Gregory was for a short time Abbot of the Esphigmenou Monastery, but in 1335 was forced to resign, because of the austerity of his monastic governance, and to take refuge in the skete-monastery of Saint Savva, where he concerned himself with theological writings. He continued to write until his repose. Here he rose to such spiritual heights that many of the holy Fathers wondered at his

virtuous life. They used to refer to him as a God-bearer when they saw his amazing miracle-working, which was a gift he received from God. He exorcised demons, unfruitful trees were made fruitful by his prayers, and he prophesied about the future as about the present. But he did not escape various and frequent temptations, as Saint Paul writes: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12), may his prayer be with us.. He bore everything with joy, that the trial of his faith, “more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might bring him praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”, as says the holy Apostle Peter (I Peter 1:7), may his prayers be with us.

Much did Saint Gregory Palamas have to bear in his struggles with the heretics, who began at that time to trouble the Church of God. The Victory of Orthodoxy won through him over the Latin-minded heretics is commemorated on the Second Sunday of the Great Fast as a continuation of the Triumph of Orthodoxy over the Iconoclasts. This Feast of Saint Gregory is the Second Triumph of Orthodoxy. This latter Victory is second in time coming five centuries after the Triumph of Orthodoxy over Iconoclasm. The victory of Saint Gregory Palamas put “to shame them that reject both the Spirit’s grace and that we men should be deified.”³ This victory ranks equally with the victory over the Christ-hating unbelief of those who destroyed not only the Icon of Christ, but also all icons.

The history of the Church shows that the victory won through the lifelong struggle of one individual, Saint Gregory Palamas, stands on an equal footing with the Church’s long and hard fought victory over the destroyers of the Icon of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, as well as of all her holy Icons. Saint Gregory’s life was dedicated to—and victorious in—his struggle for “the pure and blameless Faith of the pious and Orthodox Christians.”

Saint Gregory was confronted with two men, and later on with a third,⁴ who posed as inquirers into the faith of the pious and Orthodox Christians. They were subterfuges, ‘plants’ who assumed an innocence that they did not have. Their every effort was

³ *The Menaion*, © 2005 The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, Massachusetts. All Rights Reserved. Our Father among the Saints Gregory Palamas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Thessalonica. A composition of the Most Holy Patriarch of Constantinople Philotheus. Aposticha, third Troparion.

⁴ Barlaam the Calabrian (1290-1350), Gregory Akindynos (1310-1350), and, appearing later on the scene, Nicephorus Gregoras (1295-1360) to whom St. Gregory refers as “the non-Orthodox believers who have appeared in our day.” (*The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas ed. with intro. and notes by Christopher Veniamin Vol. One*; © 2002 Saint Tikhon’s Seminary Press South Canaan, PA 18459; nn. 100, 103. pp. 290-291.

directed towards overthrowing the Orthodox Church by undermining her Patristic foundations. Barlaam of Calabria in Italy (1290-1350) is the name of the first of such plants.

“There were hidden depths to Palamas’ stance against Barlaam,” writes Michael Angold.⁵ “After a two-year vacancy the patriarchal throne went to John [XIV] Kalekas (1334-47), a married man and a member of the imperial clergy. It was a political appointment which aroused bitter resentment both among the bishops and in monastic circles. Coinciding as this did with the reopening of dialogue with the papacy it could easily be construed as a return to the unionist strategy of Michael Palaiologos. This was an affront to the Monks of Mount Athos; the myth [*sic*] of their brave resistance to his persecution was taking shape. As spokesman in this debate with the Latin cardinal it was easy to cast Barlaam in the role of another Bekkos.”⁶

Such scholarly opinions, however widely they may be accepted, are not in accordance with the witness of the holy Fathers. In the hymns recorded in *The Menaion*, The Orthodox Church speaks of Saint Gregory as “the companion one in mind that wrought with the three divine Theologians,” who “as God-chosen orators most wise, as authors and scribes of most sacred writings, now ye three God-bearing heralds have obtained yourselves a fourth: your most famous initiate who partook of your ways and name, now doth share the hymns offered up to you.” *The Menaion* continues by identifying these three to which reference has been made above as “The sacred trumpets of august theology, the Holy Trinity’s voice, the most sacred Muses it befiteth us to praise: Great Basil, righteous Gregory,⁷ and John Chrysostom, joined by our God-inspired Father Gregory, who with them breathed forth the Spirit’s Grace,”⁸ may the prayers of the Three Hierarchs be with us. So we hear that Saint Gregory Palamas, regardless of the opposition he faced, grounded his own teaching in what the Three Hierarchs themselves had taught.

⁵ *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. 5 Eastern Christianity, Ed. Michael Angold © 2006 Cambridge University Press, p. 64.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarch_John_XI_of_Constantinople/

⁷ This Gregory is Saint Gregory the Theologian, (A.D. 329-391) who delivered the *Theological Orations* from a chapel in a home in Constantinople from 379-381 during which period of time Constantinople, which had been choked by the baneful tares sown by the Arians, was cleansed by Saint Gregory’s tireless labours and brought to the grace-ripened fields of holy Orthodoxy.

⁸ *The Menaion*, First Canon, Ode One.

In 1338 Saint Gregory moves to Thessalonica staying there three years until 1341, and living near Isidore's hermitage. While there he meets several times with Barlaam and attempts to settle their dispute amicably.⁹

Addressing Gregory himself, our choir chants, "Gregory, longing to see the Light that dawned from thy womb, O Mother of God, sought thee as his intercessor and fellow worker, and from thee attained to the grace he desired."¹⁰

Saint Gregory Palamas and the Three Hierarchs, who are commemorated on January 30, are hymned as follows, with Saint Gregory Palamas being mentioned first: "That theologian firm and staunch, that armored soldier of wisdom, who employed the holy Father's true doctrines as dread instruments of war and awe-inspiring lightning bolts, doth bravely crush the armies of haughty heretics with his words." Then turning to the Three Hierarchs themselves, we chant, "Ye living heavens of Christ's Church, ever declaring His glory, O ye holy Fathers, make us partakers of His saving and divine glory in the heights, as we with songs of glory, now keep your glorious memory."¹¹ The faith of the Church, as preached in The Menaion, clearly points to Saint Gregory Palamas, who, as heir to the Apostolic truth proclaimed by the Three Hierarchs, taught no novel doctrines.

Barlaam was a monk schooled in the philosophy of the Western teacher Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), which derives from Albertus Magnus (1193-1206 to 1280).¹² He raised a controversy over the previously unquestioned Orthodox teaching about the spiritual light of uncreated grace, which is God Himself, working in His Divine powers so that a man can be enlightened within, and, as the Holy Fathers attest, visibly illumined, too, as was attested on Mount Tabor (Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:2-9; Lk. 9: 28), as well as on the face of Moses after conversing with God on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34: 29, 30, 35). Barlaam and his followers disturbed the peace of Christ's Church and the tranquility of the monks of Athos with their blasphemous teaching.

⁹ Barlaam, following Thomas Aquinas who teaches that the deity is all essence, maintains that God is unknowable. Saint Gregory, who follows the Three Hierarchs and holy Tradition, shows that although God cannot be known in His Divine essence, we can know Him, God Himself, and participate in His Life in His Divine energies. (In *"The Way of A Pilgrim"* we read of the some of the ways the Divine energies can work in the bodies, in the souls and in the hearts of those who, having received Orthodox Baptism, continue in the Church their struggle for deification, which is salvation. Harper San Francisco 1991.)

¹⁰ *The Menaion*, Second Canon.

¹¹ *The Menaion*, Ode Three.

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albertus_Magnus

The teaching of Barlaam, Gregory Akindynos, and Nicephorus Gregoras alike depend on the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. Dr. Constantine Cavernos writes, “These Latinizers in rejection of the Orthodox distinction between God’s *essence* and His “energy” or “energies”, and the claim of Orthodox mystics to experience the latter as Uncreated, Divine Light, were denying the very possibility of man’s coming into immediate contact with God, of achieving *theosis*. They were *not* following Holy Tradition, but the Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas, who had lived a century before them. Their view implied that there is *an unbridgeable chasm separating man from God.*”¹³ They never yielded to Saint Gregory Palamas on this, their primary ‘talking point’ in this controversy.

“We are contending for everything we have” said Saint Athanasius the Great of the Church’s struggle in his day for the purity of the Orthodox Faith. This is also the case for Saint Gregory Palamas. If secular historians, looking back over their shoulders, have rightly viewed the contest of Orthodoxy against Arianism as “Athanasius Against the World,” so a more balanced view of the mid-fourteenth century controversy between Saint Gregory Palamas and those in Barlaam’s camp would produce a similar call to arms—“Saint Gregory Palamas Against the World”— for in his struggle he too could easily have stated, “We are contending for everything we have.”

For thirteen years (1338-51) the heroic shepherd, Saint Gregory, bravely fought against Barlaam and his allies. The sorrows that Saint Gregory had to bear during this period are beyond our untutored capacities to grasp. Saint Gregory was enabled to survive Barlaam’s onslaughts only through the strength communicated to his heart, mind and body by the uncreated Divine energies of the Most High God. Thus Saint Gregory’s whole life became an unstinting confession of the Holy Orthodox Faith, “a new Chosen Vessel to bear the Name of the Lord, preaching openly the Godhead uncreated and one”¹⁴.

Barlaam taught that the light of Mount Tabor was something material and created which appeared in space and tinged the air, because it was seen by the bodily eyes of

¹³ *Victories of Orthodoxy*, © Constantine Cavernos 1997 Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont Massachusetts 02178-2200 p. 44. Dr. Cavernos continues, “A consequence of this heresy was the appearance of *Deism* in Western Europe. Deism is the relegation of God to a sphere *altogether beyond human experience*. This in turn led to *Agnosticism*, the view that *neither the nature of God nor His existence is knowable*. Agnosticism, in turn, led to *Atheism*—the assertion that *God does not exist*. And Atheism has led to *Nihilism*, which is a very widespread contemporary disease of the human mind. Nihilism is the state of mankind when people do not believe in the existence of God, do not believe in spiritual values, do not believe in the reality of truth” (pp. 44, 45).

¹⁴ *The Menaion*, Sessional Hymn.

men who were not yet enlightened by grace. He also taught that all the Divine Energies, or Activities, were created, even the gifts of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, (cf. Gal. 5:22). Barlaam did not fear to lower God to the level of creatures, denying the light and beatitude of the Saints in the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father, which is the power and activity of the Trihypostatic Divinity.

Barlaam fell into this error precisely because he insisted on defining God in human terms. Since he had defined God in human terms, he could not avoid bringing God down to the level of creatures. As we hear from *The Menaion*, “For they,” (Barlaam and Acindynus, et. al.) “sharing in the opinions of the Greeks, brought the Godhead down to a creature, dishonoring, like the Jews aforetime, the dignity of the Son of God.”¹⁵

Barlaam denounced the Orthodox as dualists and polytheists because they acknowledged the Divine light and the Divine power to be uncreated and ever-existing. By regarding as an error both the faith of the hermits of Athos in the vision of God with bodily eyes, and also the preparation for this in a sensible manner, Barlaam openly rose up against them, against their prayer and against any truth concerning the vision of God. Before, however, Barlaam’s calumnies against the monks of Athos had been made known, this heretic was himself sent away in disgrace by the Patriarch John XIV Kalekas for his bigoted and reproachful behaviour.

With rage and grief Barlaam departed to Thessalonica to continue his warfare on another front, this time against the monks of Athos. Not having the strength themselves to stand against the eloquent and deceptive Barlaam, the monks of Thessalonica were obliged to send for Saint Gregory from Mount Athos. After arriving in Thessalonica, Saint Gregory at first acted in a spirit of meekness, but when it became clear that such methods had no effect on Barlaam, the stubborn teacher of lies, who was causing such tremendous upheavals in the Church, he initiated an effective program that destroyed Barlaam’s objections and spiteful jabs against Holy Tradition, not only verbally, but also by powerful writings which are full of lofty truths and divine demonstrations of the wisdom of the Holy Fathers. This work is to be found in the *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* of Saint Gregory Palamas which were written in 1338.¹⁶ With the *Triads* in mind, we hear from the *Cliros* as the *Oikos* for the Feast is chanted, this acclamation of Apostolic truth, “*Rejoice*, herald of God’s nature as an unscalable height; *rejoice*, preacher of His energy as an unfathomable depth. *Rejoice*, O herald of grace.”

¹⁵ *The Menaion*, Ode Six, Second Canon.

¹⁶ http://orthodoxwiki.org/Gregory_Palamas Please proceed with caution in reading these translations from the Greek. It is important, first, to be aware that these translations do exist and, second, as the editors note, that not all of the material in the *Triads* is presented in them, and third, that some modern editors are in strong disagreement with Saint Gregory. (Please also see Note 10.)

In the *Triads*, Saint Gregory draws from Holy Tradition to defend the experience of the Church against the thought of the Latin-minded as represented by Barlaam of Calabria on the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Holy Fathers. Addressing the question of how it is possible for humans to have knowledge of a transcendent and unknowable God, he draws upon the writings of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite who sets forward the teaching of his own spiritual Father Saint Hierotheus, first Bishop of Athens, which includes the hierarchical, distinction between the unknowable Divine *essence*, and the Divine *energies, actions, or the means* by which the Lord God acts directly throughout creation “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3), and always directly acts in behalf of the salvation of mankind within the Orthodox Church, “the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:2).

Saint Gregory, after completing his theological writings for the defense of the monks of Mount Athos and his refutation of the heresy of Barlaam, returned to the holy mountain and showed his writings to the Holy Fathers.

Soon after this Saint Gregory was obliged to fight against the Latin minded heretics before all the world. For this service he won immortal glory in the Church on earth and the crown of truth in the Church in Heaven. Meanwhile, Barlaam had succeeded in winning the Patriarch of Constantinople, John XIV Kalekas, to his side. The Patriarch even sent a written summons to Gregory and his stalwarts to appear before an Ecclesiastical Court. Unable to bear the false teaching endorsed by Barlaam which stemmed through Augustine from the heresy of Arius a teaching which shook the very foundations of Christian faith and morals, Saint Gregory, filled with the Holy Spirit, stepped forward to defend Orthodoxy and the elders of Mount Athos. In order to decide this dispute which had arisen and to establish Orthodoxy, the pious Emperor Andronicus Paleologus called a council attended by Barlaam and his confederates.

The First Council of 1341 in the Church of the Holy Wisdom

At the Council in Constantinople of June 10, 1341 in the Church of Hagia Sophia, presided over by the Emperor Andronicus III. Saint Gregory Palamas held a debate with Barlaam which focused on the nature of the light on Mount Tabor at the time of Christ’s Transfiguration. Barlaam was allowed to make his accusations against Palamas, but he was soon turned into the accused when the gathered Bishops began to question him on specific points of his own theology with which they, as well as Gregory, disagreed. By the end of the day, when Barlaam had realized that the council was not going to decide in his favour he publicly confessed his error and asked for forgiveness. Saint Gregory Palamas readily forgave him.

On May 27, 1341 the Council accepted the position of St. Gregory Palamas, based on the teaching of the Three Hierarchs, that **God, unapproachable in His Divine Essence, reveals Himself through His Divine Energies, which are directed towards the world and may be perceived, like the light of Mount Tabor, but which are neither material nor created.**¹⁷ The teachings of “the wicked prophets of falsehood and ministers of error”¹⁸ had been publicly condemned.¹⁹

This is the Victory of Orthodoxy celebrated on the Second Sunday of the Great Fast. Saint John Chrysostom uses a compelling simile to speak of the effect of the Lord’s ineffable power to elevate man in Christ to the heights: “And like as though any one were to place himself in the space between any two persons that were standing apart, and stretching forth both his hands were to lay hold on either side, and tie them together; even so hath He done, joining the old covenant with the new, God’s nature with man’s, the things that are His with ours.”²⁰

Andronicus III would die only five days later, on June 15, 1341. Barlaam seems to have hoped now to have made his case again, but soon accepted the futility of such an endeavour. Barlaam himself had been anathematized.

Saint Gregory, in speaking of the distinction between the Divine essence and the Divine energies draws on a comparison between God and the sun. As the sun has its rays, so God has His energies (among them, grace and light). By His energies, God creates, sustains, and governs the universe. By His energies, He transforms creation and deifies it, that is, He fills the all creation with His energies as water fills a sponge. These actions or energies of God are the true revelation of God Himself to the Church. God is incomprehensible, unknowable and imparticipatable in His essence; He is knowable

¹⁷These four lines state the decision, or *Tome*, of the Councils held in Constantinople during the period 1341-1351. Thoroughly grounded in the teaching of the Three Hierarchs, as the service in The Menaion for Saint Gregory Palamas attests, the teaching on the ineffable distinction between the Divine essence and the Divine energies ratified by these Councils stands as Apostolic Truth. Please refer to the comments by Dr. Constantine Cavernos on p.11 and also in note 12.

¹⁸ *The Menaion*, Ode Eight, first Troparion.

¹⁹ By now our readers have been alerted to the duplicity embraced by those in modern scholarship who elect to employ the terms, “Hesychastic Controversy,” or “Palamism” to describe this *struggle for the purity of the Faith of the Orthodox Church*, “which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). A way of prayer and the name of a man are, indeed, involved in this struggle but certainly not as defining characteristics.

²⁰ *The Works of St. Chrysostom* NPNF Vol. 10, Homily 2, p.10.

and participatable in His energies and actions which are God Himself in the Mysteries of the Church, in our prayers and in our lives.

Meanwhile, Saint Gregory remained in Thessalonica for three years. During this time, his ardent spirit was absorbed in setting forward the foundations of Orthodoxy so as to make her God-founded purity plain for all to see. Hesychia (ἡ ἡσυχία), i.e. heartfelt mourning, weeping, and complete solitude became the beloved occupation of his life. In this way our human nature is transfigured in Christ through the power of the Divine energies. As Saint Gregory the Theologian declared to the flock in the house chapel of Anastasia in Constantinople: "He still pleads even now as Man for my salvation; for He continues to wear the Body which He assumed until He has made me God by His Incarnation."²¹ The Church is the Body of Christ and His Body is suffused with the powerful, penetrating, Divine Energies, which are bearers of uncreated light. They are namable but numberless. The Divine Energies are appropriately celebrated in the Kontakion for the Consecration of the Church of the Holy Resurrection:

*Kontakion of the Consecration. Fourth Tome
On this day Thou hast appeared*

THE Church is shown to be * a many lighted heaven * that doth shine a guiding light * upon all them that do believe; * wherein while standing we cry aloud: * Do Thou Thyself now establish this house, O Lord.

Rejoicing in this hymn, we hear that the Holy Orthodox Church, enfolded in Apostolic Truth, is veritably "a many-lighted heaven" radiant with the uncreated powers of the Almighty and compassionate Lord God. Who can count the many healings and releases from pain which have occurred when the sick, even one on her death bed critically ill with lung cancer, have been anointed with holy oil from a lampada in front of a holy Icon and received instant healing? How many have been physically healed when they were Baptized? Saint Vladimir of Kiev stands as just one instance. How many have had their lives lengthened or their spiritual powers enhanced and sharpened through their Monastic Tonsure? Saint Irene Myrtiodissa (Nov. 13) comes to mind as another telling instance of the power of the uncreated grace of Monastic Tonsure; may her prayers be with us.

It is through His actions flowing from His incomprehensible compassion for mankind that the Lord, in the mystery of Holy Baptism, vouchsafes a mystical union

²¹Preached in the house Chapel of Anastasia in Constantinople between 379 and 381. The Fourth Theological Oration §12; NPNF Second Series Vol. VII, p. 315.

between the Christian, a creature, and the Christian's uncreated Saviour, God Himself. In this way "He that eateth my Flesh and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him" (Jn. 6:56); and, too, this is "Everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:40); the ineffable Divine energies are communicated to the faithful in the holy Mysteries as well as in the Church's mystical life of communal and individual prayer, fasting, alms-giving, and spiritual counsel for salvation. By the prayer of the Church the discos is laden with the Body of Christ, the Bread which is Eternal Life and the chalice is filled with the Blood of God, the all-refining, fiery energies and flame of the Holy Spirit. In this and in other ways, the Divine energies act in the holy Mysteries.

As for Saint Gregory Palamas, realizing that the peace of the desert was not available to him, avoided, as far as possible, all ties with the world by living in a remote part of the house. There he arranged a small cell for himself and wholeheartedly embraced stillness and prayer, that is, the life of a hesychast.

Can we not catch the melodies of the divinely-wrought hymns of the Menaion in the Seventh Ode, Second Canon as they sound in our ear:

THE thralls of error, stricken by thy doctrines and the lightening of thy divine words as with the resounding of thunder, are unable to see clearly, O Father, and the madmen now ridiculously grope for the walls like a blind man, as it is written.

ANIGHT without illumination is fallen upon the disbelievers; and now that natural light, the Kingdom and glory of God, which the Friend of man revealed to His initiates upon Tabor, thou, O Gregory, partaking of in all abundance, dost communicate unto them that believe.

THOU hast put to shame them that impiously did insult to the grace of God, O glorious Gregory, who shamefully mocked stillness and prayer and ineffable deification, and thou hast driven them from the house of God, which do thou ever preserve by thy prayers.

The Second Council of 1341

A second Council was held in August, 1341. Neither Barlaam nor his supporters were present. This Council condemned Acindynus and emphatically upheld the previous Council's ratification of the Apostolic Faith.

Political pressures now appear. Responding to them Patriarch John Kalekas XIV allowed Acindynus some latitude in attacking Saint Gregory Palamas. Beginning in

May of 1342 this latitude would turn into full license. Four months later in September, Kalekas had the Saint arrested on purely political charges and incarcerated him in the palace prison for four years. Here Saint Gregory actively continued in his writings concerning the purity of the holy Orthodox Faith as grounded in the teaching of the Three Hierarchs.²²

During Saint Gregory's incarceration Kalekas had made the highly controversial move of ordaining Acindynus—a formally condemned individual—to the diaconate, then to the priesthood, and eventually elevating him to the dignity of the episcopate (c. 1344/1345). With this Kalekas began to lose the support of the Empress Anne of Savoy, who stood, together with the Imperial Court, in firm opposition to these ordinations. Acindynus, now a bishop, was given a position of great power, having the prerogative of recommending new bishops to the Patriarch. In this way he could develop a contingency within the episcopate that would oppose anything that Saint Gregory Palamas either wrote, said, or did. This chain of events, however, struck a wedge between Anne and Kalekas. By January of 1347 she had convened a council to depose him from the Patriarchate. Just before this, Kalekas himself became aware of the futility of his strategies against Saint Gregory, and had begun to distance himself from Acindynus.

Anne's council was convened on February 1, 1347. The Council not only condemned Kalekas but it also reaffirmed the *Tome* of the Council of 1341.²³ Kalekas, now deposed, was replaced as Patriarch by Isidore Boukharis on May 17, 1347. He consecrated a large number of new bishops, including Saint Gregory Palamas, now freed from prison.

²² For those who might want to explore the profound historical import of the hierarchical distinction between the unknowable and imparticipatable Divine Essence and the knowable, namable, and participatable Divine energies please consult Father Peter Carras' instructive essay: <http://orthodoxyinfo.org/CouncilOfFlorence.htm>

²³ The substance of the *Tome* of 1341 is: "God, unapproachable in His Divine Essence, reveals Himself through His Divine Energies, which are directed towards the world and are able to be perceived, like the light of Mount Tabor, but which are neither material nor created." Please note Patriarch Philotheus' trenchant phrase in the Oikos for the Feast: *Rejoice, herald of God's nature as an unscalable height; rejoice, preacher of His energy as an unfathomable depth.* Orthodox Christians are anointed in and sustained by the Divine Energies. Our lives are upheld and transfigured by these sublime mysteries which are God Himself.

The Council of 1351 in the palace of Blachernae

A new threat to the purity of Orthodoxy arose when a council of Orthodox bishops was convened from May through July 1347 to excommunicate Saint Gregory and Patriarch Isidore. In response, Patriarch Isidore and Saint Gregory convened a Council in 1351 in the Palace of Blachernae. The opponents of the Orthodox Council's *Tome* of 1341 were led by an able scholar, Nicephorus Gregoras, who spoke eloquently in defense of those who opposed the *Tome* of 1341. His defense was based on the work of Acindynus who had reposed in 1350.

We may use a hymn from the Ninth Ode of the Service to Saint Gregory that will describe what happened next:

O Gregory, thou didst boldly take in hand the sharp sword of the Spirit, and armoured with His full array, like a great commander above defeat, thou wentest forth with valiant zeal, pulling down the strongholds of godless men, the error of Ideas, the worship of creation, and thou didst cast them forth in full defeat.

The error of the Neo-platonic doctrine of Ideas and the worship of creation as eternal were errors well known to those among the Latins who preceded Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). These notions, among others, had been condemned on March 7, 1277 by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Paris Étienne Tempier, and by the Dominican Robert Kilwardby, Archbishop of Canterbury on March 18, 1277, both prelates acting in this instance independently of the Pope. Historically, this is known as to Condemnation of 1277. Nevertheless these same errors were present in the doctrines of Barlaam, Acindynus and Gregoras; Saint Gregory Palamas fought and was victorious against these specific errors.²⁴

²⁴ Étienne Gilson, Director of Studies, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* Random House, Inc. New York © 1955 by Étienne Gilson; The Condemnation of 1277, pp. 402-408; see also nn. 52, 54 pp. 728-729.

As regards the doctrine of Neo-platonic Ideas, please see *On Divine Names*, St. Dionysius the Areopagite tr. John Parker 1897-1899, p. 82. "I have not shewn thee these things for the purpose of going after them" (Hosea 13:4 LXX). Our editorial concern here is limited to the mention of "the worship of

The assembled Orthodox Hierarchs decided in favor of the *Tome* of 1341. During the period from 1341 to 1351 no council ever overrode this Conciliar declaration of the Orthodox Faith. Never challenged but upheld through bitter controversy the *Tome* of 1341 in the Church of the Holy Wisdom stands as “the one Faith” (Eph. 5:6) “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) that is, the Apostolic Faith of the Orthodox Church.

However, on account of the disturbances which then sprang up in Thessalonica, the new Archbishop was not received by his flock. Saint Gregory was, however, able to find ready refuge in his beloved Holy Mountain Athos.

In his communications with the faithful The Menaion reveres Saint Gregory in this way:

THOU wast altogether cheerful to those who came to thee with faith, O Father, sweet, upright, and meek, pouring forth the sweet and divine stream of thy words, which cheered the hearts of all the pious but stung them that were diseased in the senses of the soul.

Once, on the Feast of St. Anthony the Great (Jan.17), the founder of the eremitic life, may his prayers be with us, when the other monks, disciples of Saint Isidore, were performing the all-night Vigil while Saint Gregory stayed in his cell, suddenly in a vision there appeared to him Saint Anthony, may his prayers be with us, who said, “Complete silence is good, but fellowship with the brotherhood is sometimes necessary, especially on days of prayer and psalm-singing. Therefore you should now be with the brethren in the Vigil.” At once, Saint Gregory obeyed and joined the brethren who received him with joy, and the Vigil passed with special triumph for them.

creation” and “the error of Ideas” in the Ninth Ode of the Service to Saint Gregory and to the presence of these doctrines in the Condemnation of 1277 under the Roman Catholic Bishop, Étienne Gilson of Paris and the Dominican Robert Kilwardby, Archbishop of Canterbury. From this we learn that what was condemned in Paris and at Oxford in 1277 was present in the teachings condemned in the Service to the Saint in 1368 which doctrines he had also condemned in his lifetime. That we are able to establish this link offers evidence that in Barlaam and his associates Saint Gregory Palamas was confronted with those who adopted intellectual tools used either by Thomas Aquinas or by his successors to strengthen their attacks against the Apostolic Faith of the Orthodox Church, which, as Saint Paul writes, is “The pillar and ground of the Truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), may his prayer be with us..

Let us allow the hymns of the Church to set forward Saint Gregory's quiet perseverance, the depth of his spiritual fervor and his astute profundity in matters surpassing mental activity:

YOU pulled up the profane tares of heresies * with the strength of the Spirit and Godlike thunders of your words; * and this latest insult to grace divine, * assailing God's own energies, * ye have now uprooted like those of old, * O three most mighty Hierarchs, * since ye have found an ally * in Gregory, who used your sharpened words.

O GREGORY, thou didst boldly take in hand * the sharp sword of the Spirit, and armoured with His full array * like a great commander above defeat, * thou wentest forth with valiant zeal, * pulling down the strongholds of godless men, * the error of Ideas, the worship of creation, * and thou didst cast them forth in full defeat.

THE Spirit hath revealed thy blessed tomb * as a fountain of graces and river filled with floods of cures, * as a sea of mercy, a wondrous fount * whence healings flow forth free of charge * both for souls and bodies, O Gregory, * which silently proclaimeth * the power and glory * of Orthodoxy, which thou hast made known.

In the Praises we hear from the Choir:

THOU, O godly-minded Gregory, * didst take the glittering sword * of the Spirit to cut away * the profane and wicked root * of Barlaam the abom'nable. * And his disciple, the dire Acindynus, * that wretched trifler and traitor to the Faith, * thou castest far away * from the Church's fullness, that he take his place * with the heathen Greeks who worshipped the creation as God.²⁵

Saint Gregory recognized that "the dire Acindynus" had willingly chosen to "take his place with the heathen Greeks who worshipped the creation as God".

At that time a pious priest of Thessalonica who was preparing to celebrate the Divine Liturgy prayed to God that He would graciously reveal to him whether Gregory was really in error in his beliefs regarding the Monastic and Divine Vision, as the

²⁵ *The Menaion*; The Praises.

people thought, or whether he had boldness before the Lord. This revelation the priest asked to be demonstrated through his paralyzed daughter, who had lain for three years without movement.

“If, O Lord.” said he, “Gregory is really Thy servant, by his prayers heal my poor daughter.”

And the Lord heard the priest’s prayer. His daughter suddenly raised herself up from the bed and from that moment received complete healing, as if she had never been ill.

This miracle made Saint Gregory famous, but the Church disturbances still continued in Thessalonica. Then the Bulgarian King Stephan, aware of the Saint’s virtues and struggles for the Church of God, invited him to occupy the throne of the Metropolitan of Bulgaria. Saint Gregory would not consent to this since he had already been appointed to serve as Archbishop of Thessalonica. On Athos, however, the saintly Bishop found no peace. Soon the needs of the Church called him again to Constantinople. From there he went to the Island of Lemnos where he constantly preached the word of God and worked many signs and miracles.

He stayed on in Lemnos until the people of Thessalonica felt the need of his presence to tend their orphaned folk and recalled him themselves. This they did by sending to him in Lemnos some representatives of the clergy and the highest dignitaries of Thessalonica. When Saint Gregory arrived in Thessalonica in 1350, the people welcomed him with inexpressible joy. The Church of Thessalonica, as if inspired from above, was in her greatest state of triumph. Instead of ordinary laudatory songs, the clergy and people sang Paschal hymns and canons. Three days later, in the presence of an enormous concourse of people, God’s holy Hierarch celebrated a hierarchical Divine Liturgy and procession. In the midst of these festivities, God once again glorified His Saint by a new miracle. The priest whose paralyzed daughter was healed had an epileptic son. When the time came for the faithful to receive the Holy Mysteries, the priest fell at the feet of the Archbishop and implored him to communicate the Holy Mysteries with his own hands to his afflicted son. Touched by the priest’s humility and the plight of the young man’s epileptic seizures, Saint Gregory did as he was asked and the lad was completely healed.

On another occasion, during the Feast of the Nativity of our Most Holy Panagia (September 8/21) Saint Gregory was celebrating the Divine Liturgy in a women's convent. During the service a nun, named Heliodora, who was blind in one eye, learning that the holy Bishop was celebrating the Liturgy, approached him unnoticed and as she quietly touched the Bishop's vestments to her blind eye, she immediately received her sight. Many other miracles were worked by Saint Gregory which are recorded in the *Saint's Life* (which, sadly, is as yet untranslated) written by Philotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople.²⁶

Saint Gregory, reinforced by the respect of the Emperor and the blessing of the Patriarch, set out to return to his flock. John Paleologus, now a resident of Thessalonica, would not permit him to do so. Saint Gregory retreated, once again, to his Athonite stillness. After a change of heart, the same Paleologus recalled him with honor after three months to Thessalonica.

Returning to his See, Saint Gregory soon fell into a long and serious illness; everyone feared for his life. But God, "that knowest the secrets, and knowest all things before

²⁶ Patriarch Philotheus Kokkinos was born in Thessalonica around 1300; his mother was a convert from Judaism. He entered monastic life, first at Mt Sinai, then at the Great Lavra on Mt Athos. The struggle for the purity of the Confession of the Orthodox Faith championed by Saint Gregory Palamas (Nov. 14) was at its height. St. Philotheus became one of the firmest and most effective supporters of St Gregory in his defense of Orthodoxy against western-inspired attacks on the doctrines of our deification in Christ, the manifold uncreated graces, or Divine energies, and the possibility of true union with God based on the true confession of the Orthodox Faith. 1351, he took part in the Council of Blachernae Palace in Constantinople, and wrote its Acts. In 1354 he was made Patriarch of Constantinople; he stepped down after one year, but was recalled to the Patriarchal throne in 1364. He continued to be a zealous champion of undiluted Orthodoxy, writing treatises setting forth the theology of the Uncreated Energies of God and refuting the scholastic philosophy that was then infecting—and still infects—the Western heterodox.

Philotheus' uncompromising Orthodoxy motivated him to seek a true, rather than political, reconciliation with the West. He even worked to convene an Ecumenical Council to resolve the differences between the Orthodoxy and her adversaries. This holy Patriarch was deposed in 1376 when the Emperor Andronicus IV came to the throne; he reposed in exile in 1379. Patriarch Philotheus composed the Church's services to St Gregory Palamas. He is listed in the Synodicon of Orthodoxy thusly:

"To Philotheus, who rests in blessedness, the most holy and ever-memorable patriarch, who with words, deeds, discourses, teachings, and writings, unwaveringly struggled in behalf of the Church of Christ and her right dogmas. *Eternal Memory*. (3)"

He was Patriarch from 1354-55 and 1364-76. He championed Orthodoxy against Barlaam and Acindynus and all the Latin-minded. He is commemorated on October 11. <http://www.holytrinityorthodox.com/calendar/los/October/11-07.htm>

they be,"²⁷ prolonged his life for new struggles. Saint Gregory had not fully recovered when he received a letter from John Paleologus in which the Emperor asked him to come to Constantinople to help put a stop to the quarrels and discords in the imperial family, between himself and his father-in-law, John Kontakuzen.

Setting out on his journey, Saint Gregory was seized by the Saracen Turks of Emir Orkhan in 1334 (with whose son Saint Gregory debated over religious matters) and taken to Asia as a captive and slave. He was held for more than a year. He was sold from hand-to-hand, from town-to-town. It was the will of God that he, as an Apostle, passing from one town to another, should preach the Gospel of Christ and confirm the Orthodox in their faith, teach them to hold it firmly, to strengthen those in doubt and set forward the mysteries of the wisdom of God regarding salvation that were difficult for them to understand. He really was a true Apostle of Christ. With holy boldness, Saint Gregory struggled for the faith against the Hagarenes, and against those heretics who, after tearing themselves away from the Church of Christ were teaching wrongly about the earthly life of Christ our God, about the honorable and life giving Cross of the Lord, and about the Holy Icons and their proper veneration.

He enlightened the unbelievers with the light of the Gospel; he consoled and strengthened the enslaved captives and Christians by persuading them to bear the cross of suffering without murmuring through looking to Christ for heavenly rewards and crowns. The enemies of Saint Gregory were astonished at the wisdom and grace that proceeded from his mouth. Some of them, out of impotent malice, gave him cruel blows; he would have had to suffer even the crown of martyrdom, were it not for these same Moslems who protected him, hoping to receive a large ransom. And so it happened. A year later the Bulgarians ransomed him from the hands of the Moslems and gave its angel back to the Church of Thessalonica.

The Saint arrived from his captivity in Constantinople. The whole quay where he was to disembark was attended by an extraordinary triumph of unseen choirs who flew over the Divine Gregory. They breathed into the whole quay the stir of Godliness. Indeed, Saint Gregory was a chosen vessel of God. Shining forth with meekness, love, and humility, he at the same time continued boldly to oppose the enemies of God and the Orthodox Faith, powerfully convicting and defeating the heretics with the sword of

²⁷ *The History of Susanna* 42.

the word of God. Overcoming evil with goodness, he never listened to those who told him of the slanders of his enemies against him. He was generous and patient in all his sorrows and afflictions. He regarded persecutions and all insults as honor and glory for himself²⁸. As a true disciple of Christ, Christ's yoke was to him easy and His burden light. Not only the faithful were astonished at Saint Gregory, but the unbelievers were also impressed. His eyes were always ailing him from the constant flow of powerful tears. Through the mortification of all his passions and in his subjection of his body to the Spirit of God, Saint Gregory fought the good fight, and having delivered the spotless Church and the holy and blameless Orthodox faith from the tumults and disturbances of the heretics, he completed the full course of his long-suffering and God-pleasing life.

During the last three years of his earthly life, Saint Gregory brought miraculous miracles to the sick when they approached him with faith in Christ. Father Porphyry, one of his friends, was twice raised from the bed of sickness. Not long before his glorious repose, a certain gold-embroiderer brought his five-year old child, doomed to death by extreme hemorrhaging, to the Saint. The Divine Gregory signed the cross and prayed over the little one; once again death was thwarted and perfect health was restored by faith in Christ.

Shortly thereafter, Saint Gregory fell ill and took to his bed. Feeling his end was near, he foretold to those surrounding him the day of his departure to eternal life.

"My friends," he said to them the day after the Feast of Saint John Chrysostom, "I am going away from you now to the Lord. I know this because the Holy Chrysostom appeared to me and like a friend and with love he called me to himself." And it was on that very same day, the 14th of November 1359 at the age of 63, Saint Gregory departed to the Lord and to his eternal dwelling in Paradise. As he breathed his last breath, those surrounding him saw that his lips were still whispering something, but as much as they tried to understand his words, they could only distinguish:

"To the heights, to the heights!"

²⁸ As Saint Paul writes, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

With these words, his holy soul quietly and peacefully separated itself from his body, his face became radiant and everything in the room where he was resting was illuminated with uncreated light which Divine light Christ enabled everybody to see; and this was witnessed by the whole city. Everybody flocked to the Saint's relics for the last kiss.

God was pleased to glorify His servant in this way, who during his life was a bright abode of grace and a son of the divine Light. Leaving his holy relics, gloriously enlightened with angelic purity to his flock after his death as a rich inheritance and a precious treasure, Saint Gregory ungrudgingly grants, even now, cures to all the sick and infirm who come from all parts of the globe to his holy relics with faith in his God.²⁹

²⁹ This illumination of the room and its contents in which the Saint reposed has precedents both before and after Saint Gregory's repose. The room in which Saint Hilda of Whitby reposed in 680 on the east coast of Britain (Nov. 17) was totally illuminated with divine, uncreated light as was the case with Saint Kyranna of Thessalonica whose prison cell, after she had been cudged to death by the guard, was filled with the levin flame of uncreated light and a perfumed aroma filled her cell in 1751 (Feb. 28). Mentioning Saint Kyranna, we must also include Saint Sisoës the Great of Egypt (July 6) and the sudden flash of light that filled his cell. We cannot forget the uncreated light which radiated so strongly from the relics of Saint Abo the Perfumer of Baghdad (Jan. 8) which were tied in a bag and submerged in the depths of a river by his Hagarene tormenters. Saint Herman of Alaska's little cell on Spruce Island near Kodiak, Alaska was illuminated, together with his relics, when he reposed in 1837 (Dec. 12). The grass on his grave remained green summer and winter. Those who have venerated the relics of Saint Catherine of Sinai just below the summit of the God-trodden Mount Sinai in the Egyptian wilderness carry away with them the undeniable memory of the uncreated fragrance still emitted by her incorrupt relics. This is only a partial listing of similar manifestations of the power and wisdom of God. Wondrous is God in His Saints.



**Thou wast transfigured on the mountain, O Christ our God,
showing to Thy disciples Thy glory as much as each one could endure.**

**Shine forth on us who are sinners all Thy light ever unending,
through the prayers of the Theotokos; Light-bestower, glory to Thee.**

And to our God be glory.

Saint Basil the Great (330 A.D. reposed 379)

"We know our God from His energies, but we do not claim that we can draw near to His essence; for His energies come down to us, but His essence remains unapproachable." Letter 234, 1

<http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsLife.asp?FSID=103303>

<http://www.antiochian.org/gregory-palamas>

<http://www.ancientsites.com/aw/Post/702719>

<http://eirenikon.wordpress.com/category/palamism/>

http://faculty.washington.edu/ewebb/R327/Hesychastic_Controversy.pdf

<http://www.romanity.org/>

<http://palamites.blogspot.com/2005/06/mc-steenberg-wwwmonachosnet-st-gregory.html>:

<http://tiny.cc/Abecd> The Cambridge History of Christianity Eastern Christianity

Vol. 5 Ed. Michael Angold The Cambridge University Press © 2006

This publication offers a good survey of the tensions existing in Byzantium in the interval after the sack of Constantinople in 1204 by the Fourth Crusade and the Council of Ferrara Florence. Michael Angold's assertion, however, that the distinction between the Divine essence and the Divine energies is a novelty introduced by Saint Gregory Palamas is unsupported by any evidence.

<http://orthodoxyinfo.org/CouncilOfFlorence.htm> Father Panagiotes Carras

The historical significance for the distinction between the Divine essence and the Divine energies is noted particularly with regard to the Council of Ferrara-Florence.

http://www.monachos.net/library/Gregory_Palamas_-_Historical_Appendices

This site is helpful in that it offers a chronological summary of certain points in St. Gregory's life and provides dates for much of his written work.

The Way of A Pilgrim. Here we read of the some of the ways the Divine energies can work in the bodies, in the souls and in the hearts of those who, having received Orthodox Baptism, struggle in the Church for deification, which is salvation. Harper San Francisco 1991.