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The Limits of the Classical Culture and Philosophy Reception in “The Mystery of Theology”

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Abstract

The axiological acceptance and discerning engagement with classical dialogue by the Church Fathers was not done recklessly or without content-related reservations. There is a certain superficial antinomy that requires some clarification. Two ancient worlds, rich in spirituality – the Greek and the Christian – meet existentially and influence each other. These interconnections cannot be viewed as simple or significant only from one perspective. The dynamics of eclectic choice are persistent, and the principle of “yes, but...” is present.

Keywords

Church Fathers, apophatism, mystical knowledge, vision of God, divine nature.

I. “Our Christian Philosophy” in the Church Fathers

In this dynamic of axiological assimilation, it is not contradictory to find, for instance, among the Cappadocian Fathers,

“a multitude of texts that express love and others that express a categorical antithesis to Greek education, so that to correctly capture the meaning of this (paradoxical) antinomy, it is necessary to locate it within the spiritual currents of the fourth century... which include heretical Hellenism, ethnic Hellenism, and orthodox Hellenism”¹.

The phenomenon of dialogue is not simple. Dialogue is a rich, highly valuable, and dynamically renewing phenomenon. And merely correlating dialogue with the dynamic meaning of ancient and modern dialectics, whether positive, sophistical, or polemical, can create enough differentiations. It could offer any spiritual person, even more so the Church Fathers, the opportunity for cultural discernment to accept some forms of dialogue and reject others. On one hand, the value of dialogue is evident in certain stages of their work’s development, but on the other hand, there is also a reserved attitude toward classical dialogue in reflections on major fundamental dogmatic theological themes. Finally, there are also explainable and clarifying reasons for the specific attitude of the Church Fathers towards classical Greek dialogue.

After these necessary introductory observations, we turn to the themes adjacent to our subject, whose analysis includes essential elements of the particularity of dialogue among the Church Fathers. These include the relationships between Greek language/culture and the Gospel, between Greek philosophy and Christian theology from the perspective of their different identities. It also concerns the limits of human language and philosophical dialogue in relation to revealed faith within Patristic Theology. It addresses the “inexperienced silence” of the soul’s rational powers and dialectical syllogisms in the matter of knowing God as one begins the union with God. It discusses the one who oscillates between truth and falsehood, the role of sophistical dialectics, and the serious reservations, sometimes leading to its rejection, in the spiritual effort to find the truth.

¹ Β. ΤΑΤΑΚΗ, *Η συμβολή της Καππαδοκίας στη χριστιανική σκέψη*, Αθήνα, 1960, p. 172.

From the outset, it must be said that from the encounter between Greek language/ culture and Christianity, neither the Hellenization of Christianity nor the Christianization of Hellenism results. The terms of Greek Philosophy will always imply some thought structures different from those of Patristic Theology. The Fathers change the essence, major ideas, methods, and expressions they borrow from Greek education. This means that the Fathers generate new meanings and complex, combined modes of expression, to the point that the philosophical terms they use, while freeing them from their old content, recreate them and infuse them with a new ontological reality².

In other words, they manage to “transform the contemporary philosophical terminology of their time into theological terminology, adding to the philosophical terms they use a new (semasiological) content that was previously unknown in their era”³.

Moreover, the Church Fathers do not stop at the theology of meanings and concepts. The Church Fathers speak and write with and through the canon of the real experience of truth, from the personal experience of truth from “the Truth” (John 18, 37, John 3, 19). St. John of Damascus, in his dogmatic work *The Source of Knowledge*, clearly demonstrates that truth does not depend on dialectics but on the content we attribute to the concepts and categories of reason. Revelation formulates truths that cannot be subjected to ordinary logic and constantly requires us to modify the terms and their content (such as *ousia*, *hypostasis*) or create other new terminological categories (for example, *theandrisim*). The rational form and terms of presentation are in continuous evolution, while the content undergoes complex transformation, as the content of Patristic thought, through its originality and transcendent nature, surpasses any rational-philosophical system. The sensible reality is initially deciphered as a parable of spiritual depth. Then man enters the most holy place, beyond the veil. Only afterward does the vision receive its intellectual-conceptual

² Στυλ. ΠΑΠΑΔΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Θεολογία και γλώσσα*, Εμπειρική θεολογία - Συμβατική γλώσσα, Αθήνα, 2002, p. 29, 166. Β. ΤΑΤΑΚΗ, *Μελετήματα Χριστιανικής φιλοσοφίας*, Αθήνα, 1967, pp. 46, 52-53.

³ Γ. ΜΑΡΤΖΕΛΟΥ, «Φιλοσοφία και θεολογία στην πατερική παράδοση», Ε.Ε.Θ.Σ.Π.Θ., Νέα σειρά, Τμ. Θεολογίας, 7, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1997, p. 179.

elaboration; it is not first rational in form, but only after it has been mystical, ecclesial-liturgical experience, and this fact is characteristic of the history of dogmas. In contrast, any heresy originates primarily from a rational statement that is then grafted onto faith and deforms it.

In the development of the knowledge of God, the Easterners “Aristotelize” only in the logical arrangement of thought, in demonstrations and definitions, and this Aristotelianism is of a formal nuance. But they also “Platonize” when it comes to the metaphysical content of human thought. The depth and unfathomable nature of their theological reflection or philosophical method of reflection are not deductive but postulative, and the postulates are dogmatic affirmations revealed. Saint Dionysius the Areopagite confirms this truth when he says that such a philosophy does not demonstrate the truth but shows it as it is, through symbols, and the soul, transfigured by holiness and uncreated light, understands the truth without the help of reasoning. The fundamental principles of Christian faith do not come from philosophy “according to human tradition, according to the elements of this world”, but they are the dogmas of Revelation, lived and taught, dogmas that constitute themselves as “symbols of faith”. These fundamental principles are actually the contents of God’s wisdom, which penetrates the historical body of existing things, to make them “a completely new creation”. We are dealing with a reality characterized not by a philosophical system but only by a philosophical method that experiences the truths of God and from which it receives guidance and illumination. Therefore, dialectics are placed within the dogmas and truths of Holy Scripture. The mystical experience of uncreated light continually transforms theology into a mystagogy, and this Orthodox characteristic transcends any pure thought.

The pronounced Neoplatonism of a Cappadocian Saint like Gregory of Nyssa integrates into the philosophical climate of Byzantine Eastern thought, especially through the commentaries on the Areopagite Writings by John, Bishop of Scythopolis. Saint Maximus, Saint Symeon the New Theologian, and especially the monastic spiritual life—naturally opposed to any purely philosophical speculation—find in these writings the most suitable technical means for expressing Orthodox thought. The

Church Fathers revalued philosophical contemplation and considered it a “preparatory teaching” for Christian spirituality, referring to the Greek philosophers as “disciples of Moses”.

“We can say in conclusion” – one might say – “that there is no philosophy in terms of a system within the dogmas, but within the dogmas there are elements of a divine philosophy...”⁴. Dogmas represent truths of faith necessary for salvation. For Christianity, there is one all-encompassing truth that saves us: Jesus Christ, the God-Man. The all-encompassing truth is essentially the Most Holy Trinity, the communion of perfect Persons; but the Trinity works salvation through the Son of God, the divine Hypostasis who unites in Himself divinity and humanity, desiring to gather and recapitulate all in Himself. In the Divine Word, everything finds its origin and foundation, existence and meanings, and through His Incarnation, He encompasses everything. Therefore, the dogmas explicate Christ and His work of recapitulating all things in Him. Christ Himself said, “I am the truth” (John 14, 6).

This “divine philosophy” which, the more it is strengthened and experienced, diminishes the influence and limits of “reason” and the position of dialogue, has deep roots. It takes us back to the time of the Cappadocian Fathers. These theologically Greek-educated figures, who recognize the value of Greek philosophy, do not hesitate to maintain safe distances when necessary. Saint Gregory the Theologian speaks clearly about “our own philosophy”, the Christian one. In this philosophy, we take care not to exceed the limits of human thought. On the contrary, we philosophize

“not like wild horses that are hard to control and whose fleeting thoughts throw off and disdain proper piety while following distantly from the starting point of their paths, but we philosophize by considering our own ways”⁵.

⁴ Paul ΕΥΔΟΚΙΜΟΝ, “Το μυστήριον του Λόγου”, (Μετάφρ. Κουτρομπής Δ.), in: *Ο Ζωντανός λόγος Πνευματικών Συμπόσιον περί Αγ. Γραφής*, Αθήνα, 1970, p. 55.

⁵ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΝΑΖΙΑΝΖΗΝΟΣ Ο ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΣ, *Λόγος* 27, 5, PG 36, 17 Α.

In response to the question of what things we can philosophize about and how much we can philosophize, the answer is consistent with the previous one: “All that is possible for us and as much as the listener’s habit and capacity fulfill”⁶. In contrast to the Christian wisdom, ancient wisdom is considered false. “Come to me, and analyze the troubled thought with precise expression and that captivating eloquence”⁷.

Thus, the Christian philosopher, faced with a choice between two philosophies, will certainly not choose “the worldly one, which plays with false truths in the form and problems of philosophy, but ours, which seems humble, sets limits on philosophy, and is guided by God”⁸. From Greek philosophy, he will take only the external images, while truth will be accepted only from Christian philosophy. “Advance on a middle path, avoiding the pride of those and following our wisdom more than the form and distinctive, external elements of Greek philosophers, from us the truth and the superiority of philosophizing”⁹. Saint Basil the Great had made a golden rule out of the ancient dictum: “perfection means measure in everything”¹⁰.

II. “The Mystery of Theology” of God’s Mystical Knowledge

Up to this point, we have observed the distinction between Christian philosophy and ancient philosophy, as well as the general critical transmutation that reflections, methods, and forms of expression undergo—inherently including dialogue and any element of Greek philosophy—in their biblical and patristic transcription and transfiguration. It is very clear that the Cappadocian Fathers were categorically opposed to any Hellenization of their dogmatic teaching¹¹. This observation leads us to

⁶ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Ναζιανζηνός ο Θεολόγος, *Λόγος 27, 5*, PG 36, 17 A.

⁷ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Ναζιανζηνός ο Θεολόγος, *Λόγος 27, 5*, PG 36, 17 A.

⁸ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Ναζιανζηνός ο Θεολόγος, *Λόγος 4*, PG 35, 1204 A.

⁹ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Ναζιανζηνός ο Θεολόγος, *Λόγος 5*, PG 35, 1204 D.

¹⁰ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Ναζιανζηνός ο Θεολόγος, *Εγκώμιο στον Μέγα Βασίλειο*, PG 36, 573 B.

¹¹ Cf. N. ΜΑΤΣΟΥΚΑ, *Γένεσις και ουσία του ορθοδόξου δόγματος*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1969, pp. 34-67.

another related cognitive issue: the rational limits of humanity, the finitude of rational argumentation, and the reception, the assumption of classical dialogue in relation to Orthodox faith in Patristic Theology.

It is evident that the Church Fathers strove to prevent Christian philosophy – that is, their theology par excellence – from being transformed into just another philosophical inquiry, a simple philosophy among many others, a philosophical treatise among so many others. A philosophical teaching or doctrine (treatise, idea, conviction) that, while grounded and supported by the omnipotence of “reason”, could easily be overturned, rejected, contested, and reconsidered by reason itself. On the contrary, the Church Fathers fought to anchor their theology not in the genesis, conditions, or limits of their own. They moved within the sphere of the Divine Mystery, safeguarding the untouched, ineffable, and unfathomable depth illuminated by the holy uncreated divine light. Theology as Mystery, says Saint Gregory the Theologian, “expresses the wisdom of God, inaccessible in its secret depth, which is imparted to those capable of fulfilling it”¹².

Regarding this “wisdom of God”, the intellectual-cognitive powers of man are considered insufficient and imperfect because it has been shown that “the essence of God cannot be understood by the nature of man, and thought cannot explain it satisfactorily”¹³. And God is infinite, incomprehensible, and beyond human understanding because the divine nature infinitely transcends human reason, being “above his reason”¹⁴. Saint Gregory of Nyssa explains that God is that reality, the Reality of realities, which no term can encompass and which no word can adequately express: “The blessed and eternal [Divine] nature, transcending any thought, encompasses all beings within Itself and cannot be encompassed within a term”¹⁵.

¹² Άγιος Γρηγόριος Ναζιανζηνός ο Θεολόγος, *Λόγος* 32, PG 36, 189 A.

¹³ Ο Άγιος Βασίλειος ο Μέγας, *Ανατρεπτικός του Απολογητικού του Δυσσεβούς Ευνομίου*, 1, 14, PG 29, 545 A.

¹⁴ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Εξήγησις ακριβής, εις τον Εκκλησιαστήν του Σολομώντος, εις ομιλίας Η'*, PG 44, 729 A.

¹⁵ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Εξήγησις ακριβής, εις τα άσματα των ασμάτων*, 5, PG 44, 873 C.

Commenting on the verse “I sought Him, but I did not find Him”¹⁶, Saint Gregory observes:

“How could He be discovered Who does not appear at all to the senses... neither to thought, nor to suppositions, nor to rational thinking, but being always unknown to any rational approach, Who entirely eludes the understanding of those who seek Him. That is why I say: I sought Him with the investigative powers of the soul in reasoning and in meanings, being completely incomprehensible and remaining far from the understanding of the mind”¹⁷.

Ultimately, “God is neither demonstrated nor demonstrable. Moreover, as the foundation of human existence, He does not even require external proof, since the strongest and most sufficient evidence of Him is spiritual experience”¹⁸.

And since our mind—and consequently, dialogue—cannot truly approach or comprehend God, it remains untested, humble, and silent before Him. “Neither does the mind, with its thoughts and assumptions, nor reason itself advance toward what lies beyond, nor does it ultimately reveal the continuity”¹⁹.

Then faith comes, always working synergistically with rational thought, to complete the knowledge of God. The seeking soul of man succeeds in knowing God through observing the greatness of creation and contemplating other creative works of God (goodness, love for humanity, justice etc.). “We affirm that we know our God through His energies, while we do not claim to approach His essence. For His energies are communicated to us, whereas His essence remains inaccessible”²⁰.

¹⁶ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Εξήγησις ακριβής, εις τα άσματα των ασμάτων*, 5, 6 PG 44, 873 C.

¹⁷ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Εξήγησις ακριβής, εις τα άσματα των ασμάτων*, 12, PG 44, 1028 B.

¹⁸ Π. Χρήστου, *Ο υπαρκτικός διάλογος κατά τους θεολόγους της Καπαδοκίας*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1961, p. 14.

¹⁹ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Εις την επιγραφήν των Ψαλμών*, PG 44, 485 A.

²⁰ Ο Άγιος Βασίλειος ο Μέγας, *Επιστολή 234, Προς Αμφιλόχιον, περί του Αγίου Πνεύματος 1*, PG 32, 869 AB. See: Γ. Μαρτζέλου, *Ουσία και ενέργεια του Θεού κατά τον Μ. Βασίλειον*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1993, pp. 89-148.

And most importantly, faith comes to cultivate the mystical, secret life of man. It prepares within the purified soul the mystical vision of the Living God, the sense of God's reality and presence within us. "However, the immutable, eternal nature that contains all things is, properly speaking, accessible to us only through faith"²¹.

The divine nature does not exist in space or time, but we understand it transcendently before and above them in an ineffable way. A presence that God Himself grants to every believer who desires with all their being to communicate with Him, to live in God, to exist with God, and to be united with Him eternally.

Thus, we approach perhaps the most sensitive aspect of Orthodox theology and spirituality, of Orthodoxy in general. Orthodoxy is "a dialogue between the human soul and the Spirit of God, but a dialogue that creates a unity in a divine manner. God unites only with those who are deified (*Θεός Θεοίς ενούμενος*)", says St. Symeon... According to St. Macarius, the theologian is "taught by God", while St. Symeon asserts that the Spirit is the one who makes a theologian out of a learned person, after the latter no longer knows intellectually about God, but is fully filled with God²².

As St. Gregory of Nyssa conclusively notes, "He who exists eternally offers Himself as food so that we may receive Him within ourselves and become what He is"²³. Thus, faith becomes love, and through love, we become what we desire and love. "And the loving relationship naturally creates union with the beloved; therefore, what we prefer out of love, that we also become"²⁴.

All the Church Fathers asserted that no one can approach God through rational understanding without first purifying themselves from passions. St. Gregory the Theologian says: "Do you want to become a theologian and worthy of God? Ascend through your way of life, attain purity through purification; keep the commandments, first purify yourself, and then

²¹ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Αντιρρητικός, προς τα Απολλινάριου* 1, ΕΠΕ 2, p. 371.

²² Paul ΕΝΔΟΚΙΜΟΝ, *L'Orthodoxie*, Paris, 1959, p. 67.

²³ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Εξήγησις ακριβής, εις τον Εκκλησιαστήν του Σολομώντος, εις ομιλίας Η', PG 44, 740 Α.*

²⁴ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Εξήγησις ακριβής, εις τον Εκκλησιαστήν του Σολομώντος, εις ομιλίας Η', PG 44, 737 D.*

approach the Pure One”²⁵. This is why the Cappadocian Fathers speak of the “Mystery of Theology”.

Similarly, St. Gregory of Nyssa explains that “theology is a high and difficult mountain to climb. One can barely reach its foothills. And only the strong can achieve this”²⁶. There could be no deeper or more substantial dialogue than the union and communion of man with God, toward which Orthodox theology strives.

III. The Vision of God as True Theology

An interesting perspective on classical philosophical principles is also presented in the theology of St. Gregory Palamas, who argues that human wisdom and philosophical-rational argumentation are powerless in grasping the depths of theological thought, particularly the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.

St. Gregory Palamas does not fundamentally condemn that philosophy which remains within its proper limits, namely, the knowledge of created things, but he critiques the philosophy attributed to certain scholastics who introduced abstract rationalist teachings and methods into the doctrine inspired by the Bible and the patristics²⁷. In his polemic with Barlaam, St. Gregory supports a double wisdom – divine and human – ironically asking: “What does divinely inspired teaching have to do with vanity?”²⁸. Philosophical knowledge is a natural gift “not sent from above”²⁹, whereas divine wisdom is the mystical work of the Holy Spirit within the Church. “For we have not enriched our confession of faith by following certain thoughts, but through the words spoken by God”³⁰. The wisdom from above

²⁵ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΝΑΖΙΑΝΖΗΝΟΣ Ο ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΣ, *Λόγος* 20, 12, PG 35, 1080.

²⁶ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΝΥΣΣΗΣ, *Περί του βίου Μωυσέως, ή περί της κατ' αρετήν τελειότητος*, PG 44, 373, 376.

²⁷ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζοντων*, Panaiotis Hristou's edition, in five volumes, *Συγγράμματα*, τόμ. Α', Θεσσαλονίκη 1962, 1, 1, 16, p. 378.

²⁸ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζοντων*, 2, 1, 6, p. 470.

²⁹ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζοντων*, 1, 1, 21, p. 385.

³⁰ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Αποδεικνύοντας τη λέξη* I, p. 125.

is not “acquired through words and syllogisms, but is proven through work and life”³¹.

Moreover, apodictic theology has life as its starting point, in contrast to the dialectical method of Barlaam and Akindynos, which is reduced only to nuances and common meanings, and is based solely on syllogisms. The Palamite method distinguishes between science as research and charismatic theology. While the former pertains to created reality, the latter pertains to uncreated reality and is not the result of human reflection but the work of uncreated energies. While acknowledging the role and importance of natural knowledge, St. Gregory emphasizes apodictic knowledge, based on revealed teaching and the experiential nature of the Church’s theology. While his opponent Barlaam categorically denied apodictic knowledge, asserting that “there is no proof for divine matters”, St. Gregory warns that God transcends any reality expressed through reason, word, expression, and discourse, as God is beyond any dialectical method, even apodictic ones. And when we use certain syllogisms about God, we do so based on the living experience of the Church³². The use of the apodictic way begins with “the active power of the Holy Spirit through which the God-inspired Fathers, speaking beyond the mind with things beyond the mind, were taught by the grace of God and taught by imitating God”³³.

Speaking about the Mystery of the Procession of the Holy Spirit, Palamas also addresses how one can seek and attain knowledge of this divine truth. This existential search is confirmed not “through persuasive words of human wisdom, but through the demonstration of the Spirit and of power/energy”, in a manner illuminated by God.

“The [apodictic] element refers to the vital, eternal being and the true being, which is always found in this way; whereas the dialectic [element] refers to probability and possibility, with the natural tendency of taking a different form each time, so that

³¹ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΆΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζόντων*, 2, 1, 11, p. 370.

³² Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΆΣ, *Επιστολή ΙΙ προς Βαρλαάμ* I, 33, έκδ. Π. Χρήστου, p. 244.

³³ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΆΣ, *Επιστολή ΙΙ προς Βαρλαάμ*, I, 58, p. 258.

sometimes it exists and sometimes it doesn't, sometimes it is true and other times it is not"³⁴.

Apodictic syllogisms are the rational formulation of the spiritual experiences that the saint lived through, during which God revealed Himself and granted him true knowledge. Their distinction from dialectic syllogisms is practical, didactic, and highly significant for the particularity of dialogue among the Fathers. The apodictic syllogism refers to what is true, while the dialectic syllogism refers to what is possible.

“The apodictic syllogism also cares for the truth and acts with conscience, without needing to take either side of the antithesis; the dialectic syllogism cares only to convince and, using dialogue without limits, is forced to accept whatever the interlocutor allows, even if these are unconvincing. Therefore, the apodictic syllogism remains inflexible and without distorting the demonstrated meaning, while the dialectic syllogism is easily changeable and sometimes cancels itself out by its own will”³⁵.

The apodictic syllogism is concerned with truth, is stable, and does not compromise. The dialectic syllogism seeks to convince at any cost, using unlimited dialogue and continuously changing its stance.

“The former is confirmed by the true and always familiar subject, while the latter is driven by probabilities that are not necessarily true, sometimes even completely false, but generally alien to the subject. [Whom will you believe when they argue about divine matters, or will you, together with Zerubbabel of Cyrus, boldly declare that you possess the truth of all?]. And while the former operates on the basis of cause and not only on that of conclusion, but also of action, thus the conclusion is always necessary and truthful, the dialectic syllogism never operates on the basis of the cause of action, not always on the conclusion, and sometimes

³⁴ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΆΣ, *Επιστολή Ι προς Βαρλαάμ*, έκδ. Π. Χρήστου, vol. 1, 33, p. 484.

³⁵ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΆΣ, *Α' προς Ακίνδυνον*, έκδ. Π. ΧΡΗΣΤΟΥ, 13, p. 426.

not even on this, therefore the conclusion is mere opinion and not necessarily true”³⁶.

The apodictic syllogism relies on what is true and natural (in the subject at hand), and based on the causes of conclusion and action, it arrives at a truthful result. The dialectic syllogism is provoked by probabilities and, without connection to the subject, and based on abusive and arbitrary causes, ends up as a mere conception. “True dialectic is superior to any good wisdom... it dares beyond all men’s understanding of God... it is called the science of divine and heavenly things... only this true wisdom alone guides”³⁷.

The entire analysis and comparison by Saint Gregory between the two types of syllogisms is indeed worthy of attention. What stands out particularly is the subtlety and specificity of his observations. Here, for the sake of brevity, we will focus on just a few aspects.

The first aspect concerns the use of dialogue – specifically dialectic dialogue – without limits, being compelled to incorporate as many elements as the interlocutor allows, even if they are not convincing. To this, we can add the fact that dialectic dialogue seeks to convince at any cost, and then, the fact that it proceeds from probabilities and without relation to the subject, and, through arbitrary causes, arrives at a mere teaching...

We believe that Saint Gregory is not referring to the positive Socratic-Platonic dialectic, identified with classical dialogue, but rather to the one called sophistic or polemic scholasticism³⁸. This dialectic

“cannot be positively correlated with dialogue... Dialogue also presupposes a thesis. It is interested in certifying true knowledge and discovering the truth through well intentioned persuasion... the sophistic one, on the contrary, relies on arbitrary hypotheses”³⁹.

³⁶ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΛΑΜÁS, *Α΄ προς Ακίνδυνον*, p. 428.

³⁷ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΛΑΜÁS, *Α΄ προς Ακίνδυνον*, p. 428.

³⁸ A clear differentiation between the two types of dialectics is found in CLEMENT ALEXANDRINUS, *Στροφωατείς*, 1, 28, *PG* 8, 924 ABC and 741 B.

³⁹ Cf. Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΛΑΜÁS, *Κεφάλαια φυσικά και θεολογικά* 1, 2, 4.

With these thoughts, we do not attempt to challenge the self-evident value of “demonstrable syllogisms”, but merely to point out that dialogue-communion involves “self-knowledge” and would never dare to delve into the depths of the dogma of the Holy Trinity.

One final observation: Saint Gregory considers the distinction between syllogisms as follows: “What about those things that concern the divine? Do we seek the true revelation of the fact, or do we engage in a discussion for show (ostentatious demonstration)?”⁴⁰. Does this mean seeking the *truth* or debating the argument? A valid and very interesting question. And this opinion is not unique to Saint Gregory Palamas; it is also held by the Cappadocian Fathers and other Church Fathers. And, if we are not mistaken, much of the Fathers’ caution and responsibility in the face of dialogue and dialectics lies here: in the malicious use of these methods by their “adversaries”. The result is well known: while these are useful spiritual tools for discovering the truth, they often end up falsifying it.

For Saint Gregory, the vision of God constitutes the path to authentic knowledge, although this vision (theoptia) transcends any knowledge: “Beyond all knowledge is such a union, though metaphorically it is called knowledge”⁴¹. The saint emphasizes that the vision of God imparts true knowledge about Him: “For how could God’s essence not exist for those who, through sincere prayer, transcend all that is sensory and intelligible, and in this prayer, the Glory of that divine essence is revealed to them?”⁴².

Theology without vision strays from its true source and becomes confined to a lifeless and closed knowledge: “it is not at all certain to speak about God for those who do not know how to speak with God”⁴³.

Vision means true theologizing, even though there is a nuanced distinction between vision and theology: “to speak about God is not the same as to be with Him”⁴⁴. Theology is accessible “even to those who have not purified their life and soul”⁴⁵, whereas theoptia, as a mystical and

⁴⁰ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Α’ προς Ακίνδυνον*, p. 428.

⁴¹ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζοντων*, 2, 3, 17, p. 553.

⁴² Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζοντων*, 2, 3, 38, p. 572.

⁴³ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Επιστολή Ι προς Βαρλαάμ*, 20, p. 236.

⁴⁴ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζοντων* 1, 3, 42, p. 453.

⁴⁵ Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΑΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζοντων* 1, 3, 42, p. 453.

gracious union of man with God, is impossible without purification from passions and the practice of virtues.

IV. Dialectic and Classical Dialogue in the Theology of the Church Fathers

It is worth noting that the openness or reluctance towards classical dialectic and dialogue varies among the Church Fathers, depending on the circumstances, themes, and issues they faced. Sometimes the difference is so great that one can speak of an ambivalent attitude. A characteristic example is the position of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, who shows considerable restraint and almost distrusts the syllogistic and analytical method of dialectics when using it to prove Christian truth.

For Saint Gregory, dialectics is as capable of aiding the truth as it is of aiding falsehood.

“Since it is evident to all that the dialectical method has equal capacity for both situations, both for falsifying the truth and for revealing the lie. Therefore, we often doubt even the truth when it is demonstrated through this method, thinking that the method’s skill deceives our mind and causes it to lose sight of the truth”⁴⁶.

Of course, in other theological contexts, he himself resorts to dialectic and makes use of the scientific and philosophical data of his time⁴⁷.

Saint Basil the Great considers dialectic in polemics with heretics as a “certainty for dogmas, which does not allow to be easily conquered by those who desire them”⁴⁸. However, at other times, he praises and exalts not curious, sincere, and unpretentious faith, opposing excessively abstract

⁴⁶ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΝΥΣΣΗΣ, *Διάλογος περί ψυχής και αναστάσεως*, PG 46, 52 BC.

⁴⁷ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΝΥΣΣΗΣ, *Διάλογος περί ψυχής και αναστάσεως*, PG 46, 57 B – 64 A.
Cf. *Εἰς τὰ τῆς Γραφῆς ῥήματα*, „Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ομοίωσιν” PG 44, 144B and following.

⁴⁸ Ο Άγιος ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΣ Ο ΜΕΓΑΣ, *Σχόλιο στον Προφήτη Ησαΐα*, cap. 2, 92, PG 30, 269 C.

theoretical inquiries and useless searches. Speaking about the early Christian Church, Saint Basil emphasizes that

“all those who had the disease of inquiry were few, and all, despite being unashamed workers of God’s commandments, worshiped God peacefully through their simple and sincere confession and steadfastly kept the simple faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”⁴⁹.

In a similar manner, he expresses himself in another case: “That is why I urge and implore you to cease curious inquiry and indecent polemics, being content with the words of the saints and those of the Lord”⁵⁰.

Sometimes, in an attempt to show goodwill, he compares the behavior of the three Magi before Christ with that of the Christians of his time:

“The Magi worship, and the Christians debate how God became Incarnate... Let there be silence concerning what is superfluous in the Church of God; think upon what is confessed, and do not persistently investigate what is hidden”⁵¹.

“Let the rest be honored in silence”⁵², says St. Gregory the Theologian, placing us before a truth that needs no analysis, “for the spirit of the multitude is not capable of understanding the depth of words...”, according to St. Maximus the Confessor, “and we should not open the eyes of the foolish to the depth of mercy”⁵³. The Incarnation aims to gather all things in Christ, both those in heaven “and those on earth” (Ephesians 1, 10), to reveal the wisdom of God, the hidden mystery which God ordained before the ages for our glory (1 Corinthians 2, 7). The Incarnation involves

⁴⁹ Ο Άγιος ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΣ Ο ΜΕΓΑΣ, *Επιστολή 127, Στον Σωφρόνιο τον Επίσκοπο ΕΠΕ 3*, p. 264.

⁵⁰ Ο Άγιος ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΣ Ο ΜΕΓΑΣ, *Περί πίστεως 5*, PG 31, 688 D – 689 A.

⁵¹ Ο Άγιος ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΣ Ο ΜΕΓΑΣ, *Κήρυγμα στην Αγία Γέννηση του Χριστού*, PG 31, 1473 C.

⁵² Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΝΑΖΙΑΝΖΗΝΟΣ Ο ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΣ, PG 36, 653.

⁵³ Άγιος ΜΑΞΙΜΟΣ Ο ΟΜΟΛΟΓΗΤΗΣ, *Προς Θαλάσσιον τον οσιώτατον πρεσβύτερον και ηγούμενον Περιφόρων απόρων της θείας Γραφής 43*, PG 90, 412 A. *Γνωστικά κεφάλαια 2*, 99, PG XC, 1172 D.

the ultimate level of communion. The humanization of God is prefigured in the dogma of deification, which it presupposes, from which it springs, and in which it finds fulfillment. Atonement and judgment correspond to the fall into sin. The depth of the Mystery of the Incarnation corresponds only to the Kingdom of God, for it is the very fulfillment of the Kingdom. Therefore, the Church is considered the organism of salvation, the path and means of its sacraments, but at the same time, it is also salvation itself, the coming of the Kingdom.

On another occasion, acting out of pastoral concern and trying to prevent the harm to the faith of some due to endless discussions and disputes, St. Basil recommended avoiding them altogether:

“And this because we know that if we alter the simplicity of faith even once, on the one hand, we will not find any end to the discussions because contradiction will always lead us more towards agitation, and on the other hand, we will scandalize the souls of the innocent by introducing confusing elements”⁵⁴.

Addressing the monks, following the general conviction of the Church Fathers that rational argumentation is powerless in approaching the mystery of the Holy Trinity and that consequently, the aporias and contentions that would arise from such a discussion would cause more harm than benefit, he advises:

“Regarding the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, there should be no discussion, but rather thoughtful contemplation and bold confession of the uncreated and consubstantial Trinity. Respond to those who ask if necessary, be baptized as we have received from Tradition, believe as we confessed at Baptism, and glorify as we have believed”⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ Ο Άγιος ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΣ Ο ΜΕΓΑΣ, *Επιστολή 258, Στον Επιφάνιο τον Επίσκοπο 2*, ΕΠΕ 3, p. 270.

⁵⁵ Ο Άγιος ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΣ Ο ΜΕΓΑΣ, *Ασκητικός λόγος 1*, PG 31, 649 BC.

In conclusion: Dialogue and dialectic – as methods and techniques of human reason – have helped the Church Fathers in the search, discovery, and defense of Christian truth. Through the weapons of truth and right conviction, they successfully confronted the persecutors of the Truth and the heretics of false, deceitful knowledge. This contribution has been laid down in history, and no one can contest it. This is the point we have tried to bring to attention in the present work.

V. The Ineffable Apophatism of Experiencing God’s Presence

The complexities of these issues often intensify due to their direct interconnectedness, particularly when the irrational use of Greek philosophy threatens to distort or Hellenize Christian doctrine. This matter ultimately ties into the essence of Patristic Theology, which is the knowledge of God, a knowledge that cannot be attained solely through human abilities, no matter how gifted, endowed, or organized they might be. According to St. Gregory the Theologian, reaching a participatory knowledge of God requires both faith and spiritual effort: “to understand that we are nothing compared to the unique and true wisdom, we must turn solely to it, constantly seeking the illumination of the light that emanates from it”⁵⁶.

Only through divine illumination can human imperfections and inadequacies be transcended, and God reveals Himself, offering true knowledge. Of course, through spiritual experience, a person can use their rational abilities more effectively, including demonstrative syllogisms, to theologically express the rich discoveries they have shared in.

Consequently, anyone wishing to theologize in an Orthodox manner must recognize human limitations while also possessing the necessary discernment to differentiate between philosophical thought and the revealed truth of the Church. Our God-bearing Fathers successfully accomplished this, recognizing the true elements of classical culture, utilizing and employing dialogue and dialectic in service of Christian

⁵⁶ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Ναζιανζηνός ο Θεολόγος, *Λόγος 17*, PG 35, 969 C.

truth. Simultaneously, they gave the rightful place to “the wisdom from the beginning and the true wisdom”, which is Christian faith and Mystery. Moreover, their sensitivity to the purity of style and language, their insistent return to the archaic form of language, but above all, their conscious distancing from secular language and the creation of a sacred and doxological language for prayer and Liturgy⁵⁷, resulted in a language that is for and worthy of God.

When we say God or God the Creator, we only indicate His face turned toward the world, the God of Economy and Providence, and not God in Himself. Thus, cataphatic, or positive, theology, “symbolic theology”, applies only to these revealed attributes, i.e., only to God’s economic manifestations in the world. This knowledge of God through His acts is only possible because of Revelation and immediately excludes any “rational exposition”, any deductive logical method concerning His inexpressible Divine Being. The translation and exposition of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity into the realm of concepts is nothing more than an encoded expression, an interpretive approximation, while the reality professed by this linguistic translation is absolutely original and irreducible to any system of thought. On the contrary, a God of reason, where the principle of reason would turn into a creative attribute, would be nothing but a fabricated idol. A halo of silence surrounds the cloud of God’s unknowability. The cataphatic method operates with affirmation, but by defining and conceptualizing God, cataphatism limits God, establishing its own doctrine as incomplete, for through it, one sees “darkly, through a glass” (1 Corinthians 13, 12).

The cataphatic method must be complemented by the apophatic method, which operates with negations or the opposites of everything in the universe. Affirmative, positive theology is not devalued or relativized but rather precisely and deeply anchored within its proper dimension and limits. According to St. Gregory of Nyssa, negative theology habituates us to the salvific ontological distance that we cannot cross: “The concepts of

⁵⁷ O. ROUSSEAU, “Les langues liturgiques de l’Orient et de l’Occident”, in: *Irénikon*, 29, 1956.

thought create idols of God, but only wonder/astonishment understands something”⁵⁸.

Wonder or fascination with the Mystery’s experience is appropriate for that correct attitude which situates itself beyond all knowledge, “beyond even ignorance, up to the highest summit of mystical Scriptures, where the simple, absolute, and incorruptible mysteries of theology are revealed, in the most-bright darkness of tranquility”⁵⁹. Conversely, those subjected to the senses, empirical data, and conceptions of reality attenuate the hidden, mysterious sense and confuse us in their precise evaluation. However, this does not imply agnosticism “because, due to this very ignorance, we know beyond all thought”⁶⁰.

Here, it is not a matter of human impotence or incapacity but of the unfathomable, unsearchable, and unknowable depth of the divine essence. The inherent limit of faith protects the Mystery of God’s presence. First and foremost, it is a Mystery, for the more God is present, the more He is more hidden, “darker”, more mysterious. A present God will always be a mysterious God. The expression “radiant darkness”⁶¹ is a way of expressing God’s most real presence and, at the same time, His most elusive presence. According to the same St. Gregory of Nyssa, a person can only experience “glimmers of darkness”⁶².

For St. Gregory of Nyssa⁶³, only faith – in the full sense of the word – appears as the sole path of unifying communion, as it indicates the state of a soul that no longer has its center within itself. It is evident that the mystery of light and the mystery of darkness coincide and culminate in a perfect understanding and vision, which is also recognized in the mystery of love that transcends itself. This knowledge is not a philosophical knowledge but one of resemblance, knowledge through analogy – participation.

Apophatic denial uplifts the human soul and gathers it spiritually, making it the dwelling place of God. It is not a matter of adapting dogmatic

⁵⁸ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΝÝΣΣΗΣ, *Περί του βίου Μωυσέως, ή περί της κατ’ αρετήν τελειότητος*, PG 44, 377 B. *Εξήγησις ακριβής, εις τα άσματα των ασμάτων*, PG 44, 1028 D.

⁵⁹ Άγιος ΔΙΟΝÝΣΙΟΣ Ο ΑΡΕΟΠΑΓÝΤΗΣ, *Μυστική θεολογία*, PG 3, 1000.

⁶⁰ Άγιος ΔΙΟΝÝΣΙΟΣ Ο ΑΡΕΟΠΑΓÝΤΗΣ, *Μυστική θεολογία*, PG 3, 1001.

⁶¹ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΝÝΣΣΗΣ, PG 44, 1001 B.

⁶² Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΝÝΣΣΗΣ, PG 44, 1057 A.

⁶³ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓÓΡΙΟΣ ΝÝΣΣΗΣ, PG 45, 945 D.

antinomies to our logic but of changing, transfiguring our being, adapting it to the work and order of the Holy Spirit (sanctification – deification). When seeking God, a person is found by God; when pursuing His truth, the truth takes the person and elevates them to the eternal level of the Kingdom. “To find God means to seek Him incessantly... this means to truly see God, to never be satisfied with desiring Him”⁶⁴.

Apophaticism as a method teaches us the correct attitude towards theological science: a person does not speculate but is transfigured. Every human assertion is also a limit, a negation of itself, because it never reaches the ultimate reality beyond fullness, and this total incapacity leads to its own denial. “Man cannot see Me, and if he were to see Me, he would die”. (Exodus 33, 20).

St. Gregory of Nyssa notes the danger of limiting God through human definitions. God is “Totally Other”, a “Perfect Other”, with “Totally Otherness”. This “Totally Other” aspect of God has no scale of comparison: in His categorical ontological transcendence, He is entirely different from the world in His totality, fullness, and perfection, with no exceptions. On the other hand, God transcends His own ontological transcendence in His manifestations. Grace reveals the limits of the created, which grace itself immediately surpasses precisely because it is grace, divine infinite love for mankind. St. Paul teaches us that “God is nothing but Yes”. Human “Yes” is placed within this Divine “Yes” at the Incarnation of the Logos of God, and this is the theandric “Yes” of Christ, “the wisdom of Christ”, “the place of the Wisdom of God”⁶⁵.

The golden spiritual path – illuminated and analogous with the measure of each one’s contribution to the two spiritual dimensions, between reason and the Divine Word, abstract philosophical thinking and the living truth of the Church – was not a mere act of courage. Only the spiritual and charismatic Fathers “taught by God” dared to attempt something similar and to succeed (Isaiah 54, 13 and John 6, 45).

⁶⁴ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *PG* 44, 97 A, 44, 404 D.

⁶⁵ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *PG* 44, 97 A, 44, 404 D.

VI. Ecclesiastical Models in the Study of Dialogue with Philosophy and Classical Culture

a. The Philokalic Experience of the Presence and Preeminence of God

Why are the Cappadocian Fathers our principal teachers and guides in the theme of dialogue with philosophy and classical culture? The answer is not difficult. First and foremost, the three Cappadocian Fathers – Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa – together form one of the most important “triads” of theology and spirituality in our Church⁶⁶. They were born and raised in the same place, as chosen men of Cappadocia, where Orthodox Tradition had gifted the Church with blessed fruits of witness, holiness, and martyrdom. The Cappadocian Fathers had the favorable opportunity to complete extensive studies with the best results in the philosophical schools of their time, where, among other things, they became acquainted with the possibilities of dialogue and practiced its enabling and use. Considered all three as highly gifted personalities, the “triad” of Cappadocian Saints presents similarities and differences of mutual interpenetration, i.e., a divine Philokalia, an admirable and fascinating whole. An astonishing unity, an enchanting harmony, and a maximum consistency of soul and life devotedly characterize the work of each of the three.

Regarding the theme of dialogue with philosophy and classical culture, the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers reveals truths and life attitudes directly or indirectly connected with the phenomenon of receiving the classical Areopagus. Their mission was to critically and creatively value it and enrich it with a new transfigurative prototype content.

In the spiritual horizon of the Cappadocian Fathers, there is a sense of proximity and indwelling of the infinite divine, of God’s presence. “The man who was destined to enjoy divine goods had to be related by nature to the One who was to participate”⁶⁷. For the Spirit does not open up and

⁶⁶ Perhaps the most well-known ecclesial “triad” is that of the Three Hierarchs, of whom two are Cappadocians: Basil and Gregory the Theologian.

⁶⁷ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Λόγος κατηχητικός μέγας*, PG 45, 21 CD.

manifest except in its own, natural, and propitious environment, i.e., in the divine dwelling space: “The life of the soul consists in the contemplation of God”⁶⁸.

St. Gregory the Theologian expresses this truth in a verse meant to make us aware that God is first and everything becomes secondary. “Stand. All things are secondary to God (that is, first is God, and then all other things about humans should come second)”⁶⁹.

God is Being, but not Plato’s Being, an impersonal and formless essence, even without life. The God of Revelation, the One with Whom man can have fellowship, conversation, dialogue, communion, participation. Through His uncreated energies, God is a continuous, uninterrupted presence. The human soul senses the divine presence in the multitude of blessed opportunities of the inner and outer world. Additionally, it feels and experiences that its existence is saved only through the presence of divine beauty, the soul’s participation in the life of communion with God.

b. The Antinomy of Participability and Non-Participability of the Divine Nature as a Criterion of Glory

For apophatic theology, the divine essence is absolutely transcendent to humanity, which leads to an antinomic (but never contradictory) assertion of God’s total inaccessibility in Himself and His immanent manifestations in the world. God “comes to meet us” through His energies and is wholly present within them. The divine energy is not a part of God; it is God revealing Himself without losing anything of His categorical “non-emergence” from His essence.

The divine energies, “rays of Divinity” according to Dionysius the Areopagite, are common to all the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity; they are uncreated, essential, eternal, and accessible to creatures. Divine energies do not reach divine unity, indivisibility, and simplicity, just as the distinctions between the Hypostases of the Trinity do not make God a compound or a composite structure. Philosophy understands God as pure act, admitting nothing to be God without being itself God. What is not

⁶⁸ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Λόγος κατηχητικός μέγας*, PG 46, 176 C.

⁶⁹ Άγιος Γρηγόριος Ναζιανζηνός ο Θεολόγος, *Ηθικά επικά ποιήματα*, Ποίημα 14, “Σχετικά με την ανθρώπινη φύση”, PG 37, 765, στίχος 124.

essence/being does not belong to the divine nature. But God is more than existence, especially in its logical form, because He is the Creator of every form, being thus above and beyond concept. God's simplicity is "totally other" than our idea of simplicity. God does not lose His simplicity through the particularity and distinction of the Hypostases or through the sharing, diversity, multitude, and variety of powers and works⁷⁰.

For the Fathers of the Church, the diversity and unity in the Trinity are conceived simultaneously. St. Gregory the Theologian writes: "I do not reach to conceive the One and am illuminated by the Three. I do not reach to divide the Three and am lifted up to the One"⁷¹. Thus, each dogma is antinomic, beyond reason or logic, but never contradictory. Commenting on the well-known expression "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1, 4), St. Gregory Palamas states that it has an antinomic character which associates it with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Just as God is One God and the Holy Trinity, so the divine nature must be simultaneously non-participable and in a certain sense participable. Although we partake of the divine nature, His essence remains entirely inaccessible. We must assert both simultaneously, says St. Gregory, and maintain their antinomy as a criterion of Glory.

The entire Orthodox theology is determined by this fundamental assertion: that God's essence is absolutely transcendent, while the uncreated works or energies are immanent, synergistic, and cooperative with man.

"Do not think that God is seen according to His essence, which is above essence, but according to the gift and divine-working energy, according to the grace of adoption, the uncreated deification, the enhypostatic radiance... but the essence of God is beyond what is imparted to us"⁷².

Deification, divine grace, and illumination are not the essence but the energy of God, "a power and a common work of the Trinity". God

⁷⁰ Cf. Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΌΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΆΣ, *Η Όμολογία Όρθοδόξων Πίστεως* ed. Hristou, II, p. 496.

⁷¹ Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΌΡΙΟΣ ΝΑΖΙΑΝΖΗΝΌΣ Ο ΘΕΟΛΌΓΟΣ, *Λόγος* 40, 41, ΒΕΠΕΣ 60, p. 107.

⁷² Ο Άγιος ΓΡΗΓΌΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΜΆΣ, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζόντων*, 3, 1, 29, vol. 1, p. 641.

created us to become partakers of the divine nature, to be like Him, being deified by the grace that creates all existing beings and calls into existence everything that exists⁷³.

VII. Conclusions

These clarifications about the presence of God show that the theological statements of the Church Fathers are both biblical and anthropological. Grounded on the unshakable foundation of evangelical truth, they operate with authenticity and through the perspective of eternity. The Fathers of the Church present a unified line of thought that continues and illuminates the history of human thought, which assumes, recreates, and illuminates human history from creation and fall to the renewal and Paschal transfiguration in Christ and the ongoing deification of human nature.

Thus, after God and co-synergy with God, man “created by God” achieves the highest preeminence in the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers. This understanding, this consideration of man truly deserves special attention.

“He does not analyze man statically; he sees him dynamically, in an evolutionary process moving towards God or away from God. Man is always in a relationship of communion and can never exist independently either from God or from his fellow human beings. Moreover, man does not relate theoretically to truths, but through a living relationship with the Truth par excellence, Who is God”⁷⁴.

It is also remarkable that Christian anthropology is concerned with the real, concrete human being, not in general, undefined terms, but about the concrete individual human existence, with its struggles, fragility, and existential agonies in the journey towards salvation. A salvation directly

⁷³ See Άγιος ΜΆΞΙΜΟΣ Ο ΟΜΟΛΟΓΗΤΉΣ, *Επιστολή 43 προς Ιωάννη τον Κυβισμό*.

⁷⁴ Ιω. ΚΑΡΑΒΙΔΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Προσωπείο και πρόσωπο κατά τους Τρείς Ιεράρχες*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1979, p. 14.

related to maintaining the existential identity of man and the possibility of developing existential relationships and dialogues in many forms: with oneself, towards God, and with one's neighbor⁷⁵.

In this way, the Cappadocian Fathers prove to be

“ideal guides to the knowledge of God, our neighbor, and ourselves. In their life and thought, the idea of dialogue acquires a very important position. Their life evolved in all its stages in the rhythm of the drama; their written work is intensely marked by an uninterrupted dialogue with opponents, friends, their own selves, and God. Their entire thought and existence tend towards interpreting the drama of the human person, which finds its solution in the encounter with God”⁷⁶.

They struggled and, ultimately, succeeded in the unsurpassable attempt of the salvific dialogue with their contemporaries and, through them, with the citizens of the whole world, until the end of the ages.

⁷⁵ Αν. ΓΙΑΝΝΟΥΛΑΪΤΟΥ, *Εις την γραμμὴν των Πατέρων. Η δυναμική κατανόησις της παραδόσεως των Τριών Ιεραρχών*, Αθήνα, 1971, π. 5.

⁷⁶ Π. ΧΡΗΣΤΟΥ, *Ο υπαρκτικός διάλογος κατά τους θεολόγους της Καππαδοκίας*, π. 5.