

Encountering God: A Comparative Study of the Doctrine of the Divine Energy in Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas

Introduction

How can humankind, which is finite, unite with the transcendent God? How does God communicate with the finite and yet remain transcendent? In mainstream Orthodox theology the answer to these fundamental questions involves recourse to the doctrine of the Divine Energy. More specifically, two theologians usually come to mind in this elaboration, namely Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. Yet there is a tendency to collapse Maximus' earlier teaching on the Divine Energy into Gregory Palamas' much later teaching.¹ Much scholarship exists on both theologians, but few scholars have examined their respective doctrines of Divine Energy together in order to differentiate their teachings, and thus give voice to the uniqueness of each theologian. The lack of scholarship in this area has led some to overgeneralize and treat their teachings as equivalent. John Meyendorff, for instance, claimed that Maximus' Christian ontology "presupposes a distinction in God between 'nature' (or essence) and 'energy,' a distinction that will later be called 'Palamism.'"²

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¹ Both theologians are popular today, especially in the English speaking Orthodox world. Commenting on Maximus' popularity, Andrew Louth wrote, "he is frequently dubbed the greatest of Byzantine theologians," Andrew Louth, "Recent Research on St. Maximus the Confessor: A Survey," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1998): 73.

² John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983), 132.

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In an effort to restore the distinctive positions of both theologians on this important issue of the Divine Energy, this essay will provide a comparative study of both authors. I will demonstrate that while Palmas' theology of the Divine Energy is similar to Maximus' theology, Maximus treats the Divine Energy as a description of what the Divine Essence does; Palamas, however, treats the Divine Energy as a subsistent distinction in God.³ For the purpose of clarity, this paper will be divided into three major sections: sections one and two will explicate the theology of Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas respectively, and section three will briefly compare the two authors.

Maximus the Confessor

Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580-662) was not a systematic theologian in the contemporary or scholastic sense. He never produced a *Summa* or a purely systematic theological treatise. Though all his works are theological, they combine mysticism, pastoral care, metaphysics, and Christian doctrine. Regarding his method, Andrew Louth remarked:

The movement of his mind is that of one who ponders and meditates, patiently drawing together all sorts of apparently diverse concerns. It is what is sometimes called 'lateral thinking,' i.e. his mind does not move straight ahead in conformity to a linear, logical argument, rather it moves sideways, and gathers together a collection of considerations that are gradually made to converge.⁴

Complicating matters further, for our purposes, Maximus never addresses the Divine Energy in detail. His doctrine of the Divine Energy was never the sole subject of his thought but rather a tool, albeit important, that he used in order to clarify his Christology, cosmology, mysticism, and eschatology. His thoughts on the Divine Energy are scattered throughout his works. Moreover, his teachings on Divine Energy are formed largely within a polemical context. Thus in order to clarify his ideas, I have divided this section into two main subsections: subsection one addresses his historical context, and subsection two examines his theology of the Divine Energy.

³ The subtle difference in their thought allows Palamas to make particular conclusions, such as the double-procession of the Holy Spirit in the *Filioque*, which was not warranted in Maximus.

⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *On Love in Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Andrew Louth (London: Routledge, 1996), 94.

Historical Survey

Although the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 defined that Christ is the hypostatic union, the debate over the humanity and divinity of Christ continued within Christianity. The so-called monophysites were not satisfied with this definition and thus broke communion with those Christians who accepted Chalcedon. The monophysites held that Christ had only one nature, the Divine nature. Even though communion between Chalcedonian and Monophysite Christians was broken, primarily due to the actions and promptings of the Byzantine emperors, various attempts were made to broker a reunion between these Christian communities. These attempts included compromise formulas that, while not denying the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, sought to make explicit aspects of the hypostatic union that remained vague in a manner that better reflected Monophysite theology. Although the union of the Divine and Human nature had been established, the manner in which this union functioned, i.e. how Christ acted – a question of Christ’s energy and will - and whether Christ had one or two wills, became the new context of theological debate.⁵

For this study, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Sergius I offers one of the most important compromise formulas. Around AD 620, the Patriarch “proposed a compromise formula by introducing Monoenergism, the doctrine that Christ did not have two distinct types of activity, both human and Divine, but only one type, Divine-human.”⁶ According to Louth, this seemed to Sergius I to be a natural development of “the Cyrilline phrase, ‘one Incarnate nature of God the Word,’ [and] would suggest, given the Aristotelian association of nature and activity, the idea of a single energy.”⁷ Sergius I elicited several Church fathers to his aid; however the most important was the Ps-Denys the Areopagite who spoke of the “Divine-human [*theandric*] activity.”⁸

Until AD 630, there was no indication that the Chalcedonian Christians opposed Patriarch Sergius’ formula, and moreover, his formula helped in the

⁵ The Council of Constantinople II (AD 533) itself was convoked by the Emperor Justinian I in order to reunite Monophysites with Chalcedonian Christians. The Council condemned the *Three Chapters*, which included the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the teacher of Nestorius. In doing so it sent a message to Monophysite Christians that Chalcedonian theology was not *de facto* Nestorianism.

⁶ Martin Joseph Higgins, “The History of the Byzantine Church,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale 2002), 2: 749.

⁷ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

reunion of the Egyptian Church with that of Byzantium.⁹ However, in AD 633, a highly respected monk, Sophronius declared that this teaching was heretical, triggering a debate in the Chalcedonian Churches regarding the energy of Christ. In order to stop this debate from causing a schism not only with Egypt but also within the Chalcedonian Churches, the Patriarch of Constantinople Sergius, Pope Honorius I, and the monk Sophronius, who had now been elected Patriarch of Jerusalem, agreed not to discuss the energies of Christ any longer. This decision was made an edict by the Emperor Heracalius in AD 634 or 635.¹⁰ However, the edict was not well-received by the Monophysites, and this compelled Emperor Heracalius, who desperately needed their support in order to unite the Christian empire, to publish a new exposition of the faith, his *Ecthesis* (AD 638), a creed elaborated by Patriarch Sergius. As Martin Higgins relates:

It presented the dogma of the Trinity and the Incarnation according to the Council of Chalcedon, prohibited the expression one or two energies in Christ, and affirmed that the unique *hypostasis* of Christ had one sole will without any confusion of the two natures (i.e., the Word made Flesh). *Monothelism* was thus substituted for Monoenergism.¹¹ [Author's emphasis]

Controversy over the energy of Christ was resurrected under a new debate regarding the will of Christ. Skipping over the many details of how this debate developed, it is necessary to note that only in AD 640 did Maximus first begin to speak publicly against Monothelism. After that Maximus quickly became one of the highly respected and vocal opponents of any form of Monophysitism within the Chalcedonian Churches. His recognition as an authority on this controversy is evident by his invitation to participate in a council in Rome (AD 649), which defined that Christ had two energies and wills.¹² Unfortunately, Maximus' resistance to Monothelism would lead to his arrest, suffering, exile, and subsequent death.

Doctrine of Divine Energy

Maximus' thoughts on the Divine energy develop Ps-Deny's teaching on theandric energy. Theandric energy refers to the synergetic co-operation of Christ's Divine and natural will or energy. Christ's two wills, which correspond

⁹ Ibid. 14.

¹⁰ Higgins, "History of the Byzantine Church," 749.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 17.

to his two natures respectively, function as one¹³ and this produces a “new mode of existence...an ineffable ‘mode of coming together’” or synergy of the human and Divine energies in Christ.¹⁴ Therefore, Maximus’ theology represents a further explication of the Chalcedonian faith. He clarifies more exactly how Christ is truly human and divine in his actions and deeds.

For Maximus, although the energy includes the will, they are not necessarily synonymous. When Maximus equates energy with the will, he is referring to a natural/essential will, not hypostatic will. Natural will “is a natural desire that corresponds to the nature of the rational being.”¹⁵ Or more precisely, the natural will is “the power that longs for what is natural.”¹⁶ Natural will is made manifest in our existential desire to be in communion with God.¹⁷ Contemporary conceptions of the will as simply the act of choosing refer to hypostatic will. Hypostatic will is the conscious choice that a hypostasis makes that may or may not be in accord with the essential will. In his later works Maximus defines the hypostatic will as the gnomonic will, a will that pertains solely to those human beings who live in the postlapsarian state.¹⁸ Because the gnomonic will is the result of sin,¹⁹ it neither exists for God nor for prelapsarian human beings.²⁰ His

¹³ Maximus wrote: “[Christ] has a double energy, not an intermediate energy,” Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 56. However, the “human will [of Christ] is wholly deified, in its agreement with the Divine will,” *ibid.*, 186, *Opuscule* 7:80D.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶ Ian A. McFarland, “‘Naturally and by Grace’: Maximus the Confessor,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 4 (2005): 421.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 423.

¹⁸ A human being, in his/her post-fallen state, wills by means of a gnomonic will, Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 196, *Opuscule* 3:53C. Sin itself is the differing of the gnomonic will from the Divine will. It is intimately related to the passions which arise after the fall, and therefore is the will by which the human being can choose for or against God. Humankind in its natural state willed in accordance with its natural energy, which is wholly directed towards God.

¹⁹ Whether or not a gnomonic will existed for prelapsarian Adam and Eve is not clear in Maximus. Though if it did exist, it would have existed solely as a potential. All that is clear is that the gnomonic will does not function until Adam sins. Either way, once the human being is redeemed and deified, the gnomonic will ceases to exist, McFarland, “‘Naturally and by Grace,’” 413.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 423-428. Note that for Maximus, Christ could not have a gnomonic will since he was sinless. Sinlessness or salvation entails the ability to consciously act in complete accordance with one’s natural will as opposed to one’s gnomonic will. In the deified state the choice for sin no longer exists as a potential choice and thus the gnomonic will, which is the locus of such potential desires, no longer exists. Spiritual asceticism is necessary to accomplish this goal. In other words, deification is the end of the process of purification of the human hypostasis from the passions, or the gnomonic will. A deified human being is like Christ in that he/she wills what is its natural end, union with God.

distinction has an important Christological implication: since Christ is sinless, Christ must have lacked a gnostic will.

Christ is a case in point that reveals how the natural will and energy work in tandem. Maximus writes that Christ “preserve[s] unblemished the natural will of the Divine nature of the Incarnate Word, and the energy that essentially goes with it.”²¹ Energy is the natural will or the activity of the nature. As Lars Thunberg demonstrates, Maximus’ teaching on energy presupposes Aristotle’s metaphysics; for Aristotle the “*ousia* [was] the source of movement and rest.”²² Energy is the category Maximus uses to speak about the movement or rest of the nature itself. While movement describes a living *ousia*, rest describes a dead or potentialized *ousia*. In the latter case, the *ousia* is unactualized because there is no movement or energy. All actualized natures have a corresponding energy. Accordingly, Christ must have two energies to be consistent with Chalcedonian Christology. If Christ has one energy/natural will, then either one nature ceased to exist or He has only one nature. Either alternative violates Chalcedon’s teaching that Christ has two natures “without confusion, without change.”²³

Although it is clear in Maximus’ thought that the energies are the activity or movement of the nature, the question remains: are the energies simply a nominal distinction, referring solely to God *ad extra*? Other than what has been already said, there is no clear indication that Maximus considered the energies as a distinction in the Triune God. This is not too surprising since Maximus stresses that God is an incomprehensible unity. All things exist in God as one eternal reality; no composition or accident can be predicated to God. Maximus is even cautious about speaking about God’s unity because it transcends even analogical language. For instance, he writes, “[God] who is hymned as monad and triad [referring to the Trinity], is neither monad nor triad, but in order that we may hymn the transcendent unity and Divine fruitfulness, we name [God] with the Divine names of triad and unity.”²⁴ The energy of God is rarely addressed outside

²¹ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 183, *Opusculum* 7.

²² Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1995), 87.

²³ Nonetheless, for fallen humankind affected by the original sin, the will cannot be equated with the energy. Fallen humankind has a composite nature; it is a composite being that contains two superior parts, the mind and a will, *ibid.*, 209. Within a rational human nature, therefore, there are other faculties, which are activities that are constituted by the energy that are not the will. The essential will is then only one, albeit significant, natural element of energy, *ibid.*, 89.

²⁴ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 143, *Dialogue* 10, 41: 1188B. Maximus stresses that “God alone is simple,” Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life; The Four Centuries on Charity*, trans. Polycarp Sherwood, *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 21 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1956),

of the Christological framework and the context of salvation history. Within Maximus' writings, Divine Energy is most often addressed within the context of mysticism. For this reason I now turn to Maximus' mystical writings.

For Maximus the goal of the spiritual life is deification which he understands "as a state in which the creature's 'natural energy' (*physikē energeia*) is suspended in such a way that God establishes [the creature's own] natural energy within God."²⁵ Deification is first and foremost a union of the human and Divine Energy, or more specifically the event in which God's energy overwhelms a human person to the point where the human energy becomes completely inactive and united with God's energy. Nevertheless, the suspension of human energy is not inactivity in the formal sense. Given Maximus' Aristotelian understanding of the relationship between essence and energy, an inactive nature would result in the deadening of the human nature or the annihilation of the human person, for the human nature and will would no longer exist. For Maximus the natural will and energy of the human hypostasis is always oriented towards God. Thus, deification accomplishes humankind's goal. For Maximus, deification is an "actively-inactive" participation on the part of the human person, who actively receives the Divine Energy, yet remains inactive insofar as deification is entirely initiated and sustained by God. Note that the human person always remains a creature, as its nature remains distinct from the Divine Nature.

Christ has a very important role in Maximus' mystical theology: not only does Christ make possible mysticism, but Maximus appropriates the sacramental order that he believes Christ instituted as a pedagogical tool to explain spiritual life. Each sacramental order corresponds to a different state in the spiritual life that relates to the relationship between the human and Divine Energy/Will. Deacons and priests are a division of the first state of simple participatory knowledge, while bishops refer to a state of *hyperknowing* or deification.²⁶

30. God exceeds every multiplicity, every duality, and "every relation even if it be only that of subject and object, of thinker and thought," *ibid.*, 30.

²⁵ Ian A. McFadden, "Developing an Apophatic Christocentrism," *Theology Today* 60 (2003): 203.

²⁶ This is McFadden's translation of Maximus' term *hyperagnōstos* that Maximus uses in chapter forty-five of his third century on Love. To grasp the nuance of this state it is important to note that for Maximus there are two types of participatory knowledge of God. The first type of participation was alluded to above; it is knowledge that results from a normal sense perception or the function of the intellect. The mind creates an image in itself of that which it experienced and seeks to understand it. As the Christian grows in the spiritual life closer to God, the Christian gains a more intimate relationship and knowledge of God. The second type of knowledge is the "hyperknowing;" it is also participation, but it is participation according to an entirely different order. It is ineffable and can only be described with antinomies such as "actively-inactive." Regarding this distinction, Maximus wrote: "When the intellect receives conceptual

The diaconate corresponds to the beginning of spiritual life. Recalling Maximus' account of the hypostatic/gnomic will, in this state the gnomic will is purified. This purification entails the toil of purifying the mind of impassioned thoughts, i.e. any thought which attracts the human person to this world. Love does not cease in this state, rather the soul achieves a state of *apatheia*, whereby it loves God alone.²⁷ However, by loving God alone the Christian has returned to one's natural state and loves other things through God. More specifically, the Christian knows and experiences created being in itself as the *logoi* and knows the *logoi* in relation to the *Logos*.²⁸ With this new insight the believer now enters the state of the priesthood.

The states of deacon and priest represent our knowledge of what God's Energy/Natural Will is, and how we ought to conform to it.²⁹ However, the final

images (*noemata*) of things, it becomes conformed to each image. If it contemplates these objects spiritually, it is transformed in various ways according to that which is contemplated. But once it is established (*genomenos*) in God, it loses form and configuration altogether, for by contemplating Him who is simple it becomes simple itself and wholly filled with spiritual radiance, (Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Charity*, 397, in McFadden, "Developing an Apophatic Christocentrism," 203). Knowledge *via* conformity to the image refers to the simple participatory knowledge, whereas the knowledge that occurs in God's Divine Energy refers to *hyperknowing*."

²⁷ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 41.

²⁸ On the relationship between the Logos and the logoi, Maximus wrote: "We are speechless before the sublime teaching about the *Logos*, for He cannot be expressed in words or conceived in thought. Although he is *beyond being* and nothing can participate in him in any way, nor is he any of the totality of things that can be known in relation to other things, nevertheless we affirm that the one *Logos* is many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are One. The many rational principles are one by being providentially attached, led, and offered up, to the One Rational Principle of the many, as to a source which possesses universal sovereignty, or as to a point which predetermines and unites all the radii [emanating] straight out of it and that gather them altogether," *Ambiguum* 7, PG 91: 1081B in Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. and ed. Paul Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 57.

²⁹ Maximus wrote: "The *logoi* which are in beings, in the infinity of which it contemplates the energies of God, then, to speak truly, *it reproduces the numerous and infinite differences in the divine energies which it perceives*. Then, as regards the employment of scientific...into that which is really true, for reasons that one may readily appreciate...(the intellect) will find the power of any such inquiry [to be] ineffective and its method useless, for *it has no means of understanding how God Who is truly none of the things that exist*, and Who in the strict sense is all things, and yet beyond them all, [exists] in each *logos* of all particular things and in all the *logoi* together whereby all things exist. If, therefore, in a proper sense, every Divine energy properly signifies God indivisibly, wholly and entirely through itself, *in each thing according to the logos* - whatever it may be - whereby it exists, who is capable of conceiving and of saying exactly how, being wholly and entirely and altogether common to all and yet altogether particularly present in each of these realities, God is without part and division, without [thereby] being diversely distributed in

state, the state of bishop, refers to the realization of God's will and a unity of human and divine energy in some sense. This is the state of "perfect knowledge," the knowledge of God-Himself,³⁰ the completion of the spiritual holy orders. This knowledge occurs without any created action. It is a pure gift. The *logoi* in God, and as God, as God's *Logos*, are more intensely known and participated in. During this divinized state, "[the Christian] will affectionately love and cleave to the *logoi* already mentioned that pre-exist in God, or rather, he will love God himself, in whom the *logoi* of beautiful things are securely grounded."³¹ Whereas the priestly stage may be characterized as the mystical contemplation of the *logoi*, in the episcopal state, knowledge of the *Logos* leads to a participatory knowledge in the Blessed Trinity.³² It is important to understand that deification occurs with/in/through the *logoi*. To clarify, the *logoi* are for Maximus God's natural will for creation.³³ Maximus refers to them as "Divine willings;"³⁴ more specifically, they are the decisions of God's will.³⁵ Nevertheless, he stresses that a veritable gap exists between the world of ideas, the *logoi*, and God's essence or the Creator, the *Logos*. The *logoi* are to Maximus "not identical either with the essence of God or with the existence of the things in the created world."³⁶ The nature of the *logoi* is not clear in Maximus' thought. Nonetheless we can adduce that based on his understanding of will and energy, the *logoi*, which are God's wills that exist in the *Logos*, must be united to God in God's energy. The *logoi* determine creation but are not creation, and thus it cannot be assumed that they share the same essence of creation. Their eternal, i.e. "pre-existent," reality determines that

the infinite differences of these realities in which He exists as Being, and without thereby being contracted according to the particular existence of each individual [*logos*], and also without fusing the differences of these realities into the sole and unique totality of them all, but on the contrary that He is truly all in all, He Who never abandoned His own simplicity [which is] without parts," (emphasis added), *Ambigua* 22, PG 91:1257A-B, in Joseph P. Farrell, *Free Choice in Saint Maximus the Confessor* (South Cana, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1989), 139-140.

³⁰ Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life*, 2. 21.

³¹ *Ambiguum* 7, PG 91: 1084B, in Maximus the Confessor, *On Cosmic Mystery*, 59.

³² Joost van Rossum, "The Logoi of Creation and the Divine 'Energies' in Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas," *Studia Patristica* XXVII (2003): 214.

³³ On this relationship between the *logoi* and God's will, Maximus writes: "We say that he [God] knows existent things [i.e. the *logoi* as they exist in the world] as the products of his own acts of will; ... for if he created all things by his will, and if no one will deny that one must, in all justice and piety, allow God to know his own will, . . . then God must recognize things as the products of his will," *Ambigua* 22, PG 91: 1085AB, in Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 2003) 119.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁵ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 77.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

they transcend creation. They do not strictly exist outside God, as Origen would have it, and whom Maximus vigorously engages in polemics.³⁷ They do not share God or creation's essence. In fact the *logoi* themselves "are primarily related to the different natures;"³⁸ they determine how a given nature is to exist, but are also "the basis of unification within each species"³⁹ of a given nature. The *logoi* in-themselves, which are the means God employs in God's infinite determination of the existences of things, do not have their own nature. *Logoi* are, in a sense, conceptual tools for God. The closest analogy may be our own mental images. Before we conceive a thing, that thing, which is not yet realized in reality, exists conceptually in our mind. This image, however, does not have its own nature, nor is it our own nature, although it is completely sustained by our nature. Yet, our nature transcends it. The nature exists within the activity of our own nature. The mental image is our will and is sustained by our will for the concept to be created. The moment we stop thinking it ceases to exist. It is in this sense that we can speak of the *logoi* as wills or the energy of God. Deification then involves Divine Energy. In my analogy our *logos* does not constitute us, but rather it is only an activity that we perform. In some sense the performer transcends the act preformed. Likewise when we transpose this analogy to God, it is clear that God's action/will/energy do not extend to God's inner life, since God is not constituted by them.

Given Maximus' stress on the transcendence of God-in-Himself and that deification involves union with the Divine Energy/Divine Will or *logoi*, we may conclude that the Divine Energy refers to God-for-us. However, this is not all that Maximus says on the subject of Divine Energy. There is an important nuance, namely that we do not unite with God's energy *per se*, which could be construed as a type of pantheism,⁴⁰ but rather that we unite with Christ's theandric energy. When we consider that Christ is the *Logos* incarnate, who is responsible for creating the *logoi* and placing within humankind a natural will or energy for Divine union, it is fitting that Christ is the means for deification.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 81.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Maximus distances himself from any form of pantheism. Not only does Maximus stress that Divine Essence transcends Divine Energy, cf. *Cen. Gost.* 1.7, PG 90: 1085B; I.49, in Thunberg, 1101A; *Ad Thal.*, 63, PG 90: 673D; but Maximus, who was first and foremost a monk and spiritual father, throughout his life attempted to demonstrate the incompatibility of Origen with the Gospel. (Origen's ideas were popular and widely disseminated in cenobitic communities at this time through the works of Evagrius and Ps-Evagrius.) Two theses in particular occupied his polemics, namely that "there once existed a single entity of rational beings," and that "we were all conatural with God," Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, 45.

What was only an ideal relationship after the creation of humankind, i.e. the union of *logoi* and humankind through the *Logos*, was made possible through the Incarnation.⁴¹ The Incarnation was, therefore, a pancosmic event, for not only was humankind restored, i.e. it made it possible for the human essential will to be free from the taint of the gnostic will, but Christ brought “together in his own free unity as an individual two different things: *the identity* of all the world’s ideas in God’s essence and their identity with each other as creatures (that is, in not being God).”⁴² In other words, Christ unites Divine Nature and energy/will with human nature and energy/will. Based on Maximus’ understanding of nature as a universal category, all human hypostases that share the human nature must be affected by the union of the Divine and human nature of Christ.⁴³ As Christ is a synthetic or “composite” hypostasis, Christ is a particular and unique instance of two universals.⁴⁴ Christ experiencing deification uniquely in terms of a union without confusion of the Divine and human natures. Because his natures are united it follows, given Maximus’ metaphysics, that Christ’s energies are united in a similar manner.⁴⁵ The composite hypostasis of Christ is the bridge over the ontological gap between creation and God. In this sense, “incarnation and deification are two sides of the same mystery.”⁴⁶ The union of Christ’s natures and wills make possible the deification of the human will and energy with God. The ontological abyss remains - after all we never encounter God-in-Himself - however, through/by/with/in Christ, humankind is able to communicate with God in God’s activity *ad extra*.

In the process of deification the natural will of the Christian unites with the theandric energy of Christ. The Divine Energy that humankind encounters is always mediated through the person of Jesus Christ. For Maximus, even though humankind’s deification “will go as far as the point of ‘indivisible identity’ and will

⁴¹ Cf. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 75.

⁴² Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 122.

⁴³ Following the Church fathers, Maximus writes: “Man has become God to the degree that God has become man, for he [man] has been led by God, through the stages of Divine assent, into the highest regions to the same degree that God has descended down to the farthest reaches of our nature, by means of a man and through a destruction of his own self that nevertheless implies no change,” *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1385BC, in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 281.

⁴⁴ Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 99.

⁴⁵ Törönen wrote: “The parts, then, that constitute the one Christ are his two natures, and the whole is, not a new composite nature, but a composite hypostasis or ‘person.’” (Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 34.)

⁴⁶ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 325.

stop just short of the irreducible difference of natures,⁴⁷ it is always deification within the context of Christology. Thus, the final stage of the spiritual life, i.e. the spiritual bishop, is only accessible through conformity to Christ's will, which also happens to be our true will.⁴⁸

In summary, there is no clear indication in Maximus' theology that he considered the energies or will of God to reflect God-in-Himself. However, when Maximus speaks of energy, he speaks of it as an activity or movement. God-in-Himself is a sacred mystery since God-in-Himself transcends human reason. We find in Maximus what theologians, such as Sergius Bulgakov, would call an antinomy between God-in-Himself and God-for-us. Given its Christological and mystical context, it seems Divine Energy refers to the activity of the *ousia* in salvation history. Thus, energy does not exist in God, but extends only to God's actions *ad extra*. Therefore Maximus is consistent when he insists that God-in-Himself is the only existent without motion, for God-in-Himself is a mystery that transcends all motion/activity.⁴⁹ By this I do not mean that God is static, but that God-in-Himself is not moved, whereas God moves all things. Motion "belongs exclusively to the realm of the created."⁵⁰ From the human perspective, energy is the natural movement towards God. Because creation is created and thus given motion, motion is a constituent of created nature and energy. It permeates creaturely nature; they exist within God's own energy that moves them. All created natures therefore move towards God.

However, this is not the case for God. God is the only true mover. God is not sustained by his energy or moved by God's energy. Note that when Maximus speaks of the immanent activities of God, i.e. the processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Father, he does not use language of Divine Energy. They are not activities in the proper sense of the word, but rather subsistent realities. Maximus does not speak of them as movements. For Maximus, they are given, and, in fact, all that can be said about God's inner life or God's processions is expressed with apophatic language. Maximus insists, God is "beyond all division and composition and part and whole, because one cannot say how much it is, for it is free from any kind of connection or property and is unbounded....it is beyond everything."⁵¹ In fact, throughout his entire theological corpus, Maximus

⁴⁷ Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 353.

⁴⁸ The conformity of wills was perhaps why Maximus also stresses that deification is a moral union as opposed to a natural union, Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 329.

⁴⁹ Maximus the Confessor, *Difficulty 10*, in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 141.

⁵⁰ Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 70.

⁵¹ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 143.

“assigns the Trinity to negative theology.”⁵² Cataphatic theology is assigned exclusively to the Economic Trinity or, more specifically, God’s actions for and in salvation history.⁵³ The inner life of the Trinity, of the processions of origination of the Son and Holy Spirit, can only be affirmed as a given reality provided by revelation and the Church fathers, but it cannot be understood: “[God] does not provide the beings below it with the least trace...of how it [God] can be at once unity and trinity.”⁵⁴ With Maximus’ apophatic framework in mind which he attributed to the Immanent Trinity, it would not have been possible for him to speak about the Energy of God, which is the life of God as the revealer and Creator, as extending to the immanent life of God.

Palamas’ Theology

Gregory Palamas’ (AD 1296-1359) conception of the Divine Energy is the most central and at the same time one of the most difficult doctrines of his thought. Anna Williams in her enlightening study, *The Ground of Union* demonstrated that even among contemporary scholars Palamas’ doctrine of the Divine Energy is debated. Williams identified at least four different opinions on this issue. André de Halleux, for instance, “notes that Palamas never speaks of the distinction [essence-energy] as real without noting that it does not compromise simplicity...Palamism ultimately locates itself on a superior epistemological level to its objectors [i.e. the level of antinomy].”⁵⁵ Gerhard Richter, however, regarded Palamas’ distinction “as an *ad hoc* response to the hesychast controversy, and not the result of philosophical deliberations over simplicity,”⁵⁶ and thus Palamas does not make an ontological claim. Similar to Richter, Kallistos Timothy Ware, wrote, “Palamas’ own writings make it abundantly clear that he affirmed the essence-energy distinction *not for philosophical but for experiential reasons*.”⁵⁷ The Divine Energy only refers to our experience of God and not God in-Himself. Though much less lucid, Vladimir Lossky wrote, “the energies might be described as that mode of existence of the Trinity which is outside of its inaccessible essence. God thus exists in His essence outside his essence.”⁵⁸

⁵² Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 99.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Ambigua*, PG 92, 1168A, in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 99.

⁵⁵ Anna Ngaire Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 139.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 142.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 143.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 140.

Williams finds flaws with all these opinions for various reasons and offers her own suggestion that Palamas' distinction of the essence-energy is a prototype for the immanent-economic Trinitarian distinction widely used today in contemporary theological discourse. God is "independent of, yet willingly implicated in, the created order."⁵⁹ Nevertheless she admits that even though, "the burden of textual evidence falls on the side of a nominal distinction,"⁶⁰ there is evidence to argue that this distinction is essential. And in fact, John Meyendorff, the most prolific commentator on Palamas in modern times, argued that it is not accurate to equate the energies with the economy, i.e. to treat them as solely a nominal distinction. He wrote:

while preserving the personalism of the Father and the traditional Byzantine position concerning the "economic" procession of the Spirit from the Son, Palamas, because he considers the Divine energies as uncreated and eternal, *does not limit that "economy" to temporal existence* [emphasis added].⁶¹

Meyendorff suggests that the economy, in Palamas' account, extends to the inner life of God. Unfortunately, Palamas' remains ambiguous on the exact nature of Divine Energy.

The plurality of opinions among scholars is a result of the ambiguity in Palamas' own thought. Because of this ambiguity, some scholars, albeit a minority, argue that Palamas is simply an unsystematic thinker.⁶² For them, Palamas treats the Divine Energy as a second nature which contradicts God's unity, and must therefore be rejected. This is a traditional criticism of Palamas from scholastic theologians, such as Martin Jungie.⁶³ In more recent times, Dorothea Wendebourg took up

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁶¹ John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (London: Faith Press, 1964), 232.

⁶² Albeit not critical of Palamas, Sergius Bulgakov plays on the ambiguity in Palamas' thought. He treats his Sophiology as a systematic development of Palamas' distinction, cf. Sergius Bulgakov, "Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 1-2 (2005): 23-24. Bulgakov is an important figure because he was responsible for introducing Palamas to modern Orthodox theological discourse. His student, John Meyendorff, and critic, Vladimir Lossky, popularized Palamas' thought and purged it of Bulgakov's Sophiological implications.

⁶³ Martin Jungie, a well-known scholastic critic of Palamas, argues that Palamas' fundamental error is to admit composition in God, Martin Jungie, "Grégoire Palamas" in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. Alfred Vacant (Paris: Librairie Letozey et Anè, 1932), 2 pt. 2: 1764. Jungie also offers an important interpretation of the Palamite controversy that was influential in the West: see Martin Jungie's entry on the "Palamite (controversie)" in *Dictionnaire de théologie*

this criticism and adds that the essence-energy distinction creates soteriological problems that lead to a “complete defeat of Trinitarian Theology.”⁶⁴ Wendebourg argues that based on Palamas’ distinction, in the economy of salvation we do not encounter the hypostases of the Trinity, but rather only information about them through the Divine Energy.⁶⁵ In Christ, we do not have a personal encounter with the Second Person of the Trinity, Who became man, but rather only with the energy proceeding from the Second Person.⁶⁶

For my purpose the essential question is whether Palamas follows Maximus in attributing the Divine Energy solely to God *ad extra*? I will demonstrate in this section that for Palamas the Divine Energy refers to both God *ad extra* and God *ad intra*. Regarding the former, Divine Energy *refers* to a distinction in the essence. It is not a second nature but rather refers to an eternal reality in God. It is a distinction in God that does not contradict Orthodox Trinitarian theology. For Palamas just as we can speak of God as Trinity and yet one, we can also speak of God as Divine Energy and yet maintain God’s unity and simplicity.

Before we can examine Palamas’ theology, we must first address Palamas’ method, purpose, and style. This is important because it will allow us to grasp Palamas’ teaching without being distracted by his seemingly inconsistent and at times conflicting thoughts. The critique that Palamas is unsystematic and postulates energy as a second nature is based on a failure to recognize his method, purpose, and style. Gregory Palamas is first and foremost a polemicist. All his writings that addressed the Divine Energy were written within a polemical context; in particular the defense of his fellow hesychasts against Barlaam’s accusations.

catholique that has been recently translated online: “Martin Jungie: The Palamite Controversy,” trans. Peter Gilbert, in *De uno ecclesiarum*, accessed March 15, 2013, <http://bkkos.wordpress.com>. In this text Jungie approaches the triumph of Palamitism in the Orthodox Church with sorrow. He writes: “The triumph of Palamism was fatal. The fact that the Latins and the Latinophrones were necessarily hostile to it, far from harming it, contributed to its success. Very soon Latinism and Antipalamism, in the minds of many, would come to be seen as one and the same thing,” *ibid*.

⁶⁴ Dorothea Wendebourg, “From the Cappadocian Fathers to Gregory Palamas: The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,” *Studia Patristica* 14, no. 1 (1982): 197 in Williams, *The Ground of Union*, 140.

⁶⁵ Williams criticizes Wendebourg for being too stringent. In effect, Williams argues that Wendebourg will not admit that Palamas’ essence-energy distinction is based in the *oikonomia-theologia* distinction because Palamas does not say this explicitly. However, there is precedent for this interpretation amongst secondary scholars, including Congar, cf. Yves Congar, “La déification dans la tradition spirituelle de l’Orient d’après une étude récente,” *Vie Spirituelle* (1935): 91-107.

⁶⁶ Wendebourg, “From the Cappadocian Fathers to Gregory Palamas,” 192-198.

Originally, Palamas debated with Barlaam over the limits of theology.⁶⁷ In particular, Barlaam argued that direct knowledge of God was impossible; theological method was exclusively reserved to dialectics, whereby an argument could be fashioned only by means of proof texts from the fathers, the Sacred Scriptures, and natural reason.⁶⁸ He presupposed that human reason was superior to knowledge derived from spiritual experience. Palamas rejected this theory, and he responded that although dialectics was a valid method, it was not exclusive because theology could reach apodictic conclusions, that is, “it could lead to *Truth itself*.”⁶⁹ In other words, Christian experience was also a valid means for establishing theological truths. For Palamas this type of knowledge is the greatest form of knowledge. It is a pure gift from God which transcended dialectical argumentation.⁷⁰

However, this was only the incipient stage of the debate. Barlaam, who remained unconvinced that experience can be a ground for theological discourse, began to read Simeon the New Theologian and Gregory the Sinaitic, as well as to converse with hesychast monks. To his disdain he discovered that not only did the hesychast monks teach that apodictic knowledge of God was possible, but also taught that they had experienced God, Truth itself, in prayer. The debate then evolved into a personal attack against Palamas who himself was a hesychast monk and his fellow hesychasts. In outrage, Barlaam accused Palamas and the hesychast monks of millennialism,⁷¹ which is the heretical teaching that a Christian can encounter God’s essence in prayer. Palamas authored three essays against Barlaam’s teaching under the title of *In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, commonly referred to as the *Triads*. Palamas’ central argument was that apodictic knowledge and experience of God is possible; however humankind only experiences God as energy and never as essence. Later, he wrote, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* as a final purge of Barlaamism from Orthodoxy. Although it is not addressed to Barlaam himself, who at this time had left Constantinople and converted to Catholicism, it was addressed to those whom Palamas considered to be supporters of Barlaam’s thought. Much like the *Triads*, it is polemical in tone albeit much more systematic.

The polemical tone in his third *Triad* and *The One-Hundred-and-Fifty Chapters*

⁶⁷ John Meyendorff, “Introduction,” in Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. and ed. John Meyendorff and Nicholas Gendle (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 6.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Robert E. Sinkewicz, *La théologie Byzantine et sa tradition*, ed. Vassa Conticello and Carmelo Giuseppe Conticello (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 165.

⁷¹ Ibid., 133.

(hereafter: *Chapters*) should not be underestimated. His works are not systematic treatises. For instance, he begins most of his sections by asking a rhetorical question, a question which portrays his antithesis, Barlaam the Calabrian's opinion, and then proceeds to refute these claims. This method allows Palamas to speak poetically and emphatically. His preference for rhetoric over logic permits him to make strong claims, but nonetheless logically problematic claims. For instance, he wrote, "The monks know that the essence of God transcends the fact of being inaccessible to the senses, since God is not only above all created things, but is even beyond Godhead."⁷² This passage is particularly problematic when we consider that the Godhead is normally used with reference to either the Trinity itself or God the Father. Is Palamas then saying that there is a God beyond the revealed God? In fact, throughout his *Triad* Palamas speaks of God's essence as both a superessential and essential essence in addition to equating the essential essence with God's energy.⁷³ At times he seems to be describing two different Gods: the God as Absolute and God the Creator. However given his overall context and method, it is clear that these claims were made in order to stress God's transcendence, so as to distance the hesychasts from millennialism.

Anna Williams in her final analysis of Palamas' theological corpus remarked that Palamas was comfortable with ambiguity, and, in fact, uses ambiguity as a theological tool.⁷⁴ Again, even though his doctrine of the energy of God is an important part of his arguments, his concern is not the doctrine of the energy but the defense of the hesychasts' experiential claims. Thus in both the *Chapters* and the *Triads* Palamas relies substantially on arguments from authority, as opposed to dialectics. The purpose of these writings was to demonstrate that encountering God is biblically and patristically warranted although God transcends this experience. How the Divine Energy functions does not factor in his early thought. Therefore, he does not provide a definition of the Divine Energy in his *Triads*. In his *Chapters*, however, Palamas makes three statements, albeit brief, which are the closest he comes to a definition of the Divine Energy.

In the *Chapters*, Palamas wrote that Divine Energy "is neither substance nor accident, even though it is called a quasi-accident by some theologians who are

⁷² Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* 57.

⁷³ In some cases Palamas refers to the essence or substance as equivalent to the superessence: "Indeed even the name 'essence' designates one of the powers in God. Denys the Areopagite says, 'If we call the superessential Mystery 'God' or 'Life' or 'Essence' of 'Light' or 'Word' we are referring to nothing other than the defying powers which proceed from God and down to us, creating substance, giving life, and granting wisdom'" (Palamas, *Triads*, 98).

⁷⁴ Williams, *The Ground of Union*, 171.

indicating solely that it is in God but is not the substance.”⁷⁵ Earlier in his *Chapters* he wrote, “there are three realities in God, namely, substance, energy and a Trinity of Divine hypostases.”⁷⁶ And again, Palamas wrote, “Thus he [Dionysius] clearly shows that there is another distinction belonging to the Godhead... and he says that according to the Divine processions and energies.”⁷⁷ These three passages are extremely important because they define the Divine Energy as a third distinction in God. The insistence that this distinction is in God must lead us to question any exclusive nominal interpretation of the energy. Certainly in these passages, which occur within his most mature writing, there is no indication that Palamas intends the Divine Energy to simply refer to God’s relationship to us. After all, Palamas not only compares the energy to the essence and the hypostases, both of which are realities in the immanent God, but he specifically calls them a “reality in” God and “a distinction in the Godhead.”⁷⁸ Properly speaking, it is a reality in God that refers to how God relates to the world. God is therefore God the Creator in-Himself: the Divine Energy is God’s relation to the world in God’s own substance.⁷⁹ To treat the Divine Energy as simply God *ad extra* is a blatant misrepresentation of Palamas’ explicit teaching. It is a distinction in God in the way that the hypostases are distinctions in God. Comparing the Divine Energy to the hypostases, Palamas wrote, “Thus, in the same way [with respect to how ‘each hypostasis is neither substance nor accident in God’], the Divine Energy of God is neither a substance nor accident nor is it classed among non-existent things.”⁸⁰ The Divine Energy is a subsistent distinction in God. Unlike the hypostatic distinctions, it is foremost a distinction that belongs to the Godhead (the Father).⁸¹ In as much as the Divine nature is primarily the nature of the Father - the Father after all generates the other persons of the Trinity - the energy is properly a distinction in God the Father though it extends, like the essence, to the Son and Spirit. Thus, though the energy is one, it is also many and extends to each hypostasis. It is no wonder that Palamas at times speaks of the energy as an essence in contradistinction to the superessence.⁸² They are both realities in the trihypostatic God. Yet the energy is like the hypostases, i.e. the Son and the

⁷⁵ Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988), 127, 231.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 75, 171.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 85, 183.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 85, 183.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 134, 239.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 135, 241.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 85, 183.

⁸² Palamas, *Triads*, 98.

Spirit, because it *proceeds* from the substance of the Father.⁸³ Properly speaking the Divine Energy is a begotten nature-like reality of God. By “begotten” I mean that the Divine Energy is eternally subsistent in God. It is the life of the Divine nature. In this sense Palamas is saying something quite different than that the Divine Energy simply expresses God’s relationship to us, for he clearly wants to say something about God-in-Himself. Namely, this is Palamas’ attempt to express that God is not an abstract being accessible only through thought, but can truly be personally encountered and experienced. Nevertheless, although God is an eternally active being whom we encounter, God also transcends this encounter. God even transcends his energy in the way that the actor transcends her/his action.⁸⁴ Here we see that Palamas is in complete agreement with Maximus insofar as he defines energy as activity.

But Palamas is clearly saying something more than Maximus. When we consider that the *Chapters* was written in order to tie up loose ends, and that one of the loose ends was his teachings about Divine Energy, it is clear that had Palamas intended his theology of Divine Energy to refer exclusively to God-for-us or the *oikonomia*, this was his opportunity for him to say so. He does not do so, and instead he treats the energy as a given distinction or essential reality in God. For him the energy of God is simple and a given: just as no proof is needed to explain God’s three hypostases in the light of God’s united essence, there is no need for Palamas to explain how the unity of God’s essence and energy is possible. Therefore, Palamas treats the Divine Energy as a reality in God; beyond references to authoritative sources, he does not explain his rationale. He states what for him is a reality of the Orthodox faith.

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia* were widely known during Palamas’ life. Yet Palamas is completely silent on this issue although it is true that his doctrine of Divine Energy includes the *oikonomia*. The fact that he does not limit the Divine Energy to the *oikonomia* is indicative of his true intention. Palamas intended his doctrine to refer to the *theologia*, God-in-Himself. This does not suggest that Palamas conceives of the Divine Energy as essential in the same way that the essence is essential, i.e. a second nature. Rather the Divine Energy is essential in the same way that the hypostases are essential, i.e. pertaining to Divine Being. Therefore, Palamas in his *Chapters*, as illustrated above, compares the Divine Energy to the hypostases.⁸⁵ Like the hypostases, the divine energy is a given distinction, which reveals to us God’s inner life.

⁸³ Palamas, *Chapters*, 100, 209.

⁸⁴ Palamas, *Triads*, 97.

⁸⁵ Palamas, *Chapters*, 135, 241.

Precisely, this explains why Palamas does not consider his doctrine an innovation, and more importantly why he never writes a separate theological treatise on the Divine Energy. There was no need to write one. His proof consists in his commentaries on the light revealed on Mount Tabor, and his arguments from the Church fathers on the distinction they make between energy and essence. How God can be distinguished as substance, energy, and hypostasis is not for Palamas a valid question for theological discourse. For him theology is a question of “why” not of “how.” Thus, what is viewed by many modern western commentaries as a weakness in his theology is for Palamas perfectly warranted. His distinction of this reality allows him to hold without contradiction that we participate *in* God, and yet “the substance of God is absolutely indivisible and therefore it is absolutely imparticipable.”⁸⁶

Based upon his essential account of the Divine Energy, Palamas is able to posit the *Filioque* in the inner life God. This point is extremely important for our study, because it demonstrates more clearly that the energies extend to the Immanent Trinity. He wrote, “The Holy Spirit belongs to Christ by essence and by energy, because Christ is God; nevertheless, according to the essence and hypostasis it belongs but does not proceed, whereas, according to energy, it belongs and proceeds.”⁸⁷ What is most interesting about this passage is Palamas’ use of the term “procession” with respect to the Divine Energy.⁸⁸ Procession traditionally refers to the origination of the Son or, within the Greek context, the Holy Spirit from the Father alone. It has clear ontological/hypostatic implications. By using “procession” to speak of the Spirit’s relation to the Son, Palamas goes against the popular theological understanding of the relationship between the Son and the Spirit in the Eastern Church of his time. Generally, within the Orthodox theological tradition “procession” denoted the Holy Spirit’s eternal origin from the Father, and “mission” refers to the Holy Spirit’s relationship to the Son in the economy of salvation. What Palamas is trying to express is that Divine Energy is not the substance of hypostasis; rather it is an actual and real category of the eternal activity of God the Father. Thus, the energy is present in the Father’s willful act of begetting the Son. The Son is begotten from the Father in the essence of the Father and at the same time is begotten in energy, for in any act of God, energy is present. However, the procession of the Son from the Father in substance and energy cannot be equated. Although simultaneous - after all no time exists in God because God is eternal - the begetting of the Son transcends the begottenness of the Son in Divine Energy. Procession in the substance of

⁸⁶ Ibid., 110, 209.

⁸⁷ “Apodictic Treatise,” fol. 44v., in Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 231.

⁸⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 232.

God is person constituting, while the processions in the energy are a result of this activity. In this sense, Palamas, quoting from Dionysius, wrote: “the same procession is also called processions.”⁸⁹ The plural “processions” is a reference to the energetic procession that occurs in God as a result of the immanent procession. The energy follows from the Father’s willful and natural act to beget, and thus cannot not be equated. With this understanding in mind, Palamas can speak of the Divine Energy as eternal.⁹⁰ Because the energy includes all God’s actions and therefore extends to creation and salvation history, Palamas can speak of the *Filioque* in a meaningful way that includes both the Western and Eastern interpretation.

Cognizant of the controversy that his choice of “procession” would cause, Palamas warned his readers not to “vainly quarrel...about this word.”⁹¹ Thus, his choice of “procession” and not “mission” was deliberate; he was not playing on words; energies extend beyond salvation history because they are a reality in God-Himself. While he presupposes the Orthodox teaching that the Son sends the Spirit to the world (mission), Palamas’ theology of the energy allows him to draw an ecumenical conclusion about the procession of the Holy Spirit. Because the energies are truly “in” God as a true distinction, the *Filioque* does occur in God’s inner life. Perhaps it is not that the Divine Energy is the Economic Trinity *per se*, but rather that the Divine Energy reveals that the Economic Trinity extends to the inner life of God, so that God is always active and oriented toward creation. I think this is similar to Anna Williams’ position that the Divine Energy for Palamas expresses the Economic-Immanent Trinity.

In summary, based on Palamas’ understanding of the Divine Energy as an eternal reality in the Godhead, I conclude that the energy is analogous to the Divine Essence insofar as it refers to a subsistent distinction in the Godhead.⁹² However it refers specifically to God’s eternal activity, which includes but is not limited to the economy of salvation. Energy is not a second nature of the Father but rather the activity of God the Father. Moreover, because God is simple, the Divine Energy is simple, though it is manifested in a plurality of energies that correspond to the three Divine Hypostases. Specifically the Divine Energy is foremost the energy of the Son and the Spirit. Not only does the Divine Energy

⁸⁹ Palamas, *Chapters*, 85, 183.

⁹⁰ In chapter eighty-one he writes that the energy is “God’s eternal will for us,” Palamas, *Chapters*, 81, 177.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁹² He writes: “There is another distinction alongside that of hypostases and a distinction belonging to the Godhead, for the distinction of the hypostases is not a distinction belonging to the Godhead,” Palamas, *Chapters*, 85, 183.

accompany the generation of both hypostases, but the Son and Spirit “create” the energy in their missions to the world.

I think that a modern reader’s difficulty in interpreting Palamas concerns Palamas’ lack of a modern terminology that adequately expresses human subjectivity and religious experience: two terms that we take for granted as beneficiaries of modernity. Ultimately Palamas is attempting to express the God he experiences personally in prayer, but also the God Who transcends this experience. This experience of transcendence and immanence that produce certainty in his conviction can only be expressed by him through his teaching on the Divine Energy. His claim that the Divine Energy is a subsistent reality in God, which is logically problematic given God’s unity, is based on his mystical experience.

A Comparison between Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas

The Divine Energy, for Maximus the Confessor, is the function of the Divine Essence that designates God’s actions *ad extra*. This simple definition is absolutely fundamental to correctly understanding Maximus’ account of the Divine Energy. Like Gregory Palamas, Maximus freely admits that God’s will is God’s Divine Energy. Thus all the acts of the economy of salvation are God’s energy, i.e. creation, grace, and God’s revelation, functions of the Divine Energy. In this sense God as revealed to us is God as Divine Energy, and thus like Palamas, Maximus locates the attributes of God not in the Immanent Trinity but in the Economic Trinity. On the other hand Palamas attributes the Divine Energy to the inner life of God. It is a constituent of God’s life, not simply what God does, but what God is. Following Maximus, Palamas accepts that Divine Energy comes from the Divine Essence. However, he locates the Divine Energy in God’s inner life as opposed to Maximus’ placement of the Divine Energy solely within the economic action of God, as an effect of the Divine nature. God in Palamas’ account is much closer to humankind than in Maximus’ account, because God is constituted as the Creator. God is the Creator, not because God creates, but because God as Creator is a reality in God. Since the energy is a subsistent reality in God, God is, analogically speaking, “made” for creating. This difference allows Palamas to speak about *Filioque* as energetic and yet immanent to God’s life. Note that Maximus accepts the *Filioque*, so long as it is understood as a western expression “to manifest the Spirit’s coming-forth (προϊέναι) through him and, in this way, to make clear the unity and identity of the essence,”⁹³ and not deny that

⁹³ Maximus the Confessor, “*Ad Domnum Marinum Cypri presbyterum*,” PG 91: 136AB; see also Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 67.

the Father is the cause of the Holy Spirit. Unlike Palamas, a discussion of Divine Energy does not factor into Maximus' account of the *Filioque*.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper we raised a question about John Meyendorff's claim that Maximus presupposes the Palamite distinction of the essence and energy. It must be concluded that although substantial agreement exists between the two, Meyendorff's claim is an overstatement. Maximus treats the energy simply as what the essence does; there is no indication in his theology that he considered it as a true distinction in God, i.e. a quasi-accident. In fact, his definition of energy as the manifestation of nature, taken from Aristotle, implies an external action, a manifestation of itself to something else, and has little bearing on God-in-Himself.

Maximus then should not be understood in the light of Palamas, but rather the reverse. Palamas must be understood as the one who develops ideas in Maximus' thought with respect to this doctrine, beyond the considerations of Maximus. All of what we have said about Maximus is included in Palamas' doctrine. The difference in their doctrine was a product of the different concerns they had given to their respective challenges. Unlike Maximus' Christological concern, Palamas was concerned with the knowledge of God. This challenge leads Palamas to further develop the theology of Divine Energy, and compelled him to clarify more clearly than Maximus to his audience how God remained transcendent and yet participable for the hesychast monks. He therefore makes explicit references that the Divine Energy is a distinction in God which extends to the entire Immanent Godhead: it is the means by which humankind is able to participate *in* God, i.e. to be deified, and maintain God's unity. Palamas needed to attribute the energy to God in-Himself, as otherwise he would have opened himself up to Barlaam's critique that God is only known by his revelations. Unfortunately, as Meyendorff remarked, the immanent implications of Palamas' theology of the Divine Energy remain incomplete.⁹⁴

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⁹⁴ Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 232.