

Orthodox Mysticism and Asceticism

Orthodox Mysticism and Asceticism:

*Philosophy and Theology
in St Gregory Palamas' Work*

Edited by

Constantinos Athanasopoulos

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LETTER FROM HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN OF VEROIA, NAOUSA AND CAMPANIA, MR. PANTELEIMON



† Ο ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ
ΒΕΡΟΙΑΣ, ΝΑΟΥΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΜΠΑΝΙΑΣ
ΠΑΝΤΕΛΕΗΜΩΝ

Βέροια, 1 Νοεμβρίου 2019

Πρὸς
Τὸν Ἐλλογιμώτατον Καθηγητὴν
Κωνσταντῖνον Ἀθανασόπουλον, Δρα Φ.,
Εἰς Ἀγίαν Παρασκευὴν

Ἐλλογιμώτατε καὶ ἀγαπητέ μου κ. Ἀθανασόπουλε,

Ἡ ἐξέχουσα καὶ φωτόμορφος καὶ θεοείκελος μορφή τοῦ μεγάλου θεόπτη τῆς Ἀγίας Ὁρθοδοξίας, τοῦ κήρυκος τῆς θεώσεως, τοῦ Ἱεράρχου καὶ ἀσκητοῦ τῆς θεοπτίας, τοῦ μεγάλου θεολόγου καὶ φωστήρος τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου δόγματος, τοῦ προστάτου τῶν μοναστῶν καὶ τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου ἡσυχασμοῦ, ἀποτελεῖ γιὰ τὴν Ἀποστολικὴ Βέροια ἓνα μεγάλο καύχημα.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς, ὁ παμφαῆς λαμπτήρ τοῦ ἀκτίστου φωτός, κατὰ τὰ πέντε χρόνια τῆς ἐδῶ παραμονῆς του στὴ Σκήτη λίγο ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη, καθαγίασε μὲ τὶς ἀδιάλειπτες προσευχητικὲς του ἀναπνοὲς τὸν ἀέρα τῆς περιοχῆς, πότισε μὲ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας τὰ χώματα αὐτοῦ τοῦ εὐλογημένου μακεδονικοῦ τόπου, ἀλλὰ καὶ φώτισε μὲ τὴν πνευματικὴ ἀκτινοβολία του ὅλοκληρο τὸν κόσμο. Ὁ ἅγιος εἶναι ἓνα σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον, ποῦ κεῖται εἰς πτώσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν, πτώσιν τῶν λατινοφρόνων, τῶν ἀθεολογῶν, τῶν ἄγνευτων τῆς μυστικῆς ἡσυχαστικῆς ἐν Θεῷ ἐμπειρίας, τῶν πολεμίων τῆς ψυχοσωματικῆς τελειώσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνάστασιν ὅλων ἐκείνων τῶν ἀπλῶν, ποῦ ζοῦν βιωματικὰ τὸν Θεό, ποῦ ἀγιάζονται ψυχή τε καὶ σῶματι, ποῦ βλέπουν σὸ ἀκτίστο φῶς τῆς Μεταμορφώσεως τοῦ Κυρίου τὴν δυνατότητα καὶ τῆς δικῆς τους προσωπικῆς ἐν τῷ ἀκτίστῳ φωτὶ μεταμορφώσεως, τῆς καλῆς ἀλλοιώσεως, τῆς ἐν Ἀγίῳ Πνεύματι τελειώσεως.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς, συνεχιστὴς τῆς ὑπερχιλιετοῦς ἐμπειρίας τῶν προφητῶν τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, τῶν Ἀποστόλων, τοῦ μεγίστου Ἀποστόλου τῶν Ἑθνῶν Παύλου, τοῦ καὶ ἱδρυτοῦ τῆς τοπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τοῦ Πρωτοδιακόνου Στεφάνου, τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως, τῶν

Letter from His Eminence Metropolitan of Veroia, Naousa
and Campagnia, Mr. Panteleimon

μεγίστων Ἱεραρχῶν καὶ θεολόγων, θεοπτῶν καὶ φωστήρων, καὶ τῶν ὁσίων μοναστῶν, μὲ τὰ πνευματέμφορα συγγράμματά του, τοὺς ἀγῶνες του γιὰ τὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς θεώσεως τοῦ ὅλου ἀνθρώπου, τὰ μοναστικά του παλαιόματα, τὴν ἐρευνα μέσα στὸ ἐσώτερο σκοτὸς τῆς ψυχῆς του τοῦ αἰδίου φωτὸς τῆς Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἔρχεται καὶ σήμερα δι' ἄλλον τρόπον, μέσα ἀπὸ τὶς ἐκδόσεις τῶν ἔργων του, τὰ συνέδρια καὶ τὶς ἡμερίδες, τὶς μελέτες γιὰ τὴν ἀγιοπνευματικὴ ἐμπειρία καὶ θεολογία του, νὰ μᾶς διδάξῃ μακραιώνες ἀλήθειες, νὰ μᾶς φωτίσῃ μὲ τὸν λόγον του μέσα σὲ μία ἐποχὴ ποὺ κυριαρχεῖ τὸ πνευματικὸ σκοτάδι, νὰ μᾶς ξυπνήσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν ὀATHυμία καὶ τὸν ὕπνον τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν παθῶν, νὰ ἀνακατευθύνῃ τὴ ζωὴ ἐκείνων ποὺ θέλουν τὸ φῶς, ἀγαποῦν τὸ φῶς, πορεύονται πρὸς τὸ φῶς, καὶ ζητοῦν νὰ εἶναι αἰωνίως μέσα σὲ αὐτό.

Γιὰ τοῦτο τὸν λόγον ἀποτελεῖ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ταπεινότητά μου, τὸν Ἐπίσκοπο καὶ Μητροπολίτη αὐτῆς τῆς εὐλογημένης περιοχῆς, μεγίστη χαρὰ κάθε πνευματικὴ ἐκδήλωση καὶ διοργάνωση ποὺ προβάλλει τὸν ἀστὲρα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξιας καὶ διδάσκαλο τῆς θεώσεως.

Ἰδιαιτέρως χαίρομαι καὶ καυχῶμαι γιὰ τὴν διεξαγωγὴ στοὺς χώρους τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Παναγίας Καλλιπέτρας τοῦ Σεμιναρίου γιὰ τὸν ἅγιο Γρηγόριο κατὰ τὸ παρελθόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ μέλλον.

Εὐχομαι καὶ ἐλπίζω καὶ προσεύχομαι στὸν Κύριο νὰ εὐλογῇ πάντοτε διὰ πρεσβειῶν τοῦ ἁγίου τοῦ ἐν λόγῳ Σεμιναρίου καὶ νὰ χαρίσῃ στοὺς διοργανωτὲς του καὶ κυρίως σὲ σᾶς, τὸν πρωτεργάτη, ὑγεία καὶ ὅλα τὰ πνευματικὰ καὶ ὕλικά ἀγαθὰ, ἀξιῶνοντας ὅλους μας νὰ διαλύσουμε τὰ σκοτάδια τῶν παθῶν ἐντὸς ἡμῶν καὶ νὰ λάμψουμε ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν οὐρανῷ μπροστὰ στὸν ἀγαπημένο μας Ἀναστάντα Κύριο.

Ὅθεν διατελῶ,

Μετὰ σεβασμοῦ καὶ τιμῆς, ἡλικίας & εὐφροσύνης
Ο ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ
 τῆς *Βεροίας καὶ Ναούσης καὶ Καμπανίας*
 Ὁ Βεροίας, Ναούσης καὶ Καμπανίας Παντελεήμων

The Metropolitan of Veroia, Naousa and Campagnia Mr. Panteleimon

Veroia 1/11/2019

To: Dr. Constantinos Athanasopoulos

Dear Dr. Athanasopoulos

The eminent, holy, great, and godlike Orthodox preacher of deification, the Hierarch and ascetic of *theoptia*, the great theologian and teacher of Orthodox dogma, the protector and guardian of monks and Orthodox hesychasm, is for the Apostolic city of Veroia a great source of pride. St Gregory Palamas, the illuminator in our hearts and minds of all truths related to the uncreated light, during his stay at the Skete of Veroia (a short distance from the city) made holy with his ceaseless prayerful breath the air of the area, made moist with his tears the soil of this holy and blessed Macedonian locality but also enlightened with his spiritual radiance all the world. The saint is still a point of debate, a reason for the fall and rise of many: the fall of all who still believe in the errors of the Latins, the errors of all who lack proper theological training and interest, the errors of all who lack an inner mystical hesychastic experience of God, of all who oppose the effort for attaining a psycho-somatic perfection for man; but, at the same time, the saint is a reason for the rise of all those who live a simple life, experientially living God's presence in their lives, who are continuously sanctified in their body and their minds and souls, who see, in the Transfiguration of Christ, the possibility of their personal transformation in uncreated light, the good alienation from their fallen nature, their perfection in the Holy Spirit.

St Gregory Palamas continues the more than thousand-year-old lived experience of God that is evidenced in the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Apostles of the New Testament, the Great Apostle of the Nations, St Paul, who is the founder of our local Church, the first called Deacon Stephen, the martyrs of our faith, the great Hierarchs and theologians, in short, he continues the tradition of all the radiant holy men and women who have seen and directly experienced God throughout the centuries. He continues in this same tradition of lived experience and testimony of God with his many divinely inspired writings, his pain-filled efforts in supporting the truth of the deification of the whole man, his many monastic and ascetic victories, his research into the depths of his soul and the elevated lofts of the eternal light of the Kingdom of God. Today, with the saint's many editions of his works, the conferences and

workshops organised in his honour, the many studies of his experience of the Holy Spirit and divinely inspired theology, the saint again comes to teach us eternal truths, enlighten our spiritually dark world, and wake us from the slumber of our sinful passions; he redirects the life of all who wish to see the light, love the light, walk towards the light and live eternally within the light.

For these reasons, it is for me, a humble Bishop and Metropolitan of this blessed part of Macedonia, a great joy to see the organisation of any spiritual and intellectual event that examines the work and life of this star of Orthodoxy, and teacher of *theosis*.

I am particularly delighted and take pride in the organisation of your conference in the Holy Monastery of the Most Holy Virgin Mother of God of Kallipetra, both in the past and in the future.

I continuously pray to our Lord to bless always, with the intercessions of our Holy Saint, the Palamas Seminar participants that you and your collaborators organise and bring together, so that we all are deemed worthy to disperse the darkness of our passions in our hearts, and shine as radiant lights in the heavens when our time comes to present ourselves in the face of our Resurrected Lord.

With love in Christ and honour
Metropolitan of Veroia, Naousa and Campagnia.
Panteleimon.

INTRODUCTION

DR. CONSTANTINOS ATHANASOPOULOS

The collection of papers presented here are contributions to scholarship regarding the work of an important late-Byzantine philosopher and theologian: St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359). His work is significant because he defended the hesychastic practices and theology of the monks of the Holy Mountain (Mount Athos) in Macedonia, on the northern Greek peninsula of Chalkidiki, where he lived for most of his life (he also lived for a few years at the Skete Veroias, another famous Central Macedonian monastic centre of the time). In his writings, St Gregory Palamas put forward a systematic and elaborate (philosophical and theological) defence of how one who is alive can know and unite with the infinite, ontologically and radically distinct from creation, simple and unknowable, triune God.

A unifying theme of the papers included here is the way Palamas brings together *praxis* and *theoria*, or, in other words, asceticism and mysticism, and the wider influence that this had on modern and contemporary Orthodox and non-Orthodox philosophy and theology. St Gregory Palamas would not be influential nor important for us today, if he had been born somewhere else, at some other time, or if indeed his main adversary in the debates, Monk Varlaam (or Barlaam) of Calabria (1290-1348, who, later in life, became the Roman Catholic Bishop of Gerace) did not attack, with particular rigour, the long-established (by that time) hesychastic practices of the monks of Holy Mountain.

The interaction between Palamas and Varlaam is not simply a story of two people who, while fighting for the same cause (i.e., defending the Orthodox dogma on the Holy Trinity against the Roman Catholic additions to the Nicene Creed), found themselves arch enemies. It is a story of an opposition between two different cultural, philosophical and theological views on salvation, the Holy Trinity, and relations between Church and political power. This opposition started before the two great schisms of the Church in the ninth and later in the eleventh century and developed into two radically different worldviews of Christianity that we now divide into East and West (i.e., Eastern Orthodox Christianity and

Western Roman Catholic Christianity; or Eastern Church and Western Church—more simply put, East and West; note that now “West” includes the various Protestant Churches). What scholars usually examine in the work of St Gregory Palamas is the later stage in the development of this opposition, an opposition that still holds and is widely accepted in the East. This opposition is still polemical in both the West and the East (even though one can see attempts at reconciliation on both sides and the establishment of an ongoing ecclesiastical dialogue). In the West, there are still publications arguing for the heretical nature of some of the texts of Palamas, and in the East Palamas’ texts are still used by Orthodox monastic communities and local synods of Orthodox bishops in theological and philosophical refutations of key theses of the non-Orthodox Christian Churches (and lately in criticising the Ecumenical Patriarch for his attempts to pray together with leaders of other Churches, such as the Pope and/or the heads of Protestant Churches). Regardless of the ongoing controversies, the reader should expect to see in this collection a sober and academically disciplined study of Palamas’ texts and their influence. In some of their aspects, the papers here continue the work of researchers published in previously edited works on the study of Palamas (Athanasopoulos & Schneider, ed. 2013; Athanasopoulos, ed. 2015a). The reader should combine the reading of this introduction here with the introduction found in Athanasopoulos (2015a), where some of the background to the debates is discussed in more detail.

The majority of the papers contained in this book are contributions to the Palamas Seminar International Conference which took place in Veroia (a Macedonian city in Northern Greece) in June 2015, with the blessing of the Metropolitan of Veroia, Naoussa and Campagna, Mr. Panteleimon. Its topic, “Hesychasm in the work of Palamas” gave an opportunity to the more than 17 participants from Europe, Asia, and the Americas to discuss various aspects of the hesychastic work of St Gregory Palamas, ranging from aesthetics to political philosophy, and from ethics and cultural theory to metaphysics. Most of the speakers, however, discussed both aspects of the philosophical and theological work of St Gregory Palamas that appear in the title of this book, i.e., Palamas’ mysticism and asceticism. For the tremendous success of the 2015 conference at Veroia we are indebted to His Eminence, Metropolitan of Veroia, Naoussa and Campania, Mr. Panteleimon for his blessing and for allowing us to have the conference in one of the historic Holy Monasteries of the Holy Skete of Veroia (a place where St Gregory Palamas and most of his family lived as monks and nuns). We are also greatly indebted to the

Right Reverend, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Theotokos at Kallipetra, Archimandrite Palamas, for the wonderful hospitality we received from his great team of monks and the resourceful and skilful team of women helpers that prepared the food and made the other arrangements for our meetings there. Special thanks are also owed to the Association of Pontian Greeks “Panagia Soumela” for the accommodation offered to participants at the Pilgrim Centre of Soumela in Vermion. Lastly, we wish to offer our warmest thanks to the monastic community of the Holy Mountain, and especially the Fathers of the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi for welcoming the men of the conference for a short visit, after the proceedings at Veroia, and talking to us on various aspects of Athonite hesychasm and asceticism.

The selection method for the papers of this volume consisted in a two-phase process: a) finalised versions of the papers were read and commented upon and feedback was provided to their authors at an early stage in terms of whether the papers were publishable as they were or needed serious revision; b) the authors of revised papers were then asked to observe the format guidelines and other stylistic editorial requirements. Only the papers that passed through these two stages are contained in this work. In addition to these papers, I have added two papers that were read at different Conferences: a paper on Romanian hesychasm that was read at the Thessaloniki 2012 International Conference on the cultural and theological significance of followers of St Gregory Palamas. The paper was re-submitted for this book (again observing the two-phase process and because its topic was suited to the title and discussed an important aspect of Palamas’ ascetic and hesychastic influence in the 17th and later centuries, through the collection of texts named Philokalia- this collection of texts will be further discussed in Conferences that Palamas Seminar is organising in 2019, 2020 and 2021). I have also added my paper on St Gregory Palamas and Meister Eckhart, a version of which I read at the Conference on St Gregory Palamas and Meister Eckhart, organised by my esteemed colleague and collaborator in the Palamas Seminar, Professor Oleg Dushin, in St Petersburg during 2014 (published later, in Russian translation, in *Verbum*). I have significantly revised the paper and included it here because it was never published in English and it discusses aspects of St Gregory Palamas’ mysticism and asceticism that readers might find interesting. In the Appendix, I have included the very interesting letter prepared by Abbot Palamas; this letter was submitted with other documents by the Holy Metropolis of Veroia, Naousa and Campania in its application to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the recognition of the family of Palamas as saints of the Orthodox Church (now celebrated on the Feast

Day for the Family of Palamas on December 18). Before I proceed to the discussion of some key ideas in terms of each contribution included in this collection of papers, I will discuss some issues found in a book review that was published in the *Philosophical Quarterly* regarding a previous collection of papers I edited. These papers were read at the International Conference on St Gregory Palamas that I organised in Thessaloniki in 2012 and were published in 2015 (see Athanasopoulos, ed., 2015a). I will also include in this part of my introduction (i.e., before the discussion of the papers presented in this work) some brief details about the Palamas Seminar. My general aim in these parts of the introduction is to allow the reader to understand the background of the scholarship and the meetings that Palamas Seminar organises.

I hold, as a matter of policy (one that I always try to follow as an editor), not to censure and limit the freedom of speech and opinion of the authors presented in the works I edit. What I insist upon is that they follow the same key standards of style and scholarship. This includes the rule that the authors justify their views through appropriate bibliographical evidence and logical arguments, which explain and justify their evidence; I do this so that their overall views and perspectives on the wider topic make sense to the general public and are accurate and representative of the debates in a rounded and balanced way. As you may understand, this means that in trying to observe this editorial policy of pro-academic freedom sometimes I include works that express views that run contrary to what I consider to be the most plausible readings of the texts of Palamas. In these cases, I consider as part of my freedom of expression and my duty to the readership of the book to express publicly my disagreements in the introduction, with the hope that, in this way, the reader gains a wider and more rounded perspective on the debates (note that I also maintain a policy of communicating my disagreement with the writer early in the feedback I provide especially during the first phase of my editorial duties, so that, if they wish, they can address it with their particular arguments in the revised versions of their work).

Surprisingly, in a book review (Pattison 2017) of a previous collection of papers I edited (Athanasopoulos, ed., 2015a), the reviewer noted my open expression of disagreement regarding the interpretations of some of the contributors in the introduction of that book. He also made a few other points that I think would be best addressed here. So, in this part of my introduction, I wish to answer some remarks that appeared in this review (Pattison 2017), so that I can clarify my approach to the editing of the papers and to offer my views on what I regard as plausible readings of

Palamas' work. I hope that, in the future, I will be able to write more extensively on these issues, but, as all things go in life, no one knows when (and if) a more opportune time will come. As such, allow me to start first with a major point of contention.

Why East vs. West in Palamas' studies?

I would like to examine this question with another question: is a differentiation between West and East a valid position in the study of the work of St Gregory Palamas? The content of what we examine and how we use it to support such a differentiation is of great importance here. As in all research outputs, the focus of the question under investigation and the methodology with which we approach possible answers to this question are extremely significant.

If Palamas were alive today, he would certainly think that there is a great differentiation between these two worldviews (East vs. West), and for most Palamas' scholars in Greece and the Orthodox world more widely (the East), this is a valid stance (even though at least some of Palamas' supporters would not accept that there is a split in Christianity: they would claim that all non-Orthodox are heretical and non-Christian and that there is only one true Christian Church, the Orthodox). Note immediately the first difference between East and West: in the non-Orthodox world (the West), there is no such broad agreement on the existence of this radical division between these two perspectives. For example, a writer with many contributions to Palamas' scholarship, Antoine Levy (a Roman Catholic scholar) challenges this differentiation, especially when it comes to the "theological apparatus" involved. He writes: "There is an East and a West within Christianity. As is well-known, the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches do not share the same understanding regarding the distribution of power in the Church. While this fact can certainly account for the division between two entities, it sheds little light on the contrast between their theological apparatus" (Levy 2013, p.96). This is not an isolated example; there are many Roman Catholic or Protestant scholars, who have views that are similar to this one (with most emphasising the convergence around key Christian beliefs, claiming that this new trend in Christian theology and philosophy, i.e., finding a convergence between Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant theological and philosophical views, should constitute the basis and support for what they term "New Orthodoxy" or "Radical Orthodoxy").

We also have a small number of scholars who claim to be Orthodox who also criticise this differentiation. Some of them base their

contention on theological grounds, some others on cultural critique (post-modern and post-structuralist). The ones who are making a theological point, see the theology of Palamas as being very close to many similar tendencies among mediaeval scholars (for example, Bonaventura, Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart, etc.). The ones with a specific cultural critique standpoint focus on the efforts of contemporary Orthodox and Roman Catholic scholars (and similar-minded ecclesiastical leaders) to overcome theological and philosophical barriers in the search for an ecumenical approach to such theological debates and the eventual union of all the Christian Churches. Note, however, even in the ecumenical movement, there is a discussion that recognises that the differences between East and West *are* significant, and so this differentiation actually should remain at least for clarificatory purposes; furthermore, some ecumenically-minded Orthodox theologians consider that there should be an added differentiation between “Chalcedonian Orthodox” and “Oriental Orthodox” (see for the importance of this Lossky 1991). In passing, let me note that Palamas’ supporters would not accept as “Orthodox” the non-Chalcedonian “Oriental” Churches, because, by the time of the debates with Varlaam, it was clear that what is now known as “Oriental Orthodox” presented a challenge to Orthodox Christological dogma. So, for our purposes in Palamas’ scholarship, it is safe to say that what in current theological debates is termed East vs. West is the debate between Christian (Chalcedonian) Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism (and/or Protestantism), and that this Orthodoxy has nothing to do with “New Orthodoxy” and “Radical Orthodoxy” (as these terms are used primarily by Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers).

Putting aside some of the significant similarities between the two approaches, I have argued repeatedly in the past that we should not only accept that there *is* a difference in the perspectives of East and West but also that we have to respect these radically distinct and culturally broad differences as binding and valid, especially when we approach the work of Palamas (please note that I am not claiming that this should be an obstacle to communication and fruitful exchange between scholars of the East and West; only that there should be an understanding of the differences and similarities in these domains, especially when we approach the work of Palamas). There is a significant theological basis for such a position. This comes not just from the actual works of Palamas, the *Tomos* of the Holy Mountain Fathers (which was the first step in making the Palamite theology of hesychasm canonical in Orthodox theology) and other early Orthodox works commenting on the debates but also in the work of contemporary theologians, such as Saint Justin Popovic (1894-1979) and

Saint Nikolai Velimirovic (1881-1956) and, more recently, Saint Sophrony (Sakharov) of Essex (1896-1993), Fr John Romanides (1927-2001), Professor Georgios Mantzarides (whose paper is included in this edited collection), Fr Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993), Metropolitan Ierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos, Elder Ephraim of Vatopedi, Elder Theokletos Dionysiatos of Dionysiou and most of the other Elders at the Holy Mountain.

In addition, there is a significant philosophical basis for this. In my contribution to this edited collection of papers, you can see some of my worries about a hasty abolition of cultural borders and barriers. My views are the result of my later philosophical development and especially my post-doctoral teaching and research in the area of philosophy of culture (I have published relevant papers in the past in Greek and English, and I taught Philosophy of History, Culture and Civilisation at the Department of Philosophy of the National Kapodistriakon University of Athens and Wittgenstein Studies at the Department of Philosophy, University of Patras, between 2000 and 2004). Language and linguistic distinctions (as Wittgenstein has shown) cannot be taken light-heartedly. We need to be clear and focused in our discussions, otherwise, we may find ourselves in confusion and linguistic chaos which is evidence of poor thinking on these matters. A desire to make things look similar (even with noble intentions) should not interfere with our desire to keep a basic standard of academic rigour. And rigour is not about making distinctions lose their meaning. In particular, it is not about making clear philosophical and theological positions obscure; academic rigour is all about keeping things clear and informing the reader where the writer stands at all times. There is a level of honesty here and a desire to be brave (no matter the cost); these are virtues that academics sometimes forget. Sometimes, they favour complacency, avoiding confrontation and maintaining or even supporting the *status quo* at all cost; but, in doing this, they sacrifice truth and the desire to be true to their cause which should (ultimately) be to move forward in the academic pursuit of truth. Furthermore, as Wittgenstein (among many others) has shown, keeping things clear linguistically and conceptually, helps us find important links and differences in terms of cultural structures and outputs at the macro and micro levels (for more on Wittgenstein, see my two contributions in this edited work).

Of course, by supporting the idea that discussions of theological and philosophical contributions to Eastern and Western Christian perspectives should be kept distinct and clearly defined when approaching Palamas Studies, I do not claim that we should follow all the polemical aspects of views such as that promoted by Khomyakov (see Khomyakov

and Kireevsky 1999; Birkbeck 1895), where the East gains a character that is (at least in certain of its aspects) alien to what Palamas' theology and philosophy were all about. Palamas was very clear that there can be no division among (Orthodox) Christians in terms of cultural and/or national identities. In his *Homilies* and other parts of his work, he stresses that there cannot be a difference between a Greek and a non-Greek in terms of salvation. Note also that, when he was Archbishop of Thessaloniki (1347-1357/9), he carefully avoided sponsoring violence (by refusing to co-operate with the Zealots of Thessaloniki) and repeatedly called on the faithful under his care to provide help and show love to other people in their community, irrespective of creed, belief or colour (see π. Γεωργίου Μεταλληνού 1995).

I would also like to emphasise that the differences between East and West should not be oversimplified: in such an oversimplification, some scholars see the West as promoting ancient Greek rationalism and the East as being in opposition to this (see for an example of such an oversimplification, in a somewhat different setting, Inagaki and Jennings 2000). I argue in many places (and in my contributions here) that this is not (and should not) be so; such an oversimplification requires seeing ancient Greek philosophy through Kantian lenses, something which the ancient Greeks would not agree with. As is well known in the history of philosophy, Kant was one of the key modern figures who supported and propounded an essentially rationalist agenda in metaphysics, ontology, logic, ethics, aesthetics, politics, and religion. There were others before him who proceeded in this manner, but he is a key figure in the rationalist camp and provided a systematic discussion of what rationalism was capable of achieving in philosophy and religion. I argue that ancient Greek philosophy is essentially non-rationalist (non-rationalist at least when considered in terms of Kantian rationalism—see Athanasopoulos 2010; 2012a; 2015b). I differ here with a considerable number of commentators on ancient Greek philosophy (e.g., Korsgaard 1999; Serck-Hanssen and Emilsson 2010; Rescher 2013). But today, even in the West, some scholars hold that Plato and Aristotle should be interpreted more liberally (see Chappell 2012). My position in Ancient Greek Philosophy also brings me into opposition to some other claims made in the West regarding the debt owed by Palamas to the rationalism of Aristotle (e.g., Levy 2013). I would like here to emphasise that Aristotle's corpus in the East was more thoroughly and consistently studied and commented upon in its entirety. It has a long tradition of interpretation (through Byzantine commentators), which had already adorned this corpus with some very plausible readings by the time the young St Gregory Palamas started studying Aristotle's

Corpus under the guidance of Theodoros Metochites at the University of Constantinople (see further on this Athanasopoulos 2010; 2015). As such, the Aristotle that St Gregory Palamas knew of (and used in his confrontation with Varlaam) was far from anything scholars in the Latin West knew (and even far from what we can know of today). A lot of the scholarship that St Gregory Palamas was using is now lost due to the barbaric destruction of the libraries in Constantinople and other strongholds of Byzantine Civilisation by the Ottoman Turks during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The very few texts that the learned men of Constantinople brought with them from the East when they found refuge in the West were only a minuscule part of what had existed up to that time. To summarise this point: there are influences of Aristotelian character on the work of Palamas, but these would not be recognised as Aristotelian by Aquinas and other mediaeval philosophers and theologians. To think that Palamas was using what we today take as Aristotle is an oversimplification that destroys the academic rigour and preferred interpretation of the relevant texts (I discuss such an oversimplification concerning Palamas' use of Aristotelian logic - opposing K. Ierodiakonou's interpretation- in Athanasopoulos 2015b; incidentally, I am not the only one who supports that Medieval and contemporary readings of Aristotle lack the breadth of scope that Byzantine Aristotelian commentators had at the time of Palamas; see for some further bibliography on this Oehler, 1964; Lemerle, 1971; Benakis, 1988; Kotzabassi, 2002; Trizio, 2017).

The differences that place the East in opposition to the West in Palamas Studies are not restricted to a specific viewpoint within Orthodoxy; they encompass a much broader cultural differentiation (I discuss this further through a Wittgensteinian-based analysis in my contributions here; see also here Prof. Viorel Vizureanu's discussion of Fr Dumitru Staniloae's work). One could say summarily (using philosophers other than Wittgenstein) that the difference is based on a different Husserlian *Lebenswelten* (Husserl 1936/1970, pp.108-9). One may also see the difference through Gadamer's discussion of institutionalised theoretical prejudices (prejudice or *Vorurteil* in Gadamer is essential, along with authority and tradition, to understanding a given position, having a positive role that allows for a more successful interpretation of the relevant texts and authors); one may even use Gadamer's methodological union of prejudice with his concept of *Horizontlehre* as the key to approaching Palamas' texts (Gadamer 1993, p.306), in opposition to the views of Schleiermacher, Habermas, and others. Note that, when one sees the differences between East and West in this way, the "mental trap" that Fr

George Florovsky warns of (i.e., that many in the West allow themselves to get trapped into believing that the East is “backward”) can easily be avoided (Florovsky 1972, p.105). The Palamas Seminar will have the opportunity to further discuss these differences in terms of specific and quite different philosophies of culture between East and West in the future (we have started discussing these differences in terms of the texts of the *Philokalia* for 2019-2020; we had the first meeting in Braga in July 2019, and had further meetings in Pskov during November 2019, in Iasi during March 2020, and Veroia-Mt Athos in July 2020, which now has been postponed for July 2021 due to COVID19 restrictions).

Concerning these wide cultural differences between East and West, it would be useful to the reader to refer briefly to some differences in terms of the mystical and ascetic perspectives of the two traditions. The mystical and ascetical perspectives in the two traditions are quite different.

One may claim that the mystical approach in the West is based on two major schools of ancient Greek mysticism: on the one hand, we have the elaborations of the Neoplatonic emanations (*aporroia- απόρροια*), proposed by Plotinus, Philo, and Porphyry—especially Plotinus’ insistence that the One is both transcendent and immanent (see Rist 1989). This is, of course, an offshoot of earlier approaches, like the ones expressed in early Pythagorean, Eleatic, and Platonist views, mixed with ancient Greek mystical practices, such as those of the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries (Burkert 1987; Guthrie 1935). On the other, we have the Stoic approach of living life according to reason (*ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν*) and *oikeiosis* (*οἰκείωσις*; see Salles 2009; Long 2013; Meijer, 2007; Powers 2012). Again, here one can see influences from earlier Greek schools of thought: the Presocratics (for example, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and Heraclitus), middle and late Platonism, and, in some ways, the later offshoots of the Peripatetic (Aristotle) School (see Sedley 2002; Brink 1995; Sandbach 1985). These mystical influences have directed mystics in the West to turn their asceticism against their body (following here the Neoplatonists and especially Celsus’ critique of early Christian beliefs on the body and some later Stoic ideas; see Pick 1911; Hijmans 1959).

In the East, even though one can see influences from all the prior schools, one can also see a stronger influence from the Cappadocian Fathers (who, together with Paul’s Epistles, helped mystics in the East develop a particular kind of asceticism, quite distinct from the asceticism of the West) and the Areopagitic texts. The Areopagitic texts (with their distinct and peculiar character of symbolic use of matter and the body; see on this Athanasopoulos 2014) were widely used in the East more than two centuries before the time that Hilduin (c. 785- c. 855), Bishop of Paris, and

Johannes Scotus Erigena (815-877), the famous early mediaeval Irish monk and scholar, were ordered to translate them *en masse* into Latin (note that in 827 the Byzantine Emperor Michael II donated a major part of these manuscripts to Louis the Pious, the son of Charlemagne; see Schmidt-Biggemann 2005, p.245). This meant that the brand of mysticism (and accompanying asceticism) that developed in the East became a distinct brand with a peculiar character that was unique and different from the one that was developing in the West. This should be taken into serious consideration when one approaches the mysticism of the East. St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas (key protagonists in the mystical theology and mystical philosophy of the East and the hesychastic asceticism that they helped develop) do not just express any of the Christian brands of mysticism and asceticism that the West is familiar with, rather they express a particular Christian brand of mysticism and asceticism of the East, quite different from similar co-temporal, earlier or later developments in the West. So, if scholars, approaching this topic, do not take these differences into serious consideration, they end up making serious misinterpretations and distortions (see for some examples of these in Φλωρόφσκυ 1992; Romanides 2008; Μητροπολίτη Ιεροθέου (Βλάχου) 2012; Μητροπολίτη Ιεροθέου (Βλάχου) 2012-2013; Ρωμανίδη 2010). I hope to elaborate further on these differences more extensively in future work (for an example of what I think on this matter, see my contribution here comparing Meister Eckhart to Palamas and my paper on the differences between Aquinas and Palamas in Athanasopoulos 2015b). For now, let me offer you an example of the kind of misinterpretation of the brand of mysticism (and asceticism) found in the East that has taken place in the relatively recent past. It relates to a famous exchange between D. Balfour and St Sophronios of Essex.

David Balfour (1903-1989) was a Roman Catholic priest who became an Orthodox monk, priest, and Archimandrite (and Confessor to the Greek Royal family shortly before WWII). In 1941, he left the Orthodox Church and entered the British diplomatic and intelligence service. In 1962, he decided to be re-admitted to the Orthodox Church and died as an Orthodox layman. A key point in D. Balfour's turn to Orthodoxy was his meeting with St Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938) at Holy Mt Athos in early 1932 at the Russian Holy Monastery of St Panteleimon (where St Silouan the Athonite and his spiritual son Elder Sophronios of Essex lived). From that time, he started writing letters to Elder Sophronios of Essex (1896-1993), who is now recognised as a Saint, asking for spiritual guidance on various issues. In one of these early letters (shortly before the end of 1932), he asked St Sophronios regarding the

famous Roman Catholic mystic John of the Cross (1542-1591). Balfour maintained that John of the Cross took a mystical approach to prayer and spiritual life that was similar to that of the Athonite hesychasts (see Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου 2004, Επιστολή 12, pp. 107-111; see also pp.117-122). Balfour, influenced by the mysticism of the Carmelites, thought that the two mystical practices were the same and offered arguments in support of this (asking St Sophronios to read the work “Dark Night of the Soul” to see for himself how close it is to mystical writings of the East). St Sophronios, in a very polite manner, dismissed the arguments offered by Balfour, guiding him to the mystical writings of St Symeon the New Theologian and other mystical writers of the East. St Sophronios insisted in his letters to David Balfour that the mystical theology of the East is based on a totally different ecclesiology and spiritual background than that of the West. St Sophronios stressed (both in his letters and in his overall attitude towards Balfour) that any true mystical illumination must be the product of sincere and deep compunction, a *nepsis* (esp. the cleansing of the soul with tears), and obedience in freedom to a spiritual guide. All this is only a prelude to a truly ecclesiastical mystical life in Christ, which includes full participation of the Eucharistic and other mysteries of the Church. Mystical life in the abstract and in a cognitive or intellectual manner (as can be found in John of the Cross’ *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *Dark Night*, see Howells 2002; 2013; 2017) would be a vain and fruitless attempt to approach God for the East and would lead one most certainly to spiritual demoralisation, insanity and self-destruction (see Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου 2004, pp.16-18; 107-111; 117-122).

From this short encounter with the views of one of the key contemporary Orthodox mystical theologians who lived on Mt Athos for many years as a disciple of St Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938), living a hesychastic life and practicing the Jesus Prayer up to his death and recently recognised as a saint in the Orthodox Church (with a unanimous decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in November 2019), it is evident that a true mystical life for the East can only be a hesychastic life, fully immersed in *ascesis* (ἄσκησις) and *nepsis* (νήψις, a spiritual and bodily process of cleansing the passions and transforming them, so that a meaningful compunction is achieved, with endless tears and love for Christ). So, mysticism and asceticism, as they were and are experienced through *ascesis* and *nepsis* in the hesychastic way of life, become in this way the key to understanding the cultural difference between East and West (on the relation of Orthodox mysticism to hesychasm see Δεληκωστοπούλου 2013, pp.271-281). But note that for the East, both mystical spiritual life and *ascesis* (which in the early period of the

development of hesychasm took the form of long fasts, long repetitions of the Jesus Prayer or as it is also known “Prayer of the Heart”, and full participation in long Church services every day) are not to be taken as purposes on their own: they serve as *stimuli* in the spiritual regeneration and concentration of the mind and the soul in the heart. This gathering and focusing of thoughts take place with the purpose of union with God, which is above anything that human language can express and above anything that the human mind can comprehend or imagine and which God will decide freely to complete via His energies (see on this John 16:12 and Paul’s 2 Corinthians 12 and the discussion of these passages in Romanides 2008; Metropolitan Hierotheos 2012-13). Further evidence can be found in most of the Fathers that the hesychasts referenced in their letters and treatises, such as St Gregory of Nyssa (esp. St Gregory of Nyssa, *Περί κατασκευής του ανθρώπου* or *De opificio hominis* and *Περί παρθενίας* or *De virginitate*); St Maximus the Confessor; St Symeon the New Theologian, and many others (Meredith 1999; Δελικωστοπούλου 2013, pp.271-281; Μαντζαρίδη 1998, pp.97-148; 225-254). A key component of the whole process (as St Sophronios of Essex, among other writers of the East claim) is freedom: absolute freedom for both God and man in their attempt to approach each other; for St Sophronios of Essex humans have to come to terms with their absolute freedom throughout their lives as a daily struggle, but they are able to use their freedom in their approach to God only through and with divine grace (Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου 2004, pp.195-199; note that here St Sophronios’ position on freedom differs significantly from Duns Scotus’ relevant views on the use and purpose of freedom; see regarding this below).

Up to this point, we have examined the cultural background differences of Eastern from Western mysticism and asceticism. We also verified our intuitions regarding this cultural background in terms of evidence from the relevant patristic sources and the personal evidence that one of the key mystical theologians of this age, St Sophronios of Essex has provided in terms of his correspondence with David Balfour. We have identified freedom as a key area of differentiation. Before we proceed to an examination of the key issue of cultural differentiation between East and West in terms of the role of freedom in the theological and philosophical approach to salvation, let me refer briefly to a key historical factor that resulted in a deepening of the wide cultural differences between these two perspectives.

During April 1204, the armies of the Fourth Crusade besieged and sacked Constantinople (Nicolle 2011; Roudometof 2014). The destruction in people and property was immense. But the cultural trauma

was far greater. According to Steven Runciman “there was never a greater crime against humanity than the Fourth Crusade” (Runciman 1954, Vol.3, p. 130). The crusader armies that sacked Constantinople and the states that contributed to it (especially Venice which, according to S. Runciman, played a more sinister role than others), were particularly ruthless in their treatment of the Byzantines: Byzantine historiographers of the time (like Nicetas Choniates, in Greek: Νικήτας Χωνιάτης; c.1155-1217, who was a real person unlike the fictional one with the same name in Umberto Eco’s *Baudolino*) give vivid depictions of the destruction of churches, monasteries, and libraries, the rapes of nuns and the looting of treasures and holy relics, which were used to adorn buildings, churches, and squares in the West (see for example the Roman era bronze horses that were taken from the Hippodrome in Constantinople to adorn the terrace of St Mark’s Basilica in Venice or the precious holy altar of the great Church of St Sophia in Constantinople, that is at the bottom of the sea with the shipwrecked Venetian ship that was carrying it to Venice; see Χωνιάτης 1975). The desolation and pain of the sacking of Constantinople were followed by a 60-year ruthless occupation of Byzantine lands which included mainland Greece and the islands of the Ionian and Aegean seas (Phillips 2004). The liberation of Constantinople by the Byzantines of Nicaea in 1261 did little to lift their spirits and they had to wait a further 20 years to see some of the previous glory reinstated in the rest of mainland Greece and the islands (see Runciman 1954, vol.3, pp. 114-123; Vryonis 1967; Χωνιάτης 1975, pp. 583-635, 637-655). The siege and the occupation by the Crusaders left a deep emotional and cultural scar on the collective memory of the Orthodox, intensifying the cultural divide that had already started with the schism of the ninth century (reports of the vandalism by the Crusaders spread as far as Russia and there are documents from that time across the Balkans and the Slavic countries that confirm this transnational culture-wide trauma; see for example the documents cited at the work of Maiorov, 2016).

Why freedom is so important in the East?

Perhaps one of the key issues in the debates about the differences between East and West is the amount of freedom one is prepared to allow for God and humans in their interaction for salvation. Freedom, as a concept, was discussed at length in ancient Greek philosophy, where it was often opposed to the concept of fate, but also included political and moral freedom (see Stalley 1994; Stalley 1998; Chappell 1995). Note that in the Orthodox patristic literature emphasis is placed on *proairesis*

(*προαίρεσις*) and not on freedom of the will (*ελευθερία βουλήσεως*) for achieving *synergeia* (*συνέργεια*) in salvation; “*προαίρεσις*” and “*τα εφ’ ἡμῖν*” as concepts connected to freedom were discussed at length in ancient Greek philosophy, esp. by Plato, the Peripatetic School, and the Stoics, and by political orators such as Lysias, Demosthenes, and Aeschines, who primarily connected them to the political sense of freedom (which has been in wide cultural discussion among the Greeks from the very first steps of Hellenic Civilisation – see for example Ηροδότου VII 104: *Ελεύθεροι γάρ εόντες οὐ πάντα ελεύθεροι εἰσὶ. Εστὶ γάρ σφι δεσπότης νόμος*; Δημοκρίτου απ. 821 F: “*Ελευθερίας δ’ ὅσον οι κρατούντες νέμονται τοῖς δῆμοις μέτεστι και το πλείων ἰσως ουκ ἀμεινον*”; see further in Raaflaub 2004). The amount of freedom one allows for God and humans in their interaction, for many (including myself) is another key difference between the East and West; (again) this is something that has been forgotten or seriously disregarded in contemporary discussions of hesychasm, mysticism and asceticism. Freedom (*ελευθερία* as *προαίρεσις*, *το εφ’ ἡμῖν* and *αυτεξούσιον*) for the Orthodox is not only the key to understanding the reason for the provision of choice in Paradise (*Genesis* 3), and many other divine actions throughout the Holy Bible, but also the *sine qua non* of wider Orthodox mysticism, asceticism, and cultural understanding of salvation and deification (*theosis*) or glorification (for some interesting connections between Orthodox mysticism and asceticism and the political realm see Papanikolaou 2012 and Brown Dewhurst 2018). There is a long and very strong lineage of ascetic biblical and patristic literature stressing this.

Biblical references include the psalms (e.g., Psalm 61), the Gospels (e.g., Mark 8:34; and the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32), and the Letters of the Apostles (1 Corinthians 9:24–25; Romans 8:21; Jude 1:3; James 2:14–26). Note that, repeatedly, both Jesus and St Paul discuss the life of the faithful in Christ as radically different from the life of the people who are bound by the Law of Moses (see for example most notably the parables of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector in Luke 18:9–14 and St Paul’s discussion of a relevant theme in Galatians 5:1 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery”).

Patristic references include the Cappadocians (John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa in particular; see Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Κατηχητικὸς Λόγος*, PG45, 24CD; Harrison 1992; Bradshaw 2011), the Desert Fathers, St Isaac the Syrian (see his 16th and 22nd *Ascetical Orations*), St John the Damascene (who relates freedom as “*αυτεξούσιο*” to the image of God (*κατ’ εικόνα το νοερόν δηλοῖ και το αυτεξούσιον*- PG94, 320), and St

Maximus the Confessor (see Maximus *Amb.* 42; PG91 1316C-D; Maximus *Pyrrh.* PG91 292D-293B; see also the relation to “το ἐφ’ ἡμῖν” in Maximus *Ep.* 2 PG91 396C; Maximus *Ep.* 2 PG91 405A; Bathrellos 2004; Törönen 2007; Loudovikos 2010). References we also find in St John of the Ladder, St Symeon the New Theologian, and of course St Gregory Palamas, along with more modern and contemporary saints (most notably St Porphyrios Kapsokalyvitis, 1906-1991, St Paisios of Mt Athos, 1924-1994, St Silouan the Athonite and St Sophronios of Essex – we discussed the last two earlier concerning differences between the mysticism and asceticism of the West and the East). For many of the hesychasts (St Gregory Palamas included), belief in the absolute ontological, epistemological, and ethical senses of freedom that both God and humans have (with God significantly greater than human) are key to safeguarding monastic and layman asceticism from the perils of misguided mysticism and asceticism. Absolute freedom is one of the ontological, epistemological and ethical characteristics that humans share with God, and, as such, any attempt to reduce or restrict the freedom of humans (or God) is an attempt to reduce or restrict the mystery of both creation and salvation.

St Gregory Palamas, discusses freedom in various parts of his works and in a variety of ways; one could highlight as an example of Palamas’ thought on this his *Oration on the Annunciation of the Theotokos* (*Ομιλία ΙΔ΄*, PG151, 176D; PG151, 172BC). Agreeing here with St Maximus the Confessor (c.580-662), Palamas sees that the absolute sense of freedom that both Christ and man share exists in fullness in the Mother of God (Theotokos) and the saints, who, in using their *προαίρεσις*¹, go beyond the ontological, epistemological and ethical limitations of their desire (*ὄρεξις*), will (*βούλησις*) and judgement (*κρίσις*) unifying them in their act of salvation through *and with* divine grace (Τσελεγγίδη 2000, 2002; Μαντζαρίδη 1998, pp.97-148; 225-254; for St Maximus’ views on freedom see the works of Loudovikos 2010; Bathrellos 2004; Törönen 2007; Bradshaw 2010). Palamas’ emphasis on this ontological, epistemological and ethical sense of freedom is of such a peculiar

¹ Note here that St Gregory Palamas uses a philosophically charged technical concept from both the Peripatetic and the Stoic schools to refer to freedom; see for example, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 1111b-1112a; 113a10-12: «...καὶ ἡ προαίρεσις ἂν εἴη βουλευτική ὄρεξις τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐκ τοῦ βουλευέσθαι γὰρ κρίναντες ὀρεγόμεθα κατὰ τὴν βούλευσιν» (see also Ross 1923; Σκαλτσᾶς, 1993); Epictetus’ *Diss.* 1.1.23 (for further discussion of *προαίρεσις* in Epictetus see Mason and Scaltsas 2007). For a comparison between Aristotle and Epictetus see Δραγώνα-Μονάχου 1978-9.

character that many in the West (even with a pro-Orthodox orientation) find it difficult to understand not only concerning Palamas' texts, but also in relation to texts of St Maximus the Confessor (for example, see the work of Farrell 1989 and the criticism of some of its main contentions by Fr John Romanides and Metropolitan Ierotheos of Nafpaktos; see Μητροπολίτη Ιεροθέου 2012; Romanides 1992), texts of St Gregory of Nyssa and other texts of many Byzantine authors (see on this Φλωρόφσκυ 1992).

In the West, there were distinct episodes in medieval philosophy and theology when the issue of freedom became important; but, overall, Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers followed the compatibilist (i.e., restricted freedom) views of Augustine (354-430; for further on Augustinian compatibilism see the works of Rogers 2004; Couenhoven 2013). Examples of such Augustinian lineage include the views of Anselm (1033-1109) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153); the discussion of Augustine's *liberum arbitrium* by Peter Lombard (1095-1160) and Albert the Great (1200-1280); and lastly the famous opposition of Duns Scotus (c.1260-1308) and Ockham (c.1287-1347) to Aquinas (1224/6-1274; see Osborne 2012). Aquinas, in his systematic and scholastic expositions, tried to unite the intuitions of Augustine and Aristotle (see, for example, the criticisms of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham on Aquinas' approach of relating *habitus* and freedom; for a discussion sympathetic to Aquinas on this issue, see the work of Cessario 1991). Most of the scholastics (except Duns Scotus and Ockham and their admirers) followed or were significantly influenced by Augustine's solution to the problem of freedom of the will. Duns Scotus, Ockham, and, much later, Louis de Molina (1535-1600) tried to formulate more creative and imaginative approaches to the Augustinian solution; for this reason, they could be considered *extreme libertarians* (with Professor Alexander Broadie calling Duns Scotus "the great philosopher of freedom in the Middle Ages"), allowing for a more liberal idea of freedom than Augustinian thought permitted (Broadie 1995; Williams 1998; Osborne 2012); however, even this (more liberal) interpretation is disputed (Ingham 2001; Freddoso 1988; Gaskin 1994) and, at any rate, Duns Scotus and Ockham did not manage to draw sufficient followers in the West to warrant a rejection of the claim that there was a medieval conformity to the views of Augustine on the issue (for example, see the case of Molina, who caused a major controversy in Spain, forcing Pope Clement VIII in 1594 to impose silence on open discussion of his views). Even though Augustine's views on sin and freedom were widely accepted in the West, for the East they were considered too restrictive and not related to *freedom simpliciter* (i.e.,

properly understood as *αὐτεξούσιον- προαίρεσις*). In the East, as indicated above, there was more emphasis on the Cappadocians and St Maximus the Confessor (on the significant differences between Augustine and Maximus see Bradshaw 2010). St Gregory Palamas and the hesychasts criticised Augustine sharply for the quite problematic soteriological consequences of his compatibilism (Ρωμανίδη 2010; Τσελεγγίδη 2000 and 2002; see on the recently re-surfaced disputed issue of Palamas' relation to Augustine regarding Palamas' 150 Chapters the work of Μητροπολίτη Ιεροθέου, 2009).

In the East, today more than ever, the ontological, epistemological, ethical and eschatological senses of freedom (as *ἐλευθερία* or as *αὐτεξούσιον- προαίρεσις*) are considered of paramount importance in our attempt to correctly understand and interpret many aspects of Orthodox philosophy and theology (see for example Yannaras 1984; Τσελεγγίδης 2002; Ρωμανίδη 2010; Δεληκωνσταντή 1997). In the case of St Gregory Palamas, in particular, this has a key philosophical and theological importance that can help us understand his mysticism and asceticism (Τσελεγγίδης 2000; Μαντζαρίδης 1998, pp.225-254). Contemporary hesychastic monastics think that freedom in-Christ (*η εν Χριστώ ελευθερία*), in all its forms (freedom from thinking with the flesh, freedom from natural necessity, freedom from death, freedom from worldly thoughts) is essential for a true Orthodox ascetic life and union with Christ (Γέροντας Γεώργιος Καψάνης 1988). They also think that all Orthodox ecclesiology and indeed all Orthodox theology becomes meaningless without freedom (Γέροντας Βασίλειος Γοντικάκης 1987; Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου 2004, pp.195-199; Αρχιμ. Ζαχαρία 2015, pp. 390-408).

The reader will find more discussion on all these issues in the papers that follow. But, before I start with a summary of some of the arguments in the papers contained in this collection, I will provide a few words about the Palamas Seminar and what it tries to achieve. As this work was produced through a joint collaborative research effort, it will be helpful to the reader to understand the aims of this effort and the background of some of the papers.

Palamas Seminar: A collaborative research effort into the philosophy and theology of St Gregory Palamas

There were several key events that made it possible to think about creating this collaborative effort and research forum and organising its first steps. The successful International Conference on the Philosophy and Theology of St Gregory Palamas (Thessaloniki-Veroia-Holy Mt Athos) in

March 2012 brought together more than 80 scholars (philosophers, theologians, specialists in political philosophy and law, historians, and theorists of art and culture) from Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, and the Americas to discuss key issues in Palamas Studies. In this conference, many new friendships were created and the three founders of the Palamas Seminar met and started discussing the possibility of developing this project. During the Round Table on St Gregory Palamas' Philosophy at the World Congress of Philosophy in Athens (August 2013), a further discussion took place. Finally, at the International Conference on Meister Eckhart and St Gregory Palamas (St Petersburg State University, St Petersburg, Russia, June 2014), ongoing discussion made it possible for the three founding members, Dr. C. Athanasopoulos (UK and Greece), Professor Dan Chitoiu (State University of Iasi/Romanian Academy), and Professor Oleg Dushin (State University of St Petersburg, Russia), to solidify their vision and propose and accept certain key principles and a plan of action (with the first Palamas Seminar Conference organised in Veroia and Mt Athos in 2015; the collection of papers here contains most of the papers read at the Veroia 2015 Conference).

We decided to create a collaborative research forum with open membership and with the intention of meeting in different places (so that as many scholars as possible can join us) to discuss aspects of the philosophy and theology of St Gregory Palamas with a view to exploring plausible interpretations of Palamas' texts and possible applications of Palamas' philosophy and theology to our contemporary world. A key principle of the seminar is that all possible effort should be expended in organising conferences, so that research can be presented and discussed in a courteous academic manner with the purpose of highlighting plausible readings of Palamas' texts and criticising misinterpretations, fake texts and poorly supported overviews of the consequences and impact of his philosophy and theology. We also decided that our efforts should include the codification and publication of plausible and scholarly, yet approachable, interpretations of Palamas' texts, beginning with the presentations of the conferences we organise. Finally, a key principle that was decided was to avoid ethnocentrism in our discussions: Palamas is for all humanity (Orthodox and non-Orthodox), regardless of national boundary, language and/or country. Palamas' works, Orthodox in character and written in the defence of Orthodox monastic practices, do not only belong to the Orthodox but are a universal cultural achievement, in the same way that Holy Mt Athos (the thousand-year-old "garden of Virgin Mary"), as a monastic community with 20 monasteries, was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1988, on the basis that "it

is an irreplaceable source of life and inspiration, belonging to all the peoples of the world, irrespectively of the territory in which they are located”.

All researchers into the work of Palamas are welcome to participate in our discussions and present their views in the Palamas Seminar in a respectful manner, with the purpose of creating a space for international discussion that can move across countries and provide a fruitful forum for exchanging ideas on interpretations and applications of St Gregory Palamas’ philosophy and theology. A website has been set up to inform the general public about the conferences that have taken place (<http://www.athanasopouleion.gr/en/node/12>). In the first four years of its operation, the Palamas Seminar organised more than six very successful conferences in Greece, Russia, Romania, and Portugal, attracting more than 160 speakers in total. After the first conference, we have discussed the following topics: Social Perspectives in St Gregory Palamas’ Philosophy and Theology (Neamt 2016); Hesychasm and Asceticism (Pskov 2017); the Role of the Jesus Prayer in Palamas’ Texts (Neamt 2018); Lossky and Palamas (Pskov 2018); Philokalia and Palamas (Braga 2019); the Ethics and Aesthetics of Philokalia (Pskov November 2019). For 2020, we met in Romania (Iassi, March 2020) to discuss the Romanian Philokalia and its relation to St Gregory Palamas, and we planned to meet in Veroia-Mt Athos to discuss Philokalia and Palamas (July 2020; this has been postponed for July 2021 due to COVID19 restrictions). Further to these actions, we decided with our collaborator Professor Viorel Vizureanu (from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest) to call for papers on the Philosophy of Philokalia (which we hope to publish in the Annals of the University of Bucharest sometime in 2021/22).

The papers contained in this collection

This collection (most of the presentations here were presented at the Veroia 2015 Conference) is divided into three major parts, each part reflecting a key interest: a) Theology; b) Philosophy; and c) Social Theory and Art. We start with the Letter of His Eminence, the Metropolitan of Veroia, Naoussa and Campagna, Mr. Penteleimon, who sets the hesychastic and ascetical tone of the collection. We close with an appendix, which contains the Letter of the Very Revd, Archimandrite Palamas, Abbot of the Monastery of the All-Holy Virgin Mary of Kallipetra, which provides justification for the recognition of the Palamas family as saints by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.