



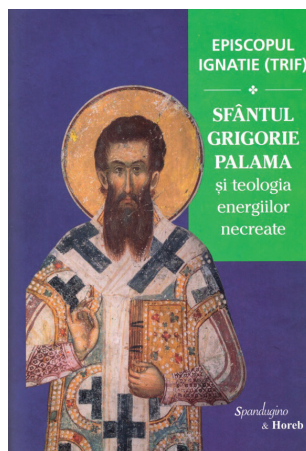
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**† IGNATIE TRIF, *Sfântul Grigorie Palama și teologia energiilor necreate*, Ed. Spandugino&Horeb, București/Huși, 2022, 618 pp.**

In the list of Romanian monographs dedicated to St. Gregory Palamas is added\*, starting in 2022, the doctoral thesis of His Grace Ignatie Trif, Bishop of Huși, which proposes a fulminating critical presentation of the relationship between the historical element (the biography and bibliography of the Palamite author) and the theology that he expounded in the 14th century in relation to the divine uncreated energies. The thesis, prefaced by protopresbyter Andrew Louth (pp. 9-11), is remarkable for its official attempt, confessed by the author



\* For a correct identification, see: † IGNATIE TRIF, *Sfântul Grigorie Palama și teologia energiilor necreate*, Ed. Spandugino&Horeb, București/Huși, 2022, pp. 547-613.

himself, to avoid any tendency to discover the vector of palamite theological thought through different hermeneutical keys. Moreover, the author's fundamental idea is to encounter a patristic author who theologized divinely the mystery of the created-uncreated relation, between being and uncreated energies, as loving manifestations of God towards the world' (p. 17).

The first major chapter entitled "The spiritual, theological and cultural personality of St. Gregory Palamas" is dedicated to the bio-bibliography of St. Gregory Palamas (1294/5 – November 14, 1357) from multiple historical-philosophical and hymnographic perspectives that the author considers (pp. 20-75). Not having a synaxarial 'flavor', the author seeks to sketch St. Gregory Palamas through historical, hagiographical and hymnographic sources which he exploits and critically analyzes to present St. Gregory in the light of the age in which he lived. Of great use for Romanian theologians is the inventory of his works (pp. 40-71), which bishop Ignatie presents in a very precise scheme: the name of the work in the original Greek, its dating, the critical edition where it can be found and finally indications on the Romanian translation and sometimes even the content of the work in brief. A recovery *sine qua non* that the author brings at the end of this first chapter, which brilliantly covers the historical segment of patristic study, is the doxological-liturgical reception of St. Gregory Palamas. It is worth noting the indication of the fact that, in the typiconal books up to the 15th century, the Mass of St. Gregory Palamas was not found in the *Triodion*, placed on the second Sunday of Lent. In addition, the Mass does not belong to patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos, but is a late elaboration, being attributed to Gennadius II Scholarius (p. 74).



As an extension of the first chapter with its historical connotations, the second chapter develops "The hesychast controversy as an overview – a historical and theological survey" (pp. 77-114). The author indicates at the outset that the phrase "palamite controversy"

present today in so many volumes with a patristic or doctrinal tinge, is “more than harmful, outlining a relativizing profile of the theology of the begotten and uncreated energies, but also a physiognomy of an unclassifiable insurgent in the case of the personality of St. Gregory Palamas” (p. 77). His Grace Ignatie succeeds in presenting the whole picture of the hesychast dispute (1334-1368) which he analyzes from the point of view of five historical stages or phases, namely: the varlaamite phase (1334-1341), the phase of the anti-hesychast synods (1342-1344), the akindynite phase (1341-1347), the gregorianite phase (1347-1351) and the kydonite phase (1351-1368). We are interested in the fact that in such a mosaicized controversy, the author of its monograph did not limit himself to a diachronic description of the events that underpinned the necessity of the palamite works. The pattern of the thesis here calls for a sincere desire not to present events in passing, but to emphasize their importance for St. Gregory Palamas and the theology he developed in light of these realities.



Closely related to this second chapter is the presentation in biographical medallions, together with the “DNA” of theological thought, of the four historical anti-palamite figures, who, moreover, gave the names to the above stages: the philosopher Barlaam of Calabria/Seminara (theological agnostic, who placed profane science above any soteriological value), Gregory Akindynos (concerned about the discrediting of the “patristic quality” of the theology of the uncreated energies), Nichephorus Gregoras (dogmatic relativism) and Prohor Kydones (thomism and syllogism). Of course, the author presents in an antithetical, mirror-image picture the byzantine theologians and humanists who accepted and embraced palamism, such as the hesychast Constantinopolitan patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (the hymnographer and theologian of uncreated energies), the intellectual hesychast monk David Disypatos, the basilite (and later hesychast monk) John Kantakouzenos, the layman and “humanist palamist” – St. Nicholas Cabasila (pp. 115-162). Certainly, this

third chapter – and the last for the reasons of the historical research of the present monograph – sums up the author’s optic of discovering in this whole palamite site the historical conjunctions that gave rise to a concrete delineation of the way in which the athonite hesychasm saw and understood the divine uncreated energies.

From these first three historical chapters, the author will now turn to two chapters that cover the segment of the theological thought of St. Gregory Palamas. In the fourth chapter (pp. 163-242), His Grace Ignatie opposes contemporary thought, which sees the archbishop of Thessalonica as a neoplatonic philosopher rather than a theologian. The author, pertinently analyzing the works of St. Gregory, considers it an error to place the byzantine theologian in the spheres of platonic philosophy and to “wrest” him from the living and age-old Tradition of the Church (p. 164). To further support his working hypothesis, the author undertakes a foray into both, the Old and New Testament tradition regarding the antinomy of the seeing-not-seeing of God (pp. 166-171) and the patristic tradition, which places this doctrine on a christological and cosmological foundation. Quoting the Church Fathers and writers from different theological backgrounds (Alexandrians – Clement of Alexandria, St. Athanasius the Great; Cappadocians – St. Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa; Antiochians – St. John Chrysostom; Byzantines – Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Maximus the Confessor; Contemplatives – St. John Damascene), as well as postpatristic authors (St. Simeon the New Theologian and the hieromonk Jerotheus), the author of the monograph punctually notes the patristic coherence in terms of the distinction-unity between the being and the uncreated and the being-energies of God. The uniqueness of this chapter is proven precisely by this decisive identification and punctuation of the distinction-unity relation, a reality so frequent in the patristic writings of St. Gregory Palamas and certainly in the content of his works, but which contemporary Greek editors (Panayiotis Hristou, Georgios Mantzaridis,



Vasilios Fanourgakis, Nikos Matsoukas) and the West ones (Boris Bobrinsky) have left on the periphery of their studies.

The last chapter emphasizes the doctrine of the uncreated energies, which the author sees as an authentic Theology of God's gift of Himself to men (pp. 243-308). The author insists very much on the intrinsic relationship between Life and the Mystery, since "God-The Trinity is Life", who calls us to share in it (p. 243). Through the divine energies, the human being comes to know the *tropos* of the communion of the creature with the Creator and the *topos* of the dwelling of these energies. But to interpret this relationship even more concretely, bishop Ignatie carefully seeks to identify the limits of the philosophical dimension in palamite theology and to emphasize how aristotelian and neoplatonic philosophy, the interaction with thomism and augustinianism, were overcome by the theological-creative vision of the Archbishop of Thessalonica. The palamite and *in extenso* christian anthropology is centered on triadological reality. In addition, the byzantine theologian shows in his dogmatic works the reality that energy is from being and not the other way around; the undivided God divides himself through a multitude of energies.



Although *the critical apparatus* is placed at the end of the work, which may cause discomfort to the reader who will have to keep switching back and forth to study the references in the critical apparatus, the latter is nevertheless of great value. The 232 pages of *the apparatus criticus* (pp. 314-546) prove an unusual work, extremely well-articulated, meticulously contrasted and demonstrated a space in which neologisms have "met" with a balanced and calibrated discourse from a theological perspective. The author of the monograph is not content with mere bibliographical references, but creates a powerful critical dialog between historical sources and contemporary literature. The indications in the final bibliography (pp. 547-613) are based on the same vision.

I'm fully convinced that this doctoral dissertation is already included in the list of monographs treated seriously both in Romania and in the West. The academic language, the highlighting of the essential ideas in the work of the byzantine theologian, the emphasis on a permanent critical dialog between the various contemporary opinions and the debunking of exaggerations or unfounded accusations against the Archbishop of Thessalonica, coupled with a bivalent structure throughout the entire content of the thesis (historical-theological), make this work one that will remain a must have for a long time to come.

