

MYSTICAL THEOLOGY
Thomas Aquinas
and
Gregory Palamas

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Moses and the Burning Bush

Knowledge of God

- Can God be directly perceived by man?
- What is the place of revelation?
- Is there any sure and immediate knowledge, apart from that provided by the senses?
- As a creature, man holds a pre-eminent position in the world; he is the goal of creation, the recapitulation of the creatures of God, sustained by God.

The Philosophers

- Socrates taught no man voluntarily chooses evil if properly instructed.
- The beneficial use of the goods of life demands knowledge of their appropriate employment.
- Wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice are the consequence of understanding and right action.
- His life and teachings profoundly influenced Plato (348 BC).

Plato

- The Dialogues explore a theme in all aspects, extracting fundamental ideas through the use of reason.
- Mathematics (especially symbolic logic) is highest reasoning.
- Sense world is conjectural whose appearances are those of belief.
- Acquisition of knowledge is an understanding of the eternal forms and ideas of which the sense world is but a projection.

Plato

- The soul is the rational part of man.
- The soul may perceive and have a share in the eternal forms and ideas, the ultimate values. Thus, the soul is divine.
- Evil cannot destroy the soul. Thus, the soul is immortal.
- Divinity creates out of chaos because he is good. Divinity is being, undivided, and unmovable.
- The soul, then, is that divine spark imprisoned in the body.

Aristotle

- Student of Plato (322 BC). Tutor of Alexander the Great.
- Rejected the idea there are eternal forms.
- Knowledge can be gathered using the senses.
- With analytical reasoning (syllogism), one can extract meaning from the sensible world.
- Knowledge can be categorized.
- Essence belongs to a specific species or genus. All that participate in that same genus share the same essence.

Aristotle

- All sense objects have a function, a formal cause.
- As that function is understood, a superior organization, a hierarchy could be constructed.
- This implies an agent (efficient cause) working in pre-existent matter (material cause).
- No first cause is implied.
- Introduced the idea of telos, final cause.
- Founder of modern scientific thought.

The God of the Philosophers

- God is utterly transcendent. He transcends even virtue, knowledge, absolute goodness, and beauty.
- God is pure being, absolutely simple and self-sufficient, impassable, and cannot be included in any of the logical categories in which we classify finite beings.
- The philosophers postulated a series of lesser divinities as agents in creation (in Persia these divinities were known as angels). See Acts 14:8.

The God of the Jews

- Wisdom is personified and assigned creative functions (Job 28:12; Prov 8:22; WIs 7:22; Sirach 24:1).
- Spirit is personified, sometimes spoken of as God's agent in creation (Jud 16:14; 2 Bar 21:4).
- Yet to the Jews these are simply the operations of God considered in abstraction from Himself.

Wisdom

- Wisdom, the Word, YHWH, is God's agent in creation and also the means by which the mind apprehends God.
- The Word is the rational principle immanent in reality, giving form and meaning to it; reality is comprehensible to men because of the presence of the Word in them.

Word

- The divine Word is first of all the ideas or thoughts of God's mind, and is then projected into formless unreal matter, making it into a real and rational universe.
- Immanent and transcendent in the divine mind, the Word is the medium of God's government in the world.

Revelation

- God Himself is the author of revelation.
- God committed it to prophets and inspired lawgivers.
- The Law and the Prophets are normative through the teachings of Jesus.
- The Apostles, eye-witnesses to the incarnate Word, above all received the revelation of God, are more authoritative as to the restricted matters touched on by Jesus.

Scripture

- Scripture is the foundation and pillar of the faith.
- Tradition itself was confirmed by Scripture for it was the preaching of the Apostles reduced to writing (Irenaeus, +207).
- Whatever Scripture teaches is necessarily true (Tertullian, ca 220).
- The indispensable key to Scripture belongs exclusively to the Church.

Scripture

- “The holy and inspired Scriptures are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth.” (Athanasius, +373)
- “For our saving faith derives its force, not from capricious reasonings, but from what may be proved out of the Bible.” (Cyril of Jerusalem, +386)
- The Didache (ca 100 AD) and the collection of services by Hippolytus (+235) demonstrate the whole liturgical apparatus of the Church are regarded as emanating from the Apostles.

Fathers of the Church

- The Church maintains the Holy Spirit spoke in the venerable fathers themselves as well as in those who assembled at the Ecumenical Councils.
- Athanasius (+373 AD), Basil of Caesarea, the Great (+379 AD), Gregory Nazianzen, the Theologian (+390 AD), Gregory of Nyssa (+395 AD), John Chrysostom, the lips of Paul (+407 AD), Augustine (+430 AD), Cyril of Alexandria (+444 AD), Maximus the Confessor (+662 AD), and John of Damascus (+749 AD) are the most highly regarded of the Fathers.

Fathers of the Church

- The Fathers have had no access to truths other than those already contained in Scripture although many had received rigorous education in philosophy.
- Their near unanimous interpretation of Scripture is a proof of the Holy Spirit.
- The norm of the faith is that which “has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.” (Vincent of Lerins, +445 AD)
- Who deviates from their teachings are enemies of the truth.

Fathers of the Church

- The East and West manifest “the offspring of the same root” in that they share the same Hellenic and Roman parentage.
- They should be regarded as sisters, or Siamese twins, or conjoined twins, dangerously and tragically separated and incomplete without the other.
- Neither is self-explanatory, neither is intelligible when taken separately.
- It is Cyril of Alexandria who begins the appeal to the authority of the Fathers,

The God of Christians

- God is one, the maker of Heaven and Earth, Who brought all things into existence out of non-existence.
- God has made Himself known in the person of Jesus, the Christ, raising Him from the dead and offering salvation to all men through Him.
- God has poured out His Holy Spirit upon the Church.
- Monotheism (one essence) is balanced with the Trinitarian revelation (three hypostases).

Apophatic theology

- The things of the Spirit are untouched by those who have no prayer life.
- Symeon, the New Theologian, (+1022 AD), articulated the Tradition expressed through Gregory of Nyssa (+395), (Pseudo)Macarius (+ ca 400 AD), and (Pseudo) Dionysius (+ ca 500 AD):
- It is audacious and presumptive to speak about God as though that which is incomprehensible were comprehensible (Ex 20:2).

Apophatic theology

- Every sphere of philosophical enquiry is transcended: knowledge is transformed into ignorance, the theology of concepts into contemplation, dogmas into experience of the ineffable mystery.
- There are two negative paths: of what is experienced that cannot be defined (The Cloud of Unknowing is a Western parallel) and of that which cannot even be experienced (Ex 33:27; the ecstasy of Paul)

Apophatic theology

- Although men are blind as a result of sin and could not see the divine light, the cleansing gift of salvation made it possible for the pure in heart to “see” God and to “see” Him truly.
- God is formless light (1 Jo 1:5).
- As Maximus (+662 AD) taught, and the 6th Ecumenical Council endorsed (680 AD), the true light is the same as God.
- Divine operations are divine; God is only appreciated in His operations.

Cataphatic Theology

- There are two ways of arriving at a knowledge of God: natural reason and through revelation.
- Both are gifts of God.
- What it is not given in the one or the other, transcends the powers of human reason and cannot, therefore, be known, at least decisively.
- However, when a truth is given in either the one or the other, then the soul is sufficient for it.
- Therefore, when given in revelation, even the spiritual things do not transcend human reason.
- Only things not known of God are suprarational.

Cataphatic Theology

- Augustine (+430 AD) held the first step toward perfection is to believe the words of Scripture; the second is to realize that the words are outward signs of an internal and intelligible reality and that they admonish us to turn to and to test propositions that claim to convey a truth about intelligible reality (or even a general truth about sensible objects) “against the inner standards we possess thanks to the presence of Christ” so as to reach true understanding and, accordingly, the good life

Cataphatic Theology

- Philosophical argument may be of help in this process; yet, it needs to be tied to the authority of Scripture and the Creed to prevent the frailty of human reason from going astray.
- Faith seeking understanding.

Cataphatic Theology

- Augustine held that man without grace can know God, but cannot love God, and therefore cannot overcome pride and be saved.
- Without grace man cannot even have the initial desire to do the will of God.
- However, once captured by (“created”) irresistible prevenient grace, he is led, if predestined, to do the will of God.
- “Created” refers to the grace of God ad extra and not to a creation or creature. It is a divine operation.

Cataphatic Theology

- Scholastic theology has its major early expression in John of Damascus (+749 AD).
- Peter Abelard (1142 AD) viewed that apart from Scripture, dialectic is the sole road to truth (a rejection of experiment and experience).
- Nothing outside the Scriptures is infallible.
- Abelard was accused of holding the Trinity (and, probably, God) could be demonstrated by human reason alone.

Cataphatic Theology

- The Aristotelian realism of Abelard is largely a critical linguistic analysis.
- As for what can be predicated of many different things because of resemblance (universals), Abelard maintained we do not predicate a thing, but a word as meaning.
- General concepts, then, are not based in the nature of things, but are confused images of many things.
- Universals, however, are God's concepts and exist in the divine mind as patterns for creation.

Cataphatic theology

- Peter Lombard (1160 AD), a student of Abelard, is known for his Four Books of the Sentences, a systematic compilation of authoritative statements on biblical passages that is derived from earlier glosses or commentaries on the texts.
- Abelard was opposed in his teaching by Bernard of Clairvaux (+1153 AD), the last of those regarded in the line of Fathers of the Church.
- Questions were also raised about the approach of Lombard.

Cataphatic theology

- Aquinas (+1274 AD), a Dominican, was a master in the exposition, interpretation, and proclamation of scripture.
- Major patristic influences included Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Theophylact of Ochrid (+1108 AD).
- The systematic compendium of the whole patristic tradition of John of Damascus and Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. 500 AD) are extensively employed.
- He was one of the first to make extensive use of the records of the Ecumenical Councils.
- Aquinas affirmed that Latins and Greeks professing the same faith do so using different words.

Cataphatic Theology

- Bonaventure is also acknowledged as an authoritative teacher (declared the “Seraphic Doctor” in 1588).
- The Franciscan position of a “formal distinction” between the persons and essence of God and his energies or operations holds that the distinction is real, not just conceptual, but is not independent of the mind, and is thus not ontological, avoiding the pitfalls of Plato.
- John Duns Scotus (1308 AD) and William of Occam (1349 AD), both Franciscans, are the two other major figures of High Scholasticism.

Cataphatic Theology

- John Duns Scotus (1308 AD), a Franciscan, insists on formal qualitative distinction. That which makes one thing not identical with another must be form, not matter.
- Duns Scotus was interested in evidence, the kinds of things that can be known without proof.
- He held with the Fathers (contra Aquinas and Occam) that there is no sure and pure truth that can be known naturally by the understanding without the special illumination of uncreated light.
- The question of mathematical forms (universals) is the objection to the position of Scotus.

Cataphatic Theology

- William of Occam (1349 AD), a Franciscan, was principally concerned to restore a pure Aristotle freed from both Augustinian and Arabic influences (as did Aquinas).
- Contra Aquinas, Occam followed Augustine more closely. He felt the Scotists had misinterpreted Augustine.

Cataphatic Theology

- Logic, for Occam, is an instrument for the philosophy of nature, which can be independent of metaphysics.
- Logic and the theory of knowledge had become dependent upon metaphysics and theology.
- Logic is the analysis of discursive science; science is about things, but logic is not.
- Things are individuals, but among terms there are universals; logic treats of universals, while science uses them without discussing them. Logic deals with things fabricated by the mind within itself, which cannot exist except through the existence of reason.

Cataphatic Theology

- When speaking one must distinguish between the word as a thing and using it as having meaning. Understanding, then, is of things, not of forms produced by the mind; these are not what is understood, but that by which things are understood (universals). Perception, then, is knowledge (contra Plato).
- William of Occam destroyed the Platonic bases of medieval scholasticism by his denial of the objective existence of universals both in the essence of God and in creation.

Cataphatic Theology

- Occam undercut the analogy of being (as propounded by Augustine) and its natural theology and law.
- His intent was to protect the divine nature from all forms of determinism.
- Creatures are not copies of uncreated universal ideas; nor are creatures copies of any proper single ideas which are either identical with the divine essence or different from the will of God.
- Occam identifies the divine will with the divine essence.

Cataphatic Theology

- Occam denied any prophetic knowledge of God in this life to be in terms of a vision of anything uncreated.
- This is the nominalism that leads to Descartes (1650 AD) and modern rationalism.
- The trajectory of Apostolic thought that reached its apogee in the undivided Church in the writings of (Pseudo)-Dionysius and the High Scholasticism of Aquinas and Scotus is abandoned.

Cataphatic Theology

- Aquinas (+1274 AD) and Bonaventure (+1274 AD) provided distinct systems of Christian thought following Aristotle in their commentaries on the Sentences. However, their reflections are subordinated to scripture and theology.
- The Roman Catholic Church acknowledged Aquinas as an authoritative teacher (“Angelic Doctor”) at the Council of Trent (1545-1560 AD). It was reaffirmed by Pope Leo XIII in 1879 AD.
- The leading anti-Union advocate, (later Patriarch) Gennadius Scholaris (+1473 AD), referred to Aquinas: “we love this divinely-inspired and wise man.”

Fathers of the Church

- The Fathers have had no access to truths other than those already contained in Scripture although many had received rigorous education in philosophy.
- Every level of human knowledge concerning God is rational. Credo ut intelligam.
- Their near unanimous interpretation of Scripture is a proof of the Holy Spirit.
- Doctrine is given once and for all in the revelation of Christ and never changes. The norm of the faith is that which “has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.” (Vincent of Lerins, +445 AD)

I believe so that I may understand

- Divine revelation is the proper source of knowledge about God.
- John Henry Newman (1890 AD), in an essay in 1845 AD, noted that subjective reception of the doctrine may change (or develop) as we examine its historical context and method of expression, but it must never do so in a way that alters the objective content.

I believe so that I may understand

- However there are two disturbing reactions to this understanding:
 - (1) The naïve confidence that one can understand the Bible by just reading it with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

The related quietist view whose fear of rational thought removes any objective defense to spiritual deception.

I believe so that I may understand

(2) The notion that the Church can gradually deepen its understanding of revelation and dogmatic truths with the passage of time, even with the aid of philosophical categories.

An example includes the declaration of the Blessed Virgin Mary as conceived without original or ancestral sin.

Participating in the Divine Nature

- To posit a real distinction of energies and essence follows Plato and destroys the necessary simplicity of God.
- Maximus (+662 AD) will speak of the energies and operations of God.
- In the 13th Century this topic is approached in the West in the context of what the blessed “see”. As God is regarded as essence, deifying grace is necessary to participate with Him.
- In the 14th Century in the East, the topic is approached in the context of the Transfiguration.

Participating in the Divine Nature

- Participation in the divine nature (theosis) is a reality for the Theotokos and for the saints. This is the basis for their mediation and intervention. (The aureoles in the icons and sacred paintings are the divine light that is indicative of that participation; Moses at Ex 34:29).
- This participation can become a reality for us. It is a grace of God.
- Would we have any other means of knowing God truly if deifying grace and light were not God Himself?

Participating in the Divine Nature

- When Gabriel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will overshadow you,” He referred to a coming only according to action, not according to hypostasis, for the Holy Spirit did not become man.
- Nevertheless, it is a genuine coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Mary is fully participating in the divine nature (theosis).



Gregory Palamas

Participating in the Divine Nature

- The clash between the Byzantine Hellenistic intellectual tradition and the Byzantine hesychastic tradition peaked in the 14th Century and had its most potent defender in the Aristotelian master and (later) Bishop of Thessaloniki, Gregory Palamas (+1359 AD).
- Palamas asserted in unmistakably Aristotelian terms the admissibility of apodictic or demonstrative arguments in theology.
- He opposed those who would use a scholastic method that subjects revelation to reason as a means of discerning religious truth.

Participating in the Divine Nature

- Palamas explicitly defended the use of the syllogism, declaring that we have in truth been taught by the Fathers to syllogize about theological matters.
- He reaffirmed the message of salvation as the central element in the Christian gospel.
- He interpreted salvation as immortality, as the gift of humility, as the disclosure of authentic humanity, as purification, as the conjunction of divine and human, the “partaking of the divine nature.” (2 Pt 1:4)

Participating in the Divine Nature

The Triune God

- The Latin (Augustinian) view of the Trinity is as a single Essence, with personal characters understood as relations
- God as actus purus, finalized in the De ente et essentia of Aquinas
- The Greek view of the Trinity, inherited from the Cappadocian Fathers, considers the single divine essence as totally transcendent and the persons or hypostasis — each with unique and unchangeable characteristics — as revealing themselves in the Tri-personal divine life.

The Triune God

- Augustine likens the Holy Spirit to an ineffable love of the begetter toward the begotten. The Son possesses this love as co-proceeding from the Father and Himself, and as resting co-naturally in Him.
- The Spirit is not only of the Father but also of the Son, and the Son possesses the Spirit as the spirit of truth, wisdom, and word.

The Triune God

- Palamas cited approvingly from Augustine with the words, “For as one of the wise and apostolic men has said.”
- Palamas proposed a Trinitarian image in man in terms of the operation of mind, knowledge, and love only.
- Proverbs 8:30 intimates the Holy Spirit when the Logos declares, “I was she who rejoiced together with him.” This verse leaves Palamas to conclude that this pre-eternal rejoicing of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit who is, as has been said, common to both.

The Triune God

- But this does not, he is careful to note, detract in any way from the fact that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father alone according to his being.”
- Consubstantiality, not hypostasis (naturally from the Son and from His essence”)

The Triune God

- The incommunicable hypostatic properties of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or of unbegotten cause and source of divinity (Father), of the effect receiving its existence by the mode of begetting (Son) and of the effect receiving its existence by the mode of procession (the Holy Spirit), are neither names of the divine essence nor definitions of the three hypostases, but names of their relations which are known by revelation and at the same time inexplicable because beyond the categories of human reason.

The Triune God

- Palamas criticized an essentialist view of God that lacks a discussion of grace:
- “They who say that God is only essence, having nothing viewed within it, fashion a God who has neither making and act, nor relation. If He Who they think is God does not have these, then there is neither energy, nor creator But together (with this) is also abolished the three hypostases of divinity, if the relation is not viewed in God’s essence.”

The Triune God

- There is a distinction between the essence and attributes or energies of God; each creature has its own uncreated divine energy or will. (Sixth Ecumenical Council, Chalcedon, 681 AD, adopting the understanding of Maximus the Confessor).
- God is a super-essential essence in which one can only see the categories of relation and action. God can manifest Himself in His very being, while remaining imparticipable in his essence.

Divine Energies

- The Sixth Ecumenical Council (681 AD, Chalcedon) affirmed that without an energy, every nature, whether divine or human, does not possess a real existence, and that consequently Christ must necessarily possess two energies manifesting the full reality of His two natures.
- If the divine energies, natural and essential, were created, the essence of God that possesses them would be equally created. That is absurd.

Divine Energies

- The three divine hypostases possess only one sole energy and every divine act is of necessity the act of the Trinity because of their consubstantiality.
- The common divine essence is the cause of the energies, but these energies remain personal acts (characteristics of the hypostasis);
- consubstantiality does not suppress the personal element in God but establishes a co-penetration between the hypostases which is manifest in just this common energy.

Divine Energies

- The objection remains that Palamas does not distinguish properly the personal existence (particular characteristics) of the three divine persons (hypostases), and breaks the properly inseparable connection between economic and immanent Trinity.
- This is Plato.

Divine Energies

- If there were a real distinction (ontological), the simplicity of God would be destroyed.
- Initially Palamas held the distinction to be real. His argument reproduced that of the neoplatonists.
- This caused great concern in the West as well as among his followers.
- In the Synod of 1351, the distinction was not held to be ontological.
- As the distinction is epistemological (formal distinction) to explain our conception of it, divine simplicity is preserved

Divine Energies

- Christ communicates to all Christians the divine energy because He made himself like to men by making His their whole nature. It is as Son of God become man that He communicates the divine life.
- God in His completeness was incarnate though only one of the divine hypostases was incarnate. Humanity and divinity are united in the hypostasis of Christ, Son of God, not in His essence. The Son receives the divine nature from the hypostasis of the Father.

Divine Energies

- “The divine and unknowable essence, if it did not possess an energy distinct from itself, would be totally non-existent and would only have been a product of imagination.” God is known (ad extra, and contra Aristotle) in His actions.
- “The Son of God is one with humanity for in His hypostasis he is united with the first fruits of humanity... however, he is not one with every man who receives grace, as He is with His own humanity; with each Christian He is united through energy and grace, and not by hypostasis... There is only one Christ because there is only one sole and indivisible hypostasis of the Word of God.”

Divine Energies

- “No one has ever expressed, or sought, or thought what God is, but it is possible to seek and demonstrate that God exists, that He is a unique Being and not a unique thing, that he has not surpassed the Trinity...”
- The Old and New Testament visions of the glory of God were real visions of the uncreated God, in which visions the body participated.

Contrast in thought

- The marked contrast between subjecting revelation to reason and the basing of reason on revelation is expressed in the contrast between the maxim, “Know yourself” (which demands self-knowledge), and the Mosaic exhortation, “take heed unto yourself” (which demands self-discipline through the grace of God).
- Moses reached the heavenly tabernacle after he had entered into the darkness of the consciousness of God’s incomprehensibility (Ex 24:15, Juan de la Cruz, +1591AD, Dark Night, is a Western parallel).



Transfiguration

Divine Energies

- At the Transfiguration the disciples saw light.
- That light could not be the essence of God as no one has ever seen God (Jo 1:18).
- If that light were not to belong to either of the natures of Christ, it would have to be a third reality which would imply a third nature in Christ.
- As that light was not part of the human nature that Christ shared with other men, it must have belonged to His divine nature and must therefore be uncreated. It is God in his operations or energies.

Divine Energies

- When Gabriel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will overshadow you,” He referred to a coming only according to action, not according to hypostasis, for the Holy Spirit did not become man.
- Nevertheless, it is a genuine coming of the Holy Spirit.
- This overshadowing is of the divine energy, else one would have to say the power, grace, and action of God, as well as His wisdom and truth, all of which were conferred upon men, were identical with His essence or were mere creatures.

Divine Energies

- At the Transfiguration, Christ receives His deification from His vision of the divine essence which because of the hypostatic union becomes visible to both His intellect and body, whereas angels and men are deified by their vision of and union with the energy of God. Thus the saints are organs of the Holy Spirit, having received the same energy as He.
- For men and angels that vision of God is a supra-sentient and supra-rational experience which is both a knowing and an unknowing, a seeing and not seeing.

Divine Energies

- “Since the Son of God, in his incomparable love for men, did not only unite His divine Hypostasis with our nature, by clothing Himself in a living body and a soul gifted with intelligence...but also united Himself...with the human hypostases themselves, in mingling Himself with each of the faithful by communion with His Holy Body, and since He becomes one single body with us and makes us a temple of the undivided Divinity, for in the very body of Christ dwells bodily the fullness of the Godhead (Col 2:9) ...

Divine Energies

- how could he not illuminate those who commune worthily with the divine ray of His Body which is within us, lightening their souls, as He illuminated the very bodies of the disciples on Mt. Tabor: For, on the day of the Transfiguration, that Body, source of the light of grace, was not yet united with our bodies; it illuminated from outside those who worthily approached it, and sent the illumination into the soul by the intermediary of the physical eyes; but, now, since it is mingled with us and exists in us it illuminates the soul from within.”

Divine Energies

- Only when within the uncreated light (the “Cloud”; the Trinity ad intra) can one see the uncreated light.
- Thus there can be no question of the glory of the Transfiguration traveling from the body of Christ through the air and into the minds of the apostles by means of the senses.
- The body of Christ illumined the apostles from without only because the same illuminating light of the body was already illuminating them from within.

Unceasing Prayer

- The gift of unceasing prayer and noetic prayer are one identical reality not in any way to be confused with non-discursive ecstatic intuition of ultimate reality.
- Liberated by the power of the Holy Spirit, the nous engages uninterruptedly in prayer alone, while the faculties of the body and the discursive intellect both participate in the fruits of, but without influencing, this uninterrupted prayer, and act simultaneously in their normal capacities. There is no distinction between contemplative and active states.

Unceasing Prayer

- Once attained to, it is possible for one to go about engaging in his daily physical and mental activities while the noetic faculty, circumscribed within the body (and in another sense outside physical and discursive rational activity) is occupied uninterruptedly in prayer alone, even during sleep.
- This speculation contrasts with those late medieval scholastics who understood the nous in a neo-Platonic sense in the state of non-discursive ecstasy, wherein the passions and the discursive intellect have no participation whatsoever.

Unceasing Prayer

- The quest for and the gift of uninterrupted prayer is not a life of contemplation and is not a seeking after ecstatic experiences, and it in no way hinders, but rather makes possible, a very high level of inspired spiritual activism.
- The noetic faculty is not the essence of the soul, but an energy.
- To attain contemplation, man must first pass through the negative stage of intellectual purification: “All vision having a form to the intelligence...comes from a ruse of the enemy.”

Unceasing Prayer

- Acquisition of grace and of life in Christ is based on the uninterrupted Jesus prayer. The prayer is a “memory of God.”
- “We pray not to convince God, for he acts always spontaneously, nor to draw Him to us, for He is everywhere, but to lift ourselves up towards Him.” It is a thanksgiving.
- “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” (Rom 12:1)

Unceasing Prayer

- “How can our living body be offered?...When the look in our eyes is gentle...when our ears are attentive to the divine teachings, not hearing them only... but ‘remembering the commandments of God to accomplish them’ (Ps 103:18)... when our tongue, our hands and our feet are at the service of the divine will.”

Union in the Divine Darkness

- Union in the divine darkness, which is identical with the divine light, belongs only to Moses and his like. Because this union transcends all human categories and experiences, it is called “darkness and light, seeing and not seeing, knowing and unknowing...How, while seeing does he not see?”...(by) “having become better than that which is human and by grace already being God and being united to God and seeing God by means of God.” Thus Moses and his like saw God because they became God by grace.

Union in the Divine Darkness

- “The Logos of well-being, by grace is present unto the worthy, bearing God, Who is by nature above all beginning and end, Who makes those who by nature have a beginning and an end become by grace without beginning and without end, because the Great Paul also, no longer living the life in time, but the divine and eternal life of the indwelling Logos, became by grace without beginning and without end...

Union in the Divine Darkness

- and Melchizedek had neither beginning of days, nor end of life, not because of (his) created nature, according to which he began and ceased to exist, but because of the divine and uncreated and eternal grace which is above all nature and time, being from the eternal God.
- Paul, therefore, was created only as long as he lived the life created from non-being by the command of God. But when he no longer lived this (life), but that which is present by the indwelling of God, he became uncreated by grace, as did also Melchizedek and everyone who comes to possess the Logos of God, alone living and acting within himself.”

Grace

- As Palamas noted, “What is new in the New Testament is not the doctrine of the Trinity, but the Incarnation and salvation event whereby the power of the devil is abolished once and for all, and the Body of Christ, the Church, is delivered from death (Hades) and made inviolate against its gates.
- Now in Christ there is the first resurrection, that of the soul, and in the day of judgment there shall be the second resurrection, that of the body. Those who have a share in the first shall have a share in the second.”

Grace

- Palamas wrote, “Although the Lord has caused us to be reborn by Divine Baptism, and, on the day of redemption seals us with the seal of the grace of the Holy Spirit, he allows us still to possess a mortal and passionate body;
- although He has chased away the master of evil from the treasures of our soul, he does allow him to attack it from without, so that man, renewed by the new covenant... should learn to drive back the attacks of the enemy, and so prepare himself to receive immortality.”

Grace

- Grace operates in both the Old and New Testaments, with the difference that now in Christ it became and can become for the just and repentant, before and after the earthly life of Christ, a permanent gift of the soul which is not lost at the death of the body.
- It is only in this sense that God in Christ dwells by the grace of the Holy Spirit in Christians in a new way.

Grace

- If grace were a natural phenomenon, accessible to every creature, the reason of reasoning beings, then God's presence in creation is in His essence; all men, good and bad, baptized and unbaptized would form one body, the body of Christ, the very Christ.
- Man has need of grace, for he cannot save himself.
- "Insofar as man cannot save himself on his own, the mind needs grace and can find it nowhere but in the Body of Christ united to our bodies by Baptism and the Eucharist," wrote Palamas.

The Kingdom of God

- The kingdom of God is the uncreated glory and unapproachable light and darkness in which God dwells, as well as the divinizing or glorifying grace which makes the elect one in glory as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in this same glory, which is man's by grace and God's by nature.
- This kingdom or ruling power of God is not only immaterial, but also beyond all creaturely existence and beyond all sensible and intelligible categories.
- It is in the future only in the sense that participation in it is consummated in the future for either the body or the soul or nature as a whole.

The Kingdom of God

- This uncreated glory or kingdom or rule of God is present in a very special way in the sacraments of the Church through the human nature of Christ for our participation in the first resurrection.
- This rule or glory of God is the justifying, life-giving, glorifying (or divinizing) uncreated grace of God, the temple in which both God and now humanity in Christ dwell, and the same which was seen by the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, and which Christ had by nature before the world came into existence.
- “Uncreated” in that it is the Trinity ad intra.

The Kingdom of God

- What are charisms but the Lord dwelling in man in many and various ways according to the worth and conduct of those who seek him (1 Cor 12). Even he who has little, and that little is obscure compared to the endowments of others, also is united to Christ in the Spirit. God appears in completeness in all His manifestations.

Communion with God

- The real communion of man with God is the necessary condition of true knowledge.
- That which is desired continually slips away from the embrace of the mind and the soul's attempts to contain it are in vain. As Gregory of Nyssa wrote, "They looked for Him but they did not find Him, for He was beyond imagination and conception and ran away at the approach of reason."
- As told in Song of Songs, in the highest stages of contemplation the soul is united with God and lives in God, as if wed.

Communion with God

- Union with God assumes disentanglement from the things of this world. Passion moves from evil to good and is directed to divine ends. The man who has subjected his appetites of anger and lust (Gal 5:4) to his faculties of knowledge, judgment, and reason, will grasp the spiritual significance of beings and will practice the appropriate virtues acting in conformity with the aim which God set for it. The commandments of God are practiced. (Jo 14:15; 15:12)

Communion with God

- The coming of grace assumes a transformation in the human being, his communion with the divine life, his deification; God is not only the object of the “vision” but is also the means by which that “vision” is obtained. He who is born of the Spirit is Spirit (Jo 3:6).
- The true likeness to God consists in making Him appear through oneself, and accomplishing the works which are His.

Communion with God

- The tombs, relics, and images of the saints have not been abandoned by the grace of God just as the God has not passed from the body of Christ after His death.
- It is only sin that separates man from the Body of Christ, the Church. Repentance reconciles. Even bishops invested with the magisterium of truth if not faithful to Tradition and act in accord with the whole Church, lose their status as Christians.

Communion with God

- It is this divine energy that sanctifies the gifts that are the Eucharist, not created grace.
- “Participation in the Divinity is such that whoever partakes of it grows and becomes more receptive. This participation develops the capacities of the participant. Whoever receives this nourishment grows and never ceases to grow...yearning, striving, and continual ascent are in themselves the true enjoyment of that which is desired,” explained Gregory of Nyssa.

Communion with God

- The Church is the new creation, the heavenly Jerusalem and spiritual paradise. At the same time, the sanctified believer is also the “great world” in whom Paradise is restored and communion with God is established. Linking the two together is the worship on earth celebrating with “types” and “symbols.”
- “Then...you are celebrating a spiritual feast and concelebrating with the heavenly powers of the angels,” exulted Symeon the New Theologian.

Communion with God

- One does not have to become a monk in order to experience God. One may do so simply by obeying the commandments and participating in the life of the Church where all grace is present.
- The visible church at worship is the “portrayal of a single body, which is the work of the Savior,” and it is Christ who is the one true priest, altar and sacrifice. Christ is temple; the Church is temple; the Christian is the temple.

Communion with God

- Nicholas Cabasillas (+1390 AD) comprehended that the interior Eucharist is the uninterrupted invocation of the name of Jesus.
- The frequent partaking of the heavenly Bread is the sacramental root of the presence of Christ in the believer's heart.
- The real presence of Christ is experienced both by the invocation of the Name and by communion of the sacrament at the Liturgy.

Communion with God

- Maximus the Confessor reminds us that, “The person who combines spiritual knowledge with the practice of the virtues and practice of the virtues with spiritual knowledge is a throne and a footstool of God” (Is 66:1).
- The way of truth is love. (Jo 14:6; 1 Jo 4:8).
- “Love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Rom 13:10)
- “Freely have you received; freely give.” (Mt 10:8)

Communion with God

- Sacramental union with God through Christ in the Church, which belongs to every baptized and practicing Christian, is a hidden reality known only by faith, which does not do away with the need of symbols as guides in one's progress toward the union of vision by deification or glorification.



Peter Paul Rubens The Gathering of the Manna
Ringling Museum, Sarasota
<http://www.ringling.org>

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