

# Epistolography in Byzantium.

## Case Study: Palamas' *Epistle 1 to Barlaam*

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### Introduction

Gregory Palamas' *1 Epistle to Barlaam*, from the point of view of its general literary classification, possesses a twofold interest; our initial concern is whether the content is mainly appositive –simple formulation of information or answers–, or compositional –critical approaches or categorizing crystallizations–, with the recourse to the validity and flexibility of thematic eclecticism being all-pervasive. On the one hand, it belongs to the Correspondence genre, which refers to texts of personal writing, both in terms of the author and the recipient, i.e., which are governed by an immediate dialectical orientation and determined by their topicality, so that they will, more or less, be of a broader collective interest. Moreover, according to the dominant tendency pervading Byzantine Epistolography, its content also reflects the relationship of their protagonists to the wider historical context of their time, to the latter's intellectual and social pulse. In terms of their specific style, they do not consistently serve rational discourse; they are also governed by emotional and experiential -or broadly ideological- overtones, quite often resorting to exaggeration, in the utterance of which narrative choices predominate, with figures of speech that record semantic openness for theoretical –or any other sort- of predominance.

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On the other hand, the Epistle in question is a Christian confessional treatise, with a targeted and specific thematic content, defined by its analytical subtitle, which refers to the ontological discussion regarding two principles and its approach based on ancient Greek arguments. It belongs to what has been described as the Hesychast debate, which had occupied Byzantium's ecclesiastical and wider intellectual life for a long period, accompanied by the compilation and writing of seminal theological texts, with strong dialectical debates. The protagonists of this dispute were Gregory Palamas and Barlaam, two fascinating ecclesiastical personalities, each with his own theological idiom. Both were profoundly knowledgeable about ancient Greek philosophy -especially Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Formal Logic- but they differed from each other in how they evaluated it and applied it to their reasoning, argumentation, and argumentative discourse structuring.

Without resorting to exaggerations or hasty assessments, we would argue that with the above two theologians-intellectuals two particular theoretical-“ideological” attitudes come to the fore regarding ancient Greek thought's *restauratio*, as well as regarding the status of reasoning/arguments in the treatment of issues that are mainly related to faith. The broader question that arises is clear: is the dialectic between the divine and the human subject to theoretical or any other textual strategies? Are the divine's Inward descendism and the human's Outward reductionism explained by Formal Logic's rules and illustrated by the ramifications;<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the above, it becomes clear that the relevant Epistle, as well as all the others, written by Gregory Palamas, do not move in the same syntactic-grammatical axis as his treatises that had a strictly targeted thematic train of thought, such as, for example, the, indeed, profound,

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1. The *First Epistle to Varlaam* is included in the first volume of Gregory Palamas' *Writings* (pp. 225-259), published in 1962 under Panagiotis K. Christou's editorship. It bears the following subtitle: «Τοῦ αὐτοῦ τῷ φιλοσόφῳ Βαρλαάμ περὶ ὧν ἔφη δύο ἀρχῶν ἢ καθ' ἑλληνικῆς ἐποψίας» and is divided into 59 subchapters. For the authorship's incidents and the Epistle's contents see pp. 188-199 of the same volume, where it is noted that Palamas composed it as a response to a Barlaam's Letter, who through its composition had attempted to give answers to the Hesychast theologian concerning his First Letter to Gregory Akindynos and suggested to him to address himself to the same (see G. Schirò, *Barlaam Calabro Epistole Greche*, pp. 229-266).

*Περὶ θεῶν ἐνεργειῶν*. The theological direction is the same between these two texts; where they differ is how this direction is brought out. The treatises in question –a milestone for the science of Theology– are thus structured by an extremely strict methodological regularity, “claiming” fundamental and foundational systematicity, while also privileging meaning-oriented reading and semantic extension over evaluative one. In any case, the above choice emerges from the fact that these are treatises with ontological content, with the consequence that objective measure and realism must be respected against any idealistic records. It is worth emphasizing that in texts following this direction the critical discourse is all-pervading, accompanied by reflective pathways, while it also derives its motives from the products of the abstraction process. In addition, these pathways also attempt to base their refutations on the Formal Logic rules, while they are explicitly linked to ontological issues. Concerning the context here, that is, and its widest possible reading, it should not be overlooked that almost all Byzantine theologians –as well as those of the early Christian post-apostolic period– consider Ontology (both divine-metaphysical and natural-empirical) to be preceding Epistemology, that it maintains its content intact regardless of the latter’s performance, and that it constitutes an indisputable objective premise, governed by the terms of presence, function, and evolution inherent to it. By implication, any change in the Ontology’s statutory position is due solely to the Ontology itself. For these topics, we would suggest that our readers consult the writings of Leontius of Byzantium, John Philoponus, John of Damascus, and Arethas of Caesarea<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, however, all the above must necessarily be included –indeed, regardless of the theoretical reasoning–, in the terms-boundaries set by Christianity, which are none other than those related to ecclesiastical experience, the adherence to which constitutes a, so to speak, supreme epistemological commitment. Here caution is needed regarding delimitations and compositions. It is a profoundly penetrating reading and a journey into faith’s essential principles, which

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2. For a thorough critical reading of this issue within Patristic tradition, see L. Chr. Siasos, *Πατερική κριτική τῆς φιλοσοφικῆς μεθόδου*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1989.

are also practiced devotionally, referring to Trinitarianism, Christology, and Spiritualism, or, respectively and in more philosophical terms, to the metaphysics of transcendence and that of immanence. Indeed, the Church's worship coordination is not limited to rituals but progresses to knowledge, which refers to those two metaphysical modes in the affirmative and the negative. In other words, the reference to any subject must derive its motives from the distinction, in unity, of the divine substance from the divine energy, as well as from the distinction, in unity, of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, in situations, that is, which are self-founded. By extension and based on the biblical sources, it refers to the intentional -not leading to pantheistic schemes- way of the creation of the sensorial world, to the spatiotemporally tangible event of the Incarnation and the Revelation of God's Son and Word in the person of Jesus Christ, as well as to the Holy Spirit's Divine Economy concerning Church's historical path towards its flock. It is a journey which cannot but be 'theandric'. The above has to be approached from the teleological-eschatological perspective, the creation of man "in the image of God" and its realization "in the likeness of God", which is based on human initiative. In a theoretical system that places particular emphasis on anthropology, as Christianity does, capital importance will be attached to personal free will, as the supreme impression of the "in the image", as an expression of conditional freedom<sup>3</sup>.

At this point, though, we should pause, and refer to the methodological approach which we will follow, so as not to branch off the literary environment. Firstly, we should note that in an epistolary treatise, the themes under discussion take on a peculiar orientation, since the personal events, on which it largely depends, are not easily delineated and are taking either fragmented or ambiguous directions. They are subject to conjuncture, which does not follow temporality as a transition from the posterior to the anterior in strictly regular terms; rather, it is often characterized by a striking "suddenness". Therefore, the epistolary

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3. The above subject is inexhaustible, demanding in terms of elaboration, and multifaceted, and is found in almost all the Byzantine theologians and philosophers. For a synthetic reading of it, see Vl. Lossky, *Ἡ Μυστική Θεολογία τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, translated into Greek by St. Pleurakis, Thessaloniki 1973, pp. 157-180 (chapter 7, "Son's Economy") and 183-201 (chapter 8, "Holy Spirit's Economy").

contents are inscribed, more than a systematic analytical treatise, in the conditions of a specific historical moment, from which they receive their particular key determinations. At the same time, they often define it, purposefully or inadvertently, from the perspective of interactivity and inter-embrace, highlighting the events' multifactorial nature. This interchange is inevitable when the protagonists are leading figures – a prerequisite for them to seal an entire era with their spirituality and action. Besides, it is universally accepted that Gregory Palamas summarized with his supreme literary compositions the patristic tradition almost in its entirety – especially the one founded by the treatises of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite –, and also constitutes until modern times the point of reference for the Orthodox East; indeed, he became the latter's ecclesiastical and theoretical pillar. We are therefore obliged to consider all the above while elaborating on *1 Letter to Barlaam*, which, apart from revisiting a well-known doctrinal issue, will bring us into contact with its authors, who are fully capable of deeply personalizing two different perspectives. A subtle question, however, is whether the person or the subject under discussion comes first. Nevertheless, in Christian terms, the latter comes first, almost universally. In the present case, therefore, the issues set out for discussion have emerged from the very beginnings of Christian theological thought, and the Church Fathers have approached them time and again to clarify their details and counter their heretical readings<sup>4</sup>.

More specifically: the Hesychast thinker and bishop inscribe himself as a protagonist in the field of a controversy. However, it is worth noting that he presents himself not as a shaper of its emergence and the way it proceeds but as a necessary participant. At the same time, he undertakes to highlight, either explicitly or implicitly, that a theoretical position's accuracy depends on the moral quality of its exponent; this can inversely be approached as a personal debt to objectivity. In support of the aforementioned double initiative, he brings to the forefront what

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4. For the Hesychast controversy, one should begin with the following articles: J. Gouillard, «Autour du Palamisme», *Échos d'Orient* XXXVII (1938), pp. 424-460; M. Jugie, «La controverse palamite (1341-1368)», *Échos d'Orient* XXX (1931), pp. 397-421; J. Meyendorff, «Le débuts de la controverse hésychaste», *Byzantion* XXIII (1953), pp. 87-120.

he considers as a normative way of reading and exploiting, on the part of every human being, the intellectual potential as virtues and its education level, which in the broader context he approaches in a Christocentric and Holy Spiritedly manner. He highlights a premise -unquestionable for him-, that this expanded form of the right reason belongs to the infinite wealth of man's divine gifts – the latter defines the demand of his response as a recipient: accordingly, he is called upon to penetrate their content and consciously make them a performative rule of his choices and, more broadly, of his life. Thus, philosophically speaking, he proposes the applied rationalism's deeply rehearsed projection. It brings to the fore that how the intellectual armament in the elaboration of any given subject -and especially the doctrinal ones- is articulated must reflect how the dialectical relation between divine and human is perceived and how it is renewed with time, under a dynamic perspective of all and continuing clarifications. Here precisely an issue emerges which is intertwined with the Physical and Supernatural Revelation, the former having a generalized content as an expression of divine creation, and the latter having a topical content and referring to God's extraordinary emergency interventions towards human beings. The position of the Hesychasts is explicit: human intellect alone, regardless of its performance, is insufficient to lead to man's initiation into divine revelations; it requires the faith's primacy<sup>5</sup>.

Gregory Palamas's reasoning concerning the above is normative: man is faced with the personal challenge to understand to the highest degree his natural or pre-ontological, rational abilities –those that expressed his creation “in the image of God”; to perceive them as grants that expand his clarifications for his reduction to the Hereafter and not to pride himself on their possession. In any case, they are the property of all men, since the Holy Trinity is not partial to its providential endowments. One crucial detail emerges: how men, especially those who bear the status of intellectuals and writers, will understand the

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5. For the Supernatural or historical Revelation, see Dim. Staniloae, *Θεολογία και Ἐκκλησία*, translated into Greek by Nic. Tsironis, Tinos Publications, Athens 1989, pp. 103-173. For the Physical Revelation, see N. A. Nisiotis, *Προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν Θεολογικὴν Γνωσιολογίαν*, Minyma Publications, Athens 1986, pp. 46-67.

measure and the limits of their abilities and will not attempt to exceed them, driven by an arrogant egotism, which tends, from a certain point onwards, to become self-deification. Faith will exclude such a possibility. Thus, the evaluative reading of a research project must not neglect to identify the psychological motivations on which a speculative analyst is based in order to proceed to his synthetic judgments and interpretative implications, within which semantic figures -even if only implicitly- are also circulated. The detection of this is intensified as soon as the realization of a subject is inscribed in the dialectical debate, where behavior's normative scale prescribes prudence, moderation, and observance of the objective measure under skepticism's constant aegis -as a critical path of self-knowledge-, application of the formal Logic's rules and respect for the interlocutor. Furthermore, the normativity is increased when the subject under discussion is of supreme theological importance and, by definition, is inscribed in the sacramental axis, against which there must be due respect. In other words -from a speculative or a conceptual point of view-, such a subject is not saturated.

As a result of the above, the following thesis emerges: if the interlocutors do not diligently specify the mundane limits, if they do not realize their relativity, and not consciously enter into the perspective of insight, they will perform as mere theorizers. Insight is defined as that thorough mental process freed from the mediation of sensory representations, against which it must maintain a transcendental attitude. This transcendence, however, does not mean that he, as an initiate, will be led to their abolition. It must not be overlooked that the natural world constitutes a theophany and, therefore, it possesses epistemological authority, but that it is also of such a nature that it is not completely concurred by human consciousness. Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa had already postulated that man perceives the world of sensory experience as a phenomenon and describes it as such. According to a Kantian view, his conceptual categories have legitimacy only in what is subject to sensory perception and not in the thing itself<sup>6</sup>.

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6. See Vl. Lossky, *Ἡ θεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*, translated into Greek by Meletios Kalamaras, Vas. Rigopoulos Publications, Thessaloniki 1973, pp. 104-109 and 113-120.

What has been noted as general epistemological axes delineate the research direction of the present study, which is intended to have a synthetic character and not be a mere aggregate of citations. We will therefore present concisely each chapter's content from those we've selected for elaboration from the *1 Epistle to Barlaam* -, as they are genetically evolved-, and undertake to bring it out both under the epistolary perspective and that which defines the modes of the doctrines' introductory emergence, and a peculiar synthesis formed by those two perspectives. We shall have two intelligent and active persons -Gregory Palamas and Barlaam- who are in conflict regarding their interpretation of certain theological issues of capital importance. Attention, however, needs to be paid to the fact that both are the essentially historical forefathers of the conflicting readings and not the recipients of a controversy that would, at least apparently, have already begun. Of course, there is no "parthenogenesis" on the above issues. It is just that the conditions had not yet matured enough for them to establish the strictly structural conditions of this spiritual phenomenon. For the above reasons, therefore, our argumentation will have to be based not only on intellectual schemes but also on their personal -or, as it were, factional- emergence. This dynamocratic dialectic between the person and the expressed meanings brings to the fore the paradigmatic axis, which feeds, in a rationally instrumental manner, through the syntactic-grammatical one, the semantic directions, and the interpretative implications that will follow. Therefore, whoever aspires to become a researcher of an Epistle with a similar texture, is called upon to function as a psychologist and to delve into two personal worlds, each of which follows its dramatic inner course in the perspective of being confronted, on the argumentative scale, with another, and indeed of the same theoretical circle. Narratively, he will encounter a "civil" dispute of the highest order, which was not without catalytic consequences for Christianity's evolution, since it caused the writing of texts of incalculable theological and philosophical importance<sup>7</sup>.

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7. We should note that many of the treatises, composed by Gregory Palamas, had received advanced feedback since they were derived either from synods or from the experiences of monastic life. To this category belong those included in those marked



These complex conditions constitute a major challenge as far as their details is concerned; it becomes necessary, already in advance, to examine the philological and linguistic textures through which the transition from chapter to chapter is made, which proceeds with regressions and is not continuously based on what is defined as a strict scientific sequence, unfolding in dialectical stages of argumentative validation. In addition, this transition has the strong possibility of belonging to both the paradigmatic and constitutional axes. We will therefore follow, by elaborating certain paragraphs of the Epistle, the Hesychast theologian as the author who insists on the formal expression of its content, concerning whether and to what extent he is able not only to justify his theoretical choices but also to justify himself as their authoritative bearer; in a way, to identify himself with the reflections, arguments, and evaluations he formulates. And this is where the following critical question arises: is he not implicitly attempting to draw up his portrait? This question is extremely crucial; within a theocentric system, it can only be examined under the prism of the response to what the divine source is or, at least, to what the divine source emanates, as well as to what the literary texts which constitute Christianity's traditional path in temporal becoming. We pose this question openly, since Gregory Palamas sets the New Testament and the Patristic texts in all his treatises as the guiding principle of his views or as his ethical-deontological reductionism, and he structures his argumentation based on their content, perceiving the latter as a non-negotiable epistemological springboard. These treatises delimit theological issues in a way that they do not allow their interpretation only on the intellectualist level. They are considered to be inspired by God, as the mediating conceptual structures for transmitting God's Word to men, so that men's word about God –*mutatis mutandis*– may follow in reverse. These texts bring Theology as Revelation into relation with Theology as Science, in a dynamocratic perspective of development which the Byzantine, and not only the Patristic, tradition will bring out<sup>8</sup>.

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with the title: *Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἠσυχάζόντων* (Συγγράμματα, vol. I, pp. 359-694).

8. See N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία*, vol. I, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1996.

Of course, in an epistolary treatise, the subjective parameter is undoubtedly pervasive; yet, the basic detail, which must be strictly taken into account, is whether the objective measure is observed, which must be defined clearly and argumentatively in relation with the negotiated terms. This also works in a further perspective: the Byzantines' cognitive performances are not autonomous; they construct their theories under the prism of the divine mystery's assimilation on their part, in the way it has been revealed through its immanence, i.e. through its energies. Therefore, the subjective tone will be subject to certain limitations, which will not interfere in a binding way with the path to insight but will provide, as far as possible, the necessary feedings. It should be noted that insight is a supremely exalting and fascinating human epistemological –and more broadly existential– achievement, but its reach is limited, precisely because is a human process<sup>9</sup>.

A further context worthy of examination is to read the words being used within the syntactic axis in which they are placed, reflecting their bearer's self-assessment as well as that of the recipient's. Nevertheless, we should ask the following syntactical-grammatical question: What is the extent to which adjectives and adverbs are used? We reckon that by recording the above, which are evaluative, we shall come into contact with the living atmosphere of a turbulent age, the intellectual boundaries of which were reflected in Synodical Tomes, which could be described as scientific products, limited of course in the amount of participation of the competent authorities, but of capital importance for the Local Synod's delimitation of truth. According to the assumption of most scholars, this doctrinal path ends as follows: However much the events constituted the Hesychast dispute may have shaken the Byzantine ecclesiastical and devotional life, what finally emerged was the Christian doctrine's strict delimitation, without the latter's openly dynamocratic character being refuted. It is thus recorded how strict reason is called upon to interact with faith and to fully "respond" to the metaphysics of immanence, whose supreme expression –not subject to formal ramifications– is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son and

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9. See N. A. Nisiotis, *Προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν Θεολογικὴν Γνωσιολογίαν*, *op.cit.*, pp. 119-130.

Word of God, transfigured on Mount Tabor – one of Jesus’s climactic appearances, which could be argued to highlight the full relation of the metaphysics of transcendence to the metaphysics of immanence, under the strict premise of «καθὼς ἠδύναντο», an expression that denotes neither skepticism nor agnosticism, but a realization of limits and the translation of the content of the dialectic between the divine and the human. Gregory Palamas devoted major experiential and mental figures to the light flashed on Tabor; thus, he put together a truly fascinating theory, closely interwoven with divine grace, mystical experience, and eschatology<sup>10</sup>.

It should be clarified that in the whole of the patristic tradition, the dialectic mentioned above is epistemologically inscribed in the concept of the distinction between the affirmative, the apophatic, and the superlative theology, which refers both to the self-founded ways of the divine’s existence and to their readings on the part of man. Indeed, we can argue that these readings are rendered through categories drawn from the philosophical legacy, with the “Corpus Aeropagiticum” “abounding” in systematicity, which defines methodological and, more broadly, epistemological normativity. It should not be mistaken in any of our remarks that Dionysius of Areopagite’s treatise *On Divine Names* –also emblematic in the field of Epistolary Writing– is pervaded by concepts that are found in the Platonic Corpus and especially in the dialogue *Parmenides*. This treatise, like the rest of Dionysius’s, constitutes the Areopagitean tradition, which is sealed by Palamas’ lofty writings, with the leading intermediaries being St. Maximus the Confessor, Nicholas of Methone, and George Pachymeris<sup>11</sup>.

In addition, even in passing, it is necessary to point out that the monograph which is going to undertake locating the textual parallels between the representatives of this Christian tradition –a rare one,

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10. For a systematic reading of Gregory Palamas’s theory regarding the theology of light, see V. Lossky, *Κατ’ εἰκόνα καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν Θεοῦ*, Vas. Rigopoulos Publications, Thessaloniki 1974, pp. 35-62, where theology’s historical and systematic branches intertwine with impressive precision.

11. For how Dionysius the Areopagite exploits the Platonic dialogue *Parmenides*, see E. Corsini’s truly emblematic monograph, *Il trattato “De divinis nominibus” dello Pseudo-Dionigi e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide*, Torino 1962.

because of its supreme quality—, which also includes theologians from the West, such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, is absent from the research production. Moreover, let us point out that, in the East at least, as a whole, representatives of this tradition often combine Epistolary writing with doctrinal teaching, apparently under the historical conjecture’s influence – and even another one of the *desiderata*: we believe that the Gregory Palamas’s Epistles must be examined under three prisms: a) their internal development, b) their timely synchronicity, i.e. under the external conditions to which they attempt to respond, and c) the combination of the two above. The third prism will also constitute what we could define as an epistemological paradigm, which must also include the perspective of the concepts’ use and evolution, naturally leading in showing the Hesychast dispute’s historical development. This trajectory’s tracing is not only horizontally linear but also vertically structural, with the hermeneutic axis not lacking in its ambition to intervene with reconstructions and extensions that will also capture the psychological structures feeding the pulsating stylistic textures. We are watching a “loud-roaring” intellectual world searching for its legacy’s navigations, which have contributed to the emergence of a magnificent and fascinating controversy, at the center of which is the question about Hellenism’s constitutive position in what we would define as *Byzantine Theology* and *Byzantine Philosophy*. This question can easily be inscribed to general categorizations; it should be examined on a case-by-case basis, bearing in mind that in Byzantium Epistolography had emerged as a systematic -or possibly even thoroughly autonomous- grammatological genre<sup>12</sup>.

In what follows, we will present paragraphs 6-12 of Gregory Palamas’s *1 Epistle to Barlaam*, to highlight some of the issues we have been touched earlier on, and paragraph 13, to follow how the transition from personal issues (those occupying a privileged place within a letter) to theoretical ones (those appropriate to a systematic treatise) is made.

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12. See H. Hunger, *Βυζαντινή Λογοτεχνία*, vol. I, translated into Greek by L. G. Benakis, J. B. Anastasiou, G. H. Makris, M.I.E.T., Athens 2008, pp. 301-357.

## B. Elaborating on *1Epistle to Barlaam's* introductory paragraphs

### 6th Paragraph: *From the theoretical opposition to the personal attack*

Gregory Palamas attempts to prove, in continuation of what he has touched upon in the previous paragraphs, that the condemnatory letter of Barlaam against him is not internally consistent, indeed because it refers to major issues – related to the attitude of Eastern Christianity against Western Christianity; thus, he places himself in the position of the thinking subject, who is in blessed wonder. It should be noted, however, that the wonder is milder than the opposition; Palamas thinks that other persons can take over to overcome it. Therefore, he asks his opponent about the causes that provoked his bitter expressions and insincerity. The Hesychast thinker still places the difference between them on personal-psychological grounds, i.e. that can be transcended, provided, of course, that the right conditions are created and the right moods are exhibited. Carefully, the doctrinal difference that plagued Byzantium is still marginalized, at least in its details, and the whole issue is transferred to the surrounding personal atmosphere which founds or even feeds the attitudes. However, the attitudes in question are shown –even if only implicitly– to be closely linked to the formulation of the doctrinal positions; thus, the underlining criterion for the constitution of the syllogisms is holistic.

The sixth paragraph continues the rationale of the previous two and moves even further along the questioning axis as to the justification of behavior. We take the following as dominant expressions: «Μὴ συμβαῖνον ἑαυτῷ, μήδ' ἀκολούθως ἑαυτῷ προαγόμενον, ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ πολλαχοῦ τε καὶ πολυτρόπως καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν μεγίστων μαχόμενον» and «μακροὺς καὶ πικροὺς ἀντεπεξήγαγες λόγους». Gregory Palamas presents Varlaam's internal contradictions narratively and thus elevates the latter to an unreliable person in a stimulating way for readers. According to our opinion, perhaps the most decisive word is «μακρούς» (“long”), which accompanies the «πικροὺς λόγους» (“bitter speeches”). This is not an automatic and current behavior of the anti-hesychast intellectual but a systematic and direct one, therefore,

Palamas attributes to him the ignorance of the facts or the intentionality to violate them in order to belittle his interlocutor, that is, his “ideological” opponent<sup>13</sup>.

7th Paragraph: *The undecided reasonings’ derogation into vain speech*

Palamas here varies his expression, attacking Barlaam with a barrage of questions, repeating his opponent’s reasons, which he constantly emphasizes are inconsistent with his previous thought on the same disputed issue under discussion. He expresses the view that there is no adduced reason for them to argue about a point and then, due to the offenders’ negative positions, remove or replace it. Thus, apart from his argument’s tactical nature, Barlaam has been inappropriately vain in the arguments he has developed and has been led by implication into contradictions anew. With these remarks, Gregory Palamas turns the apologetic tone from himself to his anti-Hesychast opponent, making him the person to whom accusatory statements must be addressed – obviously in a critical manner and on the terms of an objective measure. It does, however, give his opponent a certain amount of leeway to return to the right, provided that he understands the content of his futile words. It challenges him to know better and regulate himself so that he does not fall again into the same errors. The didactic –almost tolerant– tone is clear, leading to the distinction between the consistent and the inconsistent, with the obvious generalization that we are called to proceed calmly to our judgments. Thus, in general, we should not be carried away by the atmosphere of current affairs, which has a conventional and undistilled content, particularly restrictive of objectivity and truth. Here, too, the way he articulates his reasoning belongs to the category of those that have preceded. We take the following as the dominant expressions of the paragraph: «*Εἴ τις λῆρον ἀποκαλεῖ σου τοὺς λόγους*», «*Τίς*

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13. The sixth paragraph’s special feature is distinguished from a clear orientation regarding its objectives, with normativity not passing through assumptions, questions, and reflections. Unquestionably, the absence of intermediations reflects a firmly established self-confidence, but it is also governed by an axiomatic posture fed by the selected arguments, subject to evaluative considerations. It could not therefore be described as a rhetorically oriented text.

σοι χρεία τῆς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τοσαύτης ἔπειτα μακρηγορίας», «μετὰ τὰ σκώμματα τῶν σκανδαλιζομένων», «ὡς ἀπερισκέπτως πρότερον ἐντεθέν», «ὡς ὁ ἀσκόπως ὁδοιπορῶν ματαιοπονήσει, οὕτως ὁ ἀσκόπως λογογραφῶν ματαιολογήσει». These are figures that reflect in an argumentative estrus the deconstruction of an eminent thinker, who is described as «τὴν σοφίαν εἶπερ τις περιττὲ σύ». Is it logical and predictable that such an intellectual should scandalize his readers? Does he invalidate himself? And does this self-denigration have wider implications for the body of the Church and its cultic initiation and lifting to the Hereafter<sup>14</sup>;

8th Paragraph: *Prudence as a normative basis for the use of speech*

Following the proceeding, it is emphasized that the inopportune verbosity emerges as one of the causes that led Barlaam to expressive, syllogistic, and doctrinal deviation. With successful similes and generally, with a similar narrative style, Palamas reduces the validity of the Calabrian theologian as a thinker and even further reduces his credibility in such serious matters as theological ones. The Hesychast thinker states that he will attempt, with as concise argumentation as possible, to dispel the accusations against him and advise Barlaam to be careful and not to get angry. At the same time, he even states that he will not be carried away into verbosity, in order to avoid falling into the same mistakes with the anti-Hesychast. He defines sobriety as a precondition of discussion; it psychologically predisposes for precise theoretical delimitations grounded in sound reasoning. Tension is not a safe asset for scientific –or any other– validity, since it is based on subjectivism, often characterized by ambiguities and self-reversals. More generally, avoiding irascible high-spiritedness is necessary for reasonableness, since in this way desires and affections are brought under control. Here we

14. It should be noted that the seventh paragraph up to its middle is governed by the formulation of hypotheses, which inscribe the syllogisms in aporetic states, reinforced as such by their inscription in interrogative figures. However, the hypotheses do not finally refer to the perpetual state of doubt, serving as an intermediate tool to construct the arguments, which in the second half of the paragraph become extremely intense. The quasi-rhetorical reflections are referring to the common measure of understanding. Their intend is clear: to deconstruct the arguments of the opponent and discredit him.

could easily turn our attention to Plato's dialogue *Republic*, and the other –so-called psychological– dialogues of the Academy's founder. It is also striking that Gregory Palamas stresses to Barlaam that he must thoroughly clarify those issues which will also turn against him and his Hesychast group. In all likelihood, ironically, he is suggesting that he should change his approach to those issues the Hesychasts cannot grasp and on which he appears to be an unrivaled connoisseur. But he makes it clear that even if, after such differentiation, Barlaam continues to attack them, he will endure it. The 8th paragraph also belongs to the same category with the proceeding ones. The dominant expressions are the following: «Τοῦτο δ' ἔπαθες ἐκ τῆς ἀκαίρου πολυρῶρημοσύνης», «πολυκινήτως ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἐκῶν σαλευόμενος», «πολλὰ φεῦ προσκόμματα καὶ συντρίμματα διακενῆς ἔπαθες», «μὴ χαλᾶν εἶ τί σοι περιτραπεῖη τῶν σῶν, καὶ γὰρ σόν». Taken as a whole, these expressions project two different worlds, in terms of behavior. Tedious verbosity is in clear contrast to sober reason, presented as preventing sin and being conscious of limits, observing the objective measure in every expression and behavior, thus shaping the premises for truth's search<sup>15</sup>.

#### 9th Paragraph: *The textual-historical foundations of the arguments*

Gregory Palamas declares that he is ready to accept the content of Varlaam's selfish words, as long as he proves their validity. The Bishop of Thessaloniki again refers explicitly to the way the Calabrian monk addresses his accusations, stressing that he does not base them on solid evidence. Thus, he strengthens his argument against him. He challenges him to prove that the Hesychasts' circle is prone to bombastic magniloquence. He even claims that his knowledge is the knowledge of other theologians, noting that this common acceptance is, in a certain way, the basis of his boasting; that is, he believes that he remains

15. The 8th paragraph is governed by remarks on how discourse should be used as a reference, discussion, and communication medium. As regards its expressive modes, it is characterized by an impressive variety of verb forms (tenses, enclitics, infinitives, participles), with the obvious aim of stimulating the reader's attention as he or she passes through various tropes of the same situations. In all the linguistic expressions, however, the normative tone is pervasive, as a marker of the language to be followed.



consistent with what has been normatively preserved by tradition as a doctrinal value, apparently based on ecclesiological grounds. Orthodoxy is inscribed in the legacy of spirituality, moving far beyond the Gentiles' philosophy, which Palamas, for the time being at least, does not recognize as an example of contemplation and life choices.

This paragraph is intended to establish a basic principle: the validity of an argument is measured by the degree of its textual guarantees, especially by its synthetic prism. We take the following as dominant expressions: «Πόθεν τοῦτ' ἔχεις δεῖξαι», «κὰν ἐκ τῶν ἡμετέρων ὑπάρχη τις μεγαληγορία, δικαίαν εἶναι τὴν καθ' ἡμῶν σου ταύτην κατηγορίαν ὁμολογήσωμεν, εἰ δὲ μή, σὺ ἑαυτοῦ καταψηφιῇ», which inscribe the evaluative judgments in documented data, i.e. they correspond to the truth. If the latter does not exist, logical impossibilities arise, extending to other existential areas. In the broader context of their application here, we would note that rational impossibilities are caused or derived from moral corruption. Thus, a holistic paradigm is introduced concerning the premises of Speculative Reason, which is identified by the Practicon<sup>16</sup>, which in other cases he identifies under the prism of a dynamocratic reciprocity.

#### 10th Paragraph: *Prooemium regarding the limits of God's knowledge*

Of what Gregory Palamas has conquered as knowledge, he is sure that he merely grasps some mere echoes. Moreover, he attempts to prove that Varlaam is slandering, simply because he is slow at learning (*δυσμαθής*), a characterization which, according to the broader context, does not seem to refer to weakness but to an absence of the relevant intention. In general, we would note that stylistic or moral denunciation, occasionally directed between theoretical opponents, must have a validity grounded in concrete data, which will provide a secure springboard for overcoming given human weaknesses. This is the base point from which the Bishop

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16. The above are related to the function of proof in Christian texts, with which Gregory Palamas deals exhaustively, even using Aristotle's relevant positions. See, for example, V. Tatakis, *Μελετήματα Χριστιανικῆς Φιλοσοφίας*, Astir Publications, Athens 1981, pp. 81-92; P. Christou, *Θεολογικά Μελετήματα. Νηπτικά καὶ Ἡσυχαστικά*, Patriarchal Foundation of Patristic Studies, Thessaloniki 1977, pp. 87-114.

of Thessaloniki will draw his critical validations. In his perspective, Barlaam has failed to establish fundamental arguments and doctrines nor can he -or does he intend to- grasp the deeper meaning of his own words. Thus, the Hesychast theologian regards his opponent as semi-literate -inferior than ignorant-, mainly because of the arrogant behavior he exhibits. Gregory Palamas points out that he never claimed to have conquered divine wisdom and science. But since Barlaam has distorted his words, as the offended party he considers that he ought to overturn this accusation, implying that through this undertaking he will also preserve the Christian faith in general, which is far from arrogance and dogmatism; in his view, this is the minimum requirement for the whole discussion. The personal conflict is merely the occasion, which, although undesirable, leads to the emergence of crucial details.

The paragraph continues by raising questions about the controversy's causes; it is intended to bring out the concern regarding the limits of knowledge about the divine, which man could conquer, under intact premises. We take the following as the dominant expressions: «ἄκουσε νῦν συνετῶς», «τῆς ἀληθινῆς σοφίας οὐδὲν ἢ μικρὸν κατειλίψαμεν», «Σαφῶς οὖν ἡμῶν καταψεύδη», «τῇ δὲ οἰκείᾳ δυσμαθίᾳ μηδὲν σχεῖν παρακατασχεῖν τῶν διδαγμάτων ἐκείνων», highlighting the above twofold theme. They are exhortative, critical, and scrutinizing in nature, directing us towards the right way of life, given the fact that God is the person of reference - therefore, the determiner of choices. Consequently, the argument aims at how removing whatever secular priorities might have emerged and how the same will certainly take on the appropriate spirituality<sup>17</sup>.

#### 11th Paragraph: *The dialectical antithesis perfect-imperfect*

Gregory Palamas continues to confront Varlaam with his syllogisms, which -due to the reduction to an abstractly based evaluation- do not

17. This paragraph is articulated both by hypothetical and definitive reasoning procedures. Theological Epistemology has been exhaustively engaged in research. By way of illustration, we refer to the following studies: N. Matsoukas, «Γνώσις καὶ Ἀγνωσία τοῦ Θεοῦ», *Κληρονομία / Kleronomia* 2 (1970), pp. 53-187; I. H. Nicolas, *Dieu connu comme inconnu*, Paris 1966 and R. Roques, *Structures théologiques de la gnose à Richard de Saint Victor. Essais et analyses critiques*, Paris 1962.

have the desired accuracy about the conceptual material he chooses and the evidential methods he follows. It is attributed to him as an accusation that he uses excessive discourses, in that he unhappily accuses Gregory Palamas himself of characterizing himself as «ὕπερτέλειον», while the Hesychast himself and the members of his group have already characterized themselves as imperfect. Indeed, the Hesychast's reference to the mystical teachings is exclusively linked to the divine charity but also his self-humiliation as to the competencies he can attain - and in no way to a subjective potentiality of his own, nor apparently to that of the other Hesychasts. In the supernatural states from which he is fed, he identifies his minimum abilities, so he limits the autonomous human function for spiritual conquests by reducing them to the general. This is the perennial principle that gives clear priority to the common word of the ecclesiastical mind, fed by Christ and the Holy Spirit.

In this paragraph, the complaints to the Barlaam continue; yet, the central issues are the difference between the most perfect and the imperfect and the possibility of participation in the secret doctrine, which are the dominant expressions. In both cases, however, the criterion is God, against whom Gregory Palamas defines his imperfection while emphasizing that through His “charity”, he acquires the conditions to be led to this doctrine. The paragraph closes explicitly: «οὐκ ἔτ' ἔργον ἡμέτερον οὐδὲ τοῦτο». This phrase validates his awareness of imperfection; the writer does not want to dishearten but to highlight the awareness's limits or the reconstruction of methodological processes<sup>18</sup>.

#### 12th Paragraph: *The dialectical antithesis truth-falsehood*

Gregory Palamas considers it selfish to attribute to oneself a work that one has not even begun by oneself, referring to the accusation that Varlaam attributes to himself, that he allegedly claims to be perfect. With

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18. The eleventh paragraph is given over to questions, which, nevertheless, do not remain trapped into a deadlock of doubt but are directed towards the multimodal validation of the argumentative direction that has been followed. We must note that divine “charity” expresses the divine providence, manifesting itself through intentional divine actions, which constitute a holistic anthropology. See in this respect P. Evdokimov, *Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία*, translated into Greek by A. Mourtzopoulos, Vas. Rigopoulos Publications, Thessaloniki 1972, pp. 61-161.

rhetorical questions, he attempts to diminish the credibility and scientific authority of Varlaam's research; at the same time, he contrasts the actual truth with the partial one, the deeper speculation with the superficial one, and the universal with the particular. That is to say, he argues for the validity of the «καθόλου», grounded indeed in God's self-creation, as a cognitive integrity against the multimodal ambiguity of contingency, denouncing Barlaam for giving special weight to the latter. Since the anti-Hesychast makes such a choice, he fails to meet his goals. Therefore, based on what legitimacy would he undertake to discuss matters of capital importance, expressive of the actual truth? Thus, in philosophical terms, Gregory Palamas prioritizes a metaphysically based realism over a physically-empirically driven nominalism, to which, however, he attaches particular importance and he does not exclude it from becoming a presumption for the formulation of evaluative judgments. He also stresses that the overreaching of his opponent is an ally for him since the reproach he is sending him is revealed as false. Thus, he has from the outset a comparative advantage over him, precisely based on the fact that the truth is superior to falsehood, or that simplicity's authenticity prevails over fallacy's multiplicity, which through its repetitiveness attempts to utilize false techniques to convince him of its integrity, that is, of the exact opposite of what it is in reality.

We take the following as the dominant expressions of the paragraph: «Τίς δέ σοι πιστεύσειε ἔτι τῆς ἀληθείας φροντίζειν, περὶ τῶν κρειπτόνων καὶ δυσθεωρήτων δεξιόντι, καταψευδομένῳ σαφῶς τῶν οὕτω σαφῶς ἀναγεγραμμένων», with the next question concerning «ὄντως ἀληθείας» moving on the same axis. Through these expressions, reflecting the dialectical opposites, Gregory Palamas inscribes the epistemological paradigm of his argumentation in the internal consistency of the person who is its bearer. Has Barlaam considered if he has validated his logical transitions and their correspondence to actual data? Or does he behave like having deified his subjectivity? Acting likewise, he comes to absolutize the relative and, by implication, to relativize, even inexplicitly and unintentionally, the absolute, while also setting the premises to build a clear nominalism<sup>19</sup>.

19. In the twelfth paragraph, the transition from questioning to inferential and definitive judgments is chosen. For how truth is defined in Eastern patristic theology, see. N. A.

**13th Paragraph: *The ontological question on “first cause”***

With this paragraph, the discussion is transferred from the personal controversy to the theoretical orthodoxy. Gregory Palamas' argument here is then related to the doctrinal teaching; he points out that Barlaam's formulations are contrary to what is evident in common (ecclesiastical) experience and to what has been commented on, and certainly canonized, by the Christian tradition. In particular, the hermeneutical problem lies in the determinations that arise from the concept of «ἀρχή», which is not examined from the standpoint of the departure point. Here, the question is whether the single source on which individual principles depend, both specifying and validating it as such, can be defined as a first cause. It will then not be interpreted unambiguously but will contain a plurality of equivalent ontological sources-states, from which particular products will emerge. These are situations that collectively function as principles, operating specifically and according to the region of the world that they will create and functioning with integral regularities. In all probability, reference is made here to what is firm and undeniable, emanating from the divine energies and forming creative nuclei, which are completely strange to a hierarchic polytheism.

The above then, when transferred to the discourse on Trinitarianism, do not mean that the Father is the first cause of the Son under the type of opposition: superior-inferior, but it is the first cause in the sense that through the second Person, a process of emergence of states begins, which already exist self-established, i.e. divine creativity, not subject to necessities. What is implied here is the non-hierarchical homoousion of the Holy Trinity's three persons and, by extension, the exclusion of the priority of the divine substance over the divine energy. According to the established Christian position –with the tradition that goes back to the Corpus Aeropagiticum making a crucial contribution to its foundation–, only in their self-established distinction in unity. Therefore, the beginning does not declare the poetic cause inter-Triadically, but in a subsequent stage expresses the source of the springboard for a new ontological event, which will subsequently contribute to the beginning of Cosmology.

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Nisiotis, *Προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν Θεολογικὴν Γνωσιολογίαν*, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-107, where God's knowledge is also connected with moral and ethical issues.

However, in an inter-Triadic way, this concept must be permanently clarified, so that the reasoning does not lead to the acceptance of more than one First Cause and, therefore, to polytheism, the source of which will be the flaw in the First Cause's field.

It should be noted that the Corpus Areopagiticum strongly resisted the Neoplatonic principles, according to which the metaphysical world is hierarchical and articulated in the form of a pyramid, through ontologically subordinate processes, which weaken the unity to develop the metaphysical multitude at the same time. Under an open approach, we can also understand the divine energies as a metaphysical multitude, but without, in any case, introducing the perspective of divine evolution and obviously excluding ontological diminution. The self-established energies, in common with essence and intention, "represent" the absolute divine integrity, not subjected to tropicalities. As dominant expressions we understand the following: «Τὸ δὲ "τὴν ἑτέραν ὑπὸ τὴν ἑτέραν" σε σαφῶς εἰπεῖν καὶ "ἡ διπλὴ τῆς ἀρχῆς" τοῦθ' ἡμᾶς πρὸς τοῖς ἄλλοις ἠνάγκασε πυνθάνεσθαι καὶ διαπορεῖν, τί ποτέ σοι βούλεται "ἡ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀρχή"», which highlight issues that arise in the description of Trinitarianism in the perspective of the dialectic between unity and distinction. It is an issue of capital importance, to which Gregory Palamas has devoted a systematic treatise on ontological foundations, summarizing the relevant tradition in its entirety<sup>20</sup>.

## Epilogue

It is our opinion that under certain assumptions and transformations, the paragraphs we've elaborated on could take the character of rhetorical discourse. However, two key factors intervene which do not allow such a comfortable categorization; in other words, they relativize it. Firstly,

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20. The highly systematic treatment of the First Cause issue by G. Palamas is his famous ontological trilogy: a) *Ποσαχῶς ἡ θεία ἔνωσις καὶ διάκρισις* (pp. 69-95), b) *Περὶ θείων ἐνεργειῶν καὶ τῆς κατ' αὐτάς μεθέξεως* (pp. 96-136) and c) *Περὶ θείας καὶ θεοποιῶ μεθέξεως* (pp. 137-163). All three treatises are included in the second volume of his *Complete Works* (ed. by P. Christou), Thessaloniki 1966.

what is developed in Gregory Palamas' *Letter 1 to Barlaam* was known, and in a highly specialized way, to a wide circle of intellectuals and ecclesiastical persons, with the result that any reasoning expressed in this historical and intellectual context mainly requires further argumentative support, no rhetorical schemes. Secondly, the schismatic controversy is Christian; thus, the reduction of the discourses is considered to be directed to the Church Fathers' Trinitarian teachings - the supreme criterion of truthfulness. Consequently, the Hesychast theologian, despite occasionally resorting to certain rhetorical schemes, remains firmly in his task to demonstrate the manner of his presence according to the normative scale of conduct defined by Christian teaching. Thus, following the Epistle's unfolding as a whole, we will find that its apologetic tone evolves into an argumentative one precisely because of the principles, and not only the theoretical ones, that its author follows.

However, Gregory Palamas's style up to the twelfth paragraph is explosive; he resorts to a variety of expressive modes, with the consequence that his discourse takes on a narrative tone, such that it influences the theoretical argumentation that will follow. Despite the above, however, we believe that the discourses of his paragraphs which we have elaborated can be met with certain, mainly evaluative and validating, readings from the following two passages of Aristotle, which we draw from his treatise *Rhetoric*, in which dialectics plays a central role: "*Nevertheless, Rhetoric is useful, because the true and the just are naturally superior to their opposites, so that, if decisions are improperly made, they must owe their defeat to their own advocates; [...] Rhetoric and Dialectic alone of all the arts prove opposites; for both are equally concerned with them*" («Χρήσιμος δέ ἐστιν ἡ ῥητορικὴ διὰ τε τὸ φύσει εἶναι κρείττω τἀληθῆ καὶ τὰ δίκαια τῶν ἐναντίων, ὥστε ἐὰν μὴ κατὰ τὸ προσῆκον αἰ κρίσεις γίνωνται, ἀνάγκη δι' αὐτῶν ἡττᾶσθαι... Τῶν μὲν οὖν ἄλλων τεχνῶν οὐδεμία τἀναντία συλλογίζεται, ἡ δὲ διαλεκτικὴ καὶ ἡ ῥητορικὴ μόναι τοῦτο ποιοῦσιν»)²¹; and "*The orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence; for we feel confidence in a greater degree and more readily in persons of worth*

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21. Aristotle *Rhetoric*, 1335a.

*in regard to everything in general, but where there is no certainty and there is room for doubt, our confidence is absolute. But this confidence must be due to the speech itself, not to any preconceived idea of the speaker's character; for it is not the case, as some writers of rhetorical treatises lay down in their "Art," that the worth of the orator in no way contributes to his powers of persuasion; on the contrary, moral character, so to say, constitutes the most effective means of proof* («Διὰ μὲν οὖν τοῦ ἡθους, ὅταν οὕτω λεχθῆ ὁ λόγος ὥστε ἀξιόπιστον ποιῆσαι τὸν λέγοντα· τοῖς γὰρ ἐπεικίεσι πιστεύομεν μᾶλλον καὶ θᾶττον, περὶ πάντων μὲν ἀπλῶς, ἐν οἷς δὲ τὸ ἀκριβὲς μὴ ἔστιν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀμφιδοξεῖν, καὶ παντελῶς [...] Οὐ γάρ, ὥσπερ ἔνιοι τῶν τεχνολογούντων, οὐ τίθεμεν ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ καὶ τὴν ἐπεικίειαν τοῦ λέγοντος, ὡς οὐδὲν συμβαλλομένην πρὸς τὸ πιθανόν, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ὡς εἰπεῖν κυριωτάτην ἔχει πίστιν τὸ ἡθος [...] Διὰ δὲ τῶν λόγων πιστεύουσιν, ὅταν ἀληθὲς ἢ φαινόμενον δεῖξωμεν ἐκ τῶν περὶ ἕκαστα πιθανῶν»)²².

To summarize: we believe that Gregory Palamas can easily be evaluated as introducing a special type of Letter-writing, which has the following characteristics, the prerequisites of which we ensure to derive from the rest of his Letters: a) Each of his Letters is extensive and tends to identify its content with its author, who thus appears to have inscribed it organically in his inner world and to participate not only in the truths that he wishes to represent but also in the premises that have led to their formulation; b) he makes use of various expressive forms and tropes, thus stimulating the reflexes of its readers for careful insights –including evaluative assessments and interpretative implications– and simultaneously highlighting an excellent aesthetic writing product; c) Combining the casual expression with the sober one depends on what is required in the particular case and on its addressee.

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22. *Ibid.*, 1356a.