

Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers

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Abstract

Following a brief summary of the main tenets of Palamas' theology relating to the immanent divine ἐνέργεια, this article will explore possible precedents for such a concept in the Cappadocian Fathers. The aim is twofold: first to argue against the exclusive use of ἐνέργεια language in attempting to outline precedents for Palamite thought in the Cappadocians, and second to propose a framework for discussing the topic in terms of sanctification and deification. Through such an approach, I contend, it is possible to remain true to the Cappadocians, whilst concurrently finding striking precedents to the theology of Palamas.

Keywords

Cappadocian theology, Gregory Palamas, divine ontology, essence-energies distinction, knowledge of God, sanctification, deification

Introduction: Gregory Palamas' Essence-Energies Distinction

The thought of Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) has become increasingly known in the West since the middle of the twentieth century.¹ That said, the general contours of his theology, including his thoughts relating to an

¹ This is thanks in many ways to the efforts of Meyendorff (see in particular J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* [Editions du Seuil, 1959], which remains the standard work on Palamas). Other prominent theologians through whom Palamas' thought has been presented to the West include V. Lossky, G. Florovsky, K. Ware, and others. Recently, the theology of Palamas has attracted the attention of ecumenical studies: see A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (OUP, 1999), and D. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theology* (OUP, 2000).

essence-energies (οὐσία-ἐνέργεια) distinction within the Godhead, are by no means known (or understood) by all. I will therefore give a short introduction to this aspect of his thought before turning to the Cappadocians.²

Gregory Palamas was not a systematic theologian in the modern sense. His theology, like that of the Cappadocians, was formulated mainly in reaction to perceived heresies, those of Barlaam of Calabria, Gregory Akindynos, and Nikephoros Gregoras in particular. Unlike the Cappadocians' challenge that revolved mainly around the deity of the Son and/or the Spirit, Palamas' opponents led him to detail his views on the nature of human deification (θέωσις). It was in defending the flourishing hesychastic method of prayer—by which the mind enters the heart, laying all aside through the repetition of the 'Jesus Prayer',³ which opens the person for the reception of divine illumination, and so θέωσις—that Palamas' views concerning the essence and energies of God became most apparent. He was defending a monastic way of life particularly associated with his own monastic home, Mount Athos. Its detractors (chiefly Barlaam of Calabria) attacked both the physical methods employed by the hesychasts and their claim to being able to 'see God' and be deified. For Barlaam, this contradicted the divine unknowability.⁴

Barlaam argued that because of the unknowability of God, experiencing him directly was an impossibility. The highest form of knowledge of God seemed consequently to be equated with a devotion to the cultivation of the νοῦς (made in God's image) through philosophy and learning. Becoming like God, or becoming a god (deification/θέωσις) was not a question of literal unity or communion with the uncreated God, but such typology

²) Apart from Palamas' own works, much of what follows is drawn from the following: Meyendorff, *Introduction*; L.C. Contos, *The Concept of Theosis in Saint Gregory Palamas with Critical Text of the Contra Akindynum* (Thesis [D.Phil.] University of Oxford, 1963); G.I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (SVS Press, 1984); D. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (CUP, 2004) 234–42; and J.N. Cañellas, *La résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas: enquête historique, avec traduction et commentaire de quatre traités édités récemment*, 2 vols. (Peeters, 2006).

³) Various 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me [a sinner]'; 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me'; and others: see K. Ware *The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality* (SLG Press, 1986).

⁴) More on hesychasm can be found in K. Ware, "Praying with the Body: The Hesychast Method and Non-Christian Parallels," *Sobornost* 14.2 (1993) 6–35.

referred rather to a created *habitus* of sanctification.⁵ Palamas' objection to this view lay in what he perceived to be a digression from Christian tradition in favour of a religion for the intellectual élite, a religion for philosophers. He was adamant to affirm the authentic possibility of man's union with God, of his *θέωσις*, which was open to all (not merely the intellectually-gifted) through the keeping of the commandments and the action of divine grace. But this could not do away with divine unknowability: Palamas wanted to preserve the two poles of the imparticipable yet participable trinitarian God. How could these two apparently contradictory lines of thought be held together? In such direct terms, this was a fresh challenge for the Eastern tradition, though Palamas believed he could solve it within his patristic heritage.

The solution lay in outlining distinctions within the ontology of God, not in itself a new enterprise given the Cappadocian insistence on an οὐσία-ὑπόστασις (essence-hypostasis) distinction. Palamas thus delineates the 'realities' (ὄντων) in God: 'three realities pertain to God: οὐσία, ἐνέργεια, and the triad of divine ὑποστάσεις' (*Cap* 75).⁶ This was unacceptable to Palamas' critics, particularly Akindynos, who insisted that no real distinctions could be conceivable within the divine being, which was simple, one, undivided, and thus entirely unknowable (though the three ὑποστάσεις were still acknowledged). But for Palamas, what was unknowable was God's essence/οὐσία, which could be ontologically delineated from his communicable and immanent energies/ἐνέργεια.⁷ These ἐνέργεια

⁵ For more on Barlaam's concept of the knowledge of God, see R.E. Sinkewicz, "The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian," *Mediaeval Studies* 44 (1982) 181-242 as well as Meyendorff, *Introduction* 204-5.

⁶ For the texts of Gregory Palamas, the following abbreviations and editions are used: *Cap* = *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* (ed. R. Sinkewicz [Toronto, 1988]); *Tr* = *Défense des saints hésychastes* (ed. J. Meyendorff [Louvain, 1988]); *Energies* = *On the Divine Energies* (ed. P. Chrestou, *Syngrammata* vol. 2 [Ekdotikos Oikos Kyromanos, 1962]); *Hom* = *Homilies* (ed. P. Chrestou, 3 vols. [Ekdoseis Gregorios o Palamas, 1985-6]); *Dialogue* = *Dialogue between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite* (ed. R. Ferwerda [Global Academic Publishing, 1999]); *Processione* = *De processione spiritus sancti orationes duae* (ed. P. Chrestou, *Syngrammata* vol. 1 [Ekdotikos Oikos Kyromanos, 1962]); *Ep* = *Epistulae* (ed. P. Chrestou, *Syngrammata* vol. 1 [Ekdotikos Oikos Kyromanos, 1962]); and *Contra Akindynum* (L.C. Contos, *Concept of Theosis in St. Gregory Palamas, with Critical Text of the 'Contra Akindynum'* [D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1963]).

⁷ It is important to bear in mind that Palamas' use of ἐνέργεια cannot be placed in a linguistic straight-jacket. In the context of his essence-energies theology the term denotes any of the Trinity's immanent actions, powers, operations, etc. Cf. *Hom* 8.10: 'they [the

‘are uncreated and are to be indivisibly distinguished from the single and wholly undivided οὐσία of the Spirit’ (*Cap* 68). That they are ‘uncreated’ (ἄναρχος) is vitally important for Palamas, and is demanded in his thought by their ‘indivisibility’ from the οὐσία. His logic is that if the energies are created, then God is a creature (cf. *Tr* 3.1.23). The very notion of God ‘creating’ energies would be nonsensical to Palamas, since for him God’s creative power is itself a divine (and uncreated) energy.⁸

It cannot be overemphasized that while Palamas attempts to make the essence-energies distinction theologically and philosophically viable on its own terms, it is a concern to maintain the possibility of authentic knowledge of and communion with God (and so deification/θέωσις) that lies at the heart of his thinking behind the distinction. Without postulating this distinction, two dangers confront the theologian. Either deification is defined as assimilation to God’s οὐσία, or to one of the three ὑποστάσεις. But according to Palamas, deification cannot be a kind of absorption into God’s essence or nature (since this would compromise the deified’s own nature), nor can it be a becoming of Father, Son or Spirit, since this would wreck the personal/hypostatic integrity of the Godhead, as well as cause the loss of the deified’s own personal identity. The essence-energies distinction aims at avoiding both of these hazards by attributing the content of deification to the human being’s assimilation of the energy or life of the Godhead. This gift or grace of deification is a kind of divine ‘personalisation’ of the human being, ‘enhypostatic’, ‘not because it possesses a ὑπόστασις of its own, but because the Spirit “sends it out into the ὑπόστασις of another”’ (*Tr* 3.1.9).⁹ The human ὑπόστασις is not subsumed, but fulfilled. This is a fulfilment by grace, in which man becomes a god, though not by nature. The deifying ἐνέργεια—particularly in Pal-

three ὑποστάσεις] have in common not only their undisclosed essence [...] but also grace, power, energy (ἐνέργεια), radiance, incorruption, kingdom, and everything else by which God has communion with the holy angels and with men’. Furthermore, in general the words δύναμις and ἐνέργεια act interchangeably in Palamite theology (though cf. *Energies* 23, where the ‘energy’ is the χρῆσις of the ‘power’). The Aristotelian distinction of the two (potentiality/actuality) has little to no bearing on Palamas’ thought. For more on this question in both Palamas and more broadly, see Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*.

⁸) On one occasion Palamas speaks of some ἐνέργεια as having a beginning and/or an end in *Tr* 3.2.8 (as God’s activity of creating, or his foreknowledge), but he underlines that by ἐνέργεια here he means ‘action’ (πράξεως) as related to created things, not the divine ‘power’ (δύναμις) in itself.

⁹) The quote is from Ps. Basil, *Adversus Eunomium* 5 (PG 39.772).

amas 'divine light' or the light of Tabor¹⁰—are thus perceived to genuinely 'be' God.¹¹

A frequent accusation levelled against Palamas on this point is that it surely compromises the divine simplicity. To respond to this, Palamas insisted that whilst God is absolute simplicity, his simplicity (together with all the divine attributes) cannot be identified with the οὐσία of God, but is itself a divine ἐνέργεια (*Energies* 21; *Dialogue* 36, 55). The οὐσία must remain beyond name and attribute (a fundamental tenet, incidentally, of Cappadocian theology), and so beyond simplicity.

For Palamas, just as the divine simplicity is not compromised by the οὐσία-ὑποστάσεις distinction hammered out by the Cappadocians, so too the οὐσία-ἐνέργεια distinction does not introduce division within the Godhead. The difference between these two distinctions of ὑποστάσεις-οὐσία and οὐσία-ἐνέργεια is that the first is hypostatic/personal (in an objective sense 'relational'), and the second is 'natural'. This 'natural' distinction stems from Palamas' belief, in concert with much patristic writing (particularly found in Maximus the Confessor), that 'the guarantee of the existence of every essence is its natural energy' (*Tr* 3.2.7).¹² Palamas is adamant (with an emphasis never as clear before him) that this maxim is applicable to God, and consequently, 'the divine and unknowable οὐσία, if it did not possess an ἐνέργεια distinct from itself, would be totally non-existent and would only have been a product of the imagination' (*Cap* 136). The presence of ἐνέργεια in God thus guarantees the existence of the οὐσία, since without it, God would be immanently 'non-existent'. And economically, without ἐνέργεια God would be unable to act (ἐνεργεῖν) in the world, even to reveal himself, and so would of necessity be a human invention, a figment of the mind's eye. The distinction thus functions to

¹⁰ For more on Palamas and the theme of light, see V. Lossky, "The Theology of Light in the Thought of St. Gregory Palamas," in idem., *In the image and likeness of God* (SVS Press, 1985) 45-70.

¹¹ In a certain sense, the essence-energies distinction is a theological elaboration on scriptural passages such as 'God is a consuming fire' (Deut 4.24, Heb 12.29), 'God is light' (1Jn 1.5), 'God is love' (1Jn 4.8, 16), etc.

¹² Interestingly, Palamas maintains he is quoting Basil here, and claims Gregory of Nyssa says something similar, but the reference(s) have yet to be identified. However, a link was pointed out to me by Dr. J. Zachhuber in a sentence from the fragmentary *Tractatus ad Xenodorum* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 117.14.4-5) attributed to Gregory of Nyssa: 'we call ἐνέργεια the natural power and motion of each οὐσία without which a nature could neither be nor be recognised'.

assure not merely the possibility of genuine participation in the divine life, but to assure the existence of God in the first place. God must have immanent energies for Palamas, rooted in the trihypostatic οὐσία, which is in turn rooted in and guaranteed by the Father (cf. *Contra Akindynum* 1.7.98).¹³

Such is a basic overview of Palamite essence-energies theology. Palamas requires that God's actions each be divine—'natural' to the divine οὐσία and consequently uncreated—to justify God's capacity for authentically revealing himself to the world, and ultimately deifying the human being. It is consistently the reality of deification, of true communion between God and man, that serves as the basic motivation for the distinction. Only then, according to Palamas, can we begin to come to terms with the scriptural revelation of a God at once transcendent yet among us, hidden yet self-revealing. As embodied in the *Hagioritic Tome*, Palamas' essence-energies theology was ratified by three ecclesiastical councils held at Constantinople in 1341, 1347, and 1351 respectively.

Having set the stage somewhat, we can now focus our attention on the Cappadocians. How the essence-energies distinction fits into the broader Eastern Orthodox tradition has already been given some attention.¹⁴ However, detailed analyses are lacking, and arguments for precedents (particularly in the Cappadocians) tend to involve cursory citation of one or two texts, especially Basil's *Ep* 234.1, without further investigation. In what follows I intend to do justice to the Cappadocian approaches to the ἐνέργειαι of God, and suggest an approach to discovering precedents for Palamite thought which goes beyond simply citing statements containing the word ἐνέργεια.

¹³ The question of the Father's μοναρχία in both Palamite and Cappadocian theology is an important one, especially in the realm of their divine ontologies, but cannot be addressed here. Suffice it to mention that in theological discourse, Palamas and each of the Cappadocians take the 'monarchy' of the Father as a given. Compare the following passages: *Procesione* 1.12, *Ep* 1.2 (Palamas); *De Spiritu Sancto* 18.45–7 (SC 17) (Basil); *Or* 40.41 (SC 358), 42.15 (SC 384), though note *Or* 29.2 (SC 250) (Gregory Nazianzen); *Contra Eunomium* 1.36 (GNO 1.1.530–2) (Gregory Nyssen). For discussions of the significance of the μοναρχία of the Father in patristic theology, see for instance, J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (SVS Press, 1985) 26–66, and J. Behr, *Formation of Christian Theology: The Nicene Faith* vol. 2 (SVS Press, 2004) 306–7.

¹⁴ The topic is treated to some extent by J. Meyendorff, *St. Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe* (Editions du Seuil, 1959) and V. Lossky, *Vision de Dieu* (Delachaux & Niestlé, 1962), though with more concentration on later writers (such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the

Basil's Concept of the Knowledge of God: An Analysis of Epp 233-5 to Amphilocius¹⁵

Basil's staunch affirmation of the incomprehensibility of God's nature, which had become a central part of his theology through the controversy with Eunomius, led him to argue for something which may well look akin to Palamas' thought. As Meredith puts it, Basil 'found himself compelled to defend himself against the charge of agnosticism [...] and developed a distinction between the incomprehensible being and the comprehensible activity of God'.¹⁶ What Meredith has in mind is *Ep* 234, part of a collection of letters (*Epp* 231-6) to Amphilocius, bishop of Iconium (dated 375-6) which focus (especially *Epp* 233-5) on *θεογνωσία*. There are two currents in Basil's *θεογνωσία* discernable from these letters which turn on knowledge either as a begetting of belief in the existence of God, or as communion with God through the Spirit. The second of these is described in *Ep* 233, though with no mention of *ἐνέργεια*.¹⁷ The process of *θεογνωσία*

Confessor, and Symeon the New Theologian) rather than earlier. H.F. Hägg attempts to integrate Clement of Alexandria into the Palamite 'lineage' in *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (OUP, 2006) 264ff, and Zizioulas argues that the roots of the essence-energies distinction lie in Gregory of Nazianzus' *Or* 38.7 in *Being as Communion* 91n75. Articles also exist on the subject: see G. Habra "The Sources of the Doctrine of Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 12.6-7 (1958) 244-51, 294-303; G. Florovsky, "Saint Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 5.2 (Winter, 1959-60) 119-131; L.C. Contos, "The Essence-Energies Structure of Saint Gregory Palamas with a Brief Examination of its Patristic Foundation," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12.3 (1967) 283-94; L.H. Grondijs, "The Patristic Origins of Gregory Palamas' Doctrine of God," *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972) 323-8; J.-P. Houdret, "Palamas et les Cappadociens," *Istina* 19 (1974) 260-71; K. Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence-Energies Distinction," *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1975) 125-136 and "The Debate about Palamism," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977) 45-63, which responds to R. Williams, "The Philosophical Structures of Palamism," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977) 27-44; and see also E.D. Moutsoulas, "'Essence' et 'energies' de Dieu selon Gregoire de Nysse," *Studia Patristica* 18.3 (Peeters Leuven, 1983) 517-28; more recently see Bradshaw's *Aristotle East and West* and his articles "The Divine Energies in the New Testament," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006) 189-223 and "The Divine Glory and the Divine Energies," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006) 279-98.

¹⁵ The edition consulted is that of Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile. Lettres* vol. 3 (Les Belles Lettres, 1966).

¹⁶ A. Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1995) 23.

¹⁷ For this approach, *DSS* 18.47 (SC 17) is also worth consultation.

begins, for the believer, from the νοῦς whose duty is the apprehension of truth, truth being God himself. Assenting 'to its more divine part' by accepting the graces of the Spirit it 'becomes more divine, as far as is commensurate with its nature'. It beholds the divine beauty, 'though only so far as grace imparts and its nature receives' (§1). If the mind has 'yielded to the aid of the Spirit, it will have understanding of the truth, and will know God' (§2).

In *Ep* 234, however, the first current (knowledge leading to faith) emerges. 'To know' (τὸ εἰδέναι), Basil claims, 'has many meanings' (§1). The text goes on to introduce a basic proposition: while one may say he knows God in his wisdom, power, goodness, etc., one may never say he knows God's essence. Neither can such attributes of God be defined *as* the essence, since the essence is simple, and unknowable. Rather, in an oft-quoted passage,

αἱ μὲν ἐνέργειαι ποικίλαι, ἡ δὲ οὐσία ἀπλῆ. Ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐκ μὲν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν γνωρίζειν λέγομεν τὸν Θεὸν ἡμῶν, τῇ δὲ οὐσίᾳ αὐτῇ προσεγγίζειν οὐχ ὑπισχνούμεθα. Αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐνέργειαι αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταβαίνουσιν, ἡ δὲ οὐσία αὐτοῦ μένει ἀπρόσιτος.¹⁸

God is known from his energies. But it must be noticed that the use of ἐνέργειαι here can by no means be coterminous with Palamite divine uncreated energies.¹⁹ Basil goes on to cite the example of the disciples, who recognised the Godhead of Christ from the obedience of the sea and winds: 'therefore from the ἐνέργειαι is the knowledge, and from the knowledge is the worship [...] We know God from his power. We, therefore, believe in him who is known, and we worship him who is believed in' (§3). The

¹⁸ *Ep* 234.1.27-31: 'The activities are various, the essence simple. But we ourselves say that we know our God from the activities, but do not venture to draw near to the essence itself. For his activities come down to us, but his essence remains unapproachable'.

¹⁹ This against the trend displayed by countless scholars who take them as such: cf. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West* 166-7; Contos, "The essence-energies structure of Saint Gregory Palamas" 286; Florovsky, "Saint Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers" 130; Habra, "The Sources of the Doctrine of Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies" 296; Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria* 265; V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (James Clarke, 1957) 72; G.C. Stead, *Divine Substance* (OUP, 1977) 279; Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed" 129; K. Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Penguin, 1997) 68; J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: further studies in Personhood and the Church* (T&T Clark, 2006) 21 (although see his qualifications, especially pp. 28-9), etc.

'knowledge of God' gained by observation of the ἐνέργειαι (the movements of the forces of nature) in this letter is belief in God, or faith. This is explicitly a preliminary stage to being a 'true worshipper' or believer, i.e. it is only the initial step of the θεογνωσία process which continues with the kind of knowledge discussed in *Ep* 233. The reference to ἐνέργειαι is noteworthy, but it can tell us little vis-à-vis Palamite precedents apart from the fact that in this case the term was used differently by Basil than by 'Palamism'.

The term ἐνέργειαι is used by Basil in *Ep* 234 for awe-inspiring activities, and though not explicitly limited to them, the implication seems to be that the first stage of knowledge of God (belief in him/faith) is obtained solely through the observation of God's activities in the created world.²⁰ But terminology is by no means everything. It seems little short of axiomatic to maintain that a terminological discrepancy need not imply a conceptual one.²¹ The exact definition of ἐνέργεια is not conclusively 'created acts' for Basil.²² Nevertheless, its predominant use as such invites a deeper investigation, beyond this terminological impasse.

The same point as that made in *Ep* 234 is presented in *Ep* 235: 'in our belief about God, first comes the idea that God is. This we gather from his works (ἐκ τῶν δημιουργημάτων). For as we perceive his wisdom, his goodness, and all his invisible qualities as shown in the creation of the world, so we recognise him' (§1). He continues with the same outline of θεογνωσία as a process: 'this knowledge is followed by faith, and this faith by worship' (ibid.), but this is not all of knowledge, which (he states again) 'has many meanings' (§2). The theme of this epistle ultimately rests on an actual knowledge of God taken together with the impossibility of knowing his essence. There is likewise a hint of not really knowing the essence of anything: 'I know indeed who I am, but, so far as I am ignorant of my essence I do not know myself' (ibid.). If knowledge of God's essence is categorically

²⁰ Akindynos picks up on this point in his arguments against Palamas (*Refutatio* 3.85). Palamas himself does cite *Ep* 234.1 on several occasions (note especially *Energies* 19 and 39, and *Dialogue* 42), although he generally does not take it as a straightforward exposition of his views. A simple testimony to this is the absence of any explicit reference to the passage in either *Triads* or *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, generally regarded as Gregory's most important theological works.

²¹ Likewise, a superficial terminological similarity need not imply conceptual kinship, especially when such a large intervening time-period is in question.

²² Cf. for instance DSS 9.22 (SC 17) in conjunction with DSS 18.47 (SC 17).

omitted, what kind of knowledge remains? Basil gives an answer: ‘I repeat, knowledge is manifold—it involves perception of our Creator, recognition of his wonderful works, observance of his commandments, and co-dwelling with him (ἡ οἰκείωσις ἡ πρὸς αὐτόν)’ (§3).

While in *Ep* 234 he came to deal with the knowledge of God that precedes faith, here Basil develops his gnosiology to include ‘observance of [God’s] commandments and οἰκείωσις with him’. Man comes to a knowledge of God through perception of him in the created order and through his mighty acts (ἐνέργειαι). Through these faith is obtained, which leads to true worship (presupposing a submissive νοῦς), which in turn gives rise to an οἰκείωσις with God himself. This, in sum, is Basil’s gnosiology. Whilst ἐνέργειαι are left behind, it seems, after the acquisition of faith, the further aspects of Basil’s gnosiological structure are reasonably consonant with that of Palamas.²³ To suggest a way of approaching precedents to the Palamite distinction in the Cappadocians without making the *faux pas* of invoking statements of questionable relevance, I will concentrate on Basil’s notion of οἰκείωσις.

Basil on οἰκείωσις with God, and its Implications for the Discussion of Palamite Precedents

The greatest height of θεογνωσία in Basil’s list at *Ep* 235.3 is οἰκείωσις with God. It occurs again in the final sentence of the same epistle in an interpretation of 2 Tim 2.19 (‘the Lord knows those that are his’). This οἰκείωσις is used elsewhere in Basil to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son (*Adversus Eunomium* 2.23; 28),²⁴ and between the three ὑποστάσεις (*Ad Eun* 3.3). It is also used in the same breath at *Ad Eun* 2.4 of the Father-Son relationship and that of the Father-worshipper: the term ‘Father’ implies not the name of a passion (i.e. the material act of begetting), Basil argues, but of an οἰκείωσις, which is either accorded by grace, as with men, or by nature, as with the Only-Begotten.²⁵ This is strik-

²³) As already outlined above, it cannot be forgotten that Palamas’ distinction between essence and energies is wholly dependent on his vision of the knowledge of God, which culminates in θέωσις: see especially Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, for more on this topic.

²⁴) The text employed is SC 305.

²⁵) ἡ τῆς κατὰ χάριν, ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἡ τῆς κατὰ φύσιν, ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ μονογενοῦς (PG 29.625).

ingly similar in tone to the phrase favoured in Byzantine theology: man becomes god by grace, not by nature. In fact, later in the same passage, Basil declares the possibility of deification.²⁶

Man becoming θεός is not absent from Basil's writings. The process, of course, presupposes the οἰκονομία by which Christ recalls man from disobedience to 'οἰκείωσις with God' (cf. *De Spiritu Sancto* 15.35).²⁷ Its most striking presence is in *DSS* 9.23 where the highest of all the activities of the Spirit in man is making him a god (θεὸν γενέσθαι). This crowning sanctification is tantamount to Basil's preferred phrase of 'οἰκείωσις with God', and relies on the two master prerequisites seen in his gnosiological structure, the action of the Spirit and the state of man: 'according to the capacity, not of [the Spirit's] power, but of their nature' (*DSS* 9.22). Sanctification is synonymous, in other words, with θεογνωσία, realised in οἰκείωσις. This sanctification, whose highest expression is an οἰκείωσις with God (to the extent of being called θεός), is explained in *DSS* 9.22. The Spirit supplies through himself illumination to every faculty in search of truth. Basil proceeds to elaborate on the person of the Spirit:

Ἀπόσιτον τῇ φύσει· χωρητὸν δι' ἀγαθότητα· πάντα μὲν πληροῦν τῇ δυνάμει, μόνοις δὲ ὃν μεθεκτὸν τοῖς ἀξίοις, οὐχ ἐνὶ μέτρῳ μετεχόμενον, ἀλλὰ κατ' ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως διαιροῦν τὴν ἐνέργειαν. Ἀπλοῦν τῇ οὐσίᾳ, ποικίλον ταῖς δυνάμεσιν· ὅλον ἐκάστῳ παρὸν καὶ ὅλον ἀπανταχοῦ ὄν.²⁸

In musing on the work of the Spirit in human sanctification, Basil's phraseology appears to be little short of Palamite *avant la lettre*. One might even suggest that he challenges his own 'general-particular' argument seen in *Ep* 236.6, which seems to be limited to an unknowable, unnameable οὐσία together with three ὑποστάσεις, without mention of divine powers.

This is furthered by the fact that elsewhere in *DSS* he puts forward the idea that the divine attributes are inherently 'natural' to the three persons,

²⁶ 'They who are made perfect in virtue are deemed worthy of the title of God'.

²⁷ While Christological concerns lie beyond the scope of this study, they are certainly central to both Cappadocian and Palamite approaches to sanctification. For some provocative thoughts on the relationship between essence-energies theology and Christology, see Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* 19-32.

²⁸ *DSS* 9.22.29-34 (SC 17): 'Unapproachable by nature, apprehended because of goodness; filling all things with power, but being shared only with the worthy; not shared in one measure, but distributing the energy according to the proportion of faith; in essence simple, in powers various: being wholly present in each, and wholly everywhere'.

extending from the Father through the Son to the Spirit. Thus he describes the 'goodness' and 'holiness' of God as φυσικός and κατὰ φύσιν (cf. *DSS* 18.47), a point made in the context of human sanctification.²⁹ Touching on inherent attributes of God (stemming from an acknowledgment of a human being's genuine capacity to know God, even become θεός) τὸ κοινόν in God embraces not simply the divine οὐσία, but also the attributes of God. Basil goes no further than this, and nowhere does he present a clear or coherent analysis of the implications of such thought for his theology. But that should hardly be surprising, given the absence of any developed οὐσία/ὑπόστασις distinction until his own innovative work, let alone the need to delineate essence from energies. What is most striking is that in thinking about God and how he acts on man, and how man experiences him, Basil is thinking very much along lines that Palamas would later take: God in οἰκείωσις by nature gives man the opportunity to join in such an οἰκείωσις, though not by nature. To explain this is barely on Basil's mind, but he nevertheless hints at the theological implications of the process: to raise man to the dignity of God, God himself must be acting, 'wholly present' in his sanctifying power. It is in exploring this kind of thinking that precedents for Palamite theology can be more concretely gleaned, without relying on statements which in their context do not seem to support a Palamite reading.

Gregory of Nazianzus Speaking of God and Activity

Gregory of Nazianzus is rarely drawn upon in the discussion of Palamite precedents. However, it is with him that the most detailed vision of θέωσις emerges, which lies at the heart of Palamas' essence-energies distinction.³⁰ Here I will look briefly at Gregory's use of ἐνέργεια before going beyond in an effort to contribute more concretely to a theological investigation for precedents.

²⁹) ἡ φυσικὴ ἀγαθότης, καὶ ὁ κατὰ φύσιν ἁγιασμός, καὶ τὸ βασιλικὸν ἀξίωμα, ἐκ Πατρός, διὰ τοῦ Μονογενοῦς, ἐπὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα διήκει (*DSS* 18.47.19-21 [SC 17]).

³⁰) Gregory is the first known author to employ the noun θέωσις in Christian literature, though the concept, as well as the verbal forms ἀποθεῶ/θεοποιῶ, were not new. For a discussion of the development of deification thought, see N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (OUP, 2004). Important instances in Gregory's works include *Or* 21.2 (SC 270); 25.2, 16 (SC 284); 34.12 (SC 318); 45.7 (PG 36.633); and cf. *Ep* 101.21 (SC 208) on Christ (θεοῦ μὲν ἐνανθρωπήσαντος, ἀνθρώπου δὲ θεωθέντος).

In *Or* 29.16 Gregory describes the Father in terms of relation (σχέσις), in an attempt to preserve both the distinction of the persons and the ὁμοούσιον. The alternatives to σχέσις dealt with by Gregory merit attention, namely οὐσία and ἐνέργεια. The name 'Father', he argues, is 'neither of an essence nor an energy'; his preference is for σχέσις. But once that point is established and explained, he goes on to address the possibility of the name 'Father' being ascribed to 'essence' and 'energy'. The result, he says, will be the same. In the case of οὐσία/φύσις (he uses the terms interchangeably) 'it [the name 'Father'] will still bring in the idea of Son, and will not make it of a different nature'. Then he considers ἐνέργεια: 'you will not defeat us in this way either. The ὁμοούσιον would be indeed the result of this ἐνέργεια [that is, of the Father], or otherwise the conception of an ἐνέργεια in this matter would be absurd'. Far from ontologically relativising the various terms—σχέσις, οὐσία, and ἐνέργεια—Gregory is doing so merely on a linguistic level, once the basis for such relativisation has been established. Relation, essence, and energy are not the same, but each can be applied to 'Father' so long as the interpretations refer back to relation.³¹ The significance lies in the presence of ἐνέργεια alongside σχέσις and οὐσία. What is it doing there, and what does it tell us about Gregory's theology?

The word ἐνέργεια is there in the first place because Gregory's opponents (Eunomians in this case) challenge him to ascribe 'Father' either to an essence or an energy. Yet the term ἐνέργεια obviously holds some theological significance, since far from dismissing it, Gregory both accepts it and turns it to exposing his own theological stance, namely that the Father is best ascribed to σχέσις. A significant point can be gleaned if we bear in mind Basil's unclear use of the word, applying it most obviously to God's created manifestations of power. At first Gregory admits that 'if we say that [the Father] is the name of an ἐνέργεια, we shall be supposed to acknowledge plainly that the Son is created and not begotten'. Thus ἐνέργεια is assumed here to presuppose a created act. Later, however, the term ἐνέργεια is used instead for σχέσις and explicitly for the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, which for the three Cappadocians involves no 'createness'. The term ἐνέργεια may generally have meant a created act, but it evidently also had the capacity, in Gregory's eyes, to convey the uncreated

³¹ It might be worth pointing out something of a parallel in Palamas, in that he could also speak of the Son and Spirit as ἐνέργεια, but only when the term was redefined to mean 'hypostatic energies' (of the Father): see Meyendorff, *Introduction* 219.

and eternal relatedness of Father and Son. This fluidity and lack of precision should of course make us cautious in our investigation of Cappadocian ἐνέργεια, but, as in Basil's case, by no means rules out the possibility of finding precedents for Palamite theology.³²

A sense of God's attributes as ontologically immanent emerges at *Or* 23.11, in which each person of the Trinity is described as 'holiness itself' (αὐτοαγιότης).³³ This is essentially the same point as the 'inherent holiness' put forward by Basil. Holiness is shared in the Trinity's common οὐσία. Following in Basil's anti-Eunomian footsteps, the οὐσία cannot be defined as holiness, however, since it is beyond definition. The delineation of activity and nature in God thus begins to come to light: 'the three [persons] are one God, perceived by virtue of the identity of their movement and nature'.³⁴ According to Gregory, God's movement tells us something about his being itself. Hanson argues that an awareness of some kind of distinction between essence and activity—whether unconscious or not is hard to tell—exists: Gregory's theology of relationship entails both, yet 'this is never explained'.³⁵ But is it explainable? Gregory's treatments of the Holy Spirit and sanctification help answer this.

Gregory of Nazianzus on the Holy Spirit and Deification

Oration 31 (or the *Fifth Theological Oration*) treats of the Holy Spirit.³⁶ The whole text revolves around the argument that the Spirit is a true ὑπόστασις of the Trinity. Here Gregory lays down a fundamental tenet of later Palamite essence-energies theology by arguing that the Trinity is united 'in

³² Another confusing passage in which the term ἐνέργεια is theologically applied is *Or* 31.6. Here the possibility of the Spirit being an ἐνέργεια is excluded on the grounds that an energy, being in this case an act or movement (like a word spoken), has a beginning and an end. Gregory's preoccupation, however, is not with energies, but with the Spirit as trinitarian hypostasis. The definition he uses for ἐνέργεια here is, as in the preceding example, not absolute, and consequently cannot hold as strictly applicable to his 'immanent' theology. Palamas runs into interpretational problems here on the assumption that it does (see *Cap* 128–31).

³³ ἅγια καὶ αὐτοαγιότητα· θεὸν ἕκαστον (SC 270.23.11; PG 35.1164)

³⁴ θεὸν τὰ τρία, μετ' ἀλλήλων νοούμενα τῷ ταύτῳ τῆς κινήσεως καὶ τῆς φύσεως (ibid.)

³⁵ See R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (T&T Clark, 1988), 712.

³⁶ The text followed is that of SC 358.

essence and in power' (§16).³⁷ These 'powers' of God 'exist in' (ἐνυπάρχω) him without being hypostatic (§32). This text gives one of the clearest sets of precedents for the later Palamite concept of essence-energies. But it must be remembered that these references are relatively fleeting—Gregory's concern is with defending the Spirit as God and true ὑπόστασις of the Trinity, consubstantial with the Father and the Son, not with divine powers. Nevertheless, the references are important: God's powers are distinguished quite directly from both essence and person. Moreover, they are not only mentioned being explicitly 'in' God, but, in the same breath as the οὐσία, as a common property of the three ὑποστάσεις. Affirming this double unity pushes Basil's 'general/particular' argument further, or at least clarifies it somewhat, making what is 'general' or shared in God both οὐσία and δύναμις.

The manner in which Gregory is thinking about God here is striking, but the motive cannot be forgotten: deification. In §28 he says: 'if he [the Spirit] is not to be worshipped, how can he deify me by baptism?'³⁸ The point emerges more forcefully in *Or* 34.12: 'I cannot believe that I am saved by one who is my equal [i.e. a creature]. If the Holy Spirit is not God, let him first be made God, and then let him deify me to be his equal.'³⁹ This direct experience of God, the process of deification, is the thematic basis for much of Gregory's work, and this is inextricably linked with God's powers, actions, or energies. In the passage just mentioned it goes so far as to govern his theological method. And it is here, rather than in terminological explorations, that a delineation of essence and energies along lines later taken by Palamas begins to show. To pursue this argument, an obvious conceptual intersection between Palamas and Gregory Nazianzen can be addressed: the theme of light.

³⁷ Cf. also *Or* 42.15 (SC 384): the three ὑποστάσεις are united 'without distinction of time, of will, or of power'. Worth an aside is the fact that the Cappadocians (like Palamas) do not seem to acknowledge, or at least work with, the Aristotelian distinction between ἐνέργεια and δύναμις; they act more or less synonymously.

³⁸ εἰ μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲ προσκυνητόν, πῶς ἐμὲ θεοῖ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος—note the link between baptism and deification. Though ecclesiological concerns cannot be looked at thoroughly here, this and another instance of deification with an unequivocally ecclesiastical context deserves attention, namely the 'rites of deification' (μυσταγωγούντος τὴν θέωσιν) served at the altar, in *Or* 25.2 (SC 284). Deification by the Spirit is never to be separated in Gregory, or the Cappadocians as a whole, from the life of true worship, which equates with the life of the Church. This is true also for Palamas, for which see Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, ch. 2.

³⁹ The text is found in SC 318.

God is the true light which ‘lightens every man coming into the world’ (cf. Jn 1.9). Interpreting Ps 36.9, ‘in your light shall we see light’, Gregory uses Jn 1.9 to apply light to each person of the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Spirit are each ‘the true light’, ‘light thrice repeated; but one light and one God’ (*Or* 31.3). It is through this light, i.e. through illumination, that we come to know and experience God: ‘now we have both seen and proclaimed concisely and simply the doctrine of God the Trinity, comprehending out of light (the Father), light (the Son), in light (the Holy Spirit)’ (ibid.). The theme of knowledge of God in Gregory is hard to pin down, always giving way to the theme of encounter: comprehending God is always experiencing him, and this is bound up for Gregory with light. *Or* 40.5 begins quoting 1 John and elaborating: “‘God is light’ (1 Jn 1.5): the highest, the unapproachable, the ineffable [...] He is in the world of thought, what the sun is in the world of sense⁴⁰ [...] pouring himself out upon what is external to him’.⁴¹ Light is thus integral to God’s being, specifically not external. He talks further concerning it: ‘that light, I mean, which is contemplated in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, whose riches is their unity of nature, and the one outleaping of their brightness’ (ibid.). God is united in himself not only in οὐσία, but in ‘brightness’; again the twofold aspect of τὸ κοινόν in God emerging. It is this light which leads man to God. Significantly, it is also this divine light which appeared to the disciples at the transfiguration: ‘light was that Godhead which was shown upon the mount to the disciples—and a little too strong for their eyes’ (§6). Gregory is the keenest of the three Cappadocians on the theme of the transfiguration. He says again, ‘on the mountain he was bright as lightning, and became more luminous than the sun, initiating us into the mystery of the future’ (*Or* 29.19),⁴² and elsewhere, ‘in my view, he will come as he appeared or was manifested to the disciples on the mountain, the divine triumphing over the corporeal’ (*Ep* 101). While it would

⁴⁰ Cf. Basil’s ‘What sensible light is to the eye, God the Word is to the soul’, *Ad Eun* 2.16. Basil reserves the ‘light which lightens every man coming into the world’ to the Son/Word, a privilege which Gregory subsequently appears to apply to all three persons.

⁴¹ SC 358.

⁴² SC 250; cf. Pelikan’s conclusion that in this phrase we find a key to understanding all of Cappadocian thought on deification: ‘the outcome of the entire *economy* of salvation was nothing less than the very transfiguration or *metamorphosis* of human nature’, J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (Yale, 1993) 278–9. His argument, by putting so much weight on this line, comes across as strained, but nonetheless his conclusion appears fair.

be wrong to describe this interest in the transfiguration and its light as straightforward Palamism, Gregory at least says this: what is corporeal (τὸ σαρκίον) is enlightened by the divine light, which is shared by the three ὑποστάσεις along with their common οὐσία, and indeed, the uncreated God is this light.

The ultimate goal of the illumination wrought by God for Gregory is, of course, θέωσις: the first-created man was 'deified by its inclination to God: for to this, I think, tends that light of truth which here we possess but in measure; that we should both see and experience the splendour of God' (*Or* 45.7). After human error and the fall, man began and continued to disintegrate in vice until 'at last he needed a stronger remedy' (cf. *ibid*). Thus Christ came, the Word of God 'invisible, incomprehensible, bodiless, beginning of beginning, light of light' to his own image, 'one person in two natures, flesh and Spirit, of which the latter deified the former' (*Or* 45.9). The basis for Gregory's deification model is the incarnate Christ. He goes on: 'O new commingling! O strange conjunction! The self-existent comes into being, the uncreated is created [...] he assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the riches of his Godhead' (*ibid*. cf. 2 Cor 8.9). The relational aspect of this deification experience should not be underestimated. In being so fundamental a part of his thought on the trinitarian life, it sheds light too on man joining this life, where 'God may, to use a bold expression, hold converse with us as God' (*Or* 45.3; 38.7). The human being's σχέσις with God involves raising the former to the latter's dignity, a relationship fulfilled in light.

It is by virtue of Gregory's approach to experience or relationship with God, especially via God's light, amounting to θέωσις, that an immanent distinction between the essence and energies of God begins to find a concrete place in his theology. Having a claim for the θέωσις of man inevitably raises questions about its logistics, seeing that God is regarded as unknowable and imparticipable. Gregory's love of paradox and differing theological agendas generally prevent us catching him with any firm explanations; he either merely affirms the reality of θέωσις, or does not broach the topic at all. But in dealing with the theme of relationship with God, Gregory is constantly bringing in theological and trinitarian themes,⁴³ and it is in these passages that he brings in the current so vital to our study, namely a

⁴³ The three main *Orations* by Gregory dealt with above—29, 31 and 45—refer to both his views on God in himself and those on sanctification/θέωσις: the themes are practically inseparable for him.

definite distinction between God's 'nature and his movement', 'essence and power', 'nature and brightness', in other terms, between his οὐσία and ἐνέργεια. This arises from the need for Gregory's imparticipable God to be participable. The deified person is not made a trinitarian ὑπόστασις, nor is he subsumed in God's οὐσία (let alone does he become it), but he is nevertheless made θεός. Subsequently for Gregory the energies (particularly light) which bring this about must be common to the three ὑποστάσεις just as the οὐσία is: the powers or ἐνέργειαι are consequently beginning to be seen as an immanent aspect of God's uncreated being. But care must be employed so as not to attribute to Gregory more than is justifiable. The distinction between the essence and energies of God, while implied in Gregory's vision of sanctification, is never a theme all to itself. The distinction is there, and comes above all (perhaps exclusively) from passages in which encounter with God or θέωσις are relevant to and a thematic setting for discussion of trinitarian themes. With this conclusion in mind, the result of an attempt to argue for precedents to Palamite essence-energies theology with due care, we approach the thought of Gregory of Nyssa.

Gregory of Nyssa on Divine Names and Energies⁴⁴

To study Gregory of Nyssa for possible precedents to Palamite theology, an emphasis must be placed on his allusions to an immanent presence of God within the divine names, activities, and attributes. For him, as for Basil and Gregory, every divine name 'is an interpretation of the things thought about the divine nature and does not encompass the significance of the nature itself'.⁴⁵ Where he becomes more original is in dealing with the term θεότης. Instead of encompassing the whole of God's being, he argues that, strictly speaking, it signifies 'ἐνέργεια and not nature'.⁴⁶ The deity of God itself is made into an ἐνέργεια of God, inasmuch as it 'extends through

⁴⁴ For discussions of Gregory's use of ἐνέργεια as well as δύναμις, with special reference to the debate with Eunomius, see M.R. Barnes, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two Traditions of Transcendent Causality," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52.1 (1998) 59-87, and idem., "Divine Unity and the Divided Self: Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology in its Psychological Context," *Modern Theology* 18.4 (2002) 475-496. Now see also G. Maspero, *Trinity and Man: Gregory of Nyssa's Ad Ablabium* (Brill, 2007) 31-8.

⁴⁵ Following Mueller's text of *Ad Ablabium quod non sint tres dei* in *Gregori Nysseni opera* vol. 3.1 (Brill, 1958) 37-57; this reference 42-3.

⁴⁶ ἐνέργειαν σημαίνειν καὶ οὐχὶ φύσιν τὸ τῆς θεότητος ὄνομα (GNO 3.1.46).

the holy Trinity'.⁴⁷ It is important to note that Gregory's equation of θεότης with an ἐνέργεια here should not be pushed as a conclusive argument for precedents in itself. His argument rests on θεότης being, etymologically, God's capacity to 'oversee', not God's 'deity' as such (as commonly understood). Nevertheless, there is a clear demarcation made in this epistle between God's nature and his energies, both of which are common to the three ὑποστάσεις. As with Gregory of Nazianzus, though with the term ἐνέργεια rather than δύναμις, Gregory of Nyssa goes on to describe God as united in both nature and energy.⁴⁸

While a definite notion of an essence-energies distinction surfaces in Gregory's thinking, it soon meets a challenge. Gregory persistently defends the unity of God's actions in *Ad Ablabium*, but are these actions inherent in God? The following is ambiguous: 'every ἐνέργεια which pervades from God to creation and is named according to our perception (ἔννοια) starts off from the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is completed by the Holy Spirit'.⁴⁹ The fact that they are named according to ἔννοια might suggest an absence of reality; they could simply be human perceptions based on God's created order to help intimate concerning the unknowable.⁵⁰ Such a reading is possible and cannot be ruled out immediately, but by looking at Gregory's concept of sanctification, more fecund and less ambiguous conclusions can be drawn.

The Possibility of Precedents in Gregory of Nyssa's Sanctification Thought

Sanctification is unequivocally the activity of each of the three trinitarian ὑποστάσεις, spelt out in a passage which (wittingly?) seems to challenge his brother's theology: 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit alike give sanctification, and life, and light, and comfort, and all similar graces. And

⁴⁷ GNO 3.1.42.

⁴⁸ διὰ τὸ μήτε φύσεως μήτε ἐνεργείας ἐνθεωρεῖσθαι τινα διαφορὰν τῇ θεότητι (GNO 3.1.55). Notice Gregory's fluidity of language: θεότης is used here, not as an energy, but to denote the 'complete' trinitarian God, united in essence and energies.

⁴⁹ GNO 3.1.47-8.

⁵⁰ For more on the particular use of ἔννοια as well as ἐπίνοια ('conception') by Gregory and the Cappadocians more generally (in the context of the Eunomian controversy), see the enduringly helpful comments in W. Moore and H.A. Wilson, *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory of Nyssa* (NPNF vol. 5, T&T Clark, 1892) 249.

let no one attribute the power of sanctification in an especial sense to the Spirit'.⁵¹ This is a natural conclusion when considering Gregory's staunch insistence that God's actions are done in unity. The sanctification of the Christian is an action given by and common to the Trinity. As with Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, it depends on the *mode de vie* of the recipient, namely in Nyssen the 'life of virtue'. Life, both here and in the hereafter, is a constant straining towards the unattainable and infinite God. As this process of sanctification is a common action of the Trinity, it is never taken to stand outside or independently of God: 'certainly whoever pursues true virtue participates in nothing other than God, because he is himself absolute virtue (ἡ παντελὴς ἀρετή)'.⁵² The double aspect of interaction with God seen in Basil is likewise always in mind for Gregory. It depends on personal ἐπέκτασις, but this ceaseless progression is nothing if not nourished by God himself.

The sanctifying activity of God as in some sense distinguishable from his οὐσία arguably comes out more strikingly in Gregory than his two peers because of his indefatigable insistence on God's unknowability, and the 'darkness' of the divine. Spiritual experience is often characterised in Gregory with the phrase 'from light to darkness'.⁵³ This is not the darkness of non-being, but the 'luminous darkness' of the searchless one.⁵⁴ Such a characterization is Gregory grappling with the dilemma of Christian experience. Here God is seen, but 'this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness'.⁵⁵ In another place too, the sixth homily of *De Beatitudinibus*, the same battle is plainly in view. Here Gregory faces the problem of Christian experience directly, confronting as he does the sixth Matthean beatitude, 'blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Mt 5.8). The words of the gospel are true, to be sure, but so too are Paul's that he has not seen God nor can see him

⁵¹) GNO 3.1.11; cf. Basil's *Ep* 236.6.

⁵²) *De Vita Moysis* 1.7 (SC 1).

⁵³) The classic, and in many ways unsurpassed, text on Gregory's spirituality is J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Editions Montaigne, 1953). However, see also M. Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence* (OUP, 2004), especially 174–204, who argues amongst other things that Gregory presents a 'mysticism of light' as much as a 'mysticism of darkness'.

⁵⁴) *De Vita Moysis* 2.163 (SC 1).

⁵⁵) *Ibid.*

(cf. Eph 1.19; 3.7; Phil 3.21), as are John's, that 'no one has ever seen God' (Jn 1.18; 1 Jn 4.12). 'Seeing', then, needs at least two interpretations to surmount this problem. It is true that seeing God is impossible, but this kind of seeing implies for Gregory comprehension of the divine nature. The seeing inferred by the beatitude cannot involve such vision. Here there comes another oft-quoted reference to ἐνέργεια:

Ὁ γὰρ τῇ φύσει ἀόρατος, ὁρατὸς ταῖς ἐνεργείαις γίνεται, ἔν τισι τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν καθορώμενος.⁵⁶

Gregory continues, however, pointing out that 'the ability to infer something of the nature of the agent from his activity (ἐνέργεια) is not the sole purpose of the beatitude'.⁵⁷ The line is thereby drawn between the 'wise of this world' who can perceive something of God from 'the harmonious order of the universe', and those who fully participate in this beatitude. There are two kinds of knowledge of God at work here, and the second is evidently the only one of real value for Gregory. He points this out with an analogy: the one who praises health while living on a sickly and unwholesome diet does not gain any advantages for his own health. In the same way, simply knowing or seeing God from his ἐνέργεια is not the same as knowing or seeing him in the sense of direct experience. Surely this is a similar argument to that of Basil made in *Epp* 233-5 (though with a more disparaging view of knowledge leading to belief in itself). The use of ἐνέργεια is restricted to the created world, the 'harmonious order of the universe'. Thus, just as isolated use of *Ep* 234.1 to justify Palamite precedents is unwarranted, the same applies here.⁵⁸ But it is Gregory's further discussion of sanctification which is of greater interest for an examination of his views in conjunction with those of Palamas.

The dichotomy in Gregory's argument lies not so much between the ἐνέργεια themselves and divine experience, as between perceiving the ἐνέργεια and experiencing God. Gregory continues by linking the idea of

⁵⁶ PG 44.1269: 'For [God] who is by nature invisible, is visible in his activities, being perceived in those things that are around him'.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ V. Lossky uses it for justification in *The Vision of God* (The Faith Press, 1973) 71; Houdret uses it to dismiss a conceptual link between Palamas and the Cappadocians in "Palamas et les Cappadociens" 261. A more balanced approach to the text is taken by Palamas himself: see *Contra Akindynum* 4.8.12.

seeing God with the phrase ‘the kingdom of God is within you’ (Lk 17.21), which in turn fits in with the life of virtue: by inner cleansing man beholds the archetype in his own image which has been fashioned by God, as the sun in a mirror. God will ‘impress’ on (ἐντυπώω) and ‘form’ (μορφώω) in the one who lives the virtuous life this pristine divine image. The content of the vision described in the beatitude, and consequently of this ‘divine image’, is ‘purity, holiness, simplicity, all the lightful rays of the divine nature, through which God is seen’.⁵⁹ Mentioning these attributes of God in this way, ‘the lightful rays’ of his φύσις, brings Gregory quite close to the thought of Palamas. The sanctifying action of these attributes is distinguishable from the theological perceptions gained through God’s ἐνέργειαι in creation (which lead to relative knowledge of what God is like) in the same way as Basil’s ‘knowledge of God’ gained through God’s ἐνέργειαι is delineated from θεογνωσία which begets οἰκεῖωσις. Looking briefly at where this more direct knowledge of God leads in Gregory opens up one or two fresh observations for the discussion of Palamite precedents.

Meredith points out that in general the concept of ἐπέκτασις in Gregory, being inherently dynamic, strains out language of θέωσις because of deification’s possible connotation of ‘finality’.⁶⁰ But as long as the gift of θέωσις is viewed as ever-increasing, it need not be at odds with the thought of the other two Cappadocians. Indeed, Gregory does not neglect the concept entirely. The idea surfaces most clearly in *Oratio catechetica magna*. The first reference comes in §35 relating to baptism. The sacrament acts as the means by which Christ’s assumed and deified (συναποθεώω) humanity becomes ours.⁶¹ In §36, the most salient point for our purposes emerges from the same discussion of baptism. Gregory asks a rhetorical question: how difficult is it ‘to believe that God is everywhere and that being in all things he is present with those who call upon him [...] and does that which properly belongs (ὁ οἰκεῖος) to him to do?’ Baptism is a work ‘properly belonging’ to God. This is immediately followed by: ‘now, the work properly belonging to the divine energy (τῆς θείας ἐνεργείας) is the salvation of those who need it’. The one cleansed ‘will participate in purity; and true purity is deity (ἡ θεότης)’. An arresting theology is evoked: God,

⁵⁹ PG 44.1272: καθαρότης, ὁ ἁγιασμός, ἡ ἀπλότης, πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα τὰ φωτοειδῆ τῆς θείας φύσεως ἀπαντάσματα, δι’ ὃν ὁ θεὸς ὁράται.

⁶⁰ See A. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (Routledge, 1999) 136.

⁶¹ The text used is that of Srawley, *The Catechetical Oration of Gregory of Nyssa* (CUP, 1903).

divine energy, salvation, purity, deity, all come together in the context of the human being's sanctification, of his or her deification. As with Basil and the other Gregory, fluidity of language is apparent, but an instinct for immanently distinguishing essence and energies in God still appears. This is precisely the kind of thinking which provides precedents for Palamite essence-energies theology: God deifies man by his powers, operations, energies, or names, the 'unchangeable' nature shining in the 'changeable' one.⁶²

These attributes of God—power, virtue, purity, θεότης, etc.—are the means to sanctification. While the implications of this are not drawn out in detail, what can be seen is an approach to God very similar to that of Palamas: partaking of divine attributes is existentially possible for human beings, and in this act of participation, the person is somehow partaking divinity itself. This is perhaps the point of most significance in tackling the issue of Palamite precedents in the Cappadocians. In view of God's utterly transcendent nature, all his names or attributes must be energies, moreover energies that are intrinsic to God's being, whether purity, virtue, goodness, holiness or, for that matter, θεότης. This theory arises from Gregory's concern for human sanctification: the sanctified human being communes existentially with the life of God. It is this principle that lies at the heart of Palamas' later firm distinction between essence and energies in God.

Conclusion

What has hopefully emerged is the fact that an examination of Cappadocian theology in the context of considering precedents for Palamism in the East is not a straightforward process, and while a worthwhile endeavour, it cannot be deemed a case of simply lining up texts which contain superficial terminological similarities and drawing wide-reaching conclusions. I have concentrated on the themes of sanctification and deification as more useful avenues for this kind of research, and tried to indicate some of the ways in

⁶² Cf. Gregory's description of the unchangeable character of the divine beauty shining in Moses' face in *In inscriptions Psalmorum* (GNO 5.45); and see *De Vita Moysis* 1.76 (SC 1). I sometimes wonder if there might be some further work to be done on the precise nature of ἐπέκτασις in Gregory. His references to deification do not seem to incorporate thoughts of 'infinite progress' as one might expect following Daniélou's reading. But then, this question demands a separate article, if not a book.

which these avenues might be exploited.⁶³ This is not to argue for a definitive answer to the question of precedents for Palamism in the Cappadocians, but to present a more convincing foundation built on an exploration of their own texts and ideas, not relying on statements out of context.

⁶³) By concentrating on deification, the thesis of this study inevitably questions a tendency to dismiss Cappadocian influence on the 'postpatristic tradition' of *θέωσις*, as demonstrated in A.N. Williams, *Ground of Union* 24. Here, in discussing the influence of earlier Christian writers on Palamas, she is quite swift to dismiss the Cappadocians: 'what we seldom find in the postpatristic tradition are themes deriving from the Cappadocians, for none of them treats theosis in any depth'. Surely this kind of statement, even in light of this short study, cannot be taken as strictly accurate.