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The Divine Processions and the Divine Energies

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The concept of the divine energies (*energeiai*) is commonly associated with the late Byzantine theologian Gregory Palamas. In fact, however, it has biblical origins and figures prominently in Greek patristic theology from at least the fourth century. Here I briefly trace its history beginning with the Pauline usage of *energeia* and continuing through the Cappadocian Fathers, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas. I argue that the divine processions in Dionysius function much as do the divine energies in the Cappadocians, although Dionysius enriches the concept by setting it within the context of a Neoplatonic pattern of procession and return. Dionysius’s own work was in need of a further synthesis in that he does not explain the relationship between the divine processions and the divine *logoi*, the “divine and good acts of will” by which God creates. Maximus the Confessor then introduced a further element into this complex tradition through his argument that certain “natural energies” must necessarily accompany any nature. I argue that the real importance of Palamas from the standpoint of the history of philosophy lies not in originating the concept of the divine energies, but in using it to synthesize these disparate elements from the Cappadocians, Dionysius, and Maximus.

Keywords: Cappadocian Fathers, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory Palamas, divine processions, divine *logoi*, divine energies, essence/energies distinction.

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The Greek patristic tradition offers a bafflingly wide array of ways of understanding what are today commonly referred to as the divine attributes. Various authors – or, sometimes, the same author in various places – refer to them as powers, energies, characteristics, processions, and “things around God” (or “around the divine nature”). These descriptions are rarely explained in any detail, so to understand what they mean and why an author chooses one over another requires careful attention both to that author’s aims and to the larger context. Although my main interest

in this paper is in the relationship between the divine processions and the divine energies, to understand this relationship properly requires taking into account the other terms as well. I will accordingly proceed chronologically, tracing briefly how each of these terms came to be introduced and what it contributed to later developments.

The question of what is meant by the names of the gods already provoked considerable discussion prior to Christianity. Plato in the *Cratylus* offers a number of speculative etymologies for the names of the gods, such as that ‘Zeus’ is derived from *zēn* (to live) plus *dia* (through), since Zeus is the one through whom all creatures have life¹. He admits, however, that we know nothing of the gods themselves, so that at best we can only inquire about the meaning of the names by which people call them². Xenophon in the *Memorabilia* similarly asserts that the gods are invisible and can be praised and worshiped only through their works³. The Stoics took this line of thought further, regarding the many names of the gods as names of the various powers (*dunameis*) of the one God⁴. A similar view was held by the author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*, who offers the analogy of God as like the Persian Great King, remaining seated on his throne while ruling the cosmos through his all-pervasive power⁵. God is one but has many names based on the many works He performs⁶. Finally – and most importantly – there is Philo of Alexandria, who applied a similar line of reasoning to the biblical God. For Philo the names said of God, including ‘God’ and ‘Lord,’ refer to the divine Powers, whereas the divine essence has no proper name⁷.

Christian authors, although not reifying the divine powers to the same extent as Philo, likewise regarded the divine names as properly naming only God’s activity, or (to put the same idea in a less radical form) God as He is manifest in His activities. Justin Martyr writes, “To the Father of all, who is unbegotten, there is no name given... But these words ‘Father,’ and ‘God,’ and ‘Creator,’ and ‘Lord,’ and ‘Master,’ are not names, but appellations (*proshēseis*) derived from His good deeds and works”⁸. An appellation is here a name given to someone based on the work he performs, much like ‘fireman’ or ‘nurse’ in English. Theophilus of Antioch similarly holds that God is recognized only by His “works and mighty deeds”; he accordingly derives the preeminent divine name, *theos*, from God’s having placed (*tetheikenai*) all things in stability and His running and being active (*theein*) through all creation⁹. Clement of Alexandria asserts that we do not name God properly (*kuriōs*) but that all the divine names taken together are indicative of the divine power¹⁰. Even Origen,

¹ PLATO, *Cratylus* 396a-b.

² PLATO, *Cratylus* 400d–401a.

³ XENOPHON, *Memorabilia* 4.3.13–14.

⁴ DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* VII.147.

⁵ PSEUDO-ARISTOTLE, *De Mundo* 6.

⁶ PSEUDO-ARISTOTLE, *De Mundo* 7.

⁷ See J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, Second edition, Ithaca 1996, 155–70.

⁸ JUSTIN MARTYR, *II Apology* 6, PG 6 453A.

⁹ THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH, *Ad Autolyicum* I.4–5, PG 6 1029A–1032B. The derivation from *theein* goes back to PLATO, *Cratylus* 397d.

¹⁰ CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* V.12.

who is less apophatically inclined than these authors, holds that the names of God are ways of summarizing divine activities such as providence and judgment¹¹.

That the divine names are based upon or even refer to the works or powers of God was thus already a well-established idea in the ante-Nicene period. Gregory of Nyssa adopts a similar view but shifts the focus instead to the divine operations (*energeiai*). Like Clement, he argues that the divine nature has no extension (*diastēma*) or limit (*peras*) and therefore cannot be named¹². Citing various passages in which Scripture refers to idols and demons as gods, along with the peculiar words of God to Moses, “I have given thee as a god to Pharaoh” (Exodus 7:10), he infers that ‘god’ and ‘godhead’ (*theotēs*) are names of operations that God exercises.

The force of the appellation [*theos*] is the indication of some power, either of oversight or of operation (*energetikēs*). But the divine nature itself, as it is, remains unexpressed by all the names that are conceived for it, as our doctrine declares. For in learning that He is beneficent, and a judge, good and just, and all else of the same kind, we learn diversities of His operations (*energeiōn*), but we are none the more able to learn by our knowledge of His operations the nature of Him who works (*tou energountos*)¹³.

This passage is not wholly clear as to whether the divine names are actually names of the *energeiai* or are merely derived from the *energeiai*. Fortunately Gregory elsewhere makes it clear that he means the former: “the term ‘godhead’ is significant of operation (*energeian sēmainein*) and not of nature”¹⁴. Nor does he hold this only about *theos* and *theotēs*; citing a reference to God’s compassion and long-suffering, he asks: “Do [these words] indicate His *energeiai* or His nature? No one will say that they indicate (*echein tēn sēmasian*) anything but His *energeia*”¹⁵.

Although I have so far translated the word *energeia* as “operation,” this position advanced by Gregory shows that it cannot mean only that. If *energeia* in this context meant only operation, there would be no way to specify to which operations we are referring; in saying that the operation is that of God, we would merely be attributing it to another operation, without indicating the acting agent. This means that the *energeiai* at issue must not be simply operations, but God himself under some nameable presentation or form. This is the same idea that we observed in a more inchoate form in some ante-Nicene authors, as well as in the Stoics and Philo before

¹¹ ORIGEN, *On Prayer* 24.2–3; cf. *De Principiis* 1.1.6.

¹² GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Contra Eunomium* 1.360–69, II.69–70, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* VII, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* V; cf. *Life of Moses* I.7, II.236–38.

¹³ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On the Holy Trinity*; ed. W. JAEGGER, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* [= GNO], Leiden 1960–96, Vol. III.1, 14; cf. *Contra Eunomium* II.149, 298–99, 304, III.5.58, *On Not Three Gods* (GNO III.1, 42–44).

¹⁴ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On Not Three Gods*; ed. Jaeger, GNO III.1, 46. Gregory’s *Ad Graecos* might seem to contradict this statement, for there he says repeatedly that the term ‘god’ is indicative of substance. He qualifies this admission, however, by saying that *theos* indicates the divine substance in the same way that the terms “that which neighs” and “that which laughs” indicate the natures of horse and man. Just as neighing and laughing are characteristic features (*idiōmata*) of horses and men, so to oversee all things is the characteristic feature of the divine nature (GNO III.1, 21–22). Although here Gregory speaks of *idiōmata* rather than *energeiai*, he still grounds the referential force of *theos* in activity.

¹⁵ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Contra Eunomium* II.151; ed. JAEGGER, GNO I, 269, citing Psalm 103:8. See also *tēn endeixin echei* at *Contra Eunomium* II.583.

them. What is new in Gregory is the reference to the divine *energeia* rather than the divine powers or works, as well as the sweeping claim that many divine names (and not only a select few such as ‘God’ and ‘Lord’) refer to divine *energeiai*.

How should we understand *energeia* in this context? The first step in answering this question must be to take note of previous Christian usage of the term – which, after all, undoubtedly had much to do with the preference for it shown by Gregory. This usage was largely determined by St. Paul. To take one typical passage, Paul speaks of himself as “striving according to Christ’s energy (*energeian*) which is being effectively realized (*energoumenēn*) within me” (Col. 1:29). I render *energeia* here as ‘energy’ because it indicates both an activity or operation of God and a capacity for action that this activity imparts to St. Paul¹⁶. The divine energy is realized or made effective within Paul’s struggle to promote the Gospel, so that from one point of view Paul is the agent or conduit through whom God is acting. Yet nothing in such external direction prevents Paul’s actions from remaining his own. In effect, God has imparted to Paul the energy to do His will, and this energy is now also Paul’s energy, one that is realized only through his free cooperation¹⁷.

It is not entirely clear, in Paul’s own usage, how the divine energy is to be understood. Is it a created effect distinct from God’s own being, or is it simply the form in which God is present and active among creatures? Whatever ambiguity there was on this point was settled in later patristic writings, which embraced decisively the latter alternative. It is sufficient to quote here a passage from *On the Holy Spirit* of Basil the Great describing how the Spirit is present through His energy in those who receive His gifts.

[The Spirit is] by nature unapproachable, apprehended by reason of its goodness, filling all things with its power, but communicated only to the worthy; not shared in one measure, but distributing its energy (*energeian*) according to the proportion of faith; in essence simple, in powers various, wholly present in each and being wholly present everywhere; impassively divided and shared without loss, after the likeness of the sunbeam, whose kindly light falls on him who enjoys it as though it shone for him alone, yet illumines land and sea and mingles with the air¹⁸.

Through the divine energy the Spirit is “wholly present in each” and “shared without loss”. The divine energy is thus not a reality distinct from God, but a particular way in which God appears and is manifest. It is in this light that we must understand Gregory of Nyssa’s teaching that the divine names are names of divine energies.

This teaching in turn helps shed light on another important text, Basil’s Epistle 234. In this epistle Basil seeks to answer the taunt of the Eunomians that one who does not know the divine essence worships what he does not know. Basil replies:

¹⁶ Compare the translation of the New Revised Standard Version (“I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me”), which correctly renders *energeia* as ‘energy’ but takes *energoumenēn* as middle, thereby missing the force of the cognate accusative.

¹⁷ See further D. BRADSHAW, “The Divine Energies in the New Testament”, in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006), 189–223; J.C. LARCHET, *La théologie des énergies divines: des origines à saint Jean Damascène*, Paris 2010, 83–93; C.A. SCHWARZ, *God’s Energy: Reclaiming a New Testament Concept*, Emmelsbüll 2020.

¹⁸ BASIL, *On the Holy Spirit* 22, PG 32 108C.

We say that we know the greatness of God, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his providence over us, and the justness of his judgment, but not his very essence... But God, he says, is simple, and whatever attribute of him you have reckoned as knowable is of his essence. The absurdities involved in this sophism are innumerable. When all these high attributes have been enumerated, are they all names of one essence? And is there the same mutual force in his awfulness and his loving-kindness, his justice and his creative power, His providence and His foreknowledge, His bestowal of rewards and punishments, his majesty and his providence? In mentioning any of these, do we declare his essence?.. The energies (*energeiai*) are various, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from his energies, but do not undertake to approach near to his essence. His energies come down to us, but his essence remains beyond our reach¹⁹.

Basil seems here to be speaking about two separate types of predicate: ongoing divine activities such as providence, foreknowledge, and the bestowal of rewards and punishments, and attributes such as greatness, power, wisdom, goodness, justice, loving-kindness, and majesty. It is not surprising that he refers to the former as *energeiai*, but much more so that he includes the latter as well. How are we to understand this grouping? It is helpful to remember at this point the teaching of Basil's brother Gregory that to speak of God's compassion or long-suffering is a way of indicating His *energeia*. This suggests that, despite their differences, both ongoing activities such as providence and foreknowledge and attributes such as greatness, power, and compassion can be understood as "energies" in the sense that we have identified – that is, they are God himself as He is manifest in particular forms of activity.

We also find in the Cappadocians another way of speaking of the divine attributes, as "things around God". Gregory of Nyssa refers to these particularly often. Among those he lists in various passages are splendor, glory, holiness, justice, patience, eternity, infinity, being without beginning, power, goodness, incorruptibility, the giving of life, and light²⁰. Several of these, such as glory, holiness, justice, power, and goodness, Gregory and Basil refer to elsewhere as energies. Indeed Gregory at one point describes God's being a judge by both terms, as a thing around God and an energy²¹. However, the things around God also include several attributes that are not mentioned among the energies, such as eternity, infinity, beginninglessness, and incorruptibility. These are (with the possible exception of eternity) negative attributes. As such it would seem that they cannot be understood as divine activities or operations, and so not as "energies", even under the expansive interpretation I have offered.

In one passage Gregory himself notes such a distinction among terms applied to the divine nature. He writes:

We do not say that all these terms have a uniform significance; for some of them express qualities inherent in God (*tōn prosontōn tōi theōi*), and others qualities that are not. Thus when we say that He is just or incorruptible, by the term 'just'

¹⁹ BASIL, Epistle 234.1.

²⁰ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Contra Eunomium* II.89, 102, III.1.103–04, III.5.58, III.6.3, *Great Catechism* 5, *On Not Three Gods* (GNO III.1, 43), *On the Holy Spirit* (GNO III.1, 114).

²¹ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Contra Eunomium* III.5.58–59.

we signify that justice is found in Him, and by ‘incorruptible’ that corruption is not²².

It is noteworthy that Gregory here speaks of justice and other such positive attributes as “inherent in God”. This shows that in calling them energies or things around God he does not wish to deny that they truly are part of the divine nature. His point is simply that they do not set forth or define the divine essence which is their source. Nor, of course, do privative attributes such as “incorruptible”.

It is against this complex background that we must understand the *Divine Names* of Dionysius the Areopagite. Dionysius recasts the understanding of the divine attributes as energies found in the Cappadocians into a sweeping vision of the relationship of God to creation. Dionysius’s preferred term for such acts is *proodos*, procession. No doubt he chose this term because of its connotations in the Neoplatonic theory of emanation, in which any effect remains in its cause (the stage of *monē*), proceeds from it (the stage of *proodos*), and returns to it (the stage of *epistrophē*)²³. For Dionysius it is axiomatic that “the things caused preexist more fully and essentially in their causes”²⁴. The divine processions are thus the acts by which God sets forth and manifests what He already is, sharing these perfections with creatures in the manner and degree appropriate to each. A cursory glance at the processions treated in *The Divine Names* reveals their sweeping scope: goodness, light, beauty, love, zeal, being, wisdom, truth, power, righteousness, salvation, redemption, peace, perfection, and one (or unity). Each of these is a divine name, so that in naming the divine processions, one also names God. The processions are, as it were, God-as-actively-manifest, as opposed to the *hyperousios ousia*, God as transcendent and beyond all names²⁵.

One particularly puzzling group of divine processions is the opposites that are treated in Chapter 9 of the *Divine Names*: Great and Small, Same and Different, Similar and Unsimilar, and Rest and Motion. As has often been noted, Dionysius’s treatment of these is probably inspired by Plato’s discussion of the Five Greatest Kinds in the *Sophist*, with the addition of Great and Small perhaps suggested by their role in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides*²⁶. One might at first wonder whether these are truly processions at all, for Dionysius does not explicitly call them such, saying only that each of them is “applied to the Cause of all”²⁷. However, we must bear in mind the programmatic statement early in the *Divine Names* that all the “sacred hymns of the theologians” explicate (*diaskeuazousan*) the divine names in relation to the divine processions²⁸. It would seem, then, that every divine name in some way refers to a divine procession. This is borne out by the treatment

²² GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Contra Eunomium* II.131 (GNO I, 263).

²³ PROCLUS, *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 35.

²⁴ DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Divine Names* 2.8 645D; ed. B.R. SUCHLA, G. HEIL, and A.M. RITTER, *Corpus Dionysiacum*, Berlin 1990–91, Vol. 1, 133.

²⁵ See DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Divine Names* 5.1 816B. Unlike earlier authors, Dionysius reserves the term *ousia* as said of God for God’s being-making procession.

²⁶ For example, S.H. WEAR and J. DILLON, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, Aldershot 2007, 27.

²⁷ DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Divine Names* 9.1 509B.

²⁸ DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Divine Names* 1.4 589D.

of Great, Small, and the others in Chapter 9, for each of them is shown to apply both transcendentally to God in Himself and derivatively to His causal action among creatures. This is the same duality that in general holds of the processions.

I would suggest that we may think of each of these opposing terms as a different way of naming the procession of Being, since (as Plato showed) everything that is partakes of each of them. (It is, of course, well known that a single divine procession can have many names, as light, beauty, love, and zeal are different ways of naming the procession of Goodness.) This has an important implication. To recognize that the Great, Small, and the rest are processions should lead us to broaden our understanding of what constitutes a divine procession. We see now that even relatively abstract attributes can be processions, for they too are modalities in which God makes Himself actively present and manifest.

The most important continuator of the Dionysian legacy was undoubtedly Maximus the Confessor. Like the Cappadocians, Maximus speaks frequently of the “things around God”. However, Maximus significantly unifies this concept by identifying the things around God as “goodness and all that the term ‘goodness’ implies, that is, all life, immortality, simplicity, immutability, infinity, and such things which are essentially contemplated around Him”²⁹. The priority that Maximus gives to goodness is probably due to the fact that ‘Good’ is the preeminent divine name in Dionysius, and indeed, Dionysius identifies goodness as the divine “subsistence” (*huparxis*)³⁰. By unifying the things around God in this way, Maximus shows the common root shared by the more positive divine attributes, such as goodness and life, and those that are seemingly merely privative, such as immortality, simplicity, immutability, and infinity. For Maximus all of these are implications of divine perfection, or, to put it another way, ways in which God manifests Himself as the Good.

Maximus also sharply distinguishes all of these attributes from the divine essence, calling them works (*erga*) of God that God himself, as their creator, infinitely transcends³¹. On the other hand, Maximus adds shortly thereafter that God *is* Life, and elsewhere he emphasizes that to participate in being, goodness, wisdom, and eternity is to participate in God³². God is thus both each of these perfections and beyond them as their source. This is the same duality that characterizes the divine energies in the Cappadocians and the divine processions in Dionysius, and it strongly suggests that the “things around God” are, for Maximus, their functional equivalent. Thus we find that in Maximus too the divine processions, or their functional equivalent, include relatively abstract properties such as immortality, simplicity, and infinity as well as those such as goodness and life that are more immediately evident through activity.

A further strand in Maximus’s thinking about the divine energy emerges in his response to the monoenergist controversy. Monoenergism is the doctrine that Christ,

²⁹ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Chapters on Theology and Economy* 1.48, PG 90 1100D.

³⁰ DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Divine Names* 4.1 693B.

³¹ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Chapters on Theology and Economy* 1.48–50.

³² MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Chapters on Theology and Economy* 1.54, *Centuries on Charity* 3.24–25.

although of two natures, divine and human, possessed a single operation or energy which was both human and divine. The fundamental issue at stake in this controversy was whether energy is to be associated with hypostasis, which is one in Christ, or with essence or nature, of which there are two. Although Maximus was initially relatively open-minded toward monoenergism, he soon settled into a resolute opposition. His fundamental argument was that without the affirmation of two energies in Christ, that of two natures would be empty. Indeed, the sole proof that Christ possessed a human nature was the presence in him of the human “natural energy”³³. Maximus saw divine and human energies as cooperating in every act that Christ performed: “he experienced suffering in a divine way, since it was voluntary, for he was not a mere man, and he worked miracles in a human way, since he did them through the flesh, for he was not naked God”³⁴. Maximus also observed that to associate energy with hypostasis rather than nature would wreak havoc on Trinitarian doctrine, since it would mean that there are three energies in the Trinity rather than a single energy shared among the three Persons³⁵.

In his defense of the dyoenergist position, Maximus went beyond earlier discussions of the divine energy in introducing the new concept of natural energy³⁶. This is not quite an *energeia* in the normal sense – that is, an activity or characteristic pattern of action. It is instead a *capacity* for action of the sort that is characteristic of the nature in question. Maximus defines the natural energy as a “natural, constitutive power... which is properly and primarily characteristic of the nature, since it is the most generic motion constitutive of the species”³⁷. It is odd to find the natural energy characterized here as both a power (*dunamis*) and a motion (*kinēsis*). To judge from other similar texts, it would appear that Maximus thought of the natural energy as a kind of innate movement like that of life or thought, which naturally (and, indeed, inevitably) manifests itself in some form of outward action³⁸. Similar definitions occur in *Opuscula 27*, a dossier of patristic passages dealing with *energeia* that is found among Maximus’s works, although it is probably by a disciple. They include that the natural energy is “the innate motion of every essence”, that it is “the essential and knowledge-bearing principle of every nature”, and that it is “the power revelatory of every essence”³⁹.

As with the Cappadocians, there may be some echo here of the theory of two acts of Plotinus. But it is more important that, by the time of Maximus, Christian usage had for centuries given *energeia* the connotation of an “energy” that is both

³³ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Ambigua* 5.2.

³⁴ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Ambigua* 5.18; ed. N. CONSTAS, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, Cambridge, Mass., 2014, Vol. 1, 48.

³⁵ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, PG 91 336D-337A.

³⁶ Strictly speaking it was not new, since some earlier authors had spoken of Christ as possessing a natural human energy (e.g., Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Aphthartodocetas*, PG 86 1333A, 1336D-1337A; Leontius of Jerusalem, *Contra Monophysitas*, PG 86 1773A; Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Synodical Letter* 2.3.11). However, Maximus was the first to give the concept systematic importance.

³⁷ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Ambigua* 5.2; ed. CONSTAS, Vol. 1, 32.

³⁸ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, Epistle 6 (PG 91 432B), Epistle 7 (PG 91 436C-D), *Chapters on Theology and Economy* 1.3, *Ambigua* 20.2.

³⁹ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Opuscula 27*, PG 91 280D.

resident intrinsically in God *and* manifest outward through His activity. Maximus in effect extends this duality to creatures, seeing each being as possessing a “natural energy” that enables it to engage in its characteristic forms of activity.

The Christology of Maximus ultimately triumphed at the Sixth Ecumenical Council, which explicitly affirmed two natural energies in Christ⁴⁰. The influential summary of dyoenergist Christology by John of Damascus in his *On the Orthodox Faith* draws heavily from Maximus, including a range of definitions of natural energy similar to those I have quoted⁴¹. John is also noteworthy for our purposes in that he provides a sweeping description of the divine energy as it is present throughout all creation:

The divine irradiation and energy is one, simple, and undivided, beneficently diversified in divisible things, dispensing to all of them the components of their proper nature while remaining simple... Toward it all things tend, and in it they have their existence, and to all things it communicates their being in accordance with the nature of each. It is the being of things that are, the life of the living, the reason of the rational, and the intellectual act of those possessing intelligence⁴².

This passage is plainly modeled on the description of the divine processions in Dionysius. By speaking of energy rather than procession, John in effect supplements the Dionysian picture of God as the first principle in a process of procession and return with that of God as perpetually active in all things, creating and sustaining them and calling them to himself.

We turn at last to the thinker who made the essence/energies distinction a subject of explicit and systematic discussion, Gregory Palamas. Palamas was primarily concerned to defend the uncreated character of the light beheld by the hesychasts, but this naturally led him to deal with the insistence of his opponent Barlaam that only the divine essence is uncreated. It was in response to this point that Palamas broadened the scope of the discussion to metaphysical issues. In order to show that more than just the divine essence is uncreated, he first cites the distinction – drawn, he says, by Dionysius – between the superessential divine essence and the “essential energies” or “essential powers” of God, such as goodness, life, and being⁴³. Although ‘energy’ is not a term Dionysius normally uses for the processions, the reason for the identification becomes clear in the next section, where Palamas cites the Maximian axiom that no essence can exist without its natural energy⁴⁴. Palamas thus reads Dionysius in light of Maximus, and particularly Maximus’s concept of natural energy.

⁴⁰ See the *Exposition of Faith* issued by this Council, which affirms two natural energies in Christ along with two natural wills; N.P. TANNER, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, London 1990, Vol. 1, 128–30.

⁴¹ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *On the Orthodox Faith* 59; cf. 36–37.

⁴² JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *On the Orthodox Faith* 14, ed. P.B. KOTTER, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Berlin 1969–88, Vol. 2, 42–43.

⁴³ GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads* 3.1.23.

⁴⁴ GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads* 3.1.24.

Returning to the same subject in the next treatise, Palamas adds to the natural energies the “uncreated works” (that is, the things around God) spoken of by Maximus:

Not only the divine powers (which you will often find called natural energies by the Holy Fathers) but also the ‘works of God’ are without beginning, as the Fathers also rightly affirm... For was there not need for the work of providence even before creation, so as to lead each created thing at the appropriate time out of non-being? Was there not need for a knowledge fitting to God, so that things might first be known and then chosen, even though not in time?.. And how could one conceive of a beginning of God’s self-contemplation?⁴⁵

Palamas goes on to add the further instances of the divine will, which is uncreated yet not the same as the divine essence, and the predeterminations (*proorismoi*) by which God foreordains the existence of creatures. Although he does not explain it further here, this reference to “predeterminations” is undoubtedly an allusion to the definition in *Divine Names* 5.8 of the *logoi* that lead creatures into being as “predeterminations and divine and good acts of will”⁴⁶. Later in the same treatise, Palamas goes on to include these *logoi* explicitly among the divine energies. They are, he explains, realities that are “between” the divine essence and creatures, which preexist in the divine mind and by which all things are made⁴⁷. They are also that by which God is even now known and perceived, the “paradigmatic and perfective power and energy of all things”⁴⁸.

In later works, Palamas often speaks comprehensively of the divine “procession and energy”, using these terms more or less synonymously. He gives particular weight to the passage in *Divine Names* 2.5 referring to “the substance-bestowing, life-bestowing, wise-making, and other gifts of the Goodness that is Cause of all, in accordance with which the things that are imparticipably participated are praised on account of the participations and those that participate”⁴⁹. Here the divine “participations” and gifts are situated between “the God that is the Cause of all” and the creatures that participate in them. Palamas identifies these participations and gifts with the divine procession and energy, and both in turn with the divine *logoi*:

The energy which bestows substance, life and wisdom and which in general creates and conserves created beings is identical with the divine acts of will [that is, the *logoi*] and the divine participations themselves and the gifts of the Goodness that is the Cause of all⁵⁰.

⁴⁵ GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads* 3.2.6; ed. J. MEYENDORFF, *Défense des saints hésychastes: Introduction, texte critique, traduction, et notes*, Second edition, Leuven 1973, 653.

⁴⁶ DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Divine Names* 5.8 824C; ed. SUCHLA, Vol. 1, 188. This definition was given further currency by MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, who cited it twice (*Ambigua* 7.24, *Questions to Thalassius* 13.2).

⁴⁷ GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads* 3.2.24.

⁴⁸ GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads* 3.2.25; ed. MEYENDORFF, 689.

⁴⁹ DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Divine Names* 2.5 644A; ed. SUCHLA, Vol. 1, 129.

⁵⁰ GREGORY PALAMAS, *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, Chap. 87, ed. R. SINKEWICZ, *Saint Gregory Palamas: One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, Toronto 1988, 186; cf. *On Union and Distinction*, Chap. 13.

So here, too, we find the divine *logoi* (as well as the divine acts of will) embraced within the divine procession and energy.

It is striking to find the divine *logoi*, which Dionysius treats distinctly from the processions, so comprehensively identified with them. I believe that Palamas has correctly seen that to speak of the processions alone is insufficient to fully describe God's relation to creation. Dionysius is clear that the range of the being-making, life-giving, and wisdom-imparting processions is different, the first extending to all beings, the second only to those that are alive, and the third to those that are alive and rational. Yet what accounts for the existence of these individual things themselves? Even when we factor in that the being-making procession imparts sameness, difference, motion, and so on, we still need some account of the specific divine intention that defines how each being is unique while related to others through this complex web of relations. That is the role of the divine *logoi*. Palamas sees that the *logoi* are not acts separate from the processions, but merely the specific mode that the processions take in the case of each individual being – much as the life-giving and wisdom-imparting processions are themselves simply specific modes of that which imparts being.

Finally let me note one further terminological clarification made by Palamas. As I observed earlier, Gregory of Nyssa does not hesitate to refer to justice and other such positive attributes as “qualities inherent in God”. Drawing on a passage in *On Right Thinking* by John of Damascus, Palamas similarly refers to the natural energies as characteristics (*idiōmata*) of the nature. However, they are “from” (*ek*) the nature and caused by it, rather than vice versa, and it is in that sense that they are (in the language of the Cappadocians) “around” the nature⁵¹. Returning to the same subject later, he adds that they are characteristic (*charaktēristikai*) and indicative (*deiktikai*) of the nature, but not constitutive (*sustikai*) of it, much as being grammatical is characteristic and indicative, but not constitutive, of human nature. *Energeia* in one sense (*idiōs*) is the use (*chrēsis*) of the innate power, and in another sense it is the power itself, but the ambiguity does no harm, for these two always follow upon one another⁵².

These are, then, the ways in which the various names and attributes of God came to be unified under the single concept of the divine energies. Palamas thereby drew together the great diversity of patristic expressions into a single comprehensive vision of the relationship of God to creatures, one that exhibits how both the perfections of creatures and their individual uniqueness are due to the indwelling activity of God.

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⁵¹ GREGORY PALAMAS, *On the Divine Energies*, Chap. 10.

⁵² GREGORY PALAMAS, *On the Divine Energies*, Chap. 23.

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