

THEOLOGY AND RHETORIC: NICHOLAS KABASILAS BETWEEN THOMAS MAGISTROS AND MAKARIOS MAKRES

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ABSTRACT. This article contributes to the ongoing discussion about the relationship between Nicholas Kabasilas and Palamite theology by examining Nicholas Kabasilas' understanding of the life in Christ as expressed in his hagiography. In particular, it uncovers a new source for Kabasilas' intellectualist approach to spirituality in his *encomium* on St. Demetrios Myroblytes (*BHG* 543), namely the *Oration* on Gregory of Nazianzus by Thomas Magistros. Kabasilas' hagiographical encomia would later influence the writings of Makarios Makres, a fifteenth-century Palamite author with somewhat different theological commitments.

Keywords: Nicholas Kabasilas, St. Demetrios Myroblytes, Thomas Magistros, Makarios Makres, hagiography, *Oration* on Gregory of Nazianzus, hesychasm

This article presents a new source for Nicholas Kabasilas' theory on life in Christ, revealed in his treatise of the same name, and briefly investigates the subsequent reception of his hagiographical as well as other writings on the basis of a comparison with the works of Makarios Makres.

The Hagiographical Works of Nicholas Kabasilas: An Application of His Theories on Life in Christ

The hagiographical works of Nicholas Kabasilas offer a clear example of the way he understood the life in Christ in practice. They are practical exercises, as it were, demonstrating to every Christian how a man can attain identification

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with Christ in this life through the example of various saints (the Three Hierarchs, St. Nicholas of Myra, St. Theodora of Thessaloniki, St. Andrew of Jerusalem, and St. Demetrios Myroblytes). A brief examination of the extensive *encomium* of St. Demetrios, which illustrates this fact, is in order.

Nicholas Kabasilas' *encomium* for St. Demetrios (*BHG* 543) is one of the most classicizing pieces of this late Byzantine intellectual. Constructed according to the rules of Byzantine rhetoric, this hagiographical work is based on previous *vitae* of St. Demetrios. After explaining the difficulties encountered by any orator wishing to praise the saint, Kabasilas proceeds to a rather lengthy praise of the saint's city, Thessaloniki, which also happens to be the author's hometown. Afterwards, Kabasilas enters the main part of his text, the *encomium* of the saint's virtues and achievements: the saint's only concern from his tender age had been to become the best of all; he studied Greek literature in order to have the possibility to understand divine wisdom and achieved happiness through baptism. After the death of his parents, he distributed all his belongings to those in need and became filled with divine love, which is the foremost of all the graces of the Holy Spirit. Through his thoughts he became able to enjoy a constant communion with Christ, cleaning his soul and becoming God-like. He was constantly praying to God, his only desire being the love of the Savior as a reward for his struggles. He was most humble, brave, and prudent, and did not refrain from teaching his contemporaries and trying to lead them to God. He pointed out to them that knowing God is the only true happiness, and this is based on the acceptance of the true doctrines of the Church. He urged them to put their concern about God before anything else, pointing out that love for God not only makes men truly happy but is something proper to human beings, since everything by its nature loves God. Being aware of the dangers threatening the faithful, he did not hesitate to sacrifice his life for the sake of eternity with Christ. Kabasilas narrates Demetrios' dialogue with the emperor Maximian (*r.* 286–305), who urged him to return to the faith and the gods of his forefathers. Demetrios replies that the cult of the traditional gods is immoral, pointing out that worshipping Christ, the only true God, safeguards his true happiness. After briefly referring to Nestor, Demetrios' companion, Kabasilas describes the saint's martyrdom. The author mentions the myrrh emanating from the saint's grave, and after insisting on Demetrios' superiority to almost all the other saints both of the Old (Job, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph) and the New Testament (John the Baptist), he comes to the conclusion of his *encomium*.

While characteristic of Byzantine literature in general, this piece of rhetoric also exhibits some elements which point to Kabasilas' own particularities. He insists on St. Demetrios' struggle for the attainment of human perfection. The way of the saint is a constant struggle to become virtuous. The term "real

happiness” (εὐδαιμονία) is prominent in this text in a way reminiscent of Plato’s dialogues. Quoting the teaching of the saint to his fellow-citizens, Kabasilas begins with a traditional definition of philosophy:

The first thing of which he tried to persuade both Greeks and barbarians was that their main concern should be the knowledge of what God really is. Since knowing beings as beings is real happiness for prudent men, what may we say about the knowledge of God? Since God is the first being, we must make investigation concerning Him first of all. Afterwards, we must consider as the true faith the doctrine that Christ is the true God.¹

Kabasilas stresses that true happiness consists in baptism, which unites man with God.² One notices the apodictic manner in which Kabasilas proceeds to his exposition of St. Demetrios’ catechesis. This is far from unusual in Byzantine theology, and the passage would likely not be worthy of further discussion if it did not present certain striking similarities with Kabasilas’ primary and most notable work, namely his extensive treatise *On Life in Christ*.³

The last two books (VI and VII) of this treatise give the impression of a late antique philosophical diatribe dealing with the perennial problems of man discussed in the philosophical schools of the time. It is noteworthy that book VI begins with the question of how one may preserve and profit from the gifts he has obtained through his communion with the three great mysteries of the

¹ *Oratio* 5, 373-379: Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ἐκεῖνο πάντας ἔπειθε καὶ Ἑλληνας καὶ βαρβάρους κοινῇ, πρῶτον τῶν ἄλλων προσήκον εἶναι οἴεσθαι λόγον ποιεῖσθαι, τοῦ τίνα δεῖ νομίζειν εἶναι Θεὸν ὡς μόνην οὖσαν ταύτην ἀνθρώποις οὖσιν εὐδαιμονίαν. Εἰ γὰρ τὸ, ἢ ὄντα ἐστὶ τὰ ὄντα εἰδέναι, τοῖς εὖ φρονοῦσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων εὐδαιμονία, τί ποτ’ αὐτὴν ἐροῦμεν τὴν ἐπιστήμην τοῦ Θεοῦ; Καὶ ἅμα πρῶτου τοῦ παντὸς ὄντος, καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ λόγους, πρῶτους ποιεῖσθαι προσήκειν τῶν ἄλλων παντὸς ὄτουσιν ἔπειτα, ταύτην μόνην περὶ τὸ θεῖον ὑγιᾶ δόξαν εἶναι, τὸ, Χριστὸν νομίζειν εἶναι Θεὸν. I quote the texts in question as edited by Christina Hadjiafxenti, *Die Heiligenkomien des Nikolaos Kabasilas. Einleitung und kritische Edition* (Byzantinisches Archiv 40) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021). The first number refers to the number of Kabasilas’ composition, while the second to the lines of the text.

² *Oratio* 5, 161-164: τὴν δὲ θεῖαν ἀκτίνα τῇ ψυχῇ δεξάμενος, τῷ πάντων μὲν τῶν κακῶν ἐλευθέρους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποιοῦντι, Θεῷ δὲ συνιστάντι θεῖω λουτρῷ καὶ τὴν θαυμαστὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων εὐδαιμονίαν ἀπολαβὼν, ἀγωγόν τε πρὸς Θεὸν αὐτὴν εἶχε, καὶ συναγωνιστὴν εἶχε. See a passage from Kabasilas’ *On Life in Christ* II, 101, 1-4: Τοῦτο τοῦ βαπτίσματος τὸ ἔργον, ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολύσαι, ἀνθρώπων Θεὸν καταλλάξαι, Θεῷ τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἰσποῖησαι, ὀφθαλμὸν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἀνοῖξαι, τῆς θείας ἀκτίνος γεῦσαι. The verb συνίστημι is frequently employed with reference to the life in Christ in this treatise, see, e.g., III, 1, 1.

³ I refer to the edition of Marie-Hélène Congourdeau, *Nicolas Cabasilas. La vie en Christ. Livres I-IV. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et annotation* (SC 355) (Paris: Cerf, 1989) and *Nicolas Cabasilas. La vie en Christ. Livres V-VII. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et annotation* (SC 361) (Paris: Cerf, 1990).

Church discussed in books II–V. Kabasilas speaks here about “true happiness” once more. His answer is that this can be achieved only through virtue and fixing one’s thoughts on God. No mention of Gregory Palamas’ views about hesychastic prayer and the experience of the divine, or the uncreated, light of the divinity is to be found in this work.⁴

Nicholas Kabasilas has another way of seeing perfection: he believes that true happiness consists in communion with Christ, which is possible even in this life. That communion is made possible through the three main mysteries of the Church (baptism, chrismation, and holy communion), but man must try hard in order to retain and profit from this communion. This can be achieved only through virtue and the fixing of one’s mind in the direction of God.

St. Demetrios Myroblytes is a clear example of the life in Christ as understood by Kabasilas. His thoughts are constantly turned towards Christ and this is his real delight. “He considered his communication with Christ through his thoughts as the culmination of happiness” (5, 211-212).⁵ Demetrios prays to God (5, 247-249),⁶ but it seems that this is prayer according to Kabasilas, who in his *On Life in Christ* prefers a simple communication with God, condemning those who insist on finding a proper place and suggesting particular ways of addressing God.⁷ The same applies to the other saints praised by Kabasilas.

Thomas Magistros’ *Oration* on Gregory of Nazianzus: A Source of Nicholas Kabasilas’ Hagiographical Works

To begin, I have been able to observe that in composing his hagiographical works, Kabasilas drew heavily upon the *Oration (Logos)* on St. Gregory of Nazianzus written by Thomas Magistros, a scholar of the previous generation and a fellow Thessalonian. I offer a list of the correspondences between Kabasilas’ hagiographical works and Magistros’ *Oration*:⁸

⁴ On Kabasilas’ relations with Palamas there is a vast bibliography, see, e.g., Milan Đorđević, *Nikolas Kabasilas. Ein Weg zu einer Synthese der Traditionen* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 129–163, and Congourdeau, “Nicolas Calasilas et le Palamisme,” in *Gregorio Palamas e oltre. Studi e documenti sulle controversie teologiche del XIV secolo bizantino*, ed. Antonio Rigo (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2004), 191–210. Both these scholars tend to consider Kabasilas as amicably disposed towards Palamism.

⁵ τὸ δὲ τοῖς λογισμοῖς ἐκείνῳ συνεῖναι, πάσης ἡστινοσοῦν ἡδονῆς ἡγεῖσθαι κεφάλαιον.

⁶ τὴν δὲ πρὸς Θεὸν εὐχὴν ἔχειν μόνην τοῦτο περαινέιν, μὴδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλως ἐνεῖναι σύμμαχον εἰληφέναι Θεὸν, τοσοῦτου τινὸς ἄγειν ὤετο προσευχὴν, ὥστε καὶ κατὰ τοὺς Παύλου νόμους, οὐκ ἦν ὅτε μὴ συνεμίγνυ Θεῷ.

⁷ VI, 98, 1-7. In my view, this is a condemnation of the hesychastic practices suggested by Nikephoros the Hesychast, Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, and other ascetic authors of the fourteenth century.

⁸ The references are to *PG* 145, 216–352.

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Kabasilas, <i>encomia</i> of saints	Magistros, <i>Oration</i>
Καὶ οὕτω δήπου τὸ παραπάντων ἡμῖν ὀφείλεται θαῦμα (1, 12-13)	ὁ πᾶσιν ὁμοῦ καὶ ποιηταῖς καὶ λογοποιοῖς ὀφείλεται θαῦμα (248B)
Καὶ τὰς ἀγαθὰς πράξεις ὡς εἰκὸς προστιθέναι καὶ τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν πολιτεύειν (1, 60-61)	Στήλας ἐμπύχους οὐκ ἀκριβοῦς μόνον θεογνωσίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ βιοῦν εὖ μάλα καὶ κατ' ἀρετὴν πολιτεύειν (228B)
Οὕτω παντοδαπούς τινας τοὺς τῶν μεγάλων λόγους ἢ τοῦ Πνεύματος ἀπέδειξε χάρις (1, 113-114) ὧ παντοδαπῶν ἀγαθῶν τεχνῖται (1, 123)	ἧ παντοδαπῶν λόγων τεχνῖτα (348D)
ὧ θεοῦ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους μεγίστη καὶ κοινωφελεστάτη φιλοτιμία (1, 158-159)	Τῶν πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοῦ θεοῦ χαρίτων μεγίστη καὶ κοινωφελεστάτην φιλοτιμίαν (348B)
Πᾶσαν ἐπαίνων ὑπερβολὴν ὑπερβαίνει (2, 20-21)	Πᾶσαν ἐπαίνων ὑπερβολὴν ὑπερβαίνει (337B)
Οὐ γὰρ εἰς κενὴν εἶδε δόξαν Ἀνδρέας κατὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, οὐδ' ἠσπάσατο πλοῦτον τὸν ἄπιστον καὶ δραπέτην, οὐδ' ἄλλων ἔσχε λόγον οὐδένα, τῶν ὅσα τοὺς προστετηκότας ἀπάγειν οἶδε θεοῦ (2, 50-52)	Οὐ κενῆς δόξης καὶ δυναστείας καὶ τύφου γενόμενος ἐραστής, οὐδ' ἀσπασάμενος πλοῦτον τὸν ἄπιστον καὶ δραπέτην, καὶ ἀρχηγὸν τῶν κακῶν, καὶ πάντα χαλέπτοντα κατὰ τινὰ ποιητὴν, οὐδ' ἄλλων γε οὐδενὸς οὐδ' ὄντινοῦν ποιησάμενος λόγον, ὅσα τοὺς προστετηκότας ἀπάγειν οἶδε θεοῦ (268D)
ὅσα τοὺς κατορθοῦντας κοινωνοὺς οἶδε παρασκευάζειν τῶν Ὀλύμπου πραγμάτων (2, 52-53)	Καὶ τῶν Ὀλύμπου πραγμάτων μὴ ὅτι κοινωνοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἀλλὰ καὶ θεοὺς ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ὡς εἰπεῖν οἶδε ποιεῖν (256B)
ἄλλοις μελεδωνὸς σωτηρίας καταστῆναι δύνασθαι (2, 114)	Τοιοῦτος δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις μελεδωνὸς σωτηρίας κατέστη (280B)
Ταύτης δὲ εἰς δύο διαιρουμένης, εἷς τε θεὸν καὶ ἀνθρώπους (2, 127-128)	Ταύτης τοίνυν εἰς δύο διαιρουμένης, εἷς τε θεὸν καὶ ἀνθρώπους (276A)
ἀλλὰ κἂν τὰ πάντων δεινότατα ἀπειλῆται, κἂν ὁ Φαλάριδος ταῦρος (2, 207-208)	Κἂν ὁ Φαλάριδος ταῦρος, κἂν πάντα τὰ πάντων ἔσχατ' ἀπειλῆται (317A)
Κοινωφελὲς γὰρ ἀγαθὸν ἐκεῖνος (3, 60)	ὡς κοινωφελὲς ἀγαθὸν εἰς ἀνθρώπους τελέσαι (344A)
ἐκεῖθεν τὰ τῆς σωτηρίας ἐξῆπτε πείσματα (4, 98-99)	Καὶ σοῦ μόνου μετὰ θεὸν τὰ τῆς σωτηρίας ἐξάπτοντι πείσματα (352C)
Καὶ τῶν ταύτης πρὸς ἀνθρώπους χαρίτων μεγίστη καὶ κοινωφελεστάτη φιλοτιμία (4, 267-268)	Τῶν πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοῦ θεοῦ χαρίτων μεγίστη καὶ κοινωφελεστάτην φιλοτιμίαν (349B)
ἐν βαθυτάτῳ καὶ μάλα πίονι γήρᾳ καταλύει τὸν βίον (4, 262)	ἐν βαθυτάτῳ καὶ μάλα πίονι γήρᾳ καταλύει τὸν βίον (344B)

Kabasilas, <i>encomia of saints</i>	Magistros, <i>Oration</i>
Σὺ μὲν ἦν ἔπνεις Τριάδα καὶ πρὸς ἦν ἐκ πλείονος ἔβλεπες, ταύτης νῦν ἀμέσως μετέχεις (4, 273-274)	Καὶ ἦν ἔπνεις Τριάδα πάσης ἀμέσως μετέχεις (345C)
Μηδενὸς ἤξιου τοῦ λόγου, φλήναφον ἀτεχνῶς νομίζουσα πάντα, καὶ τῶν φρένας ὀλίγων (5, 106-107)	Οὐδενός τινος ἤξιου τοῦ λόγου, φλήναφον ἀτεχνῶς ταῦτα νομίζων, καὶ ψυχῶν ἀγεννῶν δελεάσματα (256B)
Τὴν ψυχὴν ἔπειτα πειρᾶσθαι δεικνύναι μεστὴν ἀρετῶν (5, 109-110)	Τὴν ψυχὴν εἶχε μεστὴν ἀρετῶν (225B)
Καὶ δῆτα τὴν ψυχὴν καθαίρων τὲ καὶ λεπτύνων (5, 228-229)	Τὸν νοῦν καθαίρων τε καὶ λεπτύνων (232C)
Παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ κεφάλαιον ἦν (5, 314-315 and 5, 823)	Παντὸς μὲν ἀγαθοῦ κεφάλαιον τὸ σεσῶσθαι (284A)
Εἰ γὰρ τὸ, ἧ ὄντα ἐστὶ τὰ ὄντα εἰδέναί, τοῖς εὖ φρονοῦσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων εὐδαιμονία, τί ποτ' αὐτὴν ἐροῦμεν τὴν ἐπιστήμην τοῦ Θεοῦ; (5, 375-377)	Τὸ γὰρ ἧ ὄντα ἐστὶ τὰ ὄντα εἰδέναί, καὶ θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων ἐπιστήμονας εἶναι, καὶ πολιτεύειν ἐν οὐρανῷ δυνάσθαι μακαρίας φύσεως ἴδιον ὄν, ἐξ ἄρ' ἀρετῆς καὶ λόγων ἔστιν ἡμῖν. (232C)
Τίς τοῖνυν διὰ πάντων ἤλασε τουτωνὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν...; (5, 884)	ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἤκουσι καλοκάγαθίας καὶ τοῦ διὰ πάντων ἐλάσαι (340D)
Τῶν δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ συγγεγονότων τοὺς κορυφαίους Πέτρον Ἰσμεν καὶ Παῦλον, καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τῆς βροντῆς. Παῦλος μὲν οὖν, θαυμαστὸν εἶχε περὶ τὸν δεσπότην τὸ φίλτρον, καὶ τῆς ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίας, μανικός τις ἦν ἔραστής, ἀλλ' εἰς πολεμίους τὸ πρόσθεν τῷ Χριστῷ τάττων, ἔπειτα δι' ἐμφανείας φρικώδους τῶν ἐταίρων αὐτῷ κατέστη ... "Ἐτι δὲ Πέτρος μὲν ὠμίλησε γάμω, ὁ δὲ παρθενίας ἦν ἀθλητής. Ἰωάννην δὲ τῷ πάνυ, μὴδὲμίαν ὑπερβολὴν, οὐ παρθενίας, οὐ θεολογίας, οὐ φιλοθεΐας ἀφείς, ὁ δ' ἔπειτ' ἄλλον τρόπον παρελεύνει, ὑπὲρ τοῦ ποθομένου πληγεῖς καὶ ἀποθανῶν. (5, 972-998)	Πέτρου δὲ πέρι καὶ Παύλου καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς βροντῆς, τοσοῦτον ἂν εἶπομι, ὅτι τούτους ἐπαινεῖν θέλω, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἤκουσι καλοκάγαθίας καὶ τοῦ διὰ πάντων ἐλάσαι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ Γρηγόριος ἡ μεγάλη τῆς φύσεως ἔνδειξις, καὶ ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τελευταία φορὰ, οὐχ ὅπως μετὰ τούτων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ τούτους δίκαιος ἂν εἴη τετάχθαι. Πέτρου γὰρ τὸν ζῆλον, καὶ Παύλου τὸν τόνον, καὶ τὴν Ἰωάννου θεολογίαν, καὶ ἃ πόλλ' ἕτερα τούτοις προσῆν, οὕτως εἰς ἄκρον κατωρθωκῶς, ὡς μηδὲν ἔνδειν τουτωνὶ περὶ ταῦτα. ὁ δ' ἔστιν οἷς αὐτοὺς καὶ παρήλασε, Πέτρον μὲν, οἷς οὐχ ὠμίλησε γάμω. ἀλλὰ παρθενία συνέζη, Παῦλον δὲ τῷ τὴν εὐσεβείαν ἐκ προγόνων ἀκριβῶς μεμυῆσθαι, καὶ μὴ τὴν μὲν ἀρχὴν εἰς διώκτας τελεῖν, ἔπειτα δι' ἐμφανείας φρικώδους τῷ Θεῷ προσελθεῖν, ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν Ζεβεδαίου, τῷ μὴ διὰ βραχέων μηδ' ἀπλῶς οὕτως, ἀλλὰ δαφιλέστερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον, καὶ οἷον ἀγωνιστικώτερον καὶ πρὸς ἀμιλλαν ἦφθαι θεολογίας (340D-341A)

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ὦ φύσεως ἔνδειξις καὶ φιλοτιμία τοῦ γένους (5, 1034-1035) ἡ μεγάλη τῆς φύσεως ἔνδειξις, καὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τελευτία φορὰ (6, 34-35)	Γρηγόριος ἡ μεγάλη τῆς φύσεως ἔνδειξις, καὶ ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τελευτία φορὰ (340D)
Καὶ ψυχὴ τις ἦν τῷ Δημητρίῳ Χριστὸς, οὐκ ἀφισταμένη καὶ πάλιν ἐπανιοῦσα, κατὰ τὴν ἐν μύθῳ δηπουθεν Ἐρμοτίμου, τοῦ Κλαζομενίου ψυχὴν, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ συνοῦσα (6, 110-112)	Καὶ ὅπερ περὶ Ἐρμοτίμου τοῦ Κλαζομενίου δέ που φασίν, ὡς ἄρα ἀπολιμπάνουσα αὐτὸν ἡ ψυχὴ πάλιν ἐπανήει ζωοῦσα καὶ μένος ἐμπνέουσα, τοῦτο κἀνταῦθα πως ὄραν ἔστιν, οὐ μᾶλλον ἀπήσαν ἀλλήλων, ἢ ἀλλήλοις συνῆσαν (264D)
Ποίαν τινὰ τὴν δοξαν ἐκτέον καὶ τί σε δεῖ προσεπεῖν; (6, 153-154)	Ποίαν τινὰ περὶ σοῦ δόξαν ἐκτέον καὶ τί σε δεῖ προσεπεῖν; (241D)
Καὶ συμπάσης ἀρετῆς πρυτανεῖον, καὶ Θεοῦ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους φιλοτιμία, καὶ πάντα ταυτὶ τὰ κάλλιστα προσειρησθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου, καὶ Τριάδος ἔστία (6, 171-173)	Ἴν παντὸς ἡδίστου μηδ’ ὄντινοῦν τοπαράπαν ποιησάμενος λόγον, πλὴν ὅσον εἰς ἀρετὴν φέρει καὶ Θεοῦ ξυναυλίαν! Ἴν Τριάδος ἔστία καὶ πρυτανεῖον θεολογίας καὶ δογμάτων ἀκρίβεια! (348CD)

Can Thomas Magistros Be Considered a Source of Nicholas Kabasilas’ Theology?

There can be no doubt that Nicholas Kabasilas employed Thomas Magistros’ text while composing his rhetorical works. How can one explain Kabasilas’ predilection for this obscure text of Thomas Magistros? Was Magistros perhaps his teacher in Thessaloniki? This possibility cannot be ruled out; both Magistros, who must have died around 1350,⁹ and Kabasilas, who was born around 1322,¹⁰ were prominent members of the intellectual elite of Thessaloniki. But what is more striking is that certain elements of Kabasilas’ theory on the life in Christ, which formed the basis of his treatise *On Life in Christ*, appear already in Magistros’ *Oration* on Gregory of Nazianzus. I give a summary account of these below:

⁹ Niels Gaul, *Thomas Magistros und spätbyzantinische Sophistik. Studien zum Humanismus urbaner Eliten in der frühen Palaiologenzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 369.

¹⁰ Congourdeau, *Nicolas Cabasilas. Ézéchiél, prophète de l’ Incarnation. Introduction, traduction, note et guide thématique* (Paris: Cerf, 2021), 14.

A. Man becomes united with God through virtue: ὅτι τῶν μὲν εἰς ἀρετὴν φερόντων ἐνὸς οὐδενὸς τοπαράπαν ἀπέσχου, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντων τούτων ἀπλῶς οὕτωςι περιέσχου, ὡς οὐδενὸς τινος τῶν ἄλλων οὐδεὶς, τεκμήριον ἐναργὲς ἡ θαυμαστὴ σοὶ πρὸς Θεὸν οἰκειότης, καὶ τὸ Θεὸν ἀμέλει γενέσθαι τῇ πρὸς αὐτὸν κοινωνίᾳ (244A). In the beginning of book VI of *On Life in Christ*, Kabasilas points out that what safeguards the blessedness of those united with Christ through the mysteries is virtue and life according to reason (VI, 3, 1-2).

B. Both Magistros and Kabasilas seem to employ the image of philosophy descending from heaven to earth employed by Plato in the *Timaeus*: Οὐ γὰρ ὄν ἦδεσαν ἐδόκουν ὄρᾶν, ἀλλ' ὄν ἐώρων, οὐρανόθεν εἰς γῆν ἦκειν ἐδόκουν ἐπ' εὐδαιμονίᾳ τῇ σφῶν, καὶ διατοῦτο μεῖζον ἢ κατ' ἀνθρώπους τούτῳ προσεῖχον (256A). The relevant passage of Kabasilas is the following: ἀλλὰ καὶ οἷς τῷ βίῳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐνομοθέτει, μόνος τὴν οὐράνιον τῇ γῆ προδειξας καὶ φυτεύσας φιλοσοφίαν (IV, 16, 7-8).

C. The Pauline view that the Christian lives in God in a hidden way:

Ἔπειτα μόνῃ τῇ κατὰ νοῦν ἐνεργείᾳ συντεταχῶς ἑαυτὸν, οὕτω σφοδρότερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ἀντέσχετο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὡς ἐν τούτῳ κατὰ τὸν Παῦλον καὶ ζῆν καὶ κινεῖσθαι καὶ εἶναι, καὶ χαίρειν μὲν ἑαυτῷ καθάπαξ ἑᾶν, χαίρειν δὲ τῷ Χριστῷ μηδὲν ἤττον ἢ ἀναπνεῖν. Κόσμῳ γὰρ καὶ τοῖς κόσμου πράγμασι παντάπασιν νεκρωθεὶς, ὡς μηδ' ὅ,τι ποτ' οἶον ἐθέλειν μεμνησθαι, ὁ δὲ τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ κεκρυμμένην ἕξιν ζωὴν δι' αὐτοῦ τῶν αὐτοῦ καταπολαύων χαρίτων, καὶ τούτοις ἐντρυφῶν ὅσαι ὥραι, Θεὸν καθόσον ἐφικτὸν ὁρῶν τε καὶ φανταζόμενος, καὶ πᾶσαν δυσχέρειαν ἐντεῦθεν ἀποκρουόμενος (257B).

Magistros insists that man must act according to the heart of God, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ καρδίαν ὡς εἶπεῖν πολιτεύεσθαι (281B), and be totally dependent upon God, τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ καθάπαξ ἐξῆφθαι καὶ τοῦτον ἐξ ὅλης δήπου ψυχῆς καὶ διανοίας φιλεῖν (281C). The relevant passages of Kabasilas are the following: καὶ ὁ τῆς καρδίας ἐπιεικῶς ἐστὶ καὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς κινούμεθα καὶ ζῶμεν το γε εἰς αὐτὸν ἦκον, ὡς ἔχει ζωὴς ἐκεῖνος (IV, 37, 10-12); τὸν ἐν Χριστῷ ζῆν προηρημένον ἀκόλουθον μὲν τῆς καρδίας καὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐκείνης ἐξῆφθαι (VI, 7, 1-2). It is noteworthy that a manuscript gives the title of Kabasilas' treatise as follows: Τοῦ σοφωτάτου καὶ λογιωτάτου κυροῦ Νικολάου Καβάσιλα περὶ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ κρυπτομένης ζωῆς.

D. Man attains his likeness to God through his thoughts (λογισμοί): πάλαι διὰ βίου καὶ θεωρίας εἰς ὕψος ἡμένῳ καὶ μετὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ συνόντι τοῖς λογισμοῖς.

Here is a similar passage of Kabasilas: Χριστοῦ δὲ πέρι καὶ ὧν αὐτὸς φιλανθρώπως περὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ἐμηχανήσατο σωτηρίας, διεξιέναι τοῖς λογισμοῖς, αὐτὴν ἡμῖν ἄντικρυς ἔχει τὴν ζητουμένην ζωὴν καὶ διὰ πάντων ἀποδείκνυσι μακαρίουσ (VI, 48, 2-5).

E. Both Magistros and Kabasilas insist that the Christian does not need miracles to prove his superiority; his only concern must be the attainment of virtue:

δι' ἣν οὐδὲ θαυμάτων αὐτουργὸς ἤξιωσεν ἐν τῷ παρόντι γενέσθαι, οὐδὲ τέρασι καὶ σημείοις ἐπικοσμήσαι τὸν βίον δυνάμενος, ὡς οὐκ οἶδ' εἴ τις, τοῦ δὲ μετρίου μόνου φροντίζων καὶ τὴν ἐκεῖθεν ἀποσειόμενος δόξαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἄνω μακαριότητα μόνην ἐζήτει καὶ τὸ μετὰ Θεοῦ τετάχθαι καὶ τοῦτον ἀμέσως ὁρᾶν (278D–280A).

Kabasilas refers to the same subject:

Καὶ δὴ τὸν οὕτω ζήσαντα πρὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν στήσαντες, μανθάνωμεν αὐτοῦ τὴν εὐεξίαν καὶ τὴν ὥραν, πανταχόθεν περισκοποῦντες, σκεψόμεθα δὲ τῶν μὲν ἄλλως αὐτὸν κοσμοῦντων οὐδέν, οὐδ' εἴ θαύμασι λάμπει καὶ τοιαύτην εἴληφε χάριν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν τοῦτον καθαρῶς καὶ τὸν οἴκοι κόσμον τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρετὴν. Ἐκείνως μὲν γὰρ εἰκάσαι τις ἂν τὸν σπουδαῖον, καὶ τοῦτ' αὐτὸ μόνον ἀρετῆς ἂν εἴη τεκμήριον (VII, 2, 5-13).

Ἄλλ' οὐδ' εἴ θεωριῶν τινων ἀπολαύοι καὶ ἀποκαλύψεων τυγχάνει καὶ τὰ μυστήρια πάντα οἶδεν, ἀπὸ τούτων αὐτὸν εἰσόμεθα καὶ θαυμάσομεν. Καὶ ταῦτα γὰρ ἐνίοτε ἀκολουθεῖ τοι ἐν Χριστῷ ζῶσι, οὐ συνίστησιν, οὐδ' ἐργάζεται τὴν ζωὴν, ὥστε μηδὲν πλέον εἰς ἀρετὴν εἶναι τῷ πρὸς ταῦτα μόνον ὁρῶντι (VII, 4, 10-15).

F. The virtuous man obtains some preliminary visions of the divine realities even in this life: καὶ ἦ διὰ πάντων οὗτος οἰκεῖος καὶ μέλων Θεῶ μεγίστας δεχόμενος τὰς ἐμφάσεις τῶν ἐσομένων ἐλλάμψεων (344C). Here is a relevant passage from Kabasilas: τοῖς δὲ μακαρίοις πολλαὶ τῶν μελλόντων ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος ἐμφάσεις (I, 3, 9-10).

One may conclude that Kabasilas was in a constant dialogue with Magistros' *Oration* on Gregory of Nazianzus throughout most of his life. His theology was contained in a primitive form within that text. Kabasilas employed Magistros' teachings both in his hagiographical works and in his main theological treatise (*On Life in Christ*), further developing and expanding upon them.

The Hagiographical Works of Nicholas Kabasilas and Makarios Makres

Nicholas Kabasilas' hagiographical works seem, in turn, to have been utilized quite extensively by Makarios Makres, an important theologian of the early fifteenth century. Here is an (indicative) list of parallel passages I have identified:

Kabasilas, <i>encomia</i> of saints	Makarios Makres, works ¹¹
ἀλλ' οὐ κατὰ παῖδας εἶχε τὸ φρόνημα, οὐδ' εἰς παιδιάς ἑώρα καὶ τὴν ἐκεῖθεν τέρψιν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐτιμᾶτο (4, 87-88)	Παῖς γὰρ ὧν ἦδη οὐ κατὰ παῖδας εἶχε τὸ φρόνημα εἶχεν, οὐδ' εἰς παιδιάς καὶ κρότους καὶ ἄλματα καὶ τὴν παιδικὴν ἑώρα ῥαστώνην, οὐδὲ τὴν ἐκεῖθεν τέρψιν πολλοῦ τινος ἤγε (<i>Life of Maximos Kausokalybes</i> 79-81)
Οὕτω δ' ἀγαθοὺς ἀρετῆς τεχνίτας (5, 83)	τῆς κατὰ μοναχοὺς ἀρετῆς τεχνίτης (<i>Oration on Gabriel of Thessaloniki</i> 380)
Τῶν δ' ἐντεῦθεν Δημήτριον δεῖ καλεῖν ἡγεμόνα, καὶ παρείης γε ὧ φίλτατε τῆς ὑπὲρ σοῦ σπουδῆς κοινωνήσων (5, 128-129)	Τὴν σὴν καλῶ θείαν ψυχὴν, καὶ παρείης γε φίλτατε τῆς ἐπί σοι σπουδῆς κοινωνήσων μοι (<i>Oration on Gabriel of Thessaloniki</i> 37-38)
Κοινωνοὺς οἶδε παρασκευάζειν τῶν Ὀλύμπου πραγμάτων (2, 53-54)	Καὶ κοινωνοὺς ἐντεῦθεν καθίστων τῶν Ὀλύμπου πραγμάτων (<i>Oration on the fathers of the seven ecumenical councils</i> 448-449) κοινωνοὺς τῶν Ὀλύμπου καθιστᾶσα πραγμάτων (<i>Oration on Gabriel of Thessaloniki</i> 7-8)
ὧ φύσεως ἔνδειξις καὶ φιλοτιμία γένους (5, 1034-1035)	ὧ φύσεως ἔνδειξις καὶ φιλοτιμία γένους (<i>Oration on Gabriel of Thessaloniki</i> 667-668)
Οὕτω διὰ γυναικῶν (4, 76-77)	Οὕτως ὧ διὰ γυναικῶν (<i>Miracles of St. Euphemia</i> 80-81)
Θεοῦ δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐκείνου φίλων ἔχεσθαι μὲν μόνην μάλιστα πασῶν εὐδαιμονίαν εἶναι (5, 206)	Μόνον ἦδει τίμιον τὴν ἀρετὴν χρῆμα, μόνην εὐδαιμονίαν ἐνόμιζε τῷ Θεῷ χρῆσθαι (<i>Oration on Gabriel of Thessaloniki</i> 247-248)

Makarios Makres seems to have absorbed some basic teachings of Kabasilas, at least as far as terminology is concerned. In his *Oration on Gabriel of Thessaloniki*, v. 478-480, he uses the term ἡ μακαρία συσταίη ζωὴ which reminds us of Kabasilas. Although he is very far from the theological depth of his older compatriot, it seems that Makres had been an avid reader of Kabasilas' writings.

¹¹ I refer to the edition of Asterios Argyriou, *Μακαρίου τοῦ Μακροῦ συγγράμματα* (Thessaloniki: Κέντρον Βυζαντινῶν Ἑρευνῶν, 1996). The numbers refer to the lines of the texts.

Conclusion

Kabasilas had certainly benefited from Thomas Magistros' *Oration* on Gregory of Nazianzus, both in composing his hagiographical works, which are mainly rhetorical, and in expounding his most important theological insights in his main theological treatise *On Life in Christ*. This may be the reason for the absence from the latter treatise of any points of contact between Kabasilas and Palamas. Magistros' *Oration* is a rhetorical work devoid of any interest in hesychasm or mysticism of the Palamite type. Thus, Kabasilas seems to have followed in the steps of Magistros. The intellectualistic way of approaching man's communion with Christ is a characteristic shared by both Magistros and Kabasilas. Later on, the latter's hagiographical works were considerably exploited by the Palamite hieromonk Makarios Makres of Thessaloniki in the early fifteenth century, who did not hesitate to incorporate some elements of Kabasilas' theory on life in Christ into his own rhetorical works.

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