

## THE RELATION OF GREGORY AKINDYNOS TO BARLAAM THE CALABRIAN

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**ABSTRACT.** In the writings of the fourteenth-century Hesychasts, Gregory Akindynos is characterized as a Barlaamite because his theological perceptions are considered to be no different from those of Barlaam the Calabrian. However, Akindynos himself rejects the designation of Barlaamite by denying that he is in agreement with Barlaam and claiming injustice and slander from the Palamite party. In order to support his contention, he draws attention to his strong opposition to Barlaam when the latter turned against the monks and their way of life. Nevertheless, his own writings contradict his assertion, since they testify to the identification of his theology with that of Barlaam.

**Keywords:** Gregory Palamas, Gregory Akindynos, Barlaam the Calabrian, Barlaamite, hesychasm, hesychasts, Hesychast Controversy

### Introduction

The second phase of the Hesychast Controversy, which is (roughly) defined by the Constantinopolitan synods of 1341 and 1347, is remarkably interesting.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On Hesychasm, see, e.g., Panagiotis Christou, "Περὶ τὰ αἴτια τῆς ἡσυχαστικῆς ἔριδος," in *Θεολογικά μελετήματα*, vol. 3: *Νηπτικά καὶ ἡσυχαστικά* (Thessaloniki: Πατριαρχικὸν Ἰδρυμα Πατερικῶν Μελετῶν, 1977), 87–97; Venizelos Christoforides, *Οἱ ἡσυχαστικὲς ἐρίδες κατὰ τὸν ΙΔ' αἰῶνα*, 2nd edn (Thessaloniki: Παρατηρητής, 1993); Norman Russell, *Gregory Palamas. The Hesychast Controversy and the Debate with Islam. Documents Relating to Gregory Palamas* (Translated Texts for Byzantinists 8) (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

During that period, the personality of Gregory Akindynos prevailed as the protagonist of the anti-Palamite party, the person who, according to Hesychast authors, succeeded Barlaam the Calabrian and continued his theological thought.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between Akindynos and Barlaam dates to around 1332.<sup>3</sup> After the rejection of his request by four Athonite monasteries (Lavra, Iviron, Philotheou, and Simonopetra) to remain as a monk on Mount Athos, Akindynos fled to Thessaloniki, where he met Barlaam the Calabrian.<sup>4</sup> Their encounter is considered to be a turning point and a crucial factor in the final shaping of Akindynos' problematic theological perceptions. According to Patriarch Kallistos I of Constantinople, Akindynos embraced Barlaam's "impiety" (δυσσέβειαν) and incorporated it into his own already "erroneous perceptions" (κακοδοξίαν).<sup>5</sup> This means that the interaction between Barlaam and Akindynos was so great that the latter was influenced by the former in such a way and to such an extent that he was now of one mind with him in terms of his theological perceptions.

Gregory Palamas also emphasizes the theological alignment of Barlaam and Akindynos.<sup>6</sup> In several places in his writings, he refers to Akindynos

<sup>2</sup> For Akindynos' biography, see Angela Constantinides Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos* (CFHB 21) (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1983), ix–xxxiii, 309–439. See also Andreas P. Zachariou, *Ἡ θεολογικὴ γνωσιολογία τοῦ Γρηγορίου Ἀκινδύνου. Προσέγγιση στὴ διαμόρφωση καὶ τὴν ἀπόπειρα πατερικῆς κατοχύρωσης τῶν θεολογικῶν του ἀντιλήψεων* (Athens: Γρηγόρη, 2018), 23–99. On Barlaam, see Giuseppe Schirò, *Ὁ Βαρλαάμ καὶ ἡ φιλοσοφία εἰς τὴν Θεσσαλονίκη κατὰ τὸν δέκατον τέταρτον αἰῶνα* (Εταιρεία Μακεδονικῶν Σπουδῶν 32) (Thessaloniki: Ἴδρυμα Μελετῶν Χερσονήσου τοῦ Αἴμου, 1959); Robert Sinkewicz, "The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian," *Mediaeval Studies* 44 (1982): 181–242; Antonis Fyrgos, *Dalla controversia palamitica alla polemica esicastica (con un'edizione critica delle Epistole greche di Barlaam)* (Rome: Antonianum, 2005), 161–191.

<sup>3</sup> See Constantinides Hero, *Letters*, x–xi; Juan Nadal Cañellas, "Gregorio Akindinos," in *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, vol. 2: (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> s.), eds. Carmelo Giuseppe Conticello and Vassa Conticello (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 189–314, here at 195.

<sup>4</sup> On the events which took place on Athos, see Zachariou, "Παρατηρήσεις περὶ τὴν ἀντίληψη τοῦ Γρηγορίου Ἀκινδύνου γιὰ τὸν μοναχισμό," in *Philosophos – Philotheos – Philoponos. Studies and Essays as Charisteria in Honor of Professor Bogoljub Šijaković on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Mikonja Knežević in collaboration with Rade Kisić and Dušan Krcunović (Belgrade; Podgorica: Gnomon Center for the Humanities / Matica srpska – Društvo članova u Crnoj Gori, 2021), 363–374.

<sup>5</sup> See Kallistos I's hitherto unedited <Ὁμιλία> εἰς τὴν πρώτην Κυριακὴν τῶν νηστειῶν, *Patmiacus gr.* 366, f. 415r: Οὕτω δ' ἐκεῖθεν [i.e., Ἅγιον Ὅρος] ἀποπεμφθεὶς ὁ Ἀκίνδυνος, τὴν Θεσσαλονίκη καταλαμβάνει ἔνθα δὴ καὶ ἐντυχῶν τῷ ... Βαρλαάμ, οὐ μόνον τὴν ἦν εἶχεν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἐμφωλεύουσιν κακοδοξίαν διέδειξεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν δυσσέβειαν ἐξερρόφησεν. I am currently preparing the critical edition of this homily, which will be published in 2023.

<sup>6</sup> On Palamas, see, e.g., John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, English trans. George Lawrence, 2nd edn (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974); Georgios Mantzarides, *Παλαμικά*, 3rd edn (Thessaloniki: Πουρναρά, 1998). *Proceedings of International Scientific*

as Barlaam's "initiate and successor and follower" (μύστης καὶ διάδοχος καὶ ὀπαδός).<sup>7</sup> In other words, Palamas considers him to be not only a disciple of Barlaam's theological thought, but also the person who actually replaces and succeeds him in his misconceptions, errors, and misbelief.<sup>8</sup> He thus notes the theological agreement between them and openly characterizes Akindynos as a "Barlaamite" (βαρλααμίτην).<sup>9</sup> This sobriquet, which was subsequently employed by other Hesychast authors, indicates and attests to only one thing, namely the origination of the anti-Palamite polemic in the person of Barlaam and its continuity and consistent theological expression via Akindynos.

Philotheos Kokkinos likewise characterizes Akindynos as a Barlaamite, since he continued Barlaam's divergent theology.<sup>10</sup> Akindynos succeeded Barlaam and continued his heretical teaching, which constitutes a huge danger and a "corruption" (λύμη) of the Church, the same way that Eunomius acted as the successor of the heresy of Arius and Severus as the heir of the heresy of Eutyches and Dioscorus.<sup>11</sup> Joseph Kalothetos similarly argues that Akindynos' attempt to oppose and fight Palamas, who had detected Barlaam's deceit and refuted his heretical conceptions, led to a very specific result: the renewal and the revival of Barlaam' theological errors through Akindynos; and this is actually a proof that their perceptions are not essentially different.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, David Disypatos notes that Barlaam's theological position is the same as that of Akindynos, and thus their doctrinal teaching is identical.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, John VI Kantakouzenos

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*Conferences of Athens and Limassol, Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς στὴν Ἱστορία καὶ τὸ Παρόν, Athens, 13–15 November 1998 and Limassol, 5–7 November 1999* (Holy Mountain: Monastery of Vatopedi, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Palamas, *Antirrhethikos* 2, 3, 11, *PS*, vol. 3, 92.26-28; *Letter to Macarius* 2, 2 and 4, *PS*, vol. 2, 540.3-4, 541.26-27; *Refutation of Kalekas' Letter* 18, *PS*, vol. 2, 601.7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Palamas, *Dialogue of Theophanes with Theotimos* 10, *PS*, vol. 2, 233.4-8; *Antirrhethikos* 2, 5, 13 and *Antirrhethikos* 4, 18, 48-49, *PS*, vol. 3, 94.13-14, 276.8-277.30.

<sup>9</sup> Palamas, *Antirrhethikos* 4, 18, 47, *PS* 3, 275.11-16: [...] Ἄρα τι διενηνόχασιν ἀλλήλων; see, e.g., *Antirrhethikoi* 1, 7, 33; 5, 24, 94; and 6, 9, 23, *PS* 3, 63.33-64.1; 359.5-6; 401.23.

<sup>10</sup> Kokkinos, *Κατὰ Γρηγοῦρᾶ* 11, in *Φιλοθέου Κοκκίνου Δογματικά ἔργα. Μέρος Α'*, ed. Demetrios Kaimakis (Thessaloniki: Κέντρον Βυζαντινῶν Ἐρευνῶν, 1983), 454.1517-1518.

<sup>11</sup> Kokkinos, *Λόγος εἰς τὸν ἐν ἁγίοις πατέρα ἡμῶν Γρηγόριον ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Θεσσαλονίκης* 42.32-35, in *Φιλοθέου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Κοκκίνου ἀγιολογικά ἔργα. Α'. Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἅγιοι*, ed. Demetrios Tsamis (Thessaloniki: Κέντρον Βυζαντινῶν Ἐρευνῶν, 1985), 475.

<sup>12</sup> Kalothetos, *Λόγος* 1, 5-6, in *Ἰωσήφ Καλοθέτου συγγράμματα*, ed. Tsamis (Thessaloniki: Κέντρον Βυζαντινῶν Ἐρευνῶν, 1980), 85.136-86.165. See also Kallistos I, *Διδασκαλία δογματικὴ κατὰ τῶν Βαρλααμιτῶν* 1, ed. Constantine Paidas, "Editio Princeps of an Unedited Dogmatic Discourse against the Barlaamites by the Patriarch of Constantinople Kallistos I," *BZ* 105.1 (2012): 117-130, here at 123.3-4, 14-16.

<sup>13</sup> Disypatos, *Ἱστορία διὰ βραχέων ὅπως τὴν ἀρχὴν συνέστη ἢ κατὰ τὸν Βαρλαάμ καὶ Ἀκίνδυνον πονηρὰ αἵρεσις*, ed. Manuel Candal, "Origen ideológico del palamismo en un documento de David Disipato," *OCP* 15 (1949): 85-125, here at 124.138-140: "Ὅπερ ὁ Βαρλαάμ φρονεῖ ... καὶ ὁ

points out that Akindynos embraced Barlaam's teachings and, in this respect, there was never any theological divergence between them.<sup>14</sup>

### Akindynos Rebukes Barlaam

While Palamas and the other Hesychasts consider the theological positions of Barlaam and Akindynos to be identical, Akindynos himself will deny this emphatically. He regards the accusation as slander and claims that this is due to his refusal to accept the Palamite theological position.<sup>15</sup> As proof of his non-Barlaamite attitude he refers to his vigorous, written and verbal, opposition to Barlaam. He even considers and presents his opposition to Barlaam as more significant than the opposition of anyone else: "no one rebuked Barlaam, either verbally or in writing, more than we did."<sup>16</sup> However, he hastens to clarify that his opposition to Barlaam does not imply agreement with the theological positions of Palamas. Despite the fact that Barlaam insisted on this, accusing him of "Palamism," Akindynos believes that both of them held incorrect positions,<sup>17</sup> revealing their "boldness and audacity."<sup>18</sup> He claims that his own theological views are the correct ones, occupying a place between the extreme and impious positions of Barlaam and Palamas.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, addressing Palamas, he says: "that we are not Barlaamites is proved by the discourses we wrote against Barlaam ... That we are not Palamites either is shown by what you claim, calling us Barlaamites."<sup>20</sup>

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Ἀκίνδυνος. Μὴ γὰρ δέξεται τις ὅλως παρά τινος ὅτι ἔχει τινὰ παραλλαγὴν ἐν τοῖς δόγμασι πρὸς τὸν Βαρλαάμ ὁ Ἀκίνδυνος. Cf. Chrysostomos Savvatos, "Ἀρσενίου τοῦ Στουδίτου ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς τὸν Γρηγόριο Παλαμᾶ," *Ἑλληνικά* 52.1 (2002): 69-77, here at 76.4-24.

<sup>14</sup> Kantakouzenos, *Historiae* II.40, ed. Ludovic Schopen, *Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris historiarum libri IV*, vol. 1 (Bonn: E. Weber, 1828), 556.3-12: [...] καὶ οὐδὲν ἢ μικρὸν ἢ μείζον διεφέρετο.

<sup>15</sup> Akindynos, *Antirrhetikos* IV, 15, ed. Nadal Cañellas, *Gregorii Acindyni refutationes duae operis Gregorii Palamae, cui titulus Dialogus inter Orthodoxum et Barlaamitam* (CCSG 31) (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), 338.13-339.15.

<sup>16</sup> Akindynos, *Ἐτέρα ἔκθεσις καὶ ἀνασκευὴ τῶν τοῦ Παλαμᾶ πονηροτάτων αἰρέσεων*, *Monacensis gr.* 223, f. 66v: τὸν Βαρλαάμ ... οὐδεὶς μᾶλλον ἡμῶν ἐπετίμησε καὶ οὕτως ἀπλῶς καὶ λόγοις συντεταγμένοις. Cf. *Report to Kalekas* 1 and 8, ed. Nadal Cañellas, "Gregorio Akindinos," 259.42-43, 262.182-183. See also Christou, "Εἰσαγωγικά," *PS*, vol. 2, 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> Akindynos, *Antirrhetikos* II, 50, ed. Nadal Cañellas, *Refutationes*, 154.86-91.

<sup>18</sup> Akindynos, *Antirrhetikos* I, 2, ed. Nadal Cañellas, *Refutationes*, 4.17-18.

<sup>19</sup> Akindynos, *Antirrhetikos* I, 13, ed. Nadal Cañellas, *Refutationes*, 15.1-4: [...] μέσην οἰκοῦντας τῆς εὐσεβείας χώραν τὴν ἀνεπίληπτον.

<sup>20</sup> Akindynos, *Διάλεξις τοῦ κακοδόξου Παλαμᾶ μετὰ ὀρθοδόξου*, ed. Nadal Cañellas, *Refutationes*, 414.35-39: Ὅτι μὲν οὖν οὐ Βαρλααμίται ἡμεῖς, δεικνύουσιν ἡμῶν οἱ κατ' ἐκείνου [i.e., Barlaam] λόγοι ... Ὅτι δὲ οὐδὲ τῆς παλαμναίας μοίρας, σὺ [i.e., Palamas] μαρτυρεῖς ἡμῖν, Βαρλααμίτας ἀποκαλῶν, ὥσπερ οὖν κάκεινος Παλαμίτας ἐκάλει.

The discourses to which Akindynos refers, as the written component of his opposition to Barlaam, correspond to the *Letters* he addressed to Barlaam at the height of the controversy with the Hesychasts.<sup>21</sup> These *Letters* are invoked and presented by Akindynos as proof of his own position, namely that his own views are, on the one hand, not to be identified as Barlaamite, but are also, on the other hand, to be differentiated from the theological positions of Palamas.

In order to substantiate his assertion Akindynos contends that in his *Letters* he defended the hesychast monks and their way of life from the offensive accusations of Barlaam, which proves that he does not support Barlaam's positions and therefore is not a Barlaamite. He stresses that claims to the contrary, namely that he favours Barlaam, are simply calumny and come from "libelers and slanderers." Thus, he recommends to all who seek the truth in good faith to read his *Letters*, in order to understand his real intentions, which show that he is not biased either in favour of Barlaam or Palamas. Claiming to remain firmly in the tradition of the Fathers, i.e., to maintain "doctrinal accuracy," Akindynos rejects the theological views of both Barlaam and Palamas, refusing to admit any other, alternative theology, whether it comes from the former, the latter, or even from anyone else.<sup>22</sup>

But, do the *Letters* actually vindicate Akindynos? Do they constitute texts which prove, or even suggest the truth of his claim concerning his position towards Barlaam and Palamas? In his *Letters*, Akindynos indeed opposes Barlaam's position and point of view, and praises the hesychast monks, characterizing them as "pious" and "God-loving men,"<sup>23</sup> as "holy"<sup>24</sup> and "consecrated to God" (Ναζιραίου),<sup>25</sup> who strive and seek to acquire virtue with faith and simplicity and, especially, without idle curiosity (ἀπεριέργως).<sup>26</sup> He regards Barlaam's opposition to the hesychasts as thoughtless, unjust, unwise, slanderous, and prejudiced. He even describes it as an interference in a way of life the dimensions and parameters of which Barlaam was, in any case, completely ignorant.<sup>27</sup> Akindynos denounces Barlaam because, due to his excessive pride, he wanted to challenge the godly way of life

<sup>21</sup> These are four *Letters*, nos. 7, 8, 9, and 10 in Constantinides Hero's edition, which date to just before the synod of June 1341. See Constantinides Hero, *Letters*, 20–54, 319–329.

<sup>22</sup> His contention, which is provided as a "confession," was published by Leo Allatius, *De ecclesiae occidentalis atque orientalis perpetua consensione*, book II, ch. XVI, 3 (Cologne, 1648), col. 802, and reprinted in *PG* 150, 875–876.

<sup>23</sup> Akindynos, *Letter* 7, trans. Constantinides Hero, *Letters*, 24.79–80. Unless otherwise noted, the translations of the *Letters* belong to Constantinides Hero.

<sup>24</sup> Akindynos, *Letter* 8 (26.5).

<sup>25</sup> Akindynos, *Letters* 9 and 10; my translation; cf. Constantinides Hero, *Letters*, 30.19, 40.94.

<sup>26</sup> Akindynos, *Letter* 10 (44.149–150). See also *Report to Kalekas* 1, ed. Nadal Cañellas, "Gregorio Akíndinos," 258.12–14; *Letter* 9 (30.31–32).

<sup>27</sup> Akindynos, *Letter* 9 (30.49–32.57); *Letter* 10 (40.74–94); cf. *Letter* 7 (26.126–128).

of the monks<sup>28</sup> and to teach about perfection “according to the manner of men” (ἀνθρωπίνως) in a way that it is contrary to monastic tradition, since he attempted to do so using sophisticated and elaborated rhetorical figures. Addressing Barlaam, Akindynos thus writes: “For where was prayer ever formed by means of syllogisms and continuous ‘therefores’?”<sup>29</sup>

In fact, by responding to Barlaam’s attempt to approach and understand prayer and its experience logically, with syllogisms and arguments, Akindynos suggests to him that there is only one way to properly understand and comprehend whatever concerns monks. Firstly, one must refrain from meddling more than one ought with hesychasm and trying to understand it using philosophical notions. Then, one must follow “the road that leads to the facts,” that is, to choose to live according to “the life and philosophy” of the hesychasts. In this way, one will understand the value and importance of hesychasm through one’s own experience. That is why Akindynos points out to Barlaam that: “all those who engage in divine pursuits say that there is no sufficient demonstration for those who do not engage in them, just as there is no sweetness of honey for those who have not tasted it.”<sup>30</sup>

Obviously what Akindynos points out in these four *Letters* concerning the monks and their prayer is correct, while his opposition to Barlaam seems to be in line with the tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, this particular opposition to Barlaam’s theology neither supports nor justifies his larger claim. This is, quite simply, because in his *Letters*, which he is so fond of invoking in order to prove that he is not a Barlaamite, an entirely different picture is formed, contrary to what Akindynos wishes to claim.

### **Barlaam’s and Akindynos’ Shared Theological Presuppositions**

In *Letter 8* of Akindynos, which appears to be a response to a letter of Barlaam now lost, Akindynos openly professes ideas that are similar, and indeed almost identical, to those of Barlaam. *Letter 8* is preceded by *Letter 7*, where Akindynos had mocked Barlaam’s arrogance and his supercilious, abusive, and incessant polemics against the Hesychasts. Akindynos even warned him here that he would henceforward turn away from him, cease to support him, and no longer praise what he was doing because of his position.<sup>31</sup> During the interval between these two *Letters*, as is clearly evident from *Letter 8*, Akindynos and

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<sup>28</sup> Akindynos, *Letter 10* (44.178-179).

<sup>29</sup> Akindynos, *Letter 9* (30.28-38).

<sup>30</sup> Akindynos, *Letter 10* (40.78-46.190).

<sup>31</sup> Akindynos, *Letter 7* (20.7-26.128).

Barlaam met and apparently discussed their differences. During that time, Barlaam sent a *Letter* to Akindynos, which unfortunately does not survive. Akindynos considered this *Letter* unnecessary, as he writes in *Letter* 8: "It seems to me that, as far as I am concerned, you did not need to write to me what you have written, for you told me these things recently by word of mouth, and I did not forget." The content of *Letter* 8, which captures the context of their discussion, concerns not only the Barlaamite position on hesychasm, but several other theological issues, as well. This is the reason for a statement of Akindynos reminding Barlaam that he did not oppose him on theological issues. He stresses, instead, that the difference between them concerns exclusively the way in which each of them understands and perceives hesychasm. Since Barlaam seemed to oppose and question the long-standing tradition that accompanied the hesychastic way of life, Akindynos opposed him: "You are precisely aware that I oppose you only because of your insulting treatment of the holy hesychasts from the beginning." However, as far as *theology* is concerned, there is no real difference between them: "I do not strongly oppose you on the questions of theology" (κάγώ σοι τὰ περι θεολογίας οὐ σφόδρα ἐναντιοῦμαι).<sup>32</sup>

In the same *Letter*, Akindynos points out to Barlaam that the fact that he busies himself about Palamas' theology will not have a successful outcome. Palamas' status and the acceptance that he enjoyed in the Church was such that, despite Barlaam's attempt to prove him a heretic, no one would condemn him. With this suggestion, however, Akindynos does not defend Palamas. Akindynos does not agree theologically with Palamas and is definitely correct when he insists that Barlaam wrongly accuses him of Palamism. His concern was only to defend the hesychasts; and Palamas was also a hesychast, one who, according to Akindynos himself, was distinguished for his piety and godly life, which garnered for him a great reputation. It was precisely this reputation of Palamas that was meant to discourage Barlaam's accusations of heresy. Moreover, Palamas would possibly be further strengthened by the attacked, while Barlaam would suffer a terrible defeat.

Interestingly, Akindynos notes that Barlaam's eagerness to prove that Palamas was a heretic does not follow the correct procedure. He writes that without a "synodal decision" (πρὸ γὰρ ψήφου συνοδικῆς) no one can be labelled a heretic, even if his views seem to be erroneous. Still, this reference to a synodical process (which is otherwise correct) does also not imply any kind of support or agreement with Palamas' theological perceptions. On the contrary, this is rather an indirect and subtle way of expressing, for Akindynos, his theological disagreement with Palamas. For whatever reasons (perhaps because Barlaam's

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<sup>32</sup> Akindynos, *Letter* 8 (26.2-6).

opposition at the time was to the Hesychasts), Akindynos felt that he should not state his disagreement explicitly. Perhaps this is why, in the end, he advises Barlaam both to stop meddling into Palamas' theological conceptions and to stop busying himself about the hesychastic modes of prayer, pointing out that Barlaam's actions, i.e., to accuse the hesychasts or try to prove that Palamas was heretic, are "inopportune" and futile.<sup>33</sup>

In *Letter 9*, Akindynos becomes more revealing of his beliefs. He suggests to Barlaam that his polemic against the hesychast tradition was not just insolent and erroneous, but it actually resulted in Palamas gaining even higher esteem. It is thus asserted by Akindynos that Palamas, by defending the hesychasts, gained a kind of prominence within the Church in contrast to Barlaam. This means for Akindynos that the way Barlaam chose to act was clearly incorrect and misguided. Akindynos thinks that Barlaam should have left aside the accusations against the hesychasts and concentrated on Palamas' teachings which were doctrinally incorrect. He should not have turned against the monastic practices and Palamas at the same time. Having acted in such a way he lost his credibility among the ecclesiastical authorities of Constantinople, which means that the accusation against Palamas' doctrinal divergences would have little impact—it would be "enervated" (ἐκνευρισμένη), as he writes—and thus would not be effective.<sup>34</sup>

Given the fact that Akindynos actually confesses that he is in agreement with Barlaam's theology, it is clear that his insistence on denying the accusation of being a Barlaamite is misleading. He neither supports nor defends Palamas against Barlaam's accusations. Instead, he clearly states his disagreement with Palamite theology.<sup>35</sup> And in this way, Akindynos' particular understanding of hesychasm, and especially of hesychast prayer, also comes to light. For while

<sup>33</sup> See Akindynos, *Letter 8* (26.4–28.24).

<sup>34</sup> Akindynos, *Letter 9* (32.67-75): εἰ μὲν τὰ πρὸς τὸ δόγμα ἐκείνου [i.e., Palamas] μόνον τὸ περὶ τοῦ ὑπὸ τὴν θείαν φύσιν ἀκτίστου καὶ ὑπερουσίου θεοῦ καὶ ληπτοῦ σωματικοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ... δεῦρ' ἀγαγὼν ἐδείκνυς τοῖς κυρίοις τῶν ψήφων, τᾶλλα δὲ ὑπεξήρεις, μετριώτερον ἂν ἦσθα περὶ σαυτοῦ βεβουλευμένος, οἶμαι, καὶ συνετώτερον, ἢ, ὡς ἂν σὺ φαίης, οἰκονομικώτερον· νῦν δὲ πάντα ὁμοῦ δεδωκώς, τῇ τούτων ἀκαιρία ἐκνευρίζεις κάκεῖνα. χωρὶς δὲ τούτων, οὐχ ὁμοίως σοὶ τε προσέξουσιν ἢ ἐκκλησία κάκεῖνα.

<sup>35</sup> It is obvious that at no moment of the Hesychast Controversy was Akindynos ever on Palamas' side or neutral towards him, wherefore he later moved to the anti-Palamite party. Already from the outset, he had formed very specific views that were identical with those of Barlaam. Some scholars, however, claim the opposite. See the entry on "Ακίνδυνος Γρηγόριος," in *Tusculum-Lexikon griechischer und lateinischer Autoren des Altertums und des Mittelalters*, eds. Wolfgang Buchwald, Armin Hohlweg, and Otto Prinz (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1982); Fyrigos, "Gregorios Akindynos," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 4 (1995): 997. Charalambos Soteropoulos, "Οἱ καταδικασθέντες αἰρετικοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἱερῶν συνόδων πολέμοι τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ," in *Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς σὴν Ἱστορία καὶ τὸ Παρόν*, 589.



his position is in one way consistent with Orthodox tradition, it espouses this fidelity only superficially and in the end it turns out to be very peculiar. Akindynos accepts the hesychast method of prayer as being traditional and strongly defends it. But he will deny its theological interpretation and foundations. In other words, the problem for Akindynos was not simply the issue of meddling in hesychastic practices, questioning the long tradition that accompanied it, denying the experience of the hesychasts, or attempting to conceive the topic of prayer philosophically. The specific issue for Akindynos was the theological interpretation of the hesychast experience in prayer.

Akindynos particularly respects the hesychasts because they are men of virtue, God-loving men who own no property, are not meddlesome, and know of nothing “but Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). But above all he admires them because they are “unpretentiously pious” (ἀτέχνως εὐσεβεῖς) and “simple Christians” (ἀπλῶς Χριστιανοί), who pray and strive for perfection with simplicity.<sup>36</sup> Thus, they follow without meddlesomeness the traditional “holy rules” of prayer: “[the hesychasts] pursue divine matters without learning and with simplicity, that is to say, both with faith and also in accordance with the sacred rules of prayer.”<sup>37</sup> I consider this remark by Akindynos as indicative of his theological perception. For Akindynos, though hesychasm constitutes an exceptional way of life, it is nevertheless seen and understood within a very particular framework. He who pursue and practices hesychasm should not view it philosophically or try to interpret it theologically. In other words, he limits hesychasm to *askēsis* and the practice of the virtues; and he actually rejects its philosophical and logical examination as much as its theological comprehension. On the basis of this very conception he opposes Barlaam, who questioned the traditional practice of hesychasm and subjected prayer and its experience to the philosophical proof. However, he also opposes Palamas, who, going beyond the limits within which Akindynos himself included hesychasm, interprets the hesychast experience theologically, which in its expression presupposes the fact of participation in the uncreated divine energies.<sup>38</sup>

As mentioned above, Akindynos considers certain ideas of Barlaam and Palamas as not being in line with the truth of the Church. Nevertheless, he comprehends their “divergent” positions quite differently. That is, he understands

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<sup>36</sup> Akindynos, *Letter 7* (24.79-84).

<sup>37</sup> Akindynos, *Letter 9* (30.31-32): ἀμαθῶς καὶ ἀτέχνως μετιοῦσι τὰ θεῖα, τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ πιστῶς τε καὶ τοῖς θεῖοις ἐπομένως τῆς προσευχῆς κανόσι.

<sup>38</sup> Akindynos, *Letter 8* (28.15-16), where he notes Palamas' piety and God-loving life, while in *Letter 9* (32.67-73) and *Letter 10* (46.195-198) he accuses Palamas' theology of being totally erroneous.

and categorizes what he considers to be the errors of Barlaam and Palamas quite differently. Those of the former are incomparably less problematic than those of the latter. They are “newfangled talk” (καινοφωνίες), but not particularly serious problems, which is why he regards them as mere “misdemeanours.” He considers the Palamite view, however, “much worse” and describes it as “corruption of the truth” (λύμη τῆς ἀληθείας), identifying it with a doctrinal deviation whereby polytheism is clearly professed and divine simplicity is destroyed.<sup>39</sup> Even when he adds to the list of Barlaam’s misdemeanours the latter’s conversion to Catholicism, which Akindynos understands to be a serious fault, he still considers Barlaam’s errors to be negligible in comparison with the “particularly impious” Palamite theology.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Akindynos, *Antirrhētikos* II, 51, ed. Nadal Cañellas, *Refutationes*, 155.14-17, and *Διάλεξις τοῦ κακοδόξου Παλαμᾶ μετὰ ὀρθοδόξου*, ed. Nadal Cañellas, *Refutationes*, 428.508-514.

<sup>40</sup> Akindynos, *Ἐτέρα ἔκθεσις καὶ ἀνασκευὴ τῶν τοῦ Παλαμᾶ πονηροτάτων αἰρέσεων*, *Monacensis gr.* 223, f. 66v. Cf. *Letter* 46 (198.92-97). For details on Akindynos’ divergent theological perceptions and on how he perceived and misinterpreted Palamas’ theology, see Zachariou, *Ἡ θεολογικὴ γνωσιολογία*, 103–339; idem, “Οἱ θεοφάνειες στὴ γνωσιολογία τοῦ Γρηγορίου Ἀκινδύνου. Αὐγουστίνεια ἐπίδραση;” *Θεολογία* 87.3 (2016): 59–90; idem, “Gregory Akindynos’ Theological Perceptions,” in *Akindynos in Context*, eds. Renate Burri and Katharina Heyden (Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming). It should be noted however that Akindynos’ positions have been considered as aligned with the tradition of the Church by Nadal Cañellas, who presented himself as his supporter and an advocate of his theology since 1974. Disregarding (or failing to understand) the erroneous way in which Akindynos used and interpreted the teachings of the Fathers, Nadal Cañellas made special efforts to present him as a competent theologian grounded in the patristic tradition. See Nadal Cañellas’ publications, e.g., “La critique par Akindynos de l’herméneutique patristique de Palamas,” *Istina* 3 (1974): 297–328; “La rédaction première de la Troisième lettre de Palamas à Akindynos,” *OCP* 40 (1974): 233–285; “Gregorio Akindinos, ¿Eslavo o Bizantino?,” *RSDN* 27 (1990–1991): 259–265; “Denys l’Aréopagite dans les traités de Grégoire Akindynos,” in *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident (Actes du colloque international, Paris, 21–24 Septembre 1994)*, ed. Ysabel de Andia (Paris: Institut d’études augustiniennes, 1997), 535–564; “Gregorio Akindinos,” 228–250; *La résistance d’Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas. Enquête historique, avec traduction et commentaire de quatre traités édités récemment* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006); “Le rôle de Grégoire Akindynos dans la controverse hésychaste du XIV<sup>ème</sup> siècle à Byzance,” in *Eastern Crossroads. Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy*, ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 31–58. Similar views, concerning Akindynos’ theology, have been expressed by some other scholars as well. See, for example, Lowell Clucas, “The Hesychast Controversy in Byzantium in the Fourteenth Century: A Consideration of the Basic Evidence” (PhD diss., University of California, 1975); Augustine Casiday, “Church Fathers and the Shaping of Orthodox Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, eds. Mary Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 167–187, at 183.

## Conclusion

Gregory Akindynos' conceptions are obvious; his objection to Barlaam does not actually mean a disagreement with him. It is rather a peculiar way of understanding theological parameters. Therefore the claim that he is not a Barlaamite is proved to be inaccurate. The source texts, that is, his own writings, especially his *Letters*, which he extensively cites to prove that his views are to be differentiated from Barlaamite conceptions, clearly indicate that his opposition to Barlaam was exclusively focused on the issue of the hesychastic life and not on theological matters. Akindynos' theological perceptions, notably those concerning the simplicity of God, which in his case meant the philosophical identity of the divine essence with its energies, were from the outset consistent with those of Barlaam. Before the synod of June 134, Akindynos did not express these ideas openly and publicly but kept them veiled, confining them to the Barlaamite circle. He would state them clearly, however, when the opportunity arose, during his later, fierce conflict with Palamas. Thus, the term "Barlaamite" for Akindynos is fully understandable. The Palamite party applied it to Akindynos, considering clearly and justly his theological conceptions as entirely aligned with those of Barlaam.

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