

Hesychasm and Theological Method in Fourteenth Century Byzantium

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The well-known mythology surrounding the ecclesiastical trial of Galileo in the 17th century makes him a martyr for the cause of modern science, while his interrogators have virtually unassailable places in the demonology of the modern world. And yet, the philosopher of science Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker asks us to spare a thought for the predicament of Cardinal Bellarmine, whose responsibility it was to preside over the trial of 1615:

(M)ust he not have shuddered thinking of the oncoming age of unbridled research? ... A straight way of three hundred years leads from classical mechanics to the mechanics of the atom. A straight way of twenty years leads from the mechanics of the atom to the atom bomb ... If you had been a Cardinal in 1615, and if you had seen the future ... would you have dared to take the risk of this development if there was a hope of stopping it?¹

Whether or not Galileo was right in his defence of the Copernican solar system was quite beside the point. The problem, the cause of Bellarmine's disquiet, lay in the possible implications of this new philosophy. Where would it all lead? And this was something that Bellarmine was perhaps more sensitive to than was Galileo.

I think we face a similar problem when we look back at the less well-known Palamite controversy in Constantinople in the mid-14th century. It was ostensibly a debate between two approaches to a certain type of spiritual exercise. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonika, was defending the practice of hesychasm,² the silent 'prayer of the heart', and the claims of those who practised this form of spirituality to a real encounter, a real face-to-face vision of God. His opponent, the Calabrian monk Barlaam, objected to the realism of the hesychast claim. How could God, who is beyond all our knowing, really be encountered and known in an immediate sense?

¹ C. F. v. Weizsäcker, *The Relevance of Science: Gifford Lectures 1959-60* (Collins, 1964), p. 111.

² Palamas' works are accessible in Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, ed. R. E. Sinkewicz (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: Toronto, 1988); and Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, transl. N. Gendle (Classics of Western Spirituality: London, SPCK, 1983). Useful introductions to hesychasm and its revival since the late 18th century are to be found in J. Raitt (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) chap. 9; and L. Dupre and D. E. Saliers (eds), *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern* (London, SCM, 1989), chaps 13 and 14.

Underlying this debate were two passionately held views on the nature and method of theological truth. It is on these methodological issues behind the public debate that I want to focus. This discussion of theological method has wider implications for understanding the relationship between the eastern and the western theological outlooks³.

The significance and limitation of Podskalsky's contribution

By far the most significant western contributor to our knowledge about theological method in Byzantium is the Jesuit scholar Gerhard Podskalsky. He begins his book⁴ by exploring the ambiguous relationship between the terms 'theology' and 'philosophy', up to the time of Palamas, and then goes on to discuss the relationship between monasticism and secular education in Byzantium. The monks, he argues with some justification, despite their genuine contribution to Byzantine culture as a whole, were not well-educated and represent a force for anti-intellectualism and conservatism. Any party that defined itself as 'orthodox' could count on their support. For theological education this meant some tension, especially with the re-awakening of Byzantine philosophy and literature in the 11th and 12th centuries, and the emergence of an indigenous Byzantine humanism in the 14th and 15th centuries. This tension was resolved by a gap emerging between the new secular education and the traditional methods of the theological schools. It is a tension to be seen, according to Podskalsky, in Gregory Palamas himself, who, after an early humanistic education and personal support for the use of philosophical methods (that is to say, syllogistic argumentation) in theology, goes on 'to develop into a rigorous champion of monastic anti-intellectualism'.⁵

³ G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz: der Streit um die theologische Methodik in der spätbyzantinischen Geistesgeschichte (14./15. Jh.), seine systematischen Grundlagen und seine historische Entwicklung*. (München, C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1977), p. 15; cf D. Ritschl, 'Warum wir Konzilien feiern - Konstantinopel 381', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 38, 1982, pp. 223f. K. Kern insists that eastern and western theologies are to be distinguished not so much by their dogmatic content as by their methods: see 'Les éléments de la théologie de Grégoire Palamas', *Irenikon* 20, 1947, p. 188.

⁴ G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, op. cit.; qv. G. Podskalsky, 'Die griechisch-byzantinische Theologie und ihre Methode. Aspekte und Perspektiven eines ökumenischen Problems', *Theologie und Philosophie*, 58, 1983, pp. 71-87; G. Podskalsky, 'Zur Bedeutung des Methodenproblems für die byzantinische Theologie', *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie*, 98, 1976, pp. 385-399.

⁵ G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, op. cit., p. 47.

These developments mark a contrast to the theology of the schools in the West, which came increasingly under the influence of Aristotelian thought from the 12th century onward.⁶ In the East, *theologia* denoted the doctrine of God, apprehended doxologically and intuitively rather than logically or intellectually. It stood in contrast to *oikonomia*, which referred to the doctrine of salvation, or God's dealings with the world. In the West, Augustine had drawn a distinction between Platonic philosophy as *vera theologia*, and all other varieties of pagan *theologia* in the sense of mere stories or myths about the gods. From here we find a gradual intellectualizing of the content of the term 'theology'. By the 13th century in the West it has come to mean the total content of Christian teaching as something that can be encapsulated in cognitive form.

In the East, where this intellectualizing of the content of the term 'theology' had not been carried out to nearly the same extent, the scene is set, according to Podskalsky, for the 14th-century *Methodenstreit* between Barlaam and Palamas. Podskalsky sees this debate falling into two phases, an earlier one which centred on the validity or otherwise of the theological use of syllogistic argumentation, and a second phase centring on the better known problem of the vision of the uncreated light and the real distinction between essence and energies in God. With the proviso that any judgement must remain open until we have full critical editions of some of the other major players in the drama,⁷ Podskalsky is able to put forward the thesis that Palamas' real alarm was at Barlaam's use of syllogistic reasoning in theology, partly because he was not aware of Barlaam's earlier, more conventional writings.⁸ After being defeated in normal debate, according to Podskalsky, Palamas then resorted to the 'trick'⁹ of appealing to personal experience, a state-gem that could be counted on to win the sympathy of the ignorant monastics. Podskalsky goes on to suggest that Palamas introduces

⁶ W. Kern and F.-J. Nieman, *Theologische Erkenntnislehre* (Düsseldorf, Patmos Verlag, 1981), pp. 41ff.

⁷ I note, with gratitude to Prof. J. Lison, that one such edition, of the works of Akindynos, has appeared very recently: J. Nadal Cañellas (ed), *Gregorii Acindyni Refutationes duae operis Gregorii Palamae CVI Titulus Dialogus inter orthodoxum et Barlaamitam*, coll. "Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca" 31 (Turnhout, Louvain/Brepols, University Press), 1995.

⁸ Robert Sinkewicz, another recent contributor to the discussion, is in agreement on this point, and adds that this unfamiliarity with Barlaam's earlier works helps explain the vehemence of Palamas' reply to Barlaam. To Palamas, Barlaam was introducing a dangerous innovation in theological method. See R. E. Sinkewicz, 'A new interpretation for the First Episode in the Controversy between Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Palamas', *Journal of Theological Studies* 31, 1980, pp. 489-500.

⁹ G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, op. cit., p. 143.

a 'radically new theological doctrine of knowledge' at this point, one that was unassailable because it placed the knowledge of God beyond the domain of public verification. Without the energies, the being of God would be unknowable and therefore in effect non-existent. Barlaam was therefore to be considered an agnostic. A real distinction within God was necessary for Palamas assert his own understanding of the knowledge of God in this way, independent of syllogistic reasoning.

The effect of this line of thinking was to sharpen the prevailing tension between theology and philosophy into a radical division,¹⁰ at a time when western theology was becoming far more methodologically conscious and consistent in its usage of Aristotelian philosophical categories. This division between theology and philosophy remains in Orthodox usage, and restricts the term 'theology' to the doctrines of the trinity and creation, in abstraction from soteriology as the domain of the 'economy'.¹¹ Podskalsky insists that if we do not identify theology *a priori* with mystical spirituality, then Barlaam's positive evaluation of philosophy stands in the broad tradition up to this point of the Byzantine church. Despite acknowledging within Barlaam's thinking a new rigidity in the use of the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, Podskalsky insists that the Palamite controversy was not a struggle against either Latin scholasticism or Byzantine humanism.¹² Rather, it was a retreat into monastic anti-intellectualism and obscurantism motivated by expediency, and a rejection of the knowledge of God as being a part of public discourse. The Palamite victories at the Councils of 1341 and 1351 were assured by the political influence of the monks, after Palamas, defeated in open debate, had 'fled to the ivory-tower of hesychasm'.¹³

As a historical analysis of the debate, I find Podskalsky's work generally helpful,¹⁴ except in those places where he clearly over-states the case. For example, Podskalsky is both misleading and provocative when he calls the Palamite distinction between essence and energy in God a 'real division'

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 155.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 170.

¹² As Romanides or Meyendorff, respectively, would have us believe. See J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (Leighton Buzzard, Faith Press, 1976); and J. S. Romanides, 'Notes on the Palamite Controversy', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6, 1960-61, pp. 186-205 and 9, 1963-64, pp. 225-270.

¹³ G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁴ I find it easier to accept, for example, that Palamas may have consciously rejected a syllogistic theological method, rather than the suggestion by Sinkewicz that Palamas was from the beginning philosophically unsophisticated. The evidence seems to be against Sinkewicz on this matter. (R. E. Sinkewicz, 'A new interpretation', op. cit., p. 500).

(*reale Trennung*), and the energies 'divinities' (*Gottheiten*).¹⁵ Again, according to Podskalsky, in making use of the syllogistic reasoning of the scholastic method, Barlaam was using of an accepted theological method. But on his own terms, while syllogistic reasoning was coming to be accepted in the theology of the western church, Byzantine theology had been largely untouched by the philosophical and humanistic revivals within Byzantine culture. It would be more reasonable to hypothesize that Palamas was making use of an older way of doing theology, based on doxology rather than logic, and on personal experience rather than syllogistic deduction. For this reason I am not convinced that Palamas' position was a simple retreat into anti-intellectualism as a matter of expediency in the heat of debate. If we accept that Palamas was himself the product of a humanistic background and a philosophical education,¹⁶ the decision to defend hesychast spirituality is likely to have been quite deliberate and self-conscious. I feel we need to think again about Palamas' position, in terms of a rejection of the scholastic method and and even more particularly a rejection of the emerging Byzantine humanism.

The rejection of scholasticism and humanism

George Every¹⁷ offers in passing another reason, an existential reason, why Palamas may have so strenuously opposed what he saw as Barlaam's methodological innovations. (Each party in this debate accused the other of innovating). Barlaam's arguments could, as Podskalsky acknowledges,¹⁸ have had the effect of drawing eastern theological method closer to the by this time dominant scholastic method of the West. Barlaam's motivation had an ecumenical edge to it: his hope was for ultimate church union.¹⁹ But there were pressing reasons in the East, of which Barlaam could not have been as acutely aware as Palamas, to avoid such a union. G. Every points out that large sections of Anatolia were by the mid-14th century under Turkish control. Palamas' later year-long captivity by the Turks in 1354-5 enabled him not only him to engage in some well-known inter-faith dialogue,²⁰ but it

¹⁵ G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, op. cit., p. 127.

¹⁶ See J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, op. cit., pp. 28-31.

¹⁷ G. Every, 'The Study of Eastern Orthodoxy: Hesychasm' in *Religion* 1979, p. 79.

¹⁸ G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, op. cit., pp. 172-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁰ See J. Meyendorff, op. cit., pp. 103-107. On the significance of hesychast spirituality for Islamic-Christian dialogue, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'The Prayer of the Heart in Hesychasm and Sufism', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31, 1986, pp. 195-203.

also confirmed what he already would have known about the living conditions of Orthodox Christians in the territories under Turkish rule. The situation, writes Every, 'was bad, but it would have been worse if a crusade had been in prospect.'²¹ In other words, Palamas was well aware of the possible consequences of any signs of reconciliation with the West. His motivation was to this extent practical and pastoral.

Clearly, though, this does not fully explain Palamas' reaction against Barlaam's attack on hesychasm. I think we can regard Palamas as a conservative in his theological method, as one who understood himself as standing within and defending a particular tradition of doing theology.²² It is fair to see Palamas as achieving what has characterized as a synthesis of the Byzantine tradition up to this point.²³ But Palamas' conservatism was not merely the 'conservatism of repetition'²⁴. Rather, it was innovative to the extent that it reformulated the tradition in a way that could respond to the demands of the times. The developments he saw and which did not meet with his approval were the syllogistic method of argumentation, and even more fundamentally, the revived Platonism within late-mediaeval Byzantine culture. Palamas was defending a doxological method of thinking theologically.²⁵ Palamite theology is similar to patristic theology (if we can general-

²¹ G. Every, 'The Study of Eastern Orthodoxy: Hesychasm', op. cit., p. 79.

²² For a similar interpretation see various articles by G. V. Florovsky, especially 'Spør o nemetskomo idealisme', *Put'* 25, 1930, pp. 51-80; 'The Christian Hellenism', *Orthodox Observer*, 442, 1957, pp. 9-10; 'Faith and Culture', *Collected Works* (Nordland, 1972ff.) vol. 1; 'Revelation, Philosophy and Theology', *Collected Works* vol. 3; 'Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church', *Collected Works* vol. 4. For this reason the eastern-rite Roman Catholic scholar G. Habra called Palamas 'one of the most traditional theologians' of Orthodoxy (see 'The Sources of the Doctrine of Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies', *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 12, 1957, p. 244).

²³ If the 14th century seems very late for such a synthesis to emerge, we should note that the non-Chalcedonian theologies of Alexandrian monophysitism and Antiochian quasi-Nestorianism achieved their own definitive systematic formulations only in the 13th and early 14th centuries, in the works of Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286) and Ebed Jesus (c. 1250-1318), respectively. See P. Kawerau, *Das Christentum des Ostens* (Stuttgart, 1972), pp. 63ff.

²⁴ G. V. Florovsky, 'St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers', *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 112; qv. G. Every, op. cit., p. 78.

²⁵ I. e. a method in which, in Gordon Watson's words, 'doxological statements cannot be used as premises from which conclusions about God can be drawn without further ado. The conceptual clarity of doxological statements disappears from the horizon of worshippers' thought' (G. Watson, *God and the Creature* [Sydney, U. C. Press, 1995], p. 171).

ize) in that it is not always strictly rational, at least not in the ways demanded by scholasticism.²⁶

The Byzantine Church of the fourteenth century rejected the calls of western scholasticism and home-grown Byzantine humanism. Was this rejection anti-intellectual and obscurantist, as Podskalsky believes? Was it – and this may be the other possibility if we see past the claims of Podskalsky and others that Palamas was introducing an unwarranted innovation – was this rejection of scholasticism and humanism motivated simply by theological conservatism? To answer these questions we need to look at what was being affirmed in the decisions of 1341 and 1351.

Affirmations of Palamite theological method

What was being affirmed in Palamite theological method can be summarized very schematically under four headings.

a) The role of the human body in hesychast spirituality.²⁷ The prayer of the heart is posited on the psychosomatic unity of body and soul, whereby the body itself becomes spiritual through the real indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Bodily actions and postures are integral to hesychast prayer, so that – as one interpreter has put it – in prayer ‘the *nous* (intellect) must descend into the heart, that is, to the centre of the psychosomatic reality of the human being’.²⁸ Here we have a spirituality that takes seriously the scriptural testimony to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the human body as God’s temple. Palamite theological method provides a systematic-theological structure in which this spirituality can be valued.

b) The place of experience in our knowledge of God. It is also well attested that Palamism seeks its knowledge of God not within a metaphysical

²⁶ K. Kern remarks with some irony that the language of the mystics is often confused and difficult to understand and, by comparison, the dogmatic formulations of theology are far easier to follow (‘Duchovnye Predki Sv. Grigorija Palamy’, *Bogoslovskaja mysl’* [Paris] 1942, p. 102). It is worth comparing Gustav Aulén’s famous apologetica for the classic idea of atonement which, he says, has often been ‘suppressed and treated with contempt’ in those contexts where ‘theology sets itself to seek for fully rational explanations of all things’ (G. Aulén, *Christus Victor* [London, SPCK, 1970], p. 157).

²⁷ See G. C. Papademetriou, ‘The Human Body according to St Gregory Palamas’, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34, 1989, pp. 1-9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6. Papademetriou argues that the valuation of the body in hesychast spirituality sets it over against any Platonic or neo-Platonic dualism, whereby the intellect is thought to leave the body ‘ecstatically’, in order to participate in divine grace. It is important here that we avoid reductionist understandings of the heart – it is a physical bodily organ, but also more. See T. Moore, *Care of the Soul* (New York, Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 157-8.

system, but in mystical experience.²⁹ Whatever we may feel about the appeal to experience in contemporary theology (and it is not without its problems³⁰), the Palamite appeal to mystical experience involved a rejection of the Platonic tendency to undervalue sensory experience, and the life of the senses in general, in favour of the life of the intellect. For Palamas, these domains of sense and intellect could not be separated so neatly.

c) The patristic speech about deification, or what we could call a holistic soteriology. It is an important affirmation of Palamite soteriology that the human person is enabled to participate in the divine nature and thereby to be 'deified'. Deification, understood as *epektasis*, or reaching out into the life of God, is the goal of hesychast spirituality, and the Palamite distinction between essence and energy in God enables us to speak about deification without suggesting any blurring of the primary and ultimate ontological distinction between creator and creature. Thomas Anastos speaks of deification as 'seeing through the eyes of God'.³¹ To put it this way not only ceases to suggest any *hybris* in the part of the human seeker for God. Positively, it suggests some far-reaching ethical consequences. What human problem or issue could not be solved if we could but see with the eyes of God?

d) The destabilization of theological language. Various commentators have remarked on the 'existentialism' of Palamite theological method³² and

²⁹ P. Miquel, 'Grégoire Palamas, Docteur de l'Experience', *Irenikon* 37, 1964, pp. 227-237; A. M. Allchin, 'The Appeal to Experience in the Triads of St. Gregory Palamas,' *Studia Patristica (Texte und Untersuchungen)*, 93, 1966, pp. 323-328. Plato had distinguished between the eye of the body and the eye of the soul (*Phaedo*, 65-66), and given a clear epistemological priority to the latter. The eye of the body can be deceived; but the eye of the soul opens up an interior illumination which is pure, because its source is not the world of illusion but the world of pure forms. For Plato, intellect has clear priority to sensory experience as the prime way of accessing the truth. Christian neo-Platonists - not least Augustine - carried this priority into Christian theology: *in interiore homine habitat veritas*. In itself, this suggests that we have no direct access to nature, to the world of sensory perception - because our senses are unreliable. Experiential knowledge cannot lead us to truth. At best, experience can reflect the truth, just as the world can sacramentally reflect its creator.

³⁰ See, for example, A. Kelly, 'The Rhetoric of Experience' *Living Light* 13, 1976, pp. 434-441; and S. Maitland, *A Big-Enough God* (London, Mowbray, 1995), p. 10.

³¹ T. L. Anastos, 'Gregory Palamas' Radicalization of the Essence, Energies, and Hypostasis Model of God', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38, 1993, p. 344.

³² M. Aghiorgoussis, 'Christian Existentialism of the Greek Fathers: Persons, Essence and Energies in God,' *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 23, 1978, pp. 15-41; C. Yannaras, *Person und Eros: Eine Gegenüberstellung der Ontologie der griechischen Kirchenväter und der Existenzphilosophie des Westens* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1982).

even similarities to Bultmann's programme of demythologization.³³ Behind these descriptions lies the traditional apophatic method of patristic theology, or what Anastos has called the 'programmed and self-conscious destabilization of theological language'.³⁴ While admitting that 'Palamas' theology is not a model of clarity', Anastos suggests a reason for this, namely Palamas' consciousness of the inadequacies of the very language that must be used in speaking of God. Western theology achieves a similar result by way of the analogical method, whereby our speech about God has an 'as if' quality to it. Palamism uses different and perhaps more traditional means to the same end, drawing a distinction between our descriptive speech about God on the level of the economy and our ascriptive or doxological speech to God, pointing to the beyondness of God, to that of God which lies beyond our logical names and concepts.

These, briefly sketched, are some of the methodological insights of Palamite theology, affirmed in the Byzantine tradition since the mid-14th century, and arising directly out of a concern for a particular type of spiritual practice. It is significant that western theology is currently seeking to recover some of these insights. The decisions made at the so-called Palamite councils in Constantinople in 1341 and 1351, and the canonization of Gregory Palamas in 1368 together represent the official endorsement on the part Byzantine Christianity of hesychast spirituality. These decisions also meant the endorsement of a particular understanding of 'theology', and theological method. Palamas' defence of hesychasm may seem anti-intellectual, but as Donald Allchin has put it, Palamas' 'great intellectual gifts are all at the service of the simplest of his brethren, in whom he sees a wisdom ... which far surpasses the intellectual agility of his opponents'.³⁵ It is a wisdom that is indeed a folly to the Greeks, if by 'Greeks' we mean those who have adopted the methodological assumptions of classical philosophy.

How the West was won: Platonic ideals and our problem of perception

In the book quoted earlier, von Weizsäcker tells how the West was won - won, that is, to the emerging culture of modernity, through the rediscovery of the philosophy of Platonic ideals. Western science, and indeed the culture of western humanist modernity as a whole, is the by-product of this

³³ G. Galitis, 'Apophatismus als Prinzip der Schriftauslegung bei den griechischen Kirchenvätern,' *Evangelische Theologie* 40, 1980, pp. 25-40.

³⁴ T. L. Anastos, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

³⁵ A. M. Allchin, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

revival of Platonism. The Palamite councils of the 14th century made a deliberate and conscious decision not to go down this particular track. Seen in this light, I think the Palamite controversy touches us westerners with a profound dilemma. We are all products of modern humanist culture, and this culture has brought great blessings. We have all benefited from the culture of western modernity, and that means we have a particular problem of perception when we consider the 14th-century Byzantine decision as a decision against embarking upon this culture of modernity. For those of us who are Christians, there is the added factor that this culture has, for the most part, genuinely attempted to be a Christian culture.

And yet, as George Steiner³⁶ and John Carroll³⁷ among others have shown us, our culture of modernity is deeply flawed. These flaws are not just in our culture as something 'out there'. They are flaws in our own self-definition as westerners and as western Christians. And this is the source of our dilemma. The question before us is this. If you had been an Orthodox bishop in the mid-14th century, and if you had seen 600 years into the future to the products of modernity: the benefits of modern medicine and communication, but also a technology that has led to the ruthless exploitation of the environment; the benefits of the modern welfare state but also the modern proliferation of nationalisms; the poetry of Shakespeare and Rilke but also the cultural degradation that cheapens great musical themes into advertising jingles - if you had been able to see all this, and if it had been in your power to halt this progress, wouldn't you have felt deeply troubled? Would you have dared to take the risk of this development if there was a hope of stopping it?

Now I am not suggesting that we reject these movements that have made us westerners who we are. That would be far too simple a solution, and in the end it would be to deceive ourselves. We cannot go back to some pristine form of Christian worldview (if ever there were such a thing) without these layers of interpretation that have attached themselves over the centuries. Certainly we need to go forward. And a part of this going forward may just be to look again, with new eyes, at Gregory Palamas and the insights he, and the eastern tradition generally, have retained in the hesychast spirituality and the Palamite theological method which enabled the survival of the prayer of the heart.

³⁶ G. Steiner, *Language and Silence* (London, Faber and Faber, 1967); and *Real Presences* (Faber and Faber, 1989).

³⁷ J. Carroll, *Humanism: the Wreck of Western Culture* (London, Fontana, 1993).