

RENATE BURRI – KATHARINA HEYDEN (eds), *The Role of Gregory Akindynos in the Hesychast Controversy* (Eastern Church Identities 17). Paderborn: Brill Schöningh 2024. xv+140 pp. – ISBN 978-3-657-79452-9 (€ 89.00)

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The editors of this book begin their introduction with the words: ‘Some people tend to appear in the history books only in the shadow of others. Gregory Akindynos is such a person.’ Exactly so. Sandwiched as he is in the Hesychast Controversy between the more colourful figures of Barlaam and Gregoras, Akindynos has always remained in their shadow. Moreover, scholars have hitherto studied him principally in relation to Gregory Palamas. Consequently, until now Akindynos has served chiefly as a rallying-point for opponents to Palamite theology. Even JUAN NADAL CAÑELLAS, who has done so much to present Akindynos as a serious theologian in his own right, deplores the resurgence of Palamism in the twentieth century and, aligning himself with the views of ENDRE VON IVANKA, takes a partisan line in support of his hero.<sup>1</sup> The seven scholars who have contributed to this book are not necessarily more neutral. Some of them are much more inclined to agree with Palamas than with Akindynos. Together, however, they have produced an elegant volume that draws Akindynos out of the shadows and brings him to life as a major exponent of an important strand of theological conservatism.

The first essay, by RENATE BURRI, takes us straight to the manuscripts. From the beginning of this book, we are made to feel almost as if we are looking over Akindynos’ shoulder as he is working. All the known manuscripts of Akindynos’ writings are tabulated and described, but the one of particular interest is Monac. graec. 223 [Diktyon 44670]. This manuscript (beautifully illustrated on the cover of the book) is a luxury edition of a number of Akindynos’ writings that are mostly not found elsewhere. They are written on parchment and probably produced in Akindynos’ lifetime, but the codex is not an autograph copy. We know Akindynos’ hand,

1. JUAN NADAL CAÑELLAS, *La résistance d’Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas. Enquête historique, avec traduction et commentaire de quatre traités édités récemment* (Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense Études et Documents 50). Leuven 2006, I, p. xviii.

and BURRI says that from her personal examination of the codex she can confirm that Akindynos was not involved in its production. It does, however, raise the question of the two versions of Palamas' Third Letter to Akindynos. The first version of this letter is given as the fifth item in the codex together with Akindynos refutation. The letter is on the topic of higher and lower 'divinities' (θεότητες), which were inferred by Barlaam from Palamas' arguments and which Palamas rejects yet also admits that there is a sense in which we can speak of the power and will, etc., of God as lower 'divinities' because they are divine 'energies', not the divine substance itself. Akindynos responded vehemently to Palamas letter, as a result of which Palamas in his own writings circulated a modified form of it, pulling back on the idea of higher and lower divinities. BURRI very plausibly suggests that Palamas did not issue his revised version until after the synod of 1351, which would account for the fairly wide knowledge of the earlier version, which originally had been a private letter addressed to Akindynos, and the sparseness of references to the later version.

BURRI is followed by MARIE-HÉLÈNE BLANCHET, who focuses on the period when Akindynos was the right-hand man of the patriarch John Kallikas. Until now, most research has been on the documents produced in this period and what they reveal of the polemical stance of the chief actors. BLANCHET turns to a key issue lying behind the polemics of the documents, namely, two different ecclesiological conceptions. It should be remembered that Kallikas did not have a monastic background; he had been promoted to patriarchal office from the ranks of the palace clergy and had been a married man with children. Monks, as such, had no role in the Church's administrative life and doctrinal decisions unless they were also bishops. BLANCHET draws attention to the offence caused in Constantinople by the *Hagioritic Tomos* of 1340, which although it obtained some cover by being signed and sealed by the bishop of Hierissos, the Holy Mountain's ordinary, appeared very much as if it was a monastic text attempting to pontificate to the Church on a matter of doctrine. After his ordination in 1344 (with a view to his becoming a bishop), Akindynos moved much closer to the non-monastic conception of the Church. In BLANCHET's view he 'practically went from one extreme to the other' (p. 34). She illustrates the extreme on the monastic side from Gregory of Sinai's construction of a fourth monastic hierarchy, in his exposition of Dionysios the Areopagite's *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in addition to Diony-

siaus' three ecclesiastical ones.<sup>2</sup> With the victory of hesychasm after the synod of 1347, monks flooded the episcopacy, permanently transforming it. The non-monastic Church, concerned not so much with achieving heroic sanctity and entering on deification even in this life as with respecting ecclesiastical rulings and living a decent Christian life in difficult circumstances, expired with Akindynos, who died very soon after the synod, perhaps in 1348.

With DAVID BRADSHAW we turn to the principal issue of the Hesychast Controversy, the essence/energies distinction. BRADSHAW takes us expertly through the history of the distinction, beginning with Paul's use of ἐνέργεια solely for spiritual agents (noting in passing that in antiquity ἐνεργεῖσθαι is always a passive, never a middle), and bringing us up to Dionysius and Maximus, Palamas' immediate predecessors, by way of the crucial contribution of Basil, who in his Epistle 234 (written in the context of the struggle with Eunomius, who held that God's essence was knowable) declares: 'His energies come down to us but his essence remains beyond our reach.' Palamas himself reads Dionysius through the lens of Maximus, taking the Dionysian processions to be the same as the Maximian natural energies. He also understands the Maximian λόγοι of beings to be energies. This in an innovation on Palamas' part, but BRADSHAW defends it, arguing that 'Palamas has correctly seen that to speak of the processions alone is insufficient to describe fully God's relation to creation' (pp. 60–61). The different processions are 'modes of that which imparts being' (p. 61), and the divine λόγοι are the specific modes of the processions that determine each individual being. In this way Palamas, in BRADSHAW's view, successfully synthesizes the earlier tradition.

MARCUS PLESTED follows with an examination of the light of the Transfiguration in patristic tradition and the Hesychast Controversy. The nature of this light, in view of the hesychasts' claim to be able in prayer to attain to a vision of the light with their earthly eyes, was one of the main issues from the beginning of the controversy and became the paramount one by the end. As PLESTED says, it 'was one of the key strategic victories of the Palamite party to make the question of the character of the light of the Transfiguration *the* defining issue of the Hesychast Controversy' (p. 69). The Palamite move was an obvious one in view of the importance of di-

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2. A manuscript of the original Greek text of this work, hitherto known only in a Slavonic version, was published by ANTONIO RIGO (ed.), *Il monaco, la Chiesa e la liturgia. I capitoli sulle gerarchie di Gregorio il Sinaita*. Florence 2005.

vine light in the mystical tradition from Evagrius and Macarius through to Symeon the New Theologian, but the Palamites are the first to turn the interpretation of the light of the Transfiguration into the touchstone of orthodoxy. A major problem for Palamas, however, was to explain how an uncreated reality can be seen with created eyes. PLESTED does not go into Palamas' arguments in this brief essay but simply asserts that he 'offers a compelling and dynamic reappropriation of the Fathers' (pp. 80–81). Akindynos held that to maintain that the light seen on Mount Tabor was uncreated was to compromise the divine simplicity. Traditional conservative that he was, he was unwilling to come up with a specific (and new-fangled) account of how the light was seen. He regarded it as sufficient to say that 'Christ revealed his divinity to the disciples on the Mountain as he wished and in so far as they were able to behold it' (p. 79, citing *Ref. magna* 1, 40–42). PLESTED, however, takes this as an evasive tactic on account of Akindynos' regarding anything caused by God as created, and is not impressed by his arguments. Theodore Dexios, on the other hand, is more willing to put forward an alternative explanation of the light of Tabor to the Palamite one, namely, that the light is both created and uncreated, but this was eventually rejected by the synod of 1368 as incoherent.

Akindynos' Refutation of Palamas' Third Letter comes up several times in this book. BURRI, as already mentioned, would assign a late date to Palamas' amended version. BRADSHAW reviews the history of the word θεότης and suggests that Palamas, assuming that Akindynos was familiar with the patristic texts on θεότης, wrote his first version in a kind of theological short-hand, relying 'too much on the intelligence and good-will of his friend' (p. 65). KATHARINA HEYDEN, in her own essay, examines the theological arguments of Akindynos' refutation of Palamas' Third Letter, focusing on whether Akindynos' charge of innovation is merely a rhetorical device or whether in fact it encapsulates a serious heresiological argument. HEYDEN finds that Akindynos' rhetorical strategies all spring from the conviction that the 'new' must be mistaken. Akindynos assumes that the Fathers all speak with one voice and that the issues on which they spoke are now closed. He therefore charges Palamas with 'innovation', which, arising from the falsification of patristic texts (by addition or omission), leads to the renewal of old heresies. The main scandal for Akindynos is that something can begin as created and then become 'uncreated' by grace. HEYDEN's essay concludes with some interesting observations on the legitimacy of doctrinal development. Akindynos' conservatism has deep theological roots. Palamas must show that 'development' is necessary

in order to preserve tradition. HEYDEN believes that ‘the notion of continuous revelation’ is fundamental to Palamas’ thinking (p. 98), but this way of putting it is misleading. When he is challenged on the issue (as in the *Synodal Tomos* of 1351, § 6), Palamas insists that his development is not addition (προσθήκη) but the articulation of what is already implicit (ἀνάπτυξις).

The main theological notions at stake in the dispute between Akindynos and Palamas are explored in the next essay by ANDREAS ZACHARIOU. These are whether the essence/energy distinction divides the single uncreated divinity, whether the divinity is the creator of all by means of a created energy, and whether ‘what is essential and natural to God’ are to be identified only with the persons of the Son and the Spirit. In the course of his discussion, ZACHARIOU analyses some of Akindynos’ citations from the Fathers, showing how Akindynos is selective in his quotations, on at least two occasions omitting phrases unhelpful to his argument. Regarding this as a manipulative strategy, ZACHARIOU comes down firmly in favour of Palamas.

The final essay, by DIONYSIOS BENETOS, who has taken on the continuation of NADAL’s editorial project to bring the complete works of Akindynos to publication, gives us a fascinating insight into what it is like to work on one of Akindynos’ manuscripts, namely, Scorial. graec. 230 (Φ. III. 11) [Diktyon 15184]. This is the manuscript that contains Akindynos’ correspondence. It is generally recognized that ANGELA CONSTANTINIDES HERO’s edition and translation of Gregory Akindynos’ letters, which is based on this manuscript, is not entirely trustworthy.<sup>3</sup> BENETOS lists a number of errors, lacunae, and mistaken editorial interventions which he has identified from his examination with NADAL of the manuscript and which clearly demonstrate the need for a new edition. One of the issues on which BENETOS sheds light is the important question of whether Akindynos was the spiritual director of Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina, the anti-Palamite hegoumenissa of the large Constantinopolitan monastery of Christ *Philanthropos Soter*. The correction of an error in CONSTANTINIDES HERO makes it almost certain that indeed he was.

This slim volume whets the appetite for a more comprehensive study of Akindynos, who emerges from the seven essays as the intelligent spokesman for a conservative theological tradition opposed to the Palamite version of

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3. ANGELA CONSTANTINIDES HERO, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos: Greek Text and English Translation* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 21). Washington DC 1983.

hesychasm and not influenced by the Neoplatonism that is evident in the other two major anti-Palamites of the earlier part of the controversy, Barlaam and Gregoras. It is to be hoped that the long-awaited publication of the full corpus of Akindynos' writings will eventually make such a study possible.

**Keywords**

late Byzantine theology; Hesychast controversy