

Gregory Palamas

His life and Importance



Times (1300s)

Beginning of the **Ottoman Empire**, early expansion into the Balkans.

They conquer to the city of Burs, about fifty miles south of Constantinople.

- **Church power** is in decline. Concerned about kings taxing church property, Pope Boniface VIII has issued a papal decree, Unam Sanctam, to maintain Church authority over kings.
- 1320 The production of **paper** begins in Germany.
- **The Hundred Years' War** begins when Edward III of England lays claim to the French throne. (1337)
- **Black Death** kills around a third of the population of Europe. (1347–1351).
- 1351 An outdoor game called **tennis** is created in England.
- Beginning of the **Ming Dynasty** (1368) in China
- **Peasants' Revolt** in England
- The Scots win the **Scottish Wars** of Independence.
- Beginning of the **Renaissance** in Italy
- Time of Geoffrey **Chaucer** (c. 1343–1400?) was an English author, poet, philosopher, bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat.

Times

- * The times filled with political upheaval as the Byzantine empire was in its last days and the Ottoman we steadily gaining territory.
- * Intellectualism was influencing the Church even when there were many pious people in Constantinople and the practice of hesychasm and the Jesus prayer was common even among the political elite.
- * Gregory became a great Defender of the Orthodox Faith in an era filled with controversy.

Years of his
Childhood and youth

Parents

- * Gregory born in **1296** illustrious father Constantine - senator.
- * Father and mother Kalee were very pious and practiced continuous prayer.
- * Two sister and two Brothers
- * Father became close counselor to Emperor Andronikos II Paliologos (1282-1328).
- * Was entrusted to educate his grandson (same age as Gregory) a future Emperor Andronikos III Palaiologos.



Parents

- * Constantine and Kalee entrusted children to spiritual direction of **monastics** to give them knowledge of sacred words and holy teachings.
- * **Father dies** when Gregory was 7. Foresaw his own death and gave up his government position to become a monk shortly before he died.



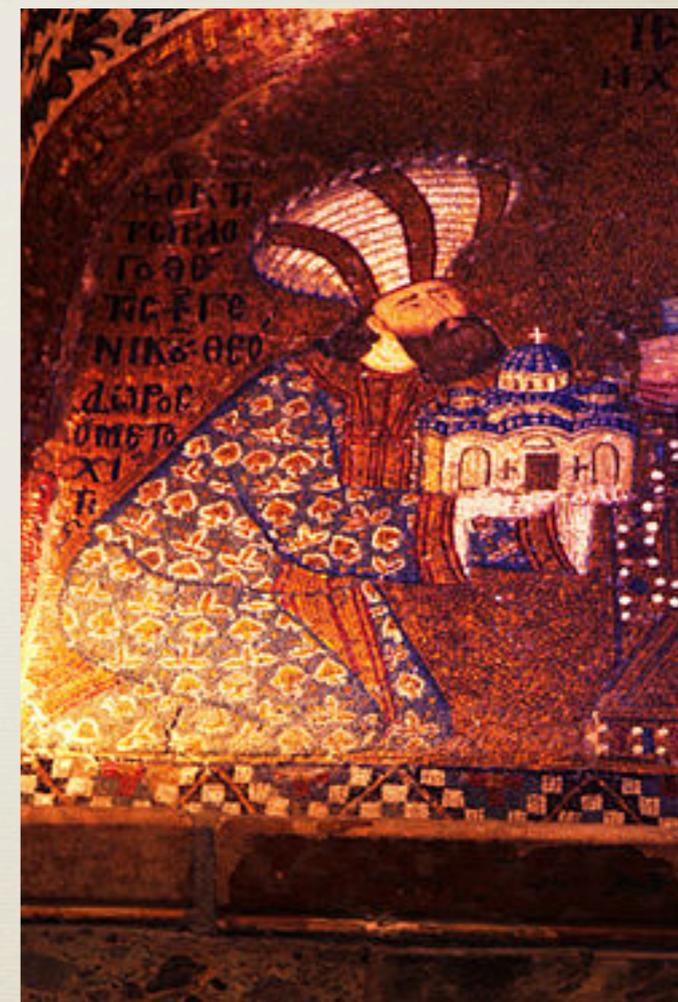
Student

- * Gregory blessed with natural intelligence and diligence but had trouble memorizing.
- * Made rule before taking up a new book to make 3 prostrations with prayer before the icon of Theotokos.
- * Attained great success in his teens in grammar and rhetoric.
- * Studied such topics as physics, logic and all the sciences of Aristotle at Imperial University.



Student

- * At 17 Emperor asked him to speak on the logic of Aristotle.
- * Theodore Metochites the prime minister and admired sage, Gregory's primary teacher said of him,
"Behold if Aristotle himself had been here in person, he would have praised him."
- * Yet, Gregory not interested in pursuing philosophy and wished to renounce it giving up influential career in the imperial government.



Student

- * Gregory met frequently with monks of Constantinople and Mount Athos.

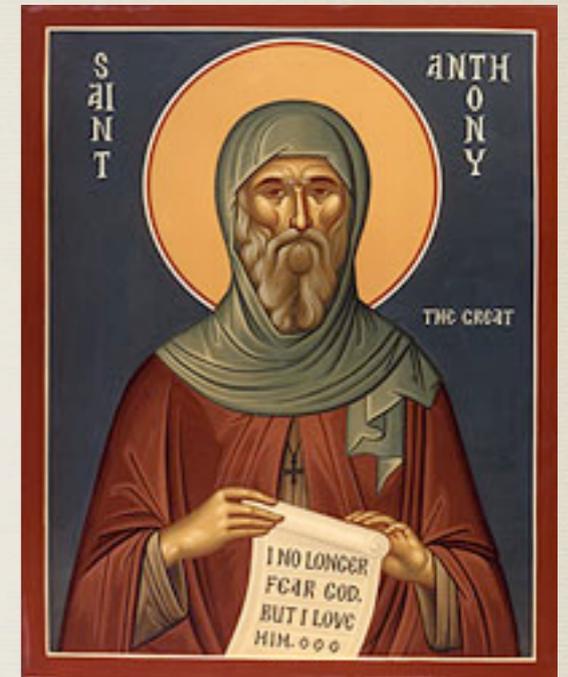
Desired to take up ascetic and monastic life.

- * Theoleptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia, who followed the hesycast-cenobite type of monasticism emphasizing the concepts of quietude and spiritual vigilance, introduced Gregory to the activity of “pure prayer” and “holy vigilance.”



Types of Monasticism

- * Many Monasteries at this time
- * Christian monasticism began in deserts of Egypt 4th century Egypt as a kind of living martyrdom.
- * Ss. Anthony and Pachomius were early monastic founders in Egypt.
- * Basil the Great developed rule in use to this day.



Eremitic Monasticism

- * From a very early time there were probably individuals who lived a life in isolation—hermits—imitating Jesus' 40 days in the desert.
- * St. Anthony lived as a hermit and developed a following of other hermits who lived nearby but not in community with him.
- * This variety of monasticism is called **eremitic** ("hermit-like")

Cenobitic Monasticism

- * St. Pachomius the Great, a follower of Anthony, also acquired a following; By 348, he directed almost 3000 monks.
- * he organized a community in where monks lived in individual huts or rooms—cells—but worked, ate, and worshipped in shared space.
- cenobitic** ("community-based").
- * Most common form in Orthodox Tradition to this day.



Hesychasm

- * **Hesychasm** (ἠσυχασμός from Greek word "hesychia" – silence, peace, quietness) – teaching and practice aimed for **acquisition of Holy Spirit** and deification of human soul and body.
- * Ultimate goal of hesychasm is human **transfiguration** and **theosis** after likeness of the risen Christ.
- * It is described in great detail in the ***Philokalia***, (φιλοκαλία, from φιλία philia "love" + κάλλος kallos "beauty": "love of the beautiful, the good") a compilation of what various saints wrote about prayer and the spiritual life.
- * Tradition Gregory actively defends.

Hesychasm

- * Perfection depends on degree the heart is **purified**.
- * Requires **freedom from passions** and imaginations.
- * Involves acquiring an **inner stillness**, free from bodily and intellectual distractions.
- * Soul and body are integral. Body involved by its self-control, patience and **taming of its passions**.
- * Generally includes many repetitions of **Jesus Prayer**,
"Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me[, a sinner]."
- * Prepares us receive through grace, **uncreated light** of God, a vision of His energies.

20 Years of Solitude

(1316 - 1337)

Gregory heads off to become a
hesychast

Gregory - Monastic

- * 1316 at **20 yrs** Gregory inherited his fathers responsibilities and property and decided to become a **monk**
- * Mother not happy but fully embraced and decided herself to become a **nun** and persuaded her other children to enter into monastic life also.
- * Gregory distributed all property among the poor and with his two brothers **left for Mount Athos** in the autumn of 1317 by foot.



Mount Athos

- * Was spring when they reached **Mount Athos** which was and is center of Orthodox Monasticism.
- * Put themselves under direction of **Elder Nikodemos** who laid a good foundation in spiritual vigilance, uninterrupted prayer, fasting and sobriety.
- * Gregory set the **Mother of God** as his protectress and mediatrix humbly calling on her constantly **“Enlighten my darkness.”**



Vision

- * After 2 years Gregory received divine visitation.
- * During prayer a radiant and magnificent man appeared to him. Gregory recognized him as apostle and **Evangelist John** the Theologian.
- * Saint John said to him,
“From beyond, as a messenger of the Lady of all that is holy, I have come to you that I might inquire of you for what reason do you cry out day and night and almost every hour, “enlighten my darkness.”



Vision

- * Gregory answered:
“what else was I able to say in prayer before God other than to seek mercy and enlightenment that I may know and apply myself to His will, for I am a man subject to passion and full of sins.”
- * Saint John replied,
“do not hesitate for I will be your helper.”
- * Gregory then asks:
“Is it in this life or the future that you propose to help me?”



Vision

- * The Evangelist answered:
“I have helped you before and do now, and will in the future!”
- * He then vanished.
- * See how divine grace was preparing Gregory.
- * Gregory loved the Mother of God very much and continually prayed for her help. He has written some of the most beautiful sermons about her life.



Mount Athos

* When his spiritual father fell asleep in the Lord in 1320 he went to **Great Lavra** (founded 10th century) & joined cenobitic community. Stayed **3 years**.

* He was under spiritual direction of **Elder Nicephoros** - very experienced in keeping attention within himself and able to reach indescribable union with God.

Writings are in the Philokalia.

* Wanting to avoid glory, now highly respected for his obedience and meekness, he chose to return to solitude.



Mount Athos

* He withdrew to the **Glossia Skete** where a number of hermits lived under the direction of Father Gregory Drimys who was also very famous holy man.

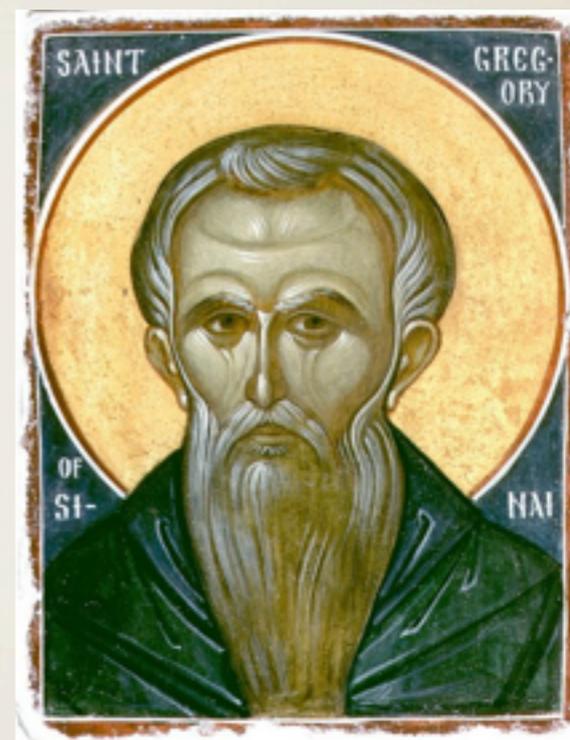


* 1325 **Moslems** attacked the hermits living outside walls of Great Lavra, Gregory and eleven monastic friends **left for Thessaloniki.** (29 yrs old)

Thessaloniki

* They were intending to go to Jerusalem but after a vision Gregory chose to stay there.

* He met in Skete of Magoula **Saint Gregory of Sinai** and his disciples Isidore and Kallistos (future patriarchs).



* He became part of spiritual circle led by Isidore which included monks, lay people and some ladies of high society. This circle extended its influence to the intellectual elite of Thessaloniki.

Veroia

- * At this time (1336) at canonical age of **30** Gregory was ordained into the **priesthood**.
- * Shortly after his ordination he left for **Veroia** (Βέροια) where he founded a hermitage outside the city to practice holy quietude.



Prayer



- * Gregory's concept of **pure prayer** was a kind of glory, a beam of light joining the divine image in man to God.
- * In darkest depths of contemplation when he has withdrawn completely from world into a perfect ecstasy of spirit, then God made Himself known.
- * When the darkness fell away, there was only the beckoning **uncreated light** of God.
- * With simplicity of heart he repeated over and over, ***"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."***

Prayer

- * He found himself in the same light which shone on **Mount Tabor** during the Transfiguration of the Lord.

Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36

- * Was this light created, physical?



Veroia

- * Routine at Veroia as follows:
For 5 days he did not go out anywhere nor received anyone.
- * Practiced contemplation, silence and uninterrupted prayer of the heart.
- * On Saturdays and Sundays, after performing the offices of a priest and receiving the holy Mysteries, he entered into spiritual fellowship with his brethren instructing and comforting them.

Akindynos

- * At this time a young Bulgarian **Gregory Akindynos**, a key future player in his story, sought spiritual instruction.
- * Didn't stay long as such a life was too difficult.
- * Akindynos went to Thessaloniki and translated the *Summa Theologiae* (1265–1274) of Thomas Aquinas into Greek.
- * What is Summa?
- * Scholars were rediscovering Aristotle, asking if and how his philosophy could be reconciled with Christian revelation. It attempts to present all of Christian theology as systematically as possible.
- * How does this approach differ from Gregory's?

Political Turmoil

- * There was a political uprising where the aging Emperor Andronikos II was challenged by a young and wealthy magnate **John**

Cantacuzene (Καντακουζηνός)

- * At this time The Ottoman Turks had succeeded in conquering almost all of Asia Minor.
- * Andronikos's son Michael was co emperor and he died leaving his grandson Andronikos III to fight for his rights.



Cantacuzene

- * John Cantacuzene, a best friend of Andronikos III, masterminded an uprising. In 1328 Emperor Andronikos II was deposed and **Andronikos III** was placed on the throne.
- * In his early life Gregory Palamas knew John Cantacuzene and they liked each other and remained friends.



Death of Mother

- * It was at this time that his mother Kallone died.
- * Gregory went to Constantinople to comfort his sisters. He persuaded them to return with him to Veroia where he set up a convent for them.

Back to Mt Athos

- * After **5 years** of a peaceful life in Veroia, there began frequent attacks from northern barbarians, Illyrians (From Albania) so he was obliged to move again.
- * Returned to Holy Mountain to Great Lavra but he did not stay in main complex but nearby in solitary hermitage of **St Savvas**.
- * His cell was high above the Lavra clinging to the steep flank of Mount Athos. Took about hour of arduous climbing to reach.



Mount Athos

- * Again **Gregory Akindynos** came to him to be a novice and to practice pure prayer.
- * In a short time Akindynos **claimed** to see the divine light and also see the face of Christ.
- * Gregory tried to explain this was only an **illusion** because its only after a period of purification that one can hope to have such a vision.

Mount Athos

- * Refused to accept explanation and was recommended to become a novice at the Great Lavra but was **rejected**.
- * Could not find any monastery that would accept him on Mount Athos.
- * Twice now, unable to follow Gregory's spiritual direction, returns to Thessaloniki where he meets and **befriends** Orthodox monk **Barlaam**, a Calabrian philosopher.



Vision

- * In third year at St. Savvas while immersed in holy mental prayer Gregory had a **vision**.
- * In his hands was vessel of pure milk filled so full was **overflowing**.
- * Turned into most excellent **wine** and emitted wonderful **fragrance** that filled him with joy.
- * **Radiant youth** appeared to him who said, *“Why do you not **share** this overflowing and wonderful drink with others? Why have you left it to pour out to no use? Do you not know this is a gift from God and that when poured out it is inexhaustible?”*



Vision

* Gregory asked:

“What if there are no people who worthily seek it or even ask for it?”



The angel answered:

“Though presently there are none that seek this with desire, nonetheless, you shall do your duty and not speculate in thought nor neglect to distribute it.

“You must render unto the Master the talent entrusted to you. Do you know the command and the talent that was given to the unprofitable servant and what became of him!”

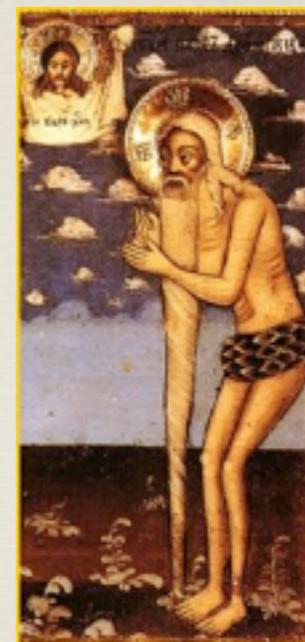
* Angel departed leaving Gregory enveloped in light.

Vision

- * How do you suppose he interpreted this vision?
- * Holy Spirit was guiding him to **start writing**.
- * He begins an active life in defense of Truth.

Writing

- * Monks on Mount Athos wanting to show way of life on Mount Athos was in harmony with hesychasm, asked Gregory to write *Life of Saint Peter the Anthonite*, which he did in 1334.
- * Next he wrote long Treatise on *Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple* to refute those who deny historical and spiritual meaning of this feast.
- * Wrote many other works quickly with clarity.



Abbot

- * Brothers at Monastery of Esphigmenou asked him to become their abbot at 38
- * Accepted & put monastery in good order.
- * He served as model of repentance by his words and deeds.
- * Simple in manners, unaffected in behavior, sweet in speech, and genuinely forgave them that repented of their sins. He taught daily with his sermons.



Abbot

- * Many miracles brought about while he was abbot.
- * Left in 1335 again seeking solace returning to his beloved hermitage.
- * At 39 he began to develop **liver issues**.
- * Now a highly respected monk and spiritual father, served as Abbot, received gift of visions and divine light, participated in miracles, demonstrated his writing skills. A new chapter opens.

Years of Controversy

*Ready to Begin his
Greatest Challenge and
Contribution*



The Challenge

- * Onto the scene comes **Barlaam** the Philosopher from Calabria In Italy.
- * Discussions were initiated by Pope John XXII for **union of the churches**.
- * Barlaam chosen to act as **official spokesperson** for Greek Orthodox Church in these discussions.
- * Was Greek but educated in West, gained confidence of Byzantine government because of fame as scholar and philosopher.
- * Often consulted about astronomy, philosophy, theology and diplomatic questions and had many writings in these areas.



Filioque

- * Main theological issue separating the Churches since 11th century was the addition of the **Filioque clause** into the Creed.
- * What is the Filioque clause?
 - * Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father **[and the Son]**.
 - * What is the significance of this? Why might this become an issue for Gregory?

Filioque

- * Barlaam was interested in the union of the eastern and Western Churches he trivialized this disagreement.
- * Took view that God was unknowable -- saw the issue of the procession of the Holy Spirit as **sheer presumption** on either side.
 - * After all, God is ultimately unknowable and not demonstrable to humans.
- * Why is this a dangerous argument?
 - * Leads to agnosticism - denies possibility of Theosis

Issue of Filioque

- * Palamas knew this change was **very** important. **degraded the role of the Holy Spirit, changed the Nature of the Holy Trinity, and hindered our ability to be united with God.**

Issue of Filioque

- * How do Orthodox describe **Trinity**?
- * **three persons, distinct, yet of one essence.**
- * How do you explain the **Spirit proceeding from both the Father and the Son**? Does it mean there are **two Gods**?

Issue of Filioque

- * If we accept that Spirit proceeds both from Father and Son as from **one principle**, then we change the Persons of "God the Father" and "God the Son" into a nonsensical Unity
- * Characteristic of an **independent Person** is taken away from the Holy Spirit, no longer moves **freely** within the Church in complete agreement with the Father and the Son.
- * Opens the door for the **rational interpretation** of things spiritual relying on human mind rather than Holy Spirit.

Issue of Filioque

- * In St. John's Gospel, the Lord expressly says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (Jn. 15:26).
- * *But when the Comforter is come, **whom** I will **send** unto you **from the Father**, even the Spirit of truth, **which proceedeth from the Father**, he shall testify of me.*
- * Clearly distinguishes sending of Spirit from its procession from the Father and is seen as a distinct person.

Issue of Filioque

- * Idea of a procession from the Father and the Son is based on **philosophical thinking** that proposes that Divine Persons are merely **relations with the Divine Essence**. Not of the essence itself. Only a relation.
- * How can we now have a union with God if the Holy Spirit is not of the essence of God but only a relation to it?

Issue of Filioque

- * Palamas' taught that the "glory of God" that is revealed in various episodes of Jewish and Christian Scripture **burning bush** seen by Moses, **Light on Mount Tabor** at the Transfiguration was **in fact** the **uncreated Energies of God** (i.e., the uncreated grace of God),
- * From the revelation of God's energies, we **know** the **divine nature of the Holy Spirit** as experienced by mankind and as recorded in Scripture.
- * **Scripture** clearly shows us we can have a **direct knowledge of God** through His energies.

Issue of Filioque

- * Barlaam held that such revelations were only **created effects**, created in man's mind
- * Why?
 - * Because no part of God whatsoever could be directly perceived by humans.
- * His position denies the reality and renewing power of Holy Spirit, as revealed to us in Scripture, which, in the words of various Orthodox hymns, "made apostles out of fishermen."
- * The Holy Spirit in the Orthodox understanding freely **interacts with the physical realm**, transforming and making it Holy.

Issue of Filioque

- * In Orthodoxy we start with the **three distinct persons** that have been **revealed** and understand that all three are of the **same essence** and **always in harmony** out of divine love.
- * Barlaam's view is no longer a revealed understanding based on human experience, but a **philosophical one**.

Issue of Filioque

- * Orthodox confess that nobody knows the Father who does not also know the Holy Spirit and the Son.
- * You cannot know God if you do not confess the Holy Trinity that has revealed himself to the Prophets the Apostles and Saints.
- * We begin prayer, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- * If we truly know Christ we will also know the Holy Spirit

Issue of Filioque

- * St. Photius clearly showed that this single procession was a common belief of the Fathers and the Ecumenical councils when he wrote:
- * *"It was openly preached as doctrine by the Seven Holy Councils - the **Second**, that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, to be followed by the **Third**, confirmed by the **Fourth**, also agreed on by the **Fifth**, also preached by the **Sixth**, and was sealed with the bright struggle of the **Seventh**"* [PG 102, 285AB]

Issue of Filioque

- * Even in West this was true for a 1000 yrs.
Most western theologians refused to use the Filioque.
- * It was not generally accepted until the time of the Scholastics, Anselm(+1109) and Aquinas(+1274) who taught that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son using philosophical arguments

Issue of Filioque

- * The implications of this distorted view is important.
- * Implies it's **impossible for man to unite with God & Holy Spirit does not communicate to man.**
- * Leads to a **more secular church** with **emphasis on worldly actions**, like social justice, and a **discouragement of monastic pursuits and ascetical efforts** to know God.
Also **deemphasizes Sacramental life** of Church.

Issue of Filioque

- * This issue is **foundation of the controversy**.
- * Baralam sought unity based on idea that God is unknowable therefor Filioque not critical issue.
- * Barlaam could not accept that the hesychast monks could have a **direct experience of God** and insisted the divine Light they experienced was something created.
- * Palamas saw this was an attack aimed at the heart of Orthodoxy, idea of **theosis**, and had to be defended.

Barlaam vs Gregory

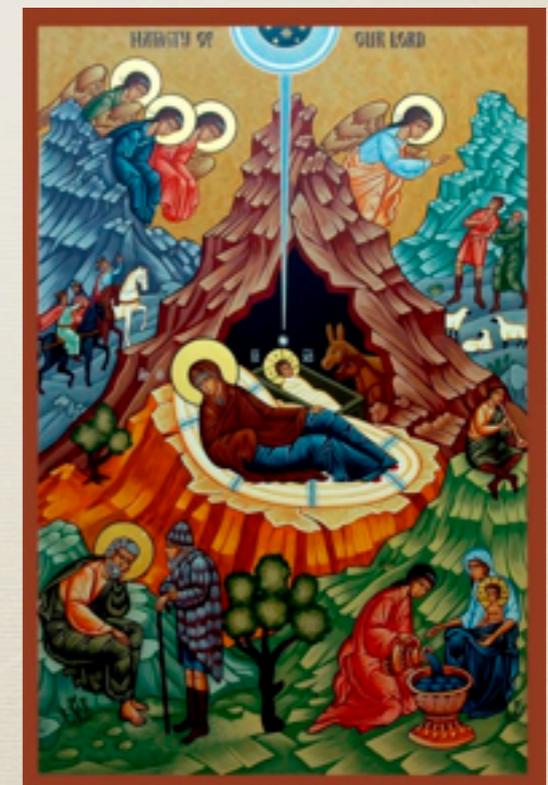
- * Barlaam's errant "defense" of Orthodoxy and anti Latin writings caused **confusion and doubt** among many.
- * Gregory, who knew God through experience, was astonished at his agnostic attitude undermining the Orthodox position while refuting the Latins.

Barlaam vs Gregory

- * Still on Mount Athos at Saint Savvas, Gregory began to write on this controversy:
 - * *Apodictic Treatises* to explain the filioque and its consequences.
 - * In *Two Orations Demonstrating the Procession of the Holy Spirit* he maintained in opposition to Barlaam that proofs concerning God's existence are different from those employed by human reason.

God Has Revealed Himself

- * Gregory says proofs of God's existence are based on **true Christian experience of faith and illumination.**
- * He agrees, God is unknowable, but **He does reveal Himself to us.**
- * The greatest revelation was through His **Incarnation.** which was real and distinct from intellectual and philosophical knowledge.
- * His essence is unknowable but we can know Him through His energies.



Barlaam vs Gregory

- * Gregory wanted to set his opponents straight on a sound theological ground but their response was not favorable.
- * Akindynos responded politely but Barlaam declared out of pride, ***“I will humiliate that man who dared to criticize me.”***
- * Gregory sends his first letter to Barlaam 1337 speaking against Aristotle, Plato and the Greek philosophers showing how Barlaam had misused their authority.

Barlaam vs Gregory

- * He wrote that **idealism of Plato is incompatible** with Christian conception of a living God.
- * Human thought must be basically transformed **by the action of the Holy Spirit** in order to receive a faithful knowledge of God.
- * Barlaam refuted this claiming that it was the **logic of philosophers who were enlightened** by God. For him Grace was reduced to a natural gift, something **created**. Rational mind was supreme.
- * Is Barlaam's view prevalent today?
 - * Today we call this "rationalism" and its common.

Barlaam vs Gregory

- * Debate got Hot and personal
- * Barlaam labeled Hesychast monks as Navel Gazers thinking they were **pretending** to see the divine essence with bodily eyes.
- * Goes to Constantinople to make a formal complaint against the monks.
- * Patriarch Kalekas (Καλέκας) formally and decisively **rejected his claims** against the monks. Sent him away threatening him with punishment if he did not stop his attack.



Barlaam vs Gregory

- * Barlaam returns to Thessaloniki but **ignores** Patriarch's command and **continues attacks** on monks of Mount Athos and surrounding area.
- * 1338, Gregory **comes to Thessaloniki** at request of friend Isadore and resides in cell near his hermitage & meets Barlaam several times trying to settle the dispute peacefully.

Barlaam vs Gregory

- * Unsuccessful, Gregory began to **preach public sermons** showing the lofty truths and giving divine proofs.
- * He composed another treatise: *Concerning Unity and Distinction*.
- * Barlaam unable to answer Gregory effectively, returned to Constantinople where he met up with his friend Akindynos who had now become close friends with the Patriarch John XIV Kalekas.