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Reclaiming the Past, Embracing the Present: A Journey Through Orthodox Ethics

Abstract

This article examines the historical evolution of Orthodox ethical thought, focusing on the integration of spiritual experience and theological doctrine. Beginning with early Christian spirituality and figures such as St. Gregory of Nyssa, the study explores key concepts such as theosis and the uncreated light. It highlights the contributions of St. Gregory Palamas and addresses the influence of Western scholasticism, leading to a patristic renewal in the 20th century. The article advocates for a contemporary Orthodox theology that remains anchored in tradition while engaging with modern challenges.



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Keywords

Orthodox ethics, theosis, St. Gregory Palamas, patristic renewal, theological doctrine

1 Introduction

Orthodox ethics, deeply rooted in the intricate interplay between spiritual experience and theological doctrine, offers a profound understanding of the human journey towards divine union. This article delves into the historical evolution of Orthodox ethical thought, tracing its origins from early Christian spirituality to the influential teachings of figures such as St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory Palamas. Through examining the intricate theological nuances and debates, this piece explores how doctrines such as theosis and the vision of uncreated light have shaped Orthodox moral theology. Additionally, it highlights the efforts to revitalize Orthodox theology in the modern era, emphasizing a return to patristic sources while addressing contemporary challenges. As we journey from the mystical ascent envisioned by early theologians to the scholastic influences and eventual revitalization in the 20th century, the article underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of Orthodox ethical thought, poised between tradition and present-day relevance.

2 From its origins to St. Gregory Palamas

Christian spirituality first received a theological formulation with St. Gregory of Nyssa through the interpretation of Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai as the time of the ascent of the faithful soul, which, ascending in the knowledge of God, comes to know that it does not know Him, until it arrives in the total darkness of non-

knowledge on the mountaintop where God Himself is found. This knowledge of God in non-knowledge was also later formulated by Pseudo-Dionysius. To this apophatic spirituality, in addition to its negative aspect of non-knowledge, the Eastern Tradition also recognized a positive aspect: grasping God by uniting with Him, experiencing God through the vision of uncreated light.

There were, however, also two deviations from the right teaching on deification in the East: on the one hand, the Platonic intellectualism of Origen and Evagrius, and on the other hand, the materialization of the sensible experience of God by the Messalians. Although the Christology professed by Evagrius, which had a significant influence on shaping early monastic spirituality, was Origenist in inspiration, his teachings on sins-"evil thoughts"-and on prayer were used for centuries in the Byzantine tradition outside their Origenist context. These teachings of his on sins and prayer would later be valued by St. John Cassian, St. John Climacus, St. Maximus the Confessor, and almost all Eastern ascetic writers.

The decisive contribution to clarifying Orthodox teaching on theôsis versus Origenism will be made by St. Maximus the Confessor. St. Maximus is first and foremost a theologian and a great teacher of the doctrine of deification by clearly specifying its meaning and nature. A convinced Chalcedonian, he best formulates the link between spirituality and theology, between Christology and the doctrine of deification. All of St. Maximus' understanding, as it pertains to salvation and deification in Christ, is grounded in the consideration expressed by St. Gregory of Nyssa in the footsteps of St. Athanasius the Great: "one is saved of human nature only that which the Son of God has assumed in the

Incarnation"¹. Everything is assumed in the Logos Pantocrator, who performed three incarnations: in creation, in the Scriptures, and in his own human body. All yearn to be unified in Christ, through whom they are also united with one another. Christ remains transcendent in being and, at the same time, is the all-in-all. Only He can fully respond to the ontological yearning of every being and all being. He is the Cause, the Life, and the Meaning.

"Indeed, the whole theology of St. Maximus can be understood as a great hymn consecrated to the unity of all things, realized through God's creative and saving love: the union of man with God and of God with man, the unity of the whole creation in man (...) For St. Maximus the Confessor, this is a unity in which nothing is lost of the infinitely rich diversity of the universe; all acquire their true individuality when they are united in a single act of worship"².

St. Maximus the Confessor is considered "the true father of Eastern theology"³ and the one who definitively formulates and interprets Christocentrism in Orthodox theology.

If divinization is realized through a personal relationship with Christ, the One who discovers the Word and actualizes communion is the Holy Spirit. In the 9th century, the personal aspect of divinization will be interpreted in the pneumatological perspective already known by St. Cyril of Alexandria. The same truths will now be deepened in the light of the Holy Spirit.

Experiential pneumatology is deepened through the Hesychast current and the Heart of Jesus Prayer, which means praying unceasingly, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a

¹ Quoted by Lars THUNBERG, *Microcosm and mediator: the theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, University of Michigan, Open Court 1995, p. 14.

² Ibid, p. 5.

³ John MEYENDORFF, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1975, p. 139.

sinner." Hesychasm will play a very special role in the doctrine of experiencing God in the divine uncreated and divinizing works.

This possibility of the experience of God is anticipated in the East by St. Simeon, nicknamed, for this reason, the New Theologian, who strongly accentuates the experiential character of theology and the conscious acquisition of the Holy Spirit as a sign of divinization. For him, theologizing means telling what you experience and what you see in loving communion with God. With St. Simeon the New Theologian, the mysticism of darkness gives way to the mysticism of light.

3 Gregory Palamas and Nicholas Cabasilas

The doctrine that made possible the explanation of this intimate and mysterious union with God is the doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas on the vision of the uncreated light (as the disciples saw the light of Christ on Tabor), a doctrine centered on the distinction between the uncreated divine energies or works in which man can participate, and the divine Being, totally transcendent and incommunicable to any creature, whether man or angel.

The uncreated, immanent and communicable divine energies, by virtue of their having sprung from the divine being by making present the Trinitarian Persons, have not left man alone in his enterprise of moral perfection. Therefore, the doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas expresses the "proprium" of orthodox moral theology.

With the Councils of Constantinople in 1341 and 1351, the teaching of Hesychast origin by St. Gregory Palamas became the official teaching of the Church of the East. It was made current and valid not only for Hesychast monks but also for the whole of Orthodoxy.

The controversy that began between St. Gregory Palamas and Barlaam the Calabrian concerned the possibility of seeing divine light and its character, whether created or uncreated. The substantial problem in this hesychast controversy was, at first, whether one could know God or not. Based on the apophatic theology developed by earlier Fathers, such as St. Gregory of Nyssa or Pseudo-Dionysius, from whom they quoted profusely from both sides to support their positions, both St. Gregory Palamas and his opponents, whether Barlaam, Achindinus, or Nicephorus Gregoras, agreed on one thing: God cannot be known in his Being, which always remains transcendent. Palamas quotes St. Basil the Great to prove this: His energies descend to us, but His Being, however, remains inaccessible⁴.

Although Barlaam initially accused Palamas and the Hesychast monks of Messianism, Palamas always rejected that accusation. Not the being of God do the Hesychasts see, but rather His energies flowing from the divine essence, closely connected to it, which, as such, are also called by Palamas "divinity." Palamas considers these energies uncreated.

The council tome of 1341 tells us in the introduction that Barlaam, hearing from Hesychast monks that "the pure in heart receive divine illuminations mystically and unspeakably, accused them of holding God's being communicable. The monks, defending that they do not receive being, but rather uncreated, eternal, and divinizing grace, Barlaam accused them of ditheism"⁵.

What interests us regarding our topic is not the dogmatic problem of uncreated light and its relation to the divine essence, but the problem of knowledge. Only the believing man, purified of sins, can receive the uncreated divine energies. Palamas believes

⁴ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *The Life and Teachings of St. Gregory Palamas* (in Romanian), EIBM, București, 2006², p. 216.

⁵ *Synodus in Sophiae Templo*, PG 153, 680 B.

that this purification of the heart from sins and vices is accomplished through obedience to the commandments. Obeying the commandments leads to the purification of the heart; the purified heart, freed from the tyranny of the senses, can know God beyond the senses and the mind, through the power of the Holy Spirit, when it unites with God in the "light." With this, Palamas affirms several decisive points regarding the specifics of Orthodox theology and morality concerning knowledge. First, the fact that God cannot be known exclusively through the natural power of reason. The center of expertise of which Palamas speaks is not the mind, but the heart held by Hesychasm to be the unitary center of all the dynamisms of the soul. Consequently, freed from sins and fortified by obedience to divine commandments, man can come to know God. The knowledge of God is realized in the experience of mysterious union with God in uncreated light. The fact that Palamas bases knowledge of God on His experience is also evident in his accusation against Barlaam: "Barlaam completely rationalizes deification because he has not experienced it. Those who have experienced it know that it is unspeakable, that it can never be fully expressed."⁶

Palamas accuses Barlaam of not admitting another way to know God besides that of reason, for which even purification of the heart is not necessary. Since Palamas states that, according to Scripture, the pure of soul will see the Lord, Barlaam explains that "the pure of soul do not see God otherwise than by analogy, according to cause, or by denial. And more sees God, he who knows the most of the parts of the world, or the greatest. For he who sees all these well, can know God as the cause of them all;

⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Life and teachings...*, p. 103.

and knows Him by analogy with all these, and by negation puts Him above all these. For God is known only by things"⁷.

Against the claim that God can be known only from things, Palamas adduces as an argument the possibility of experiencing God:

"Yet Paul, raised up to the third heaven, did not see the being of God. The same, even those purified through exychia. They know that the divine being is beyond what they see. And not by reflection do they know this, but by seeing; *they experience this denial, they do not think it through reason*. Just as experimentation and seeing divine things overcomes affirmative theology, so too experimentation in this view that divine being is beyond what is seen overcomes negative theology"⁸.

As can be seen, Barlaam does not admit any way of knowing God other than the purely rational one. For Palamas, God can also be known through experience, and "those who do not admit such a view beyond the understanding do not elevate God as far as he is entitled because they believe that the mind is sufficient to know God"⁹.

Palamas, however, does not deny knowledge of God *from* creation as if it were useless, but considers it inferior, insufficient and incapable of leading to union with God: "This view of divine things is far superior to affirmative or negative theology; as what the blind say of the sun is far less than the vision of the sun by those who see, and the sun is above even sight"¹⁰.

And finally, with this possibility of knowing God through the experience of uniting with Him, Palamas considers himself in agreement with the earlier Fathers who, he says, never under-

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 94.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 82.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 87.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 92.

stood apophaticism only in its negative sense as Barlaam understood it. In this regard, in one of his treatises against Barlaam, he writes, speaking of it, "He imagines that what the Fathers hold to be above the mind is negative theology, and yet it is not above the mind. Since it denies the known and not the unknown. Then not even this theology is above the works of the mind"¹¹.

With his doctrine, St. Gregory Palamas completes the sense of experience as a characteristic and criterion of authentic Orthodox theology, attributing great importance to it in order to true knowledge of God. Moreover, he forever determines the meaning of Orthodox doctrine on divinization as union with God through Grace. This is why one of the most prominent contemporary Orthodox theologians, who had rediscovered among the first the doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas, Father Dumitru Staniloae, could declare that the Palamite doctrine "constitutes the most important event in the history of Orthodox spirituality after the Patristic era"¹² and that "the doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas developed in the Eastern religious sphere, theoretical and practical, and determined and formulated its well-known characteristics, so that nothing serious and concrete can be said today about Orthodoxy without taking into account the doctrine of this profound Eastern thinker"¹³.

"The whole subsequent history of Orthodox moral theology will bear, both in its qualities and its limitations, the marks of this legacy, a true place of identity to turn to in every moment of crisis and difficulty"¹⁴.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Basilio PETRÀ, «Alle origini dell'etica ortodossa. Il pensiero etico di Gregorio Palamas», in *Rivista di ascetica e mistica*, 58(1989), p. 68.

In light of this teaching, Christian ethics no longer appears as the mere fulfillment of duties imposed by God's commandments. These duties lead nowhere in this life, but only guarantee salvation as an outward reward in the future life.

"The Christian grows in God from the very time of this life, since the fulfillment of these commandments brings about a gradual transformation in his being, that is, they fill him more and more with the working presence of God"¹⁵.

This true theology of divinization, theorized by St. Gregory Palamas, became accessible to every Christian through St. Nicholas Cabasilas' (1320-1371) application of it in the same century.

"What Palamas described in conceptual terms, Cabasilas expressed as an existential reality not only for Hesychast monks but also for every Christian. To understand theological achievements in 14th-century Byzantium, it is important, writes John Meyendorff, to read Palamas and Cabasilas together"¹⁶.

Cabasilas interprets the faithful's possibility of union with God through uncreated grace from the liturgical-sacramental and Christocentric perspective. Integrating the Christocentric teaching of St. Maximus and the teaching on union with God of St. Gregory Palamas, St. Nicholas Cabasilas indicates that the union of the faithful with God is realized in the Church through the Most Holy Sacraments. With Cabasilas, the criterion of experience as a canon and attribute of Orthodox moral theology, as we enunciated it earlier, fully receives its ecclesial and sacramental character.

¹⁵ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Orthodox Spirituality. Ascetics and mysticism* (in Romanian), EIBM București 1992², p. 5.

¹⁶ John MEYENDORFF, *Byzantine Theology...*, p. 108.

For Cabasilas, there is a close correspondence between the sacramental itinerary and the way of spiritual life. Sacramental initiation, which began with Baptism, is supported by the gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation, is fulfilled in the Eucharist, and culminates in mystical elevation, divinization.

In his works, *Life in Christ* and *The Interpretation of the Sacred Liturgy*, Cabasilas indicates that perfection, as a divinizing life in Christ, is accessible for the present age in the Church through the sacraments. The legacy Cabasilas leaves to Orthodox theology is: a sacramental ecclesiology, a spirituality grounded in life in Christ and as such, Christocentric, and a theocentric anthropology.

4 Orthodox "scholastic" theology and "the return to the Fathers"

The intensity of Orthodox theology in the Byzantine period declined greatly after the fall of Constantinople. It was then followed by the long night of Turkishocracy in the Balkans and Romanian principalities and tsarism in Russia, which "imposed on the Orthodox either a regime of survival under overwhelming occupation or strict annexation to the structures of an authoritarian state"¹⁷.

This "long night" was marked only by the maintenance of Orthodox doctrine and spirituality in the Liturgy and in repaired manuscripts at some monastic communities, elements that, in the

¹⁷ Ioan I. Ică jr., "The renewal of contemporary Orthodox theology: meaning, problems and dimensions (in Romanian)," in *Introductory Study to Karl Christian FELMY, Dogmatica experienței eclesiale*, Deisis Publishing, Sibiu 1999, p. 7.

17th century, generated philocal currents of spiritual reinvigoration. Byzantine traditionalism, the centrality of the liturgy in church life, together with the liberalization of sacred translations into national languages, the emphasis on experience and holiness, and, by implication the importance attached to monasticism, as well as the unity of substance existing in the entire East, from Pacerska to Neamtz and Athos, are the legacy left by Byzantium to the Orthodox countries, a legacy that made possible, together with other factors we will discuss later, the renewal of Orthodox theology in the 20th century.

"The de facto Orthodox theology accessible after the fall of Constantinople rarely corresponded to the ideal of a theology oriented to the liturgical and ascetical experience of the Fathers"¹⁸.

Added to this is the indisputable influence of Western models, now Catholic, now Protestant, of doing theology, on Orthodox theology of the 17th and 19th centuries.

Beginning with the Academy of Peter Movila, who, through his Confession of Faith transposed to the whole of Orthodoxy at the Council of Iasi in 1642, had a major influence on theological teaching throughout Orthodoxy (for a long time Peter Movila's Confession was the main textbook in theological schools), the reorganization of theological schools is carried out in accordance with Western, Catholic and Protestant models. Therefore, theology itself suffers from this "scholastic" influence by losing the original predilection of Orthodox theology for the mystery that is participated in by experience.

"The definitions of orthodox 'scholastic' theology no longer intend to describe the mystery and delimit it from misinterpretations, but want to define it in the actual sense of the

¹⁸ Karl Christian FELMY, *La teologia ortodossa contemporanea. Una introduzione*, Queriniana, Brescia 1999, pp. 24-25.

term, to reduce it to a formula and thus understand and comprehend it"¹⁹.

After the fall of Constantinople, a theology was thus slowly born that did not correspond to the ancient Orthodox tradition and criteria recalled above, a theology alienated and isolated from life. This type of theology dominated the theological schools in Russia as much as in Greece or Romania for a long time. This type of theology is called "school theology." It is worthy of attention, however, that always in Orthodox schools of theology, the counter-current was formed, that of the patristic renewal of Orthodox theology.

The Westernization of academic Orthodox theology is a process carried out in parallel with the cultural Westernization of the entire European East through the revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, and was also accentuated by the liberation from the Turks. The sharing of Western forms in both culture and forms of state organization from Eastern countries extended into academic or "school" theology as well." During this "scholastic" period of Orthodox theology, theological reflection underwent such a profound transformation that Father George Florovsky, perhaps the most important proponent of patristic renewal in the 20th century, spoke of a "pseudomorphosis" and "Babylonian captivity" of Orthodox theology during this period.

This "Babylonian captivity," with respect to Western forms, came to an end in the 20th century with the patristic renewal of Orthodox theology, as Florovsky advocated it in 1936 at the Congress of Faculties of Theology held in Athens. This renewal consisted of a return to Revelation and its authentic documents, especially the works of the Holy Church Fathers and their experiential and ecclesial theology. With this, Orthodox theology

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 23-24.

sought to reconnect the thread of its reflection and experience with the theology of the Fathers, the ancient Church, and Tradition.

This "return to the Greek Fathers," in which Florovsky saw "the only possibility and way of identity for contemporary Orthodoxy," was preceded by several hesychast and philocal movements in all Orthodox countries. In the 18th century, the hesychast movement initiated by Paisie Velicicovsky in Moldavia generated a monastic and spiritual revival in the Romanian principalities and all Slavic countries, especially Russia. Another significant influence was the neo-Hesychast movement in Greece, promoted by Nicodemus Agiorita, who edited the Greek *Philocalia* in Venice in 1782. These philocal movements had a decisive influence on the renewal of moral theology in the 20th century, integrating spirituality, mysticism, and asceticism.²⁰

The return to the Greek Fathers and the patristic renewal of the 20th century "would be inconceivable without intellectual contact with the West; both existential personalism and the neo-Patristic and Eucharistic renaissance of present-day Orthodox theology are due in an essential way not only to the renewal of philocal spirituality, but also to the intellectual contact and exchange with similar philosophies and movements implemented in the Western space"²¹.

In addition, the Western world has given some theologians who have transcended denominational boundaries by approaching

²⁰ Professor Staniloae, the translator of the *Philocalia* into Romanian, wrote the third volume of the Handbook of Moral Theology for Theological Institutes in 1981, a volume that included theory on ascetics and mysticism in the Orthodox tradition on the basis of Philocalic spirituality. The framing of this topic in moral theology seemed inadequate to some theologians even later, but this denotes the integrative tendency of Orthodox theology by pointing to the unity between heart and intellect as one of the main features of Orthodox ethics.

²¹ Ioan I. Ică jr., *The renewal of Orthodox theology...*, p. 29.

patristic thought objectively with exemplary analysis and evaluation²².

This is also why the leaven of the renewal of Orthodox theology was the Russian theologians of the diaspora, who, on the one hand, were in contact with the renewal movements of Western space, and, on the other hand, faced the provocations of a new and desacralized world.

Although indeed the theological, liturgical, and patristic renewal began earlier in the West, "Orthodox theologians are the ones who took full advantage of it, even retroactively, because they recognized in it the features of the patristic thought and tradition in which the Eastern Church is deeply rooted. As a result, with the help of theological development in the West, Orthodox theology has been able to defeat its own scholasticism"²³.

In addition to a "survival" of a "school theology" in the midst of a patristic, liturgical and Eucharistic renewal process, which can still be seen here and there in the Faculties of Theology of Orthodox countries, this patristic renewal, if it is not understood correctly and is distorted on the ideological level, can also foster the appearance of a hidden temptation. Into this temptation, for example, the Romanian Orthodox theologian, Ioan I Ica Jr, believes that the "Orthodox religious philosopher" Christos Yannaras has fallen, who,

"radicalizing the Spenglerian-inspired theory of the double Catholicist and Protestant 'pseudomorphosis' of the 17th-18th centuries, and the peroration for a return to patristic

²² Here we think of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Jean Danielou, Irene Hausherr, Henri de Lubac, Walther Volker, Werner Jaeger, John Kelly, Henri Crouzel, Johannes Quasten, and Jaroslav Pelikan who also converted to Orthodoxy.

²³ Ioannis ZIZIOLULAS, "Die Eucharistie in der neuzeitlichen orthodoxen Theologie," p. 172.

'Christian Hellenism,' launched in 1936 in Athens by Father George Florovsky [...], speaks of a patristic Orthodox Hellenism and Byzantine Hellenism as a perfect synthesis, closed in on itself and radically opposed to Western Christianity; as such it would need neither change, nor provocation, nor further enrichment"²⁴.

The dangers of idealization and self-sufficiency lead to historical immobility, which, in the age of the greatest provocations of today's society, desacralized, secularized, and largely agnostic, would bring a serious lack of wisdom to Christianity and its theology.

"Instead of proclaiming the existence of two irreconcilable ontologies, much more useful and beneficial would be to engage in a dialogue (be it even critical but conciliatory, truly personalist) inspired by penitential (and thus self-critical) and creative recourse to the sources of Revelation that offer us concrete access to the living, liturgical and mystical Tradition of the Church"²⁵.

The exhortation "back to the Fathers" has become a dominant paradigm in 20th-century Orthodox theology. Contemporary Orthodox theology, renewed but still renewable (according to the categories of already and not yet), should perhaps today accentuate more the last of its characteristics mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: unity, continuity, and actuality. This actualization of contemporary Orthodox theology, demanded by the new provocations of history, should also take into account the other two: continuity with the Tradition of the Eastern Fathers and the unity of all in Christ, God-Man, the unifying Logos, the Alpha and Omega of Christian theology. Perhaps it would be time for Orthodox theology to also renew the paradigm by which it

²⁴ Ioan I. Ică jr., *The renewal of Orthodox theology...*, p. 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

has been moving in the last century, giving up neither the characteristics that determine its original identity nor its relevance and dynamism. Instead of "back to the Fathers," it would be better to "forward together with the Fathers."

This return to the Fathers combined with the effort to de-Westernize Orthodox theology "has overshadowed all other theological issues, such as the provocations that the modern world has brought back and continues to bring back to Orthodox theology"²⁶. This exhortation "back to the Fathers" has been understood at times in the last century, mostly on its defensive side, to protect Orthodoxy rather than to witness to it. So much so that "going back to the Fathers" has not been understood by Florovsky himself as a mere "repetition" or "imitation" of the past, an "evasion from history" or "a denial of the present," nor merely as a translation into current language of the Fathers' treasures of faith, but rather as an acquisition of the mind of the Fathers (*ad mentem Patrum*) for the creative fulfillment of the future²⁷. Florovsky's insistence, however, on Christian Hellenism as the perfect, irreplaceable, and unsurpassable synthesis, valid for every time and situation, an insistence deepened by his disciples, emphasized the element of returning to the past more than that of empowering toward the future.

Thus, within Orthodox theology itself, voices have run that, besides appreciating the patristic renewal of theology, also reproach it for negative consequences such as introversion, conservatism, traditionalism, the mythologizing of patristic theology, and muteness before the provocations of the modern world.

²⁶ Pantelis KALAITZIDIS, "From the "Return to the Fathers" to the need for a modern Orthodox Theology," in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 1(2010), pp. 5-36.

²⁷ G. FLOROVSKY, *Ways of Russian Theology*, in *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 6.

In this regard, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, a professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Salonica, comparing the patristic renewal movements that took place in the 20th century in all Christian churches, states, "the difference consists in the fact that while Western theological movements were ultimately created within modernity, the Orthodox "return" movement, represented by the "neo-patristic" school, served as a bank against modernity"²⁸. This exhortation to return to the Fathers is rather a conservative proposal, a reference to the past rather than to the present, much less to the future. Therefore, Orthodoxy seems to have some difficulty today in understanding and communicating with the contemporary postmodern world. This world has developed beyond its geographic space and history, but it must deal with them today because of globalization.

Conclusion

The journey through Orthodox ethics reflects a rich tapestry of spiritual and theological developments that have shaped its unique moral landscape. The journey from early Christian spirituality through the transformative contributions of figures such as St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Maximus the Confessor, and St. Gregory Palamas highlights the profound interplay between theological doctrine and mystical experience. The struggles with Western scholastic influences and the subsequent patristic renewal in the 20th century underscore Orthodoxy's dynamic nature, as it strives to maintain its foundational truths while adapting to contemporary challenges. As Orthodox theology continues to engage with the modern world, it must balance the imperative to honor its rich tradition with the need to address new ethical and

²⁸ Pantelis KALAITZIDIS, "From the " Return to the Fathers...," p. 12.

theological questions. This requires an ongoing dialogue and a forward-looking commitment not only to preserve the wisdom of the Fathers but also to creatively respond to the realities of a rapidly changing global society. By embracing both its historical roots and modern context, Orthodox ethics can remain a vital force, offering spiritual depth and moral clarity in a complex world.

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