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# The significance of the distinction between essence and energies of God according to St. Basil the Great

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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN  
ESSENCE AND ENERGIES OF GOD  
ACCORDING TO ST. BASIL THE GREAT**

*Introduction*

Concerning the important positions that Professor D. Bradshaw has expressed in regards to the formation and development of the distinction between the essence and energies of God in the Orthodox tradition<sup>1</sup>, we considered it useful, within the limited framework of an article, to give from a historico-dogmatic point of view special treatment to the ontological and gnoseological significance of this distinction according to St. Basil the Great. This will clarify his decisive contribution to the development and formation of the above distinction within the Orthodox tradition. As was already emphasized in a related study of ours, it is indeed a noteworthy contribution, because Basil was the first of the great Fathers of the Church to develop, not only ontologically, but also gnoseologically, this distinction, constituting the basis for its further development, both by the other two Cappadocians, and by the subsequent great Fathers of the Church, especially St. Gregory Palamas<sup>2</sup>.

The teaching of Saint Basil the Great on the distinction between essence and energies of God is not the outcome of philosophical conjecture, but rather the continuation of the biblical and of the patristic tradition that came before him. Although this teaching was developed in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century by Saint Athanasius of Alexandria on an ontological basis and especially in the context of his struggle against the Arians<sup>3</sup>, Saint Basil further developed it from an ontological and gnoseological perspective, in his confrontation with the Eunomians and Pneumatomachians of his age.

*a) The challenge of the Eunomians and the Pneumatomachians*

In their attempt to save, from the attack of the Church Fathers, the fundamental Arian teaching that the Son is of different essence than that

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<sup>1</sup> See D. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 154 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. D. Martzelos, *Οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργειαι τοῦ Θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν Μέγαν Βασίλειον. Συμβολή εἰς τὴν ἱστοριοδογματικὴν διερεύνησιν τῆς περὶ οὐσίας καὶ ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ διδασκαλίας τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, ed. by P. Pournaras, Thessaloniki 2019, pp. 25 f; 193.

<sup>3</sup> See for example *De incarnatione Verbi* 17, PG 25, 125 AB; *Adversus Arianos III*, 61-64, PG 26, 452 A – 460 B.

of the Father, the Eunomians were forced to revise the Arian gnoseology and ontology, severing the traditional bond existing between them.

Thus, while the Arians accepted, as did the Fathers of the Church, that created beings are unable to conceive of the uncreated essence of God<sup>4</sup>, the Eunomians defended the possibility of full knowledge of the divine essence on the part of created beings<sup>5</sup>. They believed that this knowledge was not the result of any special intellectual effort, but was the consequence of knowledge of the name “unbegotten” (ἀγέννητος), which they accepted as ontologically defining and representing the divine essence<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, since the essence of God consisted of his unbegottenness, it could not be ontologically identified with the essence of the Son, which they considered as begotten<sup>7</sup>.

Based also on the distinction between essence and energies of God, the Eunomians revised the Arian ontology as well. In other words, while the Arians accepted two ontological categories of existence — that of the unbegotten or uncreated for the Father, and the begotten or created for all other beings<sup>8</sup>— the Eunomians distinguished ontologically the “begotten” from the “created” and accepted three such categories: the “unbegotten” for the Father, the “begotten” for the Son and the “created” for all remaining creations, among which was included the Holy Spirit. The difference between “begotten” and “created”, upon which they distinguished ontologically the Son from the Holy Spirit, resided in the

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<sup>4</sup> According to the witness of St. Athanasius, Arius applied this principle to all created beings, included the Son, underlining this point emphatically with the following words: “Τῷ Υἱῷ ὁ Θεὸς ἄρρητος ὑπάρχει. Ἐστὶ γὰρ ἑαυτῷ ὅ ἐστι, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ἄλεκτος, ὥστε οὐδὲν τῶν λεγομένων κατὰ τε κατὰλημιν συνίει ἐξειπεῖν ὁ Υἱός· ἀδύνατα γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸν Πατέρα ἐξιχνιάσαι, ὅς ἐστιν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ· αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Υἱὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ οὐσίαν οὐκ οἶδεν. Υἱὸς γὰρ ὢν θελήσει Πατρός ὑπῆρξεν ἀληθῶς. Τίς γοῦν λόγος συγχωρεῖ τὸν ἐκ Πατρὸς ὄντα αὐτὸν τὸν γεννήσαντα γινῶναι ἐν καταλήμει; Δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι τὸ ἀρχὴν ἔχον τὸν ἀναρχον ὅς ἐστιν ἐμπερινοῆσαι ἢ ἐμπεριδράξασθαι οὐχ οἷόν τε ἐστίν” (*Epistola de Synodis Arimini in Italia et Seleucia in Isauria celebratis* 15, PG 26, 708 BC). See also *Adversus Arianos I*, 6, PG 26, 24 AB; 9, PG 26, 29 B; *Ad episcopos Aegypti et Lybiae epistola encyclica* 12, PG 25, 565 A. Cf. Alexander of Alexandria, *Charissimis honoratissimisque ubique ecclesiae catholicae comministris* 3, PG 18, 573 B. About the above-mentioned idea of Arius see G. Zaphiris, “Reciprocal Trinitarian Revelation and man’s knowledge of God according to St. Athanasius”, in: *Τόμος ἑόρτιος χιλιοστῆς ἑξακοσιοστῆς ἐπετείου Μεγάλου Ἀθανασίου (373-1973)*, Thessaloniki 1974, p. 300 f.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Church historian Socrates, Eunomius maintained *verbatim* that man’s knowledge of the divine essence is identified with God’s self-knowledge with the following words: “Ὁ Θεὸς περὶ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ οὐσίας οὐδὲν πλέον ἡμῶν ἐπίσταται· οὐδέ ἐστιν αὕτη μᾶλλον μὲν ἐκείνῳ, ἤττον δὲ ἡμῖν γινωσκομένη. Ἄλλ’ ὅπερ ἂν εἰδείμεν ἡμεῖς περὶ αὐτῆς, τοῦτο πάντως κακεῖνος οἶδεν· ὁ δ’ αὖ πάλιν ἐκεῖνος, τοῦτο εὐρήσεις ἀπαραλλάκτως ἐν ἡμῖν”. The same idea had expressed, according to Epiphanius of Salamis, the teacher of Eunomius, Aetius the Anomean: see *Panarium* 56 (76), 4, PG 42, 521 C.

<sup>6</sup> See Aetius the Anomean, *Syntagmation*, in: Epiphanius of Salamis, *op. cit.*, 11, PG 42, 537 C – 541 C; Eunomius, *Apologia* 8, PG 30, 841 D – 844 B.

<sup>7</sup> See Aetius the Anomean, *op. cit.*, PG 42, 533 C – 545 A; Eunomius, *op. cit.*, 9-12, PG 30, 844 B – 848 B; 20-22, PG 30, 856 A – 857 C. See also G. D. Martzelos, *op. cit.*, pp. 31 ff. and D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>8</sup> See Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos I*, 5, PG 26, 21 A; 6, PG 26, 24 A.

fact that the “begotten” came into being through the energy of the unbegotten Father, while the “created” came into being through the energy of the begotten Son<sup>9</sup>. Considering the Persons of the Holy Trinity in this manner, as depicting the above-mentioned three ontological categories of being, they thus excluded their essential relationship.

On the basis of this ontology and gnoseology, the Eunomians invented two theological methods with which they sought to prove that the Persons of the Holy Trinity were of unlike essence. The first was supported based on the difference between the names “unbegotten” and “begotten”, which they attributed respectively to the Father and the Son<sup>10</sup>; while the second was supported on the basis of the difference of their energies, which they accepted as appearing in their ontologically different creations: that of the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>11</sup>.

It is characteristic that these theological methods were used in a different form by the Pneumatomachians, who did not accept the ontology and gnoseology of the Eunomians. In other words, in order to prove the createdness of the Holy Spirit, they on the one hand attributed different prepositions for each Person of the Holy Trinity<sup>12</sup> and on the other hand they maintained that the Holy Spirit did not have creative energy and as such differed in regards to energy from the Father and the Son<sup>13</sup>.

### ***b) The ontological and gnoseological significance of the distinction between essence and energies of God according to St Basil the Great***

Against this novel ontology and gnoseology as well as the related theological methods of the Eunomians and the Pneumatomachians, Basil puts forward the ontological and gnoseological significance of the distinction between essence and energies of God, as well as its definitive importance for the origin and significance of the divine names<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> See Eunomius, *op. cit.*, 15, PG 30, 849 C. Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia XXIV, Contra Sabellianos et Arium et Anomoeos* 6, PG 31, 612 CD. See also G. D. Martzelos, *op. cit.*, pp. 85 ff.; G. D. Martzelos, “Der Verstand und seine Grenzen nach dem hl. Basilios dem Grossen”, in: *Τόμος έόρτιος χιλιοστής έξακοσιοστής έπετείου Μεγάλου Βασιλείου (379-1979)*, Thessaloniki 1981, pp. 230 f.

<sup>10</sup> See Eunomius, *op. cit.*, 12, PG 30, 848 B; 18, PG 30, 853 AB; Aetius the Anomean, *op. cit.*, PG 42, 540 A. See also Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto* 4, PG 32, 73 AB; Epiphanius of Salamis, *op. cit.*, PG 42, 525 A; Theodoret of Cyrus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2, 23, PG 82, 1068 A.

<sup>11</sup> See Eunomius, *op. cit.*, 20, PG 30, 856 ABC. See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium I*, PG 45, 297 ABC, 352 CD.

<sup>12</sup> See Basil the Great, *op. cit.*, PG 32, 73 A.

<sup>13</sup> See Basil the Great, *In Psalmum XXXII*, 4, PG 29, 333 ABC; *De Spiritu Sancto* 5-6, PG 32, 76 A – 77 C; 50- 51, PG 32, 160 C; *Epistola CXXV*, 3, PG 32, 549 C. See also W.-D. Hauschild, *Die Pneumatomachen. Eine Untersuchung zur Dogmengeschichte des vierten Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg 1967, pp. 46 ff.

<sup>14</sup> See G. D. Martzelos, *Ουσία και ένεργειαι του Θεου κατά τον Μέγαν Βασιλείον. Συμβολή εις την ιστορικοδογματικήν διερεύνησιν της περι ουσίας και ένεργειών του Θεου διδασκαλίας της Όρθοδόξου Εκκλησίας*, ed. by P. Pournaras, Thessaloniki <sup>2</sup>1993, pp. 76 ff., 121 ff., 149 ff.

According to Basil, the transcendence of God has not only an ontological dimension but also a gnoseological one. In contrast to Eunomius, who considers the ontological transcendence of God as the presupposition for knowledge of the divine essence, Basil considers it as the presupposition for *not* knowing it. For this reason he does not accept the names “unbegotten” and “begotten” as declaring respectively the essence of the Father and the Son, but as declaring the particular manner of their existence, by which their hypostases are distinguished<sup>15</sup>. As with the uncreated essence of God, likewise the manner of existence of his hypostases remains unknown and indescribable. The knowledge of these is a characteristic property only of the uncreated Persons of the Holy Trinity<sup>16</sup>. Thus Basil considers ontology as the foundation of his gnoseology, and he re-establishes their traditional bond, which had been broken by Eunomius<sup>17</sup>.

For Basil, the emphasis on the absolute transcendence of the divine essence does not run the risk of agnosticism. While God is in himself completely inaccessible and inconceivable according to his essence as well as to his inner-Trinitarian life and movement, he is revealed and made known by his energies, which appear in the creation of the world as well as in the saving economy which surrounds man. As he underlines emphatically, “We say that we know God from His energies; we do not maintain that we access His very essence. And this because His energies come down to us, while His essence remains inaccessible”<sup>18</sup>.

In other words, God has not only an inner-Trinitarian life consisting of the essential relationship of the three hypostases among themselves, but also an exo-Trinitarian life consisting of the relationship of the divine Persons with the created world through their energies. In this sense, the distinction between essence and energies of God, because of its ontological character is, according to Basil, valid objectively in God and is not subjective or intellectual, coming from to the finite nature of the human intellect, as the roman-catholic theologian E. von Ivánka maintained<sup>19</sup>. This is also shown more clearly from the fact that Basil

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<sup>15</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium II*, 28-29, PG 29, 636 C – 640 AB. Cf. D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 158 f.

<sup>16</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium I*, 12-14, PG 29, 540 A – 545 A; *II*, 22, PG, 29, 621 A; 24, PG 29, 628 A; *III*, 6, PG 29, 668 AB; *Homilia XXIV, Contra Sabellianos et Arium et Anomæos* 7, PG 31, 613 C – 616 A; *In sanctam Christi generationem* 1-2, PG 31, 1457 C – 1460 B; *Adversus eos qui per calumniam dicunt dici a nobis deos tres* 4, PG 31, 1496 B.

<sup>17</sup> For the break of the traditional bond between ontology and gnoseology by Eunomius see G. D. Martzelos, *op. cit.*, p.p. 29 f.

<sup>18</sup> *Epistola CCXXXIV*, 1, PG 32, 869 AB: “Ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐκ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν γνωρίζειν λέγομεν τὸν Θεὸν ἡμῶν, τῇ δὲ οὐσίᾳ αὐτῇ προσεγγίζειν οὐκ ὑπισχνούμεθα. Αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐνεργεῖαι αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταβαίνουσιν, ἡ δὲ οὐσία αὐτοῦ μένει ἀπρόσιτος”.

<sup>19</sup> See “Palamismus und Vätertradition”, in: *L'Église et les églises. Études et travaux offerts à Dom Lambert Beaudouin*, vol. 2, Chevetogne 1955, pp. 33 ff.; the same author, *Plato Christianus. Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter*, Einsiedeln 1964, pp. 429 ff.; the same

connected this distinction with the distinction between essence and hypostases in a similar manner, so as to present the absolute correspondence between the eternal and the economic Trinity. Thus, according to Basil, the existence of one essence and three hypostases of God is reflected in the manifestation of the energy and the three particular works of his hypostases<sup>20</sup>.

But the gnoseological significance of God's revelation in the world through his energies is not understood, according to Basil, independently of man's relationship and communion with God and participation in His being<sup>21</sup>. Familiarization with the revelation of God, which he grants through his energies, demands the ethical and spiritual purity of the human mind and its illumination by God<sup>22</sup>. Only under these presuppositions can man on the one hand know of the existence of God, and of the variety of his energies from Creation<sup>23</sup>, and on the other hand know of the unity of essence and the peculiarity of his hypostases from his saving economy<sup>24</sup>.

It is in the frame of this gnoseological significance of God's revelation through his energies and of these spiritual presuppositions that Basil gave a very interesting and original answer to the problem of the relationship between faith and knowledge. This problem, which he dealt with, apparently arose from the dialectic between the Eunomians and the Orthodox. The Eunomians, as it is known, in considering the knowledge of the divine essence as the basis of their whole theology<sup>25</sup>, undervalued the significance of faith for the knowledge of God, as set forth by the Orthodox. It appears that for them the knowledge of the divine essence precedes faith in God. And indeed, in their setting forth the primacy of knowledge as over against faith oftentimes they would put the question to the Orthodox: "Which came first, knowledge or faith?"<sup>26</sup>.

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author, "Hellenisches im Hesychasmus. Das antinomische der Energienlehre", in: *Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, Paris 1972, p. 495.

<sup>20</sup> See *De Spiritu Sancto* 38, PG 32, 136 ABC. See also G. D. Martzelos, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 ff.

<sup>21</sup> As D. Bradshaw characteristically notes, "the divine *energeiai* are not merely operations, but God Himself as manifested within creation. It follows that the sort of participation Basil describes is not merely cooperation with God, but an actual participation in the divine being" (*op. cit.*, p. 174).

<sup>22</sup> See *In Psalmum XXIX*, 5, PG 29, 317 B; *In Psalmum XXXIII*, 3, PG 29, 357 BC; *In martyrem Julittam* 7, PG 31, 256 A; *Epistola CCXXXIII*, 1-2, PG 32, 865 A – 868 B; *Adversus Eunomium II*, 16, PG 29, 604 AB; *De Spiritu Sancto* 23 PG 32, 109 AB; 61, PG 32 180 C. See also G. D. Martzelos, *op. cit.*, pp. 123 ff.

<sup>23</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium I*, 14, PG 29, 544 B; *Homilia XII, In principium Proverbiorum* 3, PG 31, 392 B.

<sup>24</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium III*, 4 PG 29, 661 B – 665 A; *De Spiritu Sancto* 19, PG 32, 101 C – 104 A; 23, PG 32, 109 AB; 37, PG 32, 133 CD; 47, PG 32, 153 ABC; 64, PG 32, 185 BC. Cf. *Epistola CLXXXIX*, 6-7, PG 32, 692 D – 693 C. Especially on this point see G. D. Martzelos, *op. cit.*, pp. 140 ff.

<sup>25</sup> On this point see G. D. Martzelos, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 ff.

<sup>26</sup> See Basil the Great, *Epistola CCXXXV*, 1, PG 32, 872 A.

To this clearly gnoseological (epistemological) question Basil responds by taking in view so much its theological and as much as its philosophical dimension. Now the answer he gives is not the same for philosophical and theological gnoseology<sup>27</sup>. For philosophical gnoseology faith precedes knowledge. In the first place, one must, for example, believe that element *a* is called *alpha* and, having learned the character and its pronunciation, one can subsequently achieve a precise knowledge as respecting its use<sup>28</sup>. But in theological gnoseology the question of the primacy between faith and knowledge is not set forth, because so much the aim as much as also the content of faith is identified with the aim and content of knowledge. In this sense both the view that faith precedes knowledge and the view that knowledge precedes faith can be regarded as correct. “For if you say of one believing and knowing”, Basil observes characteristically, “of what he believes, of these same things he also knows; or also conversely, of what he knows, these things too he believes”<sup>29</sup>. Yet, between these two views Basil inclines most evidently towards the second. From this perspective it appears that he agrees with the Eunomians that knowledge precedes faith. This knowledge, however, has according to him a completely different meaning. It is symmetrical to man’s comprehensive capability and as such it cannot consist of the knowledge of the essence of God but in the knowledge of His existence. And we are led to this knowledge from the energies of God, which are manifested in the creatures that came to be, that were created, by Him<sup>30</sup>. As a consequence, when Basil prefers the view that knowledge precedes faith, he means that fundamental knowledge concerning the existence of God. The existence of this elementary knowledge he considers necessary for the development of faith in God. Thus religious faith is not, according to him, irrational and arbitrary; it is supported upon a rational foundation, which consists of the knowledge of the existence of God derived from the knowledge of creatures<sup>31</sup>.

From another perspective, however, faith, according to Basil, precedes knowledge of God. The knowledge of God cannot be achieved by means of the sensible organs (or organs of sense), but by means of the intellect, which is equipped through faith<sup>32</sup>. Only through faith is it possible for the necessary pre-requisites of spiritual purity and divine

<sup>27</sup> See C. Bonis, “The problem concerning Faith and Knowledge, or Reason and Revelation, as expounded in the letters of St. Basil the Great to Amphilochius of Iconium”, in: *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 5,1 (1959), p. 41 f.

<sup>28</sup> See *Epistola CCXXXV*, 1, PG 32, 872 AB.

<sup>29</sup> *Epistola CCXXXIV*, 3, PG 32, 869 D – 872 A.

<sup>30</sup> See *Epistola CCXXXIV*, 1, PG 32, 869 AB; *Epistola CCXXXV*, 1, PG 32, 872 AB.

<sup>31</sup> See *op. cit.*, PG 32, 872 B; *Epistola CCXXXIV*, 3, PG 32, 872 A.

<sup>32</sup> See *Homilia in illud “Attende tibi ipsi”* 7, PG 31, 216 A: «“Wste m»te Tmp^ qeoà zht»sVj t¼n di Ñfqalmîn katanÔhsin, øll! t¼ diano...v Tmpitrsÿaj t¼n p...stin, noht¼n œce per^ aÛtoà t¼n katflhyin ».

illumination to be realized, for the achievement of the knowledge of God to be rendered possible. Besides, for Basil, faith constitutes the fundamental prerequisite of baptism<sup>33</sup>, through which sharing in the salvific tradition of the Church we achieve not only adoption by grace but also the knowledge of God<sup>34</sup>. And in this sense faith doesn't constitute simply the pre-requisite of knowledge, just as it is for philosophical gnoseology, but is the pre-requisite of the ethical and spiritual life, and only within which framework is the true knowledge of God possible.

According to these considerations faith and knowledge are closely connected with each other in a functional unity and constitute two forms of approaching the same thing, insofar as both are supported wholly in the energies of God, which are manifested in the world<sup>35</sup>. On account of this no dialectic antithesis subsists between them, as occurred later during the Middle Ages and the more modern years in the West, when these were considered to be gnostic (cognitive) powers of the human mind functioning independently of the energies of God. If for Basil faith and knowledge are inseparably connected with each other, this is due to the fact that these are not understood independently of man's relationship with God. And it is precisely for this reason that these are not limited simply to a theoretical conception of the idea of God, but look to a deep existential relationship with Him, which Basil characterizes by the term "proskynesis", veneration or worship. Knowledge, faith and worship constitute for him three stages of the relationship with God which are connected causally between them through the divine energies. Thus knowledge of God doesn't have as its aim simply and only the basing of faith but also guidance towards His worship<sup>36</sup>. Only in worship does faith and knowledge find their theological aim and their deeper meaning and significance.

<sup>33</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium* 3, PG 29, 665 C; *De Spiritu Sancto* 28, PG 32, 117 BC.

<sup>34</sup> See *De Spiritu Sancto* 26, PG 32, 113 AB: «Cristiano<sup>3</sup> pÒqen 'me;j; Di| tÁj p...stewj, p©j tij "n eþpoi. SJzÓmeqa d□ t...na trÒpon; 'Anagennhqšntej dhlonÒti di| tÁj TMn tù bapt...smati cřritoj. PÓqen gr ¥lloqen; E□ta t³¼n swthr...an taÚthn di| PatrŒj ka^ Ufoà ka^ jg...ou PneÚmatoj bebaioumšnhn gnwr...santej, Ōn parelfbomen «tÚpon didacÁj» prohsŒmeqa; ...”Ish TMst^n 1 zhm...a, À ¥moirŌn tina toà bapt...smatoj çpelqe^n, À »n ti tîn TMk tÁj paradŒsewj TMllepon dšxasqai... T³¼n oân e,,sfgousfn me e,,j tŒ fij, t³¼n gnšsin Qeoà moi carisamšnhn parfdosin, di' Áj tšknon çpede...cqhn Qeoà...». Cf. *op. cit.*, 75, PG 32, 209. See also H. Dörries, *De Spiritu Sancto. Der Beitrag des Basiliius zum Abschluß des trinitarischen Dogmas*, Göttingen 1956, pp. 133 f.; the same author, “Basiliius und das Dogma vom Heiligen Geist”, in: *Lutherische Rundschau* 6 (1956-57), pp. 255 f.

<sup>35</sup> On the relationship between faith and knowledge according to the Orthodox Theology in general see N. Matsoukas, *Γένεσις καί οὐσία τοῦ Ὁρθοδόξου δόγματος*, Thessaloniki 1969, pp. 159 ff. See also the same author, *Κόσμος, ἄνθρωπος, κοινωνία κατά τόν Μάξιμο Ὁμολογητή*, Athens 1980, pp. 200, 305 f.

<sup>36</sup> See *Epistola CCXXXIV*, 3, PG 32, 869 C – 872 A; *Epistola CCXXXV*, 1, PG 32, 872 B. See also P. Chrestou, *Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος. Βίος καί πολιτεία, συγγράμματα, θεολογική σκέψις*, Thessaloniki 1978, p. 243.



The above-mentioned ontological and gnoseological significance, which Basil attributes to the distinction between essence and energies of God, is clearly apparent in his teaching on the origin and significance of the divine names. He maintains that the names attributed to God come from human conception (ἐπίνοια), which is the unique source of the names of all beings in general. These names, while real, cannot declare the essence of beings but only their various properties<sup>37</sup>. Consequently, the names attributed to God cannot declare the divine essence, as Eunomius maintained, but only the various characteristics of the essence, hypostases and energies of God<sup>38</sup>. Thus, ontology, gnoseology and teaching on the divine names are, according to Basil, interconnected and causally tied together. Ontology is the foundation of his gnoseology, and this in turn is the foundation of his teaching on the divine names. It is exactly for this reason that he was able to confront the theological methods of the Eunomians and the Pneumatomachians with two contrary but logically unshakable theological methods of his own, with which he proved the identity of the essence of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, invoking either the identity of their names<sup>39</sup> or the identity of their energies<sup>40</sup>.

### ***Conclusion***

In closing, in order to fully appreciate the significance of Saint Basil's teaching on essence and energies of God for the entire Orthodox tradition, we must stress that with this teaching he not only turned away the danger which Orthodoxy underwent from the Eunomians and Pneumatomachians, but also contributed decisively to the development and formulation of the Trinitarian doctrine, and especially that of the Holy Spirit. He thus prepared the ground for the theological work of the second Ecumenical Council, which was called just two years after his death.

Chiefly, however, Basil, with his teaching on essence and energies of God, provided the framework for the correct relationship between the uncreated God and the created world, which is the fundamental presupposition for Orthodox Trinitarian doctrine as well as Orthodox Cosmology, Christology and Soteriology. In this way, he provided the necessary presuppositions for the proper manner of confronting not only

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<sup>37</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium I*, 6-7, PG 29, 521 C – 525 C; *II*, 4, PG 29, 577 C – 580 B.

<sup>38</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium I*, 8, PG 29, 528 A – 529 C; *II*, 5, PG 29, 580 C. See also G. D. Martzelos, *op. cit.*, pp.158 ff.

<sup>39</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium II*, 24, PG 29, 628 C; *III*, 3-4, PG 29, 661 AB; *De Spiritu Sancto* 11, PG 32, 85 A; 48, PG 32, 156 C; 53, PG 32, 165 D.

<sup>40</sup> See *Adversus Eunomium III*, 4, PG 29, 661 B – 665 A; *De Spiritu Sancto* 19, PG 32, 101 C – 104 A; 53, PG 32, 165 D. Cf. *Epistola CLXXXIX*, 6, PG 32, 692 D – 693 A.

the Christological question, which had already begun to preoccupy the theological thought of the Church from his own period, but also the question of man's real participation in the life of God, which occupied the theological thought of the Church in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. From this point of view, the contribution of St. Basil to the development of Orthodox dogma consequentially was especially great.

In particular, Basil put forward the ontological and gnoseological significance of the distinction between God's essence and energies as well as its definitive importance for the origin and significance of the divine names, offering in this way the basis for subsequent development of the teaching on essence and energies of God within the Orthodox tradition. With the above-mentioned distinction, he indeed provided all the essential theological presuppositions for the connection made later by St. Gregory Palamas, between teaching on God's essence and energies and Orthodox spiritual experience and life, consisting in man's real communion with God and his divinization. Thus St. Basil was one of the chief contributors to the development of this teaching as the criterion of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality.