

**Text-analysis of a paragraph of
“Homily Thirty Four, on the Transfiguration”
by St Gregory Palamas**

An essay, by Neil Kazen, towards
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HOMILY THIRTY-FOUR

ON THE TRANSFIGURATION I

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12. There are people in our own times, who boast of pagan Greek learning and the wisdom of this world, and who completely disobey spiritual men in matters of the Spirit, and choose to oppose them. When they hear that the light of the Lord's transfiguration on the mountain was seen by the eyes of the apostles, they immediately reduce it to visible, created light. They drag down that immaterial, never-setting, pre-eternal light,⁵²⁶ which surpasses not only our senses but also our minds, because they themselves are at a low level, and are incapable of conceiving of anything higher than earthly things. Nevertheless, He who shone with this light proved in advance that it was uncreated⁵²⁷ by referring to it as the kingdom of God. God's kingdom is not subservient or created, but uniquely unsubduable and invincible. It is beyond the bounds of both time and aeon,⁵²⁸ and cannot be said to have had a beginning or to have been overtaken by time or age. We believe this kingdom to be the inheritance of those who are being saved.⁵²⁹

I will divide this analysis in two parts:

- 1- Flow able narrative that follows the text step by step, while analyzing it from several angles that might be intertwined. This is necessary in order not to lose the overall meaning of the passage.
- 2- Summary of the above that categorizes it from different angles separately.

1- The narrative:

Strikingly authoritarian salute, pointing a finger from above, at those people whom he looks at as if they were mere things: "There are people...:"Think of "there are tables, there are chairs around here ..."; "There are" to signify that they mere exist. "... in our own times..."... What a horror! Imagine: IN OUR OWN, OWN, OWN TIMES! One would think such creatures belong to some past and dead times, some kind of dinosaurs, because they don't deserve to live in our own time, but what a horror, they do exist in our own times! What a horror and what a calamity!

With his implication that they don't deserve to live in "our own time", he postures himself as someone looking from a wide angle of history. From that beginning, it is clear that we should not expect much convincing, but only authoritarian commands.

Having established his commanding posture, he moves on to identify the culprits: Those who are "of Greek learning and wisdom of this world". They are "learned" not inspired; narrow "Greek" not universal; "of this world" not of Heaven; "pagan" not Faithful; of such low spirits that they are "boastful". Wow to those crawly creatures, don't they know they should obey their masters "the spiritual men". But lest you think of Gregory Palamas as a controlling freak, he "humbly" declares he is concerned only about their obedience, to people like him, only in "the matters of the Spirit".

He is charitable enough to concede that they don't have to obey him in any other matter.

One would imagine him standing on a podium lecturing the masses ... no that would be like a pagan Greek at a square in Athens with Athena's snake beside him! More fitting, imagine him standing on Mt. Ethos, thundering his commands to the world: "wow to those who choose to oppose spiritual men".

He moves on to crush them by labeling them as low lives dragging down the light of the Lord's transfiguration to their low-level material explanation ... they drag down the immaterial to the material. Clearly he is attacking them with venom that doesn't fit the Light he is about to talk about. Where did all that anger come from? They must have given him a very hard time. It is understandable that rational views of the likes of Barlaam, Akindynos and Nicephoros Gregoras would be frustrating to the founder of Hesychasm, but shouldn't he set an example of the fruit of the holy "hesychia" (stillness), by adapting a loving, even while patronizing, approach? That discrepancy suggests that there is a personal anger; that they managed to hurt him personally badly (excommunicated); or that his early high education and social status (son of a councilor to the Byzantine emperor) made him intolerant to disagreement by others; or, is it that the "stillness" that he practiced, isolated him from the real world?

Having vented his wrath on his enemies, he calms down just enough to describe what he believes in: "... that immaterial, never-setting, pre-eternal light, which surpasses not only our senses but also our minds". This beautiful enlightening description of the Divine Light is followed by one more round of attack against his opponents: " ... because they themselves are at a low level, and are incapable of conceiving of anything higher than earthly things": They are at such low level that they are confined to nothing higher than earthly things, not even earthly concerns or earthly achievements, but earthly THINGS ... just like worms.

Having reduced his opponents to worms crawling on the earth, he is finally liberated from his anger, and is ready to elaborate on the Devine Light in a way compatible with it: "He who shone with this light proved in advance that it was uncreated by referring tom it as the kingdom of God". By referring to the Kingdom of God he concludes rhetorically that its light must be uncreated. And to clarify it further: "It is beyond both the bounds of time and eon" which in today's language, we call it transcendental. The light of Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor was visible only to the chosen three. So, only those who have been "saved" can inherit the kingdom of God... a final wow to his opponents.

2- Summary:

Strong language, ranging from authoritarian condemning opponents, to powerful preaching invoking the kingdom of God.

This is to address two audiences: First, his opponents, the rationalists who are below the spirit and who attack his Hesychasm and who have succeeded in excommunicating him at some point; then the wider audience, restoring grace to the true Light for all history. He is on a historical mission to place the Church on solid foundation of Hesychasm.

His concepts are abstract, yet clear enough, testifying to his high education. His sentences are articulate any multi faceted to convey his views as explosively as possible. Clearly, he has very strong bottled up anger which seems to contradict the spirit of his spiritual way. Sadly, his spiritual experience breed a supremacy that defeats the purpose of his spirituality. It is a tragedy that I witnessed in writings of other Hesyasts.

At a personal level, I can't agree more with St. Gregory Palamas on that the Devine Light cannot be seen by our senses, and that it can only be seen by the spirit in a special spiritual experience. Further, I am working on scientific path that hints to the existence of light beyond our senses: A light that cannot be measured by any material instrument yet can be sensed by DNA of life. That light is what directs life from beyond the barrier of the speed of light. So, for me, St. Gregory Palamas is my inspiration; but I feel sorry to read about his put-down of his opponents, coupled with expressions of supremacy due to his Hesychasm. I feel that by doing so, he lost the battle against the Devil who is more cunning that what many think.

I pray for the salvation of his spirit because he is my inspiration who will be placed head and centre in my future work which will be dedicated to the uncreated light.