

# A Historical Outline of Byzantine Philosophy and Its Basic Subjects

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## *1. Introduction*

We are going to present a panorama of Byzantine Philosophy. As starting point should be considered the Patristic Thought, which preceded the Byzantine Philosophy and was established in the first centuries A.D. into the Greek-Roman world. It was based on the *Old and New Testament*, the apostolic teachings, as well as on Judaism and Greek Philosophy. Also, the Ancient Oriental Religions – especially those of the Greek-Roman period, i.e. the Gnosticism- exerted an influence on it. The Patristic Thought and the Ancient Greek Philosophy were the two main pedestals of Byzantine Philosophy. But, we cannot separate completely Patristic thought from the Byzantine Philosophy, first because the Byzantine Philosophy used all the corpus of the preceded texts of the Church Fathers and second because the Patristic Thought was continued to the end of Byzantium in interaction with Byzantine Philosophy. When we use the term Byzantine Philosophy we refer to the ideological currents that flourished from the 9th century till the 15<sup>th</sup> in the geographical area of the Greek East. Its main task was the quest for truth from the metaphysical point of view. In this era we have not only commentaries and scholastic works, but also an assimilation of the previous philosophical and scientific developments in purpose of an interior evolution. The opposition to, and the use of, the Western scholasticism were also another two special characteristics of Byzantine Thought. The use of the logical works of Aristotle and the metaphysics of Plato made up its main theoretical body, always in relation to the Christian dogmas. The logical, metaphysical, cosmological, ethical, aesthetical and anthropological subjects were closely connected with the fixed Christian view of the World, God and Man. But despite the influence of the Christian religion and the Aristotelic, Platonic, Stoic, Neoplatonic etc. teachings, today we can arrive at the

conclusion that from the ninth through the fifteen century a relative autonomy of Philosophy in Byzantium was emerged. Also, the Philosophical thought in Byzantium gave some new solutions to the old problems and dared sometimes to proceed in new rational, mystical or even empirical elaborations of original philosophical questions.

## *2. Factors that have influenced Patristic Thought*

Many factors influenced the development of Patristic Thought. Church Fathers were well acquainted with Greek Philosophy, especially that of Plato and Aristotle. They were also exposed to Pythagoreanism – especially to the arithmology or other Neo-Pythagorean ideas of the first Christian centuries C.E. - and the Stoicism, both of which were in conflict with the traditional Christian doctrine. Other ideological influential factor was the Middle-Platonism of the 2nd century A.D., of which the representatives brought out a reform of the historical Platonism as an expression of the general tensions in this era. Moreover, Neo-Platonism, which founded by Plotinus in 3rd cent. A.D. was at first in opposition of, and later in alliance with, Greek Fathers.

Judaism and the *Old Testament* also exerted a great influence on the formation of the Christian dogmas. Especially the historical dimension and the personalistic element were two religious characteristics of Judaism that Christianity incorporated into its dogmatic life. With Philo of Alexandria in the 1st century A.D., who wrote in Greek, the Greek culture was mingled with the religion of Moses. Philo in his work *On Theoretical Life* introduced a theoretical along with a practical attitude towards religion and life.

Also, the *New Testament* and the Truth of Revelation played the most important role in the formation of the Christian dogmas. The Apostolic teaching especially that of Paul created the cores from which the prophets and the clergy were emerged. The institution of the Church was established after the official domination of Christianity with the support of Constantine the Great and the convocation of the Council of Nicaea (325). The completion of the Christian dogma finished with the Council of Chalkedona (451), while its interpretation started up from the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

The diffusion of Gnosticism and the Oriental Mystery Cults were another significant historical phenomenon that had an effect, as an antagonistic factor, on the Christian thought. Gnosticism appeared in two forms – pagan and Christian – and, by its complicated and hierarchical theogonies, it considered the Demiurge as evil and the world as a bad joke against humankind. The Mystery Cults developed, along with Christianity, a soteriology but, due to their bloody sacrifices and their odd dogmas, they addressed to the aristocratic elites and not to the large masses of people. On the contrary, Christianity spread widely because it concerned all kinds of people, independently of their origin, cultural level or race. Manichaeanism was also a manifestation of Gnosticism which Fathers soon rejected, particularly because of its intense diarchy. Finally, the Roman Legislation was an important element, which till the era of the Emperor Ioustinian (6<sup>th</sup> cent.), had already been incorporated into the civilization of the East Roman Empire and, in relation to other forms of the Latin world, partly influenced the formation of Byzantine thought.

### *3. Representative Fathers of Patristic Thought*

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries we can see the gradual establishment of Christian Dogma. Clement of Alexandria combined the Christianity with the Greek thought, thus starting the Christian conquest of other dogmas. Ioustin also accepted Greek Paideia and believed that it was a gift from God. Origen from Alexandria, who lived in the same era with Plotinus, was a theologian who interpreted the *Old Testament* and accepted the pre-existence of souls and the restoration (apokatastasis) of everything at the Second Coming. Also, Origen was the first Greek Father who undertook the effort to deal with a total arrangement of the Christian dogmatic elements.

The division between the spiritual method of the School of Alexandria and the literal-historical method of the School of Antiocheia concerning the interpretation of the Bible is not today accepted. We cannot make a sharp distinction between these two Schools because a. several theologians belonged to both of them i.e. Basil the Great and b. both these Schools contributed to the form of Patristic Thought, regardless of the many heretical developments which emerged from the School of Antiocheia.

The older historians also included Eusebius of Caesarea (265-340 A.D.) in the school of Alexandria. At the beginning of his career Eusebius continued the work of his teacher, Pamphilus, who by his turn had continued the work of Origen. But Eusebius was the one who introduced the first well formed Christian philosophy of History. In his work *Ecclesiastical History* he expressed the new historical consciousness of Christianity, becoming the forerunner of Saint Augustine. Eusebius had also the honour to make a public speech before the Emperor Constantine the Great, declaring the Christian Roman Idea, during the royal festival for thirty years in power. After Constantinus and his advisor Eusebius, a new political theology emerged, which had as its ideological axis the belief that the Christian Empire was the image of God upon earth.

It is in the 4<sup>th</sup> century that the three Cappadocian Fathers, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great lived and created their theological and philosophical work. They studied in Athens and they faced vigorously many heretical manifestations of their time. The three Cappadocians were the first theologians who dealt extensively with Triadology. Also, they combined the mystical and the rational thought speaking about the infinity and the incomprehension of God. Man was placed in the centre of the Universe, while matter and evil lost their ontological independency. The generosity of Christian God replaced the impersonal neoplatonic One and everybody regardless of their origin or race was destined to take part in it.

The *Corpus Areopagiticum* is a corpus of treatises written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by an unknown author, which has been preserved till our days under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, a historical person of the 1st century A.D. The influence upon the *Corpus* by Proclus is obvious. The poetic language of Pseudo-Areopagite, the theme of the mystical union with God, the two hierarchies – the ecclesiastical and the celestial- and especially the apophatic way of access to God are his main characteristics. The apophatism, that is the formula “neither-nor”, and the divine names which don't give us an affirmative and definite meaning of God, have exerted a big influence on many mediaeval intellectuals. This happened particularly after the appearance

of the *Commentary* to the *Corpus* by Maximus the Confessor in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the translation of the *Corpus* by John Scotus Eriugena in 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Leon the Byzantine (475-542) can be considered as another contemplator of great value. He was famous for his accurate terminology and systematic structure of his speculations. His work *Three Books against Nestorians and Eutychians* is a model of methodological criticism. His attitude is nominalistic. Other small spiritual movements were emerged at the same time particularly in Gaza, under the guidance of two important philosophers as were Aineias and Zacharias. The first speaks about the immortality of Soul and rejects the Platonic preexistence of it. The second doesn't accept the "world's eternity theory", which is the main problem of the criticism to Proclus and Plato by John Philoponus (6<sup>th</sup> cent.), specifically in his work *On the Creation of the World*. Also, Stephanus of Alexandria, who was a student of Philoponus, transferred the School of Alexandria's movement to Constantinople and induced the penetration of neoplatonic elements into the Christian spirit. In this period one can find the ascetic and mystical work *Climax of Paradise* by John Sinaites. The course towards God is accomplished through the continuous prayer and the ineffable love, which are the main tasks of the monk.

We can find a genuine Christian spirit in the works of Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Maximus was a monk from Constantinople who gave a fight against the heresy of monotheletism that is the dogma according to which Jesus Christ had one will. Maximus defended the two wills and activities of Christ, speaking about the importance of the human freedom and will inside Him which are equal with His divine freedom and will. Also, he wrote many books on mystical theology, Christian love, anthropology and ascetics. He spoke about the union of the self with the Godhead, while, by his comments to the *Corpus Areopagitum* he introduced a Christian surpassing of Neoplatonism. But in opposition to the Neoplatonism he maintained the element of historicity and focused on the theoretical and ascetical implications of Christ's Incarnation. The theory of cyclic time which survived till the Neoplatonism had already been replaced in this era by the idea of a linear course. Inside this linear course the facts of Creation, the Incarnation and the Second Coming take the position of the most crucial dynamic points.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century the system of John Damascenus was dominant. He was a monk and priest in the monastery of St. Sava near to Jerusalem. His basic work, under the title *Spring of Knowledge* is the first systematic work of the Christian theology. In a part of this work, under the name *Accurate Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (*Ekdosis Akrives tes Orthodoxou Pisteōs*), he attempts to present an encyclopedic synopsis of the entire knowledge of his era according to the Christian Orthodoxy. He can be called scholastic and nominalist, since he put special emphasis on the “existence” and not on “being” or “nature”. Also Damascenus took an active part in the controversy on images (iconoclasm or iconomachy), which troubled for a long time the Byzantine Empire and finished with the restoration of the images and the victory of the Greek spirit against the Orientalistic origin of iconomachy.

#### *4. The relative autonomy of Byzantine Philosophy*

The beginnings of Byzantine Philosophy must be placed in the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., when the conflict between the Greek East and the Latin West arose for the first time. The conflict from the part of the Byzantines was handled by Patriarch Photius and resulted in the definite schism between the two Churches in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Until the 9<sup>th</sup> century the Patristic thought was a unifying factor –and is still today- between the Latin West and the Byzantine East, despite the problem of the language and the different political, ecclesiastical and other evolutions. The first conflict revealed all these cultural differences, although the varied relations between the two regions did not cease, but rather multiplied. In Byzantium, after the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, one can observe the division in two parts: the friends of the Latins who insisted on the unification of the two Churches and the opponents to the Latins who were against that. These two parts were preserved till the fall of Byzantium by the Ottomans in 1453.

The 9<sup>th</sup> century must also be considered as the starting point of the Byzantine Philosophy due to the awakening of a scientific interest. This took the form of a philological inquiry and interpretation of the Ancient Greek Philosophy. While sometimes a criticism on the ancient texts developed and authentic solutions to difficult problems appeared. The philosophical tension

in this period, from 9<sup>th</sup> till 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, was not only towards a Christian interpretation, either of Dogmas, or of the Ancient Greek Philosophy, but took the form of a relative philosophical autonomy. During the period of seven centuries of Byzantine Philosophy it is difficult to make divisions in schools or movements, because only some distinguished personalities are those who gave the directions and defined the limits of thought.

#### *4a. The “first Byzantine Humanism”*

In the beginning of Byzantine Philosophy's relative autonomy, a teacher of Philosophy lived in Constantinople called Leon the Mathematician (or Philosopher). His philosophical works have not been maintained till now (except for his book *Medical Synopsis*), but he was famous in his time for his scientific and mathematical knowledge. In our historical documents was recorded a story about him. Caliph Mamun (813-833) of the Arabs had promised to the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus a large amount of money and a treaty of peace if Theophilus permitted Leon to visit the court of Caliph. But Theophilus preferred to send Leon to Thessaloniki as a bishop to the knowledge of the “real beings” to be learned by the Arabs.

In the circle of Photius (820-891), patriarch of Constantinople, an encyclopedic and humanistic interest was dominant. Photius wrote the famous *Bibliotheca*, where we can find the summaries of many historical books which patriarch had read during his life. Also, he makes many subtle definitions on the problem of universals. The genera and species are like bodies, but not real bodies. They define the substance of the subjects, without being defined themselves. They develop their substance, without constituting it. Photius tries to conciliate the nominalism with realism, knowing the solution to the problem that has been given by the Platonic scholiasts of Ammonius's school.

The scholar who was born in Patras, but he is known as Arethas of Caesarea (850-925) typifies the kind of Byzantine scholars in the mould created by Photius. His work and activities belong mainly to Christian apologetics and interpretation. He wrote many comments on Plato, Aristotle, Euclides, Dion Chrysostomos, etc, but it is more proper to be called an erudite rather than a philosopher.

At the time of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (913-959) the encyclopedic tension was maintained and reinforced. Emperor had a special interest more in his intellectual work rather than in governing the empire.

*4b. Psellos and his students (11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> cent.)*

During the period of the dynasty founded by the emperor Comnenos in 11th century, spiritual life was very intense. If the first schism between the Latin and the East Church took place in the time of Photius, now it resulted in the definite division between the two Churches. The university in Constantinople was reorganized and the eminent philosopher Michael Psellos (1018-1078?) took over its administration. Psellos was called “first among the philosophers” (*hypatos tōn philosophōn*) and is considered the most important and prolific of the Byzantine polymaths. For first time we have the appearance in Byzantium of scholars who had philosophy as their main occupation, along with theology, as were Psellos and Ioannis Italos. Psellos had a very good knowledge and gave lessons about the Ancient Greek Philosophy. His knowledge of the ancient sources (Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Commentators of Aristotle, Plotinus, Proclus e.t.c.) was immediate, but he combined them with the Christian dogma (especially of Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa). Also, he wrote many works on rhetoric, history, mathematics, astronomy, occultism, linguistics, ethnography, grammar, music e.t.c. He combined mystical beliefs with rationalism and he assimilated neoplatonic elements into the Christian dogmatic truths. He preferred Plato to Aristotle and he bequeathed this preference to his students.

The student of Psellos, Ioannis Italos (1023-1083?) followed the Neoplatonism especially of Proclus and he was the first who tried to criticize the Christianity using an autonomous philosophical spirit. He paid for his Neoplatonism and his criticism of the Christian dogma by his official condemnation. The eleven articles of Italos's teachings were condemned by the Church on 13 of May 1082 and in the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church are repeated every first Sunday at Lent. In the entire 12<sup>th</sup> century we can find many dogmatic controversies that were provoked by the renovation of an autonomous philosophy.

Many philosophers followed this movement of classicism as were the scholiast of Aristotle Michael of Ephesos, Theodoros of Smyrna and Eustratios of Nicaea, of whom the last also wrote many comments on Aristotle, comments which already in the Middle Ages were translated into Latin. Eustratios was a student of Italos and an admirer of the scholasticism and Aristotelism. Also, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries a mystical movement was emerged which goes back to Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor. Its main representatives were Symeon the New Theologian and Niketas Stethatos. Symeon was a mystic and an ascetic, and his more important work, *Hymns of Divine Love* contains a kind of empirical theology focusing on the personal love between God and man. The ecstatic character of his theology prepared the Hesychastic spirituality of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Thessaloniki, and his mysticism is in some cases similar to the religious experience that was the base of Plotinus's philosophy. Nicetas Stethatos was also a mystic of the virtue of apathy and for him the real science is an inspired science.

Another author of the 12<sup>th</sup> century was Nicolas of Methone, who wrote a critical book on Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, because at his time the interest in the last great Neo-Platonist increased.

#### 4c. Philosophers of Nicaea (13<sup>th</sup> century)

The temporary conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Latin crusaders in 1204 was the cause of the flowering in literature away from Constantinople. So in Asia Minor and especially in Nicaea the philosophers Nicephoros Blemmydes and Theodoros II Laskares lived and worked. The theological work of Nicephoros Blemmydes covers different subjects of the dogmatic controversies between the great Churches of the East and the West. His works on Logic and Physics are his most important intellectual achievements along with his contribution to the educational activity of his time.

Theodoros II Laskares, emperor of Nicaea (1254-1258) represented the illuminated monarch and his political and sociological interest was combined with the philosophical research into the discovery of the quality of beings. The philosophical movement in Nicaea was transitional for the Palaeologian

epoch, since many developments took place in Asia Minor at first half of 13<sup>th</sup> century that prepared the last Byzantine Renaissance.

#### *4d. Philosophical and Scientific movement (13<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> century)*

During the Palaeologian period (1261-1453), the last two centuries of the Byzantine Empire, we can find a renaissance of philosophical and scientific studies, especially in astronomy.

Maximus Planoudes (1255-1305) was interested especially in mathematics and he became a monk, teaching all the lessons of the general education. As a theologian he defended at first the union of the two Churches, but later his attitude changed in the opposite direction. He was the first Byzantine scholar who promoted the communication with the West. He translated many Latin works of theology and philology, and it was him who introduced at first the number zero in Greek Arithmetic. Planoudes and George Pachymeres were two major representatives of the Palaeologian Renaissance, as were the younger Nicephoros Choumnos and Theodoros Metochites.

George Pachymeres (1242-1310) was also an important Byzantine scholar, theologian, philosopher, historian and mathematician who took part in many ecclesiastical and political affairs. His occupation with the Aristotelic philosophy resulted in the selection from the Aristotelic texts of many philosophical explanations and significant definitions. So, he simplified the dense Aristotelic style and many of his works circulated in manuscripts during the Renaissance. In theology he tried to make known the subtle distinctions of the Pseudo-Areopagite. The distinction between intelligible and mystical knowledge was degraded in a distinction between sensible and intelligible knowledge. The transference to the intelligible realm is achieved according to him with the help of the mystical “ignorance” and the intermediary of God’s grace and gifts.

Nicephoros Choumnos (1250-1327) criticized the Ancient Philosophers Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus and he seemed to prefer the philosophy of Aristotle. In his most known work with the title *Against Plotinus on the Soul*, he rejects the pre-existence and the metempsychosis of the souls. He didn’t accept, either, the Platonic and plotinian argument about the remembrance of

the intelligible world by the soul, although he used the argumentation of Plato to support the Christian belief in the resurrection of bodies. A friend and a disputer with Choumnos was also Theodoros Metochites (1260/1-1332). From 1304 till 1328 he became a Prime Minister in Constantinople and in general he took an active part in the public life of his country. We have a lot of autobiographical texts for his life and action. His occupation with astronomy and cosmology led him – especially after his meeting with the teacher of astronomy Manuel Bryennios- to write many scientific works. He accepted the practical utility of mechanics due to its relation with astronomy and mathematics. Also, he opposed to the oriental superstitions of his time which had an Indian origin. Metochites obtained fame as an astronomer because he predicted accurately the Sun and Moon eclipses. In his book *Annotations and Gnomic Notes* (*Hepommatismoi kai semeioseis gnōmikai*) one can find references to 70 ancient Greek authors; the feeling of Greek identity and the anxiety for the future of the Byzantine Empire are obviously in his work intense. Metochites had also a debate on astronomical matters with Choumnos and criticized the philosophy of Aristotle. He claimed that it wasn't in complete accordance with the Christian teachings or even with Platonism.

The student of Metochites, Nicephoros Gregoras (1295-1359/1360) was also a polymath and tried to imitate Plato with his dialogue *Florentios*. In the field of cosmology he accepts the stoic theory of Fate (Heimarmene), which in a similar form will be repeated later by George Gemistos Plethon. Also, his criticism of the Aristotelic theory targeted at the Western scholasticism and opened a controversy between Aristotelians and Platonists, which will be developed especially in the next century. His views on the possibility of knowledge lead him in a kind of agnosticism but not skepticism. His belief that our knowledge is a symbol of our ignorance was directed against the sophistic arguments, without diminishing the importance of the religion. The dialogue *Florentios* referred ironically to the person of Barlaam the Calabrian, whom he presented as a superficial sophist. The Byzantine emperor rejected Gregoras's scientific conclusions as regards the calendar, but pope Gregory XIII would accept them in 1578. Apart from a historiographical work, he left

us theological treatises which are connected with the Hesychastic controversy of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and made him a serious adversary of Gregory Palamas.

#### *4e. The Hesychastic Controversy (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)*

The movement of Hesychasm initiated on Mount Athos by two monks, Necephoros the Calabrian and Gregory Sinaite. These monks proceeded to the definition of a method for prayer, which they called scientific method of calling upon Jesus Christ's name. The monk during the prayer should search for the place where the heart powers are. One can reach to this sort of meditation having the chin supported on the chest and having at the same time a breathing control. The monks, who continued this sort of meditation, were claiming that they could see a great light that is the glory and the uncreated light of God. But this practice could come to a mechanistic prayer, so the Greek monk Barlaam the Calabrian (1290-1350) accused them of the absurdity that God's light has a materialistic form. We cannot perceive the uncreated God's light by our corporeal eyes.

Barlaam did not separate the essence of God from His activities as Gregory Palamas and the Hesychasts did. Following the humanism of the Greek Thought, Barlaam believed that the scientific knowledge has the power to purify our souls in order to proceed to the knowledge of God and the union with Him. God's being is not separated from God's activities; it is through these activities that we have a perception of God. Holding such an attitude, Barlaam opposed to every mystical tension and reinforced a Byzantine "scholasticism" on the basis of the writings of Thomas Aquinas (whom the treatises criticized using the *Corpus Areopagiticum*). Many philosophers took sides with Barlaam against the Hesychasts as Nicephoros Gregoras already had done: Demetrios and Prochoros Kydonis, Manouel Calecas, Ioannis Kyparissiotes and Gregory Akindynos. It is very characteristic that in this epoch, Akindynos and Demetrius Kydonis translated the most important works of Thomas Aquinas in Greek and promoted an interest in philosophy – especially the Aristotelic – becoming the forerunners of the Renaissance.

The leading theologian and philosopher of the movement of Hesychasm was the episcopate (Bishop) of Thessalonica, Gregory Palamas (1296?-1359/1360). Palamas tried to refute the arguments of Barlaam and his followers. It is true that he had a tension towards mysticism and it is very probable that there is a neoplatonic element inside the movement of Hesychasm (On the contrary Barlaamism made the use of Aristotelic and scholastic philosophy). Palamas defended the Hesychastic method of prayer believing that our intellect is not outside, but inside our body. In opposition to every rationalistic objectification, he tried to defend the essence of Christianity, which according to him is based on our heart powers. This attitude is not subjective because even if our intellect is inside our body we have to push it inside itself. It is only by this introverted pushing that we can have a conversation with God. God can be perceived only as a light inside heart. This light is not material, because the essence and the activities of God are different. In these activities of God should be included the light of Thabor, which comes out from divine essence. Neither the speculative arguments, nor the geometrical proofs can help us to communicate with God. The essence of God is incomprehensible and the followers of Hesychasm can have an authentic religious experience only through a divine grace.

Another theologian and philosopher, who followed the mystical path of Palamas, was Nicholas Cavasilas (1320-1371). Through his two main works, *On the life in Christ* and *Interpretation of Divine Liturgy*, he followed the path of Symeon the New Theologian, Maximus the Confessor, Pseudo-Dionysius or even that of Origen. The lyrical style of his works gives a tone of the first apostolic Christian years. He believed in a kind of empirical relationship with God, but he is not interested in ecstasy or in the mystical religious experiences. Every man is sacred, because God has already communicated with our nature. The main activity of this personalistic spiritualism is summed up in a sort of mysticism.

#### *4f. Platonists against Aristotelians (15<sup>th</sup> cent.)*

As we saw, in the movement of Hesychasm a contradiction between the platonism and the aristotelism was emerged, without obtaining an intensive

character. The reference to the two great ancient Greek philosophers had as its main point the theory of knowledge. On the one hand Palamas used the Aristotelic terminology, but in the end he was closer to the neoplatonic mysticism and the Platonic intuition. On the other hand Barlaam was a more genuine Aristotelic and he preferred the rational scholasticism. The anti-palamists were them who first asked the question: who is closer to the Christian dogma, Plato or Aristotle? Who is superior as a philosopher? And who is more useful for studying? In this late period of philosophical controversies the protagonists were mainly two great men, George Gemistos Plethon and his adversary George Scholarios-Gennadios.

George Gemistos Plethon (1360?-1452) was the last great philosopher of Byzantium before its fall. In his writings we can find a feeling of Greek identity. He took part in the Council of Florence and the Council of Ferrara (1438-9) with the emperor John VIII Palaeologus. Accompanying John VIII were Plethon and his students Johannes Bessarion and George Scholarios. In Florence Plethon as a secular scholar didn't play any important role in the discussions about the union of the Greek and the Roman Churches. But he set up a temporary school to teach the doctrines of Plato. Plethon was him who essentially made Plato known in the Western world, where mainly the authority of Aristotle was dominating for centuries. One of the Maecenas in Florence, Cozimo de Medici attended these lectures and later founded the Academia Platonica (1459), in which scholars like Marsilio Ficino and Pico de la Mirandola participated and worked.

The works of Plethon extend to a great number of small treatises, which are dealing with different matters. In Florence he wrote the famous book *De Differentiis*, a description of the differences between Plato's and Aristotle's conception of God. Also, before his journey in Florence he had already prepared an important book under the title *Treatises of Laws*. It is this book which George Scholarios (who became Gennadius II, Patriarch of Constantinople) threw to fire and convinced the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaeologus to confine Plethon in Mistra (Peloponnesus); however, Plethon remained famous among his contemporaries even after the patriarchic condemnation.

The work of Plethon *De Differentiis* was the cause of the division of the scholars between Platonists and Aristotelists, not only in Byzantium, but also in Italy. George Scholarios made the beginning with his effort to defend Aristotle. Plethon wrote an anti-aristotelic treatise in two letters towards Bessarion as a response to several difficulties. After these facts the controversy was generalized: Theodoros of Gaza and Andronikos Kallistos, two of the most well known Aristotelian of this epoch, George Trebizond and his brother Andreas, Theophanis of Medeia (who died in 1480) and Michael Sophianos (who died later in 1570) took over the defense of Aristotle. Michael Apostolis, Gianandria, Nicolas Perottus and John Apostolis took sides with Plethon. Bessarion became a Platonist and wrote a book in which he expressed his sympathy to Plato. After all these controversies one could see probably a justification of Plato in Italy, but after the fall of Constantinople the Aristotelism was maintained in the former Byzantine geographical area.

Plethon had prepared a philosophical program for the social and political reforming of his country. This program derived from his ideal of society, but it wasn't appreciated as he wished, in Peloponnesus, and especially in Mistra, where he lived for the most part of his life. His theology and ontology are based on a metaphysical determinism although man maintains his freedom by the rational part of his soul. Man and his soul are in a middle position between the intelligible and the sensible world. His ethics includes a wide theory on virtues where one can find the four main Platonic virtues into many divisions. His anthropological, social and ethical theory, as well as his Platonism had a very big influence not only on his country, but also on the whole European culture of the Renaissance.

George Scholarios (1405-1468), was born in Constantinople and became the first Christian patriarch Gennadios II after the fall of Byzantium and the enslavement of his country to the Turks. He translated many scientific works from Latin into Greek and he was an admirer of Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. Of course he accepted Aristotelism to the degree that it was compatible with the Christian dogma. He gave his fight against Plethon and his neoplatonism by a series of texts. But in spite of his preference to the Latin theology, he never proceeded to the adaptation of the scholastic

philosophy. He was rather a follower of Gregory Palamas and after the Council of Florence he couldn't agree to the union of the two Churches. When he died in 1468 he had earned the fame of the last great representative of Byzantine erudition and of a wise man who had chosen to take an active part in the spiritual and political adventures of the last hours of Byzantium.

### *5. Byzantine Philosophy and Latin Philosophy*

During the Middle Ages the philosophy and especially the logic was considered as "the hand maiden of theology". This view was not dominant in Byzantium where philosophy in the theoretical and in the practical field preserved its autonomy in relation to theology. Regarding the main aspect of philosophy in the West, the scholasticism seemed to have expanded everywhere, especially after the 11th century. The majority of the works of Plato were not known in the West before the Renaissance. The Latin Christian philosophers made use of the Aristotelic texts, especially of the *Organon*. The Arabic translations of Aristotle were diffused and it is through the Averroistic Aristotelism that the Latin theologians tried to support the Christian dogma. The philosophical and theological work of Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> century) was based on the Aristotelic logic.

Of course many philosophers and theologians, who can be called mystics, were appeared in the West, since Plotinus's philosophy passed through some Latin translations of Marius Victorinus into Augustine. But through the power of anonymity Plotinus's philosophy had long been enjoyed - as his ideas had lived for centuries disguised in the theories of others-, which has known diffusion in the Western Middle Ages. The *Corpus Areopagiticum* and the *Comments* on it by Maximus the Confessor -that had been translated into Latin in 9<sup>th</sup> century by John Scotus Eriugena- were the most effective means for the neoplatonic diffusion.

Between the Latin West and the Greek East, at some point after the 6th century, the language began to constitute an obstacle for cultural contacts. The capture of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204 made the gap between the Latin and Byzantine worlds larger. The Byzantines had developed a complex of superiority and inside their arrogance they believed that

everybody except for themselves were barbarians. The Greek East till the 13<sup>th</sup> century wasn't following up the Western developments, although the Latin philosophy – except for Augustine and several other examples- hadn't flaunted advanced opinions. But after the 13<sup>th</sup> century the contacts were multiplied. The preservation of the Ancient Greek texts by the Byzantines was the cause due to which many Western researchers came to the East, looking for manuscripts.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century many scholars, who were defenders of the union between the two Churches, as were Maximus Planoudes, Demetrios and Prochoros Kydones, translated the works of Augustine, of Anselm and of Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*) into Greek. The influence of the Latin thought and the resistance to it are obvious in the movement of Hesychasm and in the controversy between the admirers of Thomism and its opponents.

Plethon and Scholarios each one by his own philosophical perspective developed a contact with the Latin and indirectly with the Arabic tradition. Plethon proposed to the Latins his own interpretation of Plato and exerted an influence upon the Italian Humanism. Scholarios translated and commented the works of Aquinas and although he was an admirer of Gregory Palamas he adopted in some cases the scholastic method of argumentation. Bessarion the student of Plethon became cardinal of the Catholic Church after the fall of Constantinople (1453) and although in the controversy between the Platonists and Aristotelians he intended to have the arbitration of the discussions, became a Platonist writing his book against Aristotelism into Latin (*Adversus Calumniatorem Platonis*)

But in spite of the existence of all these contacts, Byzantium remained closed to West right to the end. On the other hand, it is known that Byzantium exerted a fertile influence on the West even before the forced migration of Greek scholars following the collapse of the Byzantine Empire.

#### *6. The accordance between Platonism and Aristotelism in Byzantium*

As we have mentioned above, another main factor that has influenced Patristic thought was the Ancient Greek philosophy. But it is well known that Greek philosophy continued its fertile course officially till the 6<sup>th</sup> century,

when the Byzantine emperor Ioustinian terminated the running of the Platonic Academy in Athens. The two great ancient Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, and their teachings passed not only through the Patristic thought into the Byzantine philosophy but also through their authentic texts. The Byzantine philosophers continued to create commentaries on the historical corpus of the Platonic and Aristotelic texts and they had an almost complete knowledge of the tradition of the older commentators on this corpus. In general the Byzantines developed a Christian philosophy through the Aristotelic logic having as their basis Platonic metaphysical elements. It remained a cliché till today that the Byzantines used the scientific Aristotle's knowledge and its logical application rather than the Aristotelic metaphysics. Also, it is well known that the Byzantine scholars took over the continuation of the mystical and intuitive part of the Platonic philosophy, as it continued in the neoplatonic writings of Plotinus, Iambichus, Proclus and Damascius. However the characterization of Byzantines as Platonic, Aristotelic or Neoplatonic is not compatible with today's concept of Byzantine Philosophy (9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries). The research in the last decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century has reached to the conclusion that a status of relative autonomy of Byzantine philosophy was established in these seven centuries.

We can also say that, in the West, during the Middle Ages the historical works of Plato were not widely known in contrast with the works of Aristotle (usually through their Arabic translations). On the contrary the works of both great Ancient Greek philosophers were more accessible to the Byzantines. So, the Platonism and especially the neo-platonism often led to heretical tendencies and was condemned by the Church (i.e. Ioannis Italos, Eustratios of Nicaea), but it was used in combination with Aristotelism. This is the reason that we don't have a Byzantine scholasticism as in the case in the West. In Byzantium a Christian philosophy was emerged based on both most important Ancient Greek movements of Philosophy. The view of the accordance between Platonism and Aristotelism was dominant in the East Greek world. This was an interpretative direction accepted almost by everyone and was the main view of the Greek pagan commentators of the first Christian centuries (Porphyrius, Themistios and Simplicious). The

commentators Philoponus, Stephanous, David and Elias were of the same opinion. The Greek Fathers considered Plato and Aristotle in harmony as regards the essence of their teachings, but of different point of view as regards their method.

The idea of a disagreement between Plato and Aristotle came to the Byzantines after the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when they came to a closer contact with the Western Latin thought. So Scholarios in 15<sup>th</sup> century promoted Aristotelism through its Averroistic and Thomistic form, believing that it was a new ideological movement (and it was new for the Byzantines, since it derived from a one-dimensional interpretation of the Ancient Greek Philosophy). On the other hand Plethon was in favor of Platonism and it was by his lectures in Florence (and his work *De Differentiis*) that the Platonism was considered revolutionary in the Latin region. Plato had the fame in the mediaeval West of an intuitive philosopher and he represented the mystical path to the knowledge of God, which, as they believed, was in contrast with the Aristotelic *ratio* (that's why one can see a one-dimensional interpretation of the Ancient Greek Spirit). Plethon knew very well the Aristotelic and Platonic teachings and dogmas, as well as his adversary George Scholarios. That is the reason why the translations of Latin scholastic texts didn't seem to have any real influence on the Byzantine philosophy which had already formed a fixed way of philosophizing.

### *7. Basic Subjects of the Byzantine Philosophy*

The Aristotelic logic was used by the Byzantine Philosophers to express the Platonic and Christian metaphysics, but the attempt wasn't very fruitful. The ontology was related with metaphysics through a continuous inquiry for the first being. All created things have as their origin the uncreated being that is God. The creation *ex nihilo* is behind us, but the fear of death and of non being is in front of us. That's way the Byzantine metaphysics put emphasis on the “existence” and not on “being”. A personalistic theory emerged in the relation between our existence and God. Man is the purpose of Creation and because of him all created things are going to be saved. The human spirituality has as its origin God and in God we are going to return. But of course

freedom and the primordial alteration are a gift and a curse for the human beings, since they are the cause of evil in the world. Freedom doesn't cancel the Divine Providence, which exerts its power everywhere; the spring of everything is God, full of love and goodness for the human beings. God's essence is incomprehensible, but God's activities are the means for the creation; these activities are also our only way to feel and understand a personal relation with God, maintaining at the same time our individual existence.

#### *7a. The Attitude towards Logic*

The use of the Aristotelic logic influenced the development in the Latin World of a scholastic method for argumentation. In Byzantium a similar evolution didn't arise because logic was not used extensively for the support of the Christian dogma and the scientific inquiry. Aristotle was known as an authority in the subjects of logic, but especially till the 12<sup>th</sup> century the access to the Aristotelian logic was mediated by the *Isagoge* and the Comments on *Categories* of Porphyry. It is known that from the three questions in the first passage of the *Isagoge* by Porphyry derived the problem of universals; different solutions to this problem were given in the Latin medieval philosophy and in the Byzantine philosophy.

In Byzantium logic was used in the educational system and it played an important role in the philosophical treatises, as those of Pachymeres, Blemmydes and Scholarios. The Byzantines before the 9th century were teaching and studying an elementary logic. But in the main period of Byzantine philosophy (9<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) we can find many manuals of logic and many commentaries on the *Organon*, although all these didn't presuppose a logical elaboration, which would intend to the philosophical inquiry and theological systematization.

#### *7b. Metaphysics*

The Byzantine philosophy always referred to what is beyond the experience and nature, to the existence of God and to the "real being". The Christian Fathers subordinated the Platonic distinction between intelligible and sensible

world to the distinction between the created (where both the intelligible and the sensible belong) and the uncreated being. The tension to grasp the invisible, either by logos (discursive reason), or by faith, characterizes the Byzantine metaphysics. The word “metaphysics” was created by accident, when Andronikos Rodios editing the works of his teacher Aristotle, placed after Aristotle’s *Physics* the Aristotelic work on “First Philosophy” (*Meta ta physica*= after or beyond physics). But either by the Aristotelic meaning of the “First Philosophy” that is Ontology or by the Platonic and neoplatonic meaning of what is beyond nature and being, the will to obtain wisdom about God goes throughout all the whole period of the East Roman Empire.

#### *7b. i) The idea of God*

While for the Ancient Greek philosophy, especially for Plato and Aristotle, God must be characterized by immobility, the patristic and Byzantine thought accepted a movable and social God. God is a personal hypostasis as the principle not only of substance but also of being. The continuous process of Creation manifests the sociability and the generosity of God: behind this process we find the Demiurge-Creator, who created the sensible world only because of love. Necessity is not a sufficient factor for the creation of the world in the degree that it is the spontaneous love.

The knowledge of God wasn’t considered accessible only by reason with the exception of some efforts to constitute a rational argumentation for the existence of God (Gregory of Nyssa, John Damascenus). It is not the being of God that we can know, but only His activities. Besides the neoplatonic and the scholastic division of our methods to obtain knowledge of God into *via affirmationis*, *via negationis* and *via eminentiae* (the way of the attribution to God of superlative adjectives), also existed the *apophatic way* to theological knowledge: God is beyond being (or He is neither being, nor non being e.t.c.). This theological apophatism had as its origin – apart from Neo-Platonism- the works of Pseudo-Areopagite (5<sup>th</sup> cent.). So, a rationalistic approach to the idea of God didn’t flourish, despite of some efforts by Psellos and others.

The idea of God was considered as a knowledge that surpasses the *ratio* and cannot be described by logical or analogical arguments.

### *7b. ii) The “conceptual realism” of the Byzantines*

The neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry in his book *Isagoge* posed three questions:

- 1) Are the kinds of Forms existing substances or do they exist only in mind?
- 2) Do they have bodily substance or not?
- 3) Do they have an existence separate from sensible objects or do they exist only in them?

Porphyry's questioning soon passed into the West, thanks to the Latin translation of the *Isagoge* by Boethius. These questions were the cause for the emergence of the problem of universals that had occupied the greatest minds of the Medieval West. In fact the main and most important question of these three is only the first one which is whether the ideal abstract objects have an existent substance or not.

The problem of universals did not lead, in Byzantium, to the form of a controversy as in the West. But many Byzantine Philosophers gave responses to this problem following mainly the solution of the Alexandrian Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle. At some point later in the West the realism and the nominalism were transformed mainly into a twofold division (apart from other combined solutions). On the one hand existed the followers of Pope and his totalitarian form of religion and on the other hand the secular scholars who preferred the feudal state and the rising of the individualism in the cities. So, the first camp gave the primacy to a Platonic (as they believed) realism, according to which the universals have a real existence and the second camp defended an Aristotelic nominalism of the “first substance” which considered the particulars or individuals as the only real beings. Although the “first substance” of Aristotle had a priority in Byzantium, we cannot find a nominalistic solution, since the universals are not considered as concepts in our minds (*flatus vocis*). Moreover, as we saw, the Byzantines were not considered Platonism in contradiction with Aristotle, and for this reason they

preferred the solution of the Alexandrian Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle which combined the two great philosophers.

According to the Byzantine philosophers the general concepts, the universals, are not *prior to particulars* (*pro tōn pollōn*), in the mind of the Creator to be His archetypes for the creation of the World. Also, they cannot be *within the particulars* (*en tois pollois*), inseparable of the sensible concrete objects of the natural world (this is the Aristotelian “material form” (*enylon eidos*) or the “first substance” (*prote ousia*)). The general concepts are *applied to the particulars and conceptual* (*epi tois pollois kai ennoematika*). We find this last line of interpretation throughout the Byzantine period, especially in the texts of Ioannis Italos, Eustratios of Nicaea, Nicephoros Blemmydes and even in those of George Scholarios, but not in those of Plethon. The Byzantine solution to the problem of universals can be called “conceptual realism”, because neither a nominalistic nor a realistic preference was dominant.

### 7c. Uncreated and Created Being

An uncreated God, the cause of everything, has generated the created beings (*ktismata*). The division into intelligible and sensible beings of the Ancient Greek Philosophy was included inside the created beings, which are characterized by alteration and ontological homogeneity. The creation of the world appeared *ex nihilo* or by the non-being. The only uncreated creating being is God. Everything that isn't God is created. The entire creation, appeared because of God's spontaneous love, is perishable and has a beginning and an end. The only cause and the only end is God.

Creation was made not by God's essence but by His activities. It is only by His activity that we have a perception of God; this is the reason of God's incomprehension: His essence is inconceivable. Every created being derived from the divine activities and not from the archetypes or models which would be in a place outside God. The *formatting principles* (*oi logoi tōn ontōn*) or the *generative reasons* (*oi spermatikoi logoi*) are linked with the Divine Will. The divine ideas neither have a self-substance nor are in a kind of a hierarchical system before or outside the Demiurge. The Byzantines Philosophers followed the neoplatonic and especially the Plotinian elaboration of the

problem (*Enneades* V.9, V.1 and V.8) that insisted on the existence of the divine ideas inside God's intellect. But here we can observe a difference in opinion between the Platonic or neoplatonic dogma – of the ideas inside God's intellect (i.e. Photius, Arethas, Psellos)- and the patristic acceptance of the *forming principles* inside the activities and the will of God (Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Palamas).

The act of creation as a free and spontaneous act is coming up against the possible derivation of the world by necessity. The concepts of chance, alteration and relativity were introduced into the created world because of the free will of God. The world has a beginning and an end. Also the historical fact of the Incarnation is a crucial point, which connects us with the historicity and the eschatological prospective of the created beings. The circle of the historical and natural time was broken because of the relativity of the created beings to the uncreated being which is God. God's creative act is continuous; the coherence of the world is maintained by the divine Providence, which is personal in character and not deterministic. In the end, there is a purpose behind all the created beings and this is their deification that is an eschatological and teleological opening for the entire nature and for the entire human history.

#### *7d. Ethical Aesthetic Theory*

Ethics in Byzantine theology and philosophy was connected with an aesthetic aspect of the human behavior. The main effort of the Byzantine ethics was the transformation of all human passions in order that there be the constitution of a healthy human being. Through the stages of purification (katharses), enlightenment (phōtismos) and deification (theōsis) the human being acquires the fullness of his personal life. But God is also beauty and light, and through the vision of God, humans become more elegant and healthier. Man turns his soul and mind towards God expecting salvation.

The Byzantine monks took up with the art of living, especially the mystics, having as their model mainly the life of Christ, but also that of Socrates. The spiritual exercises had a central position inside this art of living. Many Byzantine philosophers and Greek Fathers made use of them. The spiritual

exercises know a large diffusion, not only inside religions but also inside philosophical schools, already by the time of Late Antiquity. With starting point the monastic movement by St. Antonius and St. Pachomius (4<sup>th</sup> cent.) many practices with ethical and esthetic purpose appeared. Mystic writers and rational scholars elaborated many plans and educational programs, either for the monks and the clergy or for every citizen who participated in the Greek and christian paideia.

These spiritual exercises after the termination of the Neoplatonic School in Athens by the emperor Iouustinian (529 A.D.) were generalized and were included in the *ordre du jour* of many educative people. Also, except for the fixed Christian education, the Byzantine Philosophers till the times of Plethon tried to work out many ethical systems of life based on the Platonic division of virtues and the Aristotelic Golden Means. The Ancient Greek and Christian ethical exercises were not included only in an obligatory program but had as main purpose to beautify human life.

Many Byzantine attempts for the constitution of ethical systems (not necessary in the form of a *scientia moralis*, as in the Medieval West -except for the *practica moralis*) used as their basis the *Ethica Nicomacheia* of Aristotle (Michael of Ephesos, Eustratios of Nicaea, George Pachymeres, Michael Psellos, Nicephoros Blemmydes, Theodoros Metochites), or the Platonic division into the four main virtues (temperance, courage, justice and prudence). Usually the ethical systems in Byzantine Philosophy were based on a metaphysical theory. This is the case of Plethon. Plethon's work *On Virtues* is an example which shows us how these ethical systems were connected with the discovery of neoplatonism in Renaissance and exerted a big influence on the formation of the *homo signorale* or *homo universalis* that is the discovery of individual.

#### *7e. Philosophical Anthropology*

The Byzantine anthropological theory focused on that man is the image and likeness of God due to the powers of his soul, spirit and free will. So, man has been chosen by God in purpose to be sovereign over the matters of earth. The continuous practice of his spiritual and mental abilities and virtues leads

him not only to happiness but also to deification (theōsis). Human beings, following the model of Jesus Christ, can overcome death and can hope for the resurrection. The Platonic, Origenistic and Neoplatonic dogmas of the preexistence of souls, as well as the metempsychosis, were rejected. Also the dualism and diarchy in the manicheanistic form were not preferable to Byzantine Philosophy; all the souls can fall in the evil alteration, but all are immortal in nature because of their relation to God. Man maintains a personal contact with God, and this personalistic attitude is an essential characteristic which distinguishes the Christian era from the Ancient Greek-Roman civilization. The personalistic theory of man was developed through the change of the term “hypostasis”, which, till Plotinus time, meant the word “nature” or “essence”. The Greek Fathers identified the term hypostasis with the term person or mode of existence, establishing a personalistic ontology. In general the Byzantines philosophers followed the patristic and Christian anthropology, speaking about deification, ecstasy and love of God.

#### *7e. i) The place of man in the world*

By the coming of Christianity, man and his destiny became the centre of the universe. Christianity because of its anthropocentric character was differentiated from neoplatonism. Of course, neoplatonism accepted the high place of man in the world, but it couldn't agree with the position that man is the final purpose of everything. But this was the declaration of the Christian Fathers. Man, being at the highest point and the purpose of all creation, took the role of a protagonist. According to Gregory of Nyssa man is the culmination of the creation, its lord and king. The destination of the creation is to be known by man and to be reestablished in its primordial spirituality. The anthropological tension became the essential principle of the worldview in the Christian era and was connected with metaphysics. The human race obtained a consciousness of its historical homogeneity and considered the history of its salvation as the measure of all things. Everything generated and perishable inside space and time has a real meaning, only if it is included in the relation between man and God.

### *7e. ii) Freedom, alteration and the problem of evil*

Since the entire world is God's creation, the question is whether God can be the cause of evil. Gnosticism was the religious movement, which attributed the evil to God or to a second God. The manicheanistic and Gnostic dogma was in contradiction with Christian Fathers, who insisted on the absolute goodness of God. The question was introduced, because Christianity attributed to God the characteristic of omnipotence; if God controls everything and He is the cause of everything, how can we explain the presence of the evil in the world? Neither God, nor matter is the cause of evil. Moreover matter and evil, already by the time of the Plotinian neoplatonism was considered as not having a real ontological existence: evil was defined as a *privatio boni*. The Greek Fathers accepted this ontological relativity of evil. For example John Damascenus in his treatise *Against Manicheans* put emphasis on the perception of evil as something that hasn't ontological independency. On the other hand Origen and Euagrios Ponticus accepted a teleological utility of the evil in the world. Death, illness, poverty etc. exist for educational purposes. Man in a sort of nietzschean way, has to live through painful incidents in purpose to strengthen his mind, soul and body. But this interpretation didn't prevail over that of Maximus the Confessor and John Damascenus, who intensively made acceptable the neoplatonic idea of evil as a privation of good. What is the origin of evil in the world? The solution, which had been accepted by the Byzantines, was that the cause of evil in the world is man's freedom and free will (autexousion). The existence of evil in the world is due to the primordial alteration and the freedom of man. A man who wouldn't make mistakes or bad choices in his life due to the Divine Providence wasn't a free man. Freedom despite of its connection to the risk and danger is more preferable and worthier for human beings.

If God is characterized by omniscience (pantognōsia), He must know in advance every human action. So the question in debate was: have our actions have they been predestinated or not? The common teaching of all the Byzantines philosophers, as of all Greek Fathers, includes the acceptance of the Divine Providence. John Damascenus defined the subject, insisting on the affirmation of our free will and on God's knowledge of everything in advance,

but not determining everything. So, the fact that God knows in advance everything is related with our free will, but doesn't mean that He has predestined or determined it.

In general we can divide the Byzantines scholars into two categories: a) to those who accepted that the Divine Providence is important and includes also the limits of our life without rejecting the Free Will of man (John Damscenus, Nicetas Stythatos, Michael Psellos, Nicolas of Methone, Theodoros Metochites, Gregory Scholarios, Marcus Eugenikos, Theophanes of Medeia) and b) to those who were against the predestination of our life by God, believing that this concept was similar to the pagan concept of Fate (Heimarmene), so that they put emphasis on the teaching of the Free Will (Photius, Nicephoros Blemmydes, Josef Bryennios). George Gemistos Plethon was him who reintroduced the concept of an extreme universal determinism according to which God Himself is subordinate to Fate; Plethon, by his faith to Fate, intended to animate the Byzantines, who were near the fall of their country, through the acceptance of something like the Nietzschean *amor fati*.

The Christian teaching of Free Will includes the acceptance not of a deterministic cosmic model, but of God's active love and goodness towards everything; this is the meaning of the Divine Providence. Man –as Socrates had already said- is capable of intervening with the affairs which are depend on his own reason and will and not on the subjects that have been already determined by God.

#### *8. Byzantine Philosophy after Byzantium*

Byzantine philosophy did not finish with the capture of the capital of Byzantium by the Ottomans in 1453. This is because the philosophical problems, which Byzantine Philosophy had posed, the discussions and the solutions that had been given continued to be issues of examination in the Western and Slavic World. The older historians of Philosophy very often arrived at the conclusion that the Byzantine scholars, who emigrated in Italy, contributed to the flourishing of the Renaissance. But usually the observance that the Byzantine scholars were the carriers of the Greek-Roman tradition

prevailed among those historians. It is true that thanks to Byzantium a great amount of the textual ancient tradition maintained and was preserved for the European civilization. But the Byzantine Philosophy was not only the guardian and the depository of the ancient Greek texts. As we saw the Byzantine Philosophy during the last seven centuries of Byzantium developed a relative philosophical autonomy besides the commentaries, the compilations or the abridgements of the classic texts. Of course, the Christian and the Theological truths were dominant during the Byzantine era; but the Byzantine Philosophy in connection with the Christian and theological dogmas developed sometimes original philosophical thought and gave some new solutions to old philosophical problems or opened new horizons to the philosophical thought. Byzantine Philosophy used rational, empirical, and sometimes irrational (or transrational) argumentation to support the philosophical truths. It took a position between faith and reason, the Christian creeds and the pagan problematic, trying to find a balance; it, also, some other times arrived at more extreme solution in order to bind together opposite mental outlooks.

The Slavic world and especially Russia had a similar vision to the old Byzantine Empire. Russia was dominating in the East after the fall of Byzantium and inherited the Christian Orthodox tradition; since Constantinople was the “New Rome”, Moscow was called the “Third Rome”. The West also became the receiver of the Byzantine Philosophy and because of Plethon, Bessarion and other Byzantine scholars the neoplatonic studies flourished during the Renaissance. In contrast to the preference for Platonism in Italy, in Constantinople, after its fall in 1453, George Scholarios, the first Greek Patriarch Gennadios II, founded the Patriarchic Academy and defended the Aristotelism against the polytheistic Platonic ideas of his adversary Plethon. The Aristotelism conquered the East because of the clergy’s fear to the possibility of a pagan renovation. The Aristotelism remained dominant in the Neo-Hellenic philosophy, and even in 17<sup>th</sup> century the philosopher Theophilus Corydalleus introduced from Italy the neo-aristotelic ideas of his teacher Cesare Cremonini. Now we know that the Neo-Hellenic philosophy despite the slavery of the Greeks to the Ottoman Empire

and the conservative ideas of the Greek Orthodox Church had a larger diffusion than we could imagine before the study and the edition of numerous philosophical manuscripts hidden in the Monasteries and in private collections. In the end we can say that the Orthodox Christian Church during the Ottoman domination in Greece maintained the Byzantine spirit and helped with the ideological awakening of the Greek nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the introduction and the assimilation of the European ideas of Modern Times.

## **Appendix – Chapters and Subdivisions**

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Factors that have influenced Patristic Thought
- 3) Representative Fathers of Patristic thought
- 4) The relative autonomy of Byzantine Philosophy
  - a) The “first Byzantine Humanism” (9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> cent.)
  - b) Psellos and his students (11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> cent.)
  - c) The philosophers of Nicaea (13<sup>th</sup> cent.)
  - d) A philosophical and scientific movement (13<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
  - e) The Hesychastic Controversy (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
  - f) Platonists against Aristotelians (15<sup>th</sup> cent.)
- 5) Byzantine Philosophy and Latin Philosophy
- 6) The accordance between Platonism and Aristotelism
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  - a) The attitude towards Logic
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  - d) Ethical Aesthetic Theory
  - e) Philosophical Anthropology
    - i) The place of man in the World
    - ii) Alteration, Freedom and the problem of evil
- 8) Byzantine Philosophy after Byzantium

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