Constantinos Athanasopoulos and Christoph Schneider (eds.), *Divine Essence and Divine Energies. Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy*, James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 2013, 298 p.

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This volume is based on a colloquium organized by the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, University of Cambridge, on 5 December 2008. Taking as its starting point the familiar work of David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge, 2004)¹, the authors discuss the distinction (not separation) between the divine essence and energy, which is a teaching specific to Orthodoxy.

The first study emphasizes two issues: on the one hand, this teaching is at the very core of the Orthodox tradition, on the other hand, it has no direct equivalent in the West. The remainder of the volume details and deepens these two issues, resulting in a genuine ecumenical debate about this (still) controversial doctrine. All authors, be they Orthodox, Anglican, Calvinist, or Catholic, discuss the essence–energy distinction from a historical, theological, and philosophical perspective. The result is a heterogeneous collection of views which, in our opinion, has as a converging point the search for an answer to the question: to what extent is the topic relevant to the Christian East and West?

In the opinion of David Bradshaw, Constatinos Athanasopoulos, and Loudovikos Nikolaos, the essence–energy distinction is a key doctrine of Orthodoxy and reflects its superiority over Western theology, which draws heavily on Aristotelian notions. The main sources of the Orthodox tradition are St Paul, the Apostolic Fathers, the Cappadocian Fathers, Dionysius the Areopagite, John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas. The authors maintain that this hermeneutical line is opposed to that of Augustine (Athanasopoulos even believes that the Eastern reception and interpretation of Aristotle is more accurate than the Western one). Roy Clouser, a proponent of the Neo-Calvinist tradition, sees commonalities between the Orthodox vision and a certain theology of a Western type; he thus distinguishes between Cappadocian and Reformational theology on the one hand and the

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¹ This book was translated into Romanian with a different title: David Bradshaw, *Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, translated by Dragoș Dască and Vasile Bârz, Ecclesiastes, Sibiu, 2010. See my review published in *Theological Review* 21 (2011), no. 1, p. 191–192.

theology of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas on the other hand. Moreover, according to the Roman Catholic theologian Antoine Lévy, Bradshaw's claim that the essence–energy distinction is superior to the understanding of some Latin theologians on analogy and divine presence is totally erroneous. East and West have a different, but not incompatible approach to the relationship between the created and the uncreated. Consequently, this issue clearly shows that one deals here with *difference-in-unity* or *unity-in-difference* (or, I wonder, a *coincidentia oppositorum*?).

To prove the contemporary relevance of the Orthodox doctrine about the essence–energies distinction, Metropolitan Vasilios of Constantia, Ammochostos, and Georgios Martzelos analyze the thinking of Basil the Great and Maximus the Confessor.

John Milbank is critical of the Orthodox distinction between the divine energies and being. This is in opposition to the contributions of David Bradshaw, Constatinos Athanasopoulos, and Nikolaos Loudovikos, as well as those by Clouser and Lévy. Stressing the importance of the notions of *gift* and *paradox* in Christianity, Milbank identifies a decline in both traditions, Eastern and Western, which occurred in the Middle Age. He draws a parallel between the formal distinction in Duns Scotus and the essence–energy distinction in Palamas. An in-depth discussion of Milbank's study exceeds the scope of this review; suffice it to say that, in his opinion, one should distinguish between two ways of participation: the first model, characteristic of Plotinian Neoplatonism, states that there is a part of God that remains inaccessible to creation. The second model, shared by theurgic Neoplatonists and followed by the Latin and Greek Church Fathers, simultaneously emphasizes both God's simplicity and the kenotic divine self-partition. God – the One – gives Himself absolutely, but precisely because He gives Himself in such a way, without reserve, He cannot be identified with gifts (which always remain less than the giver). This metaphysical approach allows for both “radical descent” and “radical ascent”: the gulf between the uncreated and the created is completely overcome, but they are not identical.

Milbank's reflections should be read as an invitation to further analyze the theology of Palamas and its relation to the West. This is partly what Nick Trakakis tries to do by connecting the essence–energy distinction to modern and contemporary thought.

The index of names and contents, as well as the bibliography, reflect the many issues addressed in the studies gathered in this book. However, they also suggest some limitations, which are mentioned in the concluding remarks. In our opinion, the volume does not sufficiently emphasize the fact that the tea-

ching about the essence–energies distinction crystallized primarily through an ascetical–mystical experience (which aims for “deification” or “divinization” – *theōsis*) rather than through theological–philosophical speculation. Further, the volume fails to mention that this teaching is not accepted by all Orthodox theologians (the Greek patristic scholar Panayotis Trembelas and the Romanian theologian Petru Rezus are two of its harshest critics), who vacillate between accepting it as a dogma or as a simple theologumen. Regarding the bibliography, there is a striking lack of relevant works in languages other than English or French; for example, a notable absence is Dorothea Wendebourg’s *Geist oder Energie*². However, these shortcomings do not affect the usefulness of the volume. Perhaps its greatest merit is that it shines a light, from a trans-disciplinary and ecumenical point of view, on a teaching which still requires deeper immersion in a topic that is important not only for the Orthodox tradition, but for all contemporary theology: the essence–energies distinction.

² Dorothea Wendebourg, *Geist oder Energie. Zur Frage der innergöttlichen Verankerung des christlichen Lebens in der byzantinischen Theologie*, München, 1980.