

The Divine Gnosiology of Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa

Dr. Eirini Avraam Artemi

National and Capodistrian University of Athens, Faculty of Theology. History of Dogma

Abstract: The knowledge of God has been the main subject of the theological teaching since the expanding of the Christian doctrine and teaching. Ecclesiastical writers as Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa accept that the knowledge about God is conventional and symbolic (deliberately). His attributes are known, however His essence "ousia" is not known. God is in finite. He is unlimited in every kind of perfection or that every conceivable perfection belongs to Him in the highest conceivable way. God is self-existent and does not depend on anything else for his existence. The biblical I am that I am. Related to divine immutability: God does not undergo any change. God is externally related to the world: no event in the world has any effect on God. God conforms to the substance metaphysics of Greek philosophy. A substance is independent, self-contained, and self-sufficient. Man knows only the God's attributes and not His "ousia". This happens, because the finite human mind can not grasp the essence of the infinite God. Besides God is unknowledgeable and inconceivable to His "ousia" while He is knowledgeable and comprehensible to His energies. It is clear that it only is possible for man to acquire indistinct "amydros" and weak "asthenis" vision of God according to his attributes "ta kathautou". In this article, we are going to examine this knowledge and vision of God through the writings of eastern and western ecclesiastical writers, Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa.

Keywords: Knowledge, ignorance, Gregory of Nyssa, Nicholas of Cusa, perfection.

1. GNOSIOLOGY: A GENERAL APPROACH

The gnosiology – the study of knowledge is not a subject that only scholars deal with. The term is derived from the Ancient Greek words gnosis "knowledge" and logos "word", "discourse". The Orthodox gnosiology is an attempt of every Christian to live according the teaching of Christ and his disciples. Apostle Paul underlines: "pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18).

The scholar of Christian theology tries to find which the real gnosiology of God is. He based on the Bible, on patristic texts and the canons of Ecumenical and Local Councils. In the ancient gnosiology, there is an important question. If the names of things (including God's) are conceived of as an image of the transcendent universalia (realism, archetype). Nominalism accepts that the universalia are simple names and not beings as in realism. In the dialogue of Plato "Cratylus", there are two opinions about the names of beings. One supports Cratylus' view: "everything has a right name of its own, which comes by nature, and that a name is not whatever people call a thing by agreement, just a piece of their own voice applied to the thing, but that there is a kind of inherent correctness in names, which is the same for all men, both Greeks and barbarians". The other sustains Hermogenes' idea that any name "is any correctness of names other than convention and agreement" (Plato, Cratylus 384d).

As far as the gnosiology in the East Othodoxy is delineated by the object to be known which is twofold: the Uncreated and the created. Only the Holy Trinity is Uncreated. The universe is created. Faith is knowledge of the Uncreated, and science is knowledge of the created. Man was created to know God; not only to believe in Him and to hope in Him, but to know Him and so to love Him and to serve Him. Knowledge of God is the aim and goal of man's life, the purpose of his creation by God.

In Orthodox theology, the gnosiology is symbolic. A distinction is made between the "essence" and "energies" of God. We can obtain knowledge of the divine uncreated energies, and not of the divine essence. God is unintelligible. The unintelligibility of God must be accepted by any human mind¹. God is infinite and incomprehensible and everything that is comprehensible about Him is His infinity and incomprehensibility. But all that we can affirm concerning God does not show forth God's nature, but only the qualities of His nature.

The development of theology is based on the spiritual experience that is provided to the human being through the divine revelation². The revelation of God to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and mainly to Moses is the first and basic knowledge proof that a man can have for God's existence. For the Greek Fathers knowledge of God is an internal experience. It has as pillars the idea of communion, transfiguration and deification of man. For Christians the gnosiology can be defined in the phrase of "the kingdom of God is within you"³, because man can be led to a logical conception of Revelation of Triune God through faith.

2. MAN'S "KNOWLEDGE" AND "IGNORANCE" – "AGNOIA" FOR GOD IN THE TEACHING OF GREGORY OF NYSSA

Gregory of Nyssa is regarded as exponent of the negative theology, and of the mystical tradition in Christianity. The supreme antinomy of the Triune God, unknowable and knowable, incommunicable and communicable, transcendent and immanent is the primary locus of his apophaticism. Moreover, the negative theology of the Gregory of Nyssa is balanced by his acute sense of the revelation of God ad extra, equally predicated of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Plested 2004:57).

Gregory speaks about the unknowable and incommunicable of God with many and different ways in his writings. He demonstrates the presence of God in the world through examples, arguments and images. He explains how our soul should try to become purified for being able to realise the divine truth. In the Moses' life and in *Contra Eunomium* the holy father explains that the human beings cannot understand the "invisible", "timeless", "ineffable" of God, they make images of Him which reveal Him: "When God was yet unknown to the human race because of the idolatrous error which then prevailed, those saints made him manifest and known to men, both by the miracles which are revealed in the works done by him, and from the titles by which the various aspects of divine power are perceived. Thus they are guides towards the understanding of the divine nature by making known to mankind merely the grandeur of their thoughts about God; the account of his being they left undiscussed and unexamined, as impossible to approach and unrewarding to those who investigate it". (*Contra Eunomium*, II, 1021-10). In opposition to the Eunomium's teaching that the nature of God was absolutely comprehensible, Gregory explains and underlines as well the incomprehensibility and infinity of God and thereby gives to human being to a life of continual conversion in virtue, to an everlasting assimilation to God: "the perfection of human nature consists... in its very growth in goodness" (*Life of Moses*, 31). Gregory affirms that God is unknowable - or at least that the "ousia" (being) of God is unknowable. Gregory finds theological justification for this in the concept of God's infinity. God is eternal and beyond the time. This eternity results in God being of infinite expanse (Brian, Daley, 1996, 219: "But if the Divine and unalterable nature is incapable of degeneracy, as even our foes allow, we must regard it as absolutely unlimited in its goodness: and the unlimited is the same as the infinite" (*Against Eunomius*, 1.15). It is possible through His sanctifying grace to be known His glory, holiness and magnificence. The knowledge of God is beyond man's power. God promised that only those who are pure of their heart can have vision of God (Lossky, 1997: 81). For God who is by nature beyond our sight is visible in His activities "energeiai", being perceived in the characteristics "idiomata" that surround Him. So, it is better for man to speak for the deeds of God but when he is going to speak about His essence, then man should be remain silent.

God is not "object" of knowledge but of admiration. According to the poet's words: "how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:9). Gregory's aim is to show that the beings of all the members of the godhead are infinite in goodness

¹ E. Artemi, "Gregory Nazianzen's trinitarian teaching based on his Twentieth Theological Oration -La doctrina trinitaria de San Gregorio Nacienceno basada en si Quinta Oración Teológica", στο *De Medio Aevo* 4 (2013/2), (127-146), p. 139, <http://capire.es/eikonimago/index.php/demedioaevo/article/view/92>.

² E. Artemi, *The Triune God on the teaching of Isidore of Pelusium and the relationship to the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria*, Athens 2012, p. 327.

³ Luke 17:21.

and power and life without distinction. The “ousia” of God has no “levels”. God in his nature is singular, simple, without opposite. It cannot degrade overtime and cannot change or lose its perfection, as even Eunomius argues. In light of this, how can someone compare one infinite goodness in the Son to another infinite goodness in the Father and say that one is lesser and the other greater? Can one infinite good be lesser than another infinite good? Of course not. In this way Gregory challenges the teaching of Eunomius that the Father and the Son are both perfect in goodness and yet the Father is superior to the Son (*Against Eunomius* 1.19).

God’s essence cannot be approached by man. The latter can feel the divine grace and glory: “Let us not be ignorant of God's nature which we recognize as his own wisdom and power and which we our minds comprehend”_. As God’s infinite nature cannot be fully conceived by the human soul, so God does not seek to reveal Himself completely to those who seek Him. Rather, he reveals just enough to enlarge the desire of the soul for more so that the soul might ever press in closer and closer on its infinite path upwards. In Gregory's own words:

“We can conceive then of no limitation in an infinite nature; and that which is limitless cannot by its nature be understood. And so every desire for the Beautiful which draws us on in this ascent is intensified by the soul's very progress towards it. And this is the real meaning of seeing God: never to have this desire satisfied” (*Apologeticus on Hexaemeron*, PG 44, 72C).

The man’s desire for the knowledge and the vision of God is constantly satisfied and yet never satisfied. “Moses sought to see God and this is the instruction he receives on how he is to see Him: seeing God means following Him wherever He might lead” (*Life of Moses*, II, 231-3, 238-9).

The knowledge for God sometimes has the same meaning with the ignorance for God and the vision of God in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. The divine darkness leads to the enlightenment. It shows the encounter with God not as an act of comprehension but as a union beyond understanding (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 202). He speaks for the vision of God expressed in terms of darkness rather than the prevailing light imagery (Laird, 2011: 10). This relation between dark and light, knowledge and ignorance for God, the holy father Moses’ vision began with light; afterwards God spoke to him in a cloud. But when Moses rose higher and became more perfect, he saw God in the darkness. Gregory explains about the ignorance of God that “divine is there where the understanding does not reach” (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, VI, 888A). That knowledge is cognitive is perhaps the first assumption with which one must do away, if he is to properly understand St. Gregory of Nyssa’s concept of the divine darkness: “This is the true Knowledge of what is sought: this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by kind of darkness” (*Life of Moses*, 95). Yet it is an assumption so basic to modern scientific thought that its influence is hardly given consideration, it is taken entirely as a base fact in the general arena of learning. Yet it is this very idea which Gregory addresses: the entire way of knowing with which we approach the knowledge of God. His is a knowing that goes beyond the confines and limitations of cognition, with its inherent inability to comprehend the transcendent (*Life of Moses*, I, 46). It is a knowing that plunges into the negative, into the darkness of that place ‘where the understanding does not reach,’ and there finds the height of true knowledge. Gregory’s concept of mystical knowing is best expressed in his image of the divine darkness: a symbol that is perhaps one of his greatest gifts to the realm of Christian thought (Papanikolaou 2006: 18). It is presented most clearly in his famous text, *The Life of Moses*, and it is primarily from that text that this brief examination shall be made (*Life of Moses*, 157).

According to Gregory of Nyssa the knowledge about God is based on “epinoia” of human mind and cannot be the correct guide for the “vision” of God, but the ignorance for the divine nature is based on the human soul. The man searches for the God and through his ignorance- the darkness of his mind for God, he can discover the divine truth. Only then the finite human being can see the infinite God. The indwelling of the Trinity within the human person. As the godhead dwells within the soul, so is the soul able to relate to the person the knowledge of it, in a manner of knowing that is no longer sensory. The soul acts as a mirror, which projects into one’s knowledge the very nature of God. The contemplation of God is not effected by sight and hearing, nor is it comprehended by any of the customary perceptions of the mind: “For no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, nor does it belong to those things which usually enter into the heart of man” (*Life of Moses*, 157; 1 Cor. 2:9, Isaiah. 64:4).

This is the beginning of the knowledge of God by the heart—by the intimate presence of God Himself. Yet it is only faint, and is still blurred, as one would expect within a cloud. The soul must still be purified, and must become ever more accustomed to this new way of knowing. It must, indeed, shed its reliance upon cognition, and embrace the seeming

groundlessness of an 'ineffable knowledge.' The person "must wash from his understanding every opinion derived from some preconception and withdraw himself from his customary intercourse with his own companion, that is, with his sense perceptions, which are, as it were, wedded to our nature as its companion. When he is so purified, then he assaults the mountain" (*Life of Moses*, 157).

Generally, the ignorance of God can be equivalent to the darkness. God is the light. The separation of man from the God, brought darkness to the mind and the heart of the human being. Vladimir Lossky underlines with a lyrical way that if God is known as light, the loss of this knowledge is darkness; and, since eternal life consists in "knowing the Father and His Son Jesus Christ", absence of knowledge of God ends in the darkness of Hell. Light is the result for accompanying the union with God, whereas the dark reality can overrun human consciousness only when human consciousness dwells on the borders of eternal death and final separation from God (*Life of Moses*, 163). Thus the obvious sense of darkness seems to be, above all, pejorative (*Life of Moses*, 164). If a man accepts his ignorance for the eternal God, He can detect the real knowledge for Him. The human soul will capture the God vision, only with its purification. Gregory analyses that only the purified man in heart can see the God (Artemi, 2002:45, 167-174).

Gregory teaches that only if the darkness "and the ignorance for God on the Mount Sinai will be changed into the light of true knowledge of Mount Tabor, man will be able to have the vision of God, the glorious face of God incarnate and the eternal uncreated light of the Triune God" (Lossky, 1974, 31). Also he says that the soul that truly loves God desires to be united with Him, man tries to find this union through the vision and knowledge God.

3. MAN'S "KNOWLEDGE" AND "VISION" FOR GOD IN THE TEACHING OF NICHOLAS OF CUSA

Nicholas of Cusa was marked for his profound mystical writings about Christianity, particularly on the possibility of knowing God with the divine human mind. This is not possible through mere human means — via "learned ignorance" (Moran2007, 174). Cusanus wrote of the enfolding of creation in God and their unfolding in creation. He was suspected by some of holding pantheistic beliefs, but his writings were never accused of being heretical (Hopkins 1910, 306). He may arguably be best understood as employing a Christian Neoplatonic framework to construct his own synthesis of inherited ideas (Hopkins 1910, 306).

Cusanus speaks about the transcendence of God and relates it with the ignorance "docta ignorantia". God is "infinite oneness"- "unitas infinita" (*De docta ignorantia*, I. 5.14). Unaided reason cannot attain to union with God. Nor does union annihilate the distinction between creature and Creator. The divine nature of God is omnipotent and unknown to human beings. This ignorance of God can be transformed into learned ignorance for God. Nicholas of Cusa tries to show how the human mind can transcend natural limits and gives way to "supereminence". Nicholas supports that the man cannot reach the God through his own mind. Sometimes any human reason can be barrier to attain such participation in God, to attain such knowledge of the divine as is possible to humanity.

Nicholas realises God as the "absolute maximum" and "the absolute minimum", enfolding as well as surpassing all contraries: "For the both maximum and minimum are superlatives. Therefore absolute quantity is not maximum quantity more than it is minimum quantity, because in it the minimum is the maximum in a coincident way" (*Selected Spiritual Writings*, 91-92, 336). For Nicholas, "God preceded opposites, is undifferentiated, not other incomparable, and without opposite, precedes distinctions, opposition, contrariety and contradiction" (*Selected Spiritual Writings*, 91-92, 336). God cannot be known by any human being. The latter is captured with a "learned ignorance" (Watts 1982, 25). Man understands that God is ignorant and he realises it with the knowledge which he obtains (Watts 1982, 27), God is the absolute Maximum; the universe is a created image of God, the "contracted" or restricted maximum. Christ, the Son of God, the enfleshed second person of the Triune God unites the first two as the Maximum at once absolute and contracted. God is both unlimited and transcendent, unreachable by human mind. So does Nicholas accept the human logic has limitation and God is beyond any logical borders. He underlines that there is not an analogy between infinite God and finite man (*De docta ignorantia*, I.3.9).

Cusanus explains that man's attempt to understand God, transforms the ignorance for God to the knowledge: "Mind is the limit and measure of all things" (*De docta ignorantia. Idiota de mente: The Layman: About Mind*, 1).

Also, he supports that our minds are images of God's mind: "You know how the divine Simplicity enfolds all things. Mind is the image of this enfolding Simplicity. If, then, you called this divine Simplicity infinite Mind, it will be the exemplar of our mind. If you called the divine mind the totality of the truth of things, you will call our mind the totality of the assimilation of things, so that it may be a totality of ideas. In the divine Mind conception is the production of things: in our mind conception is the knowledge of things. If the divine Mind is absolute Being, then its conception is the creation of beings; and conception in the human mind is the assimilation of beings (*De docta ignorantia. Idiota de mente: The Layman: About Mind*, 3) All things comes and return to God.

Cusanus is preoccupied by the nature and limits of human knowledge which prevent him from knowing the universe. The latter is finite, so does man cogitate God in proportion. "Cusanus' interest, however, is not in a modern celebration of the multiplicity of subjective perspectives but is in the more Neoplatonic project of overcoming perspectival limitation and "otherness" to gain intellectual oneness with the object itself" (Moran 2007, 177). Cusanus was influenced by the emerging humanism of the northern Renaissance. Morrat explains that: "Cusanus exploits the nominalist emphasis on God's absolute power. God is in this sense pure possibility, or the sum of all possibilities. Indeed, Cusanus' specific originality consists in his use of nominalist claims about God's infinite and unlimited power, combined with the scholastic claim that God is pure esse, pure actuality, actus purus, "maximal actual being" "maxima actualis entitas" (*De docta ignorantia* I .23.70), to make the claim that God is the infinite actualization of all possibilities, "est actu omne id quod possibile est" (*De docta ignorantia* I .5.14), God is "wholly in act"- "penitus in actu" (Moran 2007, 181). The Christian Platonic theological tradition teaching found support in the theology of Cusanus (Moran 2007, 181). The latter tries to define the suitable way to recognize, identify and utter the infinite and eternal nature of God. God is "absolute infinity" - "infinitas absoluta" (*De visione dei*, I. 13) and Nicholas adds: "Now according to the theology of negation, there is not found in God anything other than infinity" (*De docta ignorantia* I. 26.88). It is obvious that for our writer God has infinity and transcendence: "... the ultimate and deepest contemplation of God is boundless, infinite, and in excess of every concept" (*De possess* 40). Only by realization the infinity of God, the man can understand how incomprehensible the divine nature is. The only thing of God that can be understood is the disability of human mind to conceive the superiority of God (*De docta ignorantia* I. 16.44). Also there are no words to be used for God, because God is beyond opposites (*De coniecturis* I .5.20). With learned ignorance, a man can learn, can know the ultimate God. All human beings desire to know, but exact knowledge is impossible, "precise truth inapprehensible" (*De docta ignorantia* I. 2.8).

The root of the difference between God and human's spirit is in the "designation" of the unknown God. For this reason, Nicholas gives the name "Maximum" for God, because He cannot take another name, "quo nihil maius esse potest" (*De docta ignorantia* I. 5). Cusanus underlines for the knowledge of the God's existence and nature that they do not depend on the maximum idea which is "established" about Him because by this sense, the nature of God would be determined according to a comparative relationship with the finite things and therefore the divine nature would lose his characteristic of infinity: "Since the unqualifiedly and absolutely Maximum, than which there cannot be a greater, is greater than we can comprehend, because it is Infinite Truth, we attain unto it in no other way than incomprehensibly. For since it is not of the nature of those things which can be comparatively greater and lesser, it is beyond all that we can conceive" (*De docta ignorantia* I. 4). God, who is uncontracted, is Maximum *Being* only insofar as being is uncontracted. But uncontracted and undifferentiated "being" is not being in any sense conceivable or nameable by us (*On learned ignorance -De Docta Ignorantia*, I). Hence Nicholas goes on to state: "Wherefore, although it is evident through the aforesaid that the name 'being' or any other name is not a precise name for the Maximum which is beyond every name, nevertheless it is necessary that being befit it maximally but in a way not nameable by the name "maximum" and above all nameable being" (*De docta ignorantia* I. 24-26). In *DI* I, 24-26 Nicholas concedes the necessity—for purposes of worship—of conceiving of God *as if* He were contracted to various perfections which are signified by their names in our language, *as if* His trinity were truly describable as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and so on (*On learned ignorance -De Docta Ignorantia*, I).

Cusanus argues that the God can be defined with the oneness: "However, oneness cannot be number; for number, which can be comparatively greater, cannot at all be either an unqualifiedly minimum or an unqualifiedly maximum. Rather, oneness is the beginning of all number because it is the minimum; and it is the end of all number, because it is the maximum. Therefore, by comparison Absolute Oneness, to which nothing is opposed, is Absolute Maximality, which is the Blessed God. Since this Oneness is maximal, it cannot be multiple for it is all that which can be. Therefore, it cannot become number... Accordingly, Absolute Oneness cannot be comparatively greater or lesser; nor can it be multiple, Thus, Deity is Infinite oneness" (*De docta ignorantia* I. 5).

Nicholas supports that we can see God through the images of the creatures, because visible things are truly images of invisible things and that from created things the Creator can be knowably seen as in a mirror and a symbolism (*De docta ignorantia* I. 11). The journey toward God as more of a rush, pushing beyond the senses and the intellect. God is not “something” similar to all of these. God can be found farther on even beyond all “interiority”. This ignorance is truly the knowledge of God. The path that shows that God is unspeakable and incomprehensible, but He is simply God (*Selected Spiritual Writings*).

As far as for the vision of God, the icon would show some qualities for the Divine Face: “But God, insofar as He is true Uncontracted Sight, is not sight that is less than the intellect can conceive abstract sight to be; rather, He is incomparably more perfect Sight. Hence, the appearance of the icon's gaze is less able to approximate the supreme excellence of Absolute Sight than is conception. Therefore, that which is apparent in the case of that image must undoubtedly be present in an excellent way in Absolute Sight” (*De visione dei*, I. 1). The invisible Truth of His Face, cannot be seen by the bodily eyes of a man, but He can be seen by man's eye of his heart and of his mind. The face of God has no contraction. He is the Face of faces, “For the Face which is the Truth of all faces is not quantitative; hence, it is not greater or lesser than any face. Because it is neither greater nor lesser, it is equal to each and every face; and yet, it is not equal to any face, because it is not quantitative but is absolute and superexalted. It is, therefore, Truth, or Equality, that is free from all quantity” (*De visione dei*, I. 6).

Cusanus provides no ontological argument to prove the existence of God. This happens because God's existence is not bound by the formation of concept of the absolute. God is beyond even this concept and even the importance of identifying the maximum arrest not attributable to any ontological way the infinite divine being. This is the most critical assumption of philosophy. He explains that the seeker will even then see God through a cloud, though it is a more rarefied one; God will remain incomprehensible (*De docta ignorantia* I. 26). Nicholas argues that the Absolute Infinite cannot be conceived, realized by finite thought. Hence, in theology, only negations can be assumed as true. Although positive theological statements are inevitable in order to think about God, they are inadequate. Paradoxically, one can reach the incomprehensible God only by knowing his incomprehensibility. This is the meaning of the term “learned ignorance” In the end, both negative and positive theology must be dissolved into inexpressibility; God is ineffable beyond all affirmations and negations (Rohmann 1999-2000: 3). This is the extreme climax of a philosophical theology where the infinite distance between God and the finite has come to a head. More exactly, human beings cannot touch God through knowledge at all, but at the very most only by our yearning for Him (Rohmann 1999-2000: 3). As conclusion, Cusa underlines that God is indefinable; or, rather, He defines Himself. He is eternal power and act, totally unlimited and infinite.

4. THE COMPARISON OF GREGORY'S TEACHING ABOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD WITH NICHOLAS' OF CUSA TEACHING ABOUT IT

Nicholas underlines that man is a finite microcosm which mirrors the infinite universe — itself a manifestation of the immanent-transcendent God. Through reason we can know only what God is not; and we must remain in a state of “learned ignorance”. For Gregory, man has truly finite mind, so he cannot really know God, but only through his ignorance can conceive the omnipotent Being. For both ecclesiastic father, the two interdependent movements of divine self-manifestation and divine mystery, immanence and transcendence, are presented as the dynamic nexus out of which theosis arises. Nicholas of Cusa insists that Divine self-manifestation is explored as both a prerequisite and a mode of theosis.

Gregory and Nicholas underlines that the negative theology that results from divine mystery highlights the limitations of human reason as well as the human mind's potential for being the image of God. The Christological character of theosis is found in Nicholas of Cusa's doctrine of Christ as the Word of God, his understanding of the ascent of the intellect to divine Wisdom, and his concept of divine sonship. For Gregory theosis is based on the clean heart and through the darkness (γνόφος) of human mind that should be enlightened by the God's light and secret vision of His face.

Both Gregory and Nicholas speak about the doctrine of theosis in their understanding of the created, material world. The knowledge for God is vivid through the material world. Man can know God through his (man's) perfection, purification and illumination (Hudson 2007, 24). For these writers, God is Light, and that just as in the physical world we know being via light, so too, we can say that in the spiritual world do we know God via spiritual light, revelation. Gregory of Nyssa

says we know God via two manifestations, creation and revelation. For Nicholas of Cusa, he seems to be saying that, "faith" itself is the vehicle through which the soul transmits itself, through which the soul shines. Just as Nicholas of Cusa's reference to light, that it is through light we know being through the senses, thus analogously, in the Mass, through the light of faith our soul learns knowledge of God. As a consequence, the person of faith can see the world from the perspective of God's knowledge of the world through his faith, in addition to his knowledge of the world through his senses and his mind.

Gregory and Nicholas accept that the human reason is finite and God is infinite, beyond time and place. This first is created and the second is eternal, uncreated and the creator of man. Gregory relies heavily on the difference between divine essence and divine energy. Essence transcends every act of comprehensive knowledge, and it cannot be approached or attained by our speculation. Despite all human attempts to grasp the uncontainable, unknowable God, God remains unsearchable. Nicholas supports that only someone who has faith can know the God.

As conclusion both are accepted the simplicity of divine nature, but Nicholas of Cusa sometimes identifies God to the creation, and this leads to pantheism. Gregory of Nyssa argues that "the simplicity of the true faith assumes God to be that which He is, namely, incapable of being grasped by any term, or any idea, or any other device of our apprehension, remaining beyond the reach not only of human but of angelic and all supramundane intelligence, unthinkable, unutterable, above all expression in words, having but one name that can represent His proper nature, in single Name being "Above Every Name" (Contra Eunomium I, 683. II, 586). On the other hand, Nicholas argues: "As Creator, God is three and one; as infinite, He is neither three nor one nor any of the things which can be spoken. For the names that are attributed to God are taken from creatures, since He in Himself is ineffable and beyond everything that can be named or spoken" (On the Peace of Faith – De Pace Fidei, VII).

Thus the apophatic tradition reached its epitome and possibility both of religious language and of religious knowledge was denied. The denial was partly philosophical: there is no logic common to ordinary language and language used of the divine (Young, 1979, 59). The apophatic tradition of Gregory Nyssa is based to the basic biblical idea of the mysteriousness of God. Man can know God through the cloud of unknowing, the "agnoia". Nicholas of Cusa also underlines the learned ignorance, stating it is a type of awareness that does not have an intellectual root but has the greatest power to lead us into truth.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Gregory differs from Nicholas, because the eastern theologian is not to say that God and the world are conflated or mixed in a pantheistic manner, but the Christian East does affirm that created nature already assumes the gift of grace, which then awaits the consummation of supernatural grace and deification. Eastern Orthodox scholars as Gregory of Nyssa, contend that the distinction although not a division according to them, in God between His essence and energies has been neglected by the West both philosophically and theologically (Bradshaw 2004). For Western theologians, as Nicholas of Cusa, God is understood to be simple and non-compounded, and there is no room in the Divine nature for a separate metaphysical distinction of energy that would cause a division in the Godhead and create a composite divine nature (σύνθετος) (Ware 2012, 17).

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