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The Essential Traits of Knowing God in Father Stăniloae's Thinking and Their Importance for the Salvation of Man

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Abstract

Knowing God is a fundamental calling in the Christian life, because, according to the words of our Saviour Jesus Christ, salvation and the attainment of eternal life are not possible without it (cf. John 17, 3). In order to know God, He came out to meet man, through His self-discovery, or in other words, through divine Revelation. Without it, man would be a prisoner of his own illusions about the existence of God and His work in the world. Creation itself is a kind of mirror that reflects the wisdom, omnipotence, love, and goodness of God. Therefore, man can know God through His creation, having a cataphatic, intellectual or rational knowledge of God. But this knowledge is not complete and certain; there is another kind of God's knowledge, the apophatic one, which man experiences the attributes of God through. This kind of knowledge is an existential, deep and bright one, man entering a kind of dynamic of knowing God, based on divine Revelation, but also on his ascetic effort, by freeing himself from the passions that limit and close him in a closed horizon of matter. Therefore, man progresses continuously through this last kind of knowledge of God, close to Him, progress that will never cease.

Keywords

Theological knowledge, apophatic and cataphatic in the knowledge of God, Revelation - foundation of knowledge, dynamics of knowledge, ascetic effort

I. General Considerations

The issue of theological knowledge in general and the knowledge of God in particular has always concerned the Christian conscience. Therefore, several directions of this knowledge have been outlined, which accentuate one aspect or another of the realities knowledge that evade the knowledge acquired through human senses. Regarding the knowledge of God, as the Fathers said, the Church always believe it is impossible to define and explain the mystery of Divine Being. Thus, they are convinced the being of God is inaccessible to the rational knowledge of man; it evades man's intention to investigate it. Therefore, Orthodox theology preferred to follow the apophatic path of approaching God, in order to express the highest knowledge of any reference of human thought, regarding the supreme nature of the living God. Man cannot turn to God exclusively by human reason, for the living God is One of contemplation and worship. As such, man can approach Him, especially through prayer, contemplation, and experiencing His mystery above reason.

“Theology tries to articulate something only after descending from the mountain of contemplation, as Moses did. And the entry of the mind into God, or rather the coming of God into the mind of the believer, produces a state of astonishment and joy when the mind worships God in spirit and in truth. This is the right time to keep silence”¹.

When theology wants to express itself about God, it must use paradoxical, antinomic, and apophatic terms trying to express parts of the divine being mystery.

“A rational theology which is not based on existential, apophatic experience, is not theology. The apophatic path, that is, the transcendence of conceptual thinking and sensible knowledge, considers the ontological abyss between God and man. Dionysius the Areopagite uses the expression «super-being» to show the absolute transcendence of God to creation. By His «super-

¹ Ion BRIA, *Credința pe care o mărturisim*, Editura Institutului biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, (abrv: EIBMBOR), București 1987, p. 55.

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existent», hidden and eternal nature, God is invisible, intangible, immutable, and inaccessible. He must be contemplated as such, as an incomprehensible and uncircumcised being. However, God reveals Himself, moves and comes to us, is accessible, known and shared, not by His being, but by His energies, by His uncreated personal work or light, inseparable from being, but distinct from it².

Thus, in regard to the knowledge of God, both aspects of His knowledge must be considered; on the one hand, there is a knowledge, which, in fact, is a recognition of not knowing Him according to His being. On the other hand, we have the conviction shared in the Scriptures that, nevertheless, the infinite, eternal God, incomprehensible by human thought and word, can be perceived by His uncreated energies, which He created the world through, pours his grace upon it and leads it to perfection. So, both are true about God. Only by considering both aspects can the faithful man gain true knowledge of God and feel some of His luminous, powerful and joyful mystery, which exalts man higher and higher, for an ever-truer sharing of the divine mystery.

II. Divine Revelation - the Foundation of Any Gnoseology in Orthodoxy

Father Stăniloae makes a great contribution to the knowledge of God in Orthodoxy, by emphasizing the meaning of the two kinds of God's knowledge with much argumentative force: cataphatic-rational, which

² Ion BRIA, *Credința pe care o mărturisim*, p. 55. In this sense, the Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky also talks about the knowledge of God, when he says: "Apophatism is first and foremost a disposition of the mind that refuses to form concepts about God. This resolutely excludes any abstract and purely intellectual theology that would like to adapt God. This is the existential attitude that engages man as a whole: there is no theology other than living; you have to change, to become a new man. To know God, you must draw near to Him; you are not a theologian if you do not follow the path of union with God ... So apophatism is a criterion, a sure sense of a disposition of the mind according to the truth. In this sense, any true theology is an absolute apophatic theology" (Vladimir LOSSKY, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, translation, introductory study and notes by: Pr. Vasile Răducă, Editura „Anastasia”, București, f. a., p.67)

also includes negative cataphatic theology, also as theology or rational knowledge, on the one hand, and on the other hand, he unmistakably highlights the valences of the apophatic knowledge of God. At the same time, the Romanian theologian emphasizes the special importance and superiority of apophatic knowledge over the positive and negative cataphatic one. Unlike other Orthodox theologians, who do not attach much importance to cataphatic knowledge of God, as Christ Yannaras does, for example³, however, Father Stăniloae values the cataphatic knowledge, in the sense that it represents a kind of intellectual vehicle, which the depth of the apophatic knowledge of the mystery of God is expressed through. The Romanian theologian emphasizes the fact that:

“We consider the two kinds of knowledge do not contradict or exclude each other, but complement. In fact, the apophatic one is completed with the affirmative and the negative-rational one; it transfers the affirmative-and-negative-rational on its own level, but in turn it uses the terms of rational knowledge in both aspects (affirmative and negative), in the need to express itself even in a way far from being satisfactory”⁴.

At the foundation of the certain knowledge of God, both through cataphatic and apophatic knowledge, is the Divine Revelation or Discovery, since there could be no certainty of His knowledge without it. In both kinds of God’s knowledge, man stands in front of God as a Person, to whom he can address with his thoughts, requests, prayers. But only the divine revelation gives the certainty of the personal character of God’s knowledge to man. So, the knowledge of God as a Person, both in the cataphatic and in the apophatic knowledge, is mediated only by Revelation. Without Revelation in the act of knowledge, man would reach the conclusion there is a light but impersonal depth, to which man could not stand as in front of a person, in order to address himself directly, and to enter into a communion of love.

³ In his work: *De l’absence et de l’inconnaissance de Dieu*, Edition du Cerf, Paris, 1971, p. 87

⁴ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, EIBMBOR, București 1978, p. 115.

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“But it must also be remembered that supernatural revelation mediates the knowledge of God as a person in both these knowledges as a sure fact. Even apophatic knowledge, when devoid of supernatural revelation, can experience the unspoken presence of God as an impersonal depth. Therefore, we must not distinguish apophatic knowledge from affirmative-rational knowledge by the fact that the former would be a revealed supernatural knowledge, and the latter a purely natural knowledge. Both are based on supernatural revelation, when it is a knowledge of God as a person”⁵.

Only the supernatural revelation gives the believer the certainty that he is permanently before God as a person, whom he can know more and more and whom he can love more and more intensely. Father Stăniloae fully assimilates the vision of the Holy Fathers, with reference to the combination of the two kinds of knowledge: cataphatic and apophatic, in order to reach the experience of God’s mystery as love and personal communion. That is why, Father Stăniloae says, the Church Fathers often alternate the talk about affirmative-rational knowledge of God with that about apophatic knowledge. And, when the affirmative-rational knowledge has been penetrated by the apophatic one, they talk more about it, but without losing sight of the importance of the first. This coordinate of knowing God is of particular importance to the universe of theological knowledge in general and of God in particular.

At the foundation of any sure knowledge of God lies an unshakable foundation: the revelation of God Himself, so that man may come out of the ambiguities of knowledge in general, and of God in particular. Only by coming out of His transcendence, infinity and absoluteness did God extend to us a solid bridge of His communication and communion with men.

“If He had remained only in His infinity and absoluteness, God would not have fully revealed Himself. We would have remained in a permanent misunderstanding if our ideas about God were not simply products of our subjectivity. Appearing in history as an You external to each of us, we can meet Him in a concrete face, which protects us from any subjectivism. But if

⁵ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p.116

this historical face had been only temporal and finite and would not have included the divine infinity and would not have lasted forever, over time God would not have come close to us and would not have become accessible to us, as one who would not have completed His Revelation”⁶.

Therefore, God came out of His impenetrable light in order to provide a solid foundation to man’s faith in Him, but also for man to have access to a sure knowledge of Himself and to a sharing of His godly richness.

It is of utmost importance that God illuminates the meaning of His existence to man through His Revelation, the origin and finality of this human existence, which man could not have perceived only through the capacity of his mind or reason. Father Staniloae very accurately states that God reveals Himself objectively through

“consciousness and nature; but, subjectively, or because of the sin in them, promoted of their own accord, most oppose His evidence and the true meaning of their life, which is naturally revealed to us, or distort this evidence by not bringing the contribution of their will to its acceptance”⁷.

For this reason, God had to resort to another way of His revelation, through words, events and supernatural works, which do not have their origin in the unfolding of historical events and are not reduced to them. This other way of discovering God is the supernatural divine revelation. Through this way of coming out, God gave

“clarity and security to the natural faith, but also widened the knowledge of God and the eternal meaning of his existence. The supernatural acts of the direct Revelation of God give the

⁶ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Sibiu 1943, p. 48; see also: Vladimir LOSSKY, *Introducere în teologia ortodoxă*, transl. by Lidia și Remus Rus, Editura Enciclopedică, București 1993, p. 19: “God speaks to us through His Son; the incarnation completes Revelation. It discovers and constitutes Revelation itself. To think theologically does not mean to think about this Revelation, but to think with its help. ... Theology starts from a date: Revelation.”

⁷ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 28

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conscious creature the hope of rising above nature by the grace of God and by freedom.”⁸

The acts of supernatural revelation teach man to perceive the presence and work of God through nature too, which is also in connection with its Creator. “Through the words of the supernatural revelation man learned what he can understand and from the natural revelation enlightened by the supernatural one. By nature, the conscious creature sees God’s omnipotence, God’s goodness, God’s wisdom as Creator and Pronator, learning to be good, wise, and to strive toward final union with Him”.⁹

All that God has worked through His love and omnipotence has been done for man and for his closeness to his Creator, so that he too may share in the grace, love, and light of His knowledge.

III. The Rationality of Creation - the Second Premise of God’s Knowledge (after that of Revelation)

Man can also approach God through the created world, which he sees God’s wisdom, power, and love for the world in. We cannot imagine how man could approach God if we completely disregard the created world, which God the Creator imprinted a certain seal of His personal presence on. Endowed with an adequate capacity for his relationship with the created cosmos, man puts his own reason to work, in order to capture fragments from the light of God’s knowledge with its help. The great Orthodox theologians who were concerned with the gnoseological issue especially took the Church Fathers as guides on the way of knowing God: St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory the Theologian. When they scrutinized the universe of theological knowledge, they both focused on the world around them. On this way they were permanently guided by the enlightening words of the Holy Scripture. The Prophet Moses was understood as the forerunner of the faithful man, who seeks God through the things created in the universe.

For St. Gregory of Nyssa, both kinds of God’s knowledge are important. Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai to receive the Tablets of the

⁸ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 29

⁹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 29

Law is a prototype of one who dares to ascend the mountain of God's knowledge. This Holy Father considers that Moses

“came to see the tabernacle from above, after he had entered into the darkness of the conscience of God's incomprehensibility. This has led us to understand that once he has reached an experience of the incomprehensible mystery of God, he sees it either through things or outside them, or passes from one to another, to an ever-higher level. Things themselves become more and more transparent for the glory of God, Who shows himself through them, for there is no contradiction between the reasons of things and God”¹⁰.

According to Patristic thought, all created things have their reasons in the divine Logos or the Supreme Reason. The discovery and knowledge of the reasons in things represents a mission of man, who has the capacity and the tendency to continuously discover the reasons for things through the reason which he was endowed with at the creation. Through this, he approaches not only a more and more complete knowledge of creation, but, he also arrives at an ever more adequate knowledge of the Creator, who brought into existence all that exists, for man and for his spiritual growth. This happens as he identifies and knows more and more the reasons of created things. “Only in man does the rationality of indefinite virtualities of nature acquire a meaning, or reach more and more fully its fulfilment. Is it useful only for man, and not only for his biological existence, but also for his spiritual growth”¹¹.

As man seeks to know and understand the reasons for things, he draws ever closer to God, who is at the foundation of the existence of all creation.

This is all the more evident if we consider the first indications from the creation of man, when God told him to give names to those created. From here, one can see how God challenged man to put into practice the rational capacity which he was endowed with. Its purpose is to discover the meaning of the created, in correspondence with the purpose that God Himself intended for each creature. At the same time, by naming creatures according to their purpose in the whole of creation, man approached God,

¹⁰ Dumitru STĂNILĂ, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 125.

¹¹ Dumitru STĂNILĂ, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 345.

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the One Who thought them so, to be a foundation of existence for each other and all for man, the one created in God's image. Thus, man began to have the same thinking about created things that God had about them from the beginning. By this he stayed in communion with God and by means of things, which he gave the name to corresponding to their nature and purpose. To the extent that man maintains such a knowing relationship about God's creation, he always grows spiritually, through their ever more nuanced knowledge, and thereby comes powers of meaning, light, and spiritual enrichment through them, as those who are constantly in touch with God.

IV. The cataphatic and Apophatic Knowledge of God – a More and More Accentuated Progress on Communion with Him

Faithful to the Gospel and the luminous thinking of the Holy Fathers, the Orthodox theology has always held that there is a cataphatic, intellectual knowledge of God. There is also a deeper, more vivid and mysterious knowledge of Him, through what is commonly called apophatic, mysterious or unspoken knowledge. Father Stăniloae took over this way of perceiving God, the super-existing One, uniquely explaining what the two ways of knowing God consist of and why they are important in the life of the believer. The specificity of the cataphatic or intellectual knowledge of God is that through it, God is known as the creative and full of grace cause of the world. In the act of this knowledge, man puts the power of his mind or reason into practice, which he scrutinizes the depths of the meanings of creation through, like a telescope. The power of human reason is the result of God's creative act, which brought man from non-existence to existence and endowed him with His immortal image. Thus, man can think the deepest meanings of existence, discovering the beauty, harmony, order and dynamics of creation. Through his mind, man understands that such a world could not have appeared at random, and chaotically, but it is based on God's plan to manifest His divine love. He brought the world into existence, so that man, the created being closest to God, could rejoice and rise to the Creator, through the steps of creation. Man cannot give up this kind of God's knowledge, the cataphatic one, because through

this knowledge, man says something important about God, even if this knowledge is not entirely adequate or suitable to express the mystery of God's existence. In the act of this knowledge, the faithful who has the cataphatic knowledge of God is aware that everything we say about God, his attributes and works, is not entirely right for His being, therefore, he corrects everything said about God, by denying what is said. For example, if man says: God is good, just, loving, etc. he immediately realizes that He is otherwise good, right, and so on, stating that He is not good, just, loving, etc. as we humans are, but in a completely different way, to the superlative and even more than what the limited man can say about Him. But even through this act of denial of what is said about God, man remains in the sphere of the rational and intellectual. Thus, for a deeper and more vivid knowledge of God, Orthodox theology speaks of His apophatic knowledge. Through this knowledge of God, man is not only in the sphere of rational knowledge, but he delves much deeper into the infinity of divine love and light. This kind of God's knowledge is called apophatic knowledge¹², because through it, the believer has a certain experience of God, and this experience goes beyond the possibility of expressing it into words¹³. For this kind of God's knowledge, His attributes are not only intellectually thought out, but they are somewhat lived or experienced. This means the man who knows God through the experience sinks into the feeling of the divine attributes as in an infinite ocean, trying to express them. In fact, through this expression he realizes that everything he says about what he feels in apophatic knowledge is far from satisfactory. There will always be a remnant, which should be affirmed, but which is very difficult to get caught in the nets of human knowledge. In reality, man's statements on the act of apophatic knowledge are translated in terms or concepts of a cataphatic nature. "Through apophatic knowledge the human subject not only knows that God is infinite, omnipotent, etc. but also experiences him. But in this experience the infinity of God is more and is different than man can comprehend in an intellectual concept. Therefore, he corrects it by denying it"¹⁴. As man advances in a profound life of faith and love of God,

¹² See more about the meaning of the apophatic God's knowledge at Father Staniloae: Ștefan BUCHIU, *Cunoașterea apofatică în gândirea Părintelui Stăniloae*, Editura „Libra”, București, 2002.

¹³ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 113

¹⁴ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 114

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accompanied by the work of liberating passions, he has an increasingly adequate apophatic knowledge of God. He lives it especially in prayer, in the communion of the Holy Liturgy, in the loving openness towards his fellows, etc.

V. The Connection Between the Two Kinds of God's Knowledge and its Importance

In Orthodox theology, its most important representative, Father Staniloae noted that the two kinds of knowledge of God must not be opposed to each other; on the contrary, they must be considered together, in a necessary complementarity. Therefore, it was noted that

“the two kinds of knowledge do not contradict and exclude, but complement each other. Strictly speaking, the apophatic one is complemented by the affirmative and the negative-rational one; it transfers the affirmative- and negative-rational to a more proper level, but, in turn, it uses the terms of rational knowledge in both aspects (affirmative and negative), in the need to express itself even in a way far from being satisfactory. He who has a rational knowledge of God often complements it with the apophatic one, and he who has a more accentuated apophatic experience resorts to expressing it in terms of rational one”¹⁵.

The usefulness of both kinds of God's knowledge is maintained by Orthodox theology at all times in the Christian life. The knowledge of God is not only realized to quench the thirst for general human knowledge, but it has in view the sharing of the divine life by grace, which man feels the need to receive. The meaning of human life on earth cannot be fully fulfilled without it being connected to the Source of life and knowledge.

Regarding the connection between the two kinds of God's knowledge, it should also be emphasized that in order to reach apophatic knowledge, man must look at the beauty of God's creation with a clean and clear eye, and through this view he grasps the transcendent foundation of creation. The mysterious presence of God is evident in apophatic knowledge,

¹⁵ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 115

whether it takes place through the scrutiny of creation or apart from it. Cataphatic knowledge is always linked to creation or the world, which borrows the qualities it sees in creation in its expression.

Secondly, we can also remember the fact that through apophatic knowledge, man lives the personal character of God more directly and more accentuated. This means that, through apophatic knowledge, man does not connect with an impersonal essence or idea, but has an accentuated awareness of the fact that through apophatism he is in a living and direct connection with God as a Person. Of course, God's experience as a Person can also be perceived through cataphatic knowledge, but God's character of Person is better outlined through apophatic knowledge.

When man progresses in life by virtue, and first of all by theological virtues: faith, hope, and love, then the two kinds of God's knowledge are more united; in the sense that both kinds of knowledge are increasingly coordinated with each other, in the direct contemplation of God through the world, as its Creator and Pronator.

VI. The Paradox and Dynamics of Knowing God

Man's knowledge of God retains its paradoxical character. Advancing to the knowledge of God, man realizes this knowledge is in fact more of an ignorance; or in other words, we come to the knowledge that God is unknown in His being, that man reaches the darkness of the Most High's knowledge. And from this point of view, Moses remains a prototype of the paradoxical God's knowledge. St. Gregory of Nyssa describes this paradoxical way of knowing God.

“When, therefore, Moses grew in knowledge, he declared that he had seen God in the darkness, that is, that he had then come to know that what is divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension... The divine word at the beginning forbids that the Divine be likened to any of the things known by men. since every concept which comes from some comprehensible image by an approximate understanding and by guessing at the divine nature constitutes an idol of God and does not proclaim God”¹⁶.

¹⁶ Sf. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *De Vita Moysis*, PG 44, 377 C.

In other words, the knowledge of God understood in this way becomes a knowledge-ignorance. So, we know that God is above knowledge, that is, the faithful man gains the conviction that He is above the knowledge he acquires from the surrounding world about the things around him.

On the other hand, this kind of knowledge has a dynamic character. That is, as man reaches a certain stage of God's knowledge, even imperfect, he feels impelled to strive for an even deeper knowledge of Him, passing to a higher stage of His understanding. The knowing man must not fix on the images or knowledge acquired in connection with God, but he must always overcome them, through a personal effort to transcend the horizon of knowledge. Father Stăniloae rightly says that

“any meaning regarding God must have a fragility, a transparency, a lack of fixity, it must urge us to revoke it and to stimulate us towards another, but, in the same direction. If the meaning remains fixed in our minds, we border on God within its boundaries, or even forget God... In this case, that «meaning» becomes an «idol», meaning a false god. The meaning or the word used must always make God transparent, as incapable to embrace Him, as transcending any meaning, as highlighting one aspect, or another of His infinite wealth”¹⁷.

The infinite and eternal God draws man higher and higher to an ever deeper and more nuanced knowledge of Him. When man has reached a certain stage of God's knowledge, he feels attracted to a deeper and deeper knowledge of Him, having at the same time the unspeakable joy of sharing in the richness of God's life and love. As such, the human soul is carried by a “continuous thirst above and prays to God to see Him. The touched ones are always symbols or images of the archetype which it incessantly tends to increased knowledge. And the archetype is the Supreme Person. The basic symbols are the things of the world”¹⁸. Therefore, even when man is possessed by an apophatic knowledge, he always surpasses it, through a transcendence of things in the world, in order to be as direct and as close as possible to the Person of the One he wishes to know. In this act

¹⁷ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 126.

¹⁸ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 129.

of overcoming any meaning about God there is an unquenchable thirst to ascend higher and higher, step by step on the ladder of knowledge of the One whose immortal image man bears.

If man were to exclusively embrace the meaning of God, which he first reached, this meaning would be ossified in his thinking and would become a kind of idol, which would stop the rise of the human soul to an ever-living knowledge of God. This continuous advancement of man in the act of knowing God is closely linked to the spiritual progress of man, who frees himself from all that is limited by the things of the world, always going out to the infinite horizon of divine transcendence.

What must be kept in mind in this context is the dynamism of God's knowledge, which calls the man created by Him to strive higher and higher in the knowledge of the meanings of creation. Implicitly, it calls him to approach the mystery of the One Who cannot be expressed in words and meanings. Man remains with the consciousness that the mystery of God is the reality that he must assume through the act of knowledge, drawing man on ever higher gnoseological steps, in a spiral that has no upper end.

VII. Conclusions

1. The knowledge of God is the *sine qua non* condition of man's acquiring eternal life, and, implicitly, of salvation. "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17, 3).

2. In the act of knowing God, there are some fundamental elements that man must take into account: the mystery of God is the spiritual magnet which draws the human being higher and higher, drawing it in a continuous dynamic, to get closer and closer to His mystery. On the other hand, the dynamism of God's knowledge also depends on the ascetic effort that man must undertake during his life, being inspired by the theological virtues: faith, hope and love.

3. Orthodox theology has predominantly retained the two kinds of God's knowledge: cataphatic knowledge and apophatic knowledge, which Father Stăniloae emphasized the specificity of with great argumentative vigour.

4. In cataphatic knowledge the human subject considers the things created around him, which he sees the wisdom, omnipotence, goodness

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and love of God in. For, by creation, God not only is present through His creative energies, but He also speaks to man through created things.

5. God's creation is imprinted with an intelligent rationality, which is based on the Reason of the divine Logos, which all were created through (cf. John 1: 3). As such, by his reason, man comes to the conclusion that all existing things are based on the creative act of God and that the created ones are destined to be known by him, on the one hand, but at the same time, man has the purpose of ascending to God through those created, on the other hand.

6. But this rational, cataphatic knowledge of God is not certain, complete, and convincing, so man has the opportunity to resort to the second kind of God's knowledge, the apophatic, secret, or unspoken knowledge. Through this kind of knowledge man has the experience of the unspoken mystery of God. Through this knowledge, one reaches the gates of divine transcendence, but, beyond them, man can no longer enter, but can only contemplate the infinite One, who is transcendent to the world and eternal.

7. There is a close connection between the two kinds of knowing God. Man cannot do without any one of them, but he must explore both the best he can. The two kinds of God's knowledge are not in contradiction with each other, but they are complementary, leaning on each other. Using both, the believer ascends higher and higher to the mystery of the unspoken One, in a continuous dynamic, which will not find its end either in time or in eternity.