

KRZYSZTOF LEŚNIEWSKI

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE APOPHATIC DIMENSION OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY TO CONTEMPORARY ECUMENISM

INTRODUCTION: AN ATTEMPT TO DEFINE OF APOPHATICISM

Apophaticism is a phenomenon in the field of theology, which is very difficult to define in a precise way. This specific tendency underlines the “negative way” to God (the *via negativa*) and the *radical incomprehensibility of God*. Some Orthodox scholars prefer to speak of the apophatic *principle* in theology than of apophatic theology as such. There is a necessity to consider apophaticism in its wide mystical context¹

One can distinguish some important methods used in apophatic theology: negation, antinomy (contradiction in terms), paradox, experience, mystical contemplation. For all these methods the basic premise is the assumption that the essence of God and the mysteries of faith are impossible to know in a purely rational way²

Apophaticism departs from a conviction of the ontological and epistemological “absolute otherness” of God. The Being of God is completely different from non-divine things. So “knowledge” of God cannot be called “knowledge” in the ordinary sense. Knowing God is possible through a kind of “ignorance” or “unknowing” This “otherness” of God and “unknowing”

Dr Krzysztof LEŚNIEWSKI – Assistant Professor at the Ecumenical Institute of the Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondance: ul. Ochotnicza 5/5, 20-012 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: lesni@kul.lublin.pl.

¹ Cf. T. S a d l e r. *Apophaticism and Early Christian Theology*. “Phronema” 7:1992 p. 13.

² Cf. W H r y n i e w i c z. *Apofatyczna teologia*. In: *Encyklopedia Katolicka [Catholic Encyclopaedia]*. Vol. 1. Lublin 1973 col. 745.

Him by human beings are to be understood in the most *positive* manner. Genuine apophaticism grants to mystery an absolute ontological relevance³

I. THE APOPHATIC CHARACTER OF GOD

God dwells “in inaccessible light, whom no human being has seen or is able to see” (1 Tim. 6:16) teaches the Apostle Paul. The problem of the knowledge of God has been very important since the very beginning of Christianity. Christians know God to the extent that He Himself has revealed it to human beings. It is necessary to distinguish between the *comprehension* of God, which in essence is impossible and the *knowledge*, of which Paul the Apostle says “Now we see only reflections in a mirror, mere riddles” (1 Cor 13:12)⁴

The divine Personal reality, as Dumitru Staniloae underlines, is the apophatic reality *par excellence*. God cannot be defined because of His “superexistentiality”, existence surpassing every created existence. This means that existence is not given to God from without. God Himself is not only the source of existence but He is the supreme personal reality. God is not defined or named except through personal pronouns. As we remember, to Moses’ question about God’s name, He answered, “I am the one who is” (Ex 3: 14). As somebody who is truly existent God is the supreme personal reality. And as superexistent He is totally apophatic⁵

“*That* there is a God is clear; but *what* He is by essence and nature, this is altogether beyond our comprehension and knowledge”⁶ said John of Damascus. The conviction that God’s essence remains unapproachable, but His energies come down to us, is basic in the Orthodox doctrine of God. It safeguards both the divine transcendence and divine immanence⁷. In the Christian experience of God these two aspects, namely the sense of *remoteness* and that of the *nearness* of the Divine are closely linked and complete one another.

³ Cf. S a d l e r, op. cit. pp. 12-14.

⁴ Cf. M. P o m a z a n s k y, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. Transl. and ed. by H. Rose. Platina, Ca. 1983 p. 51.

⁵ Cf. D. S t a n i l o a e, *The Experience of God*. Transl. and ed. by I. Ionita and R. Barringer. Brookline, Mass. 1994 pp. 134-135.

⁶ S t J o h n of D a m a s c u s, *On the Orthodox Faith* I 4. PG 94, 797 B.

⁷ T W a r e, *The Orthodox Church*. London 1963 p. 217

er⁸ They constitute a platform of personal meeting with God and a basis of acquiring knowledge of Him.

II. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

One can distinguish two kinds of Christian knowledge about God: positive (cataphatic) and negative (apophatic) theology.

1. *Cataphatic knowledge of God*

We know God through rational knowledge. That kind of knowledge the Fathers of the Church called cataphatic. Affirmative rational knowledge has connections with the world. It is possible to deduce that God is the creating and sustaining cause of the world through cataphatic knowledge. In the course of rational knowledge human beings realise that God's infinity is greater and different from what they are able to conceive with their intellectual abilities. Cataphatic knowledge only to some extent is helpful in the process of knowing God because it does not make use of the entire content of supernatural revelation⁹ St Gregory of Nazianzos explains that rational knowledge of God is based on the things of the world:

Now our very eyes and the law of nature teach us that God exists and that he is the efficient and maintaining cause of all things: our eyes, because they fall on visible objects, and see them in beautiful stability and progress, immovably moving and revolving, if I may so say: natural law, because through these visible things and their order it reasons back to their author. For how could this universe have come into being or been put together unless God had called it into existence, and held it together?¹⁰

⁸ N. A r s e n i e v. *Transcendence and Immanence of God*. In: *Revelation of Life Eternal. An Introduction to the Christian Message*. Crestwood, NY 1982 p. 27

⁹ Cf. S t a n i l o a e. *The Experience of God* pp. 95-97

¹⁰ S t G r e g o r y o f N a z i a n z o s. *Oratio XXVIII* 6. PG 36, 32C (English translation: E. R. H a r d y and C. R i c h a r d s o n. *Christology of the Later Fathers*. Philadelphia 1954 p. 139).

In St Gregory's opinion cataphatic theology leads to some knowledge of God but in an imperfect way. This is true because whatever one can say about God does not show forth His nature but the things that relate to His nature. God is above all existing things, and even above existence itself. The function of cataphatic theology, also known as the theology of the 'divine names' is to be a ladder of manifestation of God in creation (theophany). As such it is a way which comes down towards human beings. God reveals Himself as love, goodness, wisdom. The highest names express but do not exhaust the divine essence. The main source of this kind of theology is Holy Scripture. The ladder of cataphatic theology disclosing the divine names is a series of steps which the soul can climb to contemplation. These images or ideas are very helpful in guiding to contemplation that transcends all understanding¹¹

There are several names of God in Holy Scripture by which we can address Him. Thus, God is called "Spirit", "Love", "Light" These names are given to us as a spiritual legacy in order to some extent to articulate theologically and to penetrate into the inconceivable mystery of our God, which surpasses human understanding. But we must remember that God gave Himself a name. This name is "He Who is" This name summarises the plenitude of existence, because it means He who exists of Himself, who exists before all time, who exists without beginning and end, who exists eternally, always the same and unchanging¹² St John Chrysostom in his Divine Liturgy calls God "ever-existing and eternally the same" The name of God "He Who is" to some degree points out the name of the Divine essence. And at this stage we enter the apophatic knowledge of God.

2. Apophatic knowledge of God

Intellectual efforts of the mind fail to confront the reality which is beyond the conceivable. This failure of human understanding reveals the gap between our mind and the reality it wishes to attain. It gives an experience of ignorance what God is in His inaccessible essence. Vladimir Lossky indicates:

¹¹ Cf. V L o s s k y. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, NY 1976 pp. 23-40.

¹² Cf. A. S. F r a n g o p o u l o s. *Our Orthodox Christian Faith. A Handbook of Popular Dogmatics*. Athens 1993 pp. 53-56.

“The negative way of the knowledge of God is an ascendant undertaking of the mind that progressively eliminates all positive attributes of the object it wishes to attain, in order to culminate finally in a kind of apprehension by supreme ignorance of Him who cannot be an object of knowledge”¹³

As it is widely known, the Old Testament contains a prohibition against the use of any painted or carved images of God. This situation was completely changed when God became man. The divine Person assumed human nature. The incarnation of the Word made possible iconography. But it must be underlined that in order to contemplate the Incarnate God it became necessary to purify the senses¹⁴

There are many connections between Christian apophasis and speculations of Middle and Neo-Platonism, but the apophatic attitude has deeper roots¹⁵. It is implied in the very essence of the Christian revelation. The transcendent God limited Himself and became immanent in the world. But He did not cease to be transcendent. He has remained ontologically independent of all created beings¹⁶

Vladimir Lossky gives much insight into the patristic writings closely related to the knowledge of God in his famous book *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (originally published in French in 1944). He stresses that theology is not a theoretical kind of knowledge. Its main purpose is to help in acquiring of union with God, which means deification – *theosis*. Lossky made an attempt to show that apophatic theology interpenetrates all of the fundamental doctrines of the Greek Fathers of the Church¹⁷

¹³ V L o s s k y. *Apophasis and Trinitarian Theology*. In: *In the Image and Likeness of God*. Ed. by J. H. Erickson and Th. E. Bird. Crestwood, NY 1985 p. 13.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 14.

¹⁵ Platonism is a very intellectual philosophical tradition. In Plato we discover the divinization of intellect and intellectualization of the divine. Every thought must be justified by reason. It is possible to attain God as the highest reality only through the highest exercise of reason. The apophatic theology of the first centuries of Christianity springs out of Alexandrian Platonism, but it was essentially a reaction against this. The early Christian apophatic theologians like St Gregory of Nyssa or Pseudo-Dionysius, had Platonist background but one cannot consider them as Platonists. Cf. S a d l e r. *Apophaticism and Early Christianity* pp. 15-16.

¹⁶ Cf. V L o s s k y. *Apophasis and Trinitarian Theology* pp. 14-15.

¹⁷ N. O. L o s s k y. *History of Russian Philosophy*. New York 1969 pp. 395.

3. *Mystical Contemplation of God*

How does one acquire true knowledge of God? It is not enough to know Him through rational knowledge. We need to go into the realm of “unknowing” because only beyond the limits of human capacity to understand and to rationalise, can the communion with Another whose “otherness” is irreducible, be possible. Human beings who surpass the frontiers of their intellect is capable of meeting the living and loving God, who “goes out” of Himself and leaves His inaccessible transcendence. That meeting is the meeting in love with the personal God who died on a cross in order to save us. Therefore the unknowing is not just a kind of negative theology, it is ascending towards the Holy Trinity¹⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite expressed the mystery of God by means of a specific apophatic algebra:

God is [...] is known in all things and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing. Of him there is conception, reason, understanding, touch, perception, opinion, imagination, name and many other things. On the other hand he cannot be understood, words cannot contain him, and no name can lay hold of him. He is not one of the things that are and he cannot be known in any of them. He is all things and all things and he is no thing among things. He is known to all from all things and he is known to no one from anything. This is the sort of language we must use about God, for he is praised from all things according to their proportion to him as their Cause. But again, the most divine knowledge of God, that which comes through unknowing, is achieved in a union far beyond mind, when mind turns away from all things, even from itself, and when it is made one with the dazzling rays, being then and there enlightened by the inscrutable depth of Wisdom. Still, as I have said already, we must learn about Wisdom from all things.¹⁹

The Apophatic disposition helps in the process of gradual movement from speculation to contemplation, from knowledge to experience. It creates new horizons of human understanding which reach up to the mysteries of God. The greatest mystery, the “supreme theophany” was the incarnation of the Word. It was the perfect manifestation of God in the world, which retains for

¹⁸ Cf. O. C l é m e n t. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism. Text and Commentary* London 1994 pp. 230-231

¹⁹ P s e u d o D i o n y s i u s. *The Divine Names* 7, 3. PG 3, 872 AB (English translation: C. Luibheid in: P s e u d o D i o n y s i u s. *The Complete Works*. New York–Mahwah 1987 pp. 108-109).

mankind its apophatic character²⁰ Speaking of the manifestation of the divinity in the Incarnate Word during the Transfiguration, St John Damascene had in mind the doctrine of energies: the divine and human within the God-Man. The body of Christ was never alien to the divine glory. One can ask what happened at the Transfiguration? Did Christ become what he had not been before? No! He appeared to his disciples *as he was*. He did this by opening their eyes, by giving sight to those who were blind²¹ The apostles received the faculty of contemplating the person of Christ radiating the eternal glory, perceiving the energy of the divine essence. Of course, the divine essence always remains inaccessible in itself. Only the eternal glory of God penetrates created nature and communicates to it. Thanks to the hypostatic union humanity of Christ participates in the divine glory, and makes possible for us to see God²² That fact is of a great importance for the mystical contemplation of God.

On the other hand, the transcendent God remains unknown to human beings, because God Himself is unknown by His essence:

The monks know that the essence of God transcends the fact of being inaccessible to the senses, since God is not only above all created things, but even beyond Godhead. The excellence of Him Who surpasses all things is not only beyond all affirmation, but also beyond all negation; it exceeds all excellence that is attainable by the mind. This hypostatic light seen spiritually by the saints, they know by experience to exist, as they tell us, and to exist not symbolically only, as do manifestations produced by fortuitous events; but it is an illumination immaterial and divine, a grace invisibly seen and ignorantly known. *What* it is, they do not pretend to know.²³

True contemplation is possible by the grace of God. It is a union between God and man, ultimately it is divinisation. True vision comes from above as a wonderful gift of God. Contemplation, as a positive experience, does not

²⁰ Cf. V L o s s k y. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* pp. 39-41.

²¹ Cf. St J o h n D a m a s c e n e. *The Homily on the Transfiguration*. PG 96, 564. What kind of light did the apostles see on Mount Tabor? It was not a created, meteorological phenomenon. It was a light eternal, infinite and existing outside of created light belonging by nature to God. This light was seen in the theophanies of the Old Testament as the glory of God.

²² V L o s s k y. *The Vision of God*. Crestwood, NY 1983 pp. 139-140.

²³ St G r e g o r y P a l a m a s. *The Triads II*, iii: 8 (Ed. with an Introduction by J. Meyendorff. Transl. by N. Gendle, New York-Ramsey-Toronto 1983 p. 57).

express itself in terms of cataphatic theology, because it is an encounter with the transcendent God. We know from the Holy Bible that “no man has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known” (John 1: 18). That fundamental assumption, which means that revelation always remains completely free and sovereign act of God, is essential for the understanding of knowledge of Him. This kind of knowledge is possible through grace and is subject to the will of God²⁴

III. IMPLICATIONS OF APOPHATICISM FOR ECUMENISM TODAY

All that has been stated so far is a necessary introduction for a reflection on some particular fields within theology where the apophatic approach might be helpful. It is obvious for Christian Churches that there have been many differences in doctrine, stemming from various conditions of development – mental, philosophical, historical, cultural, spiritual. Our theological languages are not the same. We have to come back to certain basic ideas and notions of primitive Christianity in order to communicate with each other properly. Yet on the other hand we need to be faithful to the theological traditions of our Churches. It is not easy to elaborate a kind of ecumenical language for communication among Christians coming from the East and the West. I would dare to think that it could be very helpful for the present ecumenical relations to use more often an apophatic principle in theology for the better communication among Christians from different ecclesiological traditions. This way we can avoid many misunderstandings dividing our Churches. Let me give some examples of the apophatic sensibility of the Orthodox Church, which can serve in the wider ecumenical context.

1. There was great wisdom in the Church Fathers' abstention from treating dogmas as “fixed points” This attitude of refusal to exhaust the knowledge of the truth in its formulation is characteristic of the Orthodox Church. Apophaticism is, first of all, an attitude of mind, which refuses to form abstract and purely intellectual concepts about God. It helps to remember that theology should be an existential knowledge. “It is a great thing to speak of

²⁴ Cf. J. M e y e n d o r f f. *A Study of Gregory Palamas*. Leighton Buzzards, Beds 1964 p. 207-209.

God, says St Gregory Nazianzen, but still better to purify oneself for God”²⁵ A theologian to be a true theologian must follow the path of union with God. Therefore deification should be the way we come to know God, and apophaticism can serve as “a criterion – the sure sign of an attitude of mind conformed to truth. In this sense all true theology is fundamentally apophatic”²⁶ An existential dimension of apophaticism has been already stressed by St Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionisius. Apophaticism is not merely an assertion of the limits of human abstractive power; it is rather something positive. It is an awareness of the positivity of mystery, the “disclosive” power of mystery for the human being who is sufficiently “open” to respond to this. It implies the possibility of dwelling on earth in a mode that is responsive to the power of mystery, a possibility that has been recognised in many times and places, often outside the context of institutionalized religions²⁷

2. It is a characteristic of the Orthodox Church to use the language of poetry and images for the interpretation of dogmas rather than the language of conventional logic and schematic concepts. Such attitude is a good example of using the apophatic principle in theology.

3. The Orthodox Church brings to the ecumenical field the element of the figurative language. When one reads the Fathers of the Church can often notice a contradiction of concepts in their writings. The reason for this is very simple. Our knowledge of God is knowledge in ignorance and an attempt to participate in what cannot be shared. Truth is identified with immediate, personal experience. Therefore the whole man, not only his mind, should be empirically involved in the process of theological learning. Theology in this sense should be understood as “form of the formless, shaping of the shapeless things, symbols of the non-symbolic, forms of things without form”²⁸

²⁵ St Gregory of Nazianos. *Oratio XXXII* 12. PG 36, 188 C.

²⁶ V L o s s k y. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* p. 39.

²⁷ S a d l e r. *Apophaticism and Early Christian Theology* pp. 21-22

²⁸ Ch. Y a n n a r a s. *Elements of Faith. An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*. Transl. by K. Schram. Edinburgh 1991 p. 18

4. The Divine Liturgy celebrated in the Orthodox Church has preserved its apophatic character. I will recall a prayer at the Anaphora: "It is meet and right to sing of Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks to Thee, to worship Thee. For Thou art God ineffable, incomprehensible, invisible, inconceivable; Thou art from everlasting and art ever the same" "What a wonderful hymn of apophatic theology! The human being blesses, praises, thanks and worships God, Who surpasses him on all levels of understanding. From the ecumenical point of view this is a very good practical lesson. It helps to overcome the temptation of making God conceivable, expressible, visible, perceptible with worldly senses. It preserves from worshipping our images of God as our idols. Thanks to apophatic character of the Eucharist, as celebrated in the Orthodox Church, Christians can raise themselves up towards that Image "who is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Archimandrite Vasileios in a very concise way shows that all things liturgically transfigured in Orthodoxy show the same apophatic character of freedom: "The *inexpressible* is manifested in its *theology*, the *invisible* in the *icon*, and the *incomprehensible* in *holiness*."²⁹

5. Inseparably connected with the Divine Liturgy and other services of the Church is liturgical *Catechesis*. We cannot forget that theology in the first eight centuries of the Church's existence was based on Liturgy. It is during the Liturgy and other services of the Church that the announcement and transmission of saving truths take place. That teaching of the Church throughout history has assumed a special form. Theology of this kind becomes a poem and a song. Its beauty has been more understandable and convincing for the faithful than thought expressed by syllogistic inferences. The language of poetry and parables seems to be more appropriate for proclaiming the Good News, than any kind rational system of philosophy. God's truth in order to preserve its infinite and divine character needs apophatic categories.

6. A very important issue for the Orthodox Church is that of understanding the "dogmas of the faith" As we all know, during the first three centuries, the Church had not elaborated theoretical formulations of dogmas which defined its faith. What was then essential in the beginning of Christianity?

²⁹ Archimandrite Vasileios of Stavronikita. *Hymn of Entry. Liturgy and Life in The Orthodox Church*. Transl. from the Greek by E. Briere. Crestwood, NY 1984 p. 64.

The answer is simple. It was the empirical experience of the saving truth by the faithful, the members of the Body of Christ. The Church lived its truth directly and generally, without theoretical speculations. Evidently, in the first decades of Christianity, a language necessary for the expression of that ecclesial experience: images, terms, and expressions, was formed. It was the language of the Gospels and other texts of the New Testament. Christos Yannaras has pointed out that “this language had not been driven to theoretical schematisation and axiomatic formulations. It merely expressed and marked out that experiential certainty”³⁰ In the further development of Christian doctrine the Platonic understanding of truth was recovered, but its epistemological and ontological claims were denied. Christian apophaticism rejected the Greek point of view on truth, emphasising that what we know about being – about creation, that is – must not be ontologically identified with God. God is “beyond affirmation and negation” (Maximus the Confessor). Therefore truth lies beyond the choice between affirmation and negation. In order to understand what the meaning of apophaticism has been in the development of Christianity one has to take into careful consideration two ideas, namely the idea of *ekstasis* (Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and St Maximus the Confessor) and the idea of the distinction between the *essence* and *energy* in God (St Maximus the Confessor)³¹ The idea of *ekstasis* has a direct relation to the fact that God is love and that He creates an immanent relationship of love outside Himself. That love gives rise to otherness of being who is able to respond and return to its original cause. God’s love is not a source of emanation in the neoplatonic sense³² St Maximus relates the idea of *ekstasis* not only to cosmology, as Pseudo-Dionysius did, but to the Trinitarian Being of God³³, because all Trinitarian theology to St

³⁰ Y a n n a r a s. *Elements of Faith* p. 15.

³¹ Cf. J. D. Z i z i o u l a s. *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*. London 1985 pp. 89-91.

³² P s e u d o D i o n y s i u s, *The Divine Names* 4, 14: “Why is it, however, that theologians sometimes refer to God as Yearning and Love and sometimes as the yearned-for and the Beloved? One the one hand he causes, produces, and generates what is being referred to, and on the other hand, he is the thing itself. He is stirred by it and he stirs it. He is moved to it and he moves it. So they call him the beloved and the yearned-for since he is beautiful and good, and, again, they call him yearning and love because he is the power moving and lifting all things up to himself [...]” (PG 3, 712 C; English translation p. 82).

³³ Maximus emphasises that love (charity) leads human being to true knowledge and illumination. Human knowledge of God is always imperfect, because what God is in Himself remains incomprehensible to man. Man’s pure desire in perfect charity, what is a kind of

Maximus is an integral part of negative theology³⁴ The idea of distinction between *essence* and *energy* in God can be very helpful to show the relationship between God and world as ontological otherness, which cannot be bridged by *essence* or nature, but only by love³⁵ The great contribution of the Fathers of the Church, as John Zizioulas rightly states, was removing the question of truth and knowledge from the field of theories and ontology in Greek philosophy and putting it within the domain of love and communion. The only way of reconciliation between truth and ontology is possible through the identification of truth and communion³⁶

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Thus far I have pointed out just some examples of the apophatic sensibility of the Orthodox Church. They show the wisdom of our Sister Church to preserve the doctrine, built by the Fathers of the Church, because it did not lose its vital power. Apophaticism as it exists in Orthodox theology would seem to be very important in our attempts to correct some tendencies towards exclusivity in the Christian formation of doctrines. It helps us to look for common categories in our ecumenically-minded theological research. We can learn from the Orthodox theologians that one can go towards the future if, at the same time, one does not ignore the past. Returning to our common past, to "the mind of the Holy Fathers" is one of the ways leading to the overcoming the present difficulties and problems of understanding and communication among Christians from different denominations, different theologi-

ekstasis (going outside or beyond himself), can unite man fully with God. Cf. L. Thunberg. *Man and the Cosmos. The Vision of St Maximus The Confessor*. Crestwood, NY 1985 p. 107.

³⁴ Cf. idem. *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*. Second Ed. Chicago and La Salle, Ill. 1995 pp. 414-415.

³⁵ J. Zizioulas (*Being as Communion* p. 91 footnote 75) asserts that the roots of the distinction between essence and energy in God can be found in St Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oratio XXXVIII* 7). O. Clément (*The Roots of Christian Mysticism* p. 239) gives more examples of that fundamental distinction: St Gregory of Nyssa (*Homilies on Beatitudes* 6), St Basil of Caesarea (*Letter 234*), St Maximus the Confessor quoted by Euthemius Zygabenus (*Dogmatic Panoply* 3), St Cyril of Alexandria (*Commentary on the Gospel John* 16, 25; *On the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity* VI). The final formulation of it was effected by St Gregory Palamas. Cf. J. Meyendorff. *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*. Crestwood, NY 1982 pp. 191-194.

³⁶ Cf. Zizioulas. *Being as Communion* p. 92.

cal and spiritual traditions. We should not forget that the Fathers of the Church were aware of the radical discrepancy between God and humanity and the limitations of our capabilities in knowing God. Our task is to articulate in the mind (or spirit) of the Fathers, with their courage and boldness. I hope that among the treasures of the Church we can find many important ideas and indications as to how to avoid exclusivity in our doctrinal thinking. I am convinced that an apophatic awareness could protect us from objectifying God and divinising the doctrines elaborated in different Christian Churches.

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WARTOŚĆ APOFATYCZNEGO WYMIARU TEOLOGII PRAWOSŁAWNEJ DLA WSPÓŁCZESNEGO EKUMENIZMU

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Jedną z cech charakterystycznych dla teologii prawosławnej jest apofatyzm. Próbę przybliżenia, czym on jest i z czego wynika, autor podjął we wstępie niniejszego artykułu. Następnie sam Bóg został ukazany na podstawie świadectwa biblijnego jako źródło wszelkiego istnienia i najdoskonalsza rzeczywistość osobowa. Było to niezbędne wprowadzenie do przedstawienia dwóch rodzajów wiedzy o Bogu: katafatycznej (racjonalnej, mówiącej w sposób twierdzący, kim jest Bóg) i apofatycznej (negatywnej, mówiącej o Bogu w przeczeniach). Wiedza o charakterze apofatycznym jest pomocna w procesie stopniowego przechodzenia od spekulacji do kontemplacji, od wiedzy o Bogu do egzystencjalnego doświadczenia misterium Boga.

W zasadniczej części artykułu wskazano konkretne przykłady prawosławnego apofatyizmu dla współczesnych wysiłków chrześcijan i Kościołów w dążeniu do jedności. Największą wartością apofatyizmu jest to, że chroni przed abstrakcyjnymi i czysto intelektualnymi koncepcjami Boga, wskazując na egzystencjalny charakter chrześcijańskiej teologii. Potwierdza to fakt, że dogmaty są wyrażone bardziej językiem poezji i obrazów niż czysto logicznymi pojęciami, a nasza wiedza o Bogu jest doświadczeniem swoistej niewiedzy i próbą partycypacji w rzeczywistości, której się nie da ogarnąć. Prawosławni podkreślają apofatyczny charakter Boskiej Liturgii. Ich zdaniem język poezji i przypowieści jest bardziej właściwy do głoszenia Słowa Bożego niż jakikolwiek system racjonalnej filozofii. Boża prawda, aby zachować swój boski charakter, potrzebuje kategorii apofatycznych.

W zakończeniu autor przywołuje dwie idee, które miały decydujący wpływ na rozumienie apofatyizmu w rozwoju chrześcijaństwa, a mianowicie ideę *ekstasis* i rozróżnienie na istotę i energię w Bogu. Wielkim wkładem Ojców Kościoła było potraktowanie zagadnienia prawdy i wiedzy w oderwaniu od teorii i ontologii filozofii greckiej i powiązanie go z miłością i wspólnotą (gr. *koinonia*).

Streścił Krzysztof Leśniewski

Słowa kluczowe: apofatyzm, poznanie Boga, kontemplacja Boga, teologia prawosławna, ekumenizm.

Key words: apophaticism, knowledge of God, contemplation of God, Orthodox theology, ecumenism.