

## **Knowing The Unknowable, Reaching The Unreachable The Apophatic Theology of Gregory of Nyssa<sup>2</sup>.**

### **Poznanie Niepoznawalnego, uchwycenie Nieuchwytnego. Apopatyczna teologia Grzegorza z Nyssy**

**Key words:** Gregory of Nyssa, apokatastasis, apophatism, apophatic theology, diastema, Church Fathers, Cappadocian Fathers, Christian ontology, Christian anthropology

**Słowa kluczowe:** Grzegorz z Nyssy, apokatastaza, apofatyzm, teologia apofatyczna, diastema, Ojcowie Kościoła, Ojcowie Kapadocy, chrześcijańska ontologia, chrześcijańska antropologia

#### **Abstract**

The article analyses the *apophatic* theology of Gregory of Nyssa. The thought system of Gregory Nyssen in its soteriological and ontological structure resides on a twofold division between God – uncreated intellectual being and intellectual creation. Its dynamic is determined on the one hand

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<sup>2</sup> In a broader philosophical setting, I discuss the problem of apophatism of Gregory of Nyssa in my monograph *A Bóg będzie wszystkim we wszystkim. Apokatastaza Grzegorza z Nyssy (And God will be All in All. Apokatastasis of Gregory of Nyssa)* (Szczerba 2008, 215-230). In the Polish context, the concept of apophatic theology has been researched i.a. within the project “Niepoznawalność Boga jako element polemiki antyariańskiej – problematyka ontologiczna i epistemologiczna” directed by Professor Tomasz Stępień. [https://projekty.ncn.gov.pl/index.php?projekt\\_id=239217](https://projekty.ncn.gov.pl/index.php?projekt_id=239217) (access 20.05.2023).

(*soteriological* perspective) by the goodness of God and freedom of creation and on the other hand (*ontological* perspective) by different ontological statuses of the Creator and creation. Developing this scheme, Gregory of Nyssa underlines the fact that God in his nature, as the absolute foundation of created reality, being beyond time and space, is absolutely unknowable to human minds and impossible to describe in human *diastematic* language. Created beings can only adequately understand God's deeds (*energeia*) or describe him in negative terms – what he is not. Nothing properly reveals God's nature (*ousia, physis*) to mankind. Such aspects as Scripture, God's names, the incarnation of Logos, the fact that humans are created in God's image or even mystical experiences refer at best to the *energeiai* of the Creator or his total incomprehensibility for creation. The concept of *diastema*, total division between created and uncreated reality underlines the consequent *apophatic* theology of Gregory of Nyssa. The concept of *metousia* provides a balance to the idea of *diastema*, showing the dependence of creation on the Creator, however it does not reveal the nature of God as such to intellectual beings.

### Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje 'apofatyczny' wymiar teologii Grzegorza z Nyssy. System myślowy Nysseńczyka w jego soteriologicznym i ontologicznym aspekcie opiera się na swoistym podziale między Bogiem rozumianym jako niestworzona natura rozumna a stworzeniem rozumnym. Dynamika systemu zdefiniowana jest z jednej strony – w perspektywie soteriologicznej – przez dobroć czy miłość Boga oraz wolność stworzenia, a z drugiej – w perspektywie ontologicznej – różnym statusem ontycznym Stwórcy i stworzenia. Rozwijając ten schemat, Grzegorz z Nyssy podkreśla fakt, że Bóg w swej naturze, jako ostateczne źródło rzeczywistości stworzonej istniejące poza czasem i przestrzenią, jest całkowicie niepoznawalny dla ludzkiego rozumu i niemożliwy do ujęcia w ludzkim, doczesnym języku. Stworzone byty mogą co najwyżej ogarnąć swoim umysłem boskie działania (*energeia*) albo opisać Boga negatywnie, czym nie jest. Nic nie objawia właściwie natury (*physis, ousia*) Boga ludziom. Takie aspekty objawienia jak Pismo Święte, Boże imiona, wcielenie Logosu, stworzenie człowieka na obraz Boga czy nawet doświadczenia mistyczne, co najwyżej odnoszą się do *energeiai* Stwórcy, w żaden sposób jednak nie przełamują totalnej niepoznawalności Boga dla stworzenia. Koncepcja *diastemy*, radykalnego podziału między stworzoną

i niestworzoną rzeczywistością podkreśla konsekwentną teologię ‘apofatyczną’ Grzegorza z Nyssy. Koncepcja uczestnictw (*metousia*) w pewien sposób równoważy *diastemę*, wskazując na fundamentalną zależność stworzenia od Stwórcy, tym niemniej nie stanowi ona sposobu objawienia natury Boga dla rozumnych stworzeń.

The thought system of Gregory of Nyssa, the Cappadocian Father of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, in its soteriological perspective, can be presented as a “bipolar” structure: God – intellectual beings. Its dynamics is determined on the one hand by God’s love or goodness and on the other hand by the freedom of creation. A good God creates all intellectual beings. In his goodness he leads them and keeps them alive. After their fall, God strives to recreate the original state of creation, through the all-encompassing salvation plan. Freedom, on the other hand, lies at the basis of the nature of intellectual beings, especially humans, as the fundamental aspect of their image of God. Free choice determines the fall of intellectual beings, their subsequent movement away from God and further depravation. Also, based on free choice, the whole human race will finally turn away from evil to God and will return to the primal state of being. Thus, finally “God will be all in all”, *apocatastasis ton panton* will mark the final reality, the end will be a repetition of the beginning (I Cor 15, 28):

In his depiction of the ontological status of beings, as the objective basis for soteriology, Gregory of Nyssa preserves the dichotomy of his thought system. He emphasizes the main caesura between created and uncreated reality. In the context of this fundamental division, Gregory of Nyssa distinguishes between (1) uncreated intellectual nature – God, (2) created intellectual nature – noetic beings, and (3) created sensual nature – earthly beings (Balas 1993, 265; Weiswurm 1952, 37). From this perspective, God is uncreated and eternal, without beginning or end. Created beings are finite in numbers, comprehensible, time and space limited. Intellectual beings have a beginning, but no end (*aion*). Sensual beings are limited at both ends, have a beginning but also an end

to their existence (Gersh 1978, 72. 212; Plass 1977, 1-2). Human beings occupy the intermediate position in this structure. They essentially belong to the intellectual nature, but in their existence are attached to earthly reality (*Oratio Catechetica Magna* 6, hereinafter abbreviated as *Or. Cat.*, PG 45, 25).

### 1. Apophatism of Gregory of Nyssa

In the dualistic thought system of Gregory of Nyssa, the absolute foundation of all being is God, who is understood – in accordance with the developing Christian orthodoxy – in trinitarian terms as one *ousia* and three *hypostaseis* (*Ad Ablabium. Quod non sint tres dei*, hereinafter abbreviated as *Abl*, PG 45, 117a; *Contra Eunomium*, hereinafter abbreviated as *CE*, I, 268-275, PG 45, 333-336). As the Absolute, the highest Being, God is the non-determined Creator of all things, who has being in “himself”. God is not limited by time or space, is “I am, who I am”, through whom all other beings have their existence. Gregory of Nyssa, in his understanding of *theologia prima*, similarly to Origen, Clemens or Philo of Alexandria advocates the apophatic perspective on the concept of God. The assumptions that the Creator exists beyond all possible categories of time and space and that God is infinite, led Gregory to the conviction that God is also unknowable.

This conviction constitutes the basis and premise for subsequent considerations about God in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa. The Biblical phrase “No one has ever seen God” (Jn 1, 18; *De vita Moysis*, hereinafter abbreviated as *Moys*, SCh II, 162-169) he understands as a reference to the transcendent nature (*physis, ousia*) of God, which exceeds any cognitive capabilities of creation. The nature of God cannot be captured by any linguistic formulas, since languages have – according to Gregory – a conventional character, bound to the spatiotemporal context of the existence of human beings. “We have learned, following the instructions of the Scriptures, that the nature [of God] is impossible to be adequately

named or expressed. We say that every designation, whether invented by humankind or passed on by the Scripture, is the effect of considerations about the divine nature, not the notion of the [divine] nature per se” (*Abl*, GNO III/1, 42-43, translations in the article are my own unless indicated otherwise). Except the assertion that God is, nothing can be said about “his” nature from the spatiotemporal perspective of creation without falling into the error of heresy (*De virginitate*, hereinafter abbreviated as *De virg*, X, GNO VIII/1 290, 11-14). “...we know nothing about God, just this one thing that [God] “is” (“I am who I am” – *ego eimi ho on*)” (CE III, 6, 8, GNO II, 188; *In canticum canticorum*, hereinafter abbreviated as *In cant.*, 8, GNO VI, 246). All adequate concepts about God refer only to “his” activity (*energeiai*) or can be formulated as negations, indicating what God is not in “his” nature and action (*De Sancta Trinitate*, further abbreviated as *Eust*, GNO III/1, 10.18-11.3; 14.7-8; CE II, 130-147, PG 45, 954-960; CE II, 561-584, PG 45, 1101-1108).

Gregory in his writings, consistently defends the incomprehensibility of God’s nature-*physis* and the fact that it cannot be captured in any categories of human language or reasoning. *De facto*, human beings with their limited cognitive capabilities, are not able to grasp not only the nature of the transcendent realm, but even the essence of the material reality (CE II, 115-118, PG 45, 949) or the nature of their own soul (CE II, 79, PG, 45, 937; CE II, 106-14, PG 45, 947-9; CE II, 259-6, PG 45, 998-1000). “God’s nature (...) exceeds any perception, it cannot be approached, nor can it be reached by any speculation” (*De beatitudinibus* 6, PG 44, 1268b, CE II, 587, PG 45, 1008). Thus, Gregory maintains that the scripture says nothing about God’s *ousia*, it only portrays God’s ways of operation in the worlds (*energeiai*) (CE II, 105, PG 45, 947; Lossky 1944, 65-7) or it designates what God is not (CE II, 580-2, PG 45, 1105-7). This is the function e.g., of the names of God, which can be found in the Scriptures like Lord, King, Father, Judge or Sheppard. They are descriptions attributed to the Creator from the

*diastematic* – spatiotemporal reality of humanity. As such they *cannot* be treated as direct notions about the nature of God, who is beyond time and space (CE I, 373-5, PG 45, 368).

Similarly, the incarnation of Logos is not so much the way of revealing God's nature *per se*, but rather "his" *energeia* – operation in the world. It is the highest and most perfect sign of God's goodness and love for human beings. Its intention is not so much the revelation of God's nature but of God's love – *energeia*. Its aim is to lead people to recognize themselves as images of God in the earthly reality. The incarnated Son becomes a perfect example of deified-sanctified (*theosis*) humanity, an aim to which humankind strives (Carabine 1992, 92). The incarnated Son also gives hope and insight to the future existence after the resurrection. However, the nature-*ousia* of the Son, analogously to the nature of the Father, is inaccessible to human knowledge/perception (CE I, 428-9, PG 45, 386; CE II, 610, PG 45, 1116).

Finally, Gregory of Nyssa is convinced that the fact of creation of human beings in or as the image of God (*In cant.* 2, GNO VI 68, 4-10) does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that people can understand the *ousia* of God. In a dialogue with Eunomius, Gregory diverts from the traditional perspective, which says once people know themselves and their soul, they will get to know God. The old Orphic-Pythagorean notion can be depicted here that the divine particle is hidden in humankind or the Christian version of it that there is some kind of kinship between humans and divinity, which guarantees a certain compatibility and knowledge of God. No, for Gregory of Nyssa, the incomprehensibility of God leads to the conclusion of incomprehensibility of the nature of human beings. "(...) we exist not unaware of many things, among which the principal ignorance refers to us, humans and all the other things around. Who has known their own soul?" (CE II, 106-7, PG, 45, 947), Gregory asks. What a person shaped in/as the image of God is left with is the knowledge about God's acting in the world, certain intuition

of God or perception of the image of the Creator in the “mirror of the souls”, according to the ancient principle that *alike sees alike* (Quasten 1999, 293). “The eye enjoys the rays of light by virtue of the light which it has in itself by nature that it may apprehend the kindred... The same necessity requires, as regards the participation in God, that in the nature that is to enjoy God there be something kindred to Him Who is to be partaken” (*De infantibus praemature abreptis*, hereinafter abbreviated as *De inf.*, PG 46, 113 D, 176A)

Human beings, cleansed from evil, perceive the image of God in their heart, says Gregory of Nyssa poetically in his *Homily on Beatitudes*. “If the heart of the human has been purified from the animal and unworthy desires, they can see the image of the Divine nature in their own beauty” (*De beat.* 6, PG 44, 1269c-1272c.) Such knowledge, however incomplete and imperfect, is sufficient, taking into consideration the limited cognitive capabilities of people. “(...) even though we have negligible and partial understanding – through our reasoning – of the divine nature, the knowledge, which we build on [our] designations, when it is used by true faith with reference to God’s nature, is fully sufficient for our limited capabilities” (CE II, 130, PG 45, 953B; See CE II, 136, PG 45, 955B; CE II, 149, PG 45, 960).

However, as for an encounter with the essence-*physis*, the nature-*ousia* of God, it will always remain inaccessible to human beings, both in earthly reality and also in eschatological eternity (*In Ecclesiastem*, hereinafter abbreviated as *In eccl.*, 7, 412-413, PG 44, 730). Getting to know God, translates – according to Gregory – into the unending process of imitating the Creator (*theosis*), endless pilgrimage to God, never-ending asymptotic approaching the Absolute, yet without ever touching it. “The First Good is unlimited (*apeirion*) in its nature. Thus, out of necessity the participation in its joy will also be unlimited (*apeiros*). So, however much can be grasped, there is always something to be discovered beyond that which has already been grasped. The search itself will never

outdo the object of the search because that which has been found is as inexhaustible as the development of that which participates in what is Infinite” (CE I, 291, PG 45, 340-1).

## 2. Diastema and Metousia

The consistent apophatism of Gregory of Nyssa leads to a particular understanding of the relationship between the main poles of his thought system: God – intellectual creation. When analyzed from a soteriological perspective, the key powers of the dynamic of the system, constitute God’s love/goodness and freedom of the creation, shaping the overall cosmic drama of the fall and salvation. However, Gregory of Nyssa also considers the relationships between the main poles of the system on the ontological level, building on different ontic statutes of the Creator and creation. From this perspective, the relationship and the dynamic between the main poles of the thought of Gregory is determined – in a Platonic way – by complementary concepts of separation (*diastema*) and participation (*metousia*).

The concept of *diastema* indicates a total separation between the Creator and creation, an absolute incomparability of the Creator to creation (Diels 1922, 335, v. 5, 8, 12). The one who is beyond time and space, is detached from creation by a caesura/chasm impossible to transgress. Or rather, adding the epistemological aspect to ontology, it is creation that is separated from the Creator by an impassable ontological and perceptive border. With reference to God *per se* (*ousia tou theou*), it is impossible to maintain any aspect of *diastema*. Between the divine *hypostaseis* in the Trinity, there is no ontological division. There is no *diastema* in the nature/*ousia* of God. There is also no space for any kind of *diastema* between the Creator and creation from the above perspective. God called the world into existence, God continuously rules over the world and the world is accessible to the Creator, fully and instantly, just like an owner and an owned thing. “The power [God] beyond any extent (*adiastatos*), beyond any measure (*aposos*), impossible to be

described (*aperigraptos*), contains in himself all the ages and everything what is in them” (CE III, VI, 68; PG 45, 796A), says Gregory of Nyssa of the nature of God, debating the concepts of Eunomius. Has God not created everything simultaneously, calling into existence – at least in the potential sense – the whole creation, past, presence and future? This is the understanding of the first verse of Genesis, which Gregory suggests following the translation of Aquila. This Greek version of the Bible renders Hebrew *bereshit* with the Greek phrase *en kephalaio*. “(...) in whom the whole world was constituted (...). All potencies, causes, acting powers of all beings, God called into existence collectively and instantly” (*In Hexameron explication apologetica*, hereinafter abbreviated as *In Hex.*, PG 44, 69D-72A; Gregorios 1980, 98).

The impassable division-*diastema* between God and creation exists only from the perspective of creation and surrounds it just like a day is surrounded by two nights. Creation can perceive reality only within the borders of time and space, it cannot breach its *diastematic* existence. This way the ontological conditions (different status) are translated by Gregory of Nyssa into epistemology, perception. Created beings cannot in any way match the Creator. A created mind must stop before the uncreated, unlimited nature and... must fall silent (CE I, 363, PG 45, 364D). With the assumption of the impassable division between God and creation, the principles of logic bound to the reality of creation have no application to the transcendent realm of the Creator.

Even mystical experiences do not go beyond the *diastema* and direct understanding of the nature of God. At most they bear certain premonitions concerning God’s nature. A perfect example is the mystical experiences of the apostle Paul, referred to in the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to Corinthians.

Hence all the raptures do not give a clear perception and understanding of the truth. At most, they make it possible to hear the voice of the groom and, as the Scripture says, lead to the experience termed ‘hearing’, something which the heart enjoys, not knowledge built on understanding. If the bride, who has been elevated so high – which we learn e.g., about

the great apostle Paul, who has been taken to the third heaven – is not able to precisely understand the groom, what can we experience (...)? (*In Cant.* 5, PG 44, 860A-B).

The concept of *diastema*, separating the creation from the Creator is built on the assumption of the diametrically different ontological status of both realms. In a coherent way, Gregory of Nyssa translates the ontological conditions of creation into the sphere of epistemology, which results in his *apophatic* depiction of the nature of God.

The above convictions of the philosopher are not led by his attempt to depreciate the role of humankind in creation and the hierarchy of beings. *De facto*, Gregory of Nyssa presents a very high view of humans, their significance as created beings and their place on the ladder of creatures. He indicates, following biblical teaching, that humankind constitutes the crown of the whole of creation. A human being represents God before the lower creatures; is the only created being which bears the image of God; participates both in the sensual and spiritual reality; and what is more, human beings with all their limitations is the creature, for whom Christ was sacrificed. It is difficult to find a better reference.

*Diastema*, which the philosopher so strongly emphasizes, refers not only to humankind, but to the whole of creation. The intellectual *sensu stricto* creatures, like the angels – even though they exceed humans in their spiritual structure – are not in a better situation when it comes to approaching God (CE II, 78, PG 45, 932). The spiritual and material worlds, although so different in their natures, are not separated with *diastema* analogous to the caesura God – creation. There is no chasm between heaven and earth in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa. Rather, the realities mingle, of which humankind is the best example (Or. Cat. 6; PG 45, 25B). Yet, infinity, with its “beyond time and space” existence of God, in the same way separates the Creator both from the material and spiritual beings (CE I, 246 PG 45, 327).

What introduces a new dimension to the concept of *diastema* and the grounds of some differentiation between the creatures, is sin, depravation

of humankind and – at least some – angels. The fall, referred to in the third chapter of Genesis, means that *diastema*, according to Gregory of Nyssa, not only has an **ontological** dimension – naturally flowing out of different statuses of the Creator and creation or **epistemological** character – a logical consequence of the ontological assumptions, but the *diastema* has also a **soteriological** aspect, indicating a particular separation from the Creator of those beings, who have fallen into sin, namely Satan, demons and humankind. It is in this sense that some of the utterances of Gregory of Nyssa can be understood, indicating that angelic beings are *a-diastematic* and that there is a difference between the *diastema* of humankind and angels. True, the faithful angels do not need the abolition of the *diastema* caused by sin in their approaching God. They can already strive to God in their infinite and undisturbed pilgrimage (*In Hex.* PG 44, 84CD, *In cant.* 6, PG 44, 885).

Conversely, human beings, just like other fallen creatures need salvation above all, the elimination of the effects of the fall, so that they can join the angelic, cosmic procession to God. However, it does not alter the fact that in the ontological and epistemological sense, all creatures are separated from the Creator by an impassable border (Otis 1976, 350-2). As Gregory indicates:

Vast and impassable is the chasm (*diastema*), which divides the created nature from the being of the Creator. Creation is limited, the Creator has no limits. Creation can be comprehended in their own conditions, exemplifying the good will of their originator. Yet, the condition of the Creator is infinity. Creation exists in various dimensions and can be understood in categories of space and time. The Creator is beyond any comprehension tied to dimensions and extensions. (...) It is possible to indicate the beginning and end of beings in this life. Yet, the category of beginning or end does not refer to the Blessed One, who is beyond creation and exists eternally as he is, beyond any categories of beginning or end, depending only on himself, not pilgrimaging through life from somewhere to somewhere in a diastematic existence (CE II, 69, PG 45, 933A-B).

The concept of *diastema*, division between the Creator and creation, is supplemented and – in a sense – balanced by the concept of participation, *metousia*. The concept emphasizes the ontological dependence of creation on the Creator (vertical dimension) and also the organic unity between intellectual beings (horizontal dimension) (*In Eccl.* 7, PG 44, 724D; Balas 1993, 266; von Ivanka 1964, 254). However, indicating the dependencies and participations between various levels of beings, Gregory of Nyssa explicitly differentiates between the existence of God and the existence of creatures. Only God is “who he is” – *ho ontos on*. Only God has a true, unconditional being. Understood in trinitarian terms as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, God is the only uncreated, perfect and infinite being. In his perfection, God is unchangeable and independent of anything besides himself.

(...) even if the comprehension turns to the direction of other existing things, the mind does not find in them any self-sufficiency, thanks to which they could exist without participation in the true Being. Yet, the one who is always the same, not increasing or decreasing, unchangeable, (...) not in need of anything else, desired by all, participating in everything, but not diminished by the participation – this is the true, real Being (Gregory of Nyssa 1978, 60, *Moys.* II, 40).

On the other hand, creation – *ta onta*, has been called to existence from non-being (*ex nihilo*) and exists only thanks to the participation in the being or rather *energeia* of the Creator. Without the will of God, the end and destiny of creation is non-existent (CE II, 578, PG 45, 1104D; Cat. or. 6, PG 45, 28C-D). Only God can sustain its being. Limited in their existence, creatures cannot be ultimately good, but they can participate and *de facto* they do participate in the perfect, unlimited Good.

Since the source, principle and treasury of all good is (¼) in uncreated nature, the whole creation strives to him, is attached to him and participates in him through communion in the First Good of the Elevated Nature. In consequence, “greater” and “smaller” can be differentiated within the creation according to the level of its participation in the

Highest. Some [creatures participate] to a smaller, some to a greater degree, which again is proportional to the participation in the autonomy of the will and its liking to the Good (CE I, 274-75, PG 45, 333).

In his nature God is separated from creation by the impassable border. Yet, the whole creation – as an exemplification of the will of the Creator – is fully accessible to God. In this sense, as much as creation participates in God's *energeia* (*ousia tou Theou* is inaccessible to creation), it really exists in God. However, the comprehension of this reality, according to Gregory of Nyssa, exceeds human capabilities of perception. "The question 'how' is to be left beyond our reach. Even the fact that the visible reality emerged from what is not in any way manifested, we accept only through faith, as something which is beyond our intellectual capabilities" (In Hex, PG 44, 68D-69A).

*Metousia*, similarly to the earlier analyzed diastema, occurs as an ontological necessity in the structure of the whole realm. The very existence of creation assumes the participation in God and full dependence on the Creator. After all, created beings exemplify God's will and the outcome of his goodness (*De hominis opificio* 16, PG 44, 184c). Still, the problem of participation-*metousia* goes – in the treatises of Gregory of Nyssa – beyond a simple, ontological dependency, some kind of counter-balance and supplementation of the concept of *diastema*. Gregory adds the issue of the soteriological dimension and emphasizes the dynamic of relationship between the Creator and creation. The participation in the ontological sense becomes the basis for the participation understood soteriologically as a deification-*theosis* process, coming nearer to God and imitating God (Balas 1993, 268). In this sense, *metousia* appears not so much as an ontological necessity, but rather as a free choice of the intellectual creation, which faithfully turns to the Creator and strives to imitate the divine goodness as much as possible. The more a human being participates in the divine good, the more possible it is to overcome the subsequent steps on the way of deification-*theosis* (*De anima et resurrectione*, PG 46, 105b; Meredith, 1989, 40).

Gregory of Nyssa sketches the dynamic of *metousia* as infinite progress, unceasing change for good, a continuously deepening relationship between the Creator and creation. It is based on the one hand on the love of the Creator and the ontological dependencies in the structure of beings. On the other hand, it is based on the free choice of creation, which turns back to the Creator, gets nearer and nearer to God, but never actually reaches the Absolute. "(...) when [God] draws a human soul to participation in himself, He always remains (...) greater than the one who participates. The soul (...) will always get better than it is, through the participation in what is greater than it is and it will never cease growing, whereas the Good, in which it participates, remains the same (...)" (*In cant.* 5, GNO VI, 158). Gregory of Nyssa depicts the soteriological dimension of *metousia*, supplementing the ontological dependence of the creation on the Creator. He believes, following Origen, Evagrius or Didymus, that finally all the intellectual creatures will turn back to God and will join the procession of beings pilgrimaging to him. However, it does not change the fact that in his nature, God will ever remain unknowable and impossible to reach for humankind and other created beings. The eschatological consummation will take the form – according to Gregory of Nyssa – of an endless, asymptotic process of getting closer and closer to God without ever reaching the Unreachable, without knowing the Unknown.

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CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKA AKADEMIA TEOLOGICZNA  
w WARSZAWIE

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Rok LXV

Zeszyt 1

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WARSZAWA 2023

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ISSN 0239-2550

eISSN: 2956-5685

Wydano nakładem

**Wydawnictwa Naukowego ChAT**

ul. Broniewskiego 48, 01-771 Warszawa, tel. +48 22 635-68-55

Objętość ark. wyd.: 10,7. Nakład: 100 egz.

Druk: [druk-24h.com.pl](http://druk-24h.com.pl)

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