

## I. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

# THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD AS REVELATION AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE WORKS OF DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE AND THEIR USE IN THE THEOLOGY OF DUMITRU STĂNILOAE

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**ABSTRACT.** Dumitru Staniloae in his Dogmatic Theology develops the connection of the Experience of God as Revelation and knowledge of the Triune God based and on the works of Dionysius Areopagite. The divine essence remains inaccessible eternally. For this reason, the man as finite logic being should articulate a moderate thought. The knowledge of God commensurate with the ability of the finite man to know the infinite God. He doesn't completely escape from the reality of darkness - a general characteristic of the created nature. The very fact that man was created out of nothing, and the characteristics of createdness and decay contain in his nature, this is an essential differentiation between him and his Creator. Thus, the basis for every human expression or knowledge about God is the fact for the ontological distinction between the created and the uncreated nature. The knowledge of God should be understood as the knowledge of God's attributes and His modes of being, the direction from the "heaven" to the "earth" and not the opposite one.

The sole ground of man's knowledge of God is thus God's self-revelation; it is premised on the idea of divine incomprehensibility. The term revelation signifies two things; that the knowledge of God itself by itself is impossible. However, God can be known (economically) through revelation, and a human being is capable of receiving this knowledge according to her/his capacity.

**Keywords:** Dumitru Staniloae, Dionysius Areopagite, knowledge of God, attributes, finite man, infinite God, commensurate.

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## 1. The Knowledge of God in the works of (pseudo) Dionysius Areopagite

“The knowledge of God is beyond man’s power. God promised that only those who are pure of their heart can have vision of God<sup>1</sup>. For God who is by nature beyond our sight is visible in His activities ‘energeiai’, being perceived in the characteristics ‘idiomata’ that surround Him. So, it is better for man to speak for the deeds of God but when he is going to speak about His essence, then man should be remain silent”<sup>2</sup>.

The divine essence remains utterly inaccessible, and for this reason man who is a finite logical being is obliged to articulate a modest reason having fully understood his cognitive limitations. Thus, through Mystical Theology, Dionysius Areopagite points out that the human mind knows God. The mind was given to man, in order to know sufficiently the truth. The only self-esteem is God. Therefore, the primary work of the mind is the awareness of God, but consciousness of the ability of the finite man to know the infinite in size God. It is certain that man is unable to understand God without his above assistance. Moreover, when man surpasses the first type of agnosia (lack of knowledge), he still has not completely escaped the reality of darkness - a general characteristic of his created nature. The very fact that man was created from the non-being and contained in his nature the characteristics of the creature and the finity of it makes him distinct from his Creator. So, the basis for any human expression or knowledge of God is the unity that involves the ontological distinction between the created and the uncreated nature.

Moreover, Divine illumination makes the human mind free from any darkness. It purifies the eyes of the mind and makes it fertile to accept the knowledge of God, according to every man’s passion for searching this divine acknowledge. God cannot be “seized” by bodily senses. On this point of view, Paul Gavrilyuk supports that Dionysius doesn’t agree with the Messalianism which accepts that God can be perceived by bodily senses<sup>3</sup>. But, Alexander Golitzin supposes that Dionysius had the goal to adopt Messalian sensibilities in ascetic circles<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”, Mat. 5:8.

<sup>2</sup> Eirini Artemi, “Man’s ‘knowledge’ and ‘ignorance’ for God in the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa”, *Mirabilia* 19, no. 2 (2014), 45. Vl. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Paul L. Gavrilyuk, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite”, in *The spiritual senses Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, eds. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 93.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem. Alexander Golitzin, “Dionysius Areopagites: A Christian Mysticism?”, in *The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism*, eds. Basil Lourie and Andrei Orlov (Vizantinorossika, St Petersburg, 2007), 145, 151, 162.

Dionysius underlines that Negative - Apophatic<sup>5</sup> theology is used by man to describe God by negation, in which one has only what may not be said about God. So, the negative way comes to play a role in knowing God, a knowing in unknowing. Through the apathetic-secret theology Christian can achieve his union and assimilation with God. Apophatic theology reveals the weakness of human thought in front of the mystery of the greatness of the divine nature. That doesn't mean that the apophatism rejects the rationality of human being. Professor Papanikolaou supports that

“The emphasis on a mystical union with God beyond reason did not necessarily entail the rejection of rationality in the life and expression of faith. A cursory reading of apologetic texts and those commenting on the ascetical life reveal the importance of the role of reason for the Eastern Christian tradition”<sup>6</sup>.

God, who transcends all human thought, reveals his actions to the human race.

In the thought of Dionysius the negative way forms a pair together with the kataphatic or positive way. According to Deirdre Carabine: “the terms apophasis and kataphasis belong to what the Pseudo-Dionysius called the ‘sacred science’ of theology”<sup>7</sup>. Dionysius analyzes the kataphatic way to the divine as the “way of speech”: that we can come to some understanding of the Transcendent by attributing all the perfections of the created order to God as its source<sup>8</sup>. So we can say that God is omnipotent, good, love and etc. On the other hand the apophatic way shows God's absolute transcendence and unknowability in such a way that we cannot say anything about the divine essence because God is so totally beyond being, beyond place and time<sup>9</sup>. The combination of the immanence and transcendence of God make us sufficient to realize the simultaneous truth of both “ways” to God: at the same time as God is immanent, God is also transcendent<sup>10</sup>. At the same time as God is knowable, God is also unknowable. God cannot be thought of as one or the other only<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> “The negative way, more often than not, is called *apophasis* or *via negativa* in religious and philosophical discourse. The apophatic tradition has a long history with its ‘metaphors of negativity’ The ‘metaphors of negativity’ came to be called as *apophasis* in the Greek tradition and *via negativa* in the Latin tradition in the West”, C.D. Sebastian, *The Cloud of Nothingness*, Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 19, Springer India 2016, 19-20, doi 10.1007/978-81-322-3646-7\_2. D. Turner, *The darkness of god: Negativity in Christian mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998), 1: 35-40.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Reasonable faith and a trinitarian logic”, in *Restoring faith in reason*, eds. L. P. Hemming & S. F. Parsons (SCM Press, London, 2002), 244.

<sup>7</sup> “Living Without a Why. An Interview with Deirdre Carabine”, *Holos: Forum for a New Worldview* 5, no. 1 (2009), <http://www.centerforsacredsciences.org/index.php/Holos/holos-carabine.html>. Deirdre Carabine, *The unknown God. Negative theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 19 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

In the treatise *On Mystical Theology*, the mystical theology is the goal and ground of the other stages of theology. The apophatic and the superlative theology are developed in succession, but also, there is the positive theology. The first declares that God cannot be described with notions that are used to describe the products which he has produced. The result of this apophaticism is to reject “any notion obstructing the knowledge of the divine nature defined positively as the One”, argues Aristotle Papanikolaou<sup>12</sup>. The negation employed in the texts of Dionysius is neither “that of privation nor of opposition, but rather a superlative negation, which in its very act of negation, is a transcendent nothing that lies before everything”<sup>13</sup>.

The superlative theology underlines that the negotiations are limitations of our mind, not of its object<sup>14</sup>. Also, the superlative theology includes giving names to God, but it is added the word *super* (in greek language is preposition), to show that should apply to God infinitely more than created things. For example, we call God Super- Good.

Finally in the positive theology, we don't employ univocal and literal words, but instead of that we should use analogies for God<sup>15</sup>. Elisabeth Theokritoff underlines:

“(Ps-)Dionysius takes up the Neoplatonist idea of the scale of being; but he turns it into a structure of theophany, revelation of God. Its purpose is to allow each creature to reflect the divine glory in its own unique way, according to its analogy with its Creator”<sup>16</sup>.

So, the Cataphatic one supplies the knowledge of God which is an imperfect knowledge, while the apophatic leads to the ignorance of God; for God is unsayable and unknowable in the categories of human language<sup>17</sup>. The Cataphatic theology expresses the knowledge of God through the divine names which refer to God<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God, Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine—Human Communion* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 55.

<sup>14</sup> “God and heaven cannot be put into words not because they are too vague, thin and wispy but because they are too definite and specific, too real for words. It is our language and concepts that too vague, thin and wispy”, Peter Kreeft, Fr. Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics: Reasoned Answers to Questions of Faith* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2009), 216.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Elisabeth Theokritoff, “Creator and creation”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, by Mary B. Cunningham and Elisabeth Theokritoff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) (63-77), 65. Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London, New York, 2001), 84-5, 105-9.

<sup>17</sup> C.D. Sebastian, *The Cloud of Nothingness* (2016), 38.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God, Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine—Human Communion* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 20.

We can support that for pseudo-Dionysius, God is better characterized and approached by negations than by affirmations. All names and theological representations must be negated. According to pseudo-Dionysius, when all names are negated, “divine silence, darkness, and unknowing” will follow. For him God in Himself is beyond the God we know through cataphatic theology. God is more adequately “known” through apophatic theology, the paradoxical mystical theology of denial or unknowing:

“God is therefore 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. 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 the 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.”<sup>19</sup>

Through the treatise of Mystical Theology, Dionysius presents the way with which a Christian can achieve his union and assimilation with God through the Apophatic-mystical theology. Apophatic theology, as it was underlined above, reveals the weakness of human thought before the mystery of the vastness of divine nature. God, who transcends all human thought, reveals His energies to mankind. Through these divine actions, and by the illumination of human’s mind by God, a man attempts to capture the knowledge of the ultimate reality, “creating” concepts - allegations that either relate to what is God, affirmative theology, or relate to what is not, affirmative theology<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, affirmative and negative way of knowing God is not an exclusively gnostic, but originally ontological issue. Gnosis is closely related to ontology and is defined by its constant parameters<sup>21</sup>. In the first chapter of this treatise “Mystical Theology” Dionysius poses the question “What is the Divine darkness” and opens with a prayer in which the supplicant says:

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<sup>19</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, VII.3, PG 3, 872AB. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, transl. by Colm Luibheid, foreword, notes, and translation collaboration by Paul Rorem, preface by Rene Roques, introductions by Jaroslav Pelikan, Jean Leclercq, and Karlfried Froehlich, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 108-109.

<sup>20</sup> Chr. Giannaras, *Heidegger and Areopagite*, the thought about the absence and the unknowing of God (Athens: Domos, 1998), 138. E. Artemi, *Terms of Formation of Knowledge in Byzantine George Pachymeres in his parable of the treatise Concerning the Mystical Theology of Dionysios Areopagite*, in greek, post doctorate thesis (Patras-Athens: University of Patras, 2015), 79.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

“TRINITY!! Higher than any being, any divinity, any goodness!<sup>22</sup> Guide of Christians in the wisdom of heaven! lead us up beyond unknowing and light, up to the farthest, highest peak of mystic scripture, where the mysteries of God’s Word lie simple, absolute and unchangeable in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence. Amid the deepest shadow [darkness] they pour overwhelming light on what is most manifest. Amid the wholly unsensed and unseen they completely fill our sightless minds with treasures beyond all beauty”<sup>23</sup>.

So, Mystical union with God is only possible in terms of the darkness of “unknowing” (*agnosia*). It is never an actual or complete union with the Unnamable God; the transcendent Divinity Who is beyond Being (*hyperousios*). Generally, it should be underlined that the use of darkness in the knowledge of God was used by Gregory of Nyssa, who can be seen as the anticipator of Denis the Areopagite.

In Dionysius’ thought the unspeakable and the speakable, the uncreated and the created one co-operate and connect each other. Through this relationship, the knowledge of God emerges. This knowledge is characterized sometimes as affirmative and other as negative. Many anthropomorphic expressions or human characteristics as hands and feet are used for God. All this is symbolic theology, according to Dionysius of Alexandria. The latter emphasizes that through these causes

“the theologian plunges into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. So man should understand that the names for God are abusive concepts of the human mind”<sup>24</sup>.

It is a situation that leads man to realize that he is in full “rationality and inanimation”, since as much as he tries to reach God, he understands so much that the share in the truth of God, in the sight of God is like going up in the rough term of mystical theology. Additionally, in Symbolic theology, the symbol is the way in which human spirituality in its broad meaning is expressed through formalizing materials. Even the words act symbolically. For their part, of course, the terms do not mature themselves as to their semantics, but to the people who use them<sup>25</sup>.

Dionysius underlines the absolute transcendence and unknowability of the Trinity while emphasizing the reasonable accuracy of words as verbal signifiers<sup>26</sup>. The divine names of God reveal his attributes which descend towards

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<sup>22</sup> Dionysius asks from God the help him, to reveal him the truth about the Godhead. It reminds us of Homer, the greek ancient poet who in his both epic poems, *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, asks the help of Muse of epic poetry to reveal the things that happen among Gods.

<sup>23</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Mystical Theology*, Prologue, PG 3, 997A, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, transl. Luibheid-Rorem (1987), 135.

<sup>24</sup> E. Artemi, *Terms of Formation of Knowledge*. (2015), 80. Dionysius Areopagite, *On Mystical Theology*, 3, PG 3, 1033B.

<sup>25</sup> E. Artemi, *Terms of Formation of Knowledge*. (2015), 80.

<sup>26</sup> Emmanuel Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation: Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 42.

the created world, yet they do not draw humanity closer to his inaccessible essence. God's nature remains beyond the human capacity for comprehension and knowledge. The human language is unable to express the antinomy of transcendental Christian God revealing Himself in this world as creator and redeemer<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, Dionysius explains that we can have a mystical union (μυστική ἔνωσις) with God, but this union is beyond human knowledge:

“But when our souls are moved by intelligent energies in the direction of the things of the intellect then our senses and all that go with them are no longer needed. And the same happens with our intelligent powers which, when the soul becomes divinized, concentrate sightlessly and through an unknowing union on the rays of ‘unapproachable light’ ”<sup>28</sup>.

The negative way of Pseudo-Dionysius was influenced by Neoplatonism. For this point, there are different views. We will refer to some scholars who agree or disagree about the connection of Neoplatonic Philosophy with the texts of Dionysius “Concerning the Mystical Theology” and “Of the Divine Names”. George Pachymeres, a Byzantine Greek historian, philosopher and miscellaneous writer of the 13th-14th century accepted Pseudo-Dionysius as a Neoplatonist<sup>29</sup>. Martin Luther accuses Dionysius of being more platonic than Christian, “plus platonizans quam christianizans”<sup>30</sup>. In modern times, Lossky is one who does not accept Pseudo-Dionysius as a Neoplatonist<sup>31</sup>. The Russian theologian explains that Dionysius' God is the God of the Holy Bible, who brought everything in being ex nihilo, and this God is not the primordial God-Unity (the One = ἐν) of the Neoplatonist philosophers<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London, New York, 2001), 90. Anita Strezova, “Knowledge and Vision of God in Cappadocian Fathers”, *The Voice of Orthodoxy*, <http://www.thevoiceoforthodoxy.com/knowledge-and-vision-of-god-in-cappadocian-fathers/>, access 15 August 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *Divine Nature*, IV, 11, PG 3, 708D, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 80; *Divine Nature*, I, 1, PG 3, 585B, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 49; *Divine Nature*, I, 1, PG 3, 588B, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 50; *Divine Nature*, II, 7, PG 3, 645A, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 63; *Divine Nature*, V, 3, PG 3, 817B, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 97-8; *Mystical Theology* IV, PG 3, 1040D, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 141; Ep. i, *To the monk Gaius*, PG 3, 1065A, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 263.

<sup>29</sup> E. Artemi, *Terms of Formation of Knowledge*. (2015), 48-72, 127-35.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, *De Ordine*, t. 1, in Louis Bail, *Summa Conciliorum Omnium apud Fredericum Leonard* (1672), 625.

<sup>31</sup> Vl. Lossky, *The mystical theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge-London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd. 1968), 29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31: “There have been many attempts to make a neoplatonist of Dionysius. ... The God of Dionysius, incomprehensible by nature, the God of Psalms: ‘who made darkness his secret place’, is not the primordial God-Unity of the neoplatonists. ... In his refusal to attribute to God the properties which make up the matter of affirmative theology, Dionysius is aiming expressly at the neo-platonist definitions: ‘He is neither One, nor Unity’ (οὐδὲ ἐν, οὐδὲ ἐνότης). In his treatise of the Divine Names, in examining the name of the One, which can be applied to God, he shows its insufficiency and compares with it another and ‘most sublime’ name – that of the Trinity, which teaches us that God is neither one nor many but that He transcends this antinomy, being unknowable in what He is (*Of the Divine Names* XIII, 3).”

Another western theologian who agrees that in Dionysius' theology is influenced by Neoplatonism, is Denys Turner. The latter adds that in Dionysius' work, there is not only neoplatonic influence but a platonic, too<sup>33</sup>. C.D. Sebastian underlines "Pseudo-Dionysius's negative way might have been influenced more by the Neoplatonic thought than the Hebraic Biblical ethos"<sup>34</sup> as Sebastian Brock had accepted<sup>35</sup>. The same opinion about the connection of neoplatonic philosophy and the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius is analyzed by professor Ch. Terezis<sup>36</sup>. He (Terezis) thinks that the texts of pseudo Dionysius have been written by Christians who lived in a neoplatonic environment<sup>37</sup> and mainly in the Mystical Theology there are neoplatonic influences but in the Divine names, there are many indirect references to platonic and aristotelian philosophy<sup>38</sup>. Broadly speaking, Dionysius' theological thought had many influences from the philosophical movement of later Platonism.

Generally, we will underline that despite the neoplatonic and platonic background in the texts of Dionysius<sup>39</sup>, there is a rich variety of historic receptions of Dionysius, in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions<sup>40</sup>. Andrew Louth argues that:

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<sup>33</sup> Turner underlines that: "Denys invented the genre for the Latin Church; and for sure, he forged the language, or a good part of it, and he made a theology out of those central metaphors without which there could not have been the mystical tradition that there has been: 'light' and 'darkness,' 'ascent' and 'descent,' that love of God and eros. This is the vocabulary of our mysticism: historically we owe it to Denys; and he owed it, as he saw it, to Plato and Moses", D. Turner, *The darkness of god: Negativity in Christian mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.

<sup>34</sup> C.D. Sebastian, *The Cloud of Nothingness* (2016), 39.

<sup>35</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, *Studies on Syriac spirituality*, ed. Jacob Vellian, The Syrian Churches series, Vol. XIII, (yothi Book House, Kottayam 1988), 42: "Wherever the influence of the Dionysian writings was strong (and it was strong in both East and West but above all in the West), the heart is not important location in the spiritual geography of the human being. It has become separated on this map of sacred space from the intellect (and in some cases more or less replaced by it). This is why, in the Western Christian tradition 'prayer of the heart' usually has a somewhat narrower sense than it has in most of the Eastern Christian tradition, for in the West the heart is simply the seat of emotions, of affective prayer, whereas in the East it has (among certain writers at any rate) retained its biblical role of being the seat of the intellect and as well."

<sup>36</sup> Ch. Terezis, *Assays in Christianity of the East* (Patras: Hellenic Open University, 2017), 599.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 600.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Golitzin, "Anarchy vs. Hierarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and their Common Roots in Ascetical Tradition," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1994): 131-179; idem, *Et introibo ad altare dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition*, *Analekta Vlatadon* 59, (Thessaloniki, 1994). Idem, "Dionysius Areopagites in the works of Saint Gregory Palamas: on the question of a 'christological corrective' and related matters", *Scrinium* 3, no. 1 (2007): 83-105, doi: 10.1163/18177565-90000151

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Coakley, "Dionysian Studies in Transition", in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Sarah Coakley, Charles M. Stang (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 15.

“Dionysius’ influence is pervasive, though not all-pervasive. It is also uneven, both in the sense that some Byzantines seem more open to his influence than others, and also in the sense that there is a very generalized influence, alongside genuine attempts at engagement with his thought”<sup>41</sup>.

We will agree with professor Louth and we will refer the names of some notable Christian thinkers who received the influence of Dionysius and they exploited the effect of Dionysius theology in a constructive way within their entire work. Here, we will refer only to some of these who employed Dionysius’ influence are Sergius of Reshaina (died 536)<sup>42</sup>, John of Scythopolitis (c. 536-550)<sup>43</sup>, Maximus Confessor (c. 580-662)<sup>44</sup>, Germanus of Constantinople (c. 634-733)<sup>45</sup>, Symeon New Theologian<sup>46</sup>, Nicholas of Cusa<sup>47</sup>, Nicetas Stethatos<sup>48</sup>, and Gregory Palamas<sup>49</sup>. The influence of Dionysius’ theology has been received fruitfully in

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew Louth, “The reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas”, in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Sarah Coakley, Charles M. Stang (Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex, 2009), 120.

<sup>42</sup> István Perczel, “The earliest Syriac reception of Dionysius”, in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Sarah Coakley, Charles M. Stang (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 70: “He (Sergius of Reshaina) interpreted Dionysius in the light of Evagrius’ gnoseology”.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 80. Paul Rorem and J. C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 9-15.

<sup>44</sup> A. Louth, “The reception of Dionysius” (2009), 128: “The influence of Dionysius on Maximus is, however, manifest, even if we discount the few scholia that may still belong to Maximus. Maximus acknowledges it explicitly in his *Mystagogy*, which is presented as a supplement to the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, and the use of apophatic theology and the other themes mentioned as part of the generalized influence of Dionysius are found throughout Maximus’ writings. What we find, too, however, is an engagement with Dionysius’ ideas that develops them in a novel way”. Also, A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London, New York, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Jelena Bogdanovic, “Rethinking the Dionysian Legacy in Medieval Architecture”, in *Dionysius the Areopagite between Orthodoxy and Heresy*, ed. Filip Ivanović (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 126.

<sup>46</sup> Alexander Golitzen, trans. and ed., *On the Mystical Life. The ethical discourses/ St. Symeon the New Theologian*, vol. 3 (Crestwood New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 39-41, 84. A. Golitzen, *El Introito ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita* (Thessalonica, 1994), 223-227.

<sup>47</sup> P. E. Sigmund, *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Political Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963), 247-9.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew J. Pereira, *Beholding Beauty In Nicetas Stethatos’ Contemplation of Paradise*, 55, <https://usqr.utsnyc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Pereira.pdf>: “In accord with his esteemed predecessor Dionysius, Nicetas shares similar philosophical presuppositions with Plato, albeit with the major difference that his analysis of the sensible and intelligible is situated within a narrative largely shaped by the biblical themes of creation, fall, and the restoration of humanity and the saving economy of the Trinitarian outreach”.

<sup>49</sup> A. Louth, “The reception of Dionysius”, 2009, 138. Hieromonk Alexander, “Dionysius Areopagites in the works of Saint Gregory Palamas: on the question of a ‘christological corrective’ and related matters”, *Scrinium* 3, no. 1 (2007), 83-105, doi: 10.1163/18177565-90000151.

contemporary Orthodox thought as John Romanides<sup>50</sup>, Vladimir Lossky<sup>51</sup>, Sergius Bulgakov<sup>52</sup>, Alexander Golitzin<sup>53</sup>, Christos Yannaras<sup>54</sup>, Andrew Louth<sup>55</sup>, Dumitru Staniloae<sup>56</sup> and many others<sup>57</sup>.

## 2. The conception of Dionysius' Areopagite theology concerning the Knowledge of God in the theology of Dumitru Stăniloae

Dumitru Stăniloae was a Romanian Orthodox theologian who supported that if someone wants to speak about God, he should have a theology of experience<sup>58</sup>. Fr Staniloae is an apophatic theologian according to His eminence Kallistos Ware<sup>59</sup>. For Staniloae "Apophatic knowledge is not irrational but supra-rational, for the Son of God is the Logos and contains in himself the "reasons" of all created things"<sup>60</sup>.

Staniloae adopts the opinion of Gregory Palamas about the knowledge and vision of God:

"The vision (contemplation) ... is one thing and theology is another, because it is not the same way to say something about God as it is to gain and see God. For negative theology is also a word. But visions (contemplations) are above words..."<sup>61</sup>

So, Staniloae underlines that the vision of God is higher than any kind of knowledge which bases on rationality or on faith<sup>62</sup>. This opinion reminds us the first part of Mystical Theology of Dionysius. The latter advises Timothy's:

<sup>50</sup> J. S. Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics", *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6, no. 2 (1960/61): 186-205 & 9, no. 2 (1963/64): 225-270. Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959-1994* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 189.

<sup>51</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Michigan – Cambridge: Grand Rapids, 2003), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Craig Rhodes, *Mystery in Philosophy: An Invocation of Pseudo-Dionysius*, (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), 12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>56</sup> Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 29.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *Dumitru Stăniloae* (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 156.

<sup>59</sup> Kallistos Ware, "Foreword" in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: The experience of God* (Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), xx.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Gregory Palamas, *Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 2.3.49, ed. Christou, vol. 1, 582.3-6. Ștefan-Lucian Toma, *The patristic tradition in the work of f. Dumitru Stăniloae and the modern world*. (in Greek) P. Pournaras, Thessaloniki 2007, 306-308. D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998). 115.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 95-96: "According to patristic tradition, there is a rational or cataphatic knowledge of God, and an apophatic or ineffable knowledge. The latter is superior to the former because it completes it. God is not known in his essence, however, through either of these. We know God through cataphatic

“to leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge”<sup>63</sup>.

In other part of his work he underlines the significance of knowing God through apophatic way abandon any words and their meanings and any symbol which refers to God<sup>64</sup>.

Father Staniloae, following Dionysius, without recognizing the scholastic view “analogy entis”<sup>65</sup>, has enough to say about the reason that creation is receptive to God himself and through it the natural revelation of God is known and realized completely in the illumination of the supernatural revelation<sup>66</sup>. This supernatural revelation generates the knowledge of faith. But it should be highlighted that the natural revelation is not entirely natural because through the creation of nature, man can know God,

“Almighty God brings into being and sustains everything, and provides in every way for everything; and is present, to all, by the irresistible embrace of all, and by His providential progressions and operations to all existing things”<sup>67</sup>.

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knowledge only as creating and sustaining cause of the world, while through apophatic knowledge we gain a kind of direct experience of his mystical presence which surpasses the simple knowledge of him as cause who is invested with certain attributes similar to those of the world. This latter knowledge is termed apophatic because the mystical presence of God experienced through it transcends the possibility of being defined in words. This knowledge is more adequate to God than is cataphatic knowledge-- Rational knowledge, however, cannot simply be renounced. Even though what it says about God may not be entirely adequate, it says nothing which is opposed to God. It is just that what it does say must be deepened through apophatic knowledge. Moreover, even apophatic knowledge, when it seeks to give any account of itself at all, must resort to the terms of the knowledge of the intellect, though it does fill these terms continuously with a deeper meaning than the mind's notions can provide. ... In our opinion these two kinds of knowledge are neither contradictory nor mutually exclusive, rather they complete each other. Strictly speaking, apophatic knowledge is completed by rational knowledge of two kinds, that which proceeds by way of affirmation and that which proceeds by way of negation. ... One who has a rational knowledge of God often completes this with apophatic knowledge, while the one whose apophatic experience is more pronounced will have recourse to the terms of rational knowledge when giving expression to this experience”.

<sup>63</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, I.1, PG 3, 997B, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 135.

<sup>64</sup> Gheorghe Dragulin, “Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite in Dumitru Staniloae’s Theology”, in Lucian Turcescu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Iasi: The center for Romanian Studies, Iasi 2002), 78.

<sup>65</sup> *Analogia entis* is an approach to the Divine which holds that the created world offers, by analogy, a means of grasping the nature of the Divine. Without it, the Divine becomes utterly unknowable, incommunicable, inconceivable, and so on.

<sup>66</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 1.

<sup>67</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, IX. 9, PG 3, 916C, trans. John Parker, *The Collected Works of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Ontario: Woodstock, 2015), 41.

So the natural revelation can be conceived by us as fully meaning of knowledge of God through the supernatural revelation of Him<sup>68</sup>, which came to its close in incarnation of Word, in Christ<sup>69</sup>. These two revelations, natural and supernatural don't confute each other.

This double methodology for knowing God through the natural and the supernatural<sup>70</sup> revelation has to do with experience and illumination and purification of human mind. No one can approach God with understanding unless he is purified from passions<sup>71</sup>. Only then he can succeed the union with Him, to obtain the knowledge of as the church fathers support<sup>72</sup>. So the believer understands that any definition of God becomes synonym to the total apophatism<sup>73</sup>. Also, the "genuine knowledge" of God can happen only within the "framework of personal communion"<sup>74</sup>.

At the same time between God and created things there is no likeness at all, even though created things were made by God and depend upon God. This means that the truth about God and the truth about the nature of the universe are not identified with one another, even though one of them is dependent on the other<sup>75</sup>: "God can always be known from the creatures, but it is possible never to know God from creatures"<sup>76</sup>. The truth about the nature hides the "superessential gloom, which is hidden by all the light in existing things"<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 23: "By supernatural revelation, God causes his own words to appear directly in the conscience of the believer, or other words which manifest his own Person. In this, God does not work through nature but through a kind of utterance and action which makes more obvious the presence of his Person, as he guides man towards union with that Personal reality as his final goal. Through this, God enters into direct and evident communion with the believer and this convinces him of God's existence and satisfies his thirst for communion with infinite Person, giving him proof at the same time that he is not left to the care of blind forces that will cause him to be lost, but is raised instead to a relationship with the supreme Personal reality who will lead him into an eternal existence in full communion with himself".

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 117: "although the content of what is known transcends the content of such terms to a much greater extent than the knowledge of him through simple faith... One who has this vision or experience of God is simultaneously aware that, in his essence, God transcends the vision or experience. ... The apophatic experience is equivalent to a sense of mystery that excludes neither reason nor sentiment, but it is more profound than these".

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Louth, "The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae", in Lucian Turcescu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Iasi: The center for Romanian Studies, 2002), 66.

<sup>74</sup> Silviu Eugene Rogobete, "Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation?: Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Staniloae", in Lucian Turcescu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Iasi: The center for Romanian Studies, 2002), 177.

<sup>75</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 87.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>77</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, II.1, PG 3, 1025B. trans. John Parker, *The Collected Works of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Ontario: Woodstock, 2015), 53.

Father Dumitru accepts that for the knowledge of God, the believer should not stay only in the apophatic theology but also in the affirmative one. So he tries to compromise the apophatic theology of Dionysius concerning the knowledge of God with the affirmative one in order to present a complete way in order God to be known to men<sup>78</sup>:

“To rise above the things of the world does not mean these disappear; it means, through them, to rise beyond them. And since they remain, the apophatic knowledge of God does not exclude affirmative rational knowledge... In apophatic knowledge the world remains, but it has become transparent of God. This knowledge is apophatic because the God who now is perceived cannot be defined; he is experienced as a reality which transcends all possibility of definition”<sup>79</sup>.

So in the previous passage is expressed the same opinion of Staniloae with Dionysius on his *Divine Names* VII.3<sup>80</sup>. Both they agree that the combination of both these ways of theology provides to people the natural knowledge of God<sup>81</sup>. Staniloae underlines:

“If we read his (Areopagite’s) writings attentively, we see that he everywhere combines apophatic knowledge with cataphatic. This follows from the fact that he too speaks of a spiritual progress in one who knows God”<sup>82</sup>.

Also, fr Staniloae declares the cataphatic knowledge, nesting it (or framing it) as he does within the exponentially larger apophatic experience. He presents Dionysius as apophatic spiritual writer who is finally and correctly identified as one who harmonizes the two apophatic and affirmative knowledge of God:

“Since it is the Cause of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to beings, and, more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being. Now

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<sup>78</sup>A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae”, (2002), 65.

<sup>79</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, (1998), 99.

<sup>80</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, VII.3, PG 3, 872AB, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 108-109: “God is therefore 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. 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 the 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”.

<sup>81</sup> A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae”, (2002), 66.

<sup>82</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, (1998), 109. Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, I.5, PG 3, 593CD.

we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of the affirmations, but rather that the cause of all is considerably prior to this, beyond privations, beyond every denial, beyond every assertion”<sup>83</sup>.

So, there is a complementary between negative and cataphatic theology<sup>84</sup>. These two kinds of theology cannot be separated from one another and complete each other.

Staniloae supports as Dionysius Areopagite and as Gregory Palamas that through the negative theology and the creatures of God, we can know God. Also, he explains that in order not Dionysius to be misunderstood, in the opening prayer of St. Dionysius’ Areopagite *Mystical Theology* it should be translated as hyper: above and not as super<sup>85</sup>.

Staniloae believes as Dionysius that the knowledge of God is the apophatic experience given only to those who “believe,” who are “Christian” and accept the illumination of their mind from the Godhead because of his development of the spiritual life. This also is very clear in the *Mystical Theology* of Dionysius and mainly in the chapter 1.1. Moreover, fr. Staniloae supports that:

“man progresses in the spiritual life, the intellectual knowledge about God -as creator of the world and source of its providential care- which comes to man from the world, is imbued with the direct and richer contemplation of him, that is, with apophatic knowledge”<sup>86</sup>.

Adrian Agachi argues that Staniloae’s teaching of apophatic knowledge was influenced more by Gregory Palamas and not of Dionysius of Areopagite<sup>87</sup>. On this point we will disagree with him because Dionysius influenced Palamas and then through the text of Palamas influenced Staniloae. So the beginning influence of Staniloae came from Dionysius. As for the relation of Gregory Palamas with Dionysius Areopagite as far as apophaticism, F. T. Tomoioagă argues:

“In his (Palamas’) interpretation (on mystical theology) of Dionysius the Areopagite, Saint Gregory is overwhelmed with wonder: Is it not obvious to everybody that Dionysius’s apophaticism is the result of a union with

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<sup>83</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, I,2, PG 3, 1000B, trans. Luibheid & Roem, 136. D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 111.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 96.

<sup>85</sup> Gheorghe Dragulin, “Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite in Dumitru Staniloae’s Theology”, in Lucian Turcescu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Iasi: The center for Romanian Studies, 2002), 76.

<sup>86</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 97.

<sup>87</sup> Adrian Agachi, *The Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 68.

God? Dionysius expresses the inability of the human mind to describe the depths of this union with the divine. However, what is ineffable at the level of language is accessible at the level of experience”<sup>88</sup>.

We can support that Staniloae was influenced by Gregory Palamas, who was really influenced by Dionysius Areopagite, as Staniloae analyzes. If someone studies carefully the *Philokalia* of Staniloae, he will draw to the conclusion that Staniloae argues that Gregory of Palamas was influenced by Dionysius’ theology. Generally, Staniloae employs the negative theology of Palamas and Dionysius to speak about the knowledge of God through His creatures and “the predefinitions of the existences in God”<sup>89</sup>.

Staniloae explains that the true knowledge “recognizes the personal reality of God as ultimate reality. This knowledge bases on participation, a dialogue in love with people and Godhead, with the creation, with each other. So it isn’t doubted that the knowledge and union are inseparable<sup>90</sup>. In this point, Staniloae reminds us of Dionysius who teaches that “every rational and intellectual beings desire and are fulfilled by God according to knowledge (γνωστικῶς)”<sup>91</sup>. This knowledge is the result of the response of the acceptance of the illumination of logical being with a reciprocal ecstatic love. The latter is the cause and creates the union of human being with God<sup>92</sup>. So, for the Romanian theologian, father Staniloae and for theologian of fifth and sixth century, Dionysius the knowledge and the union are inseparable, because only “by knowing God perfectly in the life to come we will also be united permanently with him”<sup>93</sup>.

In another point of his treatise, *Experience of God*, fr. Staniloae shows that the union with God is the only path for the infinite development in the knowledge of Godhead<sup>94</sup>, and explains the etymology of the word knowledge shows the relation with the “object” of the knowledge and in case of Christianity, the knowledge of God:

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<sup>88</sup> F.T. Tomoiogă, “The vision of divine light in Saint Gregory Palamas’s theology”, *Acta Theologica* 2015 35, no. 2, 147, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v35i2.9>.

<sup>89</sup> Gheorghe Dragulin, “Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite in Dumitru Staniloae’s Theology”, in Lucian Turcescu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Iasi: The center for Romanian Studies, 2002), 75.

<sup>90</sup> Silviu Eugene Rogobete, “Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation? Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Staniloae”, in Lucian Turcescu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Iasi: The center for Romanian Studies, 2002), 185. D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 201.

<sup>91</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, IV, 4, PG 3, 700B, trans. Alan Brown, “Dionysius the Areopagite” (pp. 226-236) in Augustine Casiday (ed), *The Orthodox Christian World*, Routledge, New York 2012, p. 229.

<sup>92</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, IV, 13; I, 4, PG 3, 712A; 592C. trans. Luibheid & Rorem, p. 82, 53.

<sup>93</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 201. Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, VII, 4, PG 3, 872D.

<sup>94</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 201.

“The etymology of the latin cognosco (cum + gnosco) shows from of old that human beings have been aware of the impersonal character of knowledge. The same thing is attested by the Romanian word *conștiință* (‘consciousness’ / ‘conscience’). I do not know myself apart from a relationship with others. In the last analysis I know or am conscious of myself in relationship with God. The light of my knowledge in respect of things or of myself is projected upon the communitarian human image from the supreme personal community. We are conscious of ourselves only in relationship with the other and, in the final analysis, before God. The ‘I’ by itself would no longer possess consciousness; through consciousness it knows its own spiritual ‘place’ in relationship with the others. It grows in self – consciousness simultaneously with its growth in self – knowledge, and its growth in self-Knowledge corresponds to its growth in self-knowledge to its growth in the knowledge of God, of its neighbors, and of created things”<sup>95</sup>.

All this above brings in our thought the close connection for the progress in knowledge of God in Staniloae’s text with Dionysius’ writings *On Divine Names* and *On Mystical Theology*. *On Divine Names*, Dionysius clarifies the way of divine knowledge through an onward movement of the Divine Names. Besides *On Mystical Theology*,

“in order to know God it is necessary to be in proximity to Him, to have come near to Him in some measure, so as to attain communion with God and deification (theosis). This condition is accomplished through prayer. This is not because prayer in itself brings us close to the incomprehensible God, but rather that the purity of heart in true prayer brings us closer to God”<sup>96</sup>.

The knowledge includes love for the “object” that man tries to know. So Staniloae underlines that we cannot obtain the knowledge of God without having love for Him<sup>97</sup>. Dionysius, on the other side, speaks about the “knowledge of the true eros: ‘εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὄντως ἔρωτος γνῶσιν’ ”<sup>98</sup>. And fr. Staniloae adds that this

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 204

<sup>96</sup> “Hieromartyr Dionysius the Areopagite the Bishop of Athens”,

<https://oca.org/saints/lives/2013/10/03/102843-hieromartyr-dionysius-the-areopagite-the-bishop-of-athens> [access 22 September 2018]

<sup>97</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 202-203: “Full Knowledge is always love also, and as such is directed towards another person... In the final analysis, knowledge is the loving reference of one subject to another subject. Even through reference to an object, the knowing subject has indirect reference to another subject, and it is only through this reference that he knows himself and actualizes himself as subject”.

<sup>98</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, IV.13, PG 3, 709C-712AB, transl. Parker, 22: “But Divine Love is ecstatic, not permitting (any) to be lovers of themselves, but of those beloved. They shew this too, the superior by becoming mindful of the inferior; and the equals by their mutual coherence; and the inferior, by a more divine respect towards things superior. Wherefore also, Paul the Great, when possessed by the Divine Love, and participating in its ecstatic power, says with inspired lips, ‘I live no longer, but Christ lives in me’. As a true lover, and beside

love of man for God can be developed through the frames of freedom. The love for God can have as real result the knowledge of God but not in theoretical level but in practice<sup>99</sup>.

For Staniloae, the apophatic and cataphatic theology have a powerful interaction between them. A synthesis between negative and affirmative reveal the knowledge of God.

“At the basis of this synthesis, however, lies an experience which transcends both the terms of affirmation and of negation that express it. God possesses these in a way which is absolutely superior to the terms themselves”<sup>100</sup>.

This view of Staniloae is attuned to the view of Dionysius *On Mystical theology*:

“Since it is the Cause of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to beings, and, more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being. Now we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of the affirmations, but rather that the cause of all is considerably prior to this, beyond privations, beyond every denial, beyond every assertion”<sup>101</sup>.

As we can understand, both affirmation and negation are part of one’s talk about God, although negation is more in keeping with God’s transcendence<sup>102</sup>.

On this point we can draw to the conclusions the negative theology and the cataphatic one are two paths for the knowledge of God. There are many differences between them, but they are not used separately because the one completes the other<sup>103</sup>. Staniloae tries to speak about the essence of God starting from Dionysius’

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himself, as he says, to Almighty God, and not living the life of himself, but the life of the Beloved, as a life excessively esteemed. One might make bold to say even this, on behalf of truth, that the very Author of all things, by the beautiful and good love of everything, through an overflow of His loving goodness, becomes out of Himself, by His providences for all existing things, and is, as it were, cozened by goodness and affection and love, and is led down from the Eminence above all, and surpassing all, to being in all, as befits an ecstatic superessential power centred in Himself. Wherefore, those skilled in Divine things call Him even Jealous, as (being) that vast good Love towards all beings, and as rousing His loving inclination to jealousy, —and as proclaiming Himself Jealous—to Whom the things desired are objects of jealousy, and as though the objects of His providential care were objects of jealousy for Him. And, in short, the lovable is of the Beautiful and Good, and Love preexisted both in the Beautiful and Good, and on account of the Beautiful and Good, is and takes Being”.

<sup>99</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 107.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>101</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, I. 2, PG 3, 1000B. transl. Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius a Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 187.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>103</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 122-123.

acceptance that the Godhead has “the existence in itself”<sup>104</sup>. For Areopagite this existence becomes synonym with the essence of God, the hypostatic reality and from this essence all the attributes of God spring and in which all the creatures participate<sup>105</sup>. Staniloae analyzes the previous view of Dionysius that “the God is the substantive Cause and maker of being, subsistence, of existence, of substance, and of nature... For God is not some kind of being”<sup>106</sup>, and he says that God is

“as personal reality, God is the undetermined source of all the qualities which are determined in some way through their procession from him. The personal divine reality is undetermined in an eminent way because it is the hypostasizing of the superessence from which every created essence receives its existence. God can be said to be the tripersonal superessence, or the superessential tripersonality. What this superessence is, we do not know. But it exists of itself; like any essence, however, it is not real except by the fact that it subsists hypostatically, in persons”<sup>107</sup>.

So for the Romanian theologian, God is the personal reality which is “self-existence” and at the same time “communion of persons”. He is the original of all things, a communion of all things, a communion of three distinct persons whose existence consists in the giving and receiving of themselves to and from each other<sup>108</sup>. Staniloae relates Dionysius’ teaching about the superessence of God with Cappadocians’ in order to found the orthodoxy of the teaching of Areopagite in this subject. This happened, because Dionysius is credited with the form of Neoplatonic frame “by making both Trinity and oneness equally inapplicable to the superessence of God”<sup>109</sup>, but related with Cappadocians, neither the person nor the essence has an ontological priority over the other as far as the Godhead.

Staniloae<sup>110</sup> as Dionysius think that the names “αὐτοδύναμιν” and “αὐτοζωήν”<sup>111</sup>, “life itself and subsistence of life itself” reveal the only God is the self - source of life, the supreme life and only He can give the life to all the others:

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>105</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, 5, 4, PG 3, 817CD. trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 98.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 129.

<sup>108</sup> Dennis F. Kinlaw, *Let's Start with Jesus: A New Way of Doing Theology* (Michigan: The Francis Asbury Society), 98.

<sup>109</sup> Paul L. Gavrilyuk, “The reception of Dionysius in twentieth-century eastern orthodoxy”, in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Sarah Coakley, Charles M. Stang (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 376. Vl. Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Bedfordshire: The Faith Press, 1973), 101.

<sup>110</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 132.

<sup>111</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, 11, 6, PG 3, 953B-956A. trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 124-125: “This is not something oblique, but is in fact quite straightforward, and there is a simple explanation for it. The absolute being underlying individual manifestations of being as their cause is not a divine or an angelic being, for only transcendent being itself can be the source, the being, and the cause of the being of beings. Nor, in summary, is God to be thought of as identical with those originating and creative beings and substances which men stupidly describe as certain gods or creators of the world.

“since God is super-essentially Existent and bestows existence upon all things that are, and brings the world into being, that single Existence of His is said to become manifold through bringing forth the many existences from Itself, while yet He remains One in the act of Self-Multiplication; Undifferentiated throughout the process of Emanation, and Full in the emptying process of Differentiation; Super-Essentially transcending the Being of all things, and guiding the whole world onwards by an indivisible act, and pouring forth without diminution His indefectible bounties”<sup>112</sup>.

Both Staniloae and Dionysius use the vision of the divine light as the way or the final step in knowledge of God. The image of light is omnipresent. The divine light is identified with God himself. The light, as natural light, as supernatural, as sun, as ray as a cloud of darkness is employed to express God. The knowledge of God is revealed through the apophatic acceptance of darkness, as the result of the light of God. Through the divine light, the mind can have the experience of the union with God<sup>113</sup>.

God’s knowledge of Himself is not distinct from His knowledge of created beings according to Staniloae and Dionysius. On this point of view Staniloae argues:

“Created things are not given to us only so that each of us can carry on a private dialogue with God; they have been given so that all of us can take part in a dialogue among ourselves and collectively take part in a dialogue with God. Put another way, this dialogue is to take place among ourselves in the consciousness that created things are given us by God so as to be used as gifts among ourselves in his name, following his command, and out of his richness...”<sup>114</sup>.

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Such men, and their fathers before them, had no genuine or proper knowledge of beings of this kind. Indeed, there are no such beings. What I am trying to express is something quite different. Being itself, life itself, divinity itself, are names signifying source, divinity, and cause, and these are applied to the one transcendent cause and source beyond source of all things. But we use the same terms in a derivative fashion and we apply them to the provident acts of power which come forth from God in whom nothing at all participates. I am talking here of being itself, of life, of divinity itself which shapes things in a way that each creature, according to capacity, has his share of these. From the fact of such sharing come to qualities and the names existing, living, possessed by divinity, and suchlike”.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 2, 10, PG 3, 649AB, by C.E. Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* (London: SPCK, 1920), 43-44.

<sup>113</sup> Cătălin Vatamanu, “Biblical grounding for the divine light theology in the Father Stăniloae’s work”, *Teologie și viață*, no. 5-8 (May-August 2015): 30. Emil Bartoș, “The Dynamics of Deification in the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae”, 211. Jonathan Morgan, “A Radiant Theology: The Concept of Light in Pseudo-Dionysius”, in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 55, no. 1-4 (2010): 132. Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, 4, 4, PG 3, 697C trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 74; *On Divine Names*, II, 7, PG 3, 645B, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 64; Ibid., I, 5, PG 3, 593C, 54; Ibid., II, 8, PG 3, 645D, 63-64. Dionysius Areopagite, *Celestial Hierarchy*, I, 1-2, PG 3, 121A, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 145. Dionysius Areopagite, *Mystical Theology* III, 3, PG 3, 1033A, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 138.

<sup>114</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, “Creation: The Visible World”, vol. II, trans. and edited by Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press, 2000), 26-27.

And Dionysius supports that the creation allowed human beings to be aware of God, the only Creator. Our knowledge of God through nature is an immanent knowledge: “God is therefore known in all things and as distinct from all things”<sup>115</sup>. So, for both writers the natural revelation of God is known and understood fully in the light of supernatural revelation, or we might say that natural revelation is given and maintained by God continuously through His own divine act which is above nature.

To sum up Staniloae tried to present Dionysius Areopagite as the real saint of the late 1<sup>st</sup> century or the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. He insists that Dionysius’ writings are authentic and they are written by Dionysius or by one of his associators<sup>116</sup>. In this paper we will refer to the effect of Areopagite on Staniloae with regard to the knowledge of God. Father Staniloae’s and Dionysius’ Areopagite teaching about the knowledge of God is thought to be a synthesis between the logical, the natural and the apophatic, cataphatic and supernatural knowledge of God and His revelation to people. The Knowledge of God is not solely scientific knowledge and theoretic, but mainly true experience illumination of human mind from Him and union with Him.

## Conclusions

In this paper we presented the teaching of Dionysius Areopagite about the knowledge of God. He underlines that light and knowledge comes from God down to human beings as illumination of the mind, as natural and supernatural revelation of God. Also we referred to Staniloae theology about the knowledge of God and the influence that fr. Staniloae accepted by Dionysius.

For Dionysius, the nature, the universe is a theophany, “a manifestation of God, in which beings closer to God manifest God to those further away”<sup>117</sup>, as father Louth underlines. Areopagite uses both apophatic and cataphatic theology, “the sacred science” to know the One God. Only with both affirmations and denials, the Triune God can be known by the human beings. Also, Dionysius speaks about the superlative theology which shows that there are no words for someone to speak about the God who is insayable and unknowable in the categories of human language.

The divine names of God reveal His attributes to people. Man tries to unite with God, in order to know Him, but this union is difficult to be described with the finite human vocabulary. Also, concerning the knowledge of God, it is

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<sup>115</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, VII, 3, PG 3, 872A, trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 108.

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2009/10/apostolic-authorship-of-corpus.html>

<sup>117</sup> Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London, New York, 2001), 85.

difficult to talk about the divine darkness without talking about the divine light simultaneously.

Fr. Dumitru Staniloae respects Dionysius' theology and for the Romanian theologian, this teaching is a genuine Christian without any influence of Neo-Platonism. He accepts the interaction of apophatic and cataphatic theology as Dionysius does. These two theologies are the only way to God to be known. God is self-existence and at the same time Communion of persons.

To sum up, the influence of Dionysius to Staniloae about the knowledge of God is profane in the same words of Staniloae:

“God is not knowable, and yet the one who believes can experience him in a sensible and conscious manner. This is the positive fact. Man is submersed in the incomprehensible, indefinable and inexpressible ocean of God; nevertheless, he is aware of this. God is the positive reality beyond what we know of as positive; yet in comparison with the created world he is a negative reality beyond what we know of as negative, Dionysius asserts this too in his paradoxical characterization of God, although the paradox does not imply that each parts cancels out the other, but rather that both parts are transcended: ‘this supra – existent Being. Mind beyond mind, word beyond speech...’<sup>118</sup><sup>119</sup>.

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<sup>118</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names*, I, 1, PG 3,588b. trans. Luibheid & Rorem, 50.

<sup>119</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1998), 112-113.

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