SEEING GOD

through the lens of Augustine of Hippo and Gregory Palamas

Bachelor Thesis

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Cover Illustration: Rembrandt Harmenzoon van Rijn, *The Supper at Emmaus* (1629), oil on wood panel 37.4 x 42.3 cm. Musée Jacquemart-André, Institut de France, Paris. (image source: The Yorck Project (2002) 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei (DVD-ROM), distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH).

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Introduction

While strolling through the University Library, I happened upon a book regarding the reception of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in Eastern Christianity: *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*.[1] I was intrigued to find out what scholars had to say about the relationship between Augustine and the Eastern Orthodox tradition, as I had learned Augustine's theology is not as central in the Eastern churches as it is in the West. The contributions of Reinhard Flogaus[2] and Brian E. Daley[3] in the volume in particular make frequent comparison between Augustine and one Gregory Palamas (1296-1357), a monk from Mt Athos, and archbishop of Thessalonica. Never having heard of Gregory Palamas or his theology, I was motivated to look deeper into the relationship between this 'typical' Eastern theologian and Augustine and 'typically' Western theologian.

The following thesis is the fruit of that initial curiosity. In it, I compare the epistemology of Augustine of Hippo (hereafter referred to simply as Augustine) and Gregory Palamas (hereafter: Palamas) by comparing two specific texts. For Palamas, the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters on Topics of Natural and Theological Science, the Moral and the Ascetic Life* (hereafter referred to as *The Chapters*) provide a concise summary of his

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[1] George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

[2] Reinhard Flogaus, "Inspiration–Exploitation–Distortion: The Use of St Augustine in the Hesychast Controversy," in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, eds. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 63–80.

[3] Brian E. Daley, "Making a Human Will Divine: Augustine and Maximus on Christ and Human Salvation," in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, eds. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 101–126.

theology, including his epistemology, and therefore is a natural choice.[4] For Augustine, I will focus on the Book Twelve of his important treatise, the *De Genesi ad litteram* (hereafter referred to with the abbreviation *Gen. litt.*).

This thesis aims to serve as a preliminary approach to the comparison of Augustine's and Palamas' epistemology based on two exemplary texts. It does not aim to compare their entire corpora nor their entire systems of thought which would be far beyond the scope of a bachelor's thesis. From each text, I will discuss three key passages that shed light on the two theologians' respective understandings of how knowledge of God is gained and how the human faculties work to gain it. In the conclusion, I will answer how *visio intellectualis* in each author might differ from one another.

The *visio intellectualis* has been the focus of patristic research as the place where the human connection with God is most visible and distinguished. This thesis hopes to contribute to that research by undertaking a comparison that has not been done before. It compares the role of the intellect in the relationship with God between two prominent theologians of both East and West. In my closing argument, I hope to answer how Gregory Palamas stands in the same tradition as Augustine when it comes to the use of Neoplatonism to describe the seeing of God, while also being different.

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[4] Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, translated by Robert E. Sinkewicz Studies and Texts 83 (Toronto: Ponitifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988).

Chapter 1: Introduction of the Primary Texts

1.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the general information that is needed to understand *De Genesi* (*Gen. litt.*) and *The Chapters*. It introduces the structure, contents, and a brief overview of scholarship concerning these two texts. While not everything can be treated here, especially when it comes to the extensive scholarship on the texts, by the end of the chapter the reader should have a general grasp of the themes these two texts play with and which themes scholars have found most interesting.

1.2. Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*

1.2.1. Context

Augustine worked on this commentary on Genesis throughout the later part of his life, from 399 to 415. He began writing after completing his *De Trinitate*, another substantial treatise he wrote during his later years. This was not the first time Augustine had written about Genesis, however, as he had attempted another commentary on the biblical book in 393, known as the *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus*. This latter work was, in fact, his second attempt at a "literal" commentary on Genesis years after completing *De Genesi adversus Manicheos,* which is probably Augustine's first work on Genesis. However, he found the commentary difficult to write and left it unfinished and only mentions the text when he found it again later in his life.

In *Gen. litt.*, Augustine writes about the "literal" (*ad litteram*) meaning of Genesis, by which he means what the text means on its own.[5] His literal interpretation should not be confused with how modern readers use the word literal, as Augustine neither "stays with the text," nor interpretates the text at what modern readers might consider face value. A literal reading should rather be understood as contrasting with allegorical exegesis, by which the commentator focusses on symbols and comparisons between texts (for example Old and New Testament), or the way in which the text points to mystical or heavenly realities. On the question whether Augustine sees the events described in Genesis as historical events in a modern sense of the word "historical", it is probably best to assume he read them as historical texts, without asserting that those events historically happened.[6]

1.2.2. Structure

Gen. litt. is usually considered as being divided into three sections, each focussing on a different theme. The entire work comments on just the opening chapters of Genesis from Gen 1:1 to Gen 3, covering both creation stories. The first five books are about the first creation story: God who makes the heavens and the earth in six days and rests on the seventh. Augustine comments on the events of Gen 2 and 3 throughout Book 6 to Book 11. Lastly, Augustine discusses the nature of paradise in more detail in Book 12. Book 12 is therefore set apart, because it does not begin strictly from the text of Genesis, but rather with a question relating to the human capacity to experience heaven, for which Augustine uses Paul's account in 2 Cor 12. Indeed, Book 12 is separated from the rest of the work so much that it is often

[5] Roland J. Teske, "De Genesi ad litteram liber," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 376.

[6] Ibidem.

discussed in scholarship, without reference to the context of the commentary, the word Genesis only being used to reference the title of the larger work.

Augustine says forthrightly that Book 12 is devoted to a treatment of the question of paradise on its own, independently of the text of Genesis.[7] That said, it is not divorced from biblical reference. Augustine spends a considerable amount of time grounding the Book within the context of 2 Cor 12:4, thereby setting the stage for his theory of the visiones. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells the story of a man who *"*was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell" (2 Cor 12:4 NIV). In the preceding verses, Paul states twice that he does not know exactly how the man was caught up, whether *"*it was in the body or out of the body", but however it was done allowed him to receive some kind of special knowledge. This "how" question provides Augustine with an occasion to explain his epistemological theory. In this way, this text provides the constant background for any discussion of the *visiones.*

Next comes the largest part of the text, which consists of discussion concerning the nature of the human person who has, Augustine writes, a tripartite capacity for knowing. Using the example of the commandment "love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mk 12:31, Mt 22:39), Augustine argues that there are three kinds of seeing at work here: first, the seeing with our bodily organs, which either see the letters written on the papyrus, for example, or hear the words being spoken; second, seeing the neighbour in one's mind, which for Augustine boils down to bringing up an image of a form not directly seen in the moment; and, thirdly, seeing love, which cannot be seen through the first two ways of seeing.[8] What

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[7] *Gen. Litt.* 12, 1, 1. "In this twelfth book, however, no longer engaged in the business of interpreting the sacred text which has claimed our attention hitherto, we will be freer to tackle in more detail the question of Paradise."
[8] *Gen. Litt.* 12, 11, 22.

sets the third seeing apart, it seems, is that it is immaterial, and that it is never constructed by the mind because that would require the mind to construct something from memory, which is impossible if things like love, wisdom, justice are just as present now as they will ever be. The first Augustine calls bodily vision, the second spiritual, and the third intellectual.

An important distinction between our spiritual vision and intellectual vision for Augustine is that the spirit sees "bodies" in the immaterial sense, while the intellect does not rely on bodies at all. Augustine regards spiritual visions as inferior to intellectual ones. The spiritual vision, can only project images, but cannot assess or analyse them, while the intellect can assess the spiritual visions and pull out the truth which has no form the spirit can visualize. The intellect does not need spiritual vision to reach understanding, which is considered a strictly intellectual property.

According to Augustine, divine visions (i.e., visions that come from God) happen within our *visio intellectualis* for the reason that they cannot deceive. In this way, Augustine explains the difference between visions from demons and visions from God. Spiritual vision cannot show anything new to us, since it makes use of our memory. Therefore, we are always dealing with "bodies" if we use our spiritual vision. This, however, is impossible for the intellect, since the intellect deals in knowledge that has no body of any kind.[8] From this, we can deduce that the intellect remains a sinless part of Augustine's theological anthropology.

Finally, we may note the use of the word "light" in Book 12, when Augustine explains how the intellect "sees". The intellect works, Augustine argues, through "light" which Augustine calls God Himself. The question relevant for this thesis is whether the use of the

[8] Jörg Schlapbach, "Intellectual Vision in Augustine, *De Genesi Ad Litteram* 12 or: Seeing the Hidden Meaning of Images," *Studia Patristica* 39 (2006): 239.

word light is comparable to how we will see that Palamas uses the word light, to describe what that some monks see through hesychast prayer. For now, we may mark the use of the word light by Augustine to refer to God himself; we will come back to it later in this study. The soul, being a creature, shivers at the sight of the light, whereas the intellect is created from it.[9]

1.2.3. Scholarship on *Gen. Litt.* 12

Book 12 of *Gen. litt.* is the most popular book of the entire commentary among scholars. There are two principal reasons for scholars' interest in the book: Augustine's understanding of *visio intellectualis*, and his theological anthropology in general.

1.2.3.1. Book 12 as part of Gen. litt.

It is easy to forget that Book 12 is part of a larger work. Augustine discusses philosophically his interpretation of paradise and the human capacity to see, departing from commenting sequentially on verses of Genesis in order to refer to passages drawn from throughout the Bible but especially from the Second Letter to the Corinthians. Many scholars, therefore, treat Book 12 as its own work that is easily separated from *Gen. litt.*. In her comparison of Augustinian and Plotinic epistemology, however, Laela Zwollo sees connections with the treatment of *visio intellectualis* in Book 12 and Augustine's discussion of the *imago Dei* in Book 3.[10] In fact, the connection between Book 12 and the rest of *Gen. litt.* becomes clearer when we view anthropology as the focus of the entire work, rather than the biblical text itself as we would expect from a modern biblical commentary.[11]

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[9] See paragraph 32 for comparison.

[10] Laela Zwollo, *St. Augustine and Plotinus: The Human Mind as Image of the Divine*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 151 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 141-194.

[11] Matthew Drever, *Image, Identity, and the Forming of the Augustinian Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 313. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199916337.001.0001.

1.2.3.2. Brief Overview of Augustine's Three-Tiered Hierarchy of Vision

Throughout *Gen. litt.,* Augustine is interested in Genesis as providing insight into human nature, how we came to be, the nature of paradise, and how we are saved. The discussion of 2 Cor 12:2-4 is then to be read as an extension of that interest, by which Augustine can speak of human capacity of experiencing paradise while at the same time speaking of paradise itself.

As the theory of the three *visiones* takes up most of the text's argument, it has naturally been the focus-point of scholarship. Two things stand out. First, it is quite clear that Augustine's theory of visions is not strictly biblical in origin, but Neoplatonic. Augustine happily makes use of the theory first laid out by Plotinus that there are three hypostases – the One, the intellect, and the soul – from which flows a tripartite anthropology that is in turn reflected in Plotinian epistemology.[12] Scholars have accordingly searched for the exact relationship between the Augustinian theory of visions and Plotinian theory. The most extensive study of this question is Laela Zwollo's book *St Augustine and Plotinus: The Human Mind as Image of the Divine.* Zwollo argues in this work that Augustine saw no insurmountable problem in borrowing from pagan philosophy, but that he also Christianised Plotinian thought at the same time.[13]

Second, scholars have puzzled over the exact workings of the theory of visions, since its abstract workings seem to be slightly different from philosopher to philosopher. The idea of intellectual vision, in particular, has garnered attention, as it deals with the human connection to the One, in the Neoplatonic context, and to God in a Christian context.

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[12] Zwollo, *St. Augustine and Plotinus*, p. 74-194.

[13] Idem. pp. 74-194, 311-357, 415-463.

Furthermore, the role of intellectual vision has major implications for Christian soteriology, as it is often connected to how God speaks to us. On the other hand, the importance of intellectual vision determines the lesser or greater importance of spiritual vision, because both happen within the soul.

1.3. Palamas' *The Chapters*

1.3.1. Context

Of the writings of Gregory Palamas, *The Chapters* is one the longest and broadest in subject. The original title tells us that this text was, at least in part, intended to argue against the teachings of Barlaam of Calabria (1290-1348).[14] Barlaam argued against hesychastic prayer, a method of prayer practised on Mt. Athos whereby someone would pray the Jesus prayer[15] and sometimes claim to see a physical light. This light was claimed by the hesychasts to be the light of God Himself, unveiled as in the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. Critics such as Barlaam argued that God could not be physically seen at all, and that such light could therefore not be God Himself. Gregory Palamas, in contrast, defended hesychasm with his doctrine of the uncreated Light. Though the controversy with Barlaam was largely already over when *The Chapters* was written,[16] it is through this text that Gregory gives a more systemic viewpoint on the nature of knowledge and its implications on the knowledge of God. It could be argued that Gregory goes further than that, as the first section of the text deals with heresies that actually predate the controversy with Barlaam, answering

[14] see: Sinkewicz's comments in in Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 10. For a good overview of Palamasism and the debate with Barlaam, see the most extensive study of Palamas: Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*.

[15] "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"

[16] Sinkewicz, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapter*s, 11.

questions related to the creation of the world and the human capacity to understand creation with reason.[17]

This has given credence to the idea that Gregory not only wrote this text with Barlaam in mind, but also with an eye to natural philosophers, or proto-humanists, who threatened the mystical approach to the knowledge of God that Gregory had defended in hesychasm.[18]At the same time, Gregory attacks the idea that the world is governed through a 'world soul'[19] and maintains a separation between natural philosophy and the realm of knowledge of God.[20]

1.3.2. Structure of the Work

The Chapters reads more as a train of thoughts rather than a structured text. It belongs to the Byzantine genre of writing known as *kefalaia* (chapters), in which the writing style reflects more how ancient writers connected a train of thought in a series of chapters, in contrast to the systematized question-and-answer style of western Scholasticism that had developed during Gregory's lifetime. Furthermore, the text of *The Chapters* was later circulated within the *Philokalia*,[21] a collection of mystical texts compiled in the eighteenth century on the basis of later medieval manuscripts comprising texts dating from the fourth to the fifteenth century.

The text of *The Chapters* can roughly be divided into two sections, the first ranging from Chapter 1 to 63 and the second from Chapter 64 onwards. In the first section, Gregory

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[17] Doru Costache, "Queen of the Sciences? Theology and Natural Knowledge in St. Gregory Palamas' One Hundred and Fifty Chapters," *Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion* 3, no. 1 (2008): 30.

[18] Ibid..

[19] Palamas, *Chapters* 1-11 (Sinkewicz 83-95).

[20] Palamas, *Chapters* 17 (Sinkewicz 101).

establishes the worldly nature of creation and the human capacity to know. In the opening part of this section (Chapters 1-13), Palamas discusses several topics pertaining to worldly knowledge and the ability to deduce things about the material world and even about God. His main argument here is that the world is created in an orderly manner by one God,[21] and that there is no world soul that governs material movements.[22] He gives an example by disproving that the clouds are moving autonomously through a soul, arguing rather that they move through natural processes.

In a second group of chapters (Chapters 16–33), Palamas begins to dissect the human faculties, which we can rightly see as analogous to Augustine's *visiones*,[23] the senses, and the imaginative faculty of the soul (ψυχής φανταστικόν*),* the latter being described as the intermediary between the senses and the intellect.[24] These work together to form the "composite" knowledge of the natural world.[25] However, Palamas then concludes that these can never equate with the acquisition of spiritual knowledge and, indeed, are unable to acquire spiritual knowledge to begin with.[26] He, then, turns to spiritual knowledge, arguing that it can only be received from the Holy Spirit. Palamas provides a few examples of spiritual knowledge, such as things described in Bible that have to be accepted from faith

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[21] Palamas, *Chapters* 1-2 (Sinkewicz 83-84).

[22] Palamas, *Chapters* 3-13 (Sinkewicz 85-97).

[23] This analogy in thought should not be taken to meant that Palamas is here rehearsing Augustinian thought directly. It seems, rather, that he received it directly from Neoplatonic philosophy itself.

[24] Palamas, *Chapters* 17 (Sinkewicz 101).

[25] Palamas, *Chapters* 19 (Sinkewicz 101-103).

[26] Palamas, *Chapters* 20 (Sinkewicz 103). "And further, the laws of nature and all its methods and arts, and in general all knowledge of anything collected from perception of particular, we have gathered together from the senses and the imagination through the mind, and no such knowledge could ever be called spiritual but rather natural, which does not attain the things of the Spirit."

because they cannot be received from senses and the imaginative faculty of the soul.[27] He concludes this part by championing the superiority of spiritual knowledge over the worldly philosophy of the ancient Greeks on account of the fact that spiritual knowledge works towards salvation.[28]

Gregory goes on to describe the nature of man and the fall from grace which has tainted man's ability to know. The third and final group of chapters in the part of Palamas' text that will be used in this thesis spans the last ten chapters (Chapters 31-40) and can be considered the most relevant for the present discussion. These chapters cover two related subjects: the nature of human essence compared to animals and angels, and the Divine nature and its potential influence on the human nature.[29] As stated above, the second half of *The Chapters* (Chapters 64-150) deals with the importance of Gregory's doctrine of the essence/energies distinction, the uncreated light of Tabor, and the dangers of the Barlaam heresy.

1.3.3. Scholarship on *The Chapters*

Western scholarship on Gregory Palamas is relatively limited and recent when compared to the reception of Augustine. The first mention of Gregory Palamas by Western scholars appears in the nineteenth century, after the revival of interest in the *Philokalia* in the

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[27] Palamas, *Chapters* 20-24 (Sinkewicz 103-109).

[28] Palamas, *Chapters* 25-29 (Sinkewicz 109-113). "Not only are man's knowledge of God and his understanding of himself and his proper rank (which knowledge now belongs to those who are Christians, even those considered uneducated laymen) a more lofty knowledge than natural science and astronomy and any philosophy in these subjects," (Ch. 29).

[29] Palamas, *Chapters* 30-40 (Sinkewicz 115-129).

Orthodox world. In this sense, Gregory Palamas only became interesting to Western theologians when his importance began to be stressed within the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

1.3.3.1. Science and faith

Epistemology seems to be the main focus in research on *The Chapters*. While the academic study of Gregory Palamas in general typically revolves around the uncreated light and the essence/energies distinction, those subjects are often researched on the basis of another text, namely, *The Triads*. *The Chapters* are less specifically about the controversy in which Gregory defended and developed his doctrines and provide a broader view on how our ability to know came to be and where it is deficient.[30]

The relationship between science and faith is thus of prime interest for scholars when it comes to the study of *The Chapters.* The broad consensus is that in this text Gregory ultimately wanted to defend knowledge of God from those who thought they could approach such knowledge by means of knowledge of the natural world. Not only did this defence amount to a justification of the mystical hesychast's way of prayer, it might also have served to defend Gregory's conception of the knowledge of God from so called "proto-humanists".[31] Of particular importance to the present thesis, a parallel has been drawn by some scholars between Gregory's epistemology and that of Augustine in the latter's *De Trinitate.* It has been argued that Gregory uses Augustinian argumentation to draw a wedge between natural

[30] Wojciech Micał, "Knowledge of God in St Gregory Palamas," *Studia Religiologica* 54, no. 3 (2021): 250, https://doi.org/10.4467/20844077SR.21.016.16553.

[31] Costache, 'Queen of the Sciences?', 30.

knowledge and knowledge of God.[32] While it would be interesting to test this conclusion, this thesis limits itself to a comparison between *The Chapters* and *Gen. litt.*

[32] Dirk Krausmüller, "Banishing Reason from the Divine Image: Gregory Palamas' *150 Chapters*," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 13 (2019): 64, https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.115.

Chapter 2: Augustine: Seeing God through *Imagio Dei*

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss three key passages from *Gen. litt.* that shed light on Augustine's understanding of the three *visiones*. I pay particular attention to Augustine's account of the intellect's origin as its primary characteristic. Even though this passage appears somewhat later in the text, I think it prudent to start with it so that we can see the relationship of the intellect with the other *visiones* more clearly. Next, I discuss the workings of intellectual visions seperately so that by the end of the chapter, it will be clear what Augustine's perception of the *visio intellectualis* was at least as it is described in *Gen. litt*.

2.2 The intellect as *imago Dei* (*Gen. litt.* 12.26.54)

For Augustine, the human soul has two faculties, the lower of which is *visio spiritualis*, the higher *visio intellectualis*. Augustine uses the word *mens,* mind,[33] when talking about the higher part of the soul, however. It is important to remember that the human soul is not only composite in faculty but also in its origin. That means that whatever the mind is capable of doing, it does so according its nature.

In *Gen. litt.* 12.26.53-54, Augustine explains that there are two degrees of rapture in which a person is taken away from their senses to receive a vision. The main difference between these degrees is that whereas spiritual vision stays within the realm of 'bodies' (since God could show the person visions of things that could also be seen bodily if those things were to appear before him or her),[34] in intellectual vision the "one and only and all-embracing virtue is to love", "the ultimate bliss to possess what you love", and therefore "the

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[33] *Gen. litt.* 12.7.16.

[34] *Gen. litt.* 12.26.53. "it should realize it is not perceiving bodies, but visions of things like bodies —not unlike the case of those who know even before they wake up that they are seeing things in a dream."

glory of the Lord is to be seen, through some significant vision, whether the bodily kind [...] or the spiritual [kind] [...], not in code but clearly".[35] This points towards the divine origin of the intellect, because Augustine frames the intellect as capable of understanding God and being able to "see" God without any mediating bodies for help. The intellect is the part of humanity which makes it created in the image of God, *imago Dei.*[36]

To solidify the theory that the intellect is the human faculty that is created in the image of God, we need to briefly turn to Book 3 of *Gen. litt.* Here, Augustine explains plainly his understanding of the intellect as created in a way that sheds light on the abilities of the intellect. First, Augustine states clearly that the subject of the phrase "created in the image of God" refers to the intellect: "[…] that man was made in God's image. That, of course, is reason itself, or mind or intelligence".[37] Before God created the heaven and the earth, Augustine argues He created light, and the intellect was created at the same time. In line with his literal interpretation, "light" does not just mean physical light for Augustine, but can be seen as a synonym for "knowledge".[38] This means that the intellect is not just a tool made for gathering and assessing knowledge, but almost indistinguishable from the knowledge (or light) itself. Where spiritual seeing and physical seeing are like catching light with your eyeballs from a light source that is fundamentally distinct from the eyeball, intellectual seeing is seeing *with the source itself*. In more abstract language: knowing God's creation involves

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[35] *Gen. litt.* 12.11.54.

[36] Laela Zwollo, "St. Augustine on the Soul's Divine Experience: *Visio intellectualis* and *Imago Dei* from Book XII of *De Genesi ad litteram libri XII*," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. LXX, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 92.

[37] *Gen. litt.* 3.20.30.

[38] *Gen. litt.* 3.20.31: "But that very light was being made first, in which knowledge would be made of the Word of God by whom it was being created; and this knowledge would itself be the light's conversion from its formlessness to the God forming it, would be its being created and formed."

other parts of creation that are created for the act of knowing; in contrast, knowing God Himself (or His attributes, such as "truth") involves God Himself, for knowing God is something only God can do.

2.3 The *visiones* report back to one another: *Gen. litt.* 12.11.24

> Thus, painstaking examination of these and similar events is enough to make it plain that bodily vision reports back to spiritual and spiritual in its turn reports back to intellectual. (*Gen. litt.* 12.11.24)

In explaining how God can show people visions, Augustine makes it clear that while a person can be alienated from the senses, it is always through the spirit that God is speaking when the person sees any "bodies".[39] The word "bodies" here refers to shapes or things that the spirit can think of, often first introduced by the senses of the bodily vision.[40] The spiritual vision is used every time something is seen that can be tangibly "seen". Augustine gives biblical examples to explain this thoroughly.[41] The intellect cannot see in this respect, because it is entirely immaterial and thus sees only things that are immaterial.

The intellect can assess the spiritual visions and can draw out the truth that has neither shape nor form, whereas spiritual vision can only project images, and cannot assess or

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[39] *Gen. litt.* 12.11.24: "We have bodily vision also coming into play, and the Holy Spirit too saying to him, again in spiritual vision [...] showing the signs and imprinting the words on his spirit."

[40] *Gen. litt.* 12.11.22: "Clearly, bodily vision does not preside over either of the other kinds, but what is observed by it is brought to the notice of the spiritual vision as its presiding officer, because when anything is noted with the eyes its image is straight away produced in the spirit. [...] And if indeed the spirit is non-rational, like an animal's, that is as far as the eyes pass on their message; while if the soul is rational, the message is also passed on to the intellect which also presides over the spirit."

[41] Augustine cites examples such as Peter receiving a vision to "kill and eat" in Acts 10:9-23 (*Gen. litt.* 12.11. 24), King Belshazzar seeing writing on the wall in Daniel 5:1-30 (*Gen. litt.* 12.11.22), and John's apocalypse (*Gen. litt.* 12.26.53).

analyse them. Augustine established the superiority of the intellect in multiple passages in this text, including in a key passage where he writes that "[the] spiritual in its turn reports back to [the] intellectual".[42] This, however, does not mean that the intellect can do everything that the *visio corporalis* and the *visio spiritualis* can do. It has its role as infallible part of the soul, created by God in His image. It can test the truthfulness of what the spirit sees, but cannot see what the spirit itself sees.

The spirit, unlike the intellect, can be manipulated by outside forces. As stated above, while it can be used by God to provide visions, Augustine writes that the spirit is also able to be manipulated by demons or natural processes. Even when detached from the senses, it can dwell on the things it has remembered.[43] This shows a greater connection between the spirit and the body than between the intellect and the spirit. The relationship between the intellect the other two *visiones* is more of a fulfilling role rather than a dependent one. In the following key passage, I will discuss the visions that occur completely within the intellect and how they differ from spiritual visions for Augustine.

2.4 How an intellectual vision is achieved: *Gen. litt.* 12.12.26

The two passages we have just been discussing treat the nature of the intellect and its relationship with the other *visiones*. The intellect as *imago Dei* and infallible interpreter of the soul are two key characteristics of the intellect for the bishop of Hippo. Augustine argues that it is in the intellectual vision that Moses spoke with God "face to face",[44] and this is the kind

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[42] *Gen. litt.* 12.11.24.

[43] *Gen. litt.* 12.12.26: "But when the soul is alienated through and through from the senses of the body, and the spiritual vision is engaged with the images of bodily realities, whether in dreams or in ecstasy, the things being seen may have no significance, and then they are simply the imaginings of the soul itself."

[44] Ex. 33:11.

of vision that the man had who was taken up to the third heaven. The question that this key passage will answer is what it means for someone to be taken up by an intellectual vision.

Augustine makes clear that an intellectual vision relates to having a purified heart.[45] When Moses spoke with God, Augustine suggests that all senses were not present, bodily or spiritually, because Moses had not earlier seen God and had not received a bodily image.[46] He suggests further that the longing of Moses communicated the voice of God within the intellect, which is also why Moses "saw" God intellectually and not bodily after their conversation.[47] It is important to remember that for Augustine intellectual vision means "true" vision, so according in his interpretation of the text -Moses did not see the "glory of God" (since that would be seeing God's essence),[48] but saw God in the form of the Church. In other words,

Moses saw something "true" in its purest form, in stead of seeing Truth itself. Since the Church is the body of Christ, there is no difference, intellectually, between the two.

While alive in a mortal body a person can only receive intellectual vision by restraining themselves through ascetic means, which includes restricting the input from the body and spirit.[49] Seeing God intellectually is not the same as seeing Him through a medium

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[45] *Gen. litt.* 12.28.56: "It is for a sight of this that hearts are purified, as it says: Blessed the heart-pure, because they shall see God [Mt 5:8]."

[46] *Gen. litt.* 12.27.55: "but in his very substance as God, without any bodily creature being assumed which could be presented to the senses of mortal flesh, and not either in spirit in figurative bodily likenesses, but clearly in his very self, insofar as a rational and intellectual creature can grasp that, withdrawn from every sense of the body"

[47] Ibid.: "Scripture, however, does not go onto describe this as actually happening in a bodily fashion, and this is sufficient indication that it was said figuratively to signify the Church."

[48] Num. 12:6-8; referred to in *Gen. litt.* 12.27.55.

[49] *Gen. litt.* 12.26.54: "In order to attain that state of undisturbed rest and that vision of inexpressible truth, we undertake here the labor of restraining ourselves from pleasure and enduring adversity and assisting the needy and resisting the fraudulent."

or through a symbol, such as the Bible or mental images, but means truly seeing Him as we see a truthful thing. In Augustine's view, this excludes the use of the body in this life, while we are still attached to sin. Seeing God perfectly is, thus, only possible if we "die" in this life either literally by ceasing to live, or ascetically, by denying the desires of the body.[50]

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed three key passages relating to Augustine's understanding of *visio intellectualis*. First, I looked at Augustine's account of the origin of the intellect as part of the light God created on the first day. I concluded that the intellect is linked to light to such a degree that it shares its knowledge and knowability. I also noted that the intellect is what is created in God's image, *imago Dei,* according to Augustine's anthropology.

Second, I have looked at the relationship between the three human faculties that together make up the entire epistemology of Augustine: the body, the spirit, and the mind. I have concluded that while all three are connected, the *visio intellectualis* is more detached from the other two *visiones* on account of its role as interpreter, and of its origin. This has consequences for how visions of the intellect are to be described and to how these visions are received.

Finally, I have shown that Augustine considers intellectual visions as happening without any influence of the body or spirit and that these are to be "detached" in order to make the intellectual vision clear for the receiver. It is important to remember that an

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[50] *Gen. litt.* 12.27.55: "But this can only happen if a person somehow dies from this life, whether by completely departing from the body, or by being so turned away and alienated from the senses of the flesh that he quite rightly does not know, as the apostle says, whether it is in the body or out of the body when he is rapt and carried up to that vision."

intellectual vision for Augustine can only happen through God's grace and that it cannot be achieved as the result of human striving.

Chapter 3: Palamas: Seeing God through one Hypostasis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss key passages from *The Chapters* that shed light on the nuances of the epistemology of Gregory Palamas. More specifically, this chapter centers on key passages that highlight three ideas about the intellect that are essential for comparing Gregory's notion of the possibility of seeing God with that of Augustine.

3.2. Goodness as Essence: *The Chapters* 35-37

After concluding that God has Goodness as part of his essence rather as a quality of his activity,[51] Palamas identifies Goodness with the Intellect itself, by which he means the λόγος: "The transcendently and absolutely perfect Goodness is Intellect; thus, what else could that which proceeds from It as from a source be except Intelligence-content or Logos?"[52]

It is worth noting that at first Palamas chooses to identify Divine Goodness with the word νους (mind, reason, understanding) rather than λόγος. This makes it possible to view the human intellect and the Intellect as separate but the same, as is the case with the two natures of Jesus: Christ's human and divine nature coexist, but remain separate. The λόγος Palamas speaks of is not any human faculty that needs the body to function; rather it is that which the Supreme Intellect put there in the human being. The human λόγος is, in other

[51] Palamas, *Chapters* 34 (Sinkewicz 117-119).

[52] Palamas, *Chapters* 35 (Sinkewicz 119-121).

words, the Divine imprint on humanity: if the God the Father is the Intellect, God the Son is the One thought of, thereby sharing in essence with the Father, but distinct. This makes the intellect in humanity its own distinct thing, not having to relying on other bodily functions. To use Gregory's own words: "the divine Logos-Gnosis is indistinguishably whatever that Goodness is, except for the fact that it is derived from It."[53]

Before treating how this relates to the human intellect, it is important, however, to note that Palamas combines two traditions of theology in the development of his epistemology in Chapter 36. As Sinkewicz has noted, Pseudo-Dionysian theology is evident earlier in the text in Chapter 34, where Palamas describes the possession of goodness on the one hand as an activity, and goodness as part of essence one the other.[54] The former, goodness as activity, pertains to rational creatures, but this way of thinking cannot be connected to God, the Supreme Intellect, for whom goodness is part of his essence. Palamas then uses elements of Alexandrian theology to identify Goodness with the Mind to establish that the Logos proceeds from God while maintaining equality with God.[55] Palamas' identification of goodness with intellect, and his understanding of goodness not only as activity but essence entail that the intellect is set apart as the only human faculty capable of receiving knowledge from God. The fact that this knowledge is seen as immanent rather than imputed is crucial, because it means that this is the kind of knowledge that can be trusted absolutely, something which cannot be said about the other two faculties responsible for

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[53] Palamas, *Chapters* 35 (Sinkewicz 119-121).

[54] Palamas, *Chapters* 33 (Sinkewicz 117). "PG 3:693B "When the theologians speak of goodness transcendent to the supremely divine Godhead they are distinguishing, I think, the thearchic substance itself from all things."

[55] Sinkewicz, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 17.

composite knowledge.[56] Another consequence of the intellect being part of the Triadic (divine) image in the human person is that this knowledge cannot grow. If God is unchanging then the intellect, being the image of God, has to be unchanging as well. That is why wisdom in the intellect is never accumulated, but revealed (as if it was always there). We can conclude, therefore, that Palamas' understanding of the intellect as something given by God means that, unlike other faculties such as the imaginative faculty of the soul or the senses, the intellect does not work towards increased knowledge.

Now that Palamas has praised the human intellect to the heavens, what explanation does he give for why this immanent knowledge is not already present within us? Palamas writes that no person imputed with intelligence can use it without 'spirit',[57] stating that the Son also needs the Holy Spirit to truly be the λόγος.[58] Before concluding that it must also be the Holy Spirit who activates the intellect in the human person, Palamas states why this cannot be the same kind of spirit as that which drives our reasoning. Two grounds are given for this distinction. First, the spirit that provides the impulse to reason is the result of cooperation between the intellect itself and the soul, and thus cannot be the Divine Spirit who activates the intellect on its own. The knowledge that this spirit provides in the reasoning that it allows is a composite knowledge of two human faculties that are both workings within the

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[56] Palamas, *Chapters* 35 (Sinkewicz 119-121): "Rather, the divine Logos is similar to the logos implanted by nature in our intellect, according to which we are made by the Creator in His own image which constitutes the spiritual knowledge coexistent with the intellect (p. 121)."

[57] Palamas, *Chapters* 36. (Sinkewicz 121-123 at p. 123): "But no intelligent person could conceive of a Logos or Intelligence-content that is lifeless and without spirit."

[58] Palamas, *Chapters* 36. (Sinkewicz 121-123 at p. 121): "Hence the Logos, God from God, possesses the Holy Spirit that issues together with Himself from the Father."

body, namely senses and the soul.[59] Second, the composite knowledge that comes from reasoning can grow, progress, and be completed. By implication, Palamas seems to suggest that knowledge of God is not "earned" or increased in the same way that traditional knowledge is; it is always present within the intellect activated by the Holy Spirit.

If it is granted that God wants us to know him, and that we can come to know him through the Holy Spirit without our own effort, how can it be that we do not already have all the knowledge that God wants to share with us? Gregory's answer to this question lies in the way he identifies the characteristics of the intellect. Palamas argues that at the source of the intellect lies a strong desire (ἔρως). This desire is both yearning for the Goodness from which it has originated, and the Goodness itself.[60] It is through this desire that we can recognize the Holy Spirit within the intellect itself. Because love is at the heart of the intellect, the acquisition of knowledge of God is consequently primarily about prayer and surrendering to the love of God more than about working it out. For this reason, prayer takes a central role in this search, an important part of Palamas' defence of the Hesychast method.[62]

Thus, we can conclude that the intellect is fundamentally different than the other human faculties because it of its essence, which shares in goodness itself. Because of this,

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[59] Palamas, *Chapters* 36 (Sinkewicz 121-123 at p. 123): "Yet the Holy Spirit is spirit not in the sense whereby the breath conjoined to the word issuing from our lips is spirit, for this is a body and is conjoined to our speech through bodily organs; nor is it spirit in the sense whereby that which accompanies, albeit bodiless, our innate reasoning process is spirit, for that, too, entails a certain impulse of the intellect that accompanies our thought-process through successive intervals of time, and progresses from incompletion to completion."

[60] Palamas, *Chapters* 37 (Sinkewicz 123-125 at p. 125)., "The Spirit of the supreme Logos is a kind of ineffable yet intense longing or eros experienced by the Begetter for the Logos born ineffably from Him, a longing experienced also by the beloved Logos and Son of the Father for His Begetter; but the Logos possesses this love by virtue of the fact that it comes from the Father in the very act through which He comes from the Father, and it resides co-naturally in Him."

Gregory treats the intellect as not receiving knowledge from the outside but having it already, which is revealed through prayer.

3.3 A Single Hypostasis: *The Chapters* 25-26

> "[The human soul is] not only capable of receiving God and His grace through ascetic struggle, it is also able to be united in Him in a single hypostasis."[61]

This conclusion to the first twenty-four chapters sets the stage for Palamas' discussion of spiritual knowledge. Until this point in the text, Palamas has outlined what knowledge the human senses and reason can contribute. Now, however, he is ready to dismiss this knowledge in favour of spiritual knowledge.[62] In the previous paragraph, I have explained Palamas' view that Intellect is Goodness itself earlier in the text. Now I discuss how this is connected with the human intellect. No worldly philosophy can, he argues, bring the human to the knowledge that God has revealed through Scripture alone. The fact that some secular philosophers reject this argument is simply proof to Palamas that one can have excellent knowledge of created things, but be none the wiser about what is most important.[65]

This dismissal of what we today would call scientific knowledge has led to much discussion of the relationship between science and religion in Palamas' thought. What is the relationship between direct knowledge of God and knowledge that is acquired by the senses? For Gregory, participation in God bestows Divine knowledge. However, this is a one-way street. One cannot grow one's own knowledge through one's senses in order to acquire Divine knowledge. The latter can only be received when someone participates in God's grace

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[61] Palamas, *Chapters* 24 (Sinkewicz 107-109).

[62] Palamas, *Chapters* 26. (Sinkewicz 109-111 at p. 111). "To know God truly - in so far as this is possible - is incomparably superior to the philosophy of the Greeks, and simply to know what place man has in relation to God surpasses all their wisdom."

out of free will. The intellect is the organ that is responsible for receiving this Divine knowledge, and it is the mind that assigns the other organs their proper place.[63]

For this reason, knowledge of created things cannot accurately be described as "knowledge of God", as Palamas seems to back away from the notion that we can acquire any uncreated knowledge from God this way.[64] Rather, we can speak of a human ability to obtain "knowledge of God's attributes", as Palamas himself seems to point to God's attributes in his demonstration of created knowledge.

That these attributes can be deduced using the human faculties of sense-perception and reason does not mean, however, that Palamas is optimistic about these faculties. Sin is not only responsible for human moral attributes, but it has also displaced the mind in such a way that knowledge becomes unreliable.[65]

3.4 The effect of getting close to God – *The Chapters* 40

I have established that in Gregory's thinking the intellect has goodness as its essence and that the highest being means being in a single hypostasis. With this third and final quotation from *The Chapters,* I will argue that these two premisses lead toward the third important insight: that the intellect serves as mediator between God and the person. This thought is present throughout these chapters, but can be summarized as follows: "When this glory is manifestly present or when it approaches unnoticed, the soul now increasingly learns

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[63] Micał, "Knowledge of God in St Gregory Palamas," 254.

[64] Palamas, *Chapters* 25 (Sinkewicz 109 at p. 109). "For almost as the irrational animals are related to the wisdom of those men (or, if you wish, like little children for whom the pancakes they have at hand would seem superior to the imperial crown, or even to everything known by those philosophers), just so are these philosophers to the true and most excellent wisdom and teaching of the Spirit"

[65] Micał, 'Knowledge of God in St Gregory Palamas', 257.

to love God more than itself and to love its neighbor as itself."[66] This is the effect of getting closer to God, in which the intellect plays a crucial role.

In Chapter 40, Gregory, again, states that the triadic image is in the human person is a reflection of the Triadic nature of God. Moreover, because God has created the human person, it is natural for a human being to be subject, obedient, and subordinate to Him.[67] When this happens, the soul begins to resemble God more and more until it "radiates" the nature of God.[68] The fruits of this process are threefold. The person will first love God beyond himself and love his neighbour as himself. Moreover, the person will "truly" love himself according to his rightful place under God.[69] In contrast, a person who loves wrongdoing is like a someone who harms himself without feeling it.[70]

From the previous conclusion, we can see how important it is to Gregory that the soul becomes one with God under a single hypostasis. It highlights the important role of the intellect is this process, because the intellect is the only human faculty that can approach God this intimately. However, what this passage shows more than the others is the effect the intellect has on the entire person. For Palamas, the intellect is not so disconnected that it alone benefits from this unity; rather, it is the only faculty to enable it.

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[66] Palamas, *Chapters* 40 (Sinkewicz 127-129).

[67] Ibid: "The triadic nature posterior to the supreme Trinity, since, more so than others, it has been made by it in its image, endowed with mind, word and spirit (namely, the human soul), ought to preserve its proper rank and take its place after God alone and be subject, subordinate and obedient to him alone and look to him alone and adorn itself with perpetual remembrance and contemplation of him and with most fervent and ardent love for him."

[68] Ibid: "it would eventually attract to itself the mysterious and ineffable radiance of that nature"

[69] Ibid: "and from then on to know and preserve its own dignity and rank and truly to love itself."

[70] Ibid: "or he who loves wrongdoing hates his own soul and, in tearing apart and disabling the image of God, he experiences suffering similar to that of madmen who pitilessly cut their own flesh to pieces without feeling it."

3.5 Conclusion

In this work, Gregory Palamas gives an extensive overview of his cosmology, with anthropology and epistemology being his lens. He argues against a certain view of the world that includes a "world spirit" and gives instead of that his own view of how the physical world works in relation to the spiritual. I have noted that scholarship on *The Chapters* is mostly interested in the 'why', that is, in trying to understand to whom Gregory was writing and if it could have served as a warning against proto-humanists who were trying to separate the study of nature from the study of God. It could also be argued that Gregory wanted to safeguard theology from being studied as a natural science. From both points of view, it is clear how Gregory uses anthropology to explain how humans have different faculties – senses, spirit, and intellect – for receiving knowledge and how the knowledge of God and nature utilize different faculties.

This thesis focusses on the intellect in regard to the main question. The way Gregory Palamas views the intellect and its relationship between God and the other human faculties can be summarized in three points, which I have connected to three excerpts from his work. First, Gregory speaks of essence and activity as things that creatures (animals, humans, and angels) can possess. He says the intellect has goodness as its essence, meaning it does not grow in knowledge of God but rather is inevitably connected with it. Second, Gregory states that because of this, it can grow to become perfectly one with God, becoming one hypostasis. Third, this process of becoming one is only possible through the intellect, but does not exclude the rest of the human person. Rather, it is through the intellect that the entire person is enlightened.

To conclude, we can say that Gregory tries to set the intellect apart from the other human faculties by stating it alone has access to see God directly by its shared essence. Only the intellect is capable of handling knowledge of God but also works together with the spirit

and the senses to get knowledge of the natural world. This creates a complicated teamwork where the intellect is beyond compare when it comes to knowledge of God but also allows the other faculties to perform their capabilities when it comes to knowledge of the natural world.

Chapter 4: Contrasting Analysis

Now that I have discussed three key passages from both authors, it is time to analyse and compare the passages laid next to each other.

4.1 What is the intellect?

One significant similarity between Augustine and Palamas is that the intellect has a divine origin (*Gen. litt.* 3.20.30 and Chapter 35). Furthermore, it is the divine origin of the intellect that makes it the only human faculty qualified to receive knowledge of God. Palamas describes the intellect as having goodness as its essence, not just as an activity;[71] this in some sense is comparable to Augustine's describing the intellect as so intimately connected with the light created on the first day.[72] that it is not just a tool to receive knowledge, but is inseparable from it. This reveals three key similarities between the two understandings of the intellect. First, for both theologians, the intellect has a more divine origin than that of the human body and soul (of which the intellect is a part). Second, the intellect is infallible in its understanding of knowledge and immune to making mistakes (although that does not mean that everyone has equal access to it after the Fall). And third, the intellect is more than a tool to acquire knowledge: it is more intimately connected to the knowledge to which it has access because it shares the image of God.

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[71] Palamas, *Chapters,* 35 (Sinkewicz 119-121).: "Rather, it is in the sense of the word naturally stored up within our mind".

[72] Roland J. Teske, "De Genesi ad litteram liber," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 376.

4.2. Single hypostasis?

In Gregory Palamas, we find the more specific idea of God and man becoming one hypostasis through the intellect (in Chapters 25 and 26). In his text, it seems Palamas is more concerned to make clear that the knowledge of God is located within the intellect and no other faculty. He stresses the difference between the subject of God and the subject of created matter by downplaying the value of the created knowledge that comes through the spirit and the senses, and by stating that the latter cannot be trusted unless the intellect is rightly ordered towards God through prayer. This is why, in the end, his idea that the intellect and God can become connected within a single hypostasis has consequences for Christian soteriology as a whole. This is shown best by the term "theosis" in eastern orthodox theology, which means the close unity between God and the human being that salvation brings. While the thought of theosis is not absent from the Christian west, it tends to be much more emphasised in the East.

In Augustine, there is no mention of the word hypostasis or an equivalent such as "substance" to describe the state of the intellect when God speaks to man. In this text, he stays close to biblical accounts such as Exodus 19 to describe how the intellect is connected to God in that specific instance. The nature of his text, serving as sophisticated commentary on the first chapters of the biblical book Genesis, may explain why his text reads more like an explanation of a specific episode rather than a thought-out anthropology. The most important conclusion I wish to highlight on the basis of this text is that Augustine clearly thinks that God speaks "without a medium" when the intellect is fully focussed on Him.

When comparing the two views, we can conclude that Augustine and Gregory share a similar understanding of how the intellect is utilized when God speaks to us as Gregory. The main differences are that Gregory seems to have developed the idea further and has

incorporated it into his advice for prayer and soteriology, while Augustine does not go that far, at least in this text.

4.3. The role of the entire human person

The previous two paragraphs focused on the intellect itself and its communication with God. Now follows a short analysis about what both writers say about the rest of the person in relation to the intellect. My working hypothesis as I approached the present research was that the rest of the body either worked complementarily with the intellect – building upon the strengths and capabilities of the intellect – or as completely passive to the intellect. The picture that emerges from the texts is, however, more nuanced.

In the text of the Gregory Palamas, we see a focus on the intellect being "in its proper place" when subordinate to God.[73] It is logical to extend this reasoning towards the other faculties in relation to the intellect. Gregory is very critical of the abilities of the spirit and senses on their own, but when the intellect is properly ordered towards God, the rest of the person also falls in alignment.

In Augustine, we find a similar relationship between the intellect and spirit. While Gregory mostly uses language that focusses on the intellect's obedience to God, however, Augustine focusses on the spirit and its vulnerability to outside forces. Furthermore, the spirit in Augustine's text is far more of a tool for conjuring images that the body has seen, rather than

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[73] Palamas, *Chapters,* 40 (Sinkewicz 127-129): "The triadic nature posterior to the supreme Trinity, since, more so than others, it has been made by it in its image, endowed with mind, word and spirit (namely, the human soul), ought to preserve its proper rank and take its place after God alone and be subject, subordinate and obedient to him alone and look to him alone and adorn itself with perpetual remembrance and contemplation of him and with most fervent and ardent love for him."

an independent, self-thinking entity. This makes the intellect the defining faculty for reason by definition.

To conclude, from the perspective of the other human faculties, the spirit is dependent on the intellect in both writers. A more extensive analysis of the subject in the works of the two theologians might lend more support to the idea that Gregory sees the spirit as a separate thinker (probably referring here to those who only use the spirit for natural philosophy), while Augustine merely sees the spirit as a tool that the intellect has to access properly to draw out the truth. In the end, the intellect remains an independent faculty that can receive knowledge from God on its own, but can also work together with the other faculties. In this particular respect, though they write nearly a thousand years apart, in different political and cultural contexts, there is a little to no difference in stance between Augustine and Gregory.

Conclusion

When I started started out on this thesis, I did not know it would entail a technical analysis of aspects of Neoplatonic philosophy. That realisation only came in the middle of reading the primary sources, when I was overwhelmed with philosophical terms I had to learn and to make my own quickly. However, this thesis has ended up not being a detailed study of how Neoplatonic philosophy is used by Augustine of Hippo and Gregory Palamas, but about what kind of theology both informed and flows forth from their use of Neoplatonic philosophy concerning a specific topic.

The main question this thesis asks is how the theologies of Augustine and Gregory compare when it comes to the question of "seeing" God, which it turns out has a lot to do with how we "see" knowledge in general. We considered the importance of the Neoplatonic epistemology first set forth by Plotinus in which a tripartite view of humanity describes the relationship of different human faculties in accumulating knowledge. These three faculties are generally speaking 1) the seeing of the body – the senses, 2) the seeing of the spirit, which for both Augustine and Gregory meant the rational mind that deals in ideas brought forth from shapes given by body, and 3) the seeing of the intellect, which is set apart as a faculty that finds truth in the ideas. The thesis directly compares one significant text from both authors on this subject, and identifies and analyses key passages from these texts in order to come to a conclusion about the underlying theology.

This question about the theology of "seeing God" in Augustine and Gregory is important to the overall field of theology, because it describes the differences and similarities of how Augustine and Gregory utilized Neoplatonic philosophy, the tripartite human view, and God's ways to communicate with us. They lived a thousand years apart and both are seen

as giants in Western and Eastern theological traditions respectively: this may lead to a too ready assumption that they stand as representatives of entirely contrasting traditions. This thesis hopes to add insight into the close similarity and subtle differences of these two figures when it comes to seeing God.

The thesis answers this central question in three parts: 1) how their use of philosophy compare, 2) whether they could agree on the role of the intellect within the seeing of God, and 3) what the role of prayer was within the seeing of God. It concludes that, in fact, there is no significant difference in the use of Neoplatonic philosophy in their respective texts. Both Augustine and Gregory seemed to have believed that the human person has three faculties for gathering knowledge. Furthermore, they both defined the three faculties in a very similar way when they were describing how empiric knowledge (that caught up by the senses) relates to rational knowledge (processed by the spirit) and how the intellect relates to both. Both writers did not hesitate to underline the spirit's capability for 'scientific' thinking to gain knowledge about the natural world, and both writers also warned about the limits of this kind of thinking. In the end, both authors underlined the superiority of knowing God above knowing the workings of creation.

The findings of this thesis will hopefully further the exploration and rediscovery of unexpected connections between church fathers in the field of theological study. The church fathers play an important role in the theological identity of both Western and Eastern Christianity, but perhaps are still too frequently scene as representative of not only divergent but contrasting traditions. The study of Neoplatonic philosophy in these prominent church fathers from the Greek and Latin traditions, living in differing political and cultural contexts, might help to nuance the understanding of their significance both in scholarship and in their wider reception in the respective ecclesial traditions, where these two figures are often

contrasted. It might furthermore encourage a change of perspective when reading the church fathers: rather than look ‘back’ to the church fathers, we should look ‘towards’ them from the context they lived in. In this thesis, I tried to take an existing idea, that of the intellect and its connection to God, and tried to see how this idea was developed further.

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