



John Chrysostom ‘On the Incomprehensible Nature of God’ – The Simpler Way of Presenting Complex Theological and Philosophical Issues

Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska¹

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to indicate how, that is, with the help of which means, Chrysostom in his five homilies *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God* introduces his community in Antioch to the intricacies of the dispute with the Anomoeans, as far as the possibility of knowing God and his essence are concerned. The main differences between those texts and other fundamental polemical sources with Eunomius will also be taken under consideration. John uses both biblical and philosophical terms to underline the negative aspect of theology and his five homilies are not so theologically and philosophically sophisticated as Basil’s or Gregory’s texts, unlike even Gregory of Nazianzus, whose *Orations*, have a similar overall message. John uses methods adequate to accomplish his goal, which is to preserve the orthodox concept and unify the Antiochian Church.

Keywords: John Chrysostom; Anomoeans; incomprehensibility of God; Eunomius

The homilies analysed in this article came to light due to specific polemical circumstances with the Anomoeans, an important element being the dispute about the possibility of knowing God and his essence. As part of this dispute, five important orthodox texts have survived through to our times², of which these homilies are the least known³. This is quite surprising, as

¹ Dr hab. Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska, Adjunct at the Interdisciplinary Research Centre of the University of Warsaw „Identity – Dialogue – Security”, University of Warsaw, Poland; email: k.kochanczyk-b@uw.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-4510-6111.

² These are: Basiliius Caesariensis, *Adversus Eunomium*, Gregorius Nyssenus, *Contra Eunomium*, Gregorius Nyssenus, *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*, Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Orationes*, Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura*.

³ This is evidenced by the number of bibliographic items related to the individual works of these authors.

John's nickname, Chrysostom, indicates that he was familiar for his wonderful speeches and preaching; his pastoral zeal was also famous.

The purpose of this paper is to indicate how, or, by the help of what means, Chrysostom introduced his community in Antioch to the intricacies of the dispute with the Anomoeans in addition to, how and why this text differs from other sources on the same theme.

1. Polemic with the Anomoeans

The first writing of the Anomoeans was Aetius' *Syntagmation* but the most important of these texts was Eunomius' *Apology (Liber apologeticus)*. Basil responded to it with his *Against Eunomium (Adversus Eunomium)*, to which Eunomius' *Apologia apologiae* was a response and, in turn, Gregory of Nyssa wrote his *Against Eunomium (Contra Eunomium)*⁴ which was the core of the polemic. In addition to the above-mentioned works, we have the *Expositio fidei*, which is the explanation of the confession of faith of Eunomius and, the *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii*, which is the rejection of this confession by Gregory of Nyssa. Of the writings mentioned here, only the *Apologia apologiae* of Eunomium has not survived, but we are aware of it from long passages quoted faithfully, it seems, by Gregory of Nyssa in his *Contra Eunomium*.

Other Church Fathers that joined the polemics with Eunomius were, Gregory of Nazianzus, who wrote *Adversus Eunomianos (Orat. 27 that is First Theological Speech)* and, John Chrysostom with his *De incomprehensibili dei natura (Contra Anomoeos homiliae 1-5)*. There were also other polemical works by Apollinarius, Didymus the Blind, Theodore of Mopsoestia and Theodoret of Cyrus but they have not survived.

The key topics of this discussion were, on the one hand, the Trinitarian debate in which orthodox authors tried to defend the equality of three divine persons⁵ and, the problem of the possibility of knowing

⁴ More about the history of the controversy: M. Przyszychowska, *Historia sporu eunomiańskiego*, in: *Eunomiusz i jego adwersarze*, v. 1, ed. K. Kochańczyk-Bonińska – M. Przyszychowska – T. Stępień, Warszawa 2021, p. 15-49; T.A. Kopecek, *A history of neo-arianism*, Cambridge 1979.

⁵ These issues have already been extensively researched and described by such excellent researchers as e.g. R.P. Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, Oxford 2000; S.M. Hildebrand, *A Reconsideration of the Development of Basil's Trinitarian Theology. The Dating of Ep. 9 and Contra Eunomium*, *VigCh* 59 (2004) p. 393-406; G. Maspero, *Trinity and Man. Gregory of Nyssa "Ad Ablabium"*, Leiden – Boston 2007; A. Mer-

God⁶, initiated by Eunomius. The second one grew into a separate concern and was not only deeply rooted in various philosophical traditions, but also surrounded by side themes, for example, the issue of the nature of language⁷ and God's simplicity⁸. The polemic with the Anomoeans was the most important, the key stage of the Trinitarian dispute, the result of which was the final defence, and clarification of, the Nicene creed. The Anomoeans doctrine occurred after AD 350, when Aetius and Eunomius began to play an important role in the life of the Church, and lost its importance after the death of Eunomius around 394: over these forty years, as Marta Przyszychowska underlines, a debate took place on an unprecedented, substantive level, conducted using proven philosophical methods⁹. Eunomius in his *Apology*, in order to demonstrate the inequality of the Father and the Son, proposed two ways/methods of acquiring knowledge about God: first from the substance to the activity; and, the second, from the activity to the substance. Following Aetius, he believed that the names given to the Father ('unbegotten' – ἀγέννητος) and the Son ('begotten' – γέννημα) expressed their substance¹⁰ and, from this assumption he derives the inequality of the divine persons. The defence of the

edith, *Studies in the Contra Eunomium of Gregory or Nyssa*, Oxford 1972; Ch.A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God. In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford 2008; J. Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysic. Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus*, Oxford 2020, p. 32-71; J.T. Lienhard, *Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of 'One Hypostasis'*, in: *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. S.T. Davis et al., Oxford 2000, p. 99-121; J.C. Larchet, *La théologie des énergies divines. Des origines à saint Jean Damascène*, Paris 2010.

⁶ For more detailed studies on the topic, see e.g.: T. Stepień – K. Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God, Known in His Activities. Incomprehensibility of God during the Trinitarian Controversy of the 4th Century*, Berlin 2018; D. Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*, Eugene 1995.

⁷ Publications devoted to these issues are, for example: M. Del Cogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, Leiden – Boston 2010; D.G. Robertson, *A Patristic Theory of Proper Names*, "Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie" 84 (2002) p. 1-19; M.R. Barnes, *The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language*, in: *Arianism after Arius*, ed. M.R. Barnes – D.H. Williams, Edinburgh 1993, p. 217-236; D. Birjukov, *Strategies of Naming in the Polemic between Eunomius and Basil of Caesarea in the Context of the Philosophical Tradition of Antiquity*, "Scriinium" 4 (2008) p. 104-121.

⁸ For an excellent publication on this subject, see: A. Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford 2009.

⁹ Cf. Przyszychowska, *Historia sporu eunomiańskiego*, p.19.

¹⁰ Cf. Eunomius, *Liber Apologeticus* 12, 7-9.

incomprehensibility of God's substance was therefore not only a matter of proper epistemology, but also an apology for orthodox trinitology. As a consequence, the incomprehensibility of God was strong and a clear sign of being Orthodox at John's times.

2. The Historical Background of the Homilies

John Chrysostom wrote twelve homilies against the Anomoeans¹¹, which can be divided into two series. The first five, which deal with God's incomprehensibility (and are our subject), were preached when he was a priest in Antioch 386-387¹² when the local community was divided. These homilies are very early as John became a priest in 386. In 379, Bishop Meletius managed to overcome schism and made an agreement with Paulinus, who supported the Anomoeans, although it was broken two years later after his death by the consecration of Bishop Flavian (381). The conflicts were vital to the Antioch community and in the same church, protagonists of both fractions could be found. It was in this permanent conflict, John preached one of his first homilies and the heretics were not only present in the church but also challenged him to do battle with them¹³. In fact, at that time, Antioch was really a cosmopolitan centre, in which pluralism was much stronger than the two Christian groups (heterodox and orthodox): there were also active Pagan and Jewish communities. Both of the latter also claimed Chrysostom's attention¹⁴.

3. The purpose and the topic of the homilies

John says explicitly that the purpose of his homilies is apologetic. His aim is the defence of true faith against the erroneous teachings of heretics, which in this case, concerns the possibility of knowing God's substance.

¹¹ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* (I-V), ed. A.-M. Malingrey, SCh 28 bis, Paris 1970; (VI-XII), PG 48, 747-812, tr. P.W. Harkins, St. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, Washington 1984, p. 51-307.

¹² J. Daniélou, *Introduction*, in: *Jean Chrysostome sur l'incomprehensibilite de Dieu*, ed. A.-M. Malingrey, SCh 28 bis, Paris 1970, p. 9.

¹³ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 340-345.

¹⁴ Cf. P.W. Harkins, *Introduction*, in: St. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, tr. P.W. Harkins, Washington 1984, p. 22.

“The time I spend on these arguments will both increase your knowledge about the Anomoeans and will make my prize of victory over those heretics a brighter one”¹⁵. The teaching presented by John is consistent with the main theses of other orthodox authors, especially those who also opposed the views of Eunomius. These are: the belief that the divine essence is incomprehensible¹⁶ not only for people but also for angels and biblical heroes¹⁷; furthermore, not only divine essence but also divine economy, is inaccessible for people¹⁸, the same is with the essence of created world¹⁹. Like others, John claims that pretending that somebody knows God’s essence is madness and blasphemy²⁰ and has to deal with accusations of worshipping God that he does not know²¹. Undoubtedly, the key to all orthodox writers is to defend the thesis that God’s substance is completely unknowable. After all, no one has ever seen God²².

Paul said this because on the one hand he knows that God exists, whereas, on the other, he does not know what God is in his essence. He knows that God is wise but he does not know how great his wisdom is. He knows that God is great but he does not know how or what his greatness is. He also knows that God is everywhere present but he does not know how this is so. He knows that God provides for all things and that he preserves and governs them to perfection. But he does not know the way in which God does all these things. Therefore, he said: ‘Our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect’²³.

¹⁵ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* IV 8-10, tr. Harkins, p. 115.

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. Basilius Caesariensis, *Adversus Eunomium* I 14; Gregorius Nazianzenus, *De filio, Oratio* 30, 17; Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 251-275; IV 302-309; III 53-59.

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Gregorius Nazianzenus, *De theologia, Oratio* 28, 17-20; Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* IV 302-309; III 53-59.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Adversus Eunomianos, Oratio* 27, 3; Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 280-281.

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. Basilius Caesariensis, *Adversus Eunomium* III 6; Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* III 473-480; III 194-196.

²⁰ Cf. Gregorius Nazianzenus, *De dogmate et constitutione Episcoporum, Oratio* 20, 11; Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 371-373.

²¹ Cf. e.g. Basilius Caesariensis, *Epistula* 235, 2; Gregorius Nyssenus, *Contra Eunomium* III 1, 103-105.

²² Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* IV 159-233; Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 393-394.

²³ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 290-301, tr. Harkins, p. 65.

Here John follows the arguments of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, based on the distinction between substance and activity in God²⁴. It is through God's action in the world that we are able to know Him but, His substance remains inaccessible and unknowable. John's argumentation is therefore very simplified compared to the in-depth analysis of Gregory, who denies the possibility of knowing the substance of God from his activities²⁵.

He also indicates that the belief that it is impossible to know God's substance, is common to Christians and Greek philosophers:

But why do I speak of the divine Scriptures when the absurdity of the Anomoeans is so obvious and their iniquity is so excessive that not even the pagans, who had wandered so far from the truth, ever tried to say anything like this? For no pagan ever dared to set down a definition of the divine essence or to encompass it with a name. And why do I speak of the divine essence? In their speculations on the nature of incorporeal beings, the Greeks did not set down a complete definition of this nature but gave an obscure statement and description rather than a definition²⁶.

John does not go into details or analyses the views of individual schools, although it is clearly visible that it is inspired by scepticism in this matter:

So it is that all the fraud of the Anomoeans is refuted from these texts. When we do not know the essence itself, not that it is but what it is, it would be the height of folly to give it a name. Besides, even if it were clear and known, it would not be safe for us, of ourselves and by ourselves, to give a name or title to the essence of the master²⁷.

In these words, we can hear Pyrrho's views, who, according to Aristotle, not only denied the possibility of knowing anything but, also advised against speaking about things we do not know²⁸.

²⁴ Cf. Stępień – Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God*, p. 119-142.

²⁵ Cf. Stępień – Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God*, p. 174-193.

²⁶ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 357-365, tr. Harkins, p. 153.

²⁷ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 334-339, tr. Harkins, p. 152.

²⁸ Cf. Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 14, 18, 1-5.

Moreover, for Chrysostom, God is unknowable not only to man but also to prophets and angels²⁹:

Let us call upon him, then, as the ineffable God who is beyond our intelligence, invisible, incomprehensible, who transcends the power of mortal words. Let us call on him as the God who is inscrutable to the angels, unseen by the Seraphim, inconceivable to the Cherubim, invisible to the principalities, to the powers, and to the virtues, in fact, to all creatures without qualification, because he is known only by the Son and the Spirit³⁰.

Although the angels do not know the essence of God, they are intermediators between transcendent God and human beings (like in Judaism³¹) and emphasise the incomprehensibility of the Creator³². According to Chrysostom, God wants to be known by His creation but everything that was revealed to us about Him is very distant from the true knowledge about His nature³³.

Moreover, like the other authors, he points to limitations in human cognition that also apply to the terrestrial reality³⁴. Human beings are unable to know even the material word³⁵ and their own soul³⁶, so how can they comprehend angels³⁷ or, the reality that is above him³⁸. In John's view, we can observe the lack of trust in human cognition, typical of authors from the latter half of the 4th century³⁹, which is, according to J. Daniélou, a common place between pagan and Christian philosophy in the late Antiquity⁴⁰.

²⁹ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 302-327.

³⁰ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* III 53-59, tr. Harkins, p. 97.

³¹ John also tried to provide pastoral care to the followers of Judaism living in the city. Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* II, 9-20.

³² Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* II 276-283; III 338-342.

³³ Cf. Stępień – Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God*, p. 224.

³⁴ Cf. e.g. Basilius Caesariensis, *Adversus Eunomium* I 14, 1-3; Gregorius Nysenus, *Contra Eunomium* II 138, 2-11; Gregorius Nazianzenus, *De filio*, *Oratio* 30, 17.

³⁵ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* II 473-480.

³⁶ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 259-283.

³⁷ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* III 194-196.

³⁸ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 249-266.

³⁹ Cf. Stępień – Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God*, p. 220.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, Paris 1953, p 131.

4. How Chrysostom protects the faithful of Antioch from the error of the Anomoeans?

In order to achieve the assumed goal, John uses homiletic methods. First of all, he refers to biblical examples and characters, as well as biblical metaphors because the Holy Scriptures are a common authority, for heretics and orthodox, who listen to his speeches.

Thus, the first in the series of homilies begins with an outline of the situation of the community. Referring to the evangelical image of the good shepherd, he distributes roles in the community. The heretic is called a wolf; the community, sheep; and, the bishop is presented as the shepherd. John introduces himself as a dog fighting a wolf to protect the flock. He purposely quotes St. Paul to indicate that the key to Christianity is not full knowledge but great love⁴¹ and, he calls this apostle to reassure his listeners that even this saint did not know the divine substance, which he himself confessed with the words: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known"⁴². Among the other biblical figures mentioned by Chrysostom in his preaching are Adam⁴³ and Zachariah⁴⁴.

In his teaching, John Chrysostom tries to use simple examples and refer to experiences common to people such as the limitations of cognition which are natural for humans⁴⁵. He points out that everyone is aware of this, so those who think that they have all the knowledge should be considered madmen, not someone better⁴⁶ for it is nothing but madness to believe that you can know the substance of God⁴⁷. Such madness, or even blasphemy, does not harm God but its author⁴⁸. In order for ordinary listeners to understand the absurdity of heretical views⁴⁹, he uses simple models:

How great is the distance between the knowledge which is going to be given to us and the knowledge which we now have? How great is the distance be-

⁴¹ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 32-57.

⁴² 1 Cor. 13:12.

⁴³ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 22; IX 5.

⁴⁴ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* VI 32.

⁴⁵ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 155-157.

⁴⁶ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 168-170.

⁴⁷ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 188-190.

⁴⁸ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* III 32-41.

⁴⁹ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 190-195.

tween a complete and perfect man and an infant at the breast? For that is the degree of superiority of the knowledge to come in comparison to our present knowledge⁵⁰.

Chrysostom deliberately uses pictorial language to provide better reception, for example, he writes at the beginning of his fifth speech about day and night and, as the editor of the English translation points out, night and sleep, which keep individuals from going beyond the measure of their strength, are used in other Chrysostom's treatises⁵¹. The preacher's words seem to reach everyone, even the simplest of minds:

[...] for the distance between God and man is as great as the distance between the potter and the clay. Rather the distance is not merely as great but much greater. The potter and the clay are of one and the same substance. It is just as Job said: 'I admit it as for those who dwell in houses of clay because we are ourselves formed from the same clay'⁵².

Other times John uses, common to everybody, the sensual experience of perceiving light in order to make his thesis more convincing:

Yet they did not see the pure light itself nor the pure essence itself. What they saw was a condescension accommodated to their nature. What is this condescension? God condescends whenever He is not seen as He is, but in the way one incapable of beholding Him is able to look upon Him. In this way God reveals Himself by accommodating what reveals to the weakness of vision of those who behold Him⁵³.

It can also be observed that in the following speeches, John grades the difficulty and introduces more complicated issues, as if making the audience familiar with the topic. He addresses the most important objection of the Anomoeans that Christians do not know the One they worship⁵⁴, an-

⁵⁰ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 120-123, tr. Harkins, p. 56.

⁵¹ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 20-24.

⁵² Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* II 336-341, tr. Harkins, p. 85.

⁵³ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* III 162-166, tr. Harkins, p. 101.

⁵⁴ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 366-429.

swering it only in the fifth speech. He describes God as a spirit and returns to the biblical arguments quoted in previous homilies. He clearly grades the difficulty by leading the audience by the hand.

John is not afraid of various expressions of negation⁵⁵, referring to terms used both by Neoplatonists⁵⁶ and those found in the Bible⁵⁷; he also takes care to explain the meaning of the words used:

He did not say: ‘Who dwells in incomprehensible light, (ἀκατάλητος)’ but: ‘an unapproachable (ἀπρόσιτος) light’, and this is much stronger than ‘incomprehensible’. A thing is said to be incomprehensible when those who seek after it fail to comprehend it, even after they have searched and sought to understand it. A thing is unapproachable which, from the start, cannot be investigated nor can anyone come near to it. We call the sea incomprehensible because, even when divers lower themselves into its waters and go down to a great depth, they cannot find the bottom. We call that thing unapproachable which, from the start, cannot be searched out or investigated⁵⁸.

The catalogue of terms used by him, created mainly with the use of *alpha privativum*, is wide and, their origin and context of use should be analyzed in a separate, dedicated paper. Chrysostom uses both biblical and philosophical terms (from Philo and Clement of Alexandria) to underline the negative aspect in theology but, although he does use the language of negative theology, he doesn’t formulate his own theory of names. Contrary to Basil and Gregory, he fights with the Anomoeans arguments without resorting to a complicated theory of language that would be too sophisticated for homiletic usage⁵⁹. Of course, as befits Chrysostom, the text is written in a beautiful language, using direct phrases to listeners and rhetorical figures like oxymorons, for example, when he calls, stupidity for God (in the eyes of the world), “the most rational madness”⁶⁰.

⁵⁵ Cf. Daniélou, *Introduction*, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Cf. Daniélou, *Introduction*, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Cf. Daniélou, *Introduction*, p. 18-20.

⁵⁸ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* III 124-133, tr. Har-kins, p. 100.

⁵⁹ Cf. Del Cogliano, *Basil of Caesarea’s Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, p. 153-260.

⁶⁰ Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* II 66.

5. The uniqueness of John's homily compared to other anti-Eunomian texts

Although the content of John's homily is in line with the rest of the texts against the Anomoeans heresies of this epoch, as has been mentioned above, several differences can be identified, starting with the question of form. All these texts are apologetical but have different recipients. The listeners present at the Antiochian church were supporters of both Christian factions and this is already peculiar to John's work compared to other polemical writings because they addressed both the Heterodox and the Orthodox hence why they are more balanced. He does not speak out against specific people and tries to be moderate, even mild⁶¹, condemning erroneous teaching and deeds, not the people themselves, however, in practice, his message is not always so delicate: he calls the Anomoeans unbelieving and infidel and explains later that he is referring to their deeds⁶². He treats them like the sick in need of healing⁶³. On the one hand, he accuses the Anomoeans of contradictions and lack of modesty, and these come from the devil⁶⁴, and on the other, at the end of the first homily, he calls for peace⁶⁵.

John prepared homilies in which he identifies the problems of his community and tries to solve it in order to protect his flock from the heresy of the Anomoeans, that is, the one particular aspect which is their belief that they have knowledge of God's essence. For comparison, Basil and Gregory formulate treatises in which they analyse, point after point, every Eunomian thesis, even quoting them: these are *refutatio* like *Contra Celsum*. The closest, in terms of form, are the *Theological Orations* of Gregory of Nazians although they are also more theologically sophisticated and, the accent is slightly different because, as far as the incomprehensibility of God is concerned for Gregory, the moral aspect is the key to getting to know God – a virtuous life is a necessary condition for practising theology⁶⁶.

We have already indicated some differences in the scope of the matters raised which concern the choice of only one issue (the unknowable

⁶¹ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 351.

⁶² Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* II 1-2.

⁶³ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* III 338-352.

⁶⁴ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* V 483-487.

⁶⁵ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomos, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* I 424-428.

⁶⁶ Cf. Stępień – Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God*, p. 213.

of God). The defence of orthodoxy in this regard is done mainly through references to the Bible and simple examples, not through theological and philosophical subtleties. John uses clear metaphors and explanations; unequivocal borders between what is orthodox and, what is vain knowledge of the Anomoeans. What should be also mentioned, although these are apologetical homilies, are that they have a conciliatory and encouraging character. John presents a more pastoral attitude but it does not mean that Chrysostom was not aware of all the nuances of the controversy. Despite those differences in form, J. Daniélou points out that John Chrysostom most likely knew the *Adversus Eunomium* of Basil the Great⁶⁷. On the contrary, we find much proof that he deliberately simplified his teaching, for example, omitting philosophical background⁶⁸. Additionally, John Chrysostom implements not only the thoughts of Gregory and Basil (main opponents of Eunomius), but includes his own interpretations as well⁶⁹.

6. Conclusions

As I have shown, John Chrysostom concentrated his polemic with the Anomoeans on one of the key problems of the theological debate – the incomprehensibility of God. John addressed his apologetical homilies to the community which was composed of both the orthodox and the Anomoeans. His aim is to preserve the orthodox concept and unify the Antiochian church. He uses the common source, that is, the Bible, both from the Old and New Testament, as well as universal experience, to underline that both people and angels cannot get knowledge about the essence of God but, they do not need it to love and worship Him. Contrary to Basil and Gregory, he fights the Anomoeans arguments without a complicated theory of language that would be too sophisticated for homiletic usage. He establishes clear borders between what is orthodox and what is vain knowledge of the Anomoeans. In his five homilies he guides the audience from simpler to more complicated issues, as if by the hand.

⁶⁷ Cf. Daniélou, *Introduction*, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Cf. Stępień – Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God*, p. 219.

⁶⁹ Daniélou, *Introduction*, p. 25.

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