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To See God - Analyzing Christian Perceptions of God

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To See God:
Analyzing Christian Perceptions of God

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In this study, the perceptions of God that two traditionally Catholic theologians held were compared in an analytical style for the purpose of discerning whether such perceptions, as seen in their literary works, varied greatly from each other or were vastly similar.

These two individuals were Dante Alighieri, author of the *Divina Commedia*, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, a 4th century Catholic mystic.

For the purposes of academic focus, Canto XXXIII of Dante's *Paradiso* and selected sections of Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* were examined.

Apophatic Versus Cataphatic

The greatest difference between these two authors were the theological concepts of “Apophatic” and “Cataphatic” viewpoints.

An apophatic perception of God is one which seeks to describe God from what He is not, while a cataphatic one does the opposite and tries to affirm a specific image of God.

St. Gregory of Nyssa sought to utilize an apophatic view, but Dante chose the path of the cataphatic.

By incorporating these concepts in the environments, attitudes, and ultimate enlightenments of their celestial perceptions, each author sought to explain their own view of who and what God is.

The result of this analysis was one of surprising value. Dante’s representation of God was one focused not truly upon God, but the effect such a being has upon the earthly human condition.

St. Gregory of Nyssa's portrayal and belief was incredibly different, as he saw God as a reason to shed love for the world and instead focus the entire spirit upon pursuing spiritual enlightenment.

This was, admittedly, an asymmetrical comparison, yet the cataphatic versus apophatic results reflect certain shifts in the theological mindsets of thinkers held to be of a traditionally Catholic variety.

Works Cited
