



THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE
FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN STUDIES

CONTINUING EDUCATION

PROTOPRESBYTER DR DORU COSTACHE

THE ORTHODOX FAITH

WAYS OF KNOWING GOD

THIRD LECTURE:

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

RECAPITULATING THE RELEVANT INFORMATION

- ▶ God desires the salvation of all and that all know the truth (1 Timothy 2)
- ▶ God's gradual and various revelation to the ancestors, through the prophets and finally through Christ (Hebrews 1)
- ▶ Christ, the Logos/Word of God, reveals the Father (John 1)
- ▶ Saint Maximus the Confessor (*The Book of Difficulties* 33 & 10): the Logos' embodiment in Scripture; the written law
- ▶ Saint John Damascene (*On the Orthodox Faith* 1): God's revelation through the Law and the prophets; God's revelation through the "only-begotten Son, our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ"

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ Lecture outlines
 - ▶ God's revelation in history
 - ▶ Theophanies
 - ▶ The contemplation of God's marks in Scripture

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ God's revelation in history
- ▶ "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." (Hebrews 1:1-2)
 - ▶ History as a context for divine revelation
 - ▶ St Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 31.25

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ God's revelation in history
 - ▶ Stages
 - ▶ Old Covenant: the patriarchs have received promises; through Moses, an alliance was concluded; God has spoken through the prophets
 - ▶ New Covenant: supreme revelation through Christ, who has established also the New Alliance and trained the apostles; God teaches the apostles through the Spirit

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ God's revelation in history
- ▶ The agent(s) of divine revelation
 - ▶ "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." (John 1:18)
 - ▶ "the Holy Spirit ... spoke through the prophets" (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed)
 - ▶ "when the Comforter comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (John 15:26)

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ God's revelation in history
 - ▶ Divine revelation = a translation of the divine message in human tongues = an embodiment of the Logos in the flesh of our human mentalities, languages and cultures
 - ▶ Scripture as inspired record of divine revelation (2 Timothy 3:16)

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

▶ Theophanies

- ▶ Another historical embodiment of divine revelation: the symbolic manifestation of God through means created
- ▶ What Scripture attests verbally or textually, theophanies proclaim in a mystical fashion
- ▶ Examples: Genesis 28 (ladder of Jacob); Exodus 3 (burning bush); Isaiah 6 (the seraphim in the temple); Ezekiel 1 (the throne of glory); Matthew 3 (Jordan)

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ The contemplation of God's marks in Scripture
 - ▶ The Pauline conviction that what is written was written for our guidance (Romans 15:4)
 - ▶ How can some scandalous passages in Scripture be formative? What does the divine word say alongside the human word of Scripture?
 - ▶ The Pauline distinction between spirit/message and letter/text (2 Corinthians 3:6)
 - ▶ Even when the letter scandalises, the spirit of the interpretation may unveil a formative dimension
 - ▶ Saint Gregory of Nyssa's distinction between *historia* and *theoria*

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ The contemplation of God's marks in Scripture
 - ▶ Example 1: unveiling the formative dimension
 - ▶ Genesis mentions patriarch Jacob working for 14 years to earn two wives, Leah and Rachel
 - ▶ Saint Andrew of Crete, *Great Canon of Repentance*: the two wives are symbols of the first two stages of the path of perfection, praxis that leads to virtue and contemplation that leads to spiritual knowledge

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ The contemplation of God's marks in Scripture
 - ▶ Example 2: getting to the divine word
 - ▶ Typically, in the early Christian centuries the spiritual interpretation was applied in order to highlight
 - ▶ The Christological message of the texts (Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Elegant Interpretations*)
 - ▶ The spiritual message of the texts (Origen, *First Homily on Genesis*)

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ The contemplation of God's marks in Scripture
 - ▶ The Orthodox way of reading Scripture is summed up in the mystagogical method
 - ▶ A mystagogical trilogy: Saint Maximus' *Book of Difficulties, To Thalassius* and *The Mystagogy*
 - ▶ How does it work? From the letter to the spirit and back again – via the testing of the spirit

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ Wisdom
 - ▶ We know of God because God has spoken to us
 - ▶ God's meaning is not always obvious, not even in Scripture
 - ▶ One should appropriate the skill of discerning God's meaning that runs parallel to the immediate, textual message – a meaning which, like in the case of the cosmic book, ultimately refers to God

HISTORICAL REVELATION, THEOPHANY AND KNOWING GOD THROUGH PONDERING THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS

- ▶ Next lecture: The Outpouring of the Spirit, the Experiences of the Saints and the Ecclesial Framework

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