



THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE  
FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN STUDIES

CONTINUING EDUCATION

PROTOPRESBYTER DR DORU COSTACHE

THE ORTHODOX FAITH

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# WAYS OF KNOWING GOD

SIXTH LECTURE: CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

## RECAPITULATING THE RELEVANT INFORMATION

- ▶ “Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess: Father, Son and Holy Spirit”
- ▶ “you are God inexpressible, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever existing, ever the same; you and your only-begotten Son and your Holy Spirit”

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Lecture outlines
  - ▶ Faith, experience, validation and theological articulation
  - ▶ Cataphatic expressions
  - ▶ Elements of iconology
  - ▶ Apophatic reverence
  - ▶ The rapport between the various expressions of divine knowledge

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Faith, experience, validation and theological articulation
  - ▶ Revisiting known elements
    - ▶ Faith as an introduction to knowing God
    - ▶ Experience and/or participation in God as true divine knowledge
    - ▶ Divine knowledge validated ecclesially, traditionally and charismatically

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Faith, experience, validation and theological articulation
  - ▶ The experiential content of divine knowledge may be articulated or communicated in various ways, depending on the missionary and pastoral needs of the Church
  - ▶ Of note: a distinction between divine realities, knowing God and expressing/communicating the content of what we know → hence the various forms of expression

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Cataphatic expressions
  - ▶ What does cataphatic mean?
  - ▶ Communicating the content of divine knowledge by way of statements and discourses
  - ▶ Rationale: the Church's need to disseminate the Gospel

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Cataphatic expressions
  - ▶ Can human language express divine realities?
    - ▶ God has clothed Godself with human languages (Saint Ephrem)
    - ▶ Human languages build analogical bridges between realities and our mind
    - ▶ When God speaks human languages, God uses human analogies, which, in turn, enable us to speak of God analogically

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Cataphatic expressions
  - ▶ Examples of analogies
    - ▶ Comparison – human beings exist; God exists
    - ▶ Weak differentiation – human beings exist; God exists truly
    - ▶ Strong differentiation b) – human beings exist; God surpasses all existence



## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Elements of iconology
  - ▶ What is an icon?
  - ▶ Communicating the content of divine knowledge by way of nonverbal analogies – images, icons
  - ▶ Rationale: the Church's need to disseminate the Gospel

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Elements of iconology
  - ▶ Can our images express divine realities?
    - ▶ We are created “according to God’s image”
    - ▶ Through the incarnation, the Logos has put on “the form of a slave” (our image)
    - ▶ Theophanies as imaginal/visual forms of divine revelation
    - ▶ We are enabled to use familiar imagery to express divine realities

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Elements of iconology
  - ▶ Visual articulations of the divine mystery
    - ▶ The Father as “the ancient of days” (Daniel 7:9)
    - ▶ The glorified Christ (Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1; Daniel 7)
    - ▶ The Holy Spirit as a dove (Matthew 3:16) and tongues of fire (Acts 2:3-4)

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Apophatic reverence
  - ▶ What does apophatic mean?
  - ▶ Reticence in communicating the content of divine knowledge
  - ▶ Rationale: the Church's need to preclude intellectual triumphalism in theological discourse

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ Apophatic reverence
  - ▶ Levels of apophaticism
    - ▶ There is no weakness or limitation in God (God is infinite)
    - ▶ God possesses the similar of our qualities in a different, perfect manner (God is superexistent)
    - ▶ Our words and images refer only to God's manifestations
    - ▶ Our words and images are just pointers to a reality that transcends them (God is unknown even in revelation)
    - ▶ The meaningful silence of the saints

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

- ▶ The rapport between the various expressions of divine knowledge
  - ▶ Preference for cataphatic discourses = enstatic mentality
  - ▶ Preference for imaginal expressions = symbolic mentality
  - ▶ Preference for apophatic expressions = ecstatic mentality
- ▶ Apophaticism lies at the heart of the discursive and iconic expressions

## CATAPHATIC EXPRESSIONS, THE ICON AND THE APOPHATIC REVERENCE

### ▶ Wisdom

- ▶ Knowing God depends on God's self-disclosure to us
- ▶ Divine knowledge requires willingness and worthiness on our part
- ▶ In practical terms this entails the effort of patiently going through stages of instruction and personal transformation
- ▶ Divine knowledge is acquired directly and indirectly
- ▶ Divine knowledge requires discernment and validation
- ▶ Divine knowledge can be articulated in various complementary ways, given the needs of the Church

## WAYS OF KNOWING GOD

- ▶ The next course in the series The Orthodox Faith addresses God's Inner Life and Outward Activity



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- ▶ If you have questions or comments, do not hesitate to contact me
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