

# Orthodox Scientists

## Revelation: Experience of God

*Religion tells how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go. Galileo*



# Question

- \* Do you think the following statement is true or false:
  - \* Scientific knowledge is certain and true but religious knowledge is unclear and not known with certainty.
- \* Lets look at how we know religious truths with certainty.



# What is a Saint?

- \* One who has been **glorified**. What does this mean?
- \* A spiritual state of visitation of the Holy Spirit, where the Spirit prays within him - noetic prayer.
- \* Expression of theosis where one truly become a **god-seer**.  
True theologian.



# Revelation as Experience

- \* Since saints are glorified they have **same** experiences of the energies of God.
- \* We say their writings are **divinely inspired**.
- \* How do they express this knowledge?
  - \* Use **descriptive language**
- \* Saints are our **Orthodox Scientists**.



Saint John receiving vision  
recorded in Book of Revelation



# Revelation as Experience



- \* Parallel with scientific study.
- \* How do scientists gain their knowledge?
  - \* Scientist looks at what he knows - studies, gathers information about it from experience. Based on empirical knowledge.
- \* Same for Saints. Like trained scientists, they are glorified observers.
  - \* Have vision of God, describe it for the benefit of other to repeat it.
  - \* Only accept empirical phenomena.
  - \* Illumination is an empirical phenomenon. So is glorification



# Revelation as Experience

- \* How does one describe an intimate experience of God?
- \* **indescribable** - can only use **symbolic concepts** of created world.
- \* Leads to **apophatic** theology.  
No worldly concept can fully describe what is indescribable.  
Experience of God is beyond all affirmations and negations.





# Revelation as Experience

- \* What is main difference between Orthodox Theology and science?
  - \* Scientists examine material world, their observations are describable, their laws can be modeled by mathematical equations.
  - \* Saints have experiences of God that are indescribable, apart from Christ's human nature, beyond verbal or mathematical description.
- \* Fundamental Truth:  
**In God there is nothing in common with what was created.**



# Revelation as Experience

- \* Basic issue between Science and Religion is their different ways of knowing. What is difference & similarity?
- \* **Difference:** One focused on physical realities other on spiritual realities
- \* **Similarity:** Both based on observation.
- \* What is role of reason? Do we exclude it in regards to spiritual knowledge?



# Fr. John Romanides



- \* John Savvas Romanides (1927 – 2001)
- \* Prominent 20th c. Orthodox priest, theologian, writer, Represented Greek Church to World Council of Churches for a long time, Known for patristic approach to theology and defense of Orthodoxy against scholasticism of West.
- \* Born in Piraeus, Greece, his parents emigrated to the United States when two months old. Grew up in Manhattan.



# Fr. John Romanides



- \* A graduate of Hellenic College, Brookline, Mass., and of Yale Divinity School, received Ph.D. from University of Athens.
  - \* From 1956 to 1965 he was Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Holy Cross Theological School in Brookline, Mass.
- In 1968 appointed as tenured Professor of Dogmatic Theology at University of Thessaloniki, Greece, a position held until retirement in 1982.



# Revelation as Experience



- \* Fr. Romanides writes,
- \* *This knowledge that the saints have of God **includes** man's faculty of **reason**... He does not lose his senses; they participate in the experience of divine vision.*
- \* *On the other hand, the **experience** of divine vision itself **surpasses** the senses and the power of reason, so the **knowledge of God is beyond reason**.*
- \* *Fathers describe this knowledge as '**unknowing**', not because it is bereft of knowledge, but because it **surpasses knowledge**.*
- \* *This is the **knowledge of the Prophets, Apostles and saints** of the Church and foundation of Orthodox Theology.*



# Christianity

- \* What is purpose of Christianity? Is it about doing good works?
  - \* Based on faith in Christ, to lead people through purification to illumination - **union with God**.
  - \* Not about simply doing good works.
    - \* Good works Must be done from within Christ.  
Follow faith and knowledge of God written in our hearts.
- \* Primary teaching of Fathers
  - Not about social or moralistic ideals,  
About asceticism, an **inner** improvement of life.
- \* Orthodoxy **not ethical system**, but therapeutic method.  
A **way** to be united with God.



# Revelation as Experience

- \* How does one become an Orthodox scientist & have a divine vision of God?
- \* 1st heart must be **purified** to gain noetic prayer -  
*"Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God"*
- \* How do we gain this purified heart?
  - \* **Passions** of body **controlled**
  - \* **Detachment** from **worldly cares**
  - \* **Surrender** to what is "**unknowable**"
- \* Must recognize it **will not come through reason.**



# Revelation as Experience

- \* How do we start?
  - \* Accept experience of those who are **experienced**, glorified & **seek** their help.
  - \* Who are these people?
- \* Later, we acquire **own** spiritual experience under their guidance.
- \* Commonly gained through **Sacraments and asceticism** - reading, prayer and fasting - **Orthodox way of life**.
- \* **Everyone** can become a saint with knowledge of God.



# Revelation as Experience

- \* Here is how Saint Theophan the Recluse puts it:
- \* *Here is the **path** by which the Spirit of God leads **to perfection** those who receive Him ...*
- \* *The beginning of it all is **repentance**,*
- \* *the middle of this work and ascetic struggle is **cleansing of the heart** from passions and its **saturation with virtues**,*
- \* *and the end is the holy mystery of **communion with God**...*





Who are the Prophets?



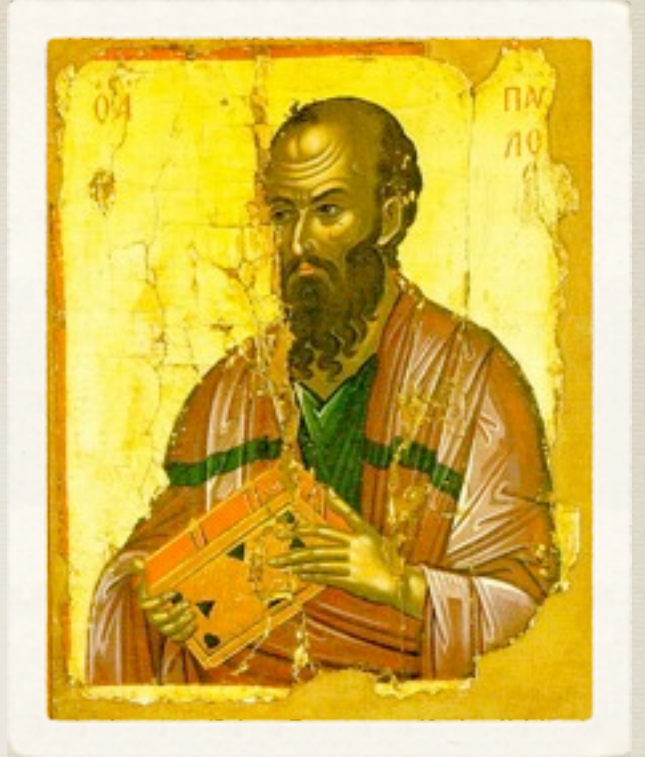
# Prophets

- \* One who is in communion with God, knows His will by revelation, has arrived at glorification and becomes an authoritative teacher.
- \* Moses, David, Elijah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jonah.....
- \* Prophecy is Grace working in the Church. Paul writes:
  - \* *And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, **second prophets**, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues... (1 Cor 12:28-30)*
- \* Gift of Prophecy is not simply a vision but a **spiritual state**.





# Prophets



- \* Paul writes,
- \* *Desire **spiritual gifts**, but especially that you may **prophecy**...he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men... that the church may receive deification.* (1 Cor 14:1-5)
- \* We are **all** called to spiritual state of prophecy.
- \* Writings of Prophets gives us knowledge about God

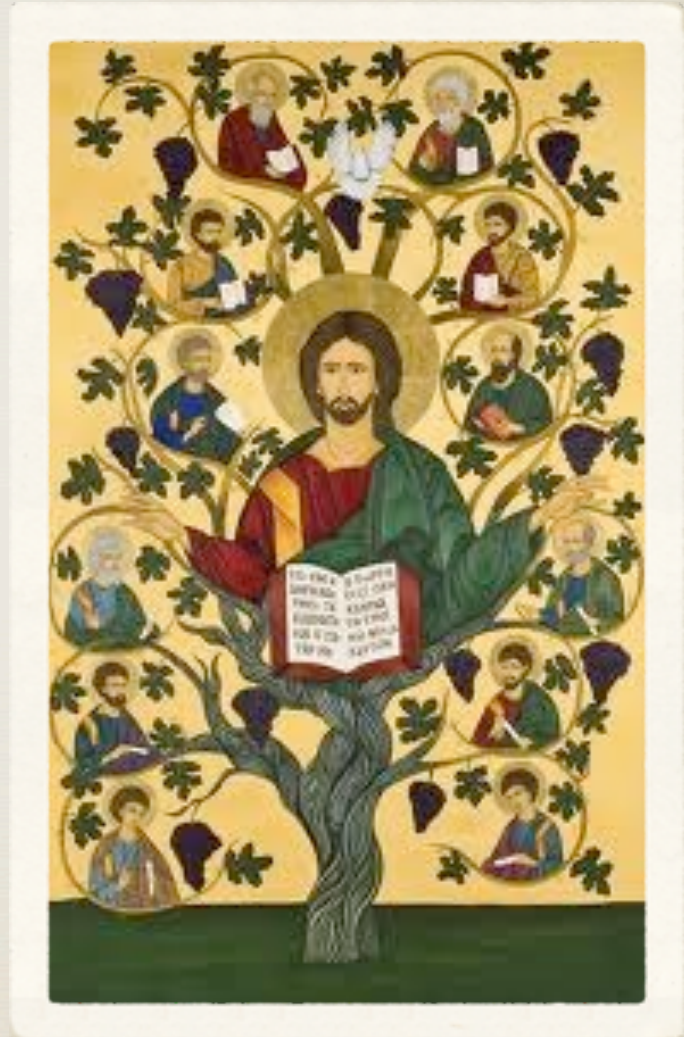


Who are the Apostles?



# Apostles

- \* Christ chose **12** Disciples.
  - They lived with Him.
  - He taught them.
  - He sent them out to preach.
  - They continued His work after Pentecost.
- \* What did they observe in three years?
  - \* Saw miracles,
  - \* Some saw Him transfigured on Mt Tabor.
  - \* Shared Last Supper.
  - \* Witnesses of Resurrection & Ascension.
  - \* At Pentecost became partakers in Holy Spirit.





# Apostles

- \* Though Christ's guidance progressed from purification to illumination and exalted to glorification.
- \* Before Pentecost how did they see Him?
  - \* According to the flesh.
- \* After?
  - \* See the God-man Christ in the Spirit within the Light.



# Apostles

- \* Christ taught those outside the 12 in **parables**, but Apostles granted 'to know the **mysteries** of the kingdom of God.' - Topic of forth Gospel.
- \* In beginning He teaches with Words, but later promises Apostles saying, "*There are some standing here who will not taste death till they **see the kingdom of God present with power***" (Mark 9:1)



# Apostles

- \* What did three chosen see on Mt Tabor?
- \* Transfiguration - Glory of God.
- \* *His face shining as the sun, and his garments became white as the light.*  
(Matt 17:2)
- \* Before Pentecost were **outside** the body of Christ,  
After were **members** of Risen Body of Christ.





# Apostles

- \* What did He mean when He told them, "*You are the **light of the world***"? (Matthew 5:14-16)
- \* They are **illuminated**, like burning candles, they have unceasing remembrance of God within them.
- \* Were the Apostles philosophers?
  - \* No. **Divinely inspired** through experience of Pentecost.
- \* Apostolic life, tradition, and succession is **participation in gifts of Holy Spirit.**





# Early Christians

- \* Early Church every Christian was like a monk. How?
- \* They lived what was called the **apostolic life**.  
Shared all things in common (Acts 2:44).  
Anyone who wanted to be baptized had to give what he had to common treasury of the parish.  
Gathered daily for Eucharistic meal.
- \* Monasticism was not a new thing added to life of church. Is continuation of apostolic life.



# Who are the Patristic Fathers?



# Patristic Fathers

- \* **Successors of the Apostles**, not simply great scholars.
- \* Apostolic Fathers: Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna;
- \* Greek Fathers: Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory the Theologian, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus
- \* Latin Fathers: Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridonium, Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville



# Patristic Fathers

- \* Received the Holy Spirit, participated in glorifying energy of God, acquired **empirical knowledge** of God.
- \* **Defended faith** against heretical teachings.
- \* Able to **Lead** their **spiritual children** to the experience and knowledge of the Triune God.
- \* Were **contemplative, watchful, and ascetic**.
- \* Should **not** view Fathers as **speculative thinkers**, but study them in context of **patristic tradition**.
- \* Their writings about God are **divinely inspired** like Scripture.



# Patristic Fathers

- \* Are the Fathers infallible?
  - \* **No.** They are **unerring** - can guide unerringly.
- \* Have constant remembrance of God and unerring guidance of Holy Spirit.  
Only in issuance of spiritual guidance they cannot make mistakes.
- \* Infallibility of Church applies only to teachings on Holy Trinity, divine grace, diagnosis of infirmities of the human personality, hell and paradise, incarnation, saints, Theotokos and everything connected with experience of glorification.
- \* **Does not include scientific knowledge!**



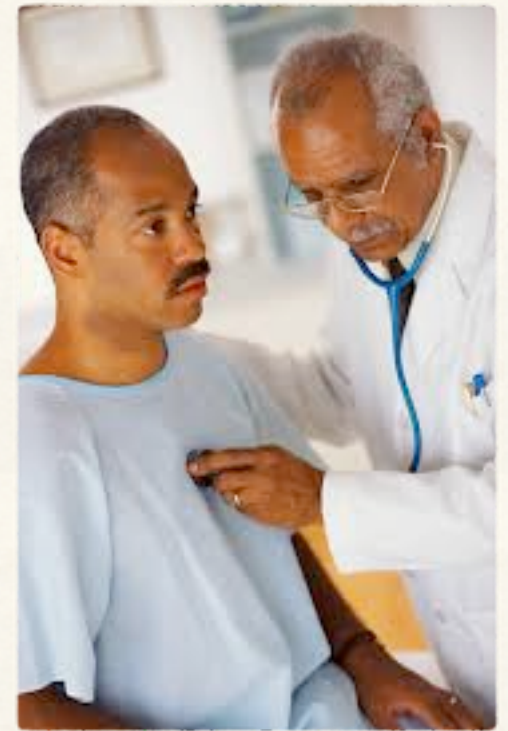
# Patristic Fathers

- \* Not philosophers.
- \* Did not accept philosophical ideas of Plato and Aristotle.
  - \* Soul was immortal by nature or the universe always existed.
- \* Familiar with ancients and philosophers but continually cast hostile remarks at them - St. Athanasius mocks them.
- \* Only interested in bringing their spiritual children from purification to illumination and from illumination to glorification.



# Patristic Fathers

- \* Medical sciences more akin to patristic theology than all the philosophies of the world. How so?
- \* Fathers were empirical. Relied on experience of Holy Spirit which they acquired in the Church. Used this for healing.





# What is an Ecumenical Council?



# Ecumenical Councils

- \* Gathering of Patristic Fathers
- \* Their conclusions are considered Dogma, truths relating to God. Why?
- \* Divine inspiration of the Councils is connected with the presence of Fathers who were divinely inspired.

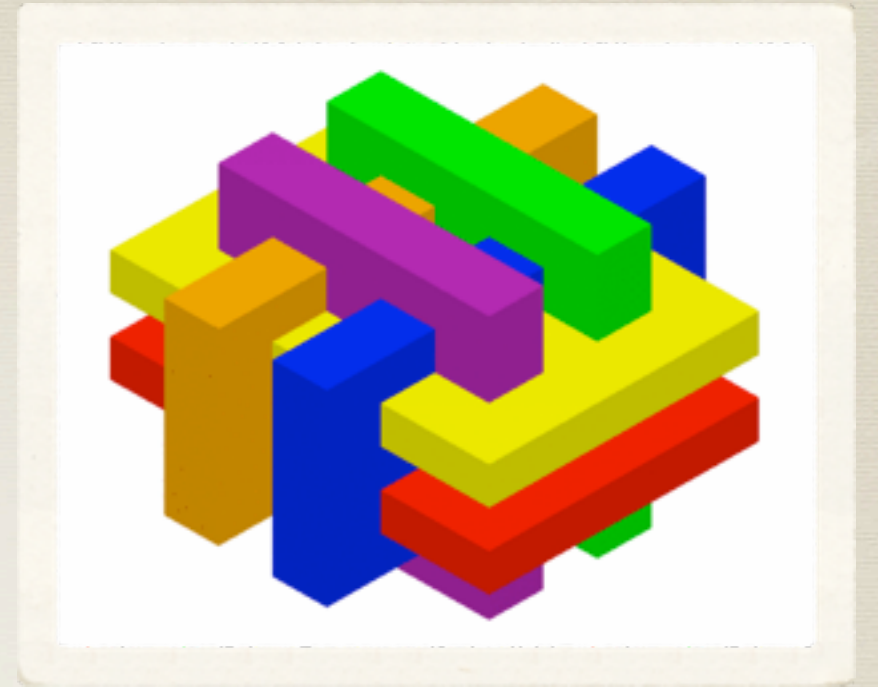




What is Holy Tradition?



# Holy Tradition



- \* Prophets, Apostles, Ecumenical councils, Scripture, writings of Fathers, Liturgical rites and sacraments, hymns, icons - all part of Holy Tradition.
- \* Orthodoxy is beautiful mosaic based on **human experiences** of God.
- \* All based on **Revelation** with purpose to **lead us** to purification, illumination, and glorification - **theosis**



# Revelation and Reason

## Are They In Conflict?



# Revelation

- \* What do we mean by a Revelation of God?
  - \* an experience that cannot be explained in words
  - \* recorded with ***created*** words, concepts and images
- \* Occurs when someone is glorified, embraced by the uncreated light.
- \* What is Bible?
  - \* Revelation recorded through people who have such experiences that we have the OT and the NT.



# Revelation

- \* Must clearly **distinguish** between **created** and **uncreated** things.
- \* Anyone who identifies concepts, texts or created meaning with uncreated things with God, is an **idolater**.
- \* To **fully understand** words written about **revelation** what is necessary?
- \* One needs to be illuminated or glorified. Why?
  - \* If not they will only ascribe meaning appropriate to the created world.
- \* What does this imply about study of Scripture?





# Revelation vs. Philosophy

- \* Heretics never understood this Orthodox principle and used created words and concepts differently. How?
- \* They **philosophized** about them.
- \* Led to **scholasticism**, common in Western Christianity.
- \* **Main figures** of scholasticism historically are Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas. St Augustine also falls into this category.
- \* **Instead of revelation**, placed emphasis on dialectical reasoning to **extend knowledge** by **inference**, and to resolve contradictions.



# Dialectic Method



- \* Philosophic dialectic:
  - \* Question to be examined
  - \* Principal objections to the question
  - \* Argument in favor of the Question, traditionally a single argument ("On the contrary..")
  - \* The determination of the Question after weighing the evidence. ("I answer that...")
  - \* Replies to each objection
- \* How does this differer from revelation?



# Scholastic Method

- \* Study book by renowned scholar. Reference other documents: Church councils, papal letters and others.
- \* Write down points of disagreement.
- \* Make two sides of an argument to be in agreement.
  - \* **Philological analysis.** Words argued to have multiple meanings. Considered that the author might have intended a certain word to mean something different. Ambiguity used to find common ground between contradictory statements.
  - \* **Logical analysis.** Relied on rules of formal logic to show contradictions did not exist but were subjective to reader.
- \* **New truth** proclaimed — All **based on Reason**





# Patristic Approach



- \* With **guidance** of Holy Scripture, dogma and patristic tradition, person led through stage of **purification**, ascending to **illumination**, which is stage of noetic prayer of heart.
- \* Never deal with God as though He is object of philosophical investigation.
- \* Created words used **only in first stages** of perfection **with guidance** of spiritual father: Holy Scripture, Writings of the Fathers and decisions of Ecumenical councils
- \* Once one is perfected and glorified - One attains **same** experience as Apostles, prophets and saints and can **fully understand** what was written - old truths understood.



# Patristic Approach



- \* Gregory the Theologian says,  
*"It is impossible to express God and even **more impossible to conceive Him.**"*  
He must be experienced to know Him.
- \* What must our aim be?
- \* **Participation in glorifying energy of God** which transcends all concepts and words.
- \* One who is glorified understands the texts and sees that the words do not correspond directly to the reality of that which is uncreated.



# Pointing to the Moon

- \* **Student to teacher;** "I have studied the scripture for many years, yet there are many areas I do not quite understand. Please enlighten me."
- \* **Teacher responds,** "I am illiterate. Please read out the characters to me and perhaps I will be able to explain the meaning."
- \* **Student:** "You cannot even recognize the characters. How are you able then to understand the meaning?"
- \* **Teacher:** "Truth has nothing to do with words. Truth can be likened to the bright moon in the sky. Words, in this case, can be likened to a finger. The finger can point to the moon's location. However, the **finger is not the moon**. To look at the moon, it is necessary to gaze beyond the finger, right?"





# Holy Scripture



- \* What is Holy Scripture?
  - \* Divine Revelation
  - \* Books of the OT and the NT determined by the Church through the holy Fathers.
- \* Did Paul know his epistles would be included in the canon of the NT?
- \* Did the Gospel writers know their writings would be included as well?
- \* Why did the NT come into existence?
  - \* To counter the heretics who began writing their own books.
- \* When was canon of NT determined?



# Scripture & Revelation

- \* Are these words that God said to the Prophets and Apostles?
- \* Neither OT or NT was dictated by God. The writers were not God's secretaries.
- \* Recorded their experiences in **own words** - divinely inspired.
- \* Is Scripture about revelation or is it the revelation itself?





# Scripture & Revelation

- \* Scripture cannot be identified with revelation. This according to Fathers is heretical.
- \* Is created word **about revelation**.
- \* Scripture is not Pentecost but it speaks using man made words **about** Pentecost.
- \* Revelation transcends Holy Scripture because the **lived experience** is revelation.
- \* Essay about your vacation is not the same as the vacation.





# Scripture & Revelation

- \* Can we say, “*Holy Scripture is **not** the Word of God but **about** the Word of God?*”
- \* Includes divinely inspired concepts of divinely inspired individuals to teach us about the **uncreated**, not created, **truth**.
- \* **Cannot** be used to support any kind of philosophy or science.
- \* Is understanding Scripture same as understanding God?
- \* Not a reference Book one can read and understand God.



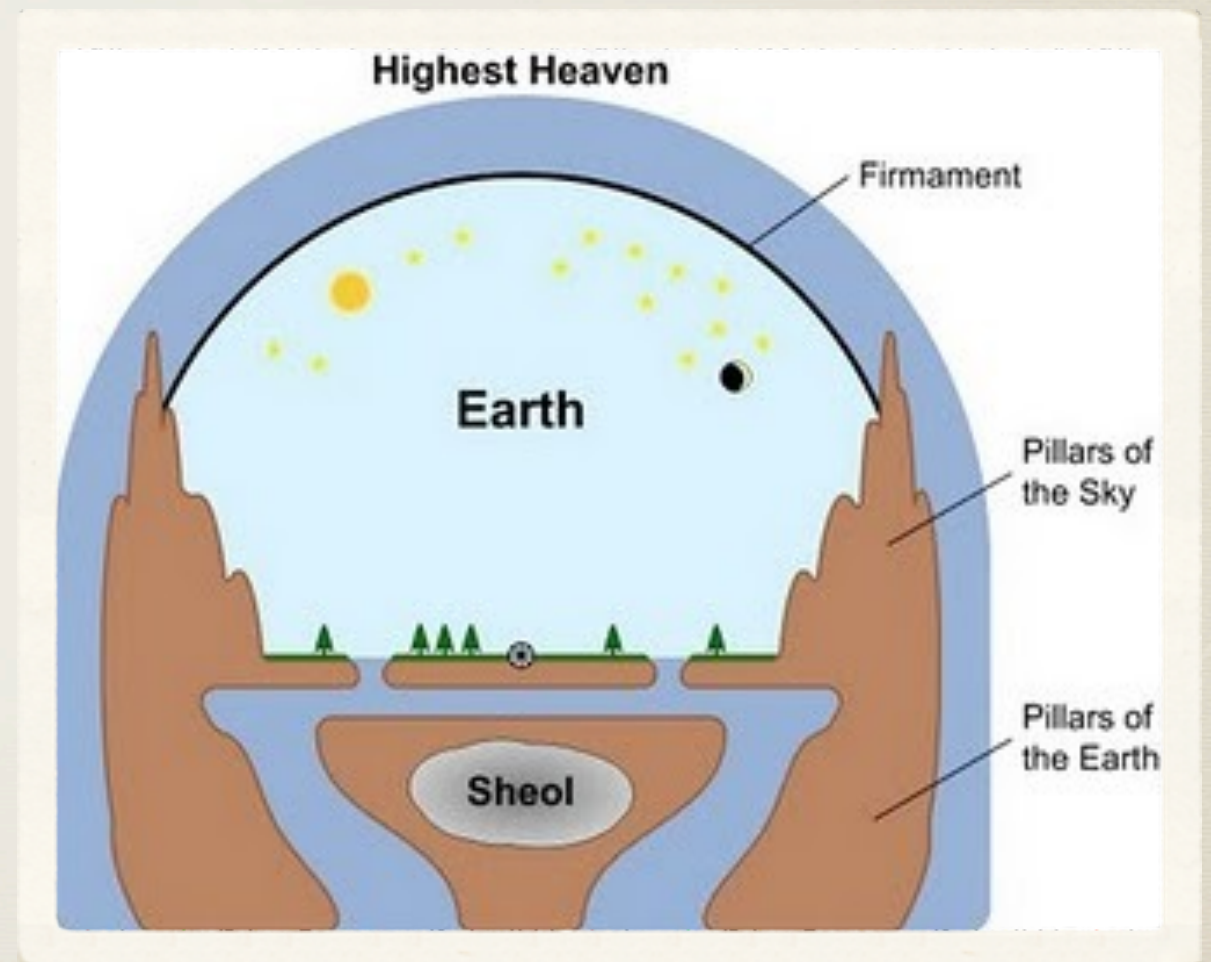
# Scripture & Revelation

- \* In Middle Ages the **Western Church** identified Holy Scripture with revelation which created many problems with appearance of modern science.
  - \* Earth is 6,000 years old
  - Six days of creation
  - Earth is center of universe
  - Man evolved from other creatures
- \* There are many things described in Scripture that are no longer accepted by modern science.
- \* Example: Cosmology of Genesis shows many similarities with the Babylonian cosmology.



# Babylonian cosmology

- \* What is firmament?
- \* Fathers had problem describing this.
- \* Moses was using concepts of creation that were familiar in his time to communicate truths about God.
- \* Concept to point out different realms.





# Aim of Scripture

- \* How are we supposed to use Scripture?
  - \* Should use words of Scripture **ascetically**, to help us reach a higher spiritual state. The aim is ascetical.
  - \* Should read Scripture as a therapy, a way of healing our fallen nature, to help us develop faith.
- \* Contains catechetical and therapeutic wisdom divinely inspired by those who wrote them. They are truths, but must go beyond them.



# Divine Inspiration



Paul tells us: *All **Scripture** is given by **inspiration of God**, and is profitable for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction in righteousness**.* (2 Tim 3:16)

- \* They are written with divine inspiration to **give us direction** to attain illumination, to be united with God - "*for reproof, correction and instruction.*"



# Interpretation



Romanides says,

- \* *If, those who read Holy Scripture every day, **do not** understand the **methodology that leads to glorification** and how the body can become a sacred relic, they **cannot** understand Holy Scripture.*
- \* Scripture belongs within the Church's acts of worship
- \* Apostles teach that interpretation is the gift of grace. - a prophetic gift.



# Aim is glorification

- \* How are we to reach glorification?
- \* Use Holy Scripture as a **reference book** along with writings of the Fathers.
- \* **Seek guides** to aid us in proper spiritual growth.
  - \* Relationship of Spiritual fathers and their children is like relationship between doctor and medical student.
- \* In addition to Scripture we have the **Services**, **Sacraments** which are direct encounters with Holy Spirit and our own **ascetic practices** as aids.
- \* All **aim** to help us along the steps of purification, illumination, and glorification - Theosis



# Way of Life

- \* How do we become an “Orthodox Scientist” united with God?
  - \* Lift ourselves to direct personal experience of God.
  - \* We follow teachings of the Fathers, the saints who were illuminated and divinely inspired.
  - \* We live an Orthodox Way of Life.
    - \* A healing **way of life** that leads to union - not a philosophy.
- What we seek is beyond all words and concepts.



\* Resource: *Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church according to the spoken teaching of Father John Romanides.*  
By Metropolitan of Nafpaktos  
Hierotheos

\* Have I raised any questions?







# The Christ Event

Next Time