

# Empirical Dogmatics, volume 1

## *Old and New Testaments*

Holy Scripture is divided into two main parts: the books of the Old Testament, before the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, and the books of the New Testament, after the incarnation of the Word. Both the Old and the New Testaments were given by revelation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, to the Prophets of the Old Testament by the unincarnate Word, as the Angel of Great Counsel, and to the Apostles of the New Testament by the incarnate Word – Christ.

In its worship and calendar of feasts the Church uses passages from the Old and New Testaments as readings. The readings for Vespers, which interpret the feasts of the Lord and the saints, come from the Old Testament, and the readings for the Divine Liturgy come from the New Testament. The word ‘Testament’ denotes someone’s will, which is recorded and confirmed by his signature.

In both Testaments the Second Person of the Holy Trinity appeared to the Prophets and Apostles. The revelation was granted to them. An agreement was made and it was sealed with the blood of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and the blood of Christ in the New Testament.

We therefore study the Old and New Testaments using the interpretative keys given by the Prophets, Apostles and Fathers and preserved within the Church.

### **a) The Value of the Old Testament**

In the West the Old Testament has been noticeably underrated and disregarded in comparison with the New Testament.

This is explained by the fact that Christ, and everything He said, is held in greater honour than the words of the Prophets of the Old Testament.

“The Westerners’ preconception is that we also have the Old Testament, which they rate at a very low level. The Old Testament is almost nothing for the Protestants and the Latins. Afterwards Christ comes and then the true faith begins. Then we have the era of the Apostles, from the public teaching of Christ until the crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension and so on. After that we have the Church.”

“Western theologians read the Old Testament and do not find much in the Old Testament that relates to the New Testament. Thus, from the point of view of Protestant and Papal research, one part of Scripture has been cut off from the other. This separation is almost complete in the view of non-Orthodox, whereas for the Orthodox there is no difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Whatever is in the New Testament is also in the Old Testament. The only difference is the incarnation and the work of redemption: ‘By death He trampled down death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life.’ The redeeming acts and the incarnation are the new elements, as is the verification, through the experience of Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit is a distinct and particular hypostasis, Who is neither a hypostasis of the Word nor of the Father, nor is He an energy, but a particular hypostasis.”

The Fathers of the Church did not see the Old and New Testaments divided into ‘Law’ and ‘Grace’, but from the perspective of the stages of perfection.

Another serious issue is that Western theologians supported the view, as we see in Barlaam, that divine manifestations in the Old Testament are transitory. They are different from the the-

ophanies of the New Testament.

The Fathers of the Church did not hold such views. It is characteristic that St Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, whose teaching is the same as the Eastern Fathers', guided blessed Augustine to prepare himself prior to Baptism by reading the Old Testament.

“Augustine tells us that in the beginning he paid attention to the form of the words. Because he was a teacher of rhetoric he noted the form, the layout of the speech, not so much the content. But gradually, as time passed, he began to notice the content as well. Then he realised that Christians have an interpretation of the Old Testament that differs a great deal from the Manichaeans. The Manichaean perception of the Old Testament is that the Old Testament belongs to the god of darkness. The Old Testament is a work of darkness, whereas the New Testament and their own writings belong to the Light.

Be that as it may, he tells us that Ambrose opened his eyes to subjects relating to the Old Testament, and he began to see things differently, in combination now with his Platonism. Then he decided to be baptised. He sent a letter to Ambrose from the place where he was on holiday, announcing his decision to be baptised the following Easter and asking what he ought to do in preparation.

Ambrose wrote him a letter telling him to read Isaiah and study him well in preparation for Baptism. Augustine confesses to us in his Philosophical Dialogues that he took up Isaiah to study him, read a few chapters, understood nothing and therefore took refuge in philosophical discussions with certain pupils and with his friends who were there, in a house lent to him by an acquaintance for the holidays. He was also slightly unwell; he had a bad cough and needed to recover.

It is clear that when he was preparing for Baptism he thought

that there was no difference between Christianity and Platonism. For someone with the slightest knowledge of the differences between the two, this is a very strange conviction, to say the least, that he took with him to Baptism.”

## **b) Links between the Old and New Testaments**

From the Orthodox viewpoint there is a close relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The difference that will be identified below is that the God revealed in the Old Testament is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity unincarnate, the Angel of Great Counsel, whereas the God revealed in the New Testament is the incarnate Word. It follows that the difference is the incarnation and the existence of the Church as the Body of Christ. Everything else is common to both.

First of all, in both the Old and New Testaments there are created words and concepts by which uncreated reality is communicated.

Then the anthropology is common to both the Old and New Testaments, namely, that man, who went far away from God and lost communion with Him, is spiritually ill. This is the single interpretative key for interpreting the whole of Holy Scripture.

“In the Old Testament there are men called Prophets and these Prophets had a specific experience. This experience is described, as far as this is possible, in the Old Testament. We find something similar in the New Testament. Afterwards, linked with this experience of the Prophets and Apostles, there is also their preaching and the entire method that they use to try and introduce the faithful to the same experience.

So we have this phenomenon, that in both the Old and New Testaments, if someone wants to find, in my opinion, the key to Holy Scripture and patristic tradition, there is one thing he

must understand: in both the Old and New Testaments there is a specific anthropology.

When I say ‘anthropology’ I do not mean it from a philosophical point of view. I mean more from a theological point of view, that there is a being who is called man. This human being has a tendency to weakness and sickness. Man is sick. Why is he sick? Because he is not in the state of glorification. Glorification is regarded as man’s natural state. As he is neither in the state of glorification nor in the state of illumination, man is spiritually and socially sick. He has an unhealthy personality, he has lost what we would nowadays call personality and has become self-centred, selfish and timid. He does not function correctly as a human being. There are different people at different levels, from cannibal to refined philosopher, but none of them lives correctly. Why not? Because their system does not work as it should. “

Sick and fallen man has selfish love and cares only for himself. He does not love God and other people. He has to be cured, to attain to unselfish love. This is achieved through Christ, Who alone is healthy and sinless.

“From the point of view of Orthodox tradition and Jewish tradition— ancient Jewish tradition, that is, the Old Testament – the human being who does not have unselfish love is ill, that is why he does not have it. He may want to have it, but he does not know how to acquire it. He is unable to acquire it and he ought to know how to obtain it.

He is like someone who is sick and knows he is sick, but does not know how to be cured. I know that someone else is healthy. I know that I am ill. But how will I be cured if I do not know how to be cured and to become like the other one who is not sick?

The one who is supremely well and sinless in the whole his-

tory of humanity is Christ. How can man become like Christ, Who is the only one Who was not only free from sickness, but was also born free from sickness, whereas all the rest of us were born sick, and everyone in the Old Testament and everyone in the New Testament was born sick? Only Christ was born sinless and not sick. Can we become like Christ because we want to be? Well, we may want to be, but how will we achieve it?"

The question of how we will achieve unselfish love, which constitutes the cure of our being and spiritual health, is what concerns the Prophets, Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. It is connected with the activation of the noetic faculty in the heart.

Throughout Holy Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments, we encounter the fact that the noetic faculty (energy) functions in the heart, and through it someone acquires knowledge of God. Meanwhile the rational faculty (energy) acts in the reason through thoughts (logismoi) and by means of it man relates to his surroundings.

In order to be cured, man has to pass through the stages of the spiritual life, which are purification of the heart, illumination of the nous and glorification. These stages of perfection are identified in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

This is the perspective in which the Law should be viewed in the Old Testament, together with the rites of purification and all the commandments in general. The Mosaic Law is clearly ascetic in character and consists of purification of the heart and progress towards illumination and glorification. Thus there are not only words and concepts in the Old Testament, but also the experience of glorification which goes beyond words and concepts.

"We have a very basic problem in contemporary Orthodox

theology. What is the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament? In the Old Testament do we have the revelation of the truth? Do we have the experience of glorification, which transcends words and concepts? Or do we only have words and concepts in the Old Testament?

The Augustinian tradition tells us that we have words and concepts, things that come and go, but we have nothing in the way of experiences that compares with the New Testament. So neither the Protestants nor the Latins understand the Old Testament as we Orthodox do. For the Fathers of the Church, all the Prophets had reached glorification.”

### **c) Difference between the Old and New Testaments**

As has been pointed out already, the experiences of the Prophets, Apostles and Fathers, of the Old and New Testaments, are identical. The spiritual life is common to both, the stages of perfection are the same, glorification is lived by the glorified saints. There are, however, differences as well.

The first difference is that the unincarnate Word appears in the Old Testament, whereas in the New the incarnate Word appears. This has been emphasised in detail elsewhere.

The second difference is that the glorification of the Prophets in the Old Testament had a temporary character, as death had not been abolished. The glorification of the Apostles in the New Testament, by contrast, is stable because of the existence of Christ's glorified human nature and the victory over death.

“The second great difference between the Old and New Testaments is between temporariness and permanence of participation in the glory of God. In the Old Testament participation is temporary. The experience of glorification is short-lived. Those who beheld the uncreated glory of the Word nevertheless died,

both in body and soul. Now, however, through the incarnation, all who have seen the glory of the Word participate permanently in the glory of the Holy Trinity, because when the body dies, the soul does not undergo death. The death of the soul is the absence of glorification, that is to say, the vision of God.

When someone in this life, now, attains to glorification, death no longer dominates him and the experience of glorification continues even after death. A very powerful sign and testimony regarding this fact is the holy relics. Holy relics exist because those who have left relics have left them as testimony to the resurrection of their bodies. That is why all together they make up the communion of the saints.”

Generally speaking, the links between the Old and New Testaments and the differences between them can be set out in three basic questions.

“I pose certain questions. I do not offer any solution to these issues. I simply think that they ought to be examined and subjected to further research.

a) What has been revealed in the Old Testament? Was the truth revealed or is it lies? b) How does the Old Testament differ from the New? And c) What does Christ mean when He says, ‘He will guide you into all truth’? What is ‘all truth’ and when was this ‘all truth’ revealed? And if ‘all truth’ has been revealed, this means that it ought to be regarded now as the highest pinnacle. And if we have a highest point after that pinnacle, we need to measure whether or not we still have that state. For ‘all truth’ to be revealed there has to be a certain state. What was revealed as ‘all truth’? The dogma of the Holy Trinity? The dogma of the incarnation? What has been revealed as ‘all truth’? And when? Was it gradually revealed? As time passed, down through the ages? Or was it revealed all at once, in a revelational experience?



And so on.

Our contemporary perceptions on these issues are not usually within the framework of the patristic tradition. One professor of ours has caught onto the word ‘revelation’ and says that even after Pentecost there is revelation. What revelation can there be after Pentecost? What does revelation mean to the Fathers of the Church? And how is revelation after Pentecost different from the revelation at Pentecost or the revelation before Pentecost or the revelation after the Resurrection, from the revelation before the Ascension, the revelation before the Resurrection, from the revelation before the incarnation?

We have revelations before the incarnation throughout the Old Testament. After the incarnation we have revelations. Before the Resurrection we have revelations. At the Resurrection and after the Resurrection we have revelations. Before the Ascension, during the event of the Ascension, there is the experience of the Ascension. Afterwards we also have Pentecost. Then the Fathers speak again about revelations. When the Fathers speak of revelation, what do they mean by the word? And what is the connection between revelation and divine inspiration?”

The answer to these questions is that in the Old Testament there is revelation of the unincarnate Word. This is truth not falsehood, but “all truth”, which was revealed on the day of Pentecost, is that the Church is the Body of Christ. The unincarnate Word is now incarnate. This is “all truth”.

“The basic difference between the Old and New Testaments is the incarnation. First of all the Word appears unincarnate to the Prophets. The first great difference: there is no incarnation in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, however, there is the Holy Trinity, Which appears to the Prophets, because the Word, Christ Himself, is manifested to the Prophets. For that

reason, for us Orthodox Christians, the Old Testament is clearly Christocentric. The things that some people say about monotheism having been revealed in the Old Testament and so on, are incorrect.”

This means that the difference between the Old and New Testaments is not the dogma of the Holy Trinity, but the incarnation.

“The Word, Who is unincarnate in the Old Testament, appeared without flesh. Now, however, the Word is incarnate and when He is revealed to man He is always revealed in the body. In the New Testament, the revelation concentrates on the human nature of Christ.

Since this is the case, even before Pentecost we have examples of glorification. We know from the Tradition about the glorification of the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Temple at three years old. She reached the Holy of Holies, which means that the All-Holy Virgin at three years of age had attained to the experience of glorification. She lived in the glory of God. She also beheld God from at least the age of three, and in this way she was made ready to be the Mother of God. That is one example.

Afterwards we have the example of the Baptism of Christ. We have the example of the two disciples of John. Later we have the Transfiguration, and then Pentecost. From the Transfiguration until Pentecost, however, Christ says that ‘He will guide you into all truth’ (John 16:13). What is meant by these words, ‘He will guide you into all truth’? We have an experience of glorification in the Old Testament. The Holy Trinity has already been revealed to the Prophets: the Father in the Word and the Holy Spirit has been revealed to the Prophets.

We have the same revelation in the New Testament, but now

the human nature of Christ is added. In the Transfiguration we have a revelation of the glory of Christ, by means of the human nature of Christ, but also in the cloud that overshadowed the Apostles. Afterwards we have Pentecost. Why is Pentecost the revelation of all truth and why is the Transfiguration not the revelation of all truth?"

The light which the Prophets of the Old Testament saw was the divine and uncreated Light, but there was no body. At the time of the Transfiguration of Christ, the Disciples saw Light issuing from the Body of Christ, which, however, was outside them, as they had not yet become members of the Body of Christ. From the day of Pentecost onwards, the holy Apostles and the saints see the Light through the Body of Christ, as they are members of this risen and glorified Body of Christ.

"That someone reaches glorification and has Light from within, means that the source of the Light is, of course, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but that it is also the human nature of Christ. Because of the hypostatic union, that is to say, on account of the fact that it is the body of the Word, not only the Word but also the flesh is a source of life. The vision of God, glorification, is a source of life.

This is the basic difference between the Old and New Testaments. This now, from the point of view of reality, is what is called the Church, historical ecclesiastical reality."

The visions of God in the New Testament are different from visions of God in the Old Testament, because now the human nature of the Word is a source of the uncreated energy of God and because the Godseers are members of the Body of Christ. Also because death has been abolished and glorification does not have a temporary character. Now the Church is the Body of Christ and there is no other truth beyond the Church. This is

“all truth” that was revealed on the day of Pentecost and is experienced through the centuries by the faithful. After Pentecost there is no additional truth.