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Herausgegeben von
Tzotcho Boiadjiev, Georgi Kapriev,
Martin Ossikovski und Andreas Speer

ИНСТИТУТ ЗА СРЕДНОВЕКОВНА ФИЛОСОФИЯ И КУЛТУРА

**АРХИВ
ЗА СРЕДНОВЕКОВНА
ФИЛОСОФИЯ
И КУЛТУРА
СВИТЪК XXXI**

Издаван от
Цочо Бояджиев, Георги Каприев,
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STOYAN TANEV (OTTAWA)

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA AND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL EXEGESIS OF THE THEOPHANIES

Introduction

I will start by referring to a personal communication I had with Fr. John Breck. Here is a reply from him to my question: How did early Christians start seeing Jesus as Lord and God much before they started discussing issues related to consubstantiality?¹

¹ The question about the care with which Church Fathers were dealing with terminology is highly relevant. I will mention, as an example, that the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431) included in its Acts the Second Letter of St Cyril of Alexandria to Nestorius, in which St Cyril expresses his dedication „to remove scandals and to expound the healthy word of faith to those who seek the truth, pointing out that ‘the most effective way to achieve this end will be zealously to occupy ourselves *with the words* of the holy fathers [*en tois ton hagian pateron peritynchantontes logois*], *to esteem their words*, to examine our words to see if we are holding to their faith *as it is written* [*en tei pistei kata to gegrammenon*]“ (Eph 431 ep 2). „These statements refer not only to the orthodox and catholic tradition in general but specifically to the creed as it was legislated and set down in writing by the First Council of Nicaea in 325, and to the very words of that first creed“ (Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, Yale University Press, 2005, p. 12).

“Your question is a difficult one, since there are so many ways the New Testament has been interpreted. I believe that the conviction that God was truly ‘embodied’ (incarnated) in the person of Jesus of Nazareth arose on the basis of personal experience shared by the disciples and others who heard his teachings and saw them realized in his acts, particularly in what we call miracles. From his first public appearance to John the Baptist Jesus openly and decisively manifested his uniqueness as more than a prophet, but as one who embodied his affirmations concerning himself (‘He who has seen me has seen the Father,’ ‘love your enemies,’ etc.). While a certain portion of these statements may derive from the evangelists themselves (especially in the Johannine tradition), the NT is filled with ‘tripartite’ formulas, not only in the Epistles but also in the Gospels, that link Father, Son and Spirit in a common life and action. ... The foundation for ‘Trinitarian theology’ is thus firmly laid in the Gospels and Epistles themselves. St. Paul was convinced that Jesus Christ was the pre-existent divine Son (e.g., Phil 2:5ff), and the fact that Matthew and Luke preserve the Nativity accounts shows that they did as well (those accounts are not just about parthenogenesis; they affirm that God, through the Spirit, assumed full human life, uniting divinity and humanity in the newborn Child). ‘God was in Christ,’ not as in the prophets or other witnesses, but ‘ontologically’ (the only way to read *morphê* in Phil 2).² Thomas’ confession, ‘My Lord and my God!’ is normative for the apostolic writers, and that already in the decades after the Resurrection when the NT documents were being composed.

² Philippians 2:5–6: „5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!“ English has no exact equivalent for the Greek word *morphe*. Unlike „form“ in English, *morphe* does not mean „shape.“ It is a philosophical term that means „the outward expression of an inner essence.“

Questions concerning consubstantiality and the exact nature of the Son's relation to the Father were inevitable outcomes of three centuries of 'life in Christ,' known 'noetically' in the Church's prayer (Liturgies) and personal experience. Christology received a fine point as time passed, but its basis, once again, was the *experience* of the Risen Christ in the daily life and mission of the early, pre-patristic Church. ...

We can't *prove* that Jesus thought of himself as literally (ontologically, so to speak) the Son of God. But that faith is not a product of idle speculation. It is based, once again, on the living *experience* of Christ, not only as the historical Jesus, but as the Risen Christ, 'known' personally by the disciples/apostles and countless other people whose lives were transformed by an encounter with him precisely as 'Lord and God.'"

The point that Fr. John makes is that the fundamental core beliefs of the Apostles, their disciples and the early Christians were based on their personal visionary experience of the divinity of Christ, of Jesus Christ in Glory, i.e. of Jesus Christ as the Son and Word of the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The early Christians discerned the radiant face of Christ in the visions of patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament. This was not a matter of „biblical exegesis“ alone, but a complex experience involving exegetical, visionary, pedagogical, ascetical, and liturgical dimensions. For them the Christological interpretation of the theophanies provided a coherent narrative leading from Genesis to Jesus Christ.

Among the earliest Christian texts in which these dimensions are visible is the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, found in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 24:

“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still,

looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish (ἄνοητοι) you are, and how slow of heart (τῇ καρδίᾳ) to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened (αὐτῶν δὲ διηνοιχθήσαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοί) and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning³ within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us (ὥς διήνοιγεν ἡμῖν τὰς γραφάς)?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord

³ In the Codex Bezae version of the text this phrase is rendered as „our hearts were veiled“ (Bucur, B. *Scripture Re-envisioned. Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible*. Boston: Brill, 2019, p. 7). See also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Bezae.

has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.... Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds (διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν) to understand the scriptures ...“

Here is a comment of Elder Vasileos, the former Abbot of the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos, on the Emmaus story.⁴

“And during the breaking of the bread their eyes are opened. They recognise Him. And he vanishes. After so much labour and pain of soul and body, the time has come for Him to reveal Himself truly by vanishing. He vanishes in a physical sense and manifests Himself in a way that is Divine. He is within them for ever. He sets His seal on their being. He illumines and fills all things. And they leave. They cannot stay. They have to tell of what has happened (that is theology). ...

When we live in Christ, we have present before us all that has gone before and all that is yet to come. ... When we live in Christ, we long for that which we have and remember that which we await. Through Him, all things have come together in one: while we are unaware of Him, He is beside us, giving us strength. And when we recognise him, He vanishes, in order to fill all things by His grace: presence and absence, sorrow and joy, knowledge and ignorance, life and death, heaven and earth and all that is under the earth.“

We can now get a glimpse of what the challenge for the Apostles was, for their disciples and the early Christians. They have experienced visions of Jesus Christ as the Lord of Glory, the One who appeared to patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament and needed to find the language to share these extraordinary experiences with others. They needed to find the best

⁴ Vasileios, *I Came that They May Have Life*, p. 25.

words to talk about the uncreated Word of God as „embodied“ (incarnated) in the person of Jesus of Nazareth as well as about the type of relation between the Father and the Word and Son of God. To do that, they did not have some divine words that God provided them with, but our human words. In addition, many of the people they were arguing with highly educated men and philosophers who were inclined to use more metaphysically loaded language. This is how the words like *hypostasis*, *ousia* and *homooousios* came into play.

James Kelley is one of the authors who have extensively focused on studying the theological contributions of Fr. John Romanides.⁵ According to Kelly,⁶ Romanides insisted that „the First Ecumenical Council was not a convocation of textual critics and careerist ecclesiastics who hoped to use scholarly methods or up-to-date philosophy to understand Church teachings. ... Rather, the question at Nicaea concerned the Lord of Glory (Christ) seen by the saints before and after the Incarnation: Was he created or uncreated? The Arians and the Orthodox agreed that the Old Testament ‘Angel of the Lord’ (Exodus 3.6) was Jesus Christ before He became Incarnate. Thus, they did not differ about *who* the Angel-Logos was and is; the question was *what exactly is the origin, and thus the status and nature of the unincarnate Angel-Logos who later ‘became’ Jesus Christ Incarnate?*” The heretics and the Orthodox ‘were not arguing speculatively over

⁵ See for example: James L. Kelley, *A Realism of Glory: Lectures on Christology in the Works of Protopresbyter John Romanides* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2009); „Protopresbyter John Romanides’s Teaching on Creation,” *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 7(1), 2016: 42–61.

⁶ James L. Kelley, *What Arius Knew (and the Christian West Still Does Not): Fr. John Romanides on the First Ecumenical Council*, 2017: <https://romeosyne.wordpress.com/2017/05/13/what-arius-knew-and-the-christian-west-still-does-not-fr-john-romanides-on-the-first-ecumenical-council/>

⁷ Romanides’ views discussed by James Kelley can be found, for example, in: John S. Romanides, „Jesus Christ, the Life of the World,” *Xenia Oecumenica* 39 (1983), pp. 232–275 (the paper was delivered

an abstract Second Person of the Holy Trinity whose identity and nature one allegedly deciphered by wondering over biblical passages with the help of Hellenistic philosophy and the Holy Spirit. What they were discussing was the spiritual experience of the prophets and apostles and, more specifically, whether it is a created or uncreated Logos who appears in glory to them and reveals in Himself as Image God the Father.⁸

For the Arians, the Lord of Glory was brought into existence at the beginning of or before all ages by God the Father. The Orthodox demonstrated to the Arians through Holy Scripture what they already knew from their own spiritual experience, that, first, the Lord of Glory has every energy that the Father has, and, second, being God's 'Angel,' He takes His being from the Father. Thus, Christ is fully God and seeing Him is not like seeing a creation, but of the uncreated One.

Things were however a lot more complicated because there were various groups, not just Arians, involved in the pre- and post-Nicaean debates. Recent scholarship made a remarkable contribution to the interpretation of pre- and post-Nicaean theological landscape. Joseph Lienhard, for example, concentrated his inquiry on the notion of *hypostasis* and realized that it was employed with two widely accepted meanings: individual subsistence or common substance.⁹ The two ways of using the word *hypostasis* characterized the two dominantly opposing parties for much of the fourth century; one preferred to speak of one *hypostasis* in God, the other of two (or three, once the controversy over the Holy Spirit arose).

Dragos Giulea contributed to the study of the fourth-century debates by introducing a new exploratory lens based on the

during W.C.C. Orthodox Consultation in Damascus, 5–9 February 1982).

⁸ Ibid., p. 234: https://www.romanity.org/htm/rom.19.en.jesus_christ_the_life_of_the_world.01.htm.

⁹ Joseph Lienhard, 'The „Arian“ Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered,' *Theological Studies*, 48 (1987), p. 415–437

concept of theological trajectories.¹⁰ Giulea emphasizes that each trajectory employs a particular theological grammar grounded on a relatively consistent basic vocabulary, including biblical and metaphysical concepts. For example, the Antiochene grammar was specified through the fact that the notions of *ousia* and *hypostasis*, when applied to the divine realm, have a similar meaning and denote an individual divine subsistence.¹¹

On the contrary, in the Nicene metaphysical vocabulary, these exact terms indicate the common substance. „Most of the Arians definitely had a precise understanding of what a first principle (*archê*) is and were unwilling to make any concession regarding the meaning of the word ‘unbegotten’ (*agennêtos*), which, according to them, should be predicated exclusively on the Father. On the contrary, various Nicene and pro-Nicene writers maintained that the term should be predicated equally on the Son.”¹² Thus, according to Giulea, the assumption of a specific meaning of one of these basic terms is tremendously consequential to any theory that employs it, much more than the ordinary words of everyday language. For him the interesting question is what were the non-negotiable core beliefs that were providing a potential reference point.¹³ And here is where the Christophanic understanding of the Theophanies comes in.

“The identification of Israel’s LORD with the ‘Lord Jesus,’ supported exegetically by His identification as the subject of biblical theophanies such as those reported in Genesis 18, Exodus 3, Exodus 33, Psalm 98/99 and 131/132, Isaiah 6, Habakkuk 3:2, Daniel 3, and Daniel 7, contributed greatly to the emer-

¹⁰ Dragos Andrei Giulea. *Antioch, Nicaea, and the Synthesis of Constantinople: Revisiting Trajectories in the Fourth-Century Christological Debates*. Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 200. Brill, 2024

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See D. Giulea, „*Antioch, Nicaea, and the Synthesis of Constantinople*“, p. 30, referring to Mark DelCogliano, „The Influence of Athanasius and the Homoiousians on Basil of Caesarea’s Decentralization of ‘Unbegotten’“, *J ECS* 19, no. 2 (2011): 197– 223.

¹³ Ibid.

gence of an increasingly distinct symbolic universe among early Christians. In the second and third centuries, it played an important role in anti-Jewish, anti-dualistic, and anti-Monarchian polemics, and is especially prominent among pre-Nicene writers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus of Rome. In the words of St Irenaeus' *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* and the later *Apostolic Constitutions*,

[At Genesis 18] two of the three were angels; but one was the Son of God, with whom Abraham spoke, pleading on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom ... Jacob sees him in a dream ... standing upon the ladder ... This is he who in the bush spoke with Moses;¹⁴ He is the Christ of God ... Him did Jacob see as a man, and said: I have seen God face to face, and my soul is preserved; Him did Abraham entertain, and acknowledge to be the Judge, and his Lord; Him did Moses see in the bush; ... Him Daniel describes as the Son of man coming to the Father ...¹⁵

According to Fr. Alexander Golitzin,¹⁶ „theophany permeates Orthodox Tradition throughout, informing its dogmatic theology and its liturgy. That Jesus, Mary's son, is the very One who appeared to Moses and the prophets – this is the consistent witness of the ante-Nicene Fathers and remains foundational throughout the fourth century Trinitarian controversies and the later Christological disputes.“¹⁷

According to Bogdan Bucur, there is certainly agreement in scholarship on the „consistent witness of the ante-Nicene Fa-

¹⁴ Irenaeus, Epid. 44–46 (trans. John Behr, *St Irenaeus of Lyon: On the Apostolic Preaching* [Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1997], 69–70).

¹⁵ Bucur, B. *Scripture Re-envisioned. Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible*. Boston: Brill, 2019, p. 1–2, referring to St Irenaeus's *Apostolic Constitutions* 5.20.5–7, 11 (SC 328:278, 280).

¹⁶ The Most Reverend Alexander, Archbishop of Dallas, the South and the Bulgarian Diocese: <https://www.oca.org/holy-synod/bishops/the-most-reverend-alexander>.

¹⁷ Alexander Golitzin, „Theophaneia: Forum on the Jewish Roots of Orthodox Spirituality,“ in *The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism* (Byzantinorossica, 2007), xviii.

thers“ to the paradoxical identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the one who spoke to the patriarchs and prophets of old. There is much less discussion, however, on whether this „Christophanic exegesis“ retained any importance for Nicene and post-Nicene Christianity or was rendered obsolete by the more sophisticated argumentation and more precise doctrinal articulation developed during the conciliar era. In what follows I will refer to the theological insights of Fr. Bogdan Bucur¹⁸ on the role of the Christophanic exegesis in the argumentation of St Athanasius of Alexandria relevant to the theological debates associated with the reception of the First Ecumenical Council.¹⁹

Christophanic Exegesis in Athanasius of Alexandria

For the Christian Church as well as for the academic guild, Athanasius counts as the definer and defender of Nicaea's proclamation of faith in the Son „one-in-essence with the Father“. To ask about the role of theophanies in the thought of Athanasius or to inquire whether, as Golitzin put it, the Christological interpretation of theophanies „remained foundational“ for his theology has hardly ever been the object of scholarly interest.²⁰ Fr.

¹⁸ Fr. Bogdan Bucur is a scholar of early Christianity, with a special interest in the link between reception history of the Bible and doctrinal developments in early Christianity and the Byzantine tradition: <https://www.svots.edu/people/very-rev-dr-bogdan-g-bucur>.

¹⁹ Bucur, Bogdan, „Christophanic Exegesis in Defense of the Nicæan Faith: Patristic Authors and Scholars of Patristics.“ *Nicaea and the Future of Christianity*, edited by George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2025, pp. 22–41. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.carleton.ca/10.1515/9781531510183-003>.

²⁰ The works of Fr. John Romanides could be seen as a representative exception. In his „Jesus Christ, the Life of the World,“ *Xenia Oecumenica* 39 (1983), pp. 232–275, Romanides points out: „Against the Arians St. Athanasius argues that the name ‘angel’ is sometimes

Bogdan Bucur has rigorously demonstrated that St Athanasius does make insistent reference to theophanic texts in justifying, or even demanding, the adoption of Christological formulae such as $\delta\mu\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\varsigma$. Athanasius's emphasis on specific theological concepts varies along the decades, but his approach to theophanies remained unchanged.

Bucur examines the *De Synodis* (359–361) – a work deemed „the culmination of his (i.e., Athanasius') doctrinal argument“²¹ – where St Athanasius refers to the one „who appeared to patriarch Jacob“²² as the revealed truth properly ac-

applied to the uncreated Logos and sometimes to a created angel. He insists that there can be no confusion on whether one sees a created angel or the uncreated Son of God sometimes called 'angel' in the Old Testament. He insists that 'when the Son is seen, so is the Father, for He is the Father's radiance; and thus the Father and the Son are one... What God speaks, it is very plain He speaks through the Logos and not through another... And he who hath seen the Son, knows that, in seeing Him, he has seen, not an angel, nor one merely greater than angels, nor in short any creature, but the Father Himself. And he who hears the Logos, knows that he hears the Father; as he who is irradiated by the radiance, knows that he is enlightened by the sun (Against Arians III, 12–14). As a key to the Old and New Testaments, St. Athanasius states that 'there is nothing that the Father operates except through the Son...' (Ibid. III, 12). This means that the Old Testament is Christo-centric since Christ is the pre-incarnate Angel of the Lord and of the Great Council, the Lord of Glory, and the Lord Sabaoth in Whom the patriarchs and prophets see and hear God and through Whom they receive grace, succor, and forgiveness."

²¹ David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

²² Jacob, later given the name Israel, is a patriarch regarded as the forefather of the Israelites, according to Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. „So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he

counted for by the Nicene formula of consubstantiality. Athanasius begins by positioning himself firmly in the faith in one God revealed to Israel and continued by the Church: He emphasizes that the terms „Son,“ „Logos,“ and „Wisdom,“ properly specified as being „of God“ or „of the Father,“ do not seek to establish the Son as a second God but point, rather, to a distinction within what is, fundamentally, a oneness such as that between sunlight and its natural property of being radiant. By analogy, the Son is „proper to the Father’s essence,“ being the Father’s „illuminating and creative [power], most proper to the Father“.

Bucur emphasizes that, for Athanasius, ὁμοούσιος is a fitting, accurate, proper term because it reflects and secures the conception of the Son as the Father’s „very“ Word and Wisdom, his „proper“ radiance, the „most proper“ power manifesting God in his work of creation and revelation. To show that the metaphysical conception encapsulated in the term ὁμοούσιος is consonant with, and an accurate conceptual translation of, the revealed truth, Athanasius refers to the Scriptures:

“For this it was that was seen by the Patriarch Jacob – as Scripture says, The sun rose unto him when the Form of God passed by (Gen 32:31); and this it was which, when they beheld it, the holy prophets said, The Word of the Lord came to me (Jer 1:2, 4, 11, 13); and recognizing the Father, who was beheld and revealed in Him [i.e., in the Logos], they made bold to say, The God of our fathers has appeared unto me, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:16).“

For Bucur, the identification of Jacob’s mysterious adversary with the Logos continues the venerable tradition of Christological exegesis of this episode by identifying the mysterious man with the Word of God incarnaturus. In addition, this identifica-

answered. Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.’ Jacob said, ‘Please tell me your name.’ But he replied, ‘Why do you ask my name?’ Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared’“ (Genesis 32:24–30).

tion allows Athanasius to highlight, repeatedly, the dogmatic relevance of the biblical text, showing that once the divine appearance to Jacob is understood Christologically, the theophany can only be accounted for by confessing the Son as „proper“ (ἴδιος) to the Father, ὁμοούσιος to the Father, inseparable from him according to essential propriety (κατὰ τὴν ιδιότητα τῆς οὐσίας). It is evident that Athanasius finds his statements about the Logos as the Father’s „proper radiance“ and „proper power“ to be substantiated by biblical narratives about visionary encounters with the Logos of the Father.²³

Bogdan Bucur expresses his deep regret that there is little attention in scholarship on the fact (though it seems quite important to Athanasius) that it is the Christophanies (Gen. 32:31, Ex. 3:16, and Jer. 1:2, 4, 11, 13) that provide the semantic content of the Nicene formula: „This being so, why do we hesitate [εὐλαβούμεθα] in calling ὁμοούσιος him who alone is ‘with the Father’?“ (πρὸς τὸν πατέρα; cf. John 1:1 πρὸς τὸν Θεόν). According to him, the textual evidence compels us to conclude that Athanasius’s defense of the Nicene faith did involve recourse to the traditional Christological exegesis of theophanies and revealed a clear conviction about the theophanic foundations of doctrinal formulations: „If it is true that Athanasius sees the ὁμοούσιος as the fitting, accurate, proper term (κυρία λέξις) for a conception of the Son as the Father’s ‘very’ Word manifesting God’s creative, revelatory, and salvific work, it is also true that he understands this term as the accurate conceptual translation of the truth about Christ’s divinity revealed at Mamre, Peniel, Sinai, or Zion, even before the Word’s becoming flesh.“ Unfortunately, the vast majority of manuals, patrology textbooks, and large monographs on fourth-century Christianity barely mention the Christological exegesis of Theophanies. In most cases the Christophanic exegesis of the Theophanies is considered as a pre-Nicene theological tradition whose significance during the conciliar era is negligible. Bucur also points out „it is usually only

²³ Bucur, Bogdan, „Christophanic Exegesis in Defense of the Nicaean Faith.“

studies of Augustine that pay any attention to Christophanic exegesis – and then only to discuss how, when, and why the bishop of Hippo rejected Christophanic exegesis and relegated theophanies to the periphery of theological reflection. Augustine's theological prejudice against the Christological exegesis of theophanies remains baked into the study of the Fathers to this day, undisturbed by the change of paradigm from patristics to early Christian studies. What is more, patristic scholarship seems to have also lost sight of what Augustine did not get wrong about Athanasius – namely, that the defense of the Nicene faith did entail an insistent recourse to theophanies.²⁴

Bucur completes his analysis by insisting that „Since Christophanic exegesis turns out to have, indeed, „remained foundational throughout the fourth century Trinitarian controversies,“ as Golitzin put it, scholarship on the Nicene faith – and patristic scholarship, in general – would do well to refocus its scholarly lenses so as to recapture this important dimension of the patristic texts, including those major Athanasian treatises discussed here.“²⁴

Conclusion

It is generally assumed that recourse to the Christological exegesis of theophanies was rendered obsolete during the conciliar era by the development of the technical theological glossary in the service of a more nuanced and precise doctrinal articulation. Scholarship on the theological developments in the fourth and fifth centuries reflects this assumption by paying only scant attention to the interpretation of biblical theophanies. We have seen however that St Athanasius's defense of the *ὁμοούσιος* does involve the Christological exegesis of theophanies: It is the Son who spoke to Moses at the burning bush; it is the Son who came to Jeremiah; it is the Son who wrestled with Jacob. This

²⁴ Bucur, Bogdan, „Christophanic Exegesis in Defense of the Nicaean Faith“.

is the basis for him to insist that it is proper to apply the term *homoousios* to the Christ: „Why, when perceiving the fact, do we decline to use the phrase conveying it?“ This question illustrates quite well the Orthodox perspective on the Nicene *ὁμοούσιος* and on dogmatic theology in general. The technical language adopted by Orthodox theologians and Councils – „that extraordinary panoply of polysyllabic Greek abstractions which we meet in the Greek Fathers, and which modern Orthodox theologians, God bless them!, are so anxious to invoke“²⁵ – is a direct conceptual expression of the biblical witness. In this sense, as Fr. Bogdan Bucur has eloquently emphasized, the Christophanic exegesis renders the Scriptures of Israel into the Christian Old Testament and offers the theological presupposition and interpretive key for the new, conceptually refined vocabulary of the Ecumenical Councils: „Considering the defense of the Nicene faith from a Christophanic perspective anchors the dogmas of the Church in the living experience of Israel’s walk with God, so that we may never forget Who it is that we are talking about: Christ, the Glory of Israel, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob, the Lawgiver and ‘God of our fathers.’“²⁶

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²⁵ Alexander Golitzin, „The Image and Glory of God in Jacob of Serug’s Homily, ‘On That Chariot That Ezekiel the Prophet Saw,’“ *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 47 (2003): 360.

²⁶ Bucur, Bogdan, „Christophanic Exegesis in Defense of the Nicaean Faith“.