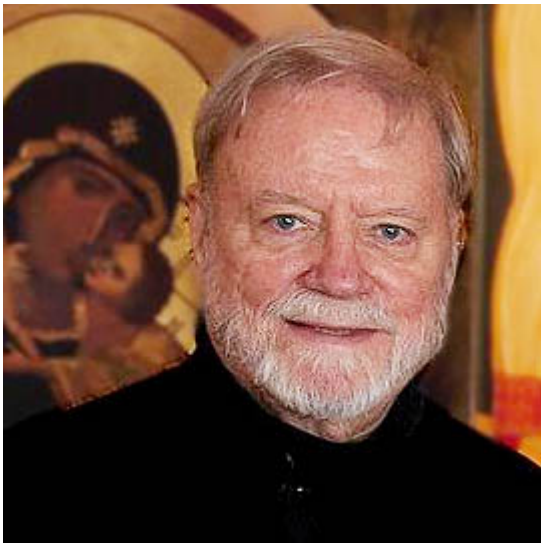


Communion & Division - The Structure of Knowledge: Introduction (Fr. Patrick H. Reardon)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Rev. Patrick H. Reardon

The purpose of these remarks is to inquire what sort of guidance theology may give us with respect to choosing a philosophy. More specifically, I want to take the highest knowledge available to man, the knowledge of God, as a starting point for investigating how the human mind should go about pursuing other and lower forms of knowledge.

It is probably best that I declare that my approach to this inquiry will be entirely apophatic. I entertain no serious hope that theology will tell us which brand of philosophy is best. I will be content, rather, if we can discover, on theological

grounds, those kinds of philosophy we Christians would do well to avoid.

And I do this in the interest of ecumenical understanding, for I have long been persuaded that the historical divisions among Christians, especially in the West, often have as much to do with philosophy as with theology. Therefore, in looking at “the divisions we must sustain,” my own critical interest will be directed to various schools of philosophy.

I take it as obvious that philosophy, if left to its own devices, will ultimately prove deceptive, for the simple reason that the thoughts of man’s heart are prone to evil from his youth. In this respect it is surely significant that the only time the word *philosophy* appears in the New Testament, it is coupled with the expression “empty deception” ([Col. 2:8](#)). Nonetheless, in asserting that philosophy, left to its own lights, will finally prove deceptive, we should not imagine that all forms of philosophy are *equally* deceptive, and theology will have performed an adequate service to philosophy if it can indicate which philosophical paths are especially deceptive.

But why start with theology? Quite simply because I believe that all things, including human beings and human knowledge, are best understood only in their fully developed and perfect state. All of us presuppose, for example, that the proper and defining qualities of sycamore trees are better ascertained by examining sycamore trees in their maturity, not in their seed stage. In the case of sycamore trees we presume, in other words, that knowing the “last things,” in this case the *eschata sykaminon* (“the last things of sycamore trees”), is more helpful than knowing the first things. Even in botany, that is, eschatology is more informative than etiology.

In the case of human beings and human knowledge, I appeal to the Christian thesis that man is created in order to know, love, and worship God. To assert that the knowledge of the true God is the proper goal of human existence, and that the human mind has been constructed precisely for this knowledge of God, seems necessarily to imply that the proper place to investigate the properties and qualities of human knowledge, with regard to any matter whatsoever, is to begin with man’s knowledge of God. My inquiry, then, is inspired by the same persuasion that prompted G. K. Chesterton to write: “Wherever men are still theological there is still some chance of their being logical.” To learn how man should go about knowing anything else, then, I will commence by inquiring how man knows God.

In short, we should begin, not at the beginning, but at the end. We should start

with eschatology. We should commence with “the fullness of time.” It is this “fullness of time,” which fulfills all things within time, that must serve to interpret everything human, including philosophy. Exactly what, then, has occurred “in the fullness of time”? As it happens this very question is addressed explicitly in Holy Scripture, and it is there that I propose to start our inquiry—The Epistle to the [Galatians 4:4–6](#):

But when the fullness of time had come, God *sent forth* his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, that he might redeem those under the Law, that we might receive sonship. And because you are sons, God *sent forth* the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying “Abba,” “Father.”

Not least among the striking features of this text is the apostle’s use of exactly the same verb to speak of the *sending forth* of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. In each case he says, “*exsapesteilen ho Theos*”—“God sent forth his Son. . . . God sent forth the Spirit of his Son.” This is a summary of how we know God: We know him because he has revealed himself by his sending forth of his Son and Holy Spirit.

This text of Galatians speaks of the sending of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit as two realities subject to distinction. In thus distinguishing them, Holy Scripture justifies our investigating each of them in distinctive (though not separate nor separable) ways. Let us, then, speak of each distinctly.



Patrick Henry Reardon is pastor of All Saints Antiochian Orthodox Church in Chicago, Illinois. He is the author of Christ in the Psalms, Christ in His Saints, and The Trial of Job (all from Conciliar Press). He is a senior editor of [Touchstone](#).