

Recollection Lectures, Michaelmas Term, 2018, Pusey House, Oxford

Lectures take place at 4 pm in the Ursell Room with tea and coffee from 3:30 in the Hood Room.

17 October 2nd week

In quo inquit, adprehendam Dominum? Plotinian Ascent and Christian Sacrifice in St Augustine's *The City of God* 10. 1-7.

James Lawson, Vice Principal and Charles Marriott Director of Pastoral Studies, St Stephen's House.

Pierre Hadot proposed that philosophical works from antiquity should be approached with the idea of spiritual progress in mind. Even if the work is apparently theoretical or systematic, it was written to allow readers to traverse a certain itinerary which would allow them to make spiritual progress. Studies which have approached the *Confessions* and *De Trinitate* with this idea of spiritual progress in mind offer a new understanding of their parallel conceptual and literary structures. A Christian reconfiguration of the Plotinian ascent has been discovered in both works. I want to argue that the same procedure may also be perceived in Augustine's response to the Platonists in Book 10 of *De civitate Dei*. Hadot's approach discloses an unnoticed aspect of his argument about sacrifice in chapters 1-7, where Augustine engages with Platonic accounts of spiritual sacrifice to present his account of the sacrifice offered by Christians.

31 October 4th week

Luke's Transfiguration Narrative: Some Patristic Perspectives.

Peter Anthony, Vicar of the Parish of St Benet, Kentish Town.

Luke's version of the Transfiguration is very distinct from that of the other synoptic evangelists' narratives. He emphasises the visionary character of the incident and links it through key themes and words to other visionary incidents in his writings. This seminar will explore ways in which early Christian reflection on this text focussed on its particular character with sensitivity, originality and ingenuity. Early commentators and artists often spotted Luke's interest in the visionary, and used the Transfiguration as a means of interpreting other visionary and prophetic texts in the scriptures.

14 November 6th week

St John Damascene on the Five Elements of Creation.

Andrew Louth, Emeritus Professor of Patristic and Byzantine Studies, University of Durham and Parish Priest of the Orthodox Parish of St Cuthbert and St Bede, Durham.

St John Damascene's *On the Orthodox Faith* has, between his account of the dOctoberrine of God and his Christology, a long section on creation. Hitherto, attention has mostly been directed, if at all, to his account of what it is to be human, which leads into his dOctoberrine of the Fall, redemption through Christ, and his Christology. The section of six chapters on the visible creation begins by asserting the God created out of nothing the five elements (sky, fire, air, water, earth), and then devotes a chapter to each. The lecture will have two concerns: firstly, to explore why John finds all this so interesting, but secondly, in a more systematic vein, to explore the place of the elements in our experience of the world, and what can survive of this in the worldview of modern physics with atoms, electrons... and strings!

28 November 8th week

Isaac of Nineveh and the Cross of Christ.

Nevsky Everett, Chaplain, Keble College Oxford

Isaac of Nineveh lived through the turbulent seventh century, and has left a substantial body of ascetic writings. He belonged to the Church of the East, formerly called 'Nestorian,' but owing to the early translation of his works, he was read very widely throughout the Orthodox world. He is a great spiritual writer, and is known for his strong emphasis on God's love for all creation. The subject of this seminar will be a homily Isaac wrote on the Cross. It is a striking work, in which Isaac describes the Cross as a new Ark and the dwelling place of God's Shekhina. We will explore some of these ideas, with a particular focus on Isaac's ecclesial context and his place in the late-Sasanian world.

NOTE DIFFERENT DAY AND TIME: Monday 12 November 6th week, 6.15pm

Space, Sound, and Spirituality: Thoughts on the Little Ice Age, Polyphony, and the Evolution of Sacred Space

Paul Shore, Adjunct Professor of Religious Studies, University of Regina, Canada

One of the most significant sets of environmental events of the Medieval and Early Modern periods was a collection of climatic changes often known as the "Little Ice Age" lasting roughly from 1200 to 1680. The Little Ice Age changed the soundscape with its own distinctive sounds. It also brought about changes in the appointment and design of interior spaces, including those where worship took place. A secondary impact involved the production of musical instruments, including Stradivari violins. Tapestries, carpet and banners provided warmth and colour during the harsh winters, but also promoted a "drier" acoustic space better suited for polyphony. We will examine these and other factors that contributed to the transformation of sacred song in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries.