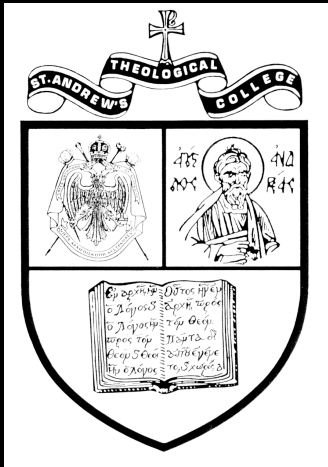


St Andrew's Patristic Symposium 2010



Seeking Out the Antecedents of the Maximian Theory of Everything

St Gregory the Theologian's *Oration* 38.11 & 17

Rev'd Dr Doru Costache
St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College

Introduction

- St Maximus the Confessor's theory of everything:
 - Ascribed to the tradition of the saints
 - No apparent literary antecedents
- The scholarly quest for antecedents

Introduction

- Scholarly disinterest in St Gregory the Theologian as a contributor to the history behind the Maximian theory

Contents

- What is a theory of everything?
- Description of the Maximian theory
- The scholarly quest for sources
- St Gregory the Theologian's input

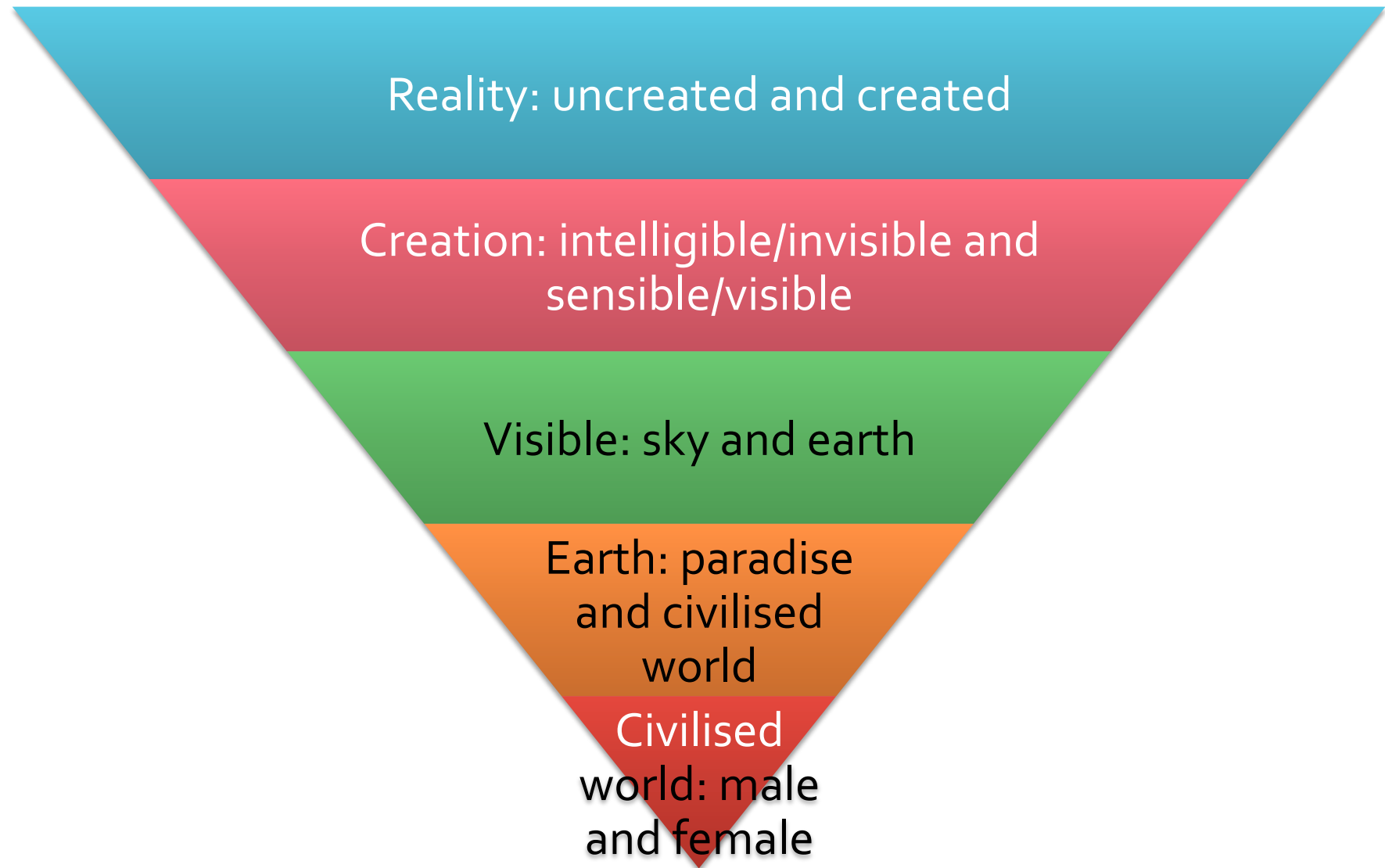
St Maximus' Theory of Everything

- A theory of everything: a scientific attempt to encapsulate reality in a consistent and complete mathematical formula
- One consistent and complete formula is impossible (Paul Davies)

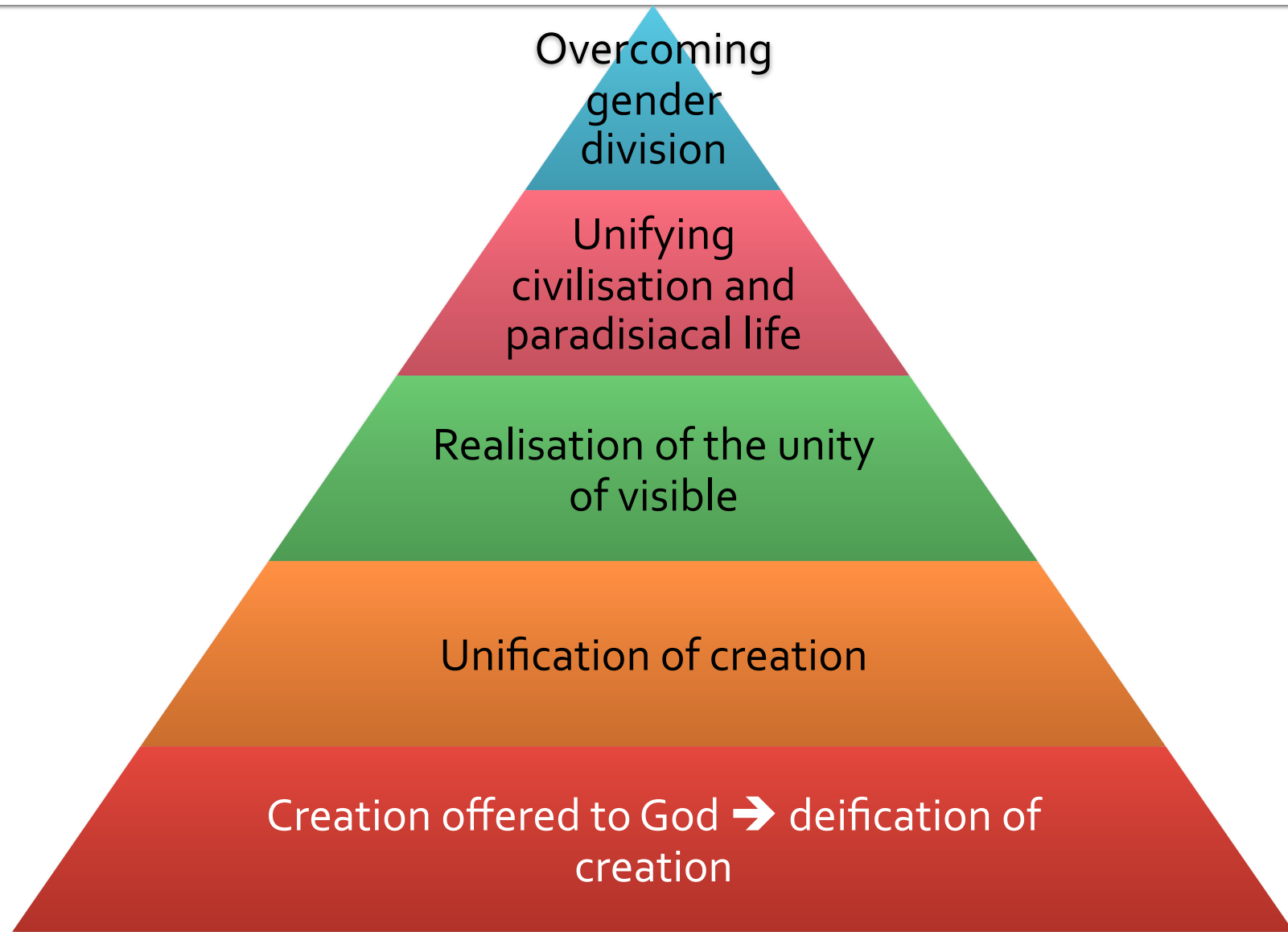
St Maximus' Theory of Everything

- *Difficulty 41*: the classic reference for the Maximian theory
- St Maximus' attempt to map reality
- A steppingstone for the theory:
contemplating the λόγοι or divine principles

Difficulty 41: Five Polarities



Difficulty 41: Five Syntheses



St Maximus' Theory of Everything

- The human failure to unify the various strands of reality
- Christ as mediator *par excellence*

Seeking Out the Antecedents

- A series of contributions that led to the Maximian construct
- We cannot reduce the Maximian genius to these antecedents (Hans Urs von Balthasar)

Seeking Out the Antecedents

- Lars Thunberg
 - The concept of the microcosm in pagan and Christian authors
 - St Gregory of Nyssa's contributions (microcosm, image of God)
 - Nemesis of Emesa's contributions (microcosm, the unifying task of humankind)

Seeking Out the Antecedents

- John Meyendorff
 - Description of the theory
 - Reference to the Cappadocian's use of the concept of the microcosm

Seeking Out the Antecedents

- Andrew Louth
 - Emphasis on St Maximus' dependence on St Gregory of Nyssa's *Against Eunomius*
 - The Platonic division of being emended: the intelligible or invisible side of reality contains a more radical rift, between the uncreated and created
 - The ignorance of creation regarding its Creator

Seeking Out the Antecedents

- Adam Cooper
 - St Maximus' reliance on St Gregory of Nyssa and Nemesisius of Emesa
 - Quotes St Gregory the Theologian's *Oration* 38.11 without reference to the Maximian *Difficulty* 41

What of Nemesius?

- Surviving the Cappadocians, he drew immensely on them
- *Treatise on the Nature of Man* 1: a summary of the Cappadocian cosmology and anthropology

What of St Gregory of Nyssa?

- Overall, one of the main sources of the Maximian thought
- Unilateral reliance of St Maximus' *Difficulty* 41 on St Gregory of Nyssa improbable
 - A text should be interpreted in the context
 - The *Book of Difficulties* deals with St Gregory the Theologian's thought

What of St Gregory of Nyssa?

- Christological chapters in the later *Book of Difficulties* 2-4
 - The doctrine of 'theandricity' articulated without the use of the term (not belonging to St Gregory)
 - Use of the terms belonging to St Gregory the Theologian: Christ as a 'composite' or 'twofold' person

What of St Gregory of Nyssa?

- The theme of ignorance
 - A common Cappadocian topic
 - St Gregory the Theologian alludes to it in *Oration* 38.7

What of St Gregory of Nyssa?

- Lars Thunberg:
 - St Maximus as a deep admirer of St Gregory the Theologian

Oration 38.11

- Quoted by St Maximus in *Difficulty 7*
 - “At first, the mind [intelligible world] and the sense [visible world] were distinct from each other, each remaining within their specific confines [...]. [...] [Thus, there was] no knowledge of the whole richness of [divine] goodness. Such [wisdom] needing to be made obvious, the artisan Logos willed to make the human being as one animal made of both, namely the invisible and visible natures. So, taking the body from the already structured matter, he exhaled the breathing from himself [...], placing on earth the human being as some second world, great in its smallness, another angel, a composite worshipper.”

Oration 38.11

- The human being presented in a cosmic setting
- Human nature as a microcosmic synthesis of the realms
- These features are reiterated as such by *Difficulty 41*

Oration 38.11

- The context
 - Chapters 9 & 10: making of the invisible and visible realms
 - Chapter 11: human being as microcosm
 - Chapter 12: paradise and fall
 - Chapter 13: divine pedagogy in history and the incarnation

Oration 38.11 & Difficulty 41

- The theory of everything: second and fifth divisions
- Reiteration of the main idea of *Oration 38.11*
- Difference:
 - *Oration 38.11* unites intelligible and sensible in the human nature
 - *Difficulty 41* does not mention the psychosomatic structure of the human nature

Oration 38.11 & Difficulty 41

- Agreement: there is a connection between human existence and the cohesion of the universe (the anthropic cosmological principle)

Oration 38.17

- Doxological recapitulation of the events in the Nativity narratives
- Context:
 - Chapter 13: the paradoxical aspect of the incarnation
 - Chapters 14 & 15: assessment of the kenotic or humble state of the Logos incarnate
 - Chapter 16: the meaning of the festal season of Christmas and Epiphany

Oration 38.17

- The consequences of the fall not explicitly addressed in their cosmological aspect
- Our return to Adam might suggest however that such consequences were not ignored by St Gregory

Oration 38.17

- The festal season as a sacrament of union:
 - “Glorify [Christ] with the shepherds; hymn with angels; dance with the archangels. Let this festival be common to the heavenly and earthly powers. For I believe that they together rejoice and celebrate today.”

Concluding Remarks

- Continuity and development of the Christian worldview
- The need to reassess the place of St Gregory the Theologian among the contributors to the theory of everything