

# A FORGOTTEN METHOD OF THEOLOGY FOR TODAY: INSIGHTS FROM AN EASTERN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

*“It is one thing to speak of God; it is quite another thing to know God”*

*Staretz Silouan*

**Abstract:** In the early twentieth century Staretz Silouan of Mount Athos wrote: “It is one thing to speak of God; it is quite another thing to know God.” Critical of the modern practice of the theological enterprise today, which has often been reduced to being no more than an intellectual inquiry – and therefore often more concerned to be afforded its rightful place within the university sector – this recently recognised saint of the Orthodox Church, was wanting to lay emphasis on theology’s uniquely ‘mystical’ or ‘existential’ nature. This paper will argue that perhaps one of the contributing factors which has led to the increasing irrelevance of theology today has not only to do with modern secularism and the purported loss of interest in the question of God as it has to do with a reductionist and purely rationalist approach to theology which has resulted in its disconnection from life and its challenges. Based on this premise, the paper will attempt to uncover some of the most characteristic aspects of the early Patristic vision of theology and its method. Essentially, it will show that theology was first and foremost considered to be a graced ‘encounter’ [συνάντησις] with God into which one was initiated through prayer. Only after having ‘approached’ – rather than ‘understood’ – the mystery of God and consequently been ‘formed’ and ‘trans-formed’ by such an experience, was one considered competent to speak about God, namely to ‘theologize’ in a life-giving manner. In presenting the Patristic understanding of theology, the paper hopes to make a contribution on modern understandings of ‘method’ in systematic theology which have tended to overlook theology’s existential and theophanic nature. It is hoped that such insights will provide a helpful way forward for theology to regain its relevance in society today.