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I have heard of the idea that the more time goes by, the more we know about God, implying that today we know more about God than the Disciples did. I also know that the Orthodox Church doesn't believe this. However, there are certain things that it seems only logical that we know more about, science being an obvious example. We obviously know more about some truths than they did 2000 years ago. Does this mean that we know more about God?

There is a belief in some Christian circles today that doctrine develops, or evolves over time. The idea seems to be that, as the tree is present in the seed in germinal form, so all truths about God are present in the early Church doctrines and dogmas about God and Christ, but in germinal form. As time goes by, this belief holds, these truths develop, or evolve, more and more and, as a consequence, our knowledge of God becomes more mature and complete, like the tree, and less like the seed. The Roman Catholic Church, for one, has embraced a version of this theory of the development of doctrine.

There are several problems with this theory, but for our purposes we can focus on the most significant, which is that it is based on a mistaken view of the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is of a different quality than our knowledge of the created world and things within it. We know the created world primarily through the senses and through reason. The scientific method, for example, is based on observation, experimentation, analysis, and drawing rational conclusions which are formulated into theories. Anyone, regardless of their faith or virtue, can gain knowledge of this sort, and over time we might say that our collective knowledge grows. Or, as some would say it, "we know more than people used to know."

Knowledge of God, on the other hand, is not gained primarily through the senses and through reason. Contrary to what many people might think, the knowledge of God is not based on ideas that the prophets and apostles had about God and Christ. Doctrines and dogmas are not, in other words, theories about God that can develop or grow into better theories over time. The knowledge of God, the source of all doctrine and dogma in the Orthodox Church, is based on the prophets and apostles direct experience of God, an experience given to those who become like God through faith, hope, love, and keeping the commandments of Christ. This keeping of the commandments with faith is a process of purification of the passions which enables us to experience God and know Him directly.

Interestingly, the Greek word that the fathers use to describe this experience of God is "theoria", the same word we use for a scientific theory. But when the fathers use theoria for the experience and knowledge of God, theoria has its more ancient and basic meaning of "vision," or beholding the glory of God in Christ, not forming a theory about God based on our ideas. The dogmas and doctrines of the Church, then are based on theoria -- vision -- not theory in the sense of a rational human formulation.

As an example of what this means for our understanding of dogma and doctrine, we would say that the apostles experienced the Holy Trinity in their vision/theoria of Christ in glory. As a result of this they were able to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father and is

Himself divine and of the same essence as the Father. Over the centuries, as there was a need to further clarify some aspect of the Church's teaching, or as false-teachings (heresies) appeared, new words and phrases would be used to describe the realities experienced by the prophets and apostles (and other saints down to our own day). But these new words and phrases and articulations were not new theories, or further developments of the Church's beliefs about God, but rather attempts to safeguard and protect the vision and experience of the saints. Nowhere in the whole history of the councils or the theological debates of Church history did any Father of the Church attempt to go beyond what the apostles knew and taught; they simply sought to clarify it and protect it from false-teaching. This cannot really, then, be called "development."

So we do learn more about the created world through science, etc. and thus we know more than people used to about these things. This doesn't apply to the knowledge of God, though, because God is not a creature, an object within the world that we know primarily through the senses and reason. We do not know more about God than the apostles simply because we live in a more scientifically advanced age, because knowledge of God is not a theory based on the sciences of this world, nor on the senses and reason. It is *theoria*: vision of Christ in glory.

Or, to put it another way, if we want to know what the saints know, then we must become like them. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."