

## THE SCRIPTURES

“Whenever you read the Gospel, Christ Himself is speaking to you. And while you read, you are praying and talking to Him.” (St. Tikhon).”

“Christianity did not appear as a religion of a book, it appeared as a Way of living.”  
Rev. Dr. Eugen Pentiu

"For the Church, the Word of God meant not only the expression of absolute truth in human language, but **primarily the appearance of God Himself** and the revelation of His divine life and strength. . . The preaching of the Word of God by the Apostles . . . not only told about Christ, but transmitted Christ Himself; it led men into His life and united them with it." Schmemmann

“But Saul, still breathing in threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked from him letters for himself to Damascus, to the synagogues, so that if he should find any **being of the Way**, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

### **The first Christians had the Holy Writings – a transformative encounter with the living Word**

“Now to Him Who is able to establish you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to a **revelation** (apocalypse/unveiling) of the **mystery** which was kept in secret in times lasting for ages, but now has been made manifest, and **by prophetic Scriptures/writings**, according to the commandment of the eternal God, was made known to all the nations to an obedience of faith— to God, alone wise, to Whom be glory through Jesus Christ to the ages. Amen. [Rom. 14:24-26]

“There is, then, an intrinsic connection between the revelation, the apocalypse, of God in Christ, and the prophetic writings, the Scriptures. From the first, the gospel is proclaimed by reference to the Scriptures, what we now call, somewhat misleadingly, the Old Testament. So important was this scriptural context, that, in one of the earliest proclamations of the gospel that we have, the apostle Paul appeals to it twice in one sentence: “For I delivered to you in the first place what I also received, that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He hath been raised the third day **according to the Scriptures**... [1 Cor. 15:3-5] This appeal remains fundamental even in the creeds of later centuries; when the Creed of Nicaea specifies that Christ 'rose in accordance with the Scripture', it is to the same Scripture, the Old Testament, not the Gospels, that reference is made.” (Fr. John Behr: *Lifting the Veil: Reading Scripture in the Orthodox Tradition*).”

### **St. Paul through his encounter with the Risen Christ gives rise to making Christianity for all people, all nations**

St. Paul opens Jesus' mission to the entire humanity, transitions Jesus from the person who embodies the New Israel to Jesus as the *Eschaton Adam* ( 1 Cor. 15:45) – the *final human being* or *the last version of humanity* (Pentiu)

## CONTINUITY THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT – ONE BIBLE TWO COVENANTS (Pentiuc)

1. The belief in One God – This One God exists in three persons
2. To believe in the bodily resurrection - Christ is Risen
3. The major feasts proclaim the continuity and fulfillment of the Scriptures from the “Old Testament”

### The Gospels

- The Synoptics (sharing a common vision)
  - Mark earliest written in common Greek
  - Matthew - Jewish Law/The New Law, starts with Abraham
  - Luke – universal Gospel starts with Adam
- The Gospel of John – Theology – the unveiling of Christ/spiritual Gospel

**The other Gospels** (Thomas, Protoevangelion of James) did not present a well-balanced portrayal of Jesus’ humanity and divinity or they did not connect Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy

**The Book of Revelation** – the only prophetic book in the New Testament written by John

- The heavenly worship and liturgy unveiled

Differences between Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy approach to the Bible

- What is the definition of scripture in relationship with Tradition
  - Scripture is a channel of God – *God’s breathing through the scripture*, formative use of the scripture. We have both the liturgical and patristic interpretations
  - West: scripture as a source of the revelation of God

### I. The whole of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit provides the context for Interpretation of the Scriptures

- A. Kallistos Ware: Four key characteristics, which mark the Orthodox scriptural mind
- ❖ Approach with obedience – learning to be still and inner-listening while reading
  - ❖ The Bible is God’s personal letter to us – what is Christ saying directly to me
  - ❖ The entire Bible is Christ-centered – everything culminates in Christ
  - ❖ Read in union with the Church and its worship

#### A. Apostolic Tradition

"Loyalty to Tradition does not mean loyalty to bygone times and to outward authority; it is a living connection with the fullness of Church experience. . . Tradition is the witness of the Spirit; the Spirit's unceasing revelation and preaching of good tidings. . . Tradition is a charismatic, not a historical principle (Florovsky, p. 46)."

"Having received this preaching and this faith, . . . the Church, although scattered in the whole world, carefully preserves it, as if living in one house. She believes these things (everywhere) alike, as if she

had but one heart and one soul, and preaches them harmoniously, teaches them, and hands them down, as if she had but one mouth." (St. Irenaeus of Lyons)

## **B. Patristic Commentaries:**

**C. Liturgical Interpretation** - Hymnographers (When is a particular passage read in Church, at what feast day etc.)

- They used the Septuagint translation for the hymn and colored it with classical Greek.

## **D. The Gospels were witnessing the Truth and not Truth itself (Christ is the Truth)**

" . . . our four Gospels . . . they were received by the Church - that is, were recognized - because their content coincided with the image of Christ and the content of his teachings that the Church already knew. The Church did not "sanction" the New Testament writings; it recognized them as the Word of God, the source of its existence from the start." (Fr. Schmemmann, The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy, p. 43)

"We can say that Scripture is a God-inspired image of Truth, but not Truth itself. . . If we declare Scripture to be self-sufficient, we only expose it to subjective, arbitrary interpretation, thus cutting it away from its sacred source. Scripture is given to us in Tradition. The Church, as the body of Christ, stands mystically first and is fuller than scripture." (Florovsky)

## **II. How to read the Bible**

- ❖ Liturgical year Matthew, Luke, Mark, are "pre-baptismal catechism" for the cleansing of the Heart (Romanides, p. 50)
- ❖ The Gospel of John: "post-baptismal catechism" which leads to contemplation and illumination
- ❖ Sunday Gospel Lessons (The Link between epistle & gospel themes)
- ❖ Major Feast Days: Great Vesper Readings from the Old Testament
- ❖ Usage in Hymnography & Sacramental Hymns (Marriage/Baptism/Unction/Ordination/Blessings of Bread)
- ❖ Hymns of Holy Week
- ❖ The Creed
- ❖ The Lord's Prayer

### **Additional video presentations on the Bible**

Fr. Harry Pappas: The Bible in the Orthodox Church (The Old Testament)  
<https://www.goarch.org/-/the-bible-in-the-orthodox-church-the-old-testament>

Rev. Dr. Eugen Pentiu and Dr. Bruce Beck.  
<https://www.goarch.org/-/the-bible-in-the-orthodox-church-the-new-testament>