

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

Studies in the Faith

The Bible



**GREEK ORTHODOX
CHURCH
OF THE
ASSUMPTION**

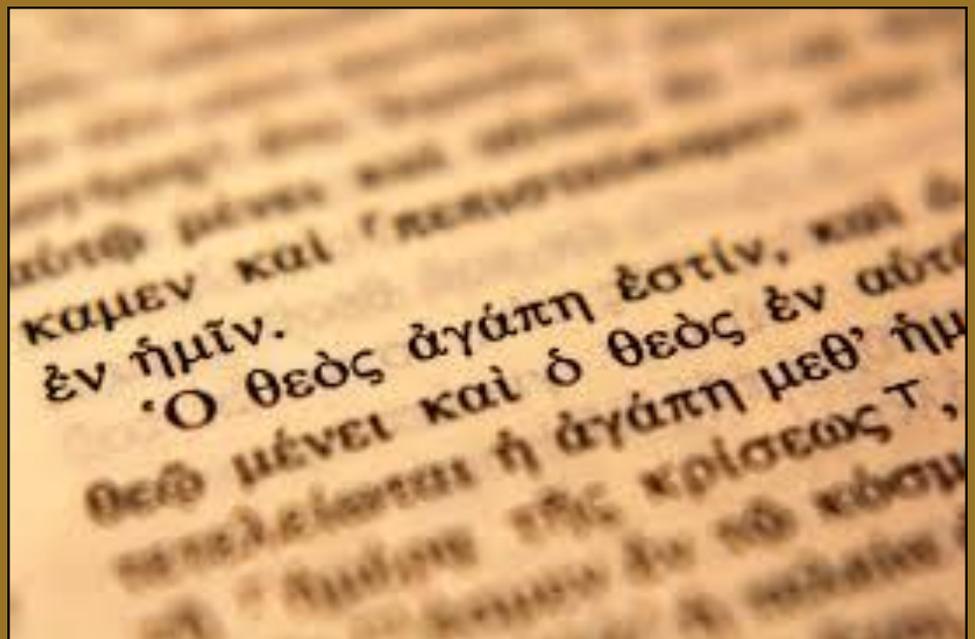
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THE BIBLE

The Holy Bible is the most authoritative part of the Sacred Tradition of the Church. The Bible is the product and the epiphenomenon of the life of the Church, being also the work of men. But it is also the work of the Holy Spirit of God, working in this life of the Church. This is why the Church is subject to the authority of the Bible.

(The Dogmatic Tradition of the Church by Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh)

READING ASSIGNMENTS

The Orthodox Church: by Timothy Ware (pages 84-98, 189-201)

“The Bible and Orthodox Tradition”: in Again, Vol. 20 No. 9, Fall 1997, Pages 20-25.

“Ask Father”: in Again, Vol. 21 No. 2, April-June 1999, Page 12.

SUGGESTED READING

Bread for Life: Reading the Bible: by Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos

THE BIBLE

The word bible comes from the Greek word (Βιβλίος) which is the plural form of noun, hence the translation 'books'.

THE CANON—WHAT BOOKS MAKE UP THE BIBLE?

The bible is a collection of books which is divided into two sections:

- A. The Old Testament
- B. The New Testament

The word ‘testament’ can mean ‘covenant’ or ‘contract’. The people of the ‘old covenant’ were the nation of Israel, and the people of the ‘new covenant’ is the Church.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Originally the Old Testament was the Bible of the Jewish people. It was written in Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people living in Palestine. Later the Jewish people became dispersed throughout Mesopotamia and became assimilated into other societies as they clung to their Jewish identity.

During the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, who ruled over Egypt (285-246 BC), the Hebrew Scriptures began to be translated into Greek. It was translated for the Jews who settled in Alexandria and who had lost the use of their native Hebrew tongue and as a result spoke only Greek. This translation came to be known as the Septuagint. The Latin word ‘Septuagint’ means ‘seventy’. It is called that in reference to the 72 translators traditionally responsible for the translation. It also goes by the Roman numerals ‘LXX’ which means ‘70’.

When Christ came into the world, Greek was the lingua franca, the universal language of trade and intellectual discourse. Hence the language of the Septuagint and the New Testament (Greek) was critical to the rapid spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The Old Testament can be divided into three sections:

1. The Historical Books
2. The Poetical and Wisdom Books
3. The Prophetic Books

DC = Deuterocanonical

* Protestant version

The Historical Books	
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Kings (1 Samuel*) 2 Kings (2 Samuel*) 3 Kings (1 Kings*) 4 Kings (2 Kings*)	1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles 1 Ezra 2 Ezra (DC) Judith (DC) Nehemiah Esther (Septuagint 10:4-16:24) 1 Maccabees (DC) 2 Maccabees (DC) 3 Maccabees (DC) 4 Maccabees (DC)
The Poetical and Wisdom Books	
Job Psalms (including Psalm 151) Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	Wisdom of Solomon (DC) Wisdom of Sirach (DC) Prayer of Manasseh (DC) - debatable Tobit
The Prophetic Books	
Hosea Amos Micah Joel Obadiah Jonah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi	Isaiah Jeremiah Baruch (DC) Lamentations Letter of Jeremiah (DC) Ezekiel Daniel Septuagint parts: A. Susanna (prefixed to chapter one of Daniel) B. The prayer of Azariah & the Song of the Three Young Men. Men. (between Daniel 3:23 & 3:24)

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROTESTANT AND ORTHODOX BIBLES

The books tagged (DC) are called 'deuterocanonical' by the Orthodox Church and 'apocryphal' by Protestants. *Apocryphal* means something hidden or unrevealed. *Deuterocanonical* means that these books were ratified as part of the Bible by ecumenical councils so they are of canonical authority, but of secondary authority due to the fact that they were:

1. Written during the inter-testamental period, i.e., after 450 BC when the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, was written and before 50 AD when the first books of the New Testament was written.
2. They were not part of the Hebrew canon. The books were rejected by the Jews only after they were accepted by the Christians as canonical. They were rejected by the Jews because the original texts were unknown at the time.
3. The authors of the deuterocanonical books were not known to the Jews.

The Orthodox Church sees the deuterocanonical books as having theological and spiritual value. For example, Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon are used in Orthodox worship. In addition, the New Testament writers quite often cited the Septuagint, which the deuterocanonical books are part of.

The Old Testament canon was compiled by St. Athanasius the Great in 328 AD and ratified by the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680 AD (Canon 24 of St. Athanasius; Canon 85 of the Apostles).

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

All the books in the Old and the New Testament alike have one thing in common, they all tell about God's dealings with his people:

- a. Through the prophets and forefathers in the Old Testament, and
- b. Through his Son, Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

The Old Testament is always to be read in light of the New Testament. This is because Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah who came to fulfill all the prophecies and promises found in the Old Testament.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The 27 books that make up the New Testament were written between 50 and 100 AD.

1. There are four Gospels which give an account of the redeeming life and work of Jesus Christ. The four Gospels are:

Gospel of Matthew	Gospel of Mark	Gospel of Luke	Gospel of John
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2. Acts of the Apostles was written by the same author of Luke's Gospel in which the origins and the life of the church is recounted.
3. There are 13 Pauline epistles. The word 'epistle' comes from the Greek word 'επιστολή' which means "letter". Paul wrote numerous letters to various churches in response to their questions and problems. In these letters, Paul addressed and exhorted the Church to a correct way of living in Christ. The 13 Pauline letters are as listed on the next page.
4. There are 8 pastoral epistles, i.e., epistles that were not written by St. Paul but by various authors. Some were written in the form of personal correspondence while others were written in the form of a sermon. The 8 pastoral epistles are as listed on the next page.

PAULINE EPISTLES	
Romans	1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians
2 Corinthians	1 Timothy
Galatians	2 Timothy
Ephesians	Titus
Philippians	Philemon
Colossians	

GENERAL EPISTLES	
Hebrews	1 John
James	2 John
1 Peter	3 John
2 Peter	Jude

- The last book of the New Testament is the Book of Revelation (or Apocalypse) which anticipates God's final victory over evil.
- Why do the Protestant Churches not include the Deutero-Canonical books in their Old Testament Canon?

THE BIBLE AND HOLY TRADITION

By the time of Christ the Jewish Torah (Old Testament) was already written down in the form of huge scrolls kept in Jewish synagogues to be read at every Sabbath service (cf. Luke 4:16-17).

It is important to keep in mind that there were no printing presses during the time of Christ. Many Protestants tend to assume that when the early Christians met for worship they brought with them bibles that contained the complete Old and New Testaments. When the Church was established, the bible did not exist. The culture of the time (whether Jewish, Greek or Roman) was predominantly oral. Even those who could read were accustomed to reading out loud. It was unusual for someone to read something to himself quietly. This was because books were a luxury. Very few existed and they were very expensive to produce.

When Jesus began his ministry, he taught in the custom of the Jewish rabbis of his time, i.e., orally. Like other rabbis, Jesus gathered a group of disciples who followed him, lived with him, and memorized his teachings. The inner core of his disciples, the Twelve, who later became the Apostles and the first Bishops of the Church, were commissioned or authorized by Christ after his resurrection to go to all the nations and teach them the Christian Faith (Matthew 28:19-20).

As the apostles went about evangelizing, they taught people principally through their preaching and teaching, i.e., oral tradition. It is important to keep in mind that the apostles did not sit down right away after Christ's ascension into heaven and put into writing what Christ said. Instead they devoted their time to evangelizing, baptizing, and teaching new believers, and installing local leaders. In the course of their ministry they wrote letters and later composed memoirs that would come to be known as gospels. This shows that the early Church relied upon the oral teachings (oral tradition) of the Apostles for their knowledge of Christ in conjunction with the written communications from the apostles (Scripture) (see II Thessalonians 2:15). The early Christians made no distinction between oral tradition and Scripture, viewing both as having apostolic authority.

The earliest of the New Testament documents were either Paul's letter to the Thessalonians or his letter to the Galatians which were written around 50 AD. The earliest of the gospels was Mark's gospel which has been dated as early as 60-70 AD. The last of the New Testament documents is the Book of Revelation which was written around 90 AD. The early Church collected these books and later ratified them. All 27 books of the New Testament were decreed by the Synod of Laodicea in 281 AD and officially ratified by the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680 AD.

Protestants often assert the primacy of Scripture, i.e., that the Bible came before the Church and that the source of all doctrine and practice must be from the Bible alone, not the 'traditions of men'. However, it is important that we look at the historical context carefully. In the beginning much of the information about Christ was transmitted orally. The first written documents did not appear until several decades later. The New Testament as an officially recognized collection of inspired writings would not take place until several centuries later!

Also, many other things were taking place in the early Church that would come to make up what is known as Holy Tradition. The Liturgy of St. James was formulated around 60 AD. The office of the bishop emerged during the time of the apostles: Ignatius of Antioch was consecrated bishop in 67 AD, Clement became bishop of Rome around 90 AD. Icons likewise can be dated as early as the first century, e.g., the Holy Napkin or the Image "Not Made by Human hands" which Christ made for King Agbar V of Edessa and the icon of the Theotokos by St. Luke. The sign of the cross was alluded to in Revelation 7:1-4.

The gradual emergence of the New Testament in the first century and its status as an official collection of writings in the late third century tells us several important things: (1) the New Testament writings emerged simultaneously with the other components of Holy Tradition, (2) the emergence of the New Testament canon is much closer in time to the Nicene Creed than to the time of Christ, and (3) the Bible developed and came out of the tradition of the Church almost 400 years after the Church was born and cannot be separated from the Tradition of the Church. All this is significant for the Orthodox understanding of the Bible and Holy Tradition. The Bible cannot be separated from Holy Tradition, the two are integrally related to each other. The Bible like the rest of Holy Tradition is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in the early Church.

HERESIES CONCERNING THE BIBLE

Marcionism - A second century heresy that denied the Old Testament as Scripture. Marcion argued that the God of the Old Testament was inferior to the God and Father of Jesus.

Bible Alone - Sola scriptura is the fundamental tenet of Protestantism. This sixteenth century heresy puts the Bible over Holy Tradition: the Creeds, the Ecumenical Councils, the Church Fathers, and the Liturgy. It believes that it is possible to recreate the early Church apart from the 'traditions of men', the result has been the denominational chaos of contemporary Protestantism.

Liberalism/Modernism - This recent movement which emerged in the nineteenth century denies the mystery of Scripture as both the word of God and the word of men. Relying upon skepticism and 'scientific' methodology, bible scholars have questioned the authorship of the bible, the supernatural miracles, and even the virgin birth and resurrection of our Lord.

VERSES AND CHAPTERS

The Bible was not originally divided into chapters and verses. In the 13th century the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, divided the sacred books of the Old Testament into chapters. Later, the Jewish Masoretes divided the Old Testament into verses. Later still, the New Testament was also divided into chapters and verses by Robert Stephens when it was first published in 1551. The chapters and verses of Scripture known today in the English Version of the Bible was published in 1560, in both Old and New Testament. ■

THE BIBLE AS RECORD AND REVELATION

Fr. Ted Bread for Life

1. The Bible is a Holy Book
 - a. The record of God's mighty acts.
 - b. The Bible is the source of divine truth which nourishes our faith.
 - c. The Bible strengthens us in our spiritual struggles.
2. According to the Orthodox Church the Bible is:
 - a. The record of God's saving truth—Not the truth itself.
 - b. The record of God's revelation—Not revelation itself.

Church Fathers wrote that Truth is a personal sharing in the divine and spiritual life. We find truth through personal communion with him, through indirect knowledge about him.

3. The Distinction between record and truth carries several important implications for us those who are Orthodox:
 - a. Safeguards the mystery of God from being identified with the letter of scripture (Eunomians who falsely claimed that the Bible somehow defined the essence of God in the 4th century was condemned as heresy,)
 - b. Permits a dynamic relationship between the word of God contained in Scripture and the words of men through which God's word is communicated.
 - c. The Orthodox Church highly esteems other records of the experience of God. For example writings in the church fathers, liturgical worship, decisions of the ecumenical councils which were also divinely inspired.
 - d. Destroys the concept that God dictated propositions which were then written down word for word by sacred authors which safeguards the Orthodox Christian from the error of idolatrous veneration of the text of Scripture.
4. The Distinction between record and revelation does not intend to minimize the importance of the Bible.
 - a. The Bible still remains primary record in the teachings and liturgical life of the church.
 - b. The Bible is always enthroned on the altar hence emphasizing the important role the icon of God in the form of the Bible has in the Orthodox Church.
 - c. Our worship services are filled with biblical readings.
 - d. Church fathers wrote much concerning the Bible.
 - e. No other treasure in the tradition of the Christian church equals the value and authority of the Bible.

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE

1. To read the Bible is to have dialogue with Christ since the Bible converges on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - a. So that we may be personally converted to the truth of God.

continued →

6. What year was the Old Testament compiled? What year was the Old Testament ratified by the Church?

NEW TESTAMENT

7. How many books make up the New Testament? Do the Catholic and Protestant churches have the same number of books in their New Testament?

8. What are the five “sections” of the New Testament?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____
- E. _____

9. What year was the New Testament compiled? What year was the New Testament ratified by the Church?

HOW DID THE BIBLE COME ABOUT?

10. How were Christ’s teachings passed on in the early Church?

11. Since scripture is compiled within the Tradition of the Church, how is scripture to be interpreted?

12. What is the Orthodox Church’s position on a persons “individual” interpretation of scripture? What role does Tradition play in our interpretation of scripture?

13. The Bible was not originally divided into chapters and verses. When was the Old Testament divided into chapters, and by whom? When was the Old Testament divided into verses?

14. The New Testament was divided into chapters and verses when, and by whom?

15. What is the danger of regarding the Bible as the revelation of Jesus Christ? The Orthodox Church regards scripture as the record of revelation and not the revelation itself. Why do you think the Church makes this distinction?

16. Why do we study the Bible?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

CLASS CHECK LIST

- Read Class Info
- Complete the Class Review and Worksheet
- Read pages 84-98, 189-201 of The Orthodox Church, by Timothy Ware.
- Read the article "Ask Father", in Again, Vol. 21 No. 2, April-June 1999, Page 12
- Read the article "The Bible and Orthodox Tradition": in Again, Vol. 20 No. 9, Fall 1997, Pages 20-25.

NOTES



“The Bible and Orthodox Tradition”

by Fr. David Anderson

(*Again Magazine, Fall 1997, Volume 20, No. 9, Pages 20-25*)

The Orthodox Church governs her life by Holy Tradition. Many, however, are confused as to what exactly Holy Tradition is.

The word "tradition" comes from the Latin *traditio*, which is a translation of a Greek word used frequently in the Scriptures, *paradosis*. Translated literally, this word means something that is handed on from one person to another, in the same way that a baton is handed over in a relay race. Something that is "traditioned" is passed on from one person or group of people to another. St. Paul clarifies in Galatians 1:11 that the Tradition of the Church is "not according to man." In other words, it is revealed by God. It is not a human product.

Tradition means an experience, an entire life—not simply a series of teachings, but the living out of those teachings that have come from the God who has revealed Himself to us. Tradition is the living out of the revelation of God by His people.

Where is this Tradition to be found? What are its sources?

FIVE SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN TRADITION

1) *The Holy Scriptures*

The first place we give to the Holy Scriptures: the Bible, Old and New Testaments. The Bible is understood by Orthodox Christians to be the principal written record of the experience by God's people of God's revealing himself to them. It is understood that the Church, therefore, wrote the Bible. The Bible is the word of God, but the word of God was not written directly and personally by God. The Holy Scriptures did not fall from heaven in a fully complete written form. By whom were the Scriptures written? They were written by human beings who were inspired by God. What they write is the truth about God. They write what they write as members of God's people.

For example, in the early years of the Christian Church, those most important books of Holy Scripture that we call the Gospels did not exist. Several decades passed after Pentecost before the first Gospel was written. It was the end of the first century by the time all four Gospels were written. Three hundred more years passed before a decision was made in the Church that there would be only four Gospels.

The books that are in the Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are there because God's people, through those who were set aside as having the authority to make the decision, decided that these books would be part of the Bible, and other books would not. The Church, as God's people inspired by God, wrote the Bible. The Church produced the Bible. The Bible did not produce the Church.

The Holy Scriptures are the principal and most honored written record of God's revelation to His people. But it is the understanding of the Orthodox that the Holy Scriptures cannot be completely, truthfully understood unless they are understood within the context of the Church that produced them, that declared them to be what they are. So the Bible is the Book of the Church, the first source of the Christian Tradition. We will speak of the Bible in greater detail later on.

2) *The Liturgy*

The second source is the liturgy of the Church. "Liturgy" is a word that means in Greek, "common work." The liturgy of the Church means the work of the Church when it comes together to be the people of God and to wor-

ship God. Liturgy includes the whole body of the Church's common worship: the services for the various hours of the day, the days of the week, the feast days and seasons of the Church, the sacraments of the Church (baptism, the Holy Eucharist, marriage, and others).

In all this public prayer of the Church we have a record of what the Church believes. In fact, there is a saying that has been popular among the Orthodox from the beginning: the rule of faith, the standard of what we believe, is established by the way we pray (in Latin, *lex orandi, lex credendi*). The best Orthodox answer to the question, "What do you believe as Orthodox Christians? How can I find out what you believe?" would not be simply to say, "Come hear this talk or read this book." Teaching is essential in the life of the Church and always has been. But the first answer that an Orthodox Christian always gives to that question is, "Come and see."

That is always the Orthodox invitation. Come and see what we do when we assemble together to be the Church in the common worship of God. Anybody who exposes himself or herself intensely to the Church's common worship will have a better course in Orthodox Faith, doctrine, and practice than any book could give, and nothing can take the place of that. So the liturgy is the second source of the Tradition.

3) The Councils

The third source is the councils of the Church. A council is a meeting of those in the Church who have been given the authority to decide what is faithful to the tradition of the Church and what is not. The first council that we hear described in the Holy Scripture (Acts 15) takes place in the Church of Jerusalem. This council was convened to decide the question of whether Gentiles could become Christians and whether they should be required to obey the Jewish Law. This was a situation that Jesus had not specifically prepared His Apostles to deal with. But He had given them the authority in the Church to distinguish between what was true and what was not, so they met to decide what to do with the Gentiles who wanted to become part of the Church.

The result of this council was a compromise: the Gentiles would be required to keep a few core principles of the Jewish law, but the rest of it was not binding on them. Moreover, the Apostles made it very clear that this was not merely a human decision. They were so bold as to say, "It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us that this is how we answer this question."

Many types of council have met through the centuries of the Church's life and they have decided many questions. The answers they give to the questions that have to be resolved come in two forms: creeds and canons.

Creeds are statements of faith. The most important of the Church's statements of faith is contained in the creed called the Nicene Creed. It is called "Nicene" because it was written at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in A.D. 325. ("Ecumenical" in this case means a council involving the whole Church throughout the known world.) There are many other creeds used in the Church that come from other councils, and all of them together constitute one source of the Church's Tradition.

Councils also produce canons. The word "canon" comes from the Greek *kanon*, which means a ruler or a yardstick, something used to measure what is to be normative in the practice of the Church. Canons provide answers, for example, to questions of discipline or morality in the Church. What is to be done when people in the Church fall into sin? How are they to be reconciled to the Church? What is to be done when there are disputes between two churches, as there were disputes among the Apostles? There have always been disputes among the people of God. The people of God, though they receive the revelation of God, do not become perfect overnight, and most of them do not become perfect in this world. So the canons of the Church are a body of rules, or norms, to regulate the discipline of the Church, and their source is the Councils.

4) The Saints

The fourth source of the Church's Tradition, another double source, is the lives of the saints and the teaching of one particular group of saints who are called the Fathers (a group which includes some mothers).

In every generation in the life of the Church, there have been people who live the teachings of Christ faithfully, heroically, who attain while living in this world the destiny for which we as Christians believe God has created it: to share His own life.

The ultimate promise concerning the Christian revelation is that it is true. "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." Free from what? Free from error, free from sin, free from emptiness, and ultimately free from death in the negative sense. Those are the things that God frees us from. But He does this so that we can be free for something that is indescribably greater: to reach our destiny as partakers of the life of God Himself.

There are those in the Church who, by their faithful obedience and perfection in faith, hope, and love for God, are the greatest examples. We could call them the heroes of the Church. The icons in our churches show us the saints from every age. Those saints are present in the Church, are sources of the Church's experience to show the people who belong to the Church of God the way to life, the way to truth, to show each one of us that yes, it is possible. It is possible for the saints and it is possible for us to reach this destiny that God calls us to.

A certain group of those saints is called the Fathers. By a Father of the Church, we mean one who by his (or her) wisdom in teaching or defending Church doctrine, often at the cost of his life or in the face of great suffering, bore witness to the Tradition of the Church. When we read the Gospels, we say yes, what is written in the Gospel here is what the Church has always believed. In the same sense, when we read the writings of the great Fathers, we can find in them a faithful and true testimony to what the Church has always believed and experienced about God.

5) Church Art

The final source of the Christian Tradition we will call Church art. Now, it might come as a surprise to some that along with such exalted things as the Holy Scriptures and the liturgy of the Church and the saints and the Fathers, we would speak of Church art. In the minds of some people, art is simply a kind of decoration, a secondary thing. But the Orthodox understanding of the nature of the human being, of how God has made us, how God revealed Himself to us, is that material creation is very much involved. One could say that the Orthodox Faith, the Orthodox experience is a holistic one. It involved the whole man. It involves the material creation. In fact, the Incarnation—the entry of God into the material world, God becoming man, God becoming matter—is uniquely at the heart of the Christian Faith.

Art is, by definition, the use of material things as the medium for the revelation of God. So for the Orthodox, art is not icing on the cake; it is something very central to what we know of how God has revealed Himself to us. One goes into an Orthodox church building and is immediately surrounded by all sorts of things that appeal to the senses. We could divide them into three categories. Firstly, iconography: the way in which the images of Christ, His life, His Mother, and the saints are portrayed in the Church. Secondly, Church music: the way our Church services are sung, the chants that are used in the liturgical services. And finally, Church architecture: even the way an Orthodox church is traditionally built is a visible testimony to the Faith of the Church as it has been experienced throughout the ages. None of these is understood to be merely accidental or a frill. Rather, they are at the heart of our experience in the Church as the people of God.

So we have these five basic sources of the Orthodox Tradition, what has been passed on from one generation of the faithful to the next, from Christ and the Apostles even to the present time: the Scripture, the liturgy, the creeds and canons that have come from the Church councils, the lives of the saints and the teaching of the Fathers, and finally Orthodox Christian art.

THE UNITY OF TRADITION

It is the Church's understanding that all of these sources of Tradition hold together in unity. One is never used in isolation from the others. It will not work. For example, for a person to say, "Well, I can find all that I need to know by staying at home and reading the Bible by myself, and I don't have to go to church." Nor would it work for a person to say, "Well, all I have to do is go to Church and look at the icons and I don't have to know anything about the Holy Scriptures." In both cases, something is being taken outside the context, outside the

boundaries in which it works. When you take something outside the boundaries in which it functions, it doesn't work the way it's supposed to work.

The Orthodox would claim that all the problems, all the false teaching, all the exaggerations, all the misunderstandings that have occurred in two thousand years of Christian history have taken place because people misguidedly have taken one or another source of Christian Tradition, isolated it from everything else, and treated it as an independent unit. The Orthodox Church is not Bible only. The Orthodox Church is not liturgy only. The Orthodox Church is not creed, council, and canon only. Rather, everything works together in unity, and when all of these sources of Tradition are accepted as the common fountain of the self-revelation of God, it is our faith that they will bring us to the life to which God has invited His creation, to the destiny that He has given us in sharing His own life, His own eternal communion—to know Him who has offered us the truth that will set us free.

THE BIBLE

There is, however, something that holds the primacy, the place of honor in the sources of our Tradition—and that is the Bible. The word “bible” comes from the Greek *biblous*, which means “books,” plural. The Bible is a collection of various books. The existence of the Bible as a single volume is a modern phenomenon made possible by the printing press. In the Bible, or in the Scriptures (which simply means “writings”), we find books of various kinds with various contents. We find books of history, poetry and songs, books of wisdom and philosophy, collections of stories. We find Gospels, which are the Church's expression of who Jesus Christ is, what He taught, what He did. We find letters written by Apostles, also called epistles. (The word “epistle” simply means “letter.”)

This collection of writings is inspired by the Holy Spirit. “Inspired” comes from “spirit,” which means “breath.” Something that has been inspired has had the breath of God breathed into it. It is an expression of God's truth. The Scriptures are those writings which the Church has produced which faithfully convey what God has revealed.

As has been said already, it is not the Bible that produced the Church. Rather, it is the Church that produced the Bible. It is the authority of the Church that decided which books would be considered as part of the Holy Scriptures, and which books would not be so considered. Many writings were being circulated, both among the Jews, over a period of a thousand years, and also among the early Christians. It is the authority of the Church that sorted through all these writings and gave the stamp of approval to those which faithfully expressed what had always been believed and experienced in the Church.

As we know, the Scriptures in the Orthodox Bible are divided up into the Old Testament and the New Testament. Although there is not a specifically Orthodox English translation of the Bible, there are some important differences between the various editions of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments.

THE ORTHODOX SCRIPTURES

The Old Testament, for the most part, was written in the Hebrew language, the language of Israel. At the time of Jesus and the Apostles, however, most of the Jews no longer lived in the territory that we call Israel. So Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament was written, had ceased to be a commonly spoken language among the Jews. It was used in the temple, and to a certain extent in the synagogues, but the people, for the most part, did not speak it at home.

The language that was most common at that time was Greek. The New Testament is written in Greek because that was the language that was commonly spoken, the so-called *lingua franca* throughout the Roman Empire. So a couple of centuries before Christ, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Greek. According to the tradition of this translation, it was made by seventy translators in the city of Alexandria in Egypt, so this Greek translation is called the Septuagint (from the Greek word for “seventy”).

At the time of Jesus and the Apostles, and during the period of the early Church, it was very rare for an individual person to have in his possession any kind of scroll of the Scriptures. They were too precious and valuable, and also treated with such reverence that it was considered inappropriate for an individual to have possession

of them. A local church or synagogue would consider itself fortunate to have one complete text of the Scripture, one set of scrolls or books.

The language familiar to most of those hearing or reading the Scriptures in the early Church would have been Greek, so it is this Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint that is the official Old Testament of the Orthodox Church. Because nearly all currently available English Old Testaments are not translated from the Septuagint texts, but from the Hebrew texts, it's hard to get a Septuagint Old Testament. Why does the Orthodox Church insist that this remain the standard Old Testament text? It is because, particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets, the prophecies that are made regarding the coming of the Savior, the Messiah, are far more literal, far more precise, and far more intense in the Septuagint text than they are in the Hebrew texts of the rabbis.

In any of the currently available English translations, the Old Testament is translated from the Hebrew text that was preserved by the rabbis and the Hebrew scribes. The Septuagint was actually based on an older set of manuscripts in Hebrew that are not available any more. This Septuagint translation was made before Christ, yet the prophecies of the coming of the Savior to Israel are far more intense in it than in the later texts. The early Christians saw in this the increased preparation of God revealing Himself to Israel. Of course, the ultimate revelation of the God of Israel is His own coming in the Person of Jesus Christ, His Son. The gradual intensification of the Messianic prophecies that one finds in the Septuagint text is understood by the Orthodox as being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, whenever the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, the version that is quoted *almost without exception* is the Septuagint version. In the case of the Psalms and the Prophets, the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text of the scribes are considerable. That's why, when we sing psalms or read from the Old Testament in Orthodox services, we take great care that what we are reading is faithful to the Septuagint text. Someday, by the grace of God, there will be a good translation of the complete Septuagint into modern English which will be readily available.

Thirdly, the other aspect of the Old Testament that is part of what the Orthodox accepts as canonical Scripture is what is called the "longer canon." (Canonical means legitimate according to the canon, the rule of faith.) This consists of books that are found only in the Septuagint version and not in the Hebrew texts of the rabbis. Such books as Tobit, Judah, more chapters to the Book of Esther, more chapters to the Prophecy of Daniel, the Books of Maccabees, the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, the Book of Sirach, the Prophecy of Baruch, the Prayer of Manasseh, because they are part of the longer canon that was accepted from the beginning by the early Church, are considered by the Orthodox to be fully part of the Old Testament.

Protestant translations which include these books refer to them as the "Apocrypha." The root of the word "apocrypha" means "that which is hidden." We don't use that word in the Orthodox Church to refer to the books that belong to the longer canon. Protestants use the term "Apocrypha" to imply that those books are not really part of the Old Testament, but are extra, less than fully scriptural books. But in the Orthodox Church these books of the longer canon are understood to be fully part of the Old Testament.

The official Orthodox Greek text of the New Testament is frequently referred to as the "Received Text." Sometimes it's called the "Byzantine Text." It is the text of the Gospels and Epistles that has been read in the Greek Church from the beginning. The most easily available version of the New Testament which follows very strictly this traditional, received text, yet is written in understandable modern English, is the New King James Version.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES WITHIN THE CHURCH

The Scriptures say of themselves that they are to be understood within the life and understanding of the people of God. It's important to realize that the Church of the New Testament existed for more than three hundred years before the books of the New Testament were put into their final form.

In 2Thessalonians 2: 15, we read this: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." That is a very important expression, "the traditions which you were

taught." Where do they come from? They are not all to be found in something you can pick up and read. There is an aspect of the Church's life which is conveyed orally, and has been from the beginning. There is another aspect of the Church's life which is conveyed through writing. But the essential thing to understand is that it is the Church itself that is the criterion of truth.

Another very important reference to that is found in I Timothy 3:14, 15, where St. Paul describes the Church as "the pillar and ground of the truth." The Scriptures themselves confess that the pillar and ground of truth is the Church. If we are to understand the Scriptures, we must understand them with the understanding of the Church.

St. Peter writes in his second epistle, 1:20, "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The important context of those holy men of God is that they lived within the framework of the chosen people of God, whether Israel or the Church. So it is in the Church, through the Church, that the Scriptures are understood. The Orthodox teaching is that if you divorce the Scriptures from their context, break them away from the Church which created them and declared them to be what they are, anything can happen. People through the centuries have, on the basis of private interpretation, concluded all sorts of things from reading Scripture that have not been believed or experienced by the people of God. We see, when we look at the world through Orthodox eyes, what happens when private interpretation becomes the criterion of truth.

Looking at the history of non-Orthodox Christians for the last thousand years, Orthodox observe a question, which is never satisfactorily answered. What is the criterion of truth? Where does one find the standard of truth? Is it found in one particular authority figure in the Church? Is it found in the Book, by itself, independently? Either one of those answers the Orthodox find unsatisfactory. As to the second answer, when you say, "All I need for salvation, I can find with me and my Bible alone," you are saying that the criterion of truth is me and what I think. The result of that, in Orthodox eyes, is the continual proliferation of various bodies that call themselves churches. New denominations are forming every week, all based primarily on private interpretation of the Scriptures.

EVERYWHERE, ALWAYS, AND BY ALL

So the Orthodox Faith insists that the Scriptures are understood within the life of the Church. How do we understand that? There are three important criteria for determining whether something is traditional, of the life of the Church. First is the criterion of antiquity. Antiquity means it has been believed from the beginning. Secondly, the criterion of universality: you can find it taught and believed everywhere. And thirdly there is unanimity: it has been believed and taught by everyone who has ever been a member of the Church. Everything we believe and teach the whole body of the Church's Tradition, are governed by these three factors.

As the Church lives through time and continually have to state the faith in words that are adequate to convey it, sometimes new expressions have to be formulated. But when a new expression is formulated it's not something new being added to the Faith. The most direct example is the use of the word Trinity. Nowhere in the Scriptures do you find the word Trinity. It doesn't exist. Great teachers in the Church in the fourth century made it up. Now, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are certainly in the Scriptures, from the beginning to the end. But there was a need in the fourth century to express what the Church meant by saying God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

By the time the Church had been around for four hundred years and had finally been freed from persecution, there were people in the Church teaching all sorts of doctrine that was contrary to what had been believed from the beginning. The worst of those teachings denied that Christ was fully God. Later on there were those that denied that the Holy Spirit was fully God. They said if Christ is God and the Holy Spirit is God, then you don't have one God.

So the teachers of the Church were called upon. There was a need, not to invent a new doctrine, but to express with greater clarity what had been believed from the beginning. So it is in that way that such an expression as the Trinity began to be used by the Church. That is just one illustration of how the Church lives in time and ad-

dresses the need to continually express who she is, what she believes, what she has always believed. New things happen, but those new things are in concord with what has been believed and taught from the beginning, everywhere, by everyone.

So the Orthodox claim that what we profess is the Faith of the Apostles with nothing added to it, nothing subtracted from it. In the Church's efforts throughout time to be continually faithful to what she has received and passed on in her life, what we call her Tradition, all of these written sources, whether it be Scripture or any of the other things we mentioned, as they developed throughout the ages, all are faithful together to what has been revealed from the beginning, held together by this unity of faith and experience among the people of God that we call the Church.

That is why the Orthodox are not disturbed by what are sometimes described as discrepancies in Scripture. If you read the four Gospels, you will see that they are four very different books. They express both what Jesus said and what He did in different ways. For example, if you read the accounts of the Resurrection of the Lord, which is at the very heart of our faith, you find all kinds of different details in the different Gospels. But that has never troubled the Church.

Some people read these accounts and are troubled and say, "They should agree in every last little thing." But this reflects a mentality that tries to make the Gospel into something that it isn't. The Gospel never was intended to be some kind of newsreel playback. Maybe that's one of the reasons why the Gospel has lasted two thousand years, and we forget the news after one day. We modern people have a fascination with data. Data for us equals fact. But in the Gospel, the truth is often something far deeper than mere data are capable of expressing.

When something like the Resurrection of Christ takes place, something which brings the Kingdom of God finally into the human experience and makes it possible for us to have the life of God, it is actually impossible for human writers to find words to express it fully. That's why the Orthodox insists that no single source is isolated from the rest. We don't pick and choose. There's a verb in Greek that means to pick and choose, and from that verb comes the word "heresy." To be a heretic is to pick one part of what the historical Church has always believed and experienced and to ignore the rest. You end up unbalanced. That's why the Orthodox insists on the unity of all of the sources of Tradition. These are safeguards that we are given within the life of the Church, that not only our knowledge but our experience of God will be the complete revelation that He has made of Himself.

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At the time this article was written, FR. DAVID ANDERSON was the priest at Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Ben Lomond, California.

The preceding article is excerpted from the introductory section of the Orthodox Study Bible, paperback edition.

Ask Father...

QUESTION: What are the differences between the Old Testament of the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the various Protestant churches?

ANSWER: There are several differences including differences with the content of books, differences in the order in which books are placed in the Bible, differenced in the titles of the books, and differences in which books are included.

The Orthodox Church still used the Greek Old Testament available at the time of Christ and used by Him and by His disciples. Most New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are from the Greek edition called the Septuagint (LXX) in honor of the seventy (or seventy-two) Jewish elders who did the translation of the Pentateuch. The Septuagint remained the Old Testament of the Church everywhere until the time of Jerome (d. 420). After that time the Roman Church and those churches under its authority began to accept Jerome's translation into Latin of a later edition of the Hebrew Old Testament and began using the then-current Hebrew canon as the basis for their Old Testament.

Some books were often held as having less authority than others. The Roman Church labeled some books "deuterocanonical," to distinguish them from those they considered thoroughly canonical books. Later, the reformers of the sixteenth century and their heirs separated these books from the rest of the Old Testament calling them the "Apocrypha." To many Protestant leaders the Apocrypha were not worthy of being bound with the Bible. By the early nineteenth century, Protestant Bibles were being published without the Apocrypha. Today, many Protestants have never heard of these books. Those who have heard of them usually at least vaguely consider the Apocrypha to be not trustworthy, probably heretical.

ORTHODOX OLD TESTAMENT	ROMAN CATHOLIC OLD TESTAMENT	PROTESTANT OLD TESTAMENT
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua
Judges	Judges	Judges
Ruth	Ruth	Ruth
1 Kingdoms (= 1 Samuel)	1 Kings	1 Samuel
2 Kingdoms (= 2 Samuel)	2 Kings	2 Samuel
3 Kingdoms (= 1 Kings)	3 Kings	1 Kings
4 Kingdoms (= 2 Kings)	4 Kings	2 Kings
1 Paralipomenon (= 1 Chronicles)	1 Paralipomenon (or Chronicles)	1 Chronicles
2 Paralipomenon (= 2 Chronicles) ¹	2 Paralipomenon (or Chronicles)	1 Chronicles
1 Esdras	1 Esdras	Ezra
2 Esdras ²	2 Esdras	
Nehemiah		
Tobit	Tobit	
Judith	Judith	
Esther	Esther	Esther ³
1 Maccabees	1 Maccabees	
2 Maccabees	2 Maccabees	
3 Maccabees		
Psalms *	Psalms	Psalms
Job	Job	Job
Proverbs of Solomon	Proverbs of Solomon	Proverbs of Solomon
Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes
Asma (Canticle of Canticles)	Canticle of Canticles	
Wisdom of Solomon	Wisdom of Solomon	Song of Solomon
Wisdom of Sirach	Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)	
Hosea	Hosea	Hosea
Amos	Amos	Amos
Micah	Micah	Micah
Joel	Joel	Joel
Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah	Jonah
Nahum	Nahum	Nahum
Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah
Haggai	Haggai	Haggai
Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah
Malachi	Malachi	Malachi
Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah
Baruch	Baruch (incl. Epistle of Jeremiah)	
Epistle of Jeremiah		
Lamentations	Lamentations	Lamentations
Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Ezekiel
Daniel	Daniel	Daniel **
4 Maccabees ***		

¹ Including the Prayer of Manasseh.
² Sometimes 2 Esdras and Nehemiah are combined into one book as 2 Esdras.
³ Esther here does not include those sections called "Additions to Esther."
* The numbering of the Psalms diverges after Psalm 8. The Septuagint includes 1 additional Psalm.
** Daniel here does not include those sections separately labeled as "The Song of the Three Children," "Daniel and Susanna," or "Daniel, Bel and the Snake (Dragon)."
*** 4 Maccabees is always in an appendix.

Regardless of what one might say about the usage of any of the books the immediate and direct conclusion to be drawn from the above is that the Old Testament of the Orthodox Church is the Old Testament of the historic Church, for it is the Septuagint, used by the Church from the very time of Christ. The Old Testament of the Roman Catholic Church and that of the Protestant represent changes based upon assumptions about what the "real" Bible should be. The Orthodox Church uses the Septuagint, as did the whole of the ancient Church from the beginning of New Testament times. ■



"Let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God"