



BOOK REVIEW

The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms. Project Director: Fr. Peter Gillquist. Managing Editor: Mr. Alan Wallerstedt. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993. 6 x 9. 1070 pages. Hardcover.

Thomas Nelson Publishers of Nashville, Tennessee, originators and patrons of the New King James Version of the Scriptures, have published *The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms*, using their translation of the Scriptures. The notes, introductory material, appendices, and commentary were prepared by the Academic Community of St. Athanasius Academy of Santa Barbara, California. Father Jack N. Sparks is dean of the Academy and was one of the four general editors who “reviewed, corrected, and expanded” the original material. The three other editors were Joseph Allen, former professor of Pastoral Theology at St. Vladimir’s Seminary, at Crestwood, New York; Michael Najim, former Dean of Balamand Seminary in Lebanon; and Theodore Stylianopoulos, professor of New Testament at Holy Cross Seminary in Brookline, Massachusetts. (We are not told whether they are clergymen.) Father Thomas Hopko, Dean of St. Vladimir’s Seminary, is listed as a special consultant and contributor in the editorial task of preparing the final manuscript. Mr. Alan Wallerstedt was managing editor. Others are listed as helping and making special contributions in certain areas.

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Financial contributions were made by individuals, churches, and organizations to underwrite the cost of three years of research and preparation. The Publishers helped this preparatory work by matching all contributions with equal funds of their own. Father Peter Gillquist was project director.

The book finally produced has a handsome dust cover with a miniature icon of our Lord, the Saviour of all the world, and the navy blue binding with gold trim and gold cross embossed on the front is eye-catching. There are several color plates of icons throughout. The text presented for study is clearly printed and the footnote commentary is large enough to be easily read.

The New King James Version of the Scriptures is used. It is misleadingly titled, for it is not a simple correction or updating of the King James but a new modern translation — having the attendant flaws of most modern attempts but retaining a few time-honored words and phrases. It is disappointing that the King James Version was not used, a version which is a literary monument, for it is very direct and strong in expression, while being faithful to the Greek. The King James translators were men trained in rhetoric or accustomed to public reading and speaking, not simply bookish scholars; therefore they were aware of how a passage would sound. On the other hand, they had hostile Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars scrutinizing their work, so they could not afford to be free in their translation, but were compelled to be as faithful as possible. They have been adjudged by posterity to have struck a favorable balance between accuracy and euphony. Furthermore, they were reverent, fearful of doing violence to the word of God; they respected the authors of the Scriptures and held them to be truthful and sound of mind and inspired of God.

The main objection heard to the King James Version is that it is difficult to understand, especially with the “thee’s” and “thou’s.” First, the second person singular is not unfamiliar even to completely modern audiences, and it can quickly become familiar. There are, we must admit, some places where words or phrases have shifted their meaning so much that they are incomprehensible or — worse — misunderstood. No one would cavil, I’m sure, if

there were a few corrections, as, indeed, there have been some made over the centuries. Nonetheless, millions of ill-educated people in our country have read and well understood the King James Bible, which was the only book in their home, aside from the Sears and "Monkey" Ward catalogs.

The Editor's conjoint publication of the Masoretic text of the Psalms with accompanying commentary, however, is not simply a question of picking a translation. Their excuse for using the Masoretic text was that an appropriate modern translation of the Septuagint could not be found. Some of the money spent on research and preparation should have been allocated for a translation; if not, it would have been better to print nothing, rather than the Masoretic text under an apparently Orthodox cover.

The Masoretic text of the Old Testament was compiled by Jewish scholars during the ten centuries after Christ. They used inferior texts or edited them in order that as many as possible of the messianic prophecies or types which referred to Christ would be deleted. The Septuagint, a Greek translation from the Hebrew done by rabbis about one hundred and fifty years before Christ, bears witness to this distortion. The findings from the Dead Sea Scrolls support the Septuagint readings.

Hebrew had been a dead language for some time before Christ (Aramaic was the common language in Palestine, and Greek elsewhere); and the fact that vowels were not indicated in the script, but only consonants (vowel signs were introduced in the seventh century after Christ), produced difficulties in ascertaining the meaning and pronunciation of many Hebrew words. W. O. E. Oesterly in his critical edition of the Psalter, *The Psalms*, states that in a countless number of verses the Masoretic text is "unintelligible."¹ The Septuagint has greatly helped scholars in the "restoration of doubtful passages"² in the Hebrew text. Leaving aside the textual merits, it behooves the Church not to use as a primary text one which has been biased against our Saviour by men who reject Him.

¹ P. 36.

² P. 35.

The only recommendation — and the greatest commendation — for the New King James Version is that it was based on the *textus receptus*, the received text¹ of the Gospel Scriptures, as was the King James. There are no substantial differences between this text and those accepted and read throughout the Orthodox Church. We must congratulate the Editors for using this text, although in their introductory article, "How to Use the Orthodox Study Bible," they do not explain why they chose it instead of the self-proclaimed critical text of Nestle-Aland, which the prevailing school of Biblical criticism proclaims as being the most historically accurate version of the original Scriptures. They are also non-committal about modern Biblical scholarship, merely stating, "Today, scholars agree that the science of New Testament textual criticism is in a state of flux."² Since the Editors do not apparently question the use and validity of modern Biblical criticism, we should discuss the principles and methods it uses in examining the Church's sacred texts and the Church's methods.

The Apostles preached Christ and the Kingdom of God, and many believed. The Holy Gospels, the memoirs of these first Apostles, were used to witness to and confirm the preaching of the Apostles' successors, and many more believed. This is a historical fact which cannot be gainsayed, for it is verifiable by human criteria. The world can know the fact of the preaching, but only the Church can truly know the meaning of the preaching.

Saint Isaac the Syrian in Homilies LII and LIII has best summarized the teaching of the Saints of the Church on how man perceives and is able to know the Three Degrees of Knowledge,

¹ The term "received text" is taken from the preface to the 1633 Elzevir edition of the Scriptures, which states that this edition presents "the text now received by all." It is practically identical to Stephanus' folio edition of 1550. These editions were based upon the comparison of about fifteen Greek manuscripts, including the first printed New Testament, the *Complutensian Polyglot* of 1514, published by Cardinal Ximenes, and Erasmus' editions, the first published in 1516. Most of the manuscripts were of the so-called "Byzantine type," that is, the text in use in the Orthodox Church. This was the text used for the early translations into other languages.

² P. XI.

which are a necessary lesson for every Christian, not only in sacred studies but in his daily life of struggle to be faithful to Christ.

The First Degree of Knowledge is the employment of the physical senses in the perceptions and reasonings of this material creation. Saint Isaac calls it contranatural or naked knowledge because it limits itself to the arts and sciences and the things of this world. A true and valid knowledge of God's material creation is obtained insofar as the observations are accurate and the conclusions do not transgress the limits of the material universe and of what can be verified with our physical senses. He observes that any knowledge which remains in the First Degree will become opposed to faith and become atheistic, because "it excludes all concern for God" and "limits all its concerns to this world alone. It values what it has by earthly standards and does not know that there is something better than itself."¹ This is the knowledge Saint Paul calls "carnal" knowledge.

The Second Degree of Knowledge which Saint Isaac calls natural, i.e., according to our nature, is opposed to the First Degree because its foundation is faith and trust in God, not in human perceptions. In other words, faith is the way of coming to know the things of God. It is a spiritual or noetic knowledge, perceiving spiritual things through the spirit, in distinction to the First Degree, which perceives material things through the senses.

Saint Paul describes the Second Degree of Knowledge, comparing it to the First, when he declares, "we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery . . . which none . . . of this world knew,"² "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."³ "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."⁴ The "things of the Spirit of God" are the knowledge and presence of Christ, given

¹ Homily LII.

³ I Cor. 2:12.

² I Cor. 2:7,8.

⁴ I Cor. 2:14.

through the Mystery of the Church, conveyed by the words of its instruction — "faith cometh by hearing"¹ — especially by the instruction contained in the history of God's dispensation towards man, the Holy Scriptures.

The Third Degree transcends knowledge; it is called supernatural and unknowing. It is not manifested by means external to the soul, but it is manifested within; it comes unmediated and without observation, for "the Kingdom of the Heavens is within you."² It is the revelation of God, without external cause, through God's grace. It is cessation of labor and repose of the soul in communion with God.

Saint Isaac describes the progression of the Degrees and how they are acquired:

The first knowledge comes from constant study and diligence in learning; the second comes from a good manner of life and the intellect's faith; and the third is now allotted to faith alone. For by faith knowledge is abolished, works come to an end, and the employment of the senses becomes superfluous.³

Working to hone the mind and senses by learning about and manipulating the material creation through the arts and sciences grants experience and knowledge of the First Degree. Striving in the virtues to purify the soul while trusting in God's words grants the soul experience and knowledge of spiritual verities which comprise the Second Degree. The Third Degree is without labor on our part, for its experience does not result from our efforts and ability but is entirely God's operation within us.

Knowledge — that is, the knowledge of God and of His will — has been the formative concern of the Church from earliest times. Moses spoke to God saying, "They will ask me, What is His name? What shall I say to them?"⁴ for the people desired some identifying name with which to call upon God. This knowledge, as in the case of Moses, is given by God's revelation to His friends, to the Saints who bring it down to our level, lowering that ineffable com-

¹ Rom. 10:17.

³ Homily LIII.

² Cf. Luke 17:21.

⁴ Ex. 3:13.

munication of God with the Saints to the level of verbal communication.

The Saints have always distinguished between sacred knowledge, the divine knowledge from revelation, inner knowledge, knowledge arising from the holy witness of the Church's history within the bounds of the Church, and knowledge from without, secular knowledge, the wisdom of this world, *ἡ Θύραθεν σοφία*.

The distinction between secular and sacred knowledge, together with the discernment of how man perceives and understands as expressed in the Three Degrees of Knowledge, has protected the Church from error and deception. Early on in the West, however, these distinctions began to be obscured. The Westerners began to give an absolute value to the power of reason, to logic and to Greek philosophy; they introduced them into the temple of theology and believed that they could lead to the knowledge of God. They followed Augustinian principles in which blind faith must become knowledge; but the heritage of Augustine identified this knowledge with rational knowledge, therefore implicitly making it superior to faith. Faith, instead of being a higher degree of knowledge as the Fathers taught, became a subject of rational inquiry, a supplier of axioms and premises to be manipulated by rationalism, and was invoked when necessary to mantle and excuse the inconsistencies and flaws of rationalism.

In consequence, since this philosophy of the First Degree of Knowledge was believed by Anselm and all the Scholastics to be universally comprehensible and sufficient proof in itself, that great intellectual problem of the West developed: the spiritual dichotomy of the conflict between Faith and Reason. When the flaws and weaknesses in their rationalistic underpinning of the Faith became evident, then they said one must believe blindly and reject reason, since it is God's arbitrary command. However, this contradicted their axiom that faith is supposed to develop into knowledge, i.e., knowledge conformable to reason. When their rationalistic Christian Faith was so obviously contrary to what their observations and reasonings proved, one had to choose to which pole one would cling: the Faith, in spite of one's intellectual perceptions

and the conviction that it is inferior; or to Reason, which can only exclude the premises of Christianity. This ignorance of the Church's epistemology, of the understanding that Faith and Reason did not function on the same level or degree, could only lead to the unresolvable conflict and fanatical absolutism which history has shown us. Father George Florovsky is reported to have commented on this problem by saying that in the Fathers no conflict is observed or expressed between Faith and Reason; rather, the conflict is between Faith and stupidity.

This conflict of Faith and Reason cannot be resolved until it is lifted to another plane by the Church's understanding of the distinctions and Degrees of Knowledge. In history we have seen this conflict result either in an irrational religious fanaticism, which winks its eyes at the inconsistencies of its position, or in a no less irrational atheistic fanaticism, which closes its eyes to evident intervention of the divinity. Psychologically and emotionally, they are practically identical, which accounts for the not infrequent alternations of the states. We have all heard of scientists who find God, or of churchmen who lose their faith; in effect, they are keeping the same frame of mind, shifting positions from one end of the pole to the other: just the incidentals differ. They are not transcending their human nature, but "stand in the wisdom of men";¹ yet "the world by wisdom knew not God."²

As Orthodox, we cannot believe that the text of the Scriptures is arbitrary and governed only by human considerations. We see the presence of God and His providence in our daily lives. How can they be denied to exist in the Church and in the canon and text of the Holy Scriptures? The human element cannot be ignored or denied, but neither can the divine. Yet most Biblical scholars and textual critics wish to disregard any form of divine intervention or revelation in order to make their study "scientific." To deny, ignore, or reject facts or to approach a study with pre-conceived positions, however, hardly seems compatible with the definition of science. Nonetheless, modern Biblical textual criticism, which

¹ I Cor. 2:5.

² I Cor. 1:21.

functions only on the First Degree of Knowledge, consistently does so. Not only is the fact of any miracle or revelation disbelieved, explained away, or rejected, but any other historical and objective witness which might indicate or corroborate the working of the Divinity is considered suspect, or contaminated, or untrustworthy. Anything can be proved if one disallows all witnesses to the contrary; if any fact contradicts their conjecture or theory, it is automatic proof that it is adventitious or erroneous and can safely be ignored. Here is the triumph of ideology and theory over fact.

Modern criticism of the Scriptures began about the middle of the last century. Among its founding scholars were K. Lachmann (who, however, concerned himself more with the Lower Criticism, i.e., with comparison of texts through manuscript work), Tregelles, Welhausen, Westcott, Hort, Nestle, and Tischendorf, who gave great impetus to the whole school with his discovery of the Sinaiticus Codex of the Scriptures at Mt. Sinai in the middle of the last century. All of these scholars maintained that the uncial¹ texts Vaticanus and Sinaiticus (assigned to the fourth century), the Alexandrian Codex and Codex *Ephraemi rescriptus* (assigned to the fifth), and Codex Bezae (assigned to the sixth), must have determining authority in establishing what was the original text of the Gospels with the very words of our Lord. The Lower Criticism at that time believed that uncials on parchment were the older form of manuscript. Nestle, when preparing his critical Greek text of the New Testament, always preferred the above texts when they differed from the received text.

On the other hand, J. W. Burgon, S. W. Whitney, E. Miller, P. Schaff, F. H. Scrivener, and other scholars hastened to question

¹ Uncials are the forms of letters resembling modern printed capitals, but more rounded or blocky, which were used in ancient manuscripts. The letters are separate and usually large. Minuscules refer to the cursive script used in ancient manuscripts from which modern lower-case letters were developed; the letters are smaller and somewhat connected. Manuscripts are referred to as uncials or minuscules depending on the type of letters used in their inditing.

this dogmatic preference for the above-mentioned texts. They maintained that these manuscripts were preserved precisely because they were set aside and unused since they were inferior copies; indeed, they had been obviously copied by inept hands, with many misspellings. It was hardly logical, they argued, to prefer these inferior texts of one family (that is, texts having common characteristics indicating that they were copied from the same prototype) — and thus only one text — over the received text which was found throughout the world in many families of texts which were in agreement. They also rejected the assumption that uncials were older and more primitive than the cursive or minuscule manuscripts but maintained that they were characteristic of manuscripts produced in Caesarea. Even if the oldest manuscript of the received text is younger than Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, that fact has less weight since that manuscript evidences good and careful copying and agrees with other families of manuscripts from other regions.

Furthermore, they observed, the received text has older witness, since we have translations (versions) from the second century which agree more with the received text, notably the Peshitto (the Old Syriac Version), the Old Latin, and the Sahidic and Bohairic Versions. Further witness is available from quotations in the writings of the Fathers of the Church and other writers. The overwhelming weight of witness, they conclude, is for the received text, since it has several sources and witnesses, while the Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Bezae Codices have only one.

With the many discoveries of papyrus fragments from the first centuries, the critics of the Nestle text have been vindicated. The minuscule texts are as ancient as the uncial and did not develop from them. This discovery of paleography forces a re-evaluation of the antiquity and importance of the manuscripts which determined the Nestle text. The uncial parchments, therefore, cannot be determinative; they are not a direct, purer text and so superior to the “debased” traditional text; they can err. The Sinaiticus Codex is no longer the authoritative text by which all others must be judged. Indeed, the introduction to the twenty-sixth revised

edition (1981) of the Nestle-Aland Greek text of the New Testament (known as the critical text) triumphantly states on page five, "The age of Wescott-Hort and Tischendorf is definitely over!"

Nevertheless, in the introduction to his *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Bruce Metzger — one of the five-man Editorial Committee of the Nestle-Aland critical text — exhibits a marked prejudice, since he calls the received text: "The debased Byzantine text" or "corrupted Byzantine text." He states, "The *Alexandrian text* [Vaticanus and Sinaiticus] is usually considered to be the best text and the most faithful in preserving the original. Characteristics of the Alexandrian Text are brevity and austerity . . . it is generally shorter. . . ." ¹ "The *Byzantine text* [the received text] . . . is characterized chiefly by lucidity and completeness." ²

Even though the methods of Wescott, Hort, and Tischendorf are supposedly superseded (since their criteria have been shown to be mistaken), yet the conclusions reached using these faulty criteria remain and are still accepted. Metzger, because of his prejudice, ignores the fact that in the transcription of manuscripts, it is more likely that a scribe omit a phrase or word rather than add one; especially when one considers that the copies of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus and Bezae are badly done, full of errors and misspellings. So much so, that the opposing school of critics has been able to reverse the others' own precept against them: "witnesses [to a reading] are to be weighed, not counted," that is, the quality of the testimony is more important than antiquity and frequency of occurrence. Furthermore, when the Alexandrian texts differ from the received text, they often also disagree among themselves; a good indication that the received text is being changed or deleted by individual copyists.

The reason for this prejudice shown by Metzger, representative of all his colleagues, must be found not in "scientific" principles, but in the beliefs and opinions of the critics, in the critics' understanding of the Church's early history and doctrine, expressed in

¹ P. xvii.

² P. xx.

their conjectures and theories. Metzger, at the end of his introduction, admits as much: "Textual criticism is an art as well as a science." ¹ The dogmatic certainty of their supposedly objective science is without foundation. Their preference for Vaticanus and Sinaiticus as being more primitive because they are rougher and shorter is based upon a philosophical opinion that evolution is from simplicity to complexity. However, it is certainly sounder to consider first the historical circumstances of bad copying or a decline in civilization and culture as an explanation, rather than resorting to a theoretical and abstract principle. Certainly in the case of language, the evolution is from the complex to the simple.

An example of the prejudice of modern Biblical criticism is found in the first chapter, first verse of Saint Mark's Gospel, where the words "the Son of God" are dropped. According to the critics, these are an obvious interpolation because they are absent from Sinaiticus and the minuscules 28 and 255; yet they appear in all other copies and versions and in many of the Fathers. They are rejected by modern critics against all textual evidence simply because they probably agree with the bias of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, which habitually obscures the divinity of Christ. ² Saint Irenaeus in the second century witnesses to the existence of the passage and to the fact that Saint Mark's Gospel was written to disprove the gnostics and other heretics who did not wish to acknowledge Christ as the Son of God.

Another instance is the suppression of verse four in the fifth chapter of Saint John, i.e., the Angel descending into the pool and troubling the waters, which is omitted in the Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, C and D manuscripts, while the received texts, most other texts, all versions (translations), and many Fathers include the verse. It is seldom mentioned that the preceding and succeeding words in those manuscripts which omit mention of the Angel differ widely among themselves. They cannot agree whether there was a

¹ P. xxxi.

² *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* by Burgon and Miller (now newly reprinted) has a long listing in Appendix V of passages omitted or changed in the manuscripts as proof of this bias.

“sheep-pool” or “a pool at the sheep-gate”; was it named or sur-named Bethesda, Bethsaida, Bethzatha or Belzetha, whether the crowd was great or if any were paralytics and so on. The witnesses that include the verses, although from far more differing sources, have a less troubled text and are more uniform; hence they should be more trustworthy as evincing less tampering. Yet because modern Biblical scholarship has proved to its own satisfaction that the teachings concerning Angels is a Babylonian influence on the faith of the Jews during their captivity, any excuse must be found to remove such superstitious accretions in order to find the unadulterated word of God.

This entire digression is made to indicate the sham of scientific methods behind which present-day Biblical scholarship hides its fundamental unbelief from believers and even from itself. It uses a theoretical and philosophical principle of progress and development from simple to complex to deny historical witness and the fact that human institutions — indeed humanity itself — and all their activity have never been reduced to or comprehended by any theoretical system. Unfortunately, the compilers of the *Orthodox Study Bible* have been heavily influenced by this scholarship, despite their use of the received text and their claim of patristic inspiration.

One example is the last twelve verses of the Gospel according to Saint Mark. The footnote to chapter sixteen, verses nine to twenty says, “Some manuscripts do not include this longer ending. Later traditions testify to several endings. The Church, however, has always regarded this ending as inspired.” There are some notes in the center of the columns indicating that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus lack this ending. Also, in the introductory notes to the Gospel of Saint Mark, there is a sub-heading entitled “(3) endings”, which refers to the matter.

The defense of the last twelve verses of Saint Mark and the refutation of the Biblical critics has been done quite well by Burgon and Miller, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, Appendix VII, and in the companion volume, *Causes of Corruption in the Traditional Text*, and especially in *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel Accord-*

ing to S. Mark by John Burgon. First, the proposition that some early texts lacked these twelve verses is mainly based upon a supposed statement by Eusebius, who himself considered that opinion erroneous. Secondly, most minuscules verify the twelve verses to be ancient and genuine, though the above authors mention that some texts lack them. The manuscript evidence is discussed and it is demonstrated that since the omission by Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and the Lewis Codex is a result of tampering with the text, the genuineness of the verses is vindicated. The scribe of Vaticanus — who according to Tischendorf is the corrector (*diorthota*) of Sinaiticus — when he corrected the sheet on which Saint Mark ended, re-wrote the whole sheet, spreading out the writing inordinately to cover the omission. As for Vaticanus, it is at this point that there is the only blank space in the manuscript. The Lewis Codex also lacks the last twelve verses, but it is replete with heretical blemishes and peculiarities, so much so, that it had been torn apart and put to other use. Much more modern work has been done on this matter, but the basic question remains: Why should the witness of two or three manuscripts of the same family — manuscripts which indicate tampering at this point — or an argument from silence outweigh the general witness of history?

Critics try to argue that the style differs. That it differs sharply is not obvious; and the fact that it uses a word not used by Saint Mark before is hardly proof, since our sample of his writing is small. There are many words which appear only once in any one Gospel. Writers cannot be kept to such a narrow definition of their style as these critics would like. In any case, C. S. Lewis in an article “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” demonstrates quite well the lack of literary sensibility of many illustrious Biblical critics and their ignorance of philology when they make statements of literary criticism; statements which are clean contrary to the evidence of scholarship in world philology. As Lewis points out, their ideology blinds them to their material.¹

¹ C. S. Lewis' article, originally published as “Fern-Seed and Elephants,” is included in this issue of *The True Vine*.

As far as the question of style goes, it would have been unlikely to end the Gospel at verse eight, "neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid." This was hardly the Good News preached to the world. The last statement cries for a resolution. The women heard the Angel, yet they disbelieved and told no one. How did the Apostles learn of it? Did Christ confirm the Resurrection, etc.? If one wishes to speak of style or use literary criteria, there is no way the Gospel could have ended there.

Another example of an undiscerning transmittal by the Editors of the *Orthodox Study Bible* of the theories of higher criticism is this statement in the introduction to the Gospel of Saint Mark: "The Gospel of Mark may be dated shortly before the fall of Jerusalem AD 70. Many believe that this was the first of the four Gospels to be written." The "many" are not the Church Fathers or historians, who have a different opinion, but are the scholars of the Higher Criticism (which deals with the purposes of the author of the manuscript, his time, place, beliefs, by whom or what he was influenced; the relation of the work to other scripture, its history and its significance), who maintain this belief because the style of Saint Mark's Gospel is simpler and more terse, thus primitive: a hypothesis based on the familiar philosophical doctrine that progress equals complexity. Again, it is demonstrated that these scholars have no literary or philological judgement at all, as C. S. Lewis shows (as if their own convolute and prolix work were not proof enough), since it is impossible for them not to have heard of or seen an abridgement, précis, or summary of a written composition. The abridgement will be more simple and limited than the original, because it is concentrated, concise, and usually directed to a definite purpose. The argument from style can easily be refuted simply with this counter argument. (We are speaking of style, not of the theory that Saint Mark is an abridgement of Saint Matthew: a position that is historically and critically untenable.) However, the clinching argument the critics have, which motivates the search for supporting evidence, is that Saint Matthew records our Saviour's prophecies of the fall of Jerusalem, while Saint Mark does not (Mark 13:2 is ignored); therefore the Gospel of Saint

Matthew must have been written later, since there is no such thing as prophecy. The priority of Saint Mark's is affirmed even though the historical witness of all the Church, beginning with Papias (a direct disciple of the Apostles) in the second century, is unanimous in stating that Saint Matthew's was written first.

Accepting that Saint Mark was written first necessitates accepting the premises upon which modern Biblical critics based their judgement. Their most important premise is that all prophetic utterances must have been written after the fact since prophecy, a result of divine intervention, cannot be accepted in scientific study since it surpasses the limits of human perceptions and reason; that is, it is not of the First Degree of knowledge, which is the limit of Biblical Criticism. The textual implications are many and profound. One implication is that all prophecies are interpolations; but a piecemeal assembly of the Gospels, like a mosaic, is not an acceptable explanation when the literary unity of the Gospels is considered. Also, critics of ancient secular literature have abandoned such explanations for many years as being untenable. The other explanation is that the Evangelists put these prophecies into the Saviour's mouth after the fact. In other words, the Evangelists must have been either miserably deluded or dishonest men, with the consequence that the Scriptures become a fraud, an untrue fabrication lacking any authority. Yet the prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem was known to its Christian inhabitants. When Vespasian and Titus came to besiege the city AD 70, the Christians fled to Pella of Perea because of Christ's prophecy: "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh."¹ The Jews of the time were wrathful against the Christians who refused to take part in this national fight for independence from Rome, because the words of Christ were known and believed by them.² The witnesses to the integrity of the Evangelists are not one or two but the whole college of the Twelve Apostles, of the seventy Apostles, and the

¹ Luke 21:20.

² Eusebius *Church History*, Book III, chap. 5.

thousands of the faithful in Jerusalem at the time of our Saviour's Economy in the flesh.

The primacy of the historical witness over the theories of the Biblical critics must be affirmed, especially when countering their "scientific" arguments which they limit to the First Degree of Knowledge. The factual and definite historical witness is countered only by their atheistic theorizing that denies the existence of prophecy. The witness of history is not a matter of belief or disbelief in God; that does not enter into the matter, for it is simply a report of what came first, a judgement that even an illiterate pagan of the time could have given if he were possessed of the facts. It is as simple a historical fact as the question, who came first, Julius or Augustus Caesar? The waters are muddied by the critics who wish to justify their theories, so they backtrack and try to rearrange the matter under study to their satisfaction, through an *a posteriori* determination, what is commonly called "cooking" the data.

This also has resulted in doubting or removing references to the divinity of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Mark. They then produce the circular reasoning that the critical text proves Saint Mark's Gospel to be earlier because it is primitive, lacking the more developed theology or kerygma of Christ's divinity; then, because it is more primitive, the references to His divinity must be interpolations.

In every case, all the theories and hypotheses of the modern Biblical critics — they have prevailed in all centers of theological instruction and influence, even those few which ostensibly oppose them — when reduced to their starting point, are based on the belief that there can be no divine intervention, hence no prophecy or miracle. Their god has no operations or energies. Here the patristic dictum takes hold: "Whatever has no energies has no essence," i.e., it does not exist. Most also believe that our Saviour was not considered to be divine by the early Church. Such beliefs can only be called atheistic. The "natural man," the "carnal man," according to Saint Paul, cannot discern or understand the action of God in history. Here again is the demonstration of what Saint

Isaac the Syrian declares — that the First Degree of Knowledge rejects the things of God, for it cannot discern them, since it trusts in its own criteria and strength. The Editors of the *Orthodox Study Bible* have apparently accepted the validity of this scholarship, not recognizing that it is only of the First Degree of Knowledge and not discerning that it is motivated by atheism rather than enlightened reason.

The danger lies in that their acceptance may not be fully conscious; for surely, when the argument is elucidated, they would affirm vehemently that they believe in God's intervention, in miracles and prophecy; but they would likely say — and quite rightly — that we cannot ignore facts which scholarship discovers. We have tried to indicate in a small way, however, that most modern Biblical scholarship and criticism is not informed by belief in God — rather, by atheism — and that most of its conclusions rest on theory and conjecture; worse, on a structure of linked hypotheses and conjectures whose probability falls drastically with each new linkage. Nonetheless, these conclusions are presented, against all tenets of probability theory, as being certain; and we see these conclusions and observations being used by the Editors without any refutation.

A refutation is possible by using history and incontrovertible facts and by questioning the logical and epistemological foundations upon which the conclusions of Biblical criticism are grounded. Their conjectures can be refuted by First Degree Knowledge; nevertheless, our conviction is founded upon the fact that the axioms and underlying principles of the Church's scholarship are of the Second Degree of Knowledge, which the First cannot contradict because they pass outside its realm of experience and investigation.

It is a disservice to the unsuspecting Orthodox faithful to present them with the poisoned fruits of this so-called science unmarked and unrefuted. Perhaps the Editors could say that there is not enough space to adequately refute all the claims; yet that is our contention: why bring up the matter in the first place? There was no need to mention the doubt critics have, for example, about

the last twelve verses of Saint Mark's Gospel; it certainly brings no increase in compunction or in devotion or in an Orthodox understanding of the Gospels. Since it was mentioned, however, an intelligent refutation, comprehensible to a layman, should have been made.

Space allows us to indicate only a few of the flaws of modern Biblical scholarship, but enough to understand the danger. These self-anointed judges of our Holy Scriptures are not truly scientific, but use outmoded and biased methods to reach their conclusions. They are propagandists of an ideology which they affirm with a dogmatism disguised as science in order to silence objections. They call themselves Christians, while only "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."¹ Their usual answer to any criticism of their intellectual foundation is a condescending smile, because they have no other answer; they demand that they be accepted at their own evaluation, that is, on faith. The danger of using their "conclusions," "facts," and "scientific findings" without a thorough examination and evaluation of each from the ground up, is evident to any believer. Two recent books by Eta Linne-mann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* and *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* published by Baker House Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, examine the whole question intelligently, although with an Evangelical prejudice.² This Protestant scholar perceived the treachery of the Biblical scholars and rejected it, yet their conclusions and supposed facts are being foisted upon an unsuspecting Orthodox laity.

The only refutation made in the *Orthodox Study Bible* is that the Church accepts these passages as being inspired; in other words, not a refutation at all, but a single, peremptory pronouncement,

¹ 11 Tim. 3:5.

² Two books listed in this latter publication that also deal with the foundation of the Synoptic Problem are *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis*, by William R. Farmer (New York: Macmillan, 1964), reprinted in 1976 by the Western North Carolina Press in Hillsboro, North Carolina, and *History and Criticism of the Marcan Hypothesis*, by Hans-Herber Stoldt (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1980).

an authoritarian decree, similar to an *ex cathedra* Papal decision. Such tactics do not work: the present state of the Papal church presents a compelling argument against the use of such tactics. For decades they nurtured this Godless form of scholarship, but because of the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, they always had to tack on at the end the disclaimer that the Church's official position was contrary or different. This intellectual schizophrenia has culminated in the present-day dogmatic fracturing and dissolution of the Papal church.

The commentary on Saint Matthew 1:16 ("And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ") is a good example of how valuable a help a commentary can be: "**Of whom** is a feminine form in Greek, referring only to Mary, not Joseph. Thus Matthew affirms that Jesus was born only of Mary. Joseph acted as Jesus' father, but he was not His begetter." An ambiguity of the English which would obscure the virgin birth of our Saviour is clarified by a reference to the Greek original which clearly expresses the Evangelist's meaning.

Such high points in the commentary, however, are unfortunately few. The comment at Saint John 13:18-20: "The betrayal by Judas is a moral low point in the Gospel of John" is more representative of the whole commentary. When it is not misguided or wrong — we will give some examples below — the commentary often merely paraphrases the text, which hardly seems necessary; after all, the purpose for choosing a modern translation was to have an unobscure, intelligible text whose surface meaning is clear. A commentary should give the deeper significance, explicate any ambiguities, resolve seeming contradictions, refer to related portions of Scripture, or provide historical and scientific and other information to help in understanding. The *Orthodox Study Bible* rather hinders understanding because the commentary resembles the foregoing example and cloaks and obscures the words of Scripture with its trite insights and insipid moralizing.

The commentary on Matthew 2:2, on the star of Bethlehem, presents a form of *a posteriori* conjectured history beloved of the Higher Critics. "In ancient times a star signified a god, a deified

THE TRUE VINE

king,” and then as proof they quote Numbers 24:17, the prophecy of Balaam: “There shall come a star out of Jacob.” First of all, in ancient times a star did not necessarily or even principally signify a god or a deified king. Secondly, the prophecy refers, of course, to Christ; but did the Hebrews understand it as referring to a divine being or to a king, a man anointed of the Lord? At least the commentary does not discuss novae or other astronomical phenomena, but neither does it refer to the pages of commentary written by the Fathers on the Star, again notably by Saint John Chrysostom,¹ who proved from the Scriptures that it was not a material star but the grace of God, since it was not seen by everyone, its movements were impossible for one of the heavenly bodies, and it would appear and disappear arbitrarily.

“Moses’ seat was a special chair in the synagogue assigned to the most famous rabbi of the town” is the only interpretation given for Matthew 23:2 and is an example how scholars of Biblical criticism will give an historical explanation, presenting as fact their own conjecture, without any historical referent. This reductionist trivialization does not correspond to the historical facts and the witness of the Scriptures. Teaching and doctrine were important to the Hebrews. The archaeology of Palestine has discovered that the construction of many synagogues resembles that of Capernaum. On the wall which looked towards Jerusalem, a window was in the middle, and on one side was the ark which held the Scriptures and other writings, and on the other was the seat upon which — as we learn from Luke 4:20 and other sources — would sit any who would preach or expound upon the Scriptures after they had been read. This arrangement of the synagogue, different from the modern one, indicated that the Jews held teaching or preaching in equal honor with the Scriptures, similar to what we might call Tradition and Scripture. Although that chair might have been called Moses’ seat, our Lord is speaking figuratively of the succession of teachers in the tradition of Moses and the prophets. He is obviously not referring to a physical chair, but is speaking in

¹ *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, Homily VII.



SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Fourteenth-century fresco in the Monastery of the Chora, Constantinople.

a metaphor, one familiar and understandable to His audience; a fact which the Fathers understood in their commentaries, when they express the importance of tradition and discernment to differentiate between the teachings according to the Law of God and the personal failings of the teachers. The Protestant *NIV Study Bible* understood the passage well enough — even without reading the Fathers — as shown in its interpretation: “Mat 23:2 *sit in Moses’ seat*, the authorized successors of Moses as teachers of the law.”

The parable of the mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds which yet becomes greater than all the herbs, and the birds of the air lodge in its branches, appears in Saints Matthew,¹ Mark,² and Luke.³ The commentary on Saint Luke is minimal “The **mustard seed** is tiny, but the plant grows to a height of about 10 feet in Palestine.” The commentaries on the passages in the other two Gospels become interpretive. In Saint Matthew we read: “These two short parables signify the startling success of God’s Kingdom. A few weak fishermen will convert the whole world because of the divine power of the gospel.” The commentary on the parable in Saint Mark is more extensive: “The parable of the **mustard seed** contrasts humble beginnings with a bountiful crop. Jesus begins with poor fishermen, but in a few years the Christian faith will spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. The work of God may involve apparently insignificant people and circumstances, but the possibilities are limitless because of God’s power. That being said, Jesus’ followers must always be prepared for the “long haul.” Jewish expectations in Jesus’ day were for the Kingdom to appear suddenly and fully. But God’s Kingdom takes time to grow and mature through adversity, and when it is fully formed it will be even greater than expected.”

Jewish expectations, based upon the prophets, were right; the Kingdom did appear suddenly and fully with the advent of Christ in the flesh, in His divine Economy and the revelation of His glory. The Jews, however, in the grossness of their understanding

¹ Matthew 13:31–32.

² Mark 4:30–32.

³ Luke 13:18–21.

believed that the Kingdom was earthly and material. They did not care to hear Christ saying, “The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation . . . the Kingdom of God is within you.”¹

Western Christianity fell into the same trap as the Jews, by interpreting the growth of the mustard seed as the outward success, prosperity, authority, and expansion of the Church in the world. This is a judgement based upon external marks of accomplishment, thus debasing the Kingdom to the material and earthly; and this confusion is reflected in the commentaries given above. The Orthodox interpreters refer the parable to a man’s spiritual progress and growth “within,” so that the virtues and angels will “lodge in the branches thereof.” Christ did not promise us success and prosperity, but trials and tribulations.

Another example in which the Editors debase the words of our Saviour to an earthly and carnal sense is found in the commentary on the passage in Saint Mark 10:29–30, when the Lord promises, “There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My sake, and the Gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time.” The commentary with equanimity contradicts the Lord: “That the disciples will receive earthly rewards a hundredfold **now in this time** is not an absolute promise: countless saints and martyrs were not so rewarded.” The Fathers interpret this passage to mean that they who give up their possessions (and relationships are also considered a possession in the Bible and in patristic thought) for the Lord Jesus will find a hundredfold new fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and homes in the Church. The materialistic understanding and interpretation of the Editors betrays them to disagree openly with the Lord and to disavow His promise.

The interpretation of the passage Matthew 21:21, “. . . but also if you say to the mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done” states: “Jesus does not expect His disciples literally to move mountains, but this extravagant image accurately depicts

¹ Luke 17:20–21.

the astonishing power of undoubting faith." As we shall see later in this review, when we discuss the article appended to the *Orthodox Study Bible*, "Interpreting the Scriptures", the Editors consider the allegorical method of interpretation to be aberrant and warn us that the Church avoids it, even though some writers have succumbed. Yet here, a passage which all the Holy Fathers have explicitly and at length interpreted literally, the Editors dismissively interpret allegorically.

The commentary on Luke 9:50, "But Jesus said to him, 'Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side,'" is an inappropriately applied moralization: "It is a temptation for us to want everyone to have a spiritual practice like ours, to do things the way we do, and to be in our group. How many schisms have occurred in Church history because people missed Jesus' lesson here!" The Fathers interpreting this passage adhere strictly to the historical meaning by explaining that there were some people who used the name of Jesus — since it demonstrably had power — to perform miracles, to cast out demons. The disciples wished to forbid them because they were unworthy, but our Saviour, in His mercy, hindered the disciples because demons were being driven out and the preaching was being spread, even though by unworthy men. Certainly these men would not be able to blaspheme the Name in which they wrought wonders. So also must we see the grace of God working in the Church, even though through unworthy men. The Mysteries are Christ's, even though the priest may be unworthy.

However, the worst part of the commentary is the first sentence: "This is an example of Jesus' tolerance and breadth of vision . . ." So one might describe any man. Minor as it may appear, it is the coloring and frame of mind of most of the commentary. It is another example of unconscious assimilation of modern Biblical scholarship which insists on speaking of our Saviour as a simple man, indicative at best of a Nestorian or Adoptionist viewpoint. Any Orthodox who has not been corrupted by this blasphemous mentality would have phrased the commentary: "Our Lord here teaches us and gives us an example . . ."

The related passage in Saint Mark, 9:39–40, "But Jesus said, 'Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.'" has a commentary on page 107, which aside from not being patristic, raises many questions. "9:38–40. This discussion is the aftermath of the argument as to who would be the greatest. Sectarianism and triumphalism (the attitude that one creed is superior to all others) are forbidden, for God's working transcends our limited perceptions. One is either for or **against** (v.40) Christ, but it is not always ours to know who is on which side." Does this mean that a man may believe what he likes as long as he says that he is not against Christ? Even a Moslem could say that he is not against Christ, let alone the plethora of heretics who call themselves Christians. Does this mean that God has abandoned His flock to confusion, showing no clear way to walk? This smells very strongly of the Protestant belief in the invisible Church, which belief ignores the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem,¹ which determined visible limits for the Church, that must be accepted if one wishes to be of the Brotherhood of Christ, in which alone is our salvation. The Church in council with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit clarifies the deposit of Faith which becomes a "creed" different from other creeds; and since it is true, it is superior. Otherwise, if what the commentary states is true, we are left unanchored in the winds of every contrary doctrine.

In the footnote commentary on Saint Matthew 14:14–21, the miracle of multiplying the loaves and feeding the five thousand, we read: "In 15:32–39 and Mark 8:1–10 another miracle is mentioned, in which Jesus feeds four thousand people with seven loaves and a few small fish. This miracle is probably not a duplicate report of the first miracle, but another performed in a different place." This commentator, with the use of the word "probably" declares that in his heart, whether he knows it or not, he has rejected the truth of Christ and of the Gospels and accepted the rationalism of Biblical criticism. The two miracles are

¹ Acts 15.

described separately by Saint Matthew; and the details of the feeding of the five thousand as described in Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John¹ differ significantly from the description given of the feeding of the four thousand in Saints Matthew and Mark.² Furthermore, in Saint Matthew 16:9–10, the Lord Himself refers to them as two separate events. If anyone should doubt the Scriptures on this point, he has already undercut the foundations of his trust in them and in the Saviour; and his faith is built on sand.

These and other similar commentaries in the *Orthodox Study Bible* perplexed us about the Editors' methodology of interpretation. We turned to the article by Father Jack N. Sparks entitled "Interpreting the Scriptures," which is in an appendix of the *Orthodox Study Bible*. In the preliminary remarks in this article, he mentions the formation of the Canon of Scriptures. He is rather vague about the formation and appears to say the Canon was finally confirmed and set in the eighth century by Saint John Damascene. However, the books of the Scriptures we have today had been listed long before by many writers, but most especially in the fourth century in the Thirty-ninth Festal Epistle of Saint Athanasius the Great. This Epistle, along with two others which together are known as the Three Canonical Epistles of Saint Athanasius, became definitive for the Orthodox and were confirmed by Ecumenical Councils, most explicitly by Canon II of the Sixth.

Certainly, this is a minor point, one which Fr. Jack Sparks apparently does not examine, but again indicative of an attitude and tendency in modern Biblical scholarship to attribute as late a date as possible to formation of the Scripture, in order to subtly undermine the authority of the sacred texts and to leave room for conjecture and flights of the imagination.

The above slight error of historical fact, undoubtedly unconscious and easily remedied, was recorded in some short, introductory remarks to his main theme, the interpretation of the Scriptures. Central to his article, however, is his discussion on page

¹ Matthew 14:14–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14.

² Matthew 15:32–39; Mark 8:1–9.

829 of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Although there is some ambiguity, the impression it leaves — confirmed later on in his article, as we shall see — is that God revealed Himself by speaking to man in words.

The Scriptures are the Word of God in human language. . . . When God spoke to man, the communication had to be in a form we could hear and understand. . . . We must not think that human language degrades or darkens the glory of revelation nor that it restricts the power of the Word of God. We must believe this: Human words can be used to adequately convey the Word of God to us. His Word does not become tarnished or cloudy when it is expressed in human language. . . . That God speaks to us in the forms which are our own thought and speech makes our language something greater, for now the Holy Spirit enables us to speak of God. . . . And, yes, theology, (truly defined) is our response to God Who first spoke to us, whom we have heard, and of whose words we have a record.

But in the *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology* of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, in the *Second Theological Oration* of Saint Gregory the Theologian, in chapters 163 and 164 of *The Life of Moses* by Saint Gregory of Nyssa, in Book One, chapters one and two of the *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* by Saint John Damascene, in fact, in all the Fathers who speak on this matter, we find that they teach that one must come to knowledge of God by laying aside all mental conceptions and words by entering into the dark cloud; indeed, all the Fathers declare that full knowledge of God is impossible, that it is impossible for man to see and know God in Himself. "No man hath seen God at any time."¹ "He made darkness His hiding place."² All the Fathers and inspired teachers of the Church without exception render honor of place to this apophatic theology for, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes, God "forbids that the Divine be likened to any of the things known by men, since every concept which comes from some comprehensible image by an approximate understanding and by guessing at the divine nature consti-

¹ John 1:18.

² Psalm 17:11.

tutes an idol of God and does not proclaim God.”¹ Saint John Chrysostom, in his *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, expounds this doctrine clearly, as does the Apostle Paul when, describing the subject of his preaching, he proclaims, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom”² and “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.”³ In another place, the Apostle says, “And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”⁴ The uncreated God surpasses all vision, thought, concept, or word, is beyond any grasp or circumscription, is absolutely transcendent in His nature; such is the proclamation of the Old and New Testaments.

This proclamation of God’s transcendence, however, is accompanied by the declaration in the Scriptures of God’s immanence, that He has condescended to our weakness and revealed Himself to us. The theologies of the Fathers have preserved and explicated this antinomy in the dictum: God is unknown (unknowable) in His essence, but is known (knowable) in His energies. God’s energies are His glory, grace, love, majesty, life, providence, foreknowledge, will — in short, all His operations which are omnipresent and sustain all creation but are known only when He lifts this veil which is upon our eyes, thus revealing Himself to us. Said another way, the energies of God are the knowledge of God’s nature which is accessible to us or any other creature. Words, however, are human and inferior, giving only an indirect knowledge of God’s will and glory, of His energies, but they are the means with which the initiates into God’s mysteries, they who have direct knowledge of God, reveal His will to us. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, in *The Life of Moses*, states,

The multitude was not capable of understanding the voice from above, but allowed Moses to learn by himself the secrets

¹ *Life of Moses*, 165.

³ I COR. 2:9.

² I COR. 2:7.

⁴ II COR. 12:3,4.

and to teach the people whatever doctrine he might learn through instruction from above. This is also a mark of the Church’s order: not all thrust themselves towards the apprehension of the mysteries, but choosing from among themselves someone who is able to hear things divine, they give ear gratefully to him, considering trustworthy whatever they might hear from someone initiated into the divine mysteries.¹

God’s true revelation is of His glory, of His Kingdom or presence; that is, of Himself, not of words, which the Saints use to bring revelation to our level. Words are false and incapable by their very nature, for created words only fashion a more refined idol of the uncreated than does a statue of stone. The prophet Job said, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye hath seen Thee. Wherefore, I abhorred myself and have fainted: I reckon myself dust and ashes.”² The Psalmist David, after he had beheld that ineffable beauty, proclaims, “I said in mine ecstasy: every man is a liar,”³ i.e., every man who tries to explain those ineffable good things will find that his explanation falls short.⁴ If this were not so, in the Gospels, for example, at the theophanies of Christ’s Baptism and Transfiguration, the words spoken by God the Father would not be recorded differently by each Evangelist. If words were revealed, they would have been the same; but it was God’s glory that was revealed; therefore the sense is the same, but the words differ. Similarly, when the Father spoke from Heaven to our Lord, saying, “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again,” the people who were unworthy said they heard thunder or an Angel speak. Even the example of the delivery of the Mystery of the Eucharist indicates the relation of words to revelation. Our Saviour accompanied this dread Mystery with His own words in conjunction with the secret action of grace on this one day of Holy Thursday; yet the words vary in each Gospel, and the Divine Liturgy varies from them. Perhaps this was a dispensation of our Lord

¹ Chapter 160.

² Job 42:5,6.

³ Psalm 115:11.

⁴ *Vide* Gregory of Nyssa, *Song of Songs*, PG 44, 789.

THE TRUE VINE

in His Economy to preserve us from idolatrous and superstitious attachment to words by attributing magic power to them.

The saintly Elder Hieronimos of Aegina would use this simple parable to strike home the difference in knowing God from experience or from hearsay: "There are two men sitting at a table. One is eating, the other is watching him. Who is filled?"

The holy Fathers understood this Scriptural doctrine, that the revelation of words is through an intermediary, but the actual experience of revelation is without words, for it surpasses words. In the *Divine Names* by Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, we read:

Let no one imagine that we celebrate the Divine Name of Love without Scriptural authority, for it is, I consider, unreasonable and foolish to pay attention to the letter rather than to the spirit, nor is this the method of those who wish for insight into Divine things, but rather of those who receive empty sounds and prevent them from passing beyond their ears, not wishing to know the inner significance, nor how to explain them more clearly in terms of similar meaning, but they confine themselves to meaningless arrangements of letters, uncomprehended syllables and words which do not penetrate into the intelligence of their souls, but buzz outside, around their lips and ears, just as though it were not permitted to explain the number four by calling it twice two, or a straight line by calling it a direct line, or the motherland by calling it the fatherland, or any other name which has the same significance, using many different words. It is necessary to know, according to right reason, that we use sounds and syllables and phrases on account of our senses, since when our soul is moved by noetic energies to that which is noetically perceived, both the senses and that which they perceive are surpassed, just as in turn are the noetic powers of the soul, which having become Godlike, casts itself, in the union of unknowing, upon the Rays of the Ineffable Light, in sightless vision of the Divine.¹

Saint Basil the Great in the *Hexaemeron* describes the dispensa-

¹ Chapter IV.



SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

Fourteenth-century fresco in the Monastery of the Chora, Constantinople.

tion of words as used in Scripture, that the words are human, not directly God's words.

It must be well understood that when we speak of the voice, of the word, of the command of God, this divine language does not mean to us a sound which escapes from the organs of speech, a collision of air struck by the tongue; it is a simple sign of the will of God, and, if we give it the form of an order, it is only the better to impress the souls whom we instruct.¹

Fr. Sparks, however, on page 829 of his article declares: "God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, which is His revelation. Through the creeds, the doctrines of the Church, the Eucharistic liturgy and the various prayer liturgies, and other sacred signs and symbols, theology (and, indeed, true philosophy) witnesses to the meaning of that revelation." Further on, he says, "Having received the revelation in the form of the Scriptures, the Church . . ." From these words and others that we quoted before, and from his silence on the relativity of words in God's revelation, he apparently believes that the revelation of God is only in the Holy Scriptures, which is the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Furthermore, it is a revelation of definite words in human speech. One can only conclude that little separates his thinking from that of the Fundamentalists: God descended to earth and gave mankind a book, which is His whole revelation to us. The Moslems also believe much the same about the Koran.

This Protestant insistence on the Bible, and the Bible only, being the full revelation of God ignores the fact that the Church's teaching for decades was an oral tradition, as was the Old Testament. Saint Paul exhorts us, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle."² In another place he says, "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us."³ The living Church

¹ *Hexaemeron*, II:7.

² II Thess. 2:15.

³ II Tim. 1:13.

itself is the bearer of God's revelation as Saint Paul explicitly declares: "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."¹ Saint John the Theologian declares, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book."²

There is a plethora of witnesses also from the Fathers concerning the oral tradition. Saint Basil the Great writes in his treatise on the Holy Spirit:

Of the ordinances and beliefs which are preserved in the Church, some we possess from written 'teaching,' and others we have received from the tradition of the Apostles delivered to us 'in a mystery';³ and both of these have the same force as concerns true religion. And no one will gainsay this, no one, certainly, who is even somewhat versed in the institutions of the Church. For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority on the ground that they possess no great importance, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel vitally; rather, preaching would become a mere term.⁴

Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus says much the same:

We must needs use tradition; for not all things can be received from the divine Scriptures, because the holy Apostles delivered some things by writing and others by tradition. For the holy Apostle says, "And keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you."⁵ And at another time he says, "So have I taught and so have I delivered to the Churches"⁶ and "If ye keep

¹ II Cor. 3:2-3.

² John 20:23; cf. 21:25.

³ I Cor. 2:7.

⁴ PG 32, 188 A; *The Rudder*, Canon 91 of Saint Basil.

⁵ I Cor. 11:2.

⁶ Reference not found; cf. I Cor. 15:3. Saint Epiphanius may be quoting loosely or summarizing Saint Paul's position. It is possible that the phrase was spoken by the Apostle and retained in the Church's memory since it aptly summarizes his position.

in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.”¹

The Lord Jesus promised to be with us unto the ages and so He is; for we are one Body with Him, branches of the one Vine, and we are taught “in a mystery,”² i.e., in the Church where we are instructed in the things which “the world cannot receive.”³ “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”⁴ In another place, the Lord Jesus says, “Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth . . . and He will show you things to come.”⁵ The continuous presence of Christ in the Church, through the Holy Spirit, provides a continuing revelation of God; wherefore the Church is an embodiment of all the words and deeds of our Saviour — as well as of His Apostles — of which the greater part were not written down. The unwritten portion is an immense deposit, a treasury which “even the world itself could not contain.”⁶ There is one Tradition, and it is both written and unwritten. Rather than all revelation being comprised in the Holy Scriptures and being borne witness to by the Church — which is what Fr. Sparks appears to believe — the Holy Scriptures bear witness to the revelation of God in and through the Church. Scripture is based on revealed truth, not revealed truth on Scripture.

Although it cannot be said that Fr. Sparks evidences the extremes of Fundamentalism, yet his position and principles at ground appear to be the same. If we have learnt anything from history, we can conclude that such a way of thinking can develop in two ways: either towards an absolute authority for the Scriptures, resulting in a fanatic belief in literalism with its consequent absurdities or evasions, which we see in many Fundamentalists or Moslems; or towards the rationalism and reductionism of the

¹ I Cor. 15:2.

³ Vide John 14:17.

⁵ John 16:13.

² I Cor. 2:7.

⁴ John 14:26.

⁶ John 21:25.

modern Biblical scholars, who will twist and edit every sacred text to their own meaning, which results in Scriptures with no authority whatsoever.

On pages 830 to 834, Fr. Sparks discusses methods of interpreting the Scriptures. He condemns immediately the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, especially, “various allegorical systems of interpreting the Scriptures which have sprung up from time to time — Philo, for example, and some of the writings of Origen as well. And for mystics! Well, the temptation is almost unavoidable at times.” Further on, he grudgingly admits, “We would not want to deny the value of an occasional allegorical application of Scripture.” However, he insists that only the typological method is proper for interpreting Scripture.

Although the typological method is certainly recognized and approved by the Church, it is not the only way of interpretation. Saint Cyril of Alexandria in his *Commentary on the Prophecy of Abacum* says, “One should see in himself the purpose of the prophecy in order to give birth to a double contemplation, the spiritual together with the historical.”¹ Proving that he does not refer the spiritual contemplation only to a typological interpretation, he says in another place, “Fleeing the grossness of the history, they rise to the tropological interpretation.”² Saint Gregory of Nyssa in the prologue to his *Homilies on the Song of Songs* gives a justification for the use of other methods of interpreting the Scriptures:

Because some members of the Church always think it right to follow the letter of holy scripture and do not take into account the symbolic and allegorical meanings, we must answer those who accuse us of doing so [that is, of using allegory]: there is nothing unusual in searching the divinely inspired scriptures with every means at our disposal. Thus if the literal sense, as it is called, should be of any use, we will readily have the object of our search. But if anything in the hidden, symbolic sense cannot be of use with regard to the literal sense, we will,

¹ PG 71, 845 A (Prologue).

² PG 69, 917 B.

as the Word teaches and as Proverbs says [1.6], understand the passage either as a parable, a dark saying, an utterance of wise men, or as a riddle. With regards to anagogy, it makes no difference what we call it — tropology or allegory — as long as we grasp the meaning of [scripture's] words.¹

The Church Fathers have interpreted the Scriptures in various ways, all of which are recognized and accepted: the typological (by which a historical event or person is a type or figure of the future, or of a spiritual truth, or of the economy of our Saviour), tropological (loosely, metaphorical, but usually applied to an interpretation relating to morals and conduct), the anagogical (the spiritual, mystical, or “higher” meaning, from the earthly to the heavenly) and allegorical (explanation through metaphors or symbolic representations). Many of these ways overlap, and it is often difficult to distinguish them. Some Fathers seem to use the words almost interchangeably, most likely because, with Gospel simplicity, they read and interpreted Scripture in two ways: the history or literal sense and the contemplation or spiritual sense (which includes all the methods we have mentioned). Reading the Scriptures with prayerful attention to the meanings, and gathering all information from human knowledge they might need, in the sanctity of their life, the Fathers awaited the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to make clear the history, the bare words, and to guide them to understanding, but especially to infuse the words with the eternal significance which initiates into the mysteries of God, not lawful to be uttered by man, as Saint Paul tells.

Some passages of Scripture, the Fathers affirm, can only be accepted if they are interpreted allegorically. If we remained attached to a literal meaning, with no question of the typology which is all that Fr. Sparks admits, we would, according to Saint Basil the Great, “fall into Jewish myths and old wives’ tales”;² for God would then be a fire, or have wings, a face, ears, seven eyes,³

¹ *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Casimir McCambler, Hellenic College Press, 1987, pp. 35–36.

² *Adversus Eunomium* I, 14 (PG 29, 544 c).

³ Zach. 4:10.

or be a fountain; or He would hate, repent, be jealous, sorrowful, wrathful, or some other grossly material and self-contradictory image.

Three names of authors using allegory for interpretation are proffered by Fr. Sparks: Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher; Philo, an Alexandrian Jew with Platonic influences who died AD 50; and Origen, a heretic condemned by Saints of the Church both for his doctrines and for his many wrong interpretations of Scriptures. The Saints of the Church, especially the Holy Fathers, some of whom we have quoted, who used various methods of interpretation including allegory — which they insisted was necessary — and who did not abandon the historicity of the text or wander into arbitrary and empty imagery, are ignored by Fr. Sparks; worse, they are rejected contemptuously. (“And for mystics! Well . . .”) We have already referred to the “mystic” texts of the Prophet David, of Saint Job, and of the Apostle Paul; but the primary theologians of the Church, Saint John the Evangelist and Theologian, Saint Gregory the Theologian, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Symeon the New Theologian, are termed mystics by Westerners. If the term “mystic” means a man who has attained spiritual vision, from whose eyes the scales have fallen, who has penetrated to the knowledge of the mysteries of God, that definition covers most of the Saints of the Church, if not all. The Orthodox do not call them mystics, but the friends of God, the law-givers and theologians of the Church; for they have ascended the mountain and entered into the darkness of the knowledge of God; their utterances and teachings are given with authority. Yet Fr. Sparks can say on page 834, “This is not to imply that the typology used by writers and teachers in the Church has always perfectly represented these truths. We know that even anciently there was some slippage from typology into allegory and that allegory especially found its way into homilies and devotional teachings.”

Here, apparently, is the explanation of why the commentary in the *Orthodox Study Bible* is lacking in patristic inspiration, with few references to the Fathers and fewer quotations from their writings. Since the Fathers went beyond the letter to the spirit, since they

judged “not according to the appearance but judged righteous judgement,”¹ since they led from earth to Heaven and interpreted the allegorical and symbolic passages of Scripture allegorically and symbolically, their interpretations are considered by the Editors to be flawed (“slippage”), implying that they are the products of unstable minds detached from reality, from God’s revelation, which is His concrete and literal word. At least this is the only way we can understand the absence of the Fathers’ interpretations from the commentary composed by the Editors. The fact that the Editors also printed Fr. Sparks’ article as an appendix — he is one of the four Editors — means that they agree with his policy of disregarding the Fathers and of making slighting references to them. He does not name them openly Fathers but calls them “writers and teachers of the Church”; and in order to belittle and denigrate their interpretations, he holds up as examples interpreters outside of the Church or condemned by it (Plato, Philo, and Origen).

But it is inappropriate to bring forward such writers in order to reject allegorical interpretation, because the Church is not responsible for what outsiders say or how they interpret the Scriptures. It is the inspired teachers of the Church who interpret the Scriptures, because they speak under the enlightening guidance of the Holy Spirit commensurate with their progress in the knowledge of God. They have ascended the holy mountain and entered into the cloud; we are they who stand below, waiting to hear their words conveying the will of God. They know how to interpret each Scripture appropriately, whether literally, typologically, tropologically, anagogically, or allegorically. It behooves us to listen reverently and seek understanding, not to judge or reject or to seek other teachers or to speak from “our own treasury.”

The inspired teachers, the Holy Fathers, did not speak out of their own wisdom or invent new ways of interpretation. With the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they learned from the Apostles and their successors and from the Scriptures themselves; and from them all, the Fathers were taught the use of allegory. Saint Paul

¹ John 7:24.

uses allegory in interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures, e.g., his interpretation of “Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn,”¹ and in many other places. The prophets’ visions are full of allegory. Our Lord and Saviour Himself spoke in parables and gave us allegories of the Kingdom of God.

If the authority of the Fathers is ignored or rejected, as it has been done by the Editors of the *Orthodox Study Bible*, what authority can we have? Modern Biblical criticism and scholarship? We see that it is ideologically atheistic and, consequently, can only lead to Godlessness. Our own judgement and wisdom? But “no prophecy of the Scriptures is of any private interpretation,” according to the Apostle Peter.² Wherefore, the Orthodox have always rested their confidence in the witness and interpretation of the friends of God, the Saints, as Saint Peter teaches, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”³

It is permissible for a commentator, after consulting the inspired interpretations of the Saints, to offer additional information or some supplementary commentary to their interpretation, especially on passages not dealt with by the Fathers, although he must be aware of the relative authority of his interpretations. These insights must be in harmony with the Fathers, in the same Spirit, and certainly not contrary. The articles inserted throughout on “key theological issues” lacked, on the whole, patristic inspiration. The article on the Transfiguration⁴ was good for the most part, but the interpretation in paragraph three of this article gave us pause. “Peter sees this [the Transfiguration] as a sign that the Kingdom has come. Knowing that the Feast of Tabernacles is the feast of the coming Kingdom, he asks to build booths (Matt. 17:4) as was done at that feast to serve as symbols of God’s dwelling among the just in the Kingdom.” The patristic interpretation examines the whole of the passage in context, not just a portion,

¹ I Cor. 9:9.

³ II Peter 1:21.

² II Peter 1:20.

⁴ P. 48.

pointing out that Saint Peter did not know what he was saying in speaking of building three tabernacles, certainly not that he wanted to symbolize something. Christ, the Lord of Glory, did not need an earthly dwelling nor are Moses and Elias on an equal level with Him; therefore, the bright cloud overshadowed Him and He alone was borne witness to by the Father as His beloved Son. Also, the Fathers say, Saint Peter wished to avoid the glorification of Christ, i.e., His crucifixion, by remaining upon the mountain. Saint Peter, "not knowing what he said,"¹ spoke with a human understanding and human feelings, inappropriate to the glory of the Divinity which had been revealed; just as at another time our Lord told him, "thou savourest not the things that be of God but those that be of men,"² when previously Saint Peter sought to dissuade our Saviour from the road to the Crucifixion.

The article "Justification by Faith"³ begins: "For most of Church history, salvation was seen as comprehending all of life: Christians believed in Christ, were baptized, and were nurtured in their salvation in the Church. Key doctrines of the faith centered around the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the atonement." In a rather muddled way, it appears that the article writer wished to say that one is saved by receiving spiritual rebirth in the Church and with the light of the Faith and God's help, walking in the commandments so as to please God all the days of our life. There can be no arguments with that; however, exception must be taken to the words "the atonement." For centuries now in English "the atonement" or "the doctrine of atonement" means exclusively the theological doctrine of the appeasement or satisfaction of God the Father's wrath and justice by the sacrifice of His Son, Who is a substitute sacrifice for us. Founded upon the barbaric laws of vengeance, reparation, blood right, and blood-guilt, this theory, which was developed in Medieval times by Anselm and the Scholastics, is utterly foreign to the Church of Christ. None of the Fathers preach of a literal ransom or appeasement, but rather

¹ Luke 9:33.

² P. 348.

² Cf. Matt. 16:23.

totally reject the fundamental premises of such a doctrine. Saint Gregory the Theologian in his *Homily on Pascha* renders the belief in such a legalistic expiation impossible.¹ Bishop Gustaf Aulen in his book *Christus Victor*,² demonstrates that the ancient Church knew no such doctrine. He, a bishop in the State Church of Sweden, considers this a discrepancy and lack of development on the part of the early Church; nevertheless, we accept his independent witness that such a doctrine of the atonement was foreign to the Fathers.

There is a surprising emphasis on "justification" which is referred to in many notes throughout, usually specified as being "by faith."³ "Justification" is not a term used by the Fathers and Orthodox theology; rather it is comprehended in the term "sanctification" and lacks the pre-eminent position it has in Protestant theology. The term is not even found in some Orthodox theological dictionaries.⁴ The Editors appear to be trying to teach Orthodox theology to the Orthodox using non-Orthodox terms and concepts.

Aside from the paucity of patristic references, the lack of patristic inspiration is evident in the whole approach of the Editors in the commentaries and the articles: calling our Lord simply "Jesus" without any title (Saint Paul usually refers to Him with a title; after all, we are not reporting bare history, as do the Gospels, but are speaking of our Lord, reflecting and commenting on Jesus Christ and His Gospel); referring to the Saints without that title or to the Theotokos simply as Mary (Indeed, in the appended Morning and Evening Prayers, the Mother of God and the Saints are never addressed or even mentioned, except for the solitary

¹ *Homily 45:22, PG 36, 653.*

² Trans. A. G. Herbert, Macmillan, New York, 1961.

² E.g., Mark 10:28; Acts 10:35; Rom. 3:20, 5:1; Gal. 2:16-4:31, 2:17; etc.

⁴ *Polny Pravoslavnyy Bogoslovskiy Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'* ("Complete Orthodox Theological Encyclopedic Dictionary") reprinted in Russia in 1990 from a pre-revolutionary edition; *Dictionary of Orthodox Theology*, George Demetrakopoulos, New York, 1964, and in the index of Timothy Ware's *The Orthodox Church*.

"Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen." at the end.); non-Orthodox terms, e.g., "the season of advent," "justification," "atonement," etc. Furthermore, the Editors, when speaking of Orthodox doctrines and practices, continually refer to the "Orthodox Church." Usually study aids prepared specifically for members of various denominations simply say "the Church" or "we" when referring to their beliefs and usages. This constant qualification gives the impression that the *Orthodox Study Bible* was produced in order to introduce and justify Orthodoxy to non-Orthodox; or that it was written by people who differentiate themselves somehow from the Orthodox Church.

The *Orthodox Study Bible*, as is obvious from the few representative examples, is not patristic either in conception or content, in formulation or expression, in its commentaries or addenda; indeed, it is often not only unpatristic and untraditional, but anti-patristic and anti-traditional. If it is not patristic, to call it Orthodox is a misnomer verging on misrepresentation.

Orthodox commentaries, salted with the savor of the Holy Spirit, are available. In the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers published originally by Eerdmans but now by Zondervan, the First Series has the Gospels of Saints Matthew and John, the Acts, and the Epistles interpreted by Saint John Chrysostom in six volumes. This life-long treasure is available from any religious bookstore. There is the *Commentary of the Gospel of Saint Luke* by Saint Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, from Studion Publishers. Johanna Manley has edited a commentary, *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, Monastery Press, Menlo, California, 1990. She gives the pericope for each day of the year (which comprises almost the entire New Testament) and then places commentaries written by various Fathers and other writers after each one. Each commentary is a quotation and is identified; and although some would object to calling Clement of Alexandria a Father of the Church, at least each portion is accredited to an author and the reader can make his own evaluation. The "Fathers of the Church" series (Catholic University Press) has many individual volumes which are commen-

taries, notably Saint John Chrysostom on Genesis and *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*. A commentary on the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles was translated and is being printed now by Chrysostom Press, P.O. Box 536, House Springs, Missouri, 63051, entitled *The Explanation* by Blessed Theophylact. The first volume was issued in 1992 and is reasonably priced, as is the second volume, which was just published. This verse by verse commentary has been in use in the Orthodox Church for over eight hundred years, a distillation of many Patristic commentaries. The Chrysostom Press is to be congratulated for making this treasure available in English. It is well worth waiting for the remaining volumes to be published, if a verse by verse commentary is desired.

All the above are recommended because, insofar as they are patristic, they speak with the voice of the Church; something which the unsalted *Orthodox Study Bible* cannot claim.

—Haralampos Priestmonk
Holy Transfiguration Monastery



Papyrus fragment of the Gospel of Saint John, chapter eighteen, verses 31–33, dating from the first half of the second century. The discovery of this fragment dispelled theories that the Fourth Gospel was a composition of the latter half of the second century.