



## *Holy Scripture and the Church*

By New Hieromartyr Hilarion (Troitsky),  
Archbishop of Verey

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following article was written in 1914,<sup>1</sup> when St. Hilarion was an archimandrite and a professor of the Imperial Moscow Spiritual Academy. Its message is especially pertinent for our times, when there is widespread confusion and ignorance about the true nature of Christ's Church and about the right approach to Holy Scripture. It can provide invaluable help to Orthodox Christians in understanding their Faith more deeply, and in defending and giving an account of it when confronted with heterodox—especially Protestant—claims. At the same time, it can serve as a wake-up call to Protestants, who separate the Bible from the Church, as well as to those Orthodox Christian scholars who have been unduly influenced by the modern "higher criticism" of the Bible which originated within German Protestantism—the fallacies of which are profoundly demonstrated by our modern-day Orthodox apologist, St. Hilarion.*

**I**n the Church there are no stone tablets with letters inscribed by a Divine finger. The Church has the Holy Scriptures, but He Who established the Church wrote nothing. Only once, in the Gospel of John, was it said of Christ that He stooped down and wrote

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<sup>1</sup>

Archimandrite Hilarion, *Svyashchennoye Pisaniye i Tserkov'* (Holy Scripture and the Church) (Moscow: Printing House of A. I. Snegireva, 1914) (in Russian).

something; but even this one time Christ wrote with his finger and on the ground. It may even be that He did not write any words at all, but merely drew with His finger pointing to the ground. And yet the Church has Scripture, which is called by her Holy and Divine.

Christ did not write anything. It seems that if one reflects enough on this fact, one can somewhat understand the very essence of the work of Christ. As a rule, other religious leaders of humanity, founders of various philosophical schools, have written readily and in abundance, and yet Christ wrote nothing at all. Does not this mean that in its essence the work of Christ has nothing in common with the work of any of the philosophers, teachers, or leading representatives of the intellectual life of mankind? Furthermore, has the Church herself ever viewed her Founder as one of the teachers of mankind? Has she ever considered His teachings as the essence of His work? No, with the utmost exertion of her theological strength, the Christian Church has defended as the greatest religious truth that Christ is the Only-begotten Son of God, One in essence with God the Father, Who became incarnate on earth. For that truth, the greatest Fathers of the Church labored to the point of blood. They were unbending in the battle for this truth. They did not yield a single inch to their adversaries, literarily not even a single *iota*, which in the Greek language differentiates *homoiousion*, "of similar essence": from *homoousion*, "coessential."<sup>2</sup> "Those who call these men [i.e., Arians] Christians are in great and grievous error", writes St. Athanasius the Great.<sup>3</sup> Thus did this adamant of Orthodoxy argue definitively about the impossibility of

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A reference to the Arian controversy. The fourth-century heretic Arius (ca. 250-336) contended that the Son is a created being not of the same essence as the Father, in opposition to the Church's teaching that the Son is uncreated and of the same essence as the Father.—ED.

<sup>3</sup>

St. Athanasius the Great, *Against the Arians*, Discourse I.1.

being a Christian while denying the Incarnation of the Son of God, Who is coessential with God the Father.

But was the Incarnation of the Only-begotten Son of God necessary only in order to write a book and entrust it to mankind? Was it absolutely essential for Him to be the Only-begotten Son of God just to write a book? If the Church insisted with such determination on the Divine dignity of her Founder, then obviously she did not regard writing to be the essence of His work. It was the Incarnation of the Son of God, that was necessary for the *salvation* of mankind, and not a book. No book is able, nor could it ever have been able to save mankind. Christ is not the *Teacher* but precisely the *Savior* of mankind. It was necessary to regenerate human nature, which had become decayed through sin and the beginning of this regeneration was laid by the *very Incarnation* of the Son of God—not by His teaching, not by the books of the New Testament. This truth was expressed with the utmost resolve by Church theologians as early as the second century. As is well known, beginning in the middle of the second century, Marcion<sup>4</sup> and his followers put forward a sharp distinction between the Old and New Testaments. They even taught that the two Testaments originate from different gods. Thus, according to their opinion, the New Testament contains in itself a *new teaching* which is directly opposed to the teaching of the Old Testament and therefore abolishes it. But Christ Himself and the Apostles and the Church from the very beginning recognized the Old Testament Scripture as authoritative. The teaching of Marcion was immediately met with appropriate rejection by Church writers. In the dispute with Marcion, the theologians of the second century showed in detail that the New Testament does not abolish the Old one; on the

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Marcion of Sinope (ca. 85-160): A Gnostic heretic, who proposed rejecting the Old Testament and severely editing the New Testament to remove its dependence on the Old.—ED.

contrary, the whole of the New Testament is already foretold in the Old. The new covenant was "known and preached by the prophets,"<sup>5</sup> writes St. Irenaeus of Lyons.<sup>6</sup> "Read with earnest care that Gospel which has been conveyed to us by the Apostles, and read with earnest care the prophets, and you will find that the whole conduct, and all the doctrine, and all the sufferings of our Lord, were predicted through them."<sup>7</sup> Thus, with regard to teachings, the New Testament does not in essence offer anything *completely new*. Those inclined to look upon Christ primarily as a Teacher would of course be somewhat confused by such arguments and the logical conclusions drawn from them. Nonetheless, the greatest theologian of the second century, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who according to the words of St. Epiphanius of Cyprus<sup>8</sup>, was "anointed with the heavenly favors of the true faith and knowledge,"<sup>9</sup> dispels this confusion. He points out that the purpose and the essence of Christ's coming is not

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* IV.9.3 (Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF] 1, p.472).

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons (+ca. 202): Bishop of Lugdunum (present-day Lyons in France), born probably in Smyrna (today's Izmir in Turkey), Asia Minor. One of the most important Church Fathers, he was best known for his apologetic writings against the doctrines of the Gnostics, where he asserted the Apostolic authority of the Ecumenical Church through the succession of her bishops.—TRANS.

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Op. cit. IV.34.1 (ANF 1, p. 511).

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St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (ca. 310-403): Bishop of Salamis on Cyprus and Metropolitan of the whole island. He is best known for his encyclopedic work *Panarion* (Medicine Chest), in which he gives a recapitulation of the heresies that existed up until that time. -TRANS

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*Panarion* 31.33 (tr. Frank Williams [New York: E. J. Brill, 1987], p. 189).

in a new teaching. He writes: "If a thought of this kind should then suggest itself to you, to say, 'What new thing then did the Lord bring to us by His advent?'—know ye that He brought *all [possible] novelty, by bringing Himself Who had been announced. For this very thing was proclaimed beforehand, that a novelty should come to renew and quicken mankind* [emphasis added]."<sup>10</sup>

The renewal of humanity is therefore the fruit of the very advent, the very Incarnation of the Son of God. St. Irenaeus expressed this idea especially clearly in his recently discovered work, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*: "Others do not ascribe any significance to the descent of the Son of God and the dispensation of His Incarnation, which the Apostles proclaimed and the prophets foretold, that *by it must be accomplished the perfection of our humanity* [emphasis added].... And such men should be counted among those who are lacking in faith."<sup>11</sup> Thus the perfection of our humanity, according to the teaching of St. Irenaeus, must be brought to pass by the dispensation of the Incarnation of the Son of God, not by any kind of doctrine, not by the writing of any book. By taking flesh and becoming man, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, made men partakers of the Divine nature. Assuming human nature in the unity of His Hypostasis, the Son of God by taking flesh became the New Adam, the Progenitor of the new humanity. "Beholding him that was in God's image and likeness fallen through the transgression, Jesus bowed the heavens and came down, and without changing He took up His dwelling in a Virgin womb: that

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<sup>10</sup>

Op. cit. IV.34.1 (Sources Chretiennes [SC] 100:846; cf. ANF 1, p. 511).

<sup>11</sup>

Op. cit. 99 (cf. tr. John Behr, *On the Apostolic Preaching* [Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997], pp. 100-101)

thereby He might fashion corrupt Adam anew."<sup>12</sup> St. Irenaeus says that the Son of the Most High became the Son of man in order to make man a son of God.<sup>13</sup> In the new humanity, built upon the foundation of the Incarnation of the Son of God, the unity of our human nature, broken by sin, is restored. Christ Himself named this new humanity the *Church*. In Chapter 16 of the Gospel of St. Matthew, we read how the Apostle Peter on behalf of all the Apostles confessed the truth of the Incarnation of the Only-begotten Son of God. And Christ responded to him: *Upon this rock* (obviously meaning, upon the Incarnation, upon the fact that He is the Son of the Living God) *I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Matt. 16:16-18). When Christ parted with and said farewell to His disciples, He promised to send them another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Who would instruct them, would guide them into all truth, and Who would abide with them forever (cf. John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13). This Holy Spirit is continually spoken about in Holy Scripture: that He gives life to the Church, which is the Body of Christ. The Spirit of God lives in the members of the Church (cf. Rom. 8:9, 11, 23, 26; II Tim. 1:14; I Pet. 4:14) and guides them (cf. Rom. 8:14). The Holy Spirit is the single source of all the spiritual gifts which are bestowed upon the members of the Church (cf. I Cor. 12:4-11). The Church as a whole, as well as in her individual members, lives, thinks and progresses unto perfection through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is solely through each man's bond with the Church that he receives all the means necessary for his moral regeneration.

Both Holy Scripture and the mind of the Church compel us to conceive of the meaning and essence of the work of Christ in this

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Service of the Nativity of Christ, Lity, Sticheron 4, in the *Festal Menaion* (tr. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware [South

<sup>13</sup> *Against Heresies* III.10.2.

way: it is the creating of the Church, the new humanity. Understood in this way, the work of Christ is truly unique; it towers infinitely above every human achievement. Often today parallels to the teaching of Christ are found in pagan literature, in Buddhism, in the Talmud, in Babylon, and in Egypt. However, for those who see Christ as the incarnate Son of God, any kind of talk about historical "influences" on Christianity is devoid of any meaning. The essence of the work of Christ is not in His teaching; thus it is obvious nonsense and even blasphemy to place Christ in the category of teachers and wise men along with the Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, and others. Christ brought about man's participation in the Divine nature; He infused into human nature new powers of grace; He established the Church; He sent down the Holy Spirit. None of this could have been done by any wise *man*, no matter how lofty the truths he preached, no matter how intelligent and great the books he wrote. "Our constant Columbus of every already-discovered America" (as Leo Tolstoy<sup>14</sup> was aptly called by Vladimir Soloviev<sup>15</sup>) wrote in the preface to the Geneva edition of his *Brief Exposition of the Gospel*: "I consider Christianity to be a teaching that gives meaning to life ... and thus it makes absolutely no difference

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Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910): A noted Russian writer and thinker, who besides his immense literary work, is also known for his peculiar religious views, where he rejected any theological and metaphysical grounds for Christianity, denigrating it to the level of a mere social and moral system. In his *Brief Exposition of the Gospel*, published in 1896, Tolstoy excerpted from the Gospels only the words of Christ, and only those that he himself felt were authentic. It is devoid of any references to Christ's Divinity or to anything miraculous. Tolstoy attracted numerous followers, who created a religion based on his teachings.—TRANS. and ED.

<sup>15</sup>

Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900): A Russian philosopher, famous for his idealistic stands and syncretistic views on religion, and for being a founder of the heresy of Sophiology.—TRANS. and ED.

to me whether Jesus Christ was God or not."<sup>16</sup> But the Church has understood that to look at Christianity in this way is to bring it completely to nothing. It is not enough to show man the meaning of life. He must be given strength for life. Man himself must be re-created. Mankind is saved only through the Incarnation of the Son of God and through His creation—the Church.

The Church's understanding of the work of Christ, indicated above in general outline, should serve as the only starting point for all of our discussion of Holy Scripture.

Christ did not write ... His coming to earth had nothing at all to do with writing. The essence of His work was neither teaching nor the writing of books, such as a complete course of Christian dogmatics. No, His work was not literary.

But if this is so, then what is Holy Scripture?

Christ founded the Church. The Church existed even when there was not yet a single book of New Testament Scripture. The books of the New Testament were written by the Apostles later, over the course of more than half a century after the beginning of the historical existence of the Church. In the books written by them, the Apostles left behind testimony of their oral preaching of the Gospel. They wrote for a Church already in existence, and entrusted their books to the Church to serve as perpetual edification. It is evident that the books of Holy Scripture do not constitute the essence of Christianity, since Christianity itself is not a teaching but a *new life*, established in mankind by the Holy Spirit on the basis of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Thus, it would not be impertinent to say that it is not by Holy Scripture, as a book, that man is saved, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who lives in the Church. The Church guides people to perfection. In the Church there are also other ways, other means to that effect, besides the books of Holy Scripture. St. Irenaeus of Lyons writes: "Many nations of those

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<sup>16</sup> Op. cit. (Geneva, 1890), pp. 9, 11.

barbarians who believe in Christ" have "salvation written in their hearts by the Spirit, without paper or ink, carefully preserving the ancient tradition.... Those who, in the absence of written documents, have believed this faith, are barbarians, so far as regards our language; but as regards doctrine, manner, and tenor of life, they are, because of faith, very wise indeed; and they do please God, ordering their conversation in all righteousness, chastity, and wisdom."<sup>17</sup>

In order to become a follower of a particular philosophical school it is necessary to assimilate the philosophical works by the father of that school. But is it sufficient to know the New Testament in order to become a Christian? Would this knowledge be enough for salvation? Certainly not. It is possible to know the entire New Testament by heart, it is possible to know perfectly the entire teaching of the New Testament, and still be very, very far from salvation. For salvation it is necessary to be *added* to the Church, just as it is said in the Book of Acts that those who were being saved were added to the Church (cf. Acts 2:47; 5:13-14). This was when there were no Scriptures, but there was the Church, and there were those who were being saved. Why was it essential to be added to the Church? It is because special grace-bearing power is needed for salvation, and this power can only be possessed by those who participate in the life of the Church, in the life of the single and indivisible Body of Christ. The grace-filled power of the Holy Spirit acts in the Church in many different ways: in the Mysteries and rites of the Church, in common prayer and mutual love, in church services; and, as the divinely inspired Word of God, it also operates through the books of Holy Scripture. Here we are coming close to the definition of Holy Scripture. The books of Holy Scripture are one of the means in the Church through which the grace-filled power of God acts upon people. The Spirit of God gives life only to the body

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<sup>17</sup> *Against Heresies* III.4.2 (ANF 1, p. 417).

of the Church, and therefore Holy Scripture can have meaning and significance only within the Church. "Flee to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord's Scriptures. For the Church has been planted [like a Paradise] in this world; therefore says the Spirit of God, '*Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat*' (Gen. 2:16), that is, Eat ye from every Scripture of the Lord."<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Holy Scripture is one of the manifestations of the common grace-filled life of the Church. Holy Scripture is the property of the Church, precious and priceless, but precisely the Church's property. Holy Scripture cannot be torn away from the overall life of the Church. Only the Church gives meaning to the existence of Scripture. Holy Scripture is not an independent quantity; it cannot be considered a law given to the Church that she can fulfill and from which she can deviate. Holy Scripture arose in the midst of the Church and for the sake of the Church. The Church possesses Holy Scripture and uses it for the benefit of her members.

Our Orthodox churches, it would seem, graphically preach the significance of Scripture in the Church. The Gospel Book lies on the altar table with other holy liturgical objects, with the "Reserved Gifts" and the "Presanctified Lambs." The "Apostol"<sup>19</sup> is kept together with the other liturgical books. In the ancient Church, the Gospel Book was usually kept inside the *skevophylakion*, equivalent to our vestry,<sup>20</sup> from which it was only taken out for public reading during the Divine services. If Christianity were something like a

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* V.20.2 (ANF 1, p. 548).

<sup>19</sup>

Apostol: A single volume containing the Acts of the Apostles and the Apostolic Epistles, which is used in the services of the Orthodox Church.—ED.

<sup>20</sup>

Vestry: A separate place inside the church building (often within the altar space itself) where the liturgical vessels and priestly vestments are kept.—TRANS

philosophical school, then at our Church meetings we would of course devote ourselves only to studying and interpreting the New Testament; but that is not the case with us. Christianity is not a school, and for us the reading of Holy Scripture represents only one of the elements of the public Divine services. In the deep river of grace-filled Church life, Holy Scripture is but one current.

Such discussions may appear to be disparaging of Holy Scripture. But who more than Chrysostom<sup>21</sup> has spoken about the benefit and grandeur of Holy Scripture? Was it not he who called the reading of Scripture conversation with God? Was it not for him that Divine Scripture was a spiritual garden and a paradise of sweetness?<sup>22</sup> However, we find a highly remarkable discourse at the beginning of St. John Chrysostom's commentary on St. Matthew the Evangelist:

*"It would be indeed meet for us not at all to require the aid of the written word, but to exhibit a life so pure, that the grace of the Spirit should be instead of books to our souls, and that as these are inscribed with ink, even so should our hearts be with the Spirit. But, since we have utterly put away from us this grace, come, let us at any rate embrace the second best course.*

*For that the former was better, God hath made manifest, both by His words and by His doings, since unto Noah, and unto Abraham, and unto his offspring, and unto*

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<sup>21</sup>

St. John Chrysostom (347-407): Archbishop of Constantinople. One of the most renowned Church authors, extending his influence through the ages by way of his abundant theological and pastoral writings. The most widely used text of the Divine Liturgy used within the Orthodox Church is ascribed to him.—TRANS.

<sup>22</sup>

Cf. "Homily on the Benefit of Reading Holy Scripture," *Works*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg Spiritual Academy), p. 74 (in Russian).

*Job, and unto Moses too, He discoursed not by writings, but Himself by Himself, finding their mind pure. But after the whole people of the Hebrews had fallen into the very pit of wickedness, then and thereafter was a written word, and tables, and the admonition which is given by these.*

*And this one may perceive was the case, not of the saints in the Old Testament only, but also of those in the New. For neither to the Apostles did God give anything in writing, but instead of written words He promised that He would give them the grace of the Spirit: for He, saith our Lord, shall bring all things to your remembrance (John 14:26). And that thou mayest learn that this was far better, hear what He saith by the Prophet: I will make a new covenant with you, putting my laws into their mind, and in their heart I will write them, and, they shall be all taught of God (cf. Jer. 31:33 LXX; John 6:45). And Paul too, pointing out the same superiority, said that they had received a law not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart (II Cor. 3:3).*

*But since in process of time they made shipwreck, some with regard to doctrines, others as to life and manners, there was again need that they should be put in remembrance by the written word.*

*Reflect then how great an evil it is for us, who ought to live so purely as not even to need written words, but to yield up our hearts, as books, to the Spirit; now that we have lost that honor, and are come to have need of these, to fail again in duly employing even this second remedy. For if it be a blame to stand in need of written words, and not to have brought down on ourselves the grace of the Spirit; consider how heavy the charge of not choosing to profit even after this assistance, but rather treating what is written with neglect, as if it were cast forth without purpose, and at random, and so bringing*

*down upon ourselves our punishment with increase.*"<sup>23</sup>

Here St. John Chrysostom defends the necessity of studying Holy Scripture, but at the same time he says that if things were the way they should be, we would not need Holy Scripture; that with a pure life, instead of books, grace would serve the soul, and that this path of spiritual enlightenment is higher. God spoke with the patriarchs and the apostles without the assistance of Scripture. The need for Holy Scripture arose when some turned aside from true doctrine and others from purity of life. Scripture is then a second remedy. We even deserve reproach for being in need of Scripture. It is clear first of all that St. John Chrysostom does not identify Holy Scripture with Christianity. He calls Scripture an aid, a remedy. It is evident that religious life can exist apart from Holy Scripture and without Holy Scripture, which is only one of the aids to that life. The life of the soul being saved is nourished by the Divine Spirit, within the Church, of course. It is by the will of the Divine Spirit that, for the instruction of men, He allowed the instrument of Scripture, of books, especially after the soul stopped being able to perceive the direct action of the Spirit.

It is highly remarkable that the argument made by St. John Chrysostom is repeated almost word for word by St. Isidore of Pelusium<sup>24</sup> in his letter to Deacon Isidore. In Chrysostom's discourse St. Isidore saw a sea surpassing an abundance of ideas. Isidore himself was completely delighted by Chrysostom's arguments, though he admitted that at first glance they might seem somewhat

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<sup>23</sup>

St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew 1.1-1.10* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF] 1.10, p. 1).

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St. Isidore of Pelusium (+ca. 436): An ascetic author in the tradition of the Desert Fathers, who lived in a monastery near the Egyptian town of Pelusium.—TRANS.

incredible or even provocative. "You may find it hard to believe", writes St. Isidore, "but after listening to it carefully with a good deal of thought, you will not only marvel over it but could even start applauding. And what is it, then, that thing which at first seems unlikely, and after a while not only becomes amazing, but worthy of applause too? I will explain to you in few words this sea which surpasses an abundance of ideas." Then St. Isidore repeats St. John Chrysostom's argument.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the great ascetic and great authority on questions of the spiritual life and salvation, Abba Isaac the Syrian,<sup>26</sup> former bishop of the Christ-loving city of Nineveh, testifies that for a man who is attaining perfection, who is at the higher levels of the contemplative ascetic life, Holy Scripture no longer holds the same significance as it does for people who have not yet attained an advanced state of perfection. "Until man has received the Comforter, he requires the Divine Scriptures to imprint the memory of good in his heart, to keep his striving for good constantly renewed by continual reading, and to preserve his soul from the subtleties of the ways of sin; for he has not yet acquired the power of the Spirit that drives away that delusion which takes soul-profitable recollections captive and makes a man cold through the distraction of his intellect. When the power of the Spirit has penetrated the [noetic] powers of the active soul, then in place of the law of the Scriptures, the commandments of the Spirit take root in his heart, and a man is secretly taught by the Spirit and needs no help from sensory matter. For, so long as it is from matter that the

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<sup>25</sup> *Letters* 3.106, in *Works*, part 2 (Moscow, 1860), pp. 158-60 (in Russian).

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St. Isaac the Syrian (+ca. 700): Bishop of Nineveh (near present Mosul in Iraq), who later went into a life of seclusion as a hermit. He is best known for his profound homilies on the inner spiritual life.—TRANS.

heart has its teaching, error and forgetfulness straightway follow the lesson; but when teaching comes from the Spirit, its memory is kept inviolate."<sup>27</sup> Here we can note the idea held in common with Chrysostom that Scripture is an aid to spiritual life. Reading Scripture renews in the soul its striving for the good. But the life of the soul is not completely encompassed by Scripture. This is a life of grace, and grace is given to the soul certainly not by the book of Holy Scripture, but by the Holy Spirit sent down upon the Church.

These arguments quoted by great Fathers of the Church may at first glance appear provocative, but if we ponder them and place them into the general system of the worldview of the Orthodox Church, then it is impossible not to agree that in them there is a sea surpassing all abundance of ideas. Here we are able to see the Church's appraisal of Scripture. These words could be spoken only by people living completely within the Church, who have fully assimilated the religious ideal of the Church, which consists not in a new academic teaching, but in a new life of saved humanity, built by the Holy Spirit upon the foundation of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

But, without a doubt, in the patristic ideas cited here there is an appraisal of Scripture to which we are unaccustomed. This appraisal of Scripture is understandable only to those who consciously live purely by the religious ideal. The religious ideal of the Church, the ideal of deification, of which our divine services are full, is, in the contemporary consciousness, the realm of very few.

Perhaps the saddest thing in our times is the distortion of Christ and the Church. Christianity is seen not as the new life of saved humanity, united in the Church, but as the sum of certain theoretical and moral positions. They have begun now to talk too much and too often about Christian teachings and have begun to forget about Church life. At the same time they have also begun to

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<sup>27</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies* 6 (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), p. 58.

forget that the most important part of Christ's work is His Incarnation. They have begun to regard Christ more as a wise teacher, while the truth of His Divine Sonship has receded into the background. To be a teacher it is not necessary to be the Only-begotten Son of God, One in essence with God the Father. They are willing to recognize as Christians not only the Arians, but even those who, like the ancient Jews, regard Christ as the ordinary son of a Nazareth carpenter, or at best as a brilliant religious teacher like the Buddha, Confucius, and others. Among us here [in Russia], even Leo Tolstoy has come to be considered a Christian, and what is more, not an ordinary one but a "true Christian." To the contemporary religious consciousness, it is only the teaching of Christ that is necessary and understandable, but there is no need for Christ the God-man and the new life brought down to earth by Him, which has been preserved in the one grace-filled organism of the Church. In the contemporary religious consciousness, Christ has been brought down from His throne at the right hand of God the Father and placed in a preacher's pulpit.

If we have before us a teacher, then every word of his, every literary text in which his teaching is reflected in any way, must be accorded special significance. Something similar has happened with Holy Scripture. It was accorded special significance in itself and independently of the Church when the bright ideal of the Church grew dim. Holy Scripture has become the object of special attention and many-sided study since the time of the German Reformation, when the individual person was put in place of the Church and the door to rationalism was opened wide thus deadening any authentic Church life. Having killed all Church life, Protestantism has in principle proceeded solely under the banner of Holy Scripture, proclaiming each letter to be divinely inspired. Even today Protestantism comes out with speeches about special reverence for Holy Scripture, although even for pastors faith in the divinity of Christ is no longer considered obligatory, as has been shown in

recent years by the case of Pastor Jatho<sup>28</sup> - that German Tolstoy in pastor's garb- as well as the sympathy of pastors for the new mythologists led by Arthur Drews,<sup>29</sup> who claim that Christ as a historical person never existed at all. Having lost the living Christ and authentic Church life, the Protestants began worshiping the book of the New Testament as if it were some sort of fetish. Go into a Protestant church of the extreme Protestant sects, and you will see rows of pews facing a pulpit with a Bible on it. In short, if you take the icon away from any classroom or auditorium,<sup>30</sup> what you have is a Protestant church. For the Protestants it is as if the Gospel were the work of Christ the Teacher, which has to be studied in order to be a Christian. Thus, Protestantism tries to replace the entire deep river of grace-filled Church life with but a single current, taken separately and in isolation. Having rebelled against the pope (a man), the Protestants have made the Bible into a "paper pope" and the latter adulation is more bitter than the first.

It appears that Holy Scripture is valued more highly by those who have lost the Church, but this is only in appearance.

Holy Scripture should be regarded as one of the manifestations of the grace-filled life of the Church. But those who are not within the Church do not have this grace-filled life at all. All

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Carl Jatho (1851-1913): A Lutheran pastor in Cologne, Germany, whose controversial preaching was extremely unconventional, abandoning the basic essentials of Christianity. He was accused of heresy and removed from office in 1911.—ED.

<sup>29</sup>

Arthur Drews (1865-1935): A German philosopher and writer, known for his opinions that Jesus Christ as a historical person never existed in the world, and therefore His life described in the Gospels is no more than a myth.—TRANS.

<sup>30</sup>

In pre-Revolutionary Russia it was customary for each classroom in public school to contain an icon of Christ.—TRANS.

the discourse by Protestants and sectarians on the Divine inspiration of Holy Scripture is no more than idle talk, which is unclear and highly dubious even to them. Living spiritual power cannot be magically attached to dead, lifeless things. For example, there are ardent lovers of ancient icons, who with regard to religion are nihilists. Is it possible then that the icons of their collections stay the same as they were: ancient and honored, reverently venerated and kissed in majestic ancient churches? The Spirit breathes where He wills. He gives life to the one Body of Christ. What kind of Divine inspiration can there be outside the Church, without the Spirit of God? If the grace-filled aspect of Holy Scripture is obliterated outside the Church, then what remains? We are left with the Bible, books, a literary work, a literary memorial. In the Church Holy Scripture is not everything, but outside the Church there is no Holy Scripture, no Word of God at all; what remains of Holy Scripture is only the books. Very often people outside of the Church talk about their reverence for Holy Scripture and accuse the Church of disdain. Such talk, however, represents nothing but self-deception and sad misunderstanding. We can think rightly about Holy Scripture only by beginning with the idea of the Church, and we can correctly use Scripture for our own benefit only by *living within the Church*. Without the Church, without Church life, Christianity itself dissolves into nothing,<sup>31</sup> and reading literary monuments cannot replace a dead life.

In defining the essence of Holy Scripture, we can now formulate the following proposition:

***Holy Scripture is one of the aspects of the common grace-filled life of the Church, and outside the Church***

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For more details on this subject see: Holy New Martyr Ilarion (Troitsky), *Christianity or the Church?* (Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1985, reprint 1997) (in English).—ED.

***there cannot be any Holy Scripture in the true sense of the word.***

If we establish this view of Holy Scripture, then we ought to express our disapproval of the outlook which prevails even in our [Orthodox] academic theology, according to which Holy Scripture is first and foremost a source of Church doctrine. It must be admitted that the question of the sources of doctrine is in an almost hopeless state in our philosophizing dogmatics. Two sources of doctrine are usually spoken of: Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition. Both of these source are necessary, although preference is often given to Holy Scripture. In disputes with sectarians and Protestants, much effort is made to prove that Holy Scripture alone is insufficient, that *besides* Scripture Holy Tradition is also needed. But if Holy Scripture is a source of doctrine, how do we extract the doctrine contained within this source? It is enough to remember Arianism and the First Ecumenical Council in order to realize that every heresy is based on Scripture. The question clearly arises: "How are we to understand Scripture so as to obtain from it *true* doctrine?" "It has to be understood in accordance with Tradition" they respond to us. "Wonderful! And what sort of tradition should we accept?" "That which does not contradict Scripture." What do we end up with? Scripture must be interpreted in accordance with Tradition, and Tradition must be verified by Scripture. We end up with circular logic, *idem per idem*,<sup>32</sup> or, translated somewhat loosely into Russian, the story of the white calf.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>

Literally, "the same through the same." A kind of illustration that makes no re addition to the determination of a question under consideration.—ED

<sup>33</sup>

"Story of the white calf": A Russian saying that usually designates the impossibility of drawing a logical conclusion from something.—TRANS.

Church doctrine has but one Source: the Holy Spirit, Who lives within the Church, Whom Christ promised would guide the Church *into all truth* ( John 16:13). Thus, the Church possesses true doctrine not because she draws it from Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, but only because she is in fact the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth, guided by the Holy Spirit. It is necessary to speak only about the Church. Both Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition stand or fall together with the Church. A. S. Khomiakov<sup>34</sup> wrote well in his *Treatise on the Catechetical Exposition of the Teaching on the Church*: "The Spirit of God, alive in the Church, guiding her and making her wise, is manifested in her in multiple forms: in Scripture, in Tradition, and in works; for the Church, performing the works of God, is the Church that preserves Tradition and wrote the Scripture. It is neither individuals nor a multitude of individuals in the Church that preserves Tradition and wrote Scripture, but the Spirit of God, alive in the sum of the Church. Therefore it is impossible and improper to search for the foundations of Tradition in Scripture, or for proofs of Scripture in Tradition, or for justifications of Scripture and Tradition in works. To one who lives outside of the Church neither Scripture, nor Tradition, nor works are comprehensible. To one, however, who remains within the Church and who is in communion with the Spirit of the Church, their unity is evident by the grace that lives in her."<sup>35</sup>

An excellent and profound discussion on this same subject can be read also in the *Epistle of the Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic*

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Alexei Khomiakov (1804-1860): A Russian religious philosopher and poet, belonging to the movement of the Slavophiles. His most important works focus on Orthodox ecclesiology, where he defends the catholicity and unity of the Church.—TRANS.

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*The Church is One* 5 (tr. Robert Bird, *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, eds. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird [Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne Books, 1998], pp. 34-35).

*Church on the Orthodox Faith*.<sup>36</sup> "Therefore the witness of the Catholic Church is, we believe, not inferior in authority to that of Divine Scripture. For one and the same Holy Spirit being the author of both, it is quite the same to be taught by Scripture and by the Catholic Church. Moreover, when anyone speaks from himself, he is liable to err, to deceive and be deceived. But for the Catholic Church, as never having spoken or speaking from herself, but from the Spirit of God—Who, being her teacher, makes her unfailingly rich forever—it is impossible to err in any way, or to deceive at all or be deceived; but like Divine Scripture, she is infallible and has perpetual authority."<sup>37</sup>

By living and being instructed within the Church, within which the Apostolic oral preaching is continued, a person is able to learn the dogmas of Christian Faith from the Ecumenical Church, and this is *so not because the Church herself draws her dogmas from Scripture, but because she possesses them innately*; if she, deliberating on a certain dogma, cites specific passages from the Bible, *this is not done in order to deduce her dogmas*, but solely for their confirmation. Therefore, *whoever finds his faith upon Scripture alone, does not achieve the fullness of Faith and does not know its properties*.

In complete accord with this authoritative statement, *we can reduce everything to faith in the Church*. If a man believes in the Church, then for him the Holy Scripture receives its proper significance.

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<sup>36</sup>

Also known as *The Confession of Dositheus*, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and approved by the Council of Jerusalem of 1672. It was sent in 1723 to Russia and England.—Ed.

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Op. cit., Decree 2 (tr. J. N. and W. B. Robertson, revised; in eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions of Faiths in the Christian Tradition, Volume I: Early, Eastern, and Medieval* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003], p. 616).

However, those who have not attained the fullness of faith, who do not know its attributes, who do not understand that it is *impossible* to conceive of Christianity other than as the Church—such men crudely and blasphemously reject faith in the Church. Leo Tolstoy acted in this way and wrote in the introduction to his *Brief Exposition of the Gospel*: "Stating that the expression of a particular doctrine is a Divine expression of the Holy Spirit is the highest degree of pride and stupidity. It is the highest degree of pride since there is nothing more haughty than to say that the words I have pronounced were uttered by God Himself through me; and it is the highest degree of stupidity because there is nothing more stupid than to respond to someone's claim that God Himself speaks through his mouth by saying, 'No, it is not through your mouth, but through my mouth that God speaks, and He says the complete opposite of what your God says.' Meanwhile, this is just what all the councils, all the creeds, and all the churches say, and from this there ensues and has ensued all the evil that has been committed and is being committed in the world in the name of faith."<sup>38</sup> These crude words of the dilettante "true Christian" and "great teacher" are liable to be repeated in one form or another by many people. Faith in the Church is a *podvig*,<sup>39</sup> and not an easy one, and sometimes it is beyond the strength of our contemporaries. Living within the Church means, first of all, to love, to live by love; and to live by love means to struggle against sinful self-love, from which people suffer a great deal. In particular, faith in the Church is a *podvig* for the mind, because the Church demands its submission. To make one's reason submit to the Church is especially difficult, because this submission unfailingly affects one's whole life. With regard to the Church, the *podvig* of the mind is connected with the *podvig* of the

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<sup>38</sup>

Op. cit. (Geneva, 1890), pp. 14-15.

<sup>39</sup>

*Podvig*: An ascetic feat, spiritual labor or, simply, Christian struggle.—ED.

will. Imagine for a moment that people completely submit to the Church. How many idols, how many gods and graven images must they cast down? Not only the Dnieper,<sup>40</sup> but an entire sea would be needed to sink all those idols. And yet, not even one *podvig* of the mind comes easily to a man whose reason makes him proud. Bishop Theophan the Recluse<sup>41</sup> says: "It is remarkable how Wisdom calls to herself the foolish: *Whoso is foolish, let him turn aside to me* (Prov. 9:4). Accordingly, the clever are barred from entering into the House of Wisdom, or the Holy Church. One must lay aside every kind of cleverness at the very entrance of this House. On the other hand, if all wisdom and knowledge are to be found within the House of Wisdom, then outside this House, outside the Holy Church, only foolishness, ignorance and blindness prevail. How wondrous is that which God has established! When you enter the Church, put aside your own mind, and you will become truly wise; cast away your self-centered activity, and you will become truly active; renounce your own self, and you will truly become master over yourself. Ah, if only the world could grasp this wisdom! But this is hidden from it. Not understanding the wisdom of God, the world clamors against it, and the world keeps these senseless sensible ones in their blindness."

Today there are many such "senseless sensible ones", since mankind has become too "clever" and is trying to become even more clever. Mankind's intellect is becoming ever more boastful. However, pride and boastfulness of any kind are incompatible with

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An allusion to the Baptism of the Russian lands (988) under Grand Prince Vladimir (958-1015), when the people of the capital Kiev were baptized in the waters of the river Dnieper, into which the deposed statue of Perun, the supreme pagan god of the previous Slavic religion, was thrown.—TRANS.

41

St. Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894): Russian Orthodox Bishop of Tambov, renowned for his numerous theological and pastoral writings. -TRANS.

the Church. Even in the time of the early Church, the connection linking pride with apostasy and opposition toward the Church was noted. "Heresies both have been committed and continue being committed, because a mind that is perverted does not have peace,"<sup>42</sup> writes St. Cyprian of Carthage.<sup>43</sup> "The proud and willfully disobedient ... either depart from the Church or act against the Church."<sup>44</sup>

It is precisely this anti-Church and anti-Christian mentality which underlies the separating of Holy Scripture from the Church. The Church is denied while Holy Scripture is acknowledged. The Church is reviled while Holy Scripture is extolled. Our thesis, that Holy Scripture can only exist within the Church and cannot exist outside of her, deserves to be addressed in greater detail, so that truth may prevail against error and misunderstanding. Drawing from the idea of the Church, we have reflected on the very essence of Scripture. This same idea defines us and our attitude toward Holy Scripture. Only by steadfastly keeping to the idea of the Church will we be able to repel the false words of those who divide the indivisible, separating Holy Scripture from the Church.

Today we ever more frequently run up against this kind of reasoning: "We read such and such in Holy Scripture. The Church

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42

St. Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* 10 (tr. Allen Brent, *On the Church: Select Treatises*, Popular Patristics Series [PPS] 32 [Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006], p. 161).

43

St. Cyprian of Carthage (+258): Bishop of Carthage in North Africa (near present Tunis). He is an important Father of the Church, well known for his writings on the sacramental life and the unity of the Church. He died as a martyr during the persecution of Christians under Roman Emperor Valerian.—TRANS.

44

Idem, *Letter* 59.7 (cf. tr. Allen Brent, *On the Church: Select Letters*, PPS 33 [Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006], pp. 151-52).

teaches differently. So the Church is wrong." All kinds of sectarians monotonously chant in this manner *ad nauseam*. There are even those who echo these ideas while calling themselves Christians, that is, they have adopted incomprehensible arrogance in their attitude toward the Church, placing themselves far above her. Holding the point of view described above regarding the sources of doctrine, it is not easy to respond properly. Let us consider, for example, the issue of the veneration of icons. A sectarian points out the prohibition of images in the Old Testament (cf. Ex. 20:4), or the words of Christ about spiritual worship (cf. John 4:23). For him icons are a contradiction. Do we respond by saying that the veneration of icons is based on Tradition? But Tradition is to be accepted only when it does not contradict Scripture. References, for example, to the Cherubim on the curtain of the Old Testament temple are not very convincing. Thus, the dispute continues without end and to no avail because the missionaries themselves adopt the sectarian perspective, and that perspective by its very essence leads only to a battle of words, but not to the truth. In contrast, drawing from the idea of the Church, we do not even need to argue on the basis of Scripture; for us, our faith in the Church is enough. The fruitlessness of disputes "from the Scripture" was recognized long ago by Tertullian,<sup>45</sup> who said that such arguments could only make your stomach and brain ill or cause you to lose your voice, falling finally into rabid fury from the blasphemies of heretics.<sup>46</sup> He asserts that it is not worth appealing to Scripture, since victory is either unlikely or completely impossible.<sup>47</sup> But a person of the Church can boldly

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Tertullian (ca. 160-220): An important Christian author of North African origin known for his extensive works on many subjects of theology and moral life.- Trans.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Prescription Against Heretics* 17.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 19.

reiterate these words, since to him "it is quite the same to be taught by Scripture and by the Catholic Church."<sup>48</sup>

All statements about contradictions between the Church and Holy Scripture are absolutely false and godless at their very root. Through the Holy Apostles, the Holy Spirit wrote Holy Scripture for the Church; and according to the unfailing promise of the Savior, the same Holy Spirit instructs the Church in all truth. The Holy Spirit is one and indivisible, eternal and unchangeable. He is the Spirit of Truth. How could it be that in Holy Scripture He says one thing while in the teaching and life of the Church He says another? Can it be to no purpose that the council of the Apostles, described in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, as well as all successive councils, began their decisions with the words *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us* (Acts 15:28)? To allow the possibility of contradiction between the Church and the Holy Scripture means to speak of self-contradiction by the Holy Spirit, which truly represents blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Only the devil could suggest the blasphemous idea of the Holy Spirit contradicting Himself, and it is impossible not to agree with the powerful and sharp but also wise and equitable words of St. Vincent of Lerins:<sup>49</sup> "When we find people alleging passages from the Apostles or Prophets against the Catholic Faith [openly alleging disagreement between the Church and the Holy Scripture], we may be assured beyond doubt that the devil speaks through their mouths:"<sup>50</sup> This also reminds us of the verse from the Epistle to the

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<sup>48</sup> See above, note 36.

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St. Vincent of Lerins (+445): A Church author who lived in a monastery on the island of Lerins (south of France), best known for his writings which explain the concept of Catholicity as applied to the Church. -TRANS.

<sup>50</sup> *Commonitory* 26.68 (NPNF 2.11, p. 151).

Hebrews: *Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God... and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?* (Heb. 10:29).

If by their very essence the Church and Holy Scripture cannot contradict each other, then it necessarily follows that, if the teaching of the Church seems to us to contradict Holy Scripture, it simply means that we have misunderstood either the Church teaching or Holy Scripture, or even both of them at the same time. Instead of denying and condemning Church teachings through our arrogant folly, our task is only to try to understand better both Holy Scripture and the teaching of the Church, and to comprehend the harmony between them. This is what the Holy Fathers of the Church did during the Ecumenical Councils. For example, the Arians at the First Ecumenical Council cited many passages from Holy Scripture that, according to their opinion, contradicted the truth of coessentiality, but the Fathers simply showed how all those passages should be understood so that they do not contradict the truth of the Church. In just the same way the Sixth Ecumenical Council worked a great deal on the interpretation of the Gospel narrative of the "Agony in the Garden." It is completely clear that for a man of the Church no passage of Holy Scripture may contradict Church teaching, and thus the teaching of the Church is the criterion for the true understanding of Scripture.

The necessity of a Church approach to Scripture is revealed with particular clarity if we thoroughly examine the extreme lie inscribed on the banner of Protestantism, and then look at every kind of sectarianism and, generally speaking, human light-mindedness, in addition to freethinking, which is indissolubly connected to the latter. In principle Protestantism has rejected the necessity of Church standards in interpreting Scripture. I say "in principle" since in actual fact standards have been invented in the form of newly fabricated sectarian creeds. If Church standards are rejected, then man is left alone with Scripture, and in interpreting Scripture, each one is to be guided by his own so-called common

sense, having put on his head beforehand the tiara of an infallible pope.

But is it reliable to be guided by one's common sense in interpreting Holy Scripture? Who has not encountered situations where the common sense of different people evaluate one and the same occurrence differently? In interpreting the Gospel, Tolstoy often refers to common sense. But you would need the naivete and obstinacy of that uncommonly arrogant man to identify as psychologically abnormal all those who cannot and do not accept his interpretations, which are based on common sense. But I think—and it is perhaps indisputable—that in understanding and interpreting Holy Scripture, our sense, left to itself, can in no way be "common." After all, he who observes his own moral life and has the courage to tell himself the bitter truth will no doubt notice how at times our mind is weighed down by the pressure of the passions and how we sometimes timidly and sometimes daringly and brazenly give excuses for our weak will. We usually agree with each other more or less easily on issues that do not affect our lives or that do not concern the orientation of our will. That is why in the field of mathematics there are so many universally recognized and uncontested truths. In fact, why should we not recognize that the sum of the angles in a triangle is always  $180^\circ$ , or that the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides, as is affirmed by Pythagoras' theorem? Is there any reason not to accept these mathematical truths? Accepting them does not obligate me to do anything. The same can also be said about other such so-called scientific truths. "Why should I contend here, why break a spear over it? Isn't it all the same to me whether the learned specialists tell me, for example, that matter is built out of Mendeleev's atoms or out of electrons and ions; whether the world is an undulating vibration of ether or whether it can be explained by invisible and mysterious electrical currents; whether the sun is not in fact passing through the constellation of Hercules, but, let us say, through Cancer, Scorpio or Lyra? If learned

men have found that it is so, let it be so. But when they say that it is not so, everyone else repeats after them that it is not so. Nothing is changed by it. It is the affair of specialists, their domestic affair."<sup>51</sup> But the brilliant Leibniz<sup>52</sup> said with wit and insight: "If geometry took up arms against our passions and our vital interests in the same way that morality does, we would dispute it and transgress it despite all the proofs of Euclid and Archimedes, which would be slighted as fabrications and be considered to completely violate the principles of valid reasoning, while Joseph Scaliger,<sup>53</sup> Hobbes,<sup>54</sup> and others, who wrote against Euclid and Archimedes, would not have so few followers as they do now."<sup>55</sup> But Holy Scripture is directed precisely against human passions. Everything in it speaks about life and the One Who said of Himself: "I am the Life" (cf. John 11:25, 14:6). This is why our minds, left to themselves, can remain neither pure nor sound when interpreting the Word of life.

But, out of all of this, what is instructive for our enquiry? That, if the interpretation of Holy Scripture were left to each individual person, then there would be as many understandings of

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<sup>51</sup>

Prof. A. I. Vvedensky, "So-called 'philosophical responsibility's' dominion over intellects," *The Christian*, vol. 3 (1908), p. 786 (in Russian).

<sup>52</sup>

Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716): A German philosopher and scientist, known for his rational philosophy, defense of religion, and mathematical discoveries.—TRANS

<sup>53</sup>Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609): A French religious leader and scholar.—ED

<sup>54</sup>Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679): An English philosopher, one of the main founders of the philosophy of materialism.—ED.

<sup>55</sup> *Nouveaux essais*. Ed. Erdmann. Berolini, 1840, p. 214 (in French).

the Word of God as there are people and as there are whims in all of them together. Holy Scripture itself would cease to exist in a definitive sense. Science would also have to be sacrificed to arbitrariness. Science is powerless to answer the questions of life; it cannot come to any kind of agreement on such issues. If agreement of opinion had depended upon science, then it would have come into existence long ago; but we see that, due to science, doubts and differences of opinion not only are not becoming fewer but, on the contrary, are increasing.

An excellent illustration of how a man by his own mind interprets the Holy Scripture is found in the scene from *Faust*, where Faust interprets the first verse of the Gospel of John:

I feel impelled its meaning to determine  
and in sincerity, withal,  
the sacred Text's original  
to turn into my own beloved German.  
(He opens a great tome and makes preparations for  
writing.)

'Tis written, "In the beginning was the Word."  
Here I am balked! Who, now, can help afford?  
The *Word*—impossible so high to rate it;  
Quite otherwise must I translate it,  
if by the Spirit's light I'm truly taught.  
I've writ, "In the beginning was the *Thought*."  
This first line let me weigh completely,  
lest my impatient pen proceed too fleetly.  
Is it the *Mind* which works, creates, indeed?  
"In the beginning was the *Power*," now I read.  
Yet, as I write, a warning is suggested,  
that I the sense may not have fairly tested.  
The Spirit aids me, now I see the light!

"In the beginning was the *Act*," I write.<sup>56</sup>

In some three minutes four different interpretations of one and same word have taken their turns! But was not this scene from *Faust* also performed on our Russian soil at Yasna Polyana,<sup>57</sup> where the worshiper of common sense (only his own!) after consulting a Greek lexicon settled on the following translation of that Gospel text: "In the beginning was the understanding of life"?

Just how odd interpretations of the Gospel text can sometimes be is apparent in the following example. The well-known V. V. Rozanov<sup>58</sup> once interpreted Matthew 16:18 thus: "Saying *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock* (the desert) *I will build My Church* is as if foreseeing that the entire Church, or almost all of her, would be built with a desert, eremitic character."<sup>59</sup> But in another place,<sup>60</sup> someone of like mind with Rozanov interprets the same verse in a different way: Why was the Church founded upon Peter? Because he was married, had children, and passionately loved his wife and children, not parting with them even during his evangelizing journeys. Thus, the Church is based on the principle of the family.

Is it not clear that there will be as many meanings to Holy

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<sup>56</sup>

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, translated by Bayard Taylor, revised and edited by Stuart Atkins (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1962), Part I, lines 1219-37, pp. 81-82

<sup>57</sup> The country estate of Leo Tolstoy.—TRANS.

<sup>58</sup>

Vasili Rozanov (1856-1919): A controversial Russian philosopher best known for his views on sexuality and spirituality.—TRANS.

<sup>59</sup>

*In an Uncertain and Undecided World*, second edition (St. Petersburg, 1904), p. 53 (in Russian).

<sup>60</sup> The newspaper *Russia*, June 12, 1909.

Scripture as there are people and the moods they have? We have the authoritative and superb reflections of St. Vincent of Lerins on this subject:

**"Owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters."<sup>61</sup>**

*Here, possibly, someone may ask, Do heretics also appeal to Scripture? They do indeed, and with a vengeance; for you may see them scamper through every single book of Holy Scripture—through the books of Moses, the books of Kings, the Psalms, the Epistles, the Gospels, the Prophets. Whether among their own people, or among strangers, in private or in public, in speaking or in writing, at convivial meetings, or in the streets, hardly ever do they bring forward anything of their own which they do not endeavour to shelter under words of Scripture. Read the works of Paul of Samosata, of Priscillian, of Eunomius, of Jovinian, and the rest of those pests, and you will see an infinite heap of instances, hardly a single page, which does not bristle with plausible quotations from the New Testament or the Old.... For they know that the evil stench of their doctrine will hardly find acceptance with anyone if it be exhaled pure and simple. They sprinkle it over, therefore, with the perfume of heavenly language, in order that one who would be ready to despise human error may hesitate to condemn divine words. They do, in fact, what nurses do when they prepare some bitter draught for children; they smear the edge of the cup all round with honey, that the unsuspecting child, having first tasted the sweet, may have no fear of the bitter.... It was for this reason that the Saviour cried, Beware of false*

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<sup>61</sup> *Commonitory* 2.5 (NPNF 2.11, p. 132).

*prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves* (Matt. 7:15). What are the ravening wolves? What but the savage and rabid glosses of heretics, who continually infest the Church's folds, and tear in pieces the flock of Christ wherever they are able? But that they may with more successful guile steal upon the unsuspecting sheep, retaining the ferocity of the wolf, they put off his appearance, and wrap themselves, so to say, in the language of the Divine Law, as in a fleece, so that one, having felt the softness of wool, may have no dread of the wolf's fangs.... As often as either false prophets or false apostles or false teachers cite passages from the Divine Law, by means of which, misinterpreted, they seek to prop up their own errors, there is no doubt that they are following the cunning devices of their father [the devil], which assuredly he would never have devised had he not known that where he could fraudulently and by stealth introduce error, there is no easier way of effecting his impious purpose than by pretending the authority of Holy Scripture.

But someone will say, "What proof have we that the devil is wont to appeal to Holy Scripture?" Let him read the Gospels wherein it is written, Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone (Matt. 4:5-6; Ps. 90:11-12). What sort of treatment must men, insignificant wretches that they are, look for at the hands of him who assailed even the Lord of Glory with quotations from Scripture?... For as then the head spoke to the Head, so now also the members speak to the members, the members of the devil to the members of Christ, misbelievers to believers, sacrilegious to religious, in one word, heretics to Orthodox. But what do they say? If Thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; that is, If thou wouldst be a son of God, and

wouldst receive the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, cast thyself down; that is, cast thyself down from the doctrine and tradition of that sublime Church, which is imagined to be nothing less than the very temple of God. And if one should ask one of the heretics who gives this advice, "How do you prove this? What grounds have you for saying that I ought to cast away the universal and ancient faith of the Catholic Church?" the heretic has the answer ready, "For it is written"; and forthwith he produces a thousand testimonies, a thousand examples, a thousand authorities from the Law, from the Psalms, from the Apostles, from the Prophets, by means of which, interpreted on a new and wrong principle, the unhappy soul may be precipitated from the height of Catholic truth to the lowest abyss of heresy.

But it will be said, "If the words, the sentiments, the promises of Scripture, are appealed to by the devil and his disciples, of whom some are false apostles, some false prophets and false teachers, and all without exception heretics, what are the Orthodox, the sons of the Mother Church, to do? How are they to distinguish truth from falsehood in the sacred Scriptures?" They must be very careful to ... interpret the sacred canon according to the traditions of the Universal Church and in keeping with the rules of Catholic doctrine.<sup>62</sup>

Leave a man alone with Scripture, and Scripture loses any definite meaning and significance. There remains only one man, the whims and oddities of whose mind will be concealed by the authority of the Word of God. Without the Church and outside of the Church, he is inevitably in a state of hopeless wandering, even if he has in his hands the book of Holy Scripture. "Alienated thus from the truth," writes St. Irenaeus about the heretics, "they do deservedly wallow in all error, tossed to and fro by it, thinking

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 25.64-27.70 (NPNF 2.11, pp. 150-52).

differently with regard to the same things at different times, and never attaining to a well-grounded knowledge, being more anxious to be sophists of words than disciples of the truth.... They always have the excuse of searching [after truth], ... but never succeed in finding it."<sup>63</sup>

The threatening words of the disciple of the Apostle of love, Polycarp of Smyrna,<sup>64</sup> who in his *Epistle to the Philippians* called anyone who interprets the words of the Lord according to his own lusts the firstborn of Satan,<sup>65</sup> become completely clear to us.

Moreover, left on its own with regard to Holy Scripture, the mind can go even further in doing violence to Scripture, thus confirming the wise words of Clement of Alexandria:<sup>66</sup> "Others, giving themselves up to pleasures, wrest Scripture, in accordance with their lusts."<sup>67</sup> The books of the New Testament leave wide latitude for all sorts of violence against them precisely because Christ Himself never wrote anything. Founders of philosophical schools have often left multi volume collections of their works, in which they themselves set forth their teachings in a more or less complete and definite way. Whoever wishes to master their teachings may turn to these works. It is possible not to understand

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<sup>63</sup> *Against Heresies* III.24.2 (ANF 1, p. 458).

<sup>64</sup>

St. Polycarp of Smyrna (ca. 69-155): Bishop of Smyrna, Asia Minor. One of the most important Apostolic Fathers, who later died as a martyr. He was a disciple of St. John the Evangelist.—TRANS.

<sup>65</sup> *Op. cit.* 7.

<sup>66</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-211/216): An early Christian author, who in his writings tried to present Christian teachings to the wider Hellenistic world. —TRANS.

<sup>67</sup> *Stromata* VII.16 (ANF 2, p. 551).

everything in them fully, or to understand in a rather peculiar way, but unlimited arbitrariness is not possible, since the student is linked to the authentic words of the author, the philosopher. But it is completely different with Christ and His teaching. Christ Himself wrote nothing. Others wrote about Him; they wrote more than a few years after the end of His earthly life; some of those who wrote were not direct witnesses of His deeds or hearers of His teaching. From the point of view of an independent mind [i.e., independent of the Church], the question of whether the authors of the New Testament books correctly transmitted the teaching of Christ is not only completely appropriate but also legitimate and absolutely unavoidable. Did they faithfully recount His life and miracles? Even if all of the New Testament books are perfectly authentic, does that absolutely mean that everything written in them corresponds to reality? The authenticity of a book must always be differentiated from its trustworthiness. Authenticity is far from being a sure and reliable guarantee of trustworthiness. Absolutely authentic reports, even by eyewitnesses, quite often turn out to be completely false. An eyewitness may poorly observe an event or not understand it well. He may mix things up if he writes from memory, decades after the event. Moreover, how often is a man a perfectly impartial narrator even if he only photographs an event? Is it rare for one to yield to the temptation to add something of oneself, to describe one's own dream come true? Finally, an author may have a special purpose in not communicating everything absolutely as it happened. Of course all these and similar suppositions are completely understandable and natural. But if this is so, then is it not clear that completely limitless possibilities are open for the human mind to discover within the books of the New Testament whatever it would like? It is possible not to find what is there but to read between the lines something not written in a single existing line. What in the Gospels actually belongs to Christ and what has been simply ascribed to Christ by the Apostles? Precisely what event corresponds in reality to a particular Gospel narrative? You

can surmise anything you like, and you can create a "Christianity" in full accordance not only with your own tastes and desires, but also even with your whims. But what will become of the Truth of Christ with such an attitude toward Holy Scripture?

Unfortunately, our words are not just conjecture but are derived from numerous instructive historical facts. As early as the second century there were people who, according to St. Irenaeus of Lyons, boasted of being improvers of the Apostles<sup>68</sup> and considered themselves wiser not only than the bishops but even than the Apostles.<sup>69</sup> They were the Valentinian Gnostics.<sup>70</sup> Tertullian said of them that in their hands the sayings of Holy Scripture were what sheep's clothing is to predatory wolves.<sup>71</sup> It is well known how confused the doctrinal systems of the Gnostics were, with their

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<sup>68</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* III.1 . 1 .

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* III.2.2.

<sup>70</sup>

Valentinians: A group of Gnostic heretics named after their founder Valentinus (ca. 100-160). Their movement is quite representative of the entire Gnostic doctrine. They believed in a strict dualism of spirit versus matter, where spirit was considered good and matter evil. Also, a radical division was posited between the Old Testament, as supposedly being a product of a lesser (or even evil) god, who created the material world, and the New Testament, coming from a good, "more spiritual" deity. Typical of their views was the complete contempt for the human body (and, by extension, marriage and procreation), which to them represented no more than a prison for the soul. Salvation was understood as liberation of the soul from the bondage of bodily life in this material world and its subsequent return to the spiritual realm whence it had fallen. Hence, the basic Christian doctrine of the resurrection was denied. Also, typical of their movement was extreme elitism and esotericism.—TRANS.

<sup>71</sup> *Prescription against Heretics* 4.

aeons and syzygies.<sup>72</sup> But, as St. Irenaeus puts it, they falsely dreamed these systems into existence, and thus, while they built up their own hypotheses, they inflicted injury on the Scriptures,<sup>73</sup> where they found confirmation of all their teachings—so much so, that they taught nothing without corroboration from Scripture,<sup>74</sup> even saying that everything must be verified by the Savior's teaching.<sup>75</sup> But how could it be that the Gnostic systems are contained within the New Testament? According to Gnostic teaching, Christ's teaching as set forth by the Apostles in the Gospels is vague and unclear. Not everything in the Gospels is to be understood as it is written. Among the Valentinians, the so-called theory of accommodation was very widespread. According to this theory, Christ, in the external expression of His teaching, accommodated Himself to the understanding of His disciples and listeners, and likewise the Apostles did so in their Epistles. Christ taught His disciples first typologically and mystically, secondly, enigmatically, through parables, and thirdly, clearly and directly,<sup>76</sup> and in addition, individually, for those capable of understanding.<sup>77</sup> Of course, out of this came the conclusion that Scripture is not to be understood literally, but as if the entire Scripture were a parable or

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Aeons and syzygies: Notions in Gnostic philosophy. Aeons denoted a hierarchy of thirty spiritual entities, comprised of fifteen complimentary pairings known as syzygies, that bridged the gap between the sphere of the pure spirit and the material world. -TRANS.

<sup>73</sup> See *Against Heresies* I.9.3 (ANF I, p. 330).

<sup>74</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 15, 39.

<sup>75</sup> See St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, *Panarion* 33.7.

<sup>76</sup> *Excerpts from the Writings of Theodotus* 66 (PG 9:689C).

<sup>77</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 11.27.2.

riddle. In the words of Christ, *Seek, and ye shall find* (Luke 11:9), the Gnostics saw a direct commandment to look within Scripture for a secret, mysterious meaning. Thus, there was endless allegorizing in interpretation, and as a result all the tenets of the Gnostic systems were found within Scripture. For example, in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), the Gnostics found their teaching on the thirty aeons. The landowner went to hire laborers at the first, third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hours. If these figures are added together the result is thirty. Thus, it is an indication of the thirty aeons. We can agree with Tertullian that this sort of interpretation is no less harmful to the truth than corruption of the text.<sup>78</sup>

An admirer of an independent approach to Holy Scripture, that is, an approach from outside the Church, might object: "The Gnostics may have made various absurd suppositions and started to allegorize. But today no one would do that." As a matter of fact, it is not that simple. The Gnostics were using the accepted scholarly exegetical method of their time, which was used by Church authors as well.<sup>79</sup> However, despite the similarity of the interpretive methods, they led to essentially different results. It is not the method that is to blame, but the separation of Holy Scripture from the Church, which always opens the way for human arbitrariness and allows, in the words of the *Letter of the Patriarchs*, "trifling with what ought not to be trifled with."<sup>80</sup> Such an unnatural division can

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<sup>78</sup> *Prescription against Heretics* 17.

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For more details, see Vladimir [St. Hilarion] Troitsky, *Gnosticism and the Church in Relation to the New Testament* (Sergiev Posad, 1911); published also in *Theological Herald*, vol. 2 (1911), pp. 493ff (in Russian). By the same author: *Treatise on the History of the Dogma of the Church* (Sergiev Posad, 1912), pp. 115-32 (in Russian).

<sup>80</sup> Op. cit., Decree 2 (Pelikan and Hotchkiss, p. 615).

produce nothing but damage to the truth.

We can point out another historical phenomenon which, while no less instructive, is also from a time closer to our own. The Gnostics of the beginning of the nineteenth century went much further than those of the second century. The ancient Gnostics looked for justification in the New Testament for their religious-philosophical systems; the Gnostics of the beginning of the nineteenth century set a goal of giving the "natural history of the great prophet from Nazareth?" They reasoned thus: Christ and the Apostles spoke in the language of the simple Galilean peasants. All the traits of a naive peasant world view are evident in the Gospels. The simple man sees a miracle everywhere; he is always ready to perceive the presence of supernatural forces. There are frequent references in the Gospels to miracles, to possessed people, and so forth. Does this mean that everything was in fact that way? No, it only means that the actions of Christ appeared miraculous to the common people surrounding Him, without being that way in actual fact. In order to be properly understood, the Gospels must first be transposed into the language of the educated people of that time, and then this language must be translated into our contemporary language, the language of scholars. Furthermore, much of what is in the Gospels can be explained simply by the fact that the eyewitnesses poorly observed the events, looking on them through the prism of their own naive worldview.

Just such views were developed in the beginning of the nineteenth century by Eichhorn,<sup>81</sup> who provided models of interpretation according to his own method. A complete interpretation of the New Testament according to Eichhorn's

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Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827): A German Protestant theologian, known for his opinions denying the authenticity of many books of the Bible.—TRANS.

practice was made by Paulus,<sup>82</sup> who in his astonishing interpretation does not leave even a single miracle in the Gospels, so that what actually results is a natural history of a great prophet, in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is completely unrecognizable. We see again that without the authority of the Church Holy Scripture loses any definite meaning, since self-deceived "improvers of the Apostles" immediately arise, each of them "improving" in his own way, and all of them contradicting each other. Such "improvers" are known in every era. It is surprising that people still do not understand that "improving the Apostles" is *in principle* an absurd endeavor which has been discredited countless times in history. In Protestant theology, contrasting Christ and the Apostles is the most common thing. [Such theologians] do not trust the Apostles, so they want to "improve" them. Thus, Christ appears as only some sought-for unknown quantity and His teaching as an equation with a multitude of unknowns, which everyone solves as he sees fit.

If the Church is rejected, if Holy Scripture is approached apart from the Church, then the fact that Christ wrote nothing leads automatically to the destruction of Holy Scripture. The path from the rejection of the Church to the destruction of Scripture has been and still is trodden by many, but perhaps no one has ever so candidly described this path, even unto cynicism, as did Leo Tolstoy in his introduction to the *Brief Exposition of the Gospel* (Geneva edition). "The reader must remember that Christ Himself never wrote a single book, as Plato, Philo or Marcus Aurelius did; nor did He ever transmit His teachings to literate and educated people as Socrates did, but spoke to illiterate people whom He met in life. Only after His death did people realize that what He had said was

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Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761-1851): A German Protestant theologian, who in order to make the Gospel "more plausible" to his rationalistic tastes, tried to explain away every single miracle encountered in it.—TRANS.

very important and that it would not be bad to write down some of what He was said to have done, and, after almost a hundred years had passed, started recording what they had heard about Him. The reader should also remember that there were many such memoirs, many disappeared, and many were very poor, and that the Christians made use of all of them, little by little selecting what seemed to them better and clearer. In choosing the best Gospels, the churches, in accordance with the saying, 'You can't pick out straight sticks without getting some crooked ones,' inevitably picked up many 'crooked sticks' from the vast literature about Christ, and as a result, there are many passages in the canonical Gospels that are as poor as those in the rejected apocryphal ones."<sup>83</sup>

"After eighteen hundred years of existence, these books lie before us in the same rough and incoherent state, as filled with nonsense and contradictions as they were."<sup>84</sup> From this, Tolstoy makes a direct conclusion: "The reader must remember that not only is it not wrong to throw out unnecessary passages from the Gospels, throwing light on one passage by other ones, but on the contrary, it is reprehensible and irreligious not to do this and to continue regarding a certain number of verses and letters as sacred."<sup>85</sup>

Is it not evident that as soon as Tolstoy had pondered on the fact that Christ wrote nothing, he almost necessarily arrived at a justification for a total distortion of the Gospel text? Indeed, if we allow that unnecessary parts should be removed from the Gospels, does that not open the door to every kind of arbitrariness? What is necessary and what is not? Who will determine this? Clearly, each person, according to his own taste. To Tolstoy even the Gospel

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<sup>83</sup> *Brief Exposition of the Gospel*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>84</sup>

Idem, *Harmony and Translation of the Four Gospels*, vol. 1 (Geneva, 1892), p. 10

<sup>85</sup> *Brief Exposition of the Gospel*, p. 9.

Beatitudes—where the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart are blessed—seemed unnecessary, since they "are out of place and were inserted fortuitously."<sup>86</sup> People have vastly different tastes, and if it is determined by personal taste what to retain in the Gospels and what to throw out, then, indeed, there will be exactly as many Gospels as there are people approaching the Gospel from outside the Church. Instead of the definite teaching of Christ, obviously only chaos and a confusion of individual opinions will result.

The second-century heretic Marcion trusted only the Apostle Paul, claiming that only he precisely and correctly understood the teaching of Christ and preserved it in purity, while the other Apostles were "*pseudoapostoli et Iudaici euangelizatores*,"<sup>87</sup> that is, false apostles, since they introduced elements of Judaism into the teaching of Christ. But for our Tolstoy, the Apostle Paul is among the "founders of the Christian Talmud," since he, "failing to understand the teachings of Christ well," introduced into Christianity a teaching about tradition, and this principle of tradition was the main reason for the distortion of Christian teaching and its not being understood.<sup>88</sup> Whom are we to listen to? It is not known. It seems clear that just one man left alone with Scripture will soon put himself above the Apostles and start to "improve" them, creating for himself a teaching of Christ that only his own imagination desires. If there is no Church, there will be no Scripture either. The books of Scripture—words and letters—will remain, but everyone will put his own meaning into them. If words and letters get in the way, it is possible to "improve" them a little. All of this is because Christ Himself never wrote anything and we have His

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<sup>86</sup> *Harmony and Translation of the Four Gospels*. p. 192.

<sup>87</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion* V.19 (SC 483:350).

<sup>88</sup> *Brief Exposition of the Gospel*, p. 12.

teaching only as transmitted by others, which always allows the mind to be suspicious of its accuracy and authenticity.

Pondering on the fact that Christ wrote nothing, I am often prepared to acknowledge a certain providential quality in it. Because of this fact, approaching Holy Scripture from outside the Church can be logically carried to absurdity. This has virtually already been done by Rationalism, which, on the basis of Protestantism, has shown that there are no obstacles to the complete distortion of the Gospel and its replacement with one's own inventions.

Moreover, reason left to itself will not stop at the abolition of the very books of Holy Scripture. Indeed, what is the basis for recognizing these or other books as Holy Scripture and genuine Apostolic works? There can only be one answer to this question: our recognition of certain books as Holy Scripture and authentic Apostolic works is based *solely on faith in the Church* and on trust in the authority of the Church. The books of Holy Scripture were written by the Apostles and entrusted to the custody of the Church. The Apostles, and particularly the Apostle Paul, even gave special proof of the genuineness of their Epistles, providing them with their own handwritten signature. The custodian of the authentic Epistles and all the Apostolic writings was the Church. Only she could judge the Apostolic value of her property. After all, the Church expressed in her decisions her teaching on the composition of Holy Scripture. Thus we must recognize as the New Testament precisely those twenty-seven well-known books which were recognized as the New Testament by the Church.

Blessed Augustine<sup>89</sup> said: "*Ego uero Euangelio non crederem, nisi*

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Blessed Augustine (354-430): Bishop of Hippo (in present-day Algeria). A prolific writer of Scriptural commentaries and books of theology, moral teaching, philosophy of history, and ecclesiology, as well as his renowned *Confessions*. -TRANS. and ED.

*me catholicae ecclesiae commoverat auctoritas.*" "For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church."<sup>90</sup> These words of Augustine express a great truth. If there is no Church, there will be no Holy Scripture either. Protestants and sectarians seemingly recognize and revere Holy Scripture; but does not their recognition hang in thin air? Let Protestants or sectarians completely and sincerely think out the question: why do we recognize exactly these books as Holy Scripture? To refer to one's personal opinion is to refuse to give a reasonable answer. We cannot refer to scholarship either. The question of the origin and authenticity of the books of Holy Scripture is much debated in scholarly circles. This scholarly literature has already been growing for entire centuries. Piles of books have been written, but with no positive results. There are simply no results that could command the agreement of all. How can a Protestant refer to his "impartial" scholarship, when hopeless disputes go on, even concerning the authenticity of the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John? Let the Protestants resolve the question of the genuineness of the Pastoral Epistles of the Apostle Paul! But the representatives of Protestant scholarship all answer this question in different ways. The conservative scholars recognize them to be genuine works of the Apostle Paul. Others say that they are only based on authentic letters of Paul; in their present form they cannot possibly belong to him and they contain later additions. Still others declare the Pastoral Epistles to be complete later forgeries with a tendentious motive: that they were written to justify the newly established hierarchical structure and were written in the middle of the second century, and the name of the Apostle Paul has simply been falsely ascribed to them. To whom should we listen? Why this scholar and not another? Are there many people

who are capable on their own of weighing the mass of contradictory arguments? And are there many people who are capable of entering into the fine points of scholarly investigation? There is no common authority and it is not known whom to listen to. Listening to all of them at the same time is impossible, since one goes to the woods, while another goes to the woodpile; one strives for the clouds, while another goes backwards; and yet another wants to go into the water.

Doubt in the authenticity of the books of Holy Scripture arose with Protestantism itself. Indeed, Luther<sup>91</sup> rejected the Epistle of James, calling it for some reason a straw letter. And the followers of Luther went incomparably further. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize that *the concept of an absolute canon of Holy Scripture is exclusively a Church concept; outside of the Church it is totally inconceivable.*

It is completely incomprehensible when sectarians want to talk about canonical and uncanonical books of Holy Scripture. Protestants study the history of the New Testament canon a good deal, but that very history is utterly devastating to the concept of canonicity outside the Church. History shows that the canon has not always and in all the [local] Churches been the same. A few centuries passed before the canon was fixed by conciliar decisions. For us there is nothing tempting in this, since we believe in the Church, and therefore her decisions are equally sacred, whether they belong to the second, fourth or twentieth century. But not so for the Protestants and others who deny the truth of the Church. For them, the history of the New Testament canon casts doubt upon the very concept of canonicity. The more consistent

Protestants do not conceal this. For example, Adolf Julicher<sup>92</sup> concludes his study on the history of the New Testament canon with a very characteristic sentence: "The unassailable fact of the human and gradual genesis of the New Testament canon may serve the purpose of liberating us from the danger that this canon could turn from being a support into being an oppressive yoke."<sup>93</sup>

It can be said that on the Protestant stock exchange the price of Holy Scripture is highly unstable but never rises to its face value. The price is constantly threatened by an unexpected plunge. Suddenly a scholar proves for a while the lack of authenticity of this or that New Testament book. When the Tubingen school of Baur<sup>94</sup> predominated, all that remained of the entire New Testament were four or five Epistles of the Apostle Paul. At the present time they seem inclined to recognize the authenticity of the majority of the New Testament books. But suddenly, somewhere in Egypt, some papyrus will be discovered which throws a different light on the period, and the value of Holy Scripture among the Protestants will fall headlong. The principle of an approach to Holy Scripture from outside the Church destroys the worth of Scripture itself. All the apostates from the Church—Protestants, sectarians of every kind—speak completely in vain of their respect for Holy Scripture. Their words show only misunderstanding and sometimes even

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<sup>92</sup>

Adolf Julicher (1857-1938): A German Protestant scholar who made his mark in the field of Biblical criticism.—TRANS.

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Adolf Julicher, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Tubingen, 1906), p. 517 (in German).

<sup>94</sup>

Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860): A German Protestant theologian and leader of the Tubingen School of Protestant theology, known for his extremely critical views on the history of the New Testament canon, disputing the authenticity of most of the New Testament books.—TRANS.

hypocrisy. Is it not characteristic that all the unfavorable and often blasphemous critiques of Scripture come from Protestants, in whose doctrine Scripture has replaced the Church, for whom Scripture is everything? I said above that for a Protestant Scripture is a fetish, a statue, an inanimate idol. I think that an idolater senses that he himself has made the idol. It is said about our uncivilized non-Russian natives that after a successful hunt they try in every way possible to satisfy their idols by smearing their lips with fat from the slain animal and putting into their mouths the best pieces of meat. But if the hunt proves unsuccessful, they start chopping the idol to pieces. The Holy Scripture is handled in the same way by those who approach it in estrangement from the Church. As long as Scripture does not contradict them, does not denounce them, they extol it. But when it does, they start ruthlessly cutting up their idol, tearing Scripture to pieces, some of which they consider to be counterfeit and others they deem unnecessary.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons calls Scripture the Tree of Paradise planted in the midst of the Church.<sup>95</sup> For those expelled from Paradise, however, this tree can only be the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and after partaking of it, they can be convinced only of the sad truth that they are naked. It is high time for all opponents of the Church to be persuaded of their shameful nakedness and ask the Church's forgiveness, just as the prodigal son asked his father's forgiveness! The absurd separation of Scripture from the Church has already produced its lethal fruit. Among Protestants there are some who assert, teach and preach that Christ was never in the world and that the whole Gospel history is a myth. Without the Church, there is neither Scripture nor Christ, since the Church is the Body of Christ.

Thus, the truth of the indissoluble bond between the Church and Holy Scripture is also affirmed in a negative way. A relationship

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<sup>95</sup> See above, note 17.

with Scripture from outside the Church inevitably leads to absurdity and loss of Holy Scripture itself.

Without the Church, first of all, there is no undergirding whatsoever for the interpretation of Holy Scripture; it is not Scripture that teaches man, but on the contrary, man foists upon Scripture whatever content he desires.

Without the Church, secondly, every definite way to Christ and His teaching is lost, since Christ Himself never wrote anything and the Apostles can be suspected of inaccurately transmitting the teaching of Christ.

Without the Church, thirdly, the canon of Holy Books does not have any significance whatsoever, and all Protestants and sectarians faced with the question of why precisely these books are canonical can only be left with no answer or forced to resort to shameful words of craftiness, words of evil (Ps. 140:4).

The overall conclusion of all our foregoing discussion is the following: Holy Scripture is an inviolable and inalienable possession of the Church and one of the manifestations of her grace-filled life. Outside the Church there is not and can not be any Holy Scripture. The living and active Word of God cannot be outside the Church, since outside the Church there is no grace of the Holy Spirit. If there were no Church, Holy Scripture could not exist even as a definitive written record, since no reliable guidance for correctly understanding Scripture would be left, and nothing could guarantee its authenticity and canonical stature. Let us further note, that by asserting the position that outside the Church there is no Holy Scripture, we are repeating the truth propagated by Church writers as early as the second century. St. Irenaeus of Lyons said that only within the Church is there a genuine preservation of Scripture with nothing added or taken away, together with the reading of Scripture without distortion.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Against Heresies* IV.33.8.

According to Tertullian, we must address the issue of to whom Scripture belongs.<sup>97</sup> Those to whom it does not belong should not be given access to the Holy Scripture.<sup>98</sup> Scripture belongs to the Church, but heretics are not Christians and have no right to Christian Scripture.<sup>99</sup> The Church can ask the heretics: "Who are you? You are not of my own; what are you doing here? It is my property. I have long possessed it. I trace my foundation from the authors themselves, to whom the Scripture belongs. I am the heir of the Apostles. As for you, they have, it is certain, always held you as disinherited, and rejected you as strangers, as enemies."<sup>100</sup>

The truth we have sought to substantiate is not new, but it should be reiterated in the twentieth century, because although it has been repeatedly verified by history, it is now quite often forgotten.

*Translated by Igor Radev*

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<sup>97</sup> *Prescriptions Against Heretics* 19.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 37

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*