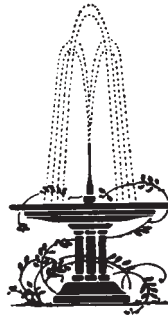


SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna
and
Bishop Auxentios of Photiki



CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST
ORTHODOX STUDIES

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

by

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and Bishop Auxentios of Photiki

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INTRODUCTION

There are, in the Orthodox Church, two ways of theology; two levels, as it were, at which the Divine truth might be approached. The first of these, essential theology, proceeds out of the spirit of the Church, from the very experience of the God-bearing Fathers, who, in their theological writings and expressions, bring to full bloom the sweet-scented flower of their spiritual vision. And this flower is nourished by the very Vine of the Faith, rooted in the same vineyard where Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors have toiled for centuries untold, and planted in the sure foundation of the truth itself. Such theology is not the domain of the scholar, nor is it ultimately the concern of the intellect. It cannot be separated from the spiritual life itself. (So it is, for example, that the great luminary of Orthodoxy, Saint Gregory Palamas [†1359], is characterized by the Church as the “perfection of monks,” the “wonderworking Gregory,” a “preacher of Grace,” and, *in consequence of this*, “theologian invincible among theologians.”) In bestowing the title “Theologian” on so few of the Fathers (and only on several, formally), the Orthodox Church pays great homage to the truth which She embodies, which is inextricably bound to the spiritual life which She directs, guides, and imparts to the humble and Faithful: a truth which is the highest form of theology, a “spiritual knowledge” of God. It is precisely this changeless, revealed theology which we dare not claim to capture in the pages of this small book.

The second form of theology, which the Church allows us, is secondary theology, primarily entailing the explication of the spiritual life, according to, and consistent with, the Divine revelation of essential theology. This theology encompasses the process by which we lift up our intellects to the mental contemplation of the Divine truth, by which we attempt to approach God in a form of mental discipline, the ultimate experience of truth being fulfilled only by the enlightenment of His Grace. Thus we have, today, “theologians,” students of this secondary way of theology, who can

help us in our strivings to elevate the mere intellect to the understanding of what is “incomprehensible.” To the extent that such efforts recognize the greater worth and importance of essential theology, they remain true to Patristic Tradition. While not proceeding from the mystical mind of the Fathers, they at least faithfully express it. To the extent, too, that these efforts are fixed on Divine truth, they of necessity inspire humility in the student. And where humility is, the Fathers teach us, God dwells. And where God dwells, there truth is to be found. It is with a fervent desire for truth, and in the context of this secondary theological way, that we humbly offer our book.

The relationship between Scripture and Tradition is not, in the history of Orthodox theological thought, of little moment. From the time of the Apostles, the proper understanding of Scripture and Tradition was of crucial importance to the Christian Church. In fact, many of the early heretics, including Arius (*ca.* 250–336), began their precipitous moves toward error by the misuse of Scripture and by an unwise rupture with Tradition. The theme upon which this book focuses, therefore, is not a novel one, and it certainly does not propose some new relationship between Scripture and Tradition. It simply recognizes the importance of a proper understanding of Scripture and Tradition in spiritual life, as witnessed by the attention of the Fathers to this serious matter, and attempts to present a readable account of what the Fathers have said about the reception of Holy Writ and the customs, practices, and doctrines passed down to us from the Apostles themselves.

Our book is also a timely one. Having lost the distinction which we make between essential and secondary theology, heterodox writers (and, alas, many Orthodox writers) have come to an independent style of writing and research. Failing to acknowledge the revealed truth of essential theology, they likewise fail to use it as the criterion of truth, by which to guide their research and form their expressions. Having no criterion of truth, they often (and sometimes rather arrogantly) endow their own opinions with a suppos-

edly self-evident aura of “truth.” And the more that their opinions deviate from the truth of the Fathers, the more this aura becomes a blinding barrier of dark rays, hiding the light of truth. Secondary theology holds forth, in darkness, while the light of essential truth dims and fades into the recesses of the mind. In this way, sadly enough, all too many Orthodox Christians have come to misunderstand completely the meaning of Scripture and to distort and debase the Patristic witness. They have come to share the views of the heterodox and to lose sight of the Orthodox notion of truth.

It is imperative that we understand, then, the *singular* attitude of the Orthodox Church toward Scripture and Tradition. To do so is to understand the correct, true attitude of the Church. After all, it was out of the Orthodox Church Herself that Scripture arose. It was in the bosom of the Church that Scripture and Tradition matured. They are Her domain and She alone fully and correctly understands them. If the Orthodox Church is the historical Church, then She embodies the historical truth of Christianity. Understanding this, we can dispense with the dangerous trend, among some Orthodox, to understand Scripture and Tradition in non-Orthodox ways, to distort the image and icon of truth contained in Holy Scripture and expressed in all Tradition. Those who advocate current Western-style “Bible studies,” concentrating on a spiritually dangerous dissection of Scripture (as though it were human poetry or a literary text, the truth of which is open to textual analysis), are obviously motivated by an improper understanding of Orthodoxy. We offer this book with the hope that, despite its inadequacies, it will lead a few to the higher spiritual life.

One of us (Bishop Auxentios) is a convert to the Orthodox Faith. The other (Archbishop Chrysostomos) comes from a family in which, for several generations, Orthodox and heterodox have intermarried. Thus, we have a comprehension of the current distortions in the Orthodox understanding of Scripture and Tradition to which other Orthodox writers might not easily come. One of us formerly embraced and intellectually struggled with non-Ortho-

dox precepts. The other witnessed, not the artificial, polite (and often compromising) ecumenical encounter of heterodox and Orthodox views, but an immediate and actual confrontation of Orthodoxy and Western thought, in a context where minds, lives, and souls were directly affected. The reader, as a consequence, should not consider these pages a mere exercise in scholarship; nor should he think that their inadequacy bespeaks any other kind of dryness. They are offered with sincere intentions, profoundly motivated by deep emotions, the love of truth, and zeal for Orthodoxy—things which might, in the end, even excuse our spiritual weakness.

Finally, we must express gratitude to a number of people who have made the present volume possible and who have encouraged us in our work. This work is truly a joint effort. Both authors have engaged in several years of extended research and owe debts of gratitude to many individuals, not all of whom can be mentioned here. Archbishop Chrysostomos, while teaching undergraduate and graduate courses at the University of California (in the Department of Psychology) was (despite his major field) given encouragement and aid to continue his work in Byzantine history, for which favor due appreciation must be expressed. Similar encouragement was also extended, earlier, by the Department of Psychology at Princeton University, where His Eminence was a doctoral candidate and an assistant in instruction.

Both of us owe no small debt of appreciation to the late Professor *Emeritus* of Harvard University and Professor of Religion, History, and Slavic Studies at Princeton University, Protopresbyter Georges Vasilievich Florovsky (1893–1979). While we were both at Princeton, Father Florovsky was a constant source of aid, especially to Bishop Auxentios, then a student in the Department of Religion. Father Florovsky's contributions to the research presented here are unquestioned. We can but ask that he be forgiven any shortcomings in our work, since they surely represent, not his scholarly inadequacy, but our own.

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“The thoughts presented...[in several essays appearing in the present book]...are clear expositions of classical Patristic reasoning. They should certainly appear in print, and without doubt they will be received as important contributions to the body of Orthodox literature.”

Protopresbyter Georges Florovsky
Emeritus Professor of Eastern Church
History, Harvard University
Visiting Professor of Religion, Princeton University

“The Orthodox view of Scripture and Tradition is an important one that should be considered by all Christians, Eastern and Western. Many of the ideas in this book help clarify the Orthodox view of these subjects. They are excellently expressed, insightful, and constitute an essential new book in the area of religious thought and history.”

Horton Davies
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“The authors, masterfully in control of subject and sources, blend the Scriptural, historical, and theological perspectives into a flowing, perceptive narrative.”

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