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## The Holy Scripture and its role in the development of the personality of believers

Ștefan-Adrian Ghiuță

Ovidius University of Constanța, România

[stefanghiuta@hotmail.com](mailto:stefanghiuta@hotmail.com)

**Abstract.** The explanation of Scripture essentially coincides with the application of its content, with the passage of this content into human life through the foundation of the Church, with the concrete specification of its structures, hierarchically, sacramental based on the indications of the Lord. Thus, Scripture passes into Tradition, which is essentially nothing more than the content of Scripture, applied to human life. A seed of redemption, the Old Testament is fulfilled by the New Testament in which the figure of the Savior and his redemptive deeds can be the most appropriate guide for the Christian's life. But we cannot ignore the divine message of the Word of God that comes to perfect justice through love, through deeds that no longer pour out mercy and charity only on a community but on all humanity.

**Keywords.** reading, tradition, personality, wisdom

Divine revelation has a universal character. It was made for all people in all ages. Revelation, as act and word, was made by God to people through chosen people and then through His Only Begotten Son Himself<sup>1</sup>. Contained in Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, it unfolds throughout history and bears witness to God's presence and work in the world, to His saving power and deeds.

In the Orthodox Church, the Holy Scripture is treated as the Revelation of God par excellence<sup>2</sup>, constituting the inspired word, transmitted through the hagiographers, to humans.

Holy Scripture is the only form of revelation that was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, having a unique and supreme position among the other forms of communication of revelation, and therefore it can be affirmed that it is "the first and absolute source for the faith of the Church from all time"<sup>3</sup>.

Holy Scripture is therefore the revelation of God; it is God's word to us, which comes from God and leads us to God, to eternal life. Therefore, without the word of God, we live outside of Life, because he is the seed (Luke 8, 11) that gives life and calls to life. The words of the Law, says Moses to the people of Israel are not idle words to you, because they are your life, and by them you will live long... (Deuteronomy 32, 47).

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<sup>1</sup> Pr. Prof. Grigorie Cristescu, *Revelation, Dogma and Sermon*, in *Theological Studies*, year VI (1954), nr. 3-4, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Mircea Basarab, *Holy Scripture and Apostolic Tradition in the Confession of the Church*, in *Orthodoxy*, year XXXII(1960), nr. 2, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria, *Scripture and Tradition. General Considerations*, in *Theological Studies*, year.1970, nr. 5-6, p. 395.

Revelation is therefore the supernatural action of God through which he communicates to man the truths necessary for salvation. It is contained in the Holy Scriptures and in the Holy Tradition, beginning with the first words that God addressed to Adam, ending with the death of the last Apostle, its culminating point being the announcement made through Jesus Christ.

According to Orthodox teaching "this communication had a progressive character, its communication for pedagogical reasons, starting from simple, incomplete forms, until it reached the perfect discovery, received directly through the Son of God"<sup>4</sup>.

But the Holy Scripture, which contains the word of God revealed to people through the holy prophets and His Son<sup>5</sup>, is not a systematic exposition, a treatise about God, the world, man and his life. It is not only a collection of inspirational writings for sermons and theological discourse, but it is a living and personal dialogue of God with man; it is God's message to man and appeal to the person, to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, to know God and to live in God.

The Savior Christ himself commands us to search the Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testament: „You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me.” (John 5, 39). Another time he says: You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,” (John 5, 38).

The Word of God is found in the Holy Scriptures and therefore it is the first source for the Christian life. Jesus Christ Himself and the Holy Apostles instruct us to search the scriptures in understanding and dealing with any problem of Christian life and morals, and on the other hand, the Lord Himself and the Apostles use the Holy Scriptures

God's message to man is contained in the divine Scriptures, which the Church has always venerated, considering them alongside the Holy Tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, because they were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They are the fundamental source from which Christian teaching is nourished; they are strength and source of faith and life in Christ<sup>6</sup>.

In the Holy Scriptures, the Father who is in heaven, comes out with much love to meet His sons and talks to them; in the word of God there is so much power and strength that it constitutes support and strength for the Church, and for the children of the Church the strength of faith, food for the soul, a pure and undried source of spiritual life<sup>7</sup>.

The Word of God revealed in the Holy Scriptures is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12) and is shared to the perfection of those who believe in it (Acts 20:32; I Thessalonians 2:13).

It can be said that the Pauline epistles have their source in the desire and love of Saint Paul, to carry out the mission entrusted to him by Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, that of leading the faithful through the preaching of the Gospel to the kingdom of God, to Christian perfection and salvation their souls from the cloud of sins<sup>8</sup>.

The holy apostle Paul affirms: But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. (I Corinthians 14, 3). For believers, the word of God is a living, dynamic

<sup>4</sup> Mircea Basarab, *The Authority of Holy Scripture in the Orthodox Church*, in *Orthodoxy*, an.(XXXII)1980, nr. 2, p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> Arhid. Prof. Dr. Ioan Zăgărean, Pr. Prof. Dr. Isodor Todoran, *Orthodox Dogmatics*, Renaissance Publishing House, 8th edition, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p 59.

<sup>6</sup> Pr. Dr. Ilie I. Ivan, *Orthodox Homiletics*, Publishing House of the Episcopate of Argeş and Muscel, 1999, p. 155.

<sup>7</sup> Enzo Bianchi, *Word and Prayer. Introduction to the Spiritual Reading of Scripture. Foreword by Metropolitan Serafim*, translated by Maria-Cornelia Oros, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1996, p.13.

<sup>8</sup> Pr. Drd. Constantin Duşu, *The Pauline Epistles as a Source of Preaching*, in *Theological Studies*, year XXIX (1977), nr. 9-10, p. 683.

reality, able to respond to the yearnings of the soul, to nourish faith, to strengthen the hope of salvation, to discover the meaning of true life.

The descent of the Holy Spirit on the Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost is of overwhelming importance in the life of the Church. The light of the Holy Spirit banished every shadow of fear from the souls of the Apostles and enabled them to understand the realities of the mission to which they were called. Then they fully understood the prophecies of the Old Testament about the Messiah and the words of their divine Teacher.

A deep transformation took place in the being of the Holy Apostles and the words of Jesus: Come after me and I will make you fishers of men (Matthew 4, 18) begin to clarify their meaning.

With unusual power they step before the crowds to announce Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the crucified and risen from the dead One<sup>9</sup>.

The apostolic sermon has its roots deeply embedded in the Lord's sermon. Jesus Christ is the founder and the ideal of Christian preaching from time immemorial, an ideal which, if it can never be reached, he still always remains the model after the perfection of which the preaching is bound to constantly strive<sup>10</sup>.

Also, the Holy Apostles adopted the same attitude of reverence towards the Holy Scriptures, on which they base both their life and their preaching. Wanting to show the educational importance and the spiritual benefits gained from reading the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Apostle Paul urges his disciple Timothy to remain steadfast in the teaching he received as a child, as all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (II Timothy 3, 16-17).

The Holy Apostle Paul advises Timothy to remain strong in the teaching of the Holy Scripture, because it is educational and leads man to perfection, to the accomplishment of all good things.

For their part, the Holy Fathers of all ages had the Holy Scriptures as their spiritual food, composing homilies whose greatness will face the ages. Their sermons abounded in scriptural texts expertly interpreted, having a strong influence on believers of all times<sup>11</sup>.

In the exhortations given to the faithful to read the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers did not forget to draw their attention not to limit themselves only to the New, but to include the Old Testament necessarily also in the scope of such a duty. Therefore, writes Origen, be very careful when reading the divine Scriptures (both the Old and New Testaments). Be of the mind there, for we need much attention in reading the Scriptures, lest we say or believe of them something out of place<sup>12</sup>. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon also believes that the command given by God to the first people to eat from all the trees of heaven is, in a deeper sense, the command to gather spiritual food from the entire Holy Scripture: It is necessary, he writes, to run away from the teachings of heretics, to come to the Church and let ourselves be raised at her breast and nourished by the Scriptures of the Lord. Because the Church is built like a paradise in this world. The Spirit of

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<sup>9</sup> Drd. Şebu Sebastian, *The form and Content of Christian Preaching in the First Three Centuries*, in *Theological Studies*, year XIX (1964), nr. 3-4, p. 206.

<sup>10</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Belu, *Apostolic Sermon*, in the *Metropolis of Transylvania*, year XI (1966), nr. 1-3, p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> Pr. Dr. Ilie I. Ivan, *Op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> Origen, *The Letter to Grigorie*, apud, Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Belu, *The Old Testament as a Homiletic Source*, in the *Metropolis of Transylvania*, year II (1957), nr. 5-8, p. 517.

the Lord says: You will eat from all the trees of paradise, which means take food from the entire Scripture<sup>13</sup>. That is, not only from the New, but also from the Old Testament.

Reading the Holy Scriptures gives the Christian the opportunity to enrich his vocabulary with biblical words and expressions, which reproduce in a simple, accessible form, the truth as transmitted to him by Christ the Savior; they give him the opportunity to learn the norm of authentic Christian life. Holy Scripture must not only be read, but it must also even be studied.

The Holy Scripture contains expositions of a unique greatness, histories, sentences that concern morality and justice and that concentrate deep wisdom in itself. All this attracts the faithful, excites them and arouses their interest in the word of God.

Holy Scripture must be studied daily and used both for its substance and for its sublime language.

If the Christian's spiritual food is good, healthy, his life can be up to par. The earth produces good fruit if the seed sown is good and if the earth is well cared for. For this, reading the Scriptures must be the daily food both priest who has the mission of enlightening through the word, and also of the ordinary Christian.

Whoever wants to be always united with God must read often and listen to the Holy Scriptures with joy... because any increase comes from reading and meditation. What we don't know we learn from reading, and what we learn we keep in meditation!<sup>14</sup>

However, the incompleteness of the Old Testament should not make us treat it as a part that can be neglected. In the entire Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, the same God is discovered, the books being written under the influence of the same Holy Spirit, having a pronounced Christocentric character.

The discovery made by Jesus Christ does not allow us to give up the Old Testament, as He himself suggests: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For I tell you truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished..." (Matthew 5, 17-18).

Through his action and words, the Savior fulfilled and perfected the revelation of the Old Testament, the purpose of the revelation being announced by Saint John with the words: "And these were written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing that you may have life in his name." (John 20, 31). The Scripture therefore includes in its pages the revealed word of God, containing many things about the knowledge of God and which are useful for our salvation.

From the fact that Scripture contains the word of God, its authority for believers follows. The divine authority of the Old Testament was recognized by Jesus Christ, but also by the authors of the New Testament who, following the Savior's example, respected the Scriptures of the Old Testament, as God's Revelation, endowed with divine authority.

Following the relationship between the two Testaments, the Orthodox Church considered the Old Testament as a constitutive part of God's Revelation, the relationship between these two being one imprinted by a deep unity, a unity resulting from the uniqueness of the revealed word that they contain: "Therefore no one should separate the Old from the New

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<sup>13</sup> *Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, Against the Heretics*, V, chapter 20, 2, in vol. *Finding and Rejecting False Knowledge or Against Heresies*, English translation, introduction and notes by Rev. Dr. Dorin Octavian Picioruș, vol. II, Theology for Today, Bucharest, 2007, p. 399.

<sup>14</sup> Isidore of Seville, *III*, 8, 2-3, *apud* Pr. Dr. Ilie I. Ivan, *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

Testament, no one must say that there is another Spirit there (the Old) and another here (the New)<sup>15</sup>.

### **The Reading and interpretation of Holy Scripture**

Holy Scripture has a special role in the life and mission of the Church, and the latter must ensure everyone's access to the text of Holy Scripture, either during the Liturgy or outside of worship.

Reading, knowing, and interpreting the Holy Scriptures is a right, and a collective obligation of everyone, both clergy and believers<sup>16</sup>.

Anyone can read the Bible, but its interpretation, since the first centuries, required the organization of special schools in a literal historical or allegorical sense, schools that inspired various categories of researchers<sup>17</sup>. Later, after the finalization of the Biblical canon, the exegetical schools and Christian theology gave the true meaning of reading and understanding the Holy Scriptures.

Therefore, the Holy Scripture was interpreted from the beginning because Christianity brought a new teaching that had to be explained in detail. The Savior himself explained the Old Testament in numerous times, as well as some parables and his own teachings. The Holy Apostles and their legitimate successors continued with great conscientiousness and responsibility, the Holy Scripture offering us a special example in the person of Philip who interprets to a servant of the queen of Ethiopia, the prophecies of Isaiah, regarding Christ (Acts of the Apostles VIII 30). The patristic period follows the principles developed by the catechetical schools, the Holy Fathers constantly urging the research of the Scriptures and explaining to the faithful the true meaning of the divine Word. Saint John Chrysostom is also manifested in this direction. Moreover, in order to induce the faithful to read the Holy Scriptures, he devotes the entire XXI Homily to the Epistle to the Ephesians to this theme asking us to dedicate ourselves to reading and to meditate long on the text<sup>18</sup>.

In the West, with the development of feudalism and Caesaropapism, the Holy Scripture became an asset of the hierarchy, being forbidden by papal bulls, both the reading by the faithful, as well as its copying, translation, and printing without the authorization of the pope<sup>19</sup>. However, people like John Wycliff, Tomas Munzer or Martin Luther defied the papal threats by translating the Scriptures into the national languages of their own peoples. This fact of the Reformation caused the Bible to be translated and printed everywhere so that we can ask ourselves the question: what the true translation and the true text is. Added to this is the fact that a series of teachings have come to be formulated, regarding the reading and especially the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, completely contrary to the spirit of the authentic Christian Church.

Such a teaching is that according to which anyone can interpret the Scriptures enlightened by the Holy Spirit, but the difficulty of interpreting the Scriptures is obvious due to the age of the writing, the multitude of authors, the different eras of writing and above all due to the divine content that exceeds the limited understanding of man and therefore the

<sup>15</sup> Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, apud Mircea Basarab, *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>16</sup> Pr. Prof. Ioan Bria, *The Faith We Confess*, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1987, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Deac. Prof. Petre I. David, *Christian Guide. Sectology*, Publishing House of the Episcopate of Argeş, Curtea de Argeş, 1994, p. 206.

<sup>18</sup> Arhim. Veniamin Micle, *The Reading and Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures*, Holy Monastery of Bistrita, Eparchy of Râmnic, 1994, p. 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Deac. Prof. Petre I. David, *Op. cit.*, p.206.

interpretation belongs to the Church through persons specially trained for this mission<sup>20</sup>. It is also claimed that everyone has the duty to interpret the Bible because the Savior said: "search the Scriptures because they testify about Me" (John 5, 39). Although this text seems to justify the idea, the Savior was only referring to those who did not recognize him as the Messiah, the one heralded by the prophets and urged them to study the writings of the Old Testament in order to edify themselves. Therefore, anyone can read the Scriptures, but only those who have a special anointing, those entrusted by the Church, can interpret them.

For the correct understanding and explanation of Holy Scripture, the interpreter has the duty to acquire a vast theological and secular culture, but above all he must know in depth the entire Holy Scripture, because in many cases it itself brings clarity to the parts that present difficulties in explanation. To all this the interpreter must add a pure soul because the mind must be freed from any preconceived ideas, and the soul must be possessed by unshakable faith in God<sup>21</sup>.

Just as the Scripture is not only a human creation but a divine work rendered, through inspiration, in human forms, so its interpretation cannot be achieved only through the effort of human reason. The interpreter of Scripture needs the help of divine grace, because only close collaboration with grace helps him to achieve an interpretation useful to the faithful soul, because "the grace of the Holy Spirit is what makes the work fruitful"<sup>22</sup>. Any effort, outside the sphere of action of the Holy Spirit, that is, of the Church, is futile. So it is not enough only the vast culture, but the insistent prayer is necessary. It shapes the soul, giving it the humility and purity necessary for the correct penetration of the inspired text.

The Bible is the head book and the first of the books in a library; the Christian cult is based on the texts of the Holy Scriptures, either from the Old or from the New Testament; any theological theme cannot be discussed without the reinforcement and based on biblical texts<sup>23</sup>.

That is why respecting the word of Scripture is the duty of all Christians, an act of piety because "Holy Scripture must not only be sung, psalmodized, commented on, by each individually and collectively, but also contemplated. The Bible is revered for the wisdom of God gathered in the treasuries of words. Contemplating the Word of God, to which the Orthodox tradition has paid great attention, means going beyond the letter and text and reaching the deep meaning, the theological purpose"<sup>24</sup>.

The Orthodox Church did not exclude direct access and private reading of Holy Scripture, considering its importance for the moral formation of believers, but insisted on an ecclesial interpretation, inclusive in its entirety and in agreement with Tradition.

### **Conclusions**

The Holy Scripture enjoys great authority in the Orthodox Church, an authority that finds its source in the perfect content expressed by the writings of the holy authors, but also by the correct transmission and explanation of the holy writings by themselves and by their successors in the atmosphere full of the Holy Spirit of the Church.

Holy Scripture is considered in the Orthodox Church as the revealed word of God, its content constituting the core of teachings that must be learned and especially lived, assuring believers an unswerving path to their goal - salvation.

<sup>20</sup> Archim. Veniamin Micle, *Op. cit.*, p. 27-28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on Genesis I, apud Arhim. Veniamin Micle, *Op. cit.*, p.

<sup>23</sup> Diac. Prof. Petre I. David, *Op. cit.*, p.206.

<sup>24</sup> Pr. Prof. Ioan Bria, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

For these reasons, we have tried to present in this work that the Holy Scripture is not only the revealed word but especially the word transmitted under divine inspiration that gives it authority, because it offers us the certainty that the divine Revelation was transmitted correctly, that the Bible contains the word of God as it was addressed to people.

The Old Testament presents us with a rich spiritual heritage through its teachings, imprinted with the idea of God's omnipotence, obedience to commandments and placing the whole of existence under the idea of moral and social justice, as an expression of divine justice. All this managed to outline a society with firm moral principles, worthy of the status of the chosen people, with the mission of preserving and proclaiming the divine plan for the restoration of humanity through Christ the Redeemer.

The importance of the New Testament in the life of the believer is capital. The Christian discovers the moral values, the rules of faith, their transposition into deeds, having before him the model of the first disciples of the Savior, of the Holy Apostles, of the first Christians.

God reveals himself in Scripture and provides the Christian with the rule of faith and the norm of life in the community. By going through the pages of Holy Scripture, this can strengthen his faith, find support for his spiritual struggle, find his way to eternity, to salvation.

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