



The Bible in the Orthodox Church

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Christian Education Webinar

The Bible and the Church



“In the great Tradition of the Orthodox Church, the Bible is the central source of truth and the most creative factor behind the worship, doctrine and practice of the Church. The great Fathers and saints of the Church viewed the Bible as an ocean of divine mysteries, having inexhaustible breadth and astonishing depths.”

**– Father Theodore
Stylianopoulos**

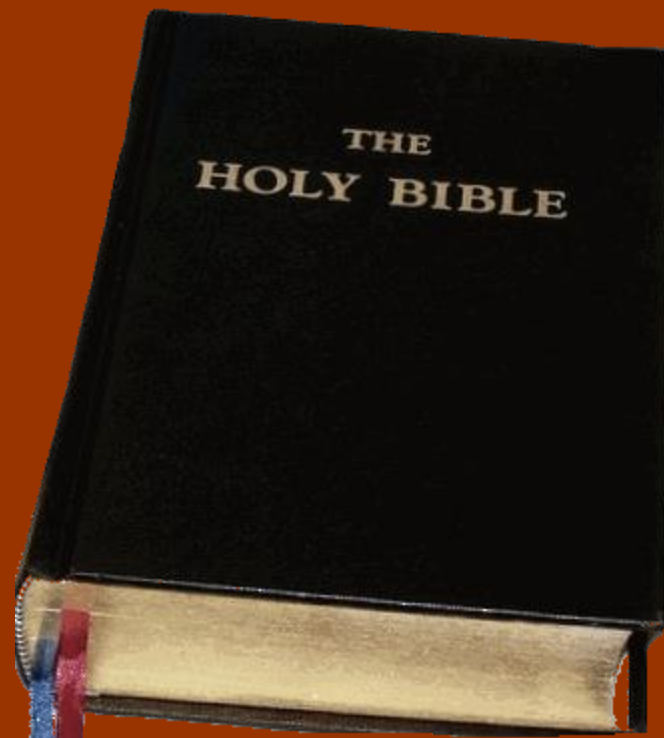
The Bible and the Church

*“The Bible is the book of the Church.
It is the main written authority within
the Church— not over or apart from it.*

*Everything in the Church must be
biblical: for the Church, in order to be
the Church, must be wholly expressive
of the Bible. The Bible lives in the
Church! Without the Church, there
would be no Bible. The Church gives
the Bible its life as a book.*

It makes the book come alive!”

— Father Thomas Hopko



What is the Bible?

*poetry, prayers, hymns,
historical narratives,
biographies, prophecies, letters,
proverbs, love songs*

**The Bible is the story
of God's love
for His creation**



St. Mark the Evangelist

What is in the Bible?

1. Who God is and what He has done for us
2. What it means to truly be a human being and what the purpose of our life is
3. How each of us should respond — with our whole life — to what God has done for us in His love



The Bible contains the answers to the most fundamental questions that we as human beings can ask.

The Canon of the Bible

The Orthodox Bible is larger

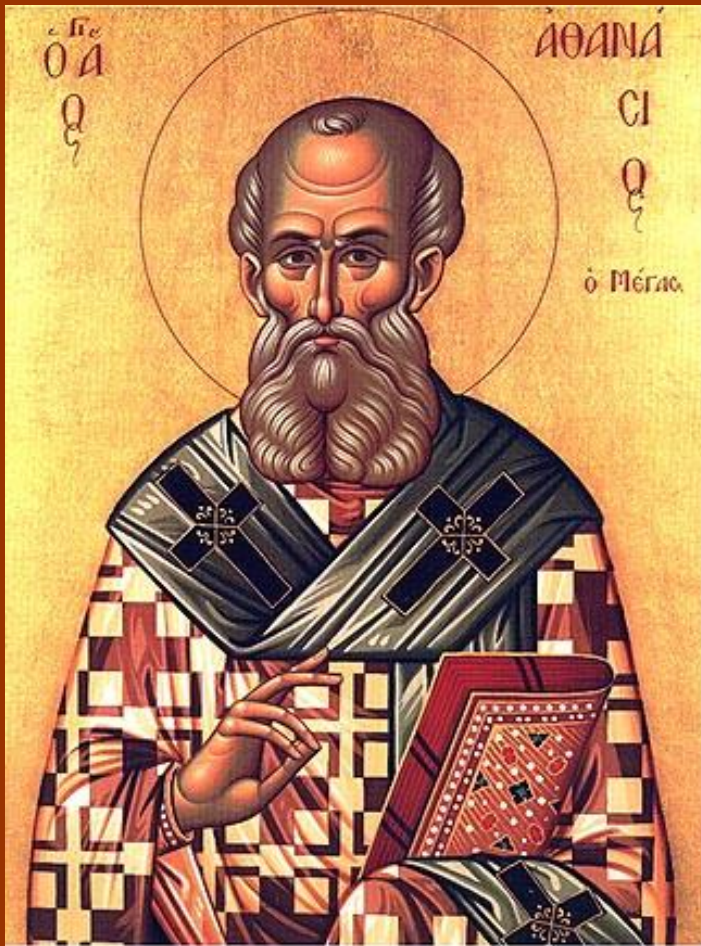
- 1st Esdras
- Tobit
- The Wisdom of Solomon
- Judith
- Baruch
- The Wisdom of Sirach
- The Letter of Jeremiah
- 1st Maccabees
- 2nd Maccabees
- 3rd Maccabees

Based on the *Septuagint* (Greek) Old Testament

Oxyrynchus Papyrus of the Old Testament
Book of Joshua, in Greek - late 2nd century

ΔΕ ΚΕΝ ΑΥΤΗΝ ΤΟ ΕΝΧΕΙΡ
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 ΟΝ ΑΥΤΗΝ ΕΝ ΣΤΟΜΑ
 ΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΕΣΩΛΕΘΕΝ

The Canon of the Bible

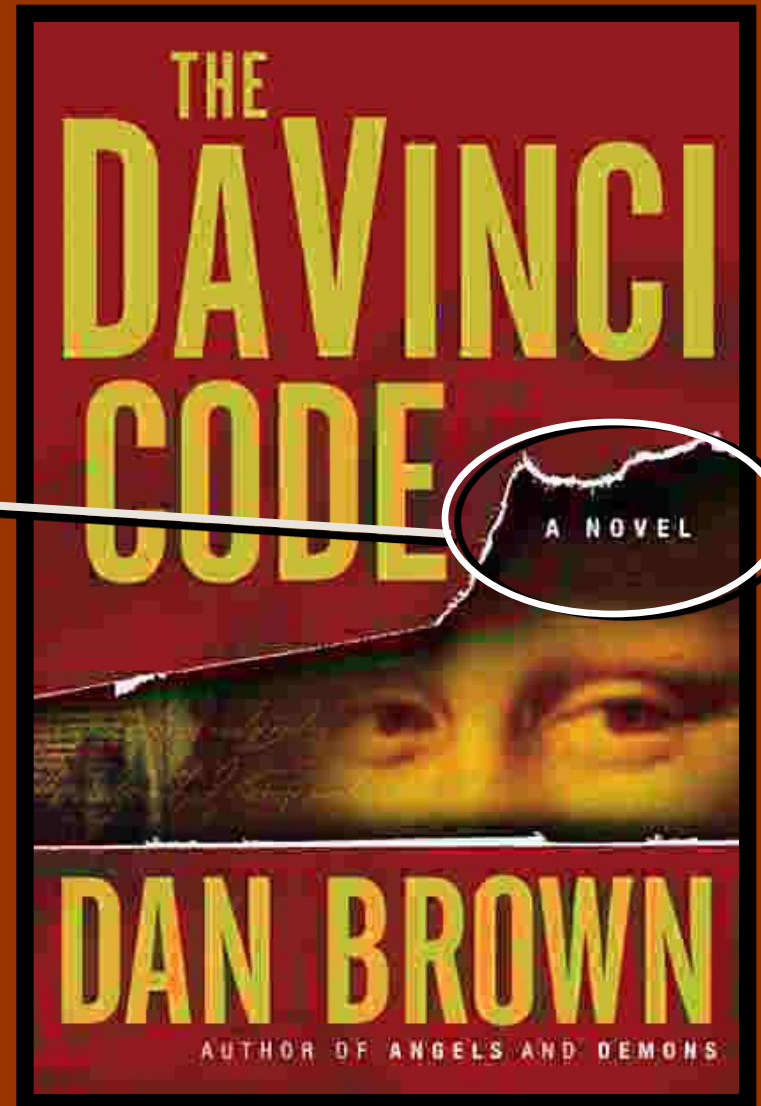


The 27 books contained in the New Testament (agreed upon by all Christians) were first listed by St. Athanasios, the bishop of Alexandria, in an encyclical (or circular letter) written in 367AD to the churches under his pastoral supervision in Egypt.

St. Athanasius the Great,
Bishop of Alexandria

The Da Vinci Code

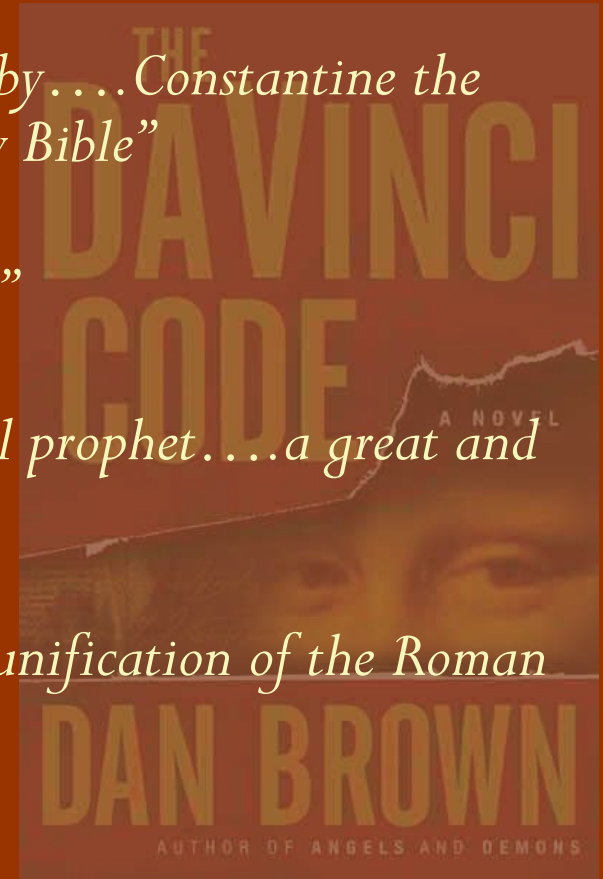
Fiction - An imaginative pretense. 2. A lie. 3. A literary work, such as a novel, whose content is produced by the imagination and is not necessarily based on fact.



The Da Vinci Code

Assertions in the Da Vinci Code:

1. *“The Bible as we know it today was collated by....Constantine the Great [who] commissioned and financed a new Bible”*
2. *“The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven”*
3. *“Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet....a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless”*
4. *“Christ’s divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman Empire and to the new Vatican power base”*



The Da Vinci Code



Fiction: “The Bible as we know it today was collated by . . . Constantine the Great [who] commissioned and financed a new Bible”

Fact: The first list of the 27 books that all Christians accept as the New Testament was compiled by St. Athanasius, Bishop and Patriarch of Alexandria in a letter to his churches in 367 AD.

Fact: The bishops and teachers merely “affirmed” what the Churches had already agreed were the books that contained the truth about Jesus Christ.

Assertions in the DaVinci Code

“The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven”

The books of the New Testament were written by the apostles in order to get the story about Jesus straight! “...an orderly account” of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus

Scholars Agree:

St. Luke's Gospel: written 80-90 AD

St. Mark's Gospel: written no later than 65 AD

(St. Constantine the Great died in 337 AD!)

Assertions in the DaVinci Code

Fiction: "Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet....a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless"

Fact: Jesus is called "the Son of God" more than fifty times in the books of the New Testament!

Fact: The 1st Ecumenical Council at Nicea upheld the teaching that Jesus is the Word and Son of God, against the false teaching of Arius.



"Truly you are the Son of God!" Matt 15.33

False Assertions in the DaVinci Code

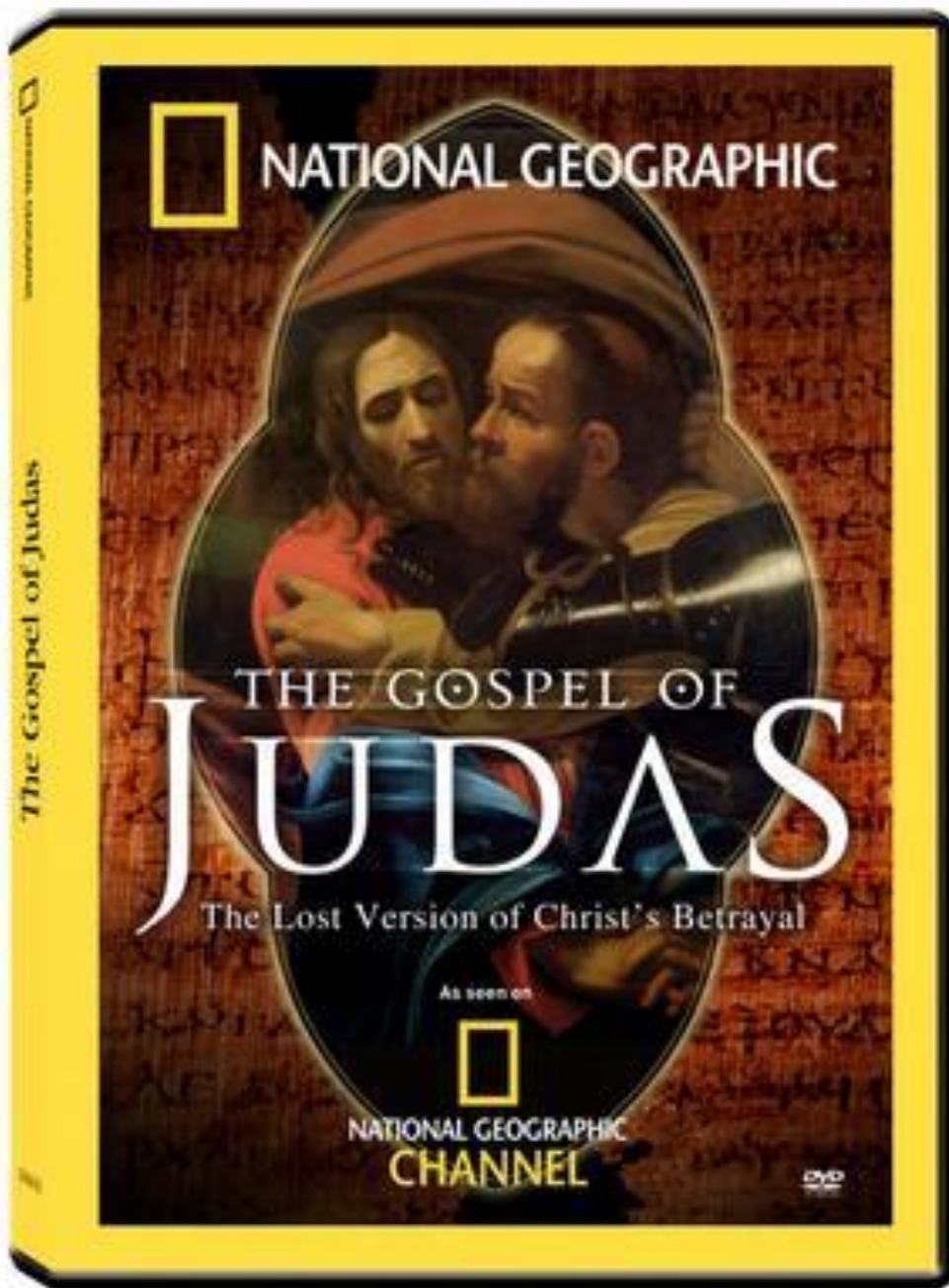
Fiction: “Christ’s divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman Empire and to the new Vatican power base”



Pope Boniface VIII
13th century

- No “Vatican” or Papacy in the 4th century!
- The Vatican begins to emerge long after Constantine, as a result of the Fall of the Roman Empire in Western Europe (5th/6th century) and develops in the Middle Ages.
- The modern Vatican State (about which Dan Brown writes) is a creation of 19th century Italian nationalism.

The New Testament and the “so-called” Gospel of Judas

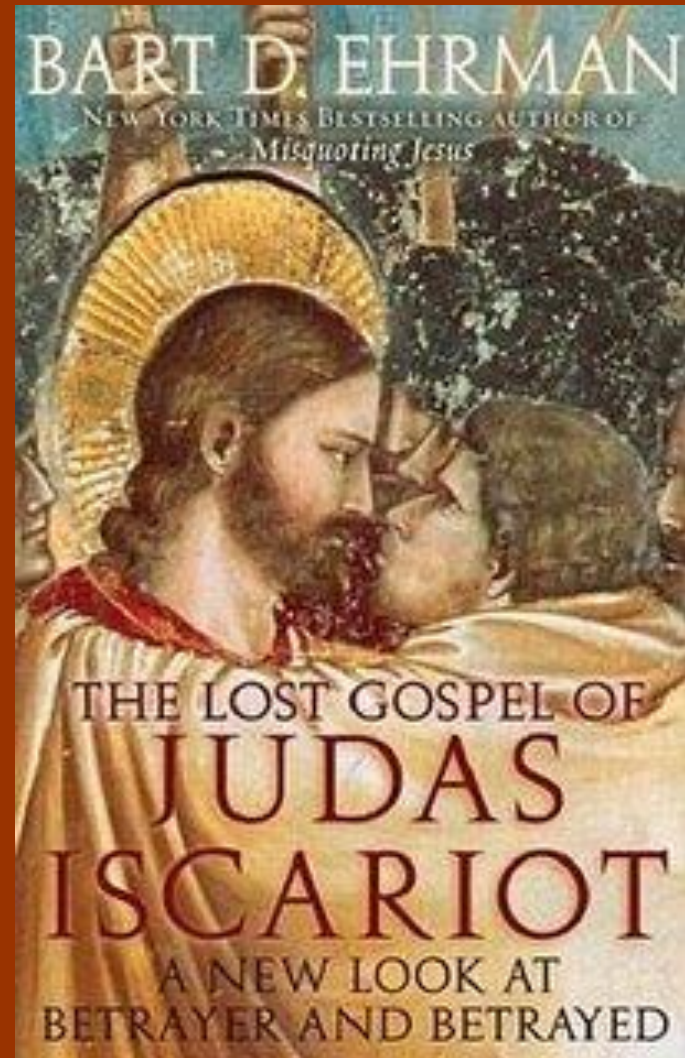


- 4th century gnostic document written in Coptic
- Discovered in a cave in the 1970's
- *Not* written by Judas
- Only 7 pages long... a far cry from the breadth of the canonical Gospels

The New Testament and the “so-called” Gospel of Judas

*False: Claims Jesus is from the immortal realm of
“Barbelo”*

- *“non-Christian babbling resulting from a group of people trying to create a false amalgam between Greek mythology and far Eastern religions with Christianity.”
-Metropolitan Bishop*
- *It was “written by a group of people who were alien to the mainstream of early Christianity.”*



Why Read the Bible?



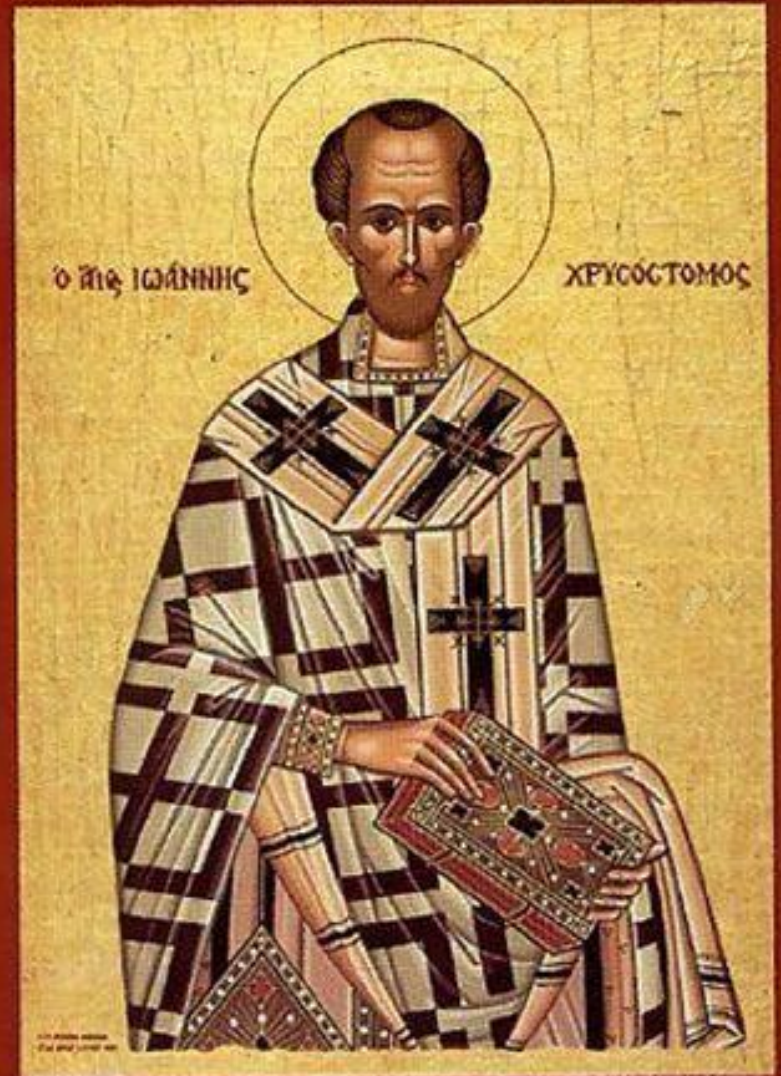
Orthodox Christians often do not read the Bible as we should. We *revere* the Bible, but we don't actually *read* it.

Calling yourself a Christian and not reading the Bible is a contradiction in terms.

Why Read the Bible?

“Ignorance of the Scriptures is a great cliff and a deep abyss. Not knowing the Scriptures is the cause of all evils. Reading the Scriptures is like possessing a great treasure. A Christian cannot help but read the Scriptures. To be a Christian is to rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit speaks to us through the Scriptures.”

— St. John Chrysostom



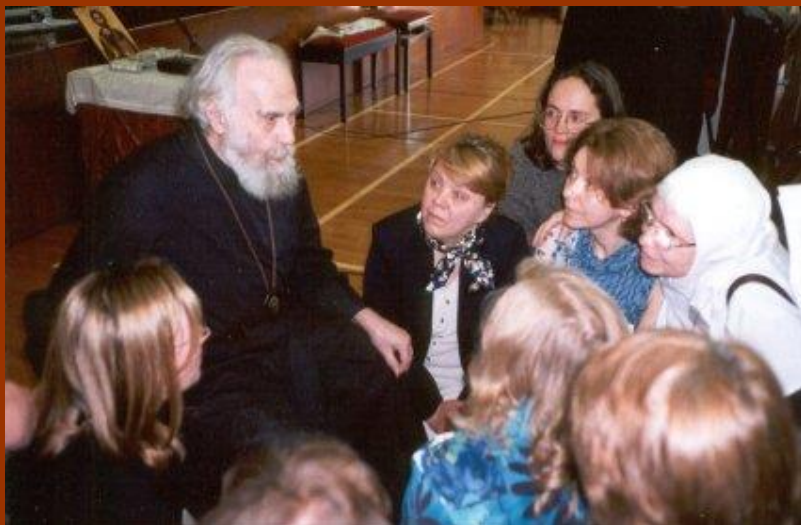
Why Read the Bible?



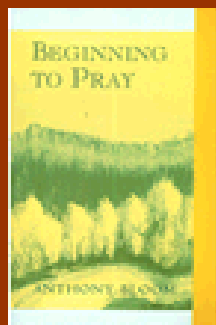
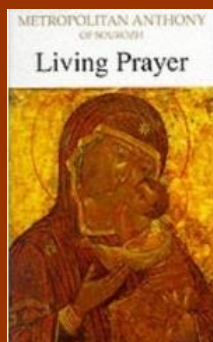
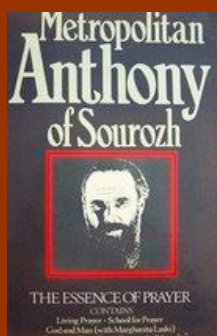
Most books *inform*, a few *reform*, but only the Bible *transforms*. In fact, the Bible does all three!

For Orthodox Christians,
the Word of God
is itself a Sacrament,
because it conveys the presence
of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The Gospels Contains Christ



Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (1914-2003)



I do not know how to tell you of what happened. I will put it quite simply and those of you who have gone through a similar experience will know what came to pass. While I was reading the beginning of St Mark's Gospel, before I reached the third chapter, I became aware of a Presence. I saw nothing. I heard nothing. It was no hallucination. It was a simple certainty that the Lord was standing there and that I was in the Presence of Him whose life I had begun to read with such revulsion and such ill-will. And the certainty was so strong that it was Christ standing there that it has never left me. This was my basic and essential meeting with the Lord. From then I knew that Christ did exist. I knew that he was *thou*, in other words that he was the Risen Christ. I met with the core of the Christian message! This was the real turning point in my life.

How to Read the Bible?

1. Always start with a prayer
2. Read a little bit *every day*
3. Read the easiest books first
4. Concentrate on a little rather than skimming a lot
5. Actively apply what you read to your life
6. Don't dwell on passages that seem strange
7. Understand the Church's interpretation rather than your own

How to Read the Bible?

1. Start with a prayer:

Loving Master, shine the pure light of Your divine knowledge in our hearts. Open the eyes of our minds that we may understand the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us reverence for Your blessed commandments, that having conquered our sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, O Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies and to You do we offer glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.



How to Read the Bible?

2. Read a little bit every day

Everybody can set aside 5 to 10 minutes a day to read the Bible.

Just 5 minutes a day can change your life.



How to Read the Bible?

3. Read the easy books first

Gospel of Matthew

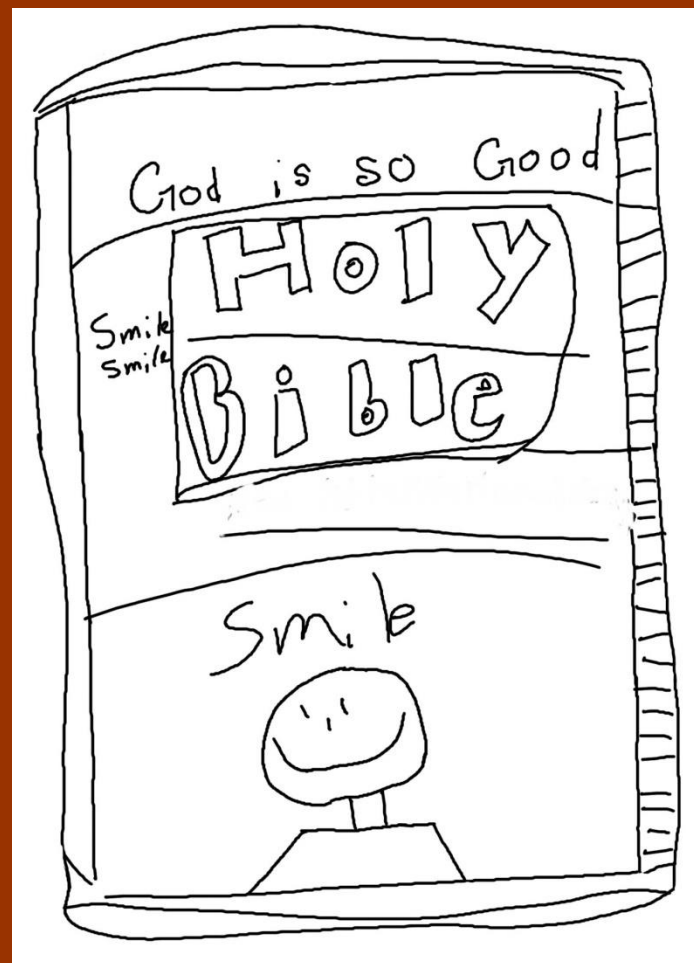
Gospel of Luke

First Letter of St. John

Proverbs

Psalms

Don't try to read all the way through starting with Genesis.



How to Read the Bible?

4. Concentrate on a little rather than skimming a lot

Don't read too much at one time. Concentrating on a few verses and what they mean is far better than skimming through a whole chapter superficially

How to Read the Bible?

5. Actively apply what you read to your life

“The words of the Scriptures are written for us not simply to understand them but also to do them.”

- St. Hesychios of Jerusalem



Your Word is a Lamp to my feet and a light to my path. ~Psalm 119.105

How to Read the Bible?

6. Don't dwell on passages that seem strange

Ask God to help you to understand them in time. And He will!

Every Scripture verse has to be understood in terms of its immediate context and in context of the entire Bible and the life of the Church as a whole.

Always beware of people who quote a Bible verse in isolation and draw strange conclusions from it.

How to Read the Bible?

7. Understand the Church's interpretation

“First of all, you must understand this: no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation”

- (2 Peter 1:20)



Interpreting the Bible



We must not only read the Scriptures, but also interpret them correctly. For this we need guidance.

Consider the Ethiopian whom St. Philip the Apostle encounters on the way to Samaria:

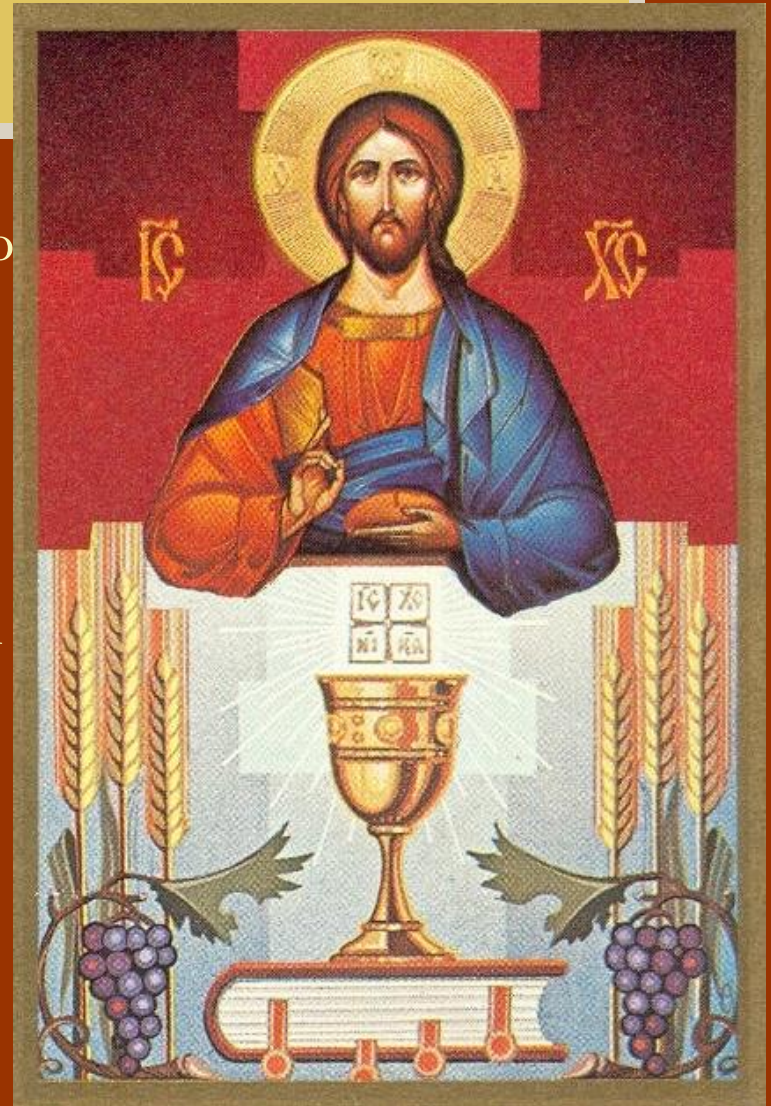
“Do you understand what you are reading?”

“How can I, unless someone guides me?” -Acts 8.30-31

Interpreting the Bible

“I am the Bread of Life. Amen, Amen, I say to you: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him”

(John 6:53-56).



The Bible and Tradition

- Orthodox Christians always interpret the Bible in the context of the Church and the Tradition of the Church.
- For us, Scripture and Tradition are *not* two different things. Rather, the Bible exists within the Tradition of the Church and is the heart and core of the Church's written Tradition.
- When we speak of the Tradition of the Church, we are *not* talking about "the traditions of men" (Colossians 2:8) condemned by the Apostle Paul.
- Holy Tradition is the "apostolic tradition" that St. Paul speaks of when he writes to the Thessalonians, "Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions which you were taught, whether by our preaching or by letter from us" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

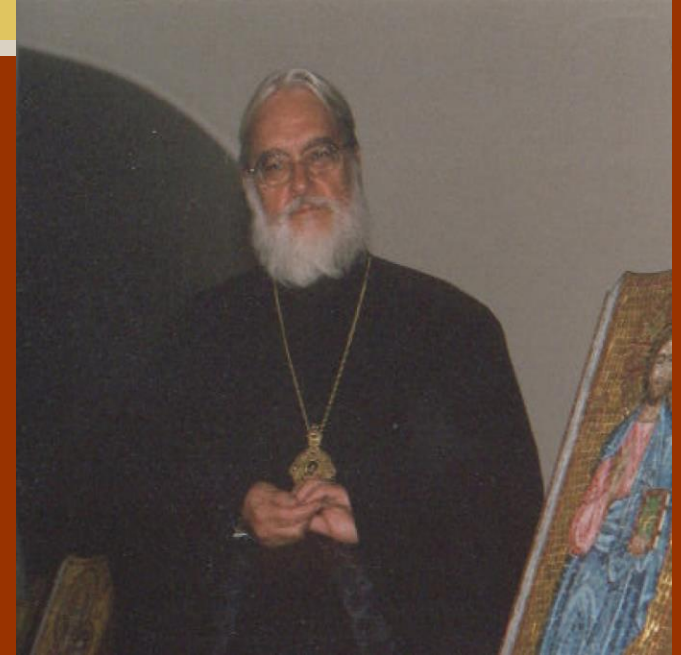
The Bible and Tradition

“Tradition is not only kept in the Church – it lives in the Church, it is the life of the Holy Spirit within the Church.

The Orthodox conception of Tradition is not static but dynamic, not merely a dead acceptance of the past but a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the present.

Loyalty to Tradition means not primarily the acceptance of formulae or customs from past generations but rather the ever-new, personal and direct experience of the Holy Spirit in the present, here and now!”

- Metropolitan Kallistos Ware



Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia

The Bible and Tradition



Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council
holding the Nicene Creed

- Not all aspects of the Holy Tradition are of equal importance.
- The Bible, the Creed and the dogmatic decrees of the 7 Ecumenical Councils have a unique pre-eminence in Orthodoxy.
- They outline the Christian belief in one God as Trinity — accepted as absolute and unchanging.

The Bible in Orthodox Worship

Orthodox
Christians are
not merely to
read the Bible,
we are also to
pray the Bible!



The prayers of the Divine Liturgy contain at least 98 quotations from the Old Testament and 114 quotations from the New Testament woven throughout.
To come to Liturgy attentively is to learn to pray the Bible!

The Bible and the Church

“Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us in order that we might have hope through the patience and encouragement that the Scriptures give us.”

- *Romans 15:4*

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults and giving instruction for living rightly.”

- *2 Timothy 3:15-16*



Saint Paul the Apostle



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