

# Holy Scripture In The Orthodox Church

## "The Bible"

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August 20 2000

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*Introduction by Father Demetrios Serfes :*

*Priest: Wisdom! Let Us Attend!  
Let Us Hear The Holy Gospel!  
Peace Be Unto All!  
Choir: And To Thy Spirit!*

The Bible is the book of the Church. We therefore read Holy Scripture, not as isolated individuals, but as members of the Church. In order to keep Holy Scripture in the mind of the Church, we observe how Scripture is used in worship, and how it is interpreted by the Holy Fathers. Our approach then to the Bible is both *Liturgical* and *Patristic*.

The Eastern Orthodox Church belief about Holy Scripture that is the Bible of the Old Testament and the New Testament we must be fully aware from within Holy Tradition. Tradition, is a life, a personal encounter with Christ our Lord in the Holy Spirit. Tradition then not only is kept by the Church - it lives in the Church, it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Bible is then the supreme expression of God's revelation to man.

Let me humbly now give you a clearer understanding of Holy Tradition in the Eastern Orthodox Church:

The meaning of Tradition in the early Christian Fathers refers to the Revelation made by God and delivered to His faithful people through the mouths of His prophets and apostles. Thus, it does not mean something "handed down" something delivered. The Greek word for Tradition, or its corresponding verb, is in a similar way used in the New Testament and applied in the same manner to the betrayal of Christ our Lord by Judas to the Jews (delivered), and to the delivery (paradosis) of Christian teaching by St. Paul to his converts.

The Tradition was called "Apostolic" because it was delivered by the Apostles to the Churches which they founded. It was later also called "ecclesiastic" because it was delivered again in each generation by the Church's teachers to their people. Its substance was considered to consist of the central facts and beliefs crystallized in the Creeds of the great orthodox bishoprics. In the early Christian literature, there are references to an "unwritten tradition" left by the Apostles. This, however, does not appear to refer to any body of information independent of Scripture but rather to the evidence of primitive Christian institutions and customs which confirm Biblical teachings.

**"The standard of the Holy Spirit as the sole Inspirer and Interpreter of the Holy Scriptures, and as the Unifier, in a spirit of freedom, of all the Faithful of all generations, in what makes our Church Orthodox" - His Grace Bishop Daniel of Budapest**

**"Real interpretation of Scripture is Church preaching, is tradition" - St. Irenaeus**

Then, by Holy Tradition (with capital **T**) the aggregate of truths of the faith is signified; these were originally orally transmitted by Christ and the Apostles to the members of the Church and, after that, taught in their entirety by the Church. These truths have been partially formulated and stated by the Ecumenical Councils, and by minor synods validated by the former; they have also been circulating in the common faith and conscience of the Church and have been included in later dogmatic and symbolic texts, in the writings of the Fathers and in the liturgical books of the Church. Holy Tradition also contains all ecclesiastical traditions (with small **t**)

referring to worship, polity, and, generally, the customs connected with the life of the Church. These traditions deserve respect on the part of the congregation but should be distinguished from the dogmatic Tradition referring to the truths of the Orthodox Faith. Holy Tradition is considered to be a source of Christian faith of the same authority and standing as that of the Bible.

This refers to the fact of Christ's appearing in glory while still on earth. It is related in the first three Gospels (Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13, Luke 9:28-36), and is also alluded to in the II Epistle of Peter 1:16-18. The vision of Christ transfigured was witnessed by Ss. Peter, James, and John, and is described by the evangelists with striking agreements as to its main outline. By tradition, the transfiguration took place on Mount Tabor, but many scholars prefer Mount Hermon, and some even the Mount of Olives. The event was interpreted as the attestation of the Jewish Law and Prophets to the Messiahship of Christ, since both Moses and Elijah appeared at the time of the Transfiguration right and left of Christ.

The event was also Divine proclamation of Christ's Sonship and a foreshadowing of his future glory. The feast of the Transfiguration originated in the Eastern Church. It was first a local and unofficial feasts, but it became widely adopted before the year 1000. From there it was introduced to the West, but it did not become a general observance until the middle of the 15th century. Feast day, August 6. - *Source: A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy, by Rev. Nikon D. Patriarcos, Hellenic Heritage Publications., Plainville, N.Y., 1984., pp. 356-357*

The soul of Holy Orthodoxy is prayer, and it is also Holy Scripture since the Christian Church is a Scriptural Church. The Eastern Orthodox Church follows the beliefs of the Old Testament, the New Testament and including several books of the Apocrypha. Since the Eastern Orthodox Church therefore looks to Holy Scripture the Bible as the supreme expression of God's revelation to man, and it must not be regarded as something set up over the Church, but as something that lives and is understood within the Church (that is why one should not separate Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition). It is from the Church that Holy Scripture ultimately derives its authority, for it was the Church, which originally decided which books form a part of Holy Scripture; and it is the Church alone which can interpret Holy Scripture with authority.

**"In accordance with the Apostolic faith delivered to us by tradition from the Fathers, I have delivered the tradition, without inventing anything extraneous to it. What I have learned, that I inscribed, comfortably with the Holy Scriptures" - St. Athanasios the Great**

This is the case being that from the many sayings in the Bible which by themselves are far from clear, and the individual reader, however sincere, is in danger of error if he trusts his own personal interpretations. Now we can say that the Orthodox Christian when reading Holy Scripture, accept the guidance of the Church. Therefore who helps us in understanding Holy Scripture and who guides us? First the Holy Spirit and secondly above all we in the Orthodox Church turn to the Holy Fathers over the many centuries which have helped with the interpretations of the Bible or as the Eastern Orthodox Church like to express: Holy Scriptures.

*Glory Be To Thee, O God, Glory Be To Thee!*  
Humbly In Christ Our True God,  
+Father Demetrios Serfes  
Who prays for you and with you!

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The following questions can help in understanding more about Holy Scriptures in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

1. Can you briefly explain the Holy Fathers in the Church and the Patristic Fathers?
2. Can you tell me which translation the Eastern Orthodox Church uses and why? - by His Eminence, Metropolitan Isaiah
3. Can you tell me how many books are there in the Orthodox Bible?

4. Can you list the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament?
  5. Can you tell me how to read the Bible and why? - by Archimandrite Justin Popovic of blessed memory
  6. Does the Orthodox Church have any prayers before reading Holy Scripture?
  7. I understand the Orthodox Church has recently published the New Testament with the Psalms and where can I obtain such a Bible?
  8. Where can I get the Old Testament Septuagint that Eastern Orthodox Christians read?
  9. Where can I obtain a full set of the Early Church Fathers?
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## 1. Can You Explain The Holy Fathers In The Church and The Patristic Fathers?

The name "father" was originally appended to bishops as the living witnesses to Christian tradition. However, from the end of the 4th century the name acquired a more specific sense referring to a rather clearly defined group of ecclesiastical authors of the past whose authority on matters of belief was widely and indisputably accepted. *St. Basil the Great* and *St. Gregory of Nazianzus* are among the first who attempted to prove the orthodoxy of their teaching by appealing to the concerted opinions of texts widely accepted at the time as Patristic. Later on during the Christological controversies of the 5th century, all parties claimed the authority of the Fathers behind their teachings.

A noble example is the Council of Ephesus (431) clearly referring to the Fathers and their canons. By the end of the 5th century the name was also applied to teachers and authors who were not bishops. As commonly accepted, the Fathers of the Church were distinguished by orthodoxy of belief, holiness of life, the approval of the Church, and antiquity. But as dogmatics was further developed together with the growth of the Church, the attribute of antiquity began to be extended in time.

In the East, the period of the Fathers of the Church ends with *St. John Damascus*. Their authority was, and still is, immense within the entire Christian Church. But though their concerted opinions on belief and practice are taken to be of inviolable authority, individual positions of Fathers not in agreement with the universally taught Patristic opinion bear no restrictive authority on the thought and the practice of the Church. And though a Patristic consensus is greatly restrictive, if not obligatory, for the Church, there is no Orthodox teaching or rule by which the Fathers are considered to be infallible; nor has the name Father been applied to particular individuals by decree of Synod or other authority, rather, it has been accorded to certain ecclesiastical personalities of prominence by the conscience of the Church and only after their life and work proved to be worthy of such distinction. (Source: "A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy", by Rev. Nicon D. Patrianos, Hellenic Heritage Publications, Plainville, N.Y., 1987, pp. 172-173).

### Patristic Fathers Of The Church

"Patristic deals with the study of the writings of the Fathers of the Church. The title "*Fathers*" is given to important Christian writers and teachers who wrote between the end of the 1st century to about the close of the 8th century. This period is commonly termed the Patristic age. Patristic literature is closely connected with the history of the Church and the history of early doctrine. This literature is the chief evidence for the events as well as for the ideas of those times. The leading Fathers authored works vital to Christian thought and practice. They defended the Gospel against heresies and misunderstandings. They wrote extensive commentaries on the Bible, explanatory works on doctrine and ecclesiastical life, and innumerable sermons on the faith and life of the Church, and projected the Christian faith vis-a-vis the best thought of their times. And considering the fact that

the genuine formulation of faith and order within Christianity took place during the times of the Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Church, the importance of the Greek Fathers is inestimable in evaluating the geniuses of the present day Christian belief and life." (Source: "A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy", Rev. Nicon D. Patriarcos, Hellenic Heritage Publications., Pleasantville, N.Y., 1987., pp. 279-280).

Some of the Holy Fathers of the Church are both from the East and in the West who were in total agreement with the Church, however we discover later onwards that a schism occurred in 1054, and those in the West and in the East were no longer in communion with one another. After the year 1054 the Eastern Orthodox Church no longer agreed with the writings of the West, even although earlier the well known writers of the Church in the West began to stray from the teachings of the holy Fathers in the East.

Here is an example of some of the Holy Fathers in the early Church, as well as well known saints who spoke or have written about the Holy Scriptures: *St. Andrew of Crete, St. Anthony the Great, St. Alexander, Patriarch of Constantinople, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Aphrahat of Persia, St. Athanasios the Great, Sts. Barsanuphis and John, St. Basil the Great, St. Clement of Rome, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. John Cimacus, St. John Chrysostom, St. John of Damascus, St. John Karpathos, St. John of Kronstadt, St. Justin the Martyr, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Mark the Ascetic, St. Maximos the Confessor, St. Neilos, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, St. Paisius Velichkovsky, St. Photios the Great, St. Polycarp of Smyrna, St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Silouan of Mt. Athos, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Theodore the Studite, St. Theophan the Recluse, St. Theophylact of Bulgaria.* . Some recent 20th century writers on Holy Scripture are: *Blessed Father Justin Popovich (1894-1979), and Archbishop Averky of blessed memory.*

To note more Holy Fathers of the Church and to learn what each one wrote read: "The Bible And The Holy Fathers" -For Orthodox- which include *Daily Scripture Readings and Commentary for Orthodox Christians*, Compiled and edited by Johanna Manely and with a forward by Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia., Monastery Books, Menlo Park, California, 1990. This book can be obtained from Holy Cross Bookstore, 50 Goddard Avenue, Brookline, Massachusetts 02146 U.S.A.

Through the Prayers of the Holy Fathers,  
O Lord, Jesus Christ Son of God,  
have mercy upon us and save us!

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## **2. Can You Tell Me Which Translation The Eastern Orthodox Church Uses and Why?**

*by His Eminence Metropolitan Isaiah of Proikonisou and Presiding Hierarch of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Denver*

The actual title of this presentation written by His Eminence Metropolitan Isaiah is titled: "*Which English Translation Of The Bible Should I Use*"? This outstanding article has appeared in the Diocesan Bulletin of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Denver.

Christianity in America is often characterized as a faith of the "Bible-thumpers." Our cities are indeed filled with "Bible churches" and the Holy Scriptures are widely assumed to be the basis of Christianity itself.

In response to this, either out of sense of "catching up" or to confront the more outlandish claims (sometimes against Orthodoxy) of fundamentalist, Bible based "Christianity" most of our Orthodox parishes hold regular "Bible study" classes.

Faithful Orthodox believers who come to these classes, and even their pastors, are quickly confronted with a vast array of Bible translations, and Bibles themselves come in all colors, sizes, shapes, and with without "study helps".

To some, the very Bible itself seems wrapped in veritable "tower of Babel" with every one we meet seeming to quote Scripture passages just a little bit differently -- and some who denounce one translation while extolling another.

To answer the question posed as the title of this article, however, we must first examine what the Bible is, and then examine its various sources and translations.

**Strictly Speaking, there never was a "Bible" in the Orthodox Church.** At least not as we commonly think of the Bible as a single volume book we can hold in our hand. Since the beginning of the Church, from the start of our liturgical tradition, there has never been a single book in an Orthodox church we could point to as "the Bible".

Instead the various "Books" of the Bible are found scattered throughout several service books located either on the Holy Altar itself, or at the chanter's stand. The Gospels (or their pericopes) are compiled into a single volume -- usually bound in precious metal and richly decorated -- placed on the Holy Altar.

The Epistles (or, again, their pericopes) are bound together in another book, called the Apostolos, which is normally found at the chanter's stand. Usually located next to the Apostolos on the chanter's shelf are the twelve volumes of the Menaion, as well as the books called the Triodion and Pentekostarion, containing various segments of the Old and the New Testaments.

The fact that there is no "Bible" in the church should not surprise us, since our liturgical tradition is a continuation of the practices of the early Church, when the Gospels and the letters from the Apostles (the Epistles) had been freshly written and copied for distribution to the Christian communities.

The "Hebrew Scriptures" (what we now call the "Old Testament", comprising the Law (the first five books) and the Prophets, were likewise written on various scrolls, just as they were found in the Jewish synagogues.

**The Church is NOT Based on the Bible.** Rather, the Bible is a product of the Church. For the first few centuries of the Christian era, no one could have put his hands on a single volume called "The Bible." In fact, there was no one put his hands on a single volume called "The Bible." In fact, there was no agreement regarding which "books" of Scripture were to be considered accurate and correct, or canonical.

Looking back over history, there were various "lists" of the canonical "books" comprising the Bible:

- The Muratorian Canon (130 AD) cites all the books we considered as parts of the Bible today, except for Hebrews, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation/Apocalypse
- Canon 60 of the local Council of Laodicea (364 AD) cited Revelation/Apocalypse
- A festal Epistle by Saint Athanasius (369 AD) lists all of them.

Even so, there was no official, authoritative "canon" listing all the books until the Sixth Ecumenical Council, at Constantinople in 680 AD. Canon II of that Council ratifies the First through the Fifth Ecumenical Councils, as well as the local councils at Carthage (255 AD), Ancyra (315 AD), Neocaesaria (315 AD), Gangra (340 AD), Antioch (341 AD), Laodicea (364 A), Sardica (347 AD), Constantinople (394 AD), and Carthage (419 AD).

When the Council at Laodicea specified the content of the bible as we know it - 39 years after the First Ecumenical Council (325 AD) and 17 years before the second Ecumenical Council (381 AD) - the Liturgy was pretty much well-defined and established and had been "canonized" by common usage the reading from these books.

It was not until the invention of the printing press in Western Europe, coinciding with the period of the Protestant Reformation of Western Christianity that "The Bible" was widely disseminated as a single volume.

**The "Protestant" Old Testament in Antithetical to Christian Truth.** When Protestant Western Christians reviewed the canonical books of Scripture, they adopted the "Hebrew Canon" accepted by the Jews since 100 AD.

The so-called Apocrypha, or Deuterocanonical, books (found in "Catholic" and "Orthodox" versions of the Bible) were a problem for Jews living after the time of Christ, since they often very clearly prophesy concerning Our Lord, and indicate His divinity.

Some of the books were also problematic for both the Jews and the Protestants because they make prophetically evident the special role of the Theotokos in the oikonomia of salvation. In fact, the Orthodox Fathers cite passages quite effectively to discuss the Church's understanding of the role of the Theotokos.

Also, they only scriptural reference to praying for the dead is found in a Deuterocanonical Book: viz., Maccabees.

Not surprisingly, these Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books were rejected from the "canon" of books indicated in the Jewish Scriptures. This canon was formally pronounced by a rabbinical council at Jamnia (c. 100 AD), which stated that all canonical Scripture had to have been written: in Palestine, in Hebrew (not Greek), and more than 400 years prior (300 BC) to that time.

In addition, the authorized Hebrew "translation" was at variance with the accepted Septuagint Greek versions, which had been prepared by 72 translators accepted Septuagint Greek version, which had been prepared by 72 translators working in Alexandria Egypt.

This is significant, because the Apostles, who were the authors of the New Testament, as well as the early Church Fathers, frequently cite passages only found in the Septuagint (Greek) Old Testament that have significant differences in meaning from the Hebrew. Moreover, they frequently cite passages from the "Apocryphal" books of the Old Testament.

**The Holy Scriptures Were Produced by the Orthodox Church.** The Church's holy prophets and Apostles wrote the books contained in the Bible. The Church determined which books were authoritative and belonged in Holy Scripture. The Church preserved and passed on the texts of these Scriptural books.

The seventy-two Jewish rabbis and scholars who gave us the Septuagint Greek Old Testament, produced seventy-two identical Greek translations working independently and in isolation from one another. Writing in Greek, the Holy Apostles Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude produced the books of the New Testament.

**The Holy Scriptures Were Preserved by the Orthodox Church.** These books and letters were studied, copied, collected, recopied, passed from group of early Christians to another, and read in the services of the Church.

Testimony to the fidelity of reproduction in this milieu is the consistent agreement among the Church Fathers when they cite Scripture, and their common understanding of Scripture in their deliberations at the local and Ecumenical councils.

Over the centuries, alterations crept into some manuscripts. Sometimes the texts were altered by accident (e.g., mistakes made in copying these books by hand). At other times intentional alterations were made, either by misguided but innocent copyists who thought they were correcting errors in the manuscripts they were working from, or by heretics who full intended to change the words of Scripture to suit their purposes.

The Church, however, guided by the Holy Spirit, distinguished between authentic and inauthentic manuscripts, discarding or ignoring the latter, copying and handing on the former.

Even today we see the authentic words of Scripture preserved. When a young priest or a chanter mispronounces a word in its original Greek, there will be a Bishop, an older priest -- or even a venerable Orthodox "grandmother" -- who will be quick to point out the aberration from the way the text "has always been sung or read"!

**The Authentic Greek Text of the Bible is Preserved by the Orthodox Church.** When translating the New Testament into English, there are many Greek manuscripts to choose from. To ask, "What does the original Greek say?" is to beg the question, which Greek text?

For Orthodox Christians this is a very easy question to answer. We simply use the Greek text handed down within the Orthodox Church which has been proven consistent by 2000 years of liturgical use and which the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has given us.

To Scripture scholars there is a huge body of ancient Greek manuscripts, known as the Byzantine text-type, which embodies the Orthodox textual tradition. These old manuscripts and lectionaries differ very little from each other, and are indeed in overwhelming agreement with each other throughout the whole New Testament. Furthermore, they are great in number and comprise the vast majority of existing Greek manuscripts.

**There is Another, Bogus, Greek Text of the Bible.** Beside the Byzantine text-type family of manuscripts, there is a minor collection of Greek Scripture texts which are very old, and sometimes predate the Byzantine texts by hundreds of years.

In the middle of the last century, "modern" Scripture scholars, or critics, determined that newly-"discovered" ancient texts -- such as the Codex Sinaiticus, the Alexandrian Codex, the Codex Ephraemi rescriptus -- dating from the fourth through the sixth centuries, had determining authority in establishing the original text of the Gospels and the words of the Lord.

Criticism was leveled against these critics by other scholars who maintained that the older manuscripts had been preserved through the ages precisely because they were set aside and unused since they were inferior copies -- obvious from the ineptitude of the hands that wrote them and the many misspellings.

They argued that it was hardly logical to prefer inferior texts from one text family over the received Byzantine texts were in agreement. Furthermore, they noted that the received text has even more ancient parallels -- in second century Syriac and Latin versions -- and is widely quoted in the Fathers.

Even papyrus fragments from the first century bear out the veracity of the Byzantine text, and refute the validity of the older texts.

Amazingly - indeed, even unbelievably - most modern translators work from an "eclectic" or "critical text, which draws very heavily from the older Codices. This eclectic text is a patchwork of readings from the various manuscripts which differ from each other *and from the Byzantine text.*

Any Greek Orthodox Christian can take a copy of the Nestle-Aland critical (eclectic) text into church, and compare the Epistles with those in the Apostolos - they differ, often, radically, in hundreds of places, not only in words and word order, but also in tenses and meanings!

The same comparison can be made between an English translation of the Psalms and the Greek version found in the Orlonion - they differ in thousands of places. The English has often been translated from the Hebrew

Masoretic text which was compiled by Jewish scholars during the first ten centuries after Christ. These scholars used inferior texts or edited them to delete or minimize the messianic prophecies or types which refer to Christ.

Surprisingly, this Hebrew version of the Psalms is used even though the Greek Septuagint is often used to decipher the Masoretic text which is often unintelligible since the vowels are not indicated.

**Most Modern English Bible Translations are Based on Bogus Versions of the Scriptures.** Unfortunately, no English translation of the Bible has been made using the Byzantine text-type manuscripts of the New Testament since the King James Version (KJV) in 1611. The others are all based on the eclectic Greek New Testament manuscripts and various Hebrew Old Testament texts.

The bottom line is that manuscripts which the Orthodox Church did not use or copy have been elevated above those texts which the Church has preserved by modern and contemporary Scripture scholars and translators.

Sadly - but perhaps significantly indicative - is the fact that the scholars who put together those eclectic critical texts decisively reject the Byzantine (that is to say, Orthodox) text-type, claiming that the Byzantine text was corrupted by Orthodox copyists eager to conform the text of Scripture to Orthodox theology as it developed over the first several centuries of the Church's life.

**The Orthodox Stand on the Critical Eclectic Texts.** As Orthodox, we cannot believe that the text of Scripture is arbitrary and governed only by human considerations - especially those of modern scholars who decide what is and what is not "authentic." We see the presence of God and His providence in our daily lives; how can they be denied to exist in the Church and in the canon and text of the Holy Scriptures? Otherwise everything in our liturgical worship is suspect and unreliable.

The human element cannot be ignored or denied, but neither can the divine. Yet most biblical scholars and textual critics wish to disregard any form of divine intervention or revelation in order to make their study "scientific." In fact, present-day biblical scholarship hides its fundamental unbelief from believers and even from itself. It ultimately results in such ludicrous claims that Jesus Christ never spoke any of the words recorded in the Bible - claims that make the front page of national news magazines and mislead millions of people.

Perhaps the best example of the modern "scholars" bias is found in the first chapter, first verse of the Gospel of Mark: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" The modernists drop the words "the Son of God" because they are absent from the Codex Sinaiticus and papyrus miniscules 28 and 255. Yet they appear in all other copies and versions and in many quotations of the fathers!

**Modern Translations Obscure the Divinity of Christ.** In what can only be a return to the ancient heresy of Arius, even the much touted 1952 Revised Standard Version (RSV) translation of Scripture tends to minimize Christ's divine nature.

Forty years ago the King James translation was widely impugned for being based on the Greek Byzantine texts which were called corrupt - an amazing accusation considering the pedigree of the eclectic critical texts.

In the liberal theological milieu of that time, many Protestant theologians denied not only the virgin birth, but also the divinity of Christ and His resurrection.

One curious feature of the RSV translation is its apparent mixture of old and new English; the older traditional second person singular pronoun, thou/thee/thy, is intermixed with the nondescript modern ye/you/you. While at first glance this seems chaotic, it actually serves as a hidden code.

The traditional "thou" usage is employed when God is addressed, but "you" whenever anyone else is addressed. Note, for example, that the Our Father in the RSV retains the word "thy" in referring to God's name, kingdom, and will.

But note that in the RSV translation a leper addresses Jesus in Mark 1:40, Saying "If *you* will, *you* can make me clean," and Peter says in Matthew 16:16, "*You* are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The only time in the RSV that Christ is addressed as "Thou" is after He is no longer on earth, but even this is found mainly in Hebrews when Paul quotes from the Old Testament.

The clearly Protestant bias against the Theotokos, and her Orthodox definition as critical to preserving the divinity of Christ is also very evident in the RSV. Consider Matthew 1:25:

LJK: "(Joseph) knew her not till *she had brought forth her firstborn son*; and he called his name Jesus."

RSV: "(Joseph) knew her not until *she had borne a son*; and he called his name Jesus."

From the Byzantine, Orthodox, texts, the KJV tells us that Mary brought forth not a son, but her firstborn - precluding her having had previous children.

Moreover, He is clearly *her* son; but not Joseph's. Note how the RSV is distinguished from the KJV in Luke 2:33; after Simeon returned Jesus to His mother, the narrative tells us:

KJV: "*Joseph and his mother* marveled at those things which were spoken of him."

RSV: "And *his father and his mother* marveled at what was said about him."

The RSV infers that Joseph is Jesus' father, presumably his biological father - a clear refutation of the dogma of virgin birth.

Or again, consider the following notable omission in John 3:13 according to the RSV:

KJV: "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which *is in heaven*."

RSV: "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man."

The Byzantine text is clearly reflected in the KJV; the eclectic text by the RSV. Yet only a tiny handful of manuscripts omit the expression "*which is in heaven*." while the vast majority of manuscripts include it, as do the quotations of Church fathers such as Saint Basil the Great, Saint Hilary, Saint John Chrysostom, and Saint Cyril.

This particular Scripture text is the clearest witness to the Orthodox teaching that Christ is fully man while not being circumscribed in any way as God, since it indicates that Christ was simultaneously on earth in the body and in heaven with the Father. It also indicates, contrary to modern liberal theology, that our Lord knew very well just Who He was, where He came from, and what business He was about.

There are many more examples, but let us simply note one more, I Corinthians 15:47, which needs no further comment:

KJV: "The first man is of the earth, earthly: the second man is *the Lord* from heaven."

RSV: "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven."

**The Corruption of "Paraphrased" Bibles.** There is no need in this article to provide such critical analysis of the various other translations which followed the RSV (e.g, NIV, NAB); all are even more flawed. A comment should be made, however, of several very dangerous paraphrased "versions" of the Bible, such as "Today's English Version" and the volume sold as "The Book."

If the Scripture scholars can criticize the Byzantine copyists for corrupting the text to conform to Orthodox theology, what are we to say about the non Orthodox paraphrases who have radically altered not only text, but the whole meaning of various passages?

These "Bibles" are to be totally and completely avoided by the Orthodox; they have no good purpose whatsoever because they are gross distortions of the truth, and serve only to infiltrate a completely corrupted theology into the minds of the faithful.

**The Orthodox Witness.** One very interesting question, never asked, is this: "If scholars are willing to assemble an eclectic text out of Scripture fragments from various sources - often of unknown doctrinal origin or authority - why haven't they ever considered the living archeological evidence of Scripture segments that have been repeated faithfully for ages in the Orthodox Liturgy?"

Why haven't serious modern scholars considered the incredible coincidence that 72 Hebrew scholars could all translate the Old Testament in exactly the same manner into the Septuagint Greek?

Why haven't they examined the translation of the Scriptures done a thousand years ago from Greek into Slavonic, which has preserved exactly, accurately, and precisely the meaning of the Greek original? And, more to the point, if errors have crept in and accumulated as texts were copied over the years, why aren't the existing copies of these Greek and Slavonic Scriptures divergent?

Non-Orthodox scholars cannot answer these questions because, to do so honestly and truthfully, they would have to admit that in fact the Orthodox Church, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has preserved intact and correctly the Holy Scriptures. And, moreover, this preservation is in part assured by the dogma and doctrine of the Church which both draw from the Scripture and provide evidence and support of its truth.

**What Translation Should I Use?** The answer is this: the King James Version (KJV) is the most reliable and faithful English translation, Unfortunately, it is written in an archaic, 500 year old style of English. Although not as incomprehensible as the 2000 year old Greek of the New Testament and Liturgy is to modern Greek speakers, it is still awkward and difficult for many to understand.

The real question that begs - indeed pleads - for an answer, is this: "Why hasn't the Greek Orthodox Church sponsored an accurate translation into modern English from the Byzantine texts and extant fragments of Scripture found in the liturgy of the Church?"

(Source: Greek Orthodox Diocese of Denver Bulletin: March 1995, Volume 3, Number 3., pp. 14-17).

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### 3. Can You Tell Me How Many Books Are There In The Orthodox Bible?

#### *The Old Testament*

The official version of the Old Testament authorized by the Orthodox Church for use in worship and reading is that of the *Septuagint*. The number of books in the Septuagint Old Testament edition of the Bible are *forty-nine*

books, *twenty-seven* in the New Testament. There are *seventy-six* books in both collections of the Bible. In the King James English Version of the Bible, or as it is commonly called --the Authorized Version, ten books are omitted from the Old Testament. These ten books were rejected by Luther, Calvin, and the Swiss and German reformers. In the English Bible they were placed in a inferior position, until they were finally omitted altogether about a century ago. The Roman Catholic edition omits two books from the Old Testament. The Council of Trent, in the third session (1546), excludes *Ist Esdras* and the *3rd Maccabees* that was confirmed by the Vatican Council of 1870. The preservation of all the Holy Books of the Holy Bible expresses the vigilance of the Orthodox Church in guarding and preserving the Bible and its truth throughout the ages unadulterated.

The books omitted by the Protestant King James Bible are *I Esra, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastical by Sirach, Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremy, the First, Second and Third Books of Maccabees, and parts of Esther and Daniel*. These books were included in all the collections of the Bible since Saint Athanasios during the Fourth Century. Also, they were included in the list of the local Synods of Hippo, 393 AD: of Carthage, 397 AD; in the Quinisext at Trullo, 692; and by the local Synods of Jerusalem, 1672; and Constantinople, 1675 A.D. They are also in constant use in our public worship, especially the books, *Wisdom of Solomon*.

The Church from the beginning, used the Septuagint and not the Palestinian version of the Bible

Note: During the time of our Lord, there were two versions of the of the Old Testament in circulation among the Jews. One was called the "**Narrow Circle**" of Jerusalem or Palestine and the other was called "**Wilder Circle**" of Alexandria. Our Lord and the Apostles, in the New Testament, used the "**Wilder Circle**" or the Septuagint. It was called Septuagint, or Seventy, because there were seventy, (according to tradition 72) scholars who first made the translation into Greek during the reign of Ptolmey II in the third century, B.C. in Alexandria. Our Church recognizes and accepts the Septuagint as the sacred and inspired Word of God. This version of the Bible circulated in the synagogues around the Mediterranean world where Christianity flourished.

#### *The New Testament*

The New Testament canon was accepted as such by the conscience of the Church and guarded by the Holy Church as the most precious treasure. By the Fourth Century, the local synods of Hippo, 393, and Carthage, 397, included all *twenty-seven* books: whereas, the local synod of Laodicia in 350 excluded the Apocalypse (Revelation). It was finally included in the canon of the New Testament, authorized by the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

Being the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, the Bible is kept in the Church with great respect and veneration, and guarded by the Holy Spirit, Who inspired the Holy Prophets.

(Source: *What Is The Holy Bible?* by Rev. George C. Papademetriou, Ph.D., Director of the Library and Instructor of Systematic Theology, Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology., Brookline, Massachusetts., 1986., pp.3-4).

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#### 4. Can you list the books of the Old & New Testament?

Books Of The Old Testament According To The Septuagint:

- |                             |                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Genesis                  | 2. Exodus               |
| 3. Leviticus                | 4. Numbers              |
| 5. Deuteronomy              | 6. Joshua               |
| 7. Judges                   | 8. Ruth                 |
| 9. Kings I (I Samuel)       | 10 Kings II (II Samuel) |
| 11. Kings III (I Kings)     | 12. Kings IV (2 Kings)  |
| 13. Chronicles I            | 14. Chronicles II       |
| 15. Esdras I                | 16. Esdras II (Ezra)    |
| 17. Nehemiah                | 18. Tobit               |
| 19. Judith                  | 20. Esther              |
| 21. Maccabees I             | 22. Maccabees II        |
| 23. Maccabees III           | 24. Psalms              |
| 25. Job                     | 26. Proverbs            |
| 27. Ecclesiastics           | 28. Song Of Solomon     |
| 29. Wisdom of Solomon       | 30. Wisdom of Sirach    |
| 31. Hosea                   | 32. Amos                |
| 33. Michah                  | 34. Joel                |
| 35. Obadiah                 | 36. Jonah               |
| 37. Nahum                   | 38. Habakkuk            |
| 39. Zephaniah               | 40. Haggai              |
| 41. Zachariah               | 42. Malachi             |
| 43. Isaiah                  | 44. Baruch              |
| 46. Lamentations of Jermiah | 47. Epistle of Jeremiah |
| 48. Ezekiel                 | 49. Daniel              |

## Books Of The New Testament :

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Matthew              | 2. Mark                  |
| 3. Luke                 | 4. John                  |
| 5. Acts                 | 6. Romans                |
| 7. First Corinthians    | 8. Second Corinthians    |
| 9. Galatians            | 10. Ephesians            |
| 11. Philippians         | 12. Colossians           |
| 13. First Thessalonians | 14. Second Thessalonians |
| 15. First Timothy       | 16. Second Timothy       |
| 17. Titus               | 18. Philemon             |
| 19. Hebrews             | 20. James                |
| 21. First Peter         | 22. Second Peter         |
| 23. First John          | 24. Second John          |
| 25. Third John          | 26. Jude                 |
| 27. Revelation          |                          |

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### **5. Can You Tell Me How To Read The Bible And Why?**

*by Archimandrite Justin Popovich of Blessed Memory (1889-1979)*

The Bible is in a sense a biography of God in the world. In it the Indescribable One has in a sense described Himself. The Holy Scriptures of the New Testament are a biography of the incarnate God in this world. In them it is related how God, in order to reveal Himself to men, sent God the Logos, who took on flesh and became man - and a man told men everything that God is, everything that God wants from this world and the people in it. God the Logos revealed God's plan for the world and God's love for the world. God the Word spoke to men about God with the help of words, insofar as human words can contain the uncontainable God.

All that is necessary for this world and the people in it - the Lord has stated in the Bible. In it He has given the answers to all questions. There is no question which can torment the human soul, and not find its Bible. Men cannot devise more questions than there are answers in the Bible. If you fail to find the answer to any of your questions in the Bible, it means that you have either posed a senseless question or did not know how to read the Bible and did not finish reading the answer in it.

#### **What The Bible Contains**

In the Bible God make known:

- (1) what the world is; where came from; why it exists; what it is heading for; how it will end;
- (2) what man is; where he comes from; where he is going; what he is made of; what his purpose is; how he will end;
- (3) what animals and plants are; what their purpose is; what they are used for;
- (4) what good is; where it comes from; what it leads to; what its purpose is; how it is attained;
- (5) what evil is; where it comes from; how it came to exist; why it exists -how it will come to an end;
- (6) what the righteous are and what sinners are; how a sinner becomes righteous and how an arrogant righteous man becomes a sinner; how a man serves God and how he serves satan; the whole path from good to evil, from God to satan;

(7) everything - from the beginning to the end; man is entire path from the body to God, from his conception in the womb to his resurrection from the dead;

(8) what the history of the world is, the history of heaven and earth, the history of mankind; what their path, purpose, and end are.

### **The Beauty Of The Bible**

In the Bible God has said absolutely everything that was necessary to be said to men. The biography of every man - everyone without exception - is found in the Bible. In it each of us can find himself portrayed and thoroughly described in detail: all those virtues and vices which you have and can have and cannot have. You will find the paths on which your own soul and everyone else's journey from sin to sinlessness, and the entire path from man to God and from man to Satan. You will find the means to free yourself from sin. In short, you will find the means to free yourself from sin. In short, you will find the complete history of sin and sinfulness, and the complete history of righteousness and righteous.

If you are mournful, you will find consolation in the Bible; if you are sad, you find joy; if you are angry - tranquility; if you are lustful - continence; if you are foolish - wisdom; if you are bad - goodness; if you are a criminal - mercy and righteousness; if you hate your fellow man - love. In it you will find a remedy for all your vices and weak points, and nourishment for all your virtues and accomplishments. If you are good, the Bible will teach you how to become better; if you are kind, it will teach you angelic tenderness; if you are intelligent, it will teach you wisdom.

If you appreciate the beauty and music literary style, there is nothing more beautiful or more moving than what is contained in Job, Isaiah, Solomon, David, John the Theologian and the Apostle Paul. Here music - the angelic music of the eternal truth of God - is clothed in human words. The more one reads and studies the Bible, the more he finds reasons to study it as often...as he can. According to St. John Chrysostom, it is like an aromatic root, which produces more and more aroma the more it is rubbed.

### **Prayerful Preparation**

Just as important as knowing why we should read the Bible is knowing how we should read the Bible. The best guides for this are the holy Fathers, headed by St. John Chrysostom who, in a manner of speaking, has written a fifth Gospel. The holy Fathers recommend serious preparation before reading and studying the Bible; but of what does this preparation consist?

First of all in prayer. Pray to the Lord to illuminate your mind - so that you may understand the words of the Bible - and to fill your heart with His grace - so that you may feel the truth and life of those words. Be aware that these are God's words, which He is speaking and saying to you personally. Prayer, together with the other virtues found in the Gospel, is the best preparation a person can have for understanding the Bible.

### **How Should We Read The Bible?**

Prayerfully and reverently, for in each word there is another drop of eternal truth, and all the words together make up the boundless ocean of the Eternal Truth.

The Bible is not a book but life; because its words are "*spirit and life*" (John 6:63). Therefore its words can be comprehended if we study them with the spirit of its spirit, and with life of its life. It is a book that must be read with life - by putting it into practice. One should first live it, and then understand it. Here the words of the Savior apply: "*Whoever is willing to do it - will understand that this teaching is from God*" (John 7:17). Do it, so that you may understand it. This is the fundamental rule of Orthodox exegesis.

At first one usually reads the Bible quickly, and then more and more slowly, until finally he will begin to read not even word by word, because in each word he is discovering an everlasting truth and an ineffable mystery.

## **Seed In Our Souls**

By reading the Bible you are adding yeast to the dough of your soul and body, which gradually expands and fills the soul until it has thoroughly permeated it and makes it rise with the truth and righteousness of the Gospel.

In every instance, the Savior's parable about the sower and the seed can be applied to every one of us. The seed of Divine Truth is given to us in the Bible. By reading it, we sow that seed in our own soul. It falls on the rocky and thorny ground of our soul, but a little also falls on the good soil of our heart - and bears fruit. And when you catch sight of the fruit and taste it, the sweetness and joy will spur you to clear and plow the rocky and thorny areas of your soul and sow it with the seed of the word of God.

The beginning of wisdom is to listen to God's word (Matt. 7:24-25). Every word of the Savior has the power and the might to heal both physical and spiritually ailments. *"Say the word and my servant will be healed"* (Matt. 8:8). The Savior said the word - and the centurion's servant was healed. Just as He once did, the Lord even now ceaselessly says His words to you, and to me, and to all of us. But we must pause, and immerse ourselves in them and receive them - with the centurion's faith. And a miracle will happen to us, and our souls will be healed just as the centurion's servant was healed.

.He still does this today, because the Lord Jesus *"is the same yesterday and today and forever"*(Heb. 13:8).

## **Be A Brother Of Christ**

In each word of the Saviour there is more eternity and permanence than in all heaven and earth with all their history. Hence He said: *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away"* (Matt. 24:35)... If a man accepts them, he is more permanent than heaven and earth, because there is power in them that immortalizes man and makes him eternal.

Learning and fulfilling the words of God makes a person a relative of the Lord Jesus. He Himself revealed this when He said: *"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and carry it out"* (Luke 8:21). In learning from the Bible, a certain blessedness floods the soul which resembles nothing on earth. The Savior spoke about this when He said, *"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it"*(Luke 11:28).

## **Words Of The Word**

Great is the mystery of the word - so great that the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Christ the Lord, is called *"the Word"* or *"the Logos"* in the Bible. *God is the Word*(John 1:1). All those words which come from the eternal and absolute Word are full of God, Divine Truth, Eternity, and Righteousness. If you listen to them, you are listening to God. If you read them, you are reading the direct words of God. God the Word became flesh, became man (John 1:14), and mute, stuttering man began to proclaim the words of the eternal truth and righteousness of God.

## **From Death To Life**

In the Savior's words there is a certain elixir of immortality, which drips drop by drop into the soul of the man who reads His words and brings his soul from death to life, from impermanence to permanence. The Savior indicated this when He said: *"Truly, truly I say unto you, whoever listens to my word and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life,...and has passed over from death to life"* (John 5:24). Thus the Savior makes the crucial assertion: *"Truly, truly I say unto you, whoever keeps my words will never see death"* (John 8:51).

Every word of Christ is full of God. Thus, when it enters a man's soul it cleanses it from every defilement. From each of His words comes a power that cleanses us from sin. Hence at the Mystical Supper the Saviour told His disciples, who used to listen to His words without ceasing: *"You have already been cleansed by the word which I have spoken to you"* (John 15:3).

Christ the Lord and His Apostles call everything that is written in the Bible the word of God, the word of the Lord (John 17:4; Acts 6:2, 13:46, 16:32, 19:20; II Cor. 2:17; Col. 1:15, II Thess. 3:1), and unless you read it and receive it as such, you will remain in the mute, stuttering words of men, vain and idle.

### **The Sanctifying Word**

Every word of God is full of God's Truth, which sanctifies the soul for all eternity once it enters it. Thus does the Savior turn to His heavenly Father in prayer: "*Father! Sanctify them with Thy Truth; Thy word is truth*" (John 17:17). If you do not accept the word of Christ as the word of God, as the word of the Truth, then falsehood and the father of lies within you in rebelling against it.

### **Grace Filled Word**

In every word of the Savior there is much that is supernatural and full of grace, and this is what sheds grace on the soul of man when the word of Christ visits it...

### **The Brightening Word**

Because every word of God contains the eternal Word of God - the Logos - it has the power to give birth and regenerate men. And when a man is born of the Word, he born of the Truth...(Cf. I Peter 1:23). By living for the Word, a man brings himself from death to life. By filling himself with eternal life, a man becomes a conqueror of death and "*a partaker of the Divine nature*" (II Peter 1:4), and of his blessedness there shall be no end.

The main and most point of all this is faith and feeling love towards Christ the Lord, because of the mystery of every word of God is opened beneath the warmth of that feeling, just as the petals of a fragrant flower are opened beneath the warmth of the sun's rays. Amen.

Source : Address given at the meeting of the Seminary Brotherhood of the Saint Sava at Sremski Karlovci on December 22, 1929. Translated by Archdeacon Stevan Scott Ph.D., "A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality, Vol. 4: The Struggle for Faith" B#80A.

The body of Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit is responsible for writing the Gospel ..."*Having received all the spiritual illumination of the Holy Spirit...*"the Fathers who proclaimed Christ" set forth the faith taught by God" (Verses at Lauds, Sunday of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council). The Church is not producing literature when it writes the Gospel nor engaging in philosophy when it formulates dogma, but in both cases it is expressing the fulness of the new life hidden within it. For this reason, the Gospel cannot be understood outside the Church nor dogma outside worship. Archimandrite Vasileios. *Hymn of Entry*, B#79A pp. 17-18.

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## **6. Does The Orthodox Church Have Any Prayers Before Reading Holy Scripture?**

First as Orthodox Christians, as we are about to read either the Old or New the Testament -the Holy Scripture, we should make the sign of the Cross and say: "*In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*" Then we can venerate the Holy Scriptures which are in our hands. The Holy Scriptures should be kept in a sacred place or either at our icon corner. One should read the Holy Scriptures often, and even daily. We must spiritually ask ourselves have we read both the Old and New Testament in our life time? Once the Ecclesiastical year begins on the first of September, within the Eastern Orthodox Church, the whole Bible is read throughout the year, keeping in mind the Church has a lesson for every day.

### **A Prayer Before The Priest Reads the Holy Scripture During Divine Liturgy:**

Illuminate our hearts, O God who loves mankind, with the pure life of Thy Divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind to understand Thy Message of Good Tidings. Implant in us the fear of Thy Blessed Commandments; that, trampling down all carnal desires, we may pursue a godly life, both thinking and performing such things as are well pleasing to Thee. For Thou are the Light of our souls and bodies, Christ our God, and to Thee we ascribe glory, together with Thy Eternal Father and Thine All Holy, Blessed and Life-Giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

### **A Prayer After You Read the Holy Bible:**

Blessed is God Who desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, now and forever. O Lord and Master, our God, call us, Thy servants to Thy holy illumination, and make us worthy of Thy wondrous grace; take from us the things of old, and renew us unto life eternal, and fill us the things of old, and renew us unto life eternal, and fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit unto union with Thee Christ, so that we may not be children of the flesh, but children of the Heavenly Kingdom. Through the Prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy upon us and save us. Amen.

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## **7. Where Can I Obtain A Bible, Which Recently Published The New Testament With The Psalms?**

The Bible you are asking about is called the "Orthodox Study Bible". This Bible contains explanatory notes by eminent Orthodox New Testament scholars and theologians to lead us to the true Orthodox understanding of the Scriptures. A unique personal study guide. Includes the Psalms from the Old Testament. Dictionary of terms helpful. Also includes meaning of the Holy Orthodox Faith. In addition morning and evening prayers, as well as the meaning of the seven sacraments (mysteries) of the Orthodox Church. Write to Light and Life Publishing Company, 4818 Park Glen Road, Minneapolis, MN. 55416.

Another new publication most recently is "The Orthodox New Testament" in two fully illustrated volumes: Vol. I: The Holy Gospels, and Vol. 2: Acts, Epistles, and Revelation. Write to Dormition Apostles Convent, P.O. Box 3118, Buena Vista, Colorado USA 81211 (Email: [apostles@amigo.net](mailto:apostles@amigo.net)).

Also the Holy Apostles Convent has available: "The Life Of The Virgin Mary, The Theotokos", "The Lives Of The Three Hierarchs", and "The Lives Of The Holy Apostles". Also the best book in understanding the book of Revelation is called: "Apocalypse", by Archbishop Averky. Write to: Holy Trinity Monastery Bookstore, Jordanville, N.Y. 13361.

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## **8. Where Can I Get The Old Testament Septuagint In Greek And English?**

Write to Holy Cross Seminary Bookstore, 50 Goddard Ave. Brookline, Massachusetts 01246

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## **9. Where Can I Obtain A Full Set Of The Early Church Fathers?**

The Early Church Fathers books contain from the period of the Apostolic Fathers to the Seven Ecumenical Councils, from the apocryphal gospels to the Arian controversy, this work is one of the most complete collections existing today of the thirty-eight volume Early Church Fathers. The price: \$349.95. Write to Light and Life Publishing Company, 4818 Park Glen Road, Minneapolis, MN. 55416.

*Glory To Thee, O GOD*  
*Glory To Thee!*

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!