

# The Unity of the Old and New Testament as a Prerequisite for an Orthodox Hermeneutic of the Bible: Traditional and Modern Hermeneutics in Dialogue

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In their long history, the Jewish synagogue and the Christian Church have adopted various methods of approaching the Scriptures. Each era has had its own interpretive methods, aiming at a fuller understanding of God's Word. The development of the sciences in modern times, as a consequence of the enthusiasm and optimism inspired in mankind by the Enlightenment, contributed to the development of new methods of interpreting the Bible, so that finally, with the development, especially during the 20th century, of the "Historical-Critical Method" of interpreting Scripture, Hermeneutics evolved into a distinct scientific discipline.

Underlying the development of this method is the belief –which has particularly influenced the Exact Sciences, Mathematics, and Physics<sup>1</sup>– that there is an objective reality, that man is capable of studying, understanding, and interpreting. The historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible is a combination of various methods applied more broadly in the field of Humanities for approaching ancient literary texts. Still, despite the almost complete dominance of the historical-critical

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1. At the beginning of the 20th century, Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead collaborated on a project to systematize all Mathematics and Logic. The project aimed to create an internally coherent system of propositions from which the whole of logic and mathematics could be deduced, and in 1912 they published the massive work *Principia Mathematica*, which was considered proof of the project's success.

method until at least the mid-1970s and its universal acceptance within academic circles, its stated goal of objectivity in interpreting Scripture was not achieved, as is readily apparent from the –quite often– radical differences observed among Bible-based communities of believers. This finding makes it obvious that there is a need to look for other norms and rules for approaching the Bible and reassessing the preconditions of this approach.

As far as Orthodox hermeneutics is concerned, a first rule could be derived from observing how the Church incorporates the Jewish Scriptures into the canon of her own Bible. In particular, the classification of the biblical works in the Jewish Canon is intended to emphasize the importance of the “Law”. The books that make up the “Law” collection occupy the first place in the Synagogue Canon. Immediately following is the “Prophets” group. In the first book of this group, in Joshua, God appears to immediately give to Moses, his successor, the following command:

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful<sup>2</sup>.

The last book of the collection, Malachi, ends with a similar commandment: “And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years”<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, the entire second collection of biblical works begins and ends with the reminder of the obligation to faithfully observe the “Law” and the same is repeated in the third group. The “Hagiographa”

2. Jos. 1, 7-8: «ἴσχυε οὖν καὶ ἀνδρίζου, φυλάσσεσθαι καὶ ποιεῖν καθότι ἐνετείλατό σοι Μωυσῆς ὁ παῖς μου, καὶ οὐκ ἐκκλινεῖς ἀπ' αὐτῶν εἰς δεξιὰ οὐδὲ εἰς ἀριστερά, ἵνα συνῆς ἐν πᾶσιν οἵς ἔσαν πράσσης, καὶ οὐκ ἀποστήσεται ἡ βίβλος τοῦ νόμου τούτου ἐκ τοῦ στόματός σου, καὶ μελετήσεις ἐν αὐτῷ ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός, ἵνα εἰδῆς ποιεῖν πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα τότε εύοδωθήσῃ, καὶ εύοδώσεις τὰς ὁδούς σου καὶ τότε συνήσεις».

3. Mal. 3, 22 (4, 6): «μνήσθητι νόμου Μωσῆ τοῦ δούλου μου, καθότι ἐνετειλάμην αὐτῷ ἐν Χωρῆβ πρὸς πάντα τὸν Ἰσραὴλ προστάγματα καὶ δικαιώματα».

[Ketuvim] begins with the book of *Psalms*; in the first of them, we have the blessing of the man “whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night”<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly, the group’s latest book, *Chronicles*, is a recapitulation of Israel’s history to remind the people of Judah, attempting to rebuild themselves after the adversities of the Babylonian captivity, that their survival depends on the “Law’s” faithful observance and the exact performance of worship.

On the contrary, the classification of biblical works in the Christian canon is intended to be a kind of introduction to the New Testament. The *Torah* in the Christian Old Testament is not an independent group of books, but is part of a larger group under the title: “Historical Books”. In this group, all the biblical narrative works are classified in chronological order of the events they describe; thus, a single narrative is created, beginning with the world’s creation and extending to the last pre-Christian centuries. This narrative aims to show how evil was introduced into the world through man’s responsibility so that God’s intervention in human history became necessary to prepare humanity to accept the salvation that Jesus Christ will bring. Now, the Law loses its central importance and becomes «παιδαγωγὸς εἰς Χριστόν».

The second group of biblical works of the Christian canon are books of a poetic and didactic nature. In the “Poetical Books” the people praise their God, address to him their appeals, their complaints, and their thanksgiving for the blessings they receive, and above all express their hopes for Christ’s coming, while in the “Books of Teachings” divine wisdom is preserved, which as a *πάρεδρος* of God’s throne<sup>5</sup>, as existent before time and creation<sup>6</sup> and as “a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. Therefore, nothing defiled

4. *Psalms* 1, 2: «ἀλλ’ ἡ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Κυρίου τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ, / καὶ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτοῦ μελετήσει ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός».

5. *Sol. Wisd.* 9, 4: «δός μοι τὴν τῶν σῶν θρόνων πάρεδρον σοφίαν / καὶ μή με ἀποδοκιμάσῃς ἐκ παιδῶν σου».

6. *Prov.* 8, 22-25: «Κύριος ἔκτισέ με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ, / πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέ με ἐν ἀρχῇ, / πρὸ τοῦ τὴν γῆν ποιῆσαι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὰς ἀβύσους ποιῆσαι, / πρὸ τοῦ προελθεῖν τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων, / πρὸ τοῦ ὅρη ἐδρασθῆναι, / πρὸ δὲ πάντων βουνῶν γεννῆσαι με».

can find entrance into her. For she is a reflection of everlasting light, an unspotted mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness”<sup>7</sup>, it will be identified by the Christian Church with the second person of the Holy Trinity<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, the Christian Canon closes the group of “Prophetic Books”. The content of these works is understood by the Church mainly as a foretelling of Christ’s presence, and the various books are classified in such a way that the picture of the expected Redeemer becomes gradually clearer. Thus, the Christian Old Testament ends with the book of Daniel, in which the resurrection of the dead is announced<sup>9</sup>, and the figure of the “Son of Man” coming “with the clouds of heaven” is described through a magnificent vision, in which: “He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed”<sup>10</sup>.

Jesus will use the same title, “Son of Man”, in the very next book of the Christian Bible, *The Gospel of Matthew*, every time he speaks about himself<sup>11</sup>. By interpreting the texts of the Old Testament christologically, the Church gives them a completely different meaning from the one that the same texts have for the Synagogue. With this new meaning the Church incorporates the books of the Old Testament into her own Bible, considering them now part of her tradition, thus legitimizing her

7. *Sol. Wisd.* 7, 25-26: «ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστι τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ δυνάμεως / καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ Παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινῆς / διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲν μεμιαμμένον εἰς αὐτὴν παρεμπίπτει. / ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀιδίου / καὶ ἐσοπτρὸν ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐνεργείας / καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ».

8. *I Cor.* 1, 24: «αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ιουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλησι, Χριστὸν Θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ Θεοῦ σοφίαν».

9. *Daniel* 12, 2-3: «καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν καθευδόντων ἐν γῆς χώματι ἐξεγερθήσονται, οὗτοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον καὶ οὗτοι εἰς ὄντειδισμὸν καὶ εἰς αἰσχύνην αἰώνιον. καὶ οἱ συνιέντες ἐκλάμψουσιν ὡς ἡ λαμπρότης τοῦ στερεώματος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν δικαίων τῶν πολλῶν ὡς οἱ ἀστέρες εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ ἔτι».

10. *Daniel* 7, 13-14: «ἔθεώρουν ἐν ὄράματι τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ ἴδοὺ μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενος ἦν καὶ ἔως τοῦ παλαιοῦ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐφθασε καὶ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ προσηγένετο. καὶ αὐτῷ ἐδόθη ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ βασιλεία, καὶ πάντες οἱ λαοί, φυλαί, γλώσσαι αὐτῷ δουλεύσουσιν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτοῦ ἐξουσία αἰώνιος, ἣτις οὐ παρελεύσεται, καὶ ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ οὐ διαφθαρήσεται».

11. *Math.* 8, 20·9, 6·10, 23·11, 19·12, 8·32, 40 et. al.

right to be she –not the Synagogue– the “new Israel”, the heir of God’s promises.

The Church’s self-consciousness as a new Israel is also attested to in how the New Testament canon was drawn up. It is well known that none of the books that make up the New Testament is a “scriptorium” product, i.e. it was not written to expose the author’s personal views to a readership, which then evaluates them and positions itself accordingly. It’s not the authors’ personalities that give authority to the biblical texts, but the Church is exclusively responsible for recognizing and accepting a book as Holy Scripture. Thus, there are books by the names of great apostles, such as Peter, written according to all the rules of biblical literature, which the Church never accepted in its canon; instead, she accepted books written by minor figures, such as Mark. This is because, in Scripture’s case, life precedes the writing of a book. Behind every biblical text is the community that experienced God’s revelation and kept its experience alive in its tradition, sometimes for centuries, until its final recording. It is, therefore, preferable to speak of recording and not of writing, since the “author” of a particular biblical text is not an individual, perhaps a prominent personality, but the community, which actively and collectively participates in the creation of the Holy Scripture, preserving the tradition in its oral and written form. Only the community is in a position to interpret the Bible authentically. All of the above could form a basic rule of orthodox hermeneutics, which could be summarized as follows: “When a man opens the Bible to read, he does not do so as an individual, but, even if he is shut up in his room, it is the Church that reads the Bible”<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is not the work of a sage, but of the Church’s members, who know Christ by participating in the sacraments and are enlightened by the same Holy Spirit that enlightened the sacred writers<sup>13</sup>.

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12. Paul Nikolaevich Evdokimov, Ὁρθοδοξία, transl. (Greek) Agamemnon Mourtzopoulos, Vassilis Rigopoulos Publications, Thessaloniki 1972, p. 255.

13. This rule follows from the Bible itself. In *Luke* 24, 13-32, we have the description of the meeting of the resurrected Jesus with two of his disciples, who were on their way from Jerusalem to a nearby village, Emmaus. The disciples began to talk with him and he urged them to search the books “of Moses and all the Prophets” for what had been written about him. The disciples did not initially recognize Him, but only later, during

This is why the Fathers of the so-called Quinisext Ecumenical Council (691 A.D., 102 canons) defined in the XIX Canon: «εἰ γραφικὸς ἀνακινηθείη λόγος, μὴ ἄλλως τοῦτον ἐρμηνεύετωσαν ἢ ὡς ἂν οἱ τῆς Ἑκκλησίας φωστῆρες καὶ διδάσκαλοι, διὰ τῶν οἰκείων συγγραμμάτων παρέθεντο» (“And if any controversy regarding Scripture shall have been raised, let them not interpret it, otherwise than as the lights and doctors of the church in their writings have expounded it”). Unfortunately, this rule subsequently worked in ways that were far removed from the goals of the Fathers who instituted it. Thus, instead of being a safe rule of orthodox hermeneutics, which would allow a new flowering of biblical studies, it became a source of stagnation and retreat. From that time onwards, apart from some important exceptions, like Gregory of Palamas, original hermeneutical work ceased, and hermeneutics was limited to collecting the interpretations of the ancient Fathers. This resulted in the so-called “Catenes”, which, especially in the West, constituted the only hermeneutical method until the advent of the Reformation. The disadvantages of this method are obvious. There has been no original interpretation: the biblical text ceased to be a source of inspiration, speaking to every age; it became a means of substantiating the theses of Systematic Theology. In this way, the spirit of the Fathers was betrayed, since each ecclesiastical writer selected only certain phrases relevant to the particular biblical passage, cut from its overall context. Apart from anything else, however, such a method of interpretation presupposes a static Christianity and places restrictions on the action of the Holy Spirit; thus, it could be considered anything but orthodox.

The aim of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council’s XIX Canon was not to forbid theological thought and writing but to prevent the heretics

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the sharing of the bread, were they able to realize that their interlocutor was Christ Himself. Something similar is described in the episode between the Ethiopian official and the apostle Philip in *Acts* 8, 27-35. The Ethiopian was reading the Old Testament but couldn’t understand its contents without the help of someone else. These two incidents make abundantly clear that the study of the Bible is not sufficient to understand it. The two disciples and the Ethiopian could not recognize Christ through the prophecies of the Old Testament; they achieved this by participating in the Church’s sacramental life (Holy Eucharist, preaching, baptism).

from using doctrinal positions for arbitrary interpretations<sup>14</sup>. In all cases, as mentioned above, the experience of the Church comes first, and the Bible should be interpreted only in the light of this experience. The interpreter is free to apply any method and interpret a biblical text as he thinks best, but he can never place his interpretation above the faith of the Church.

The above assumption, however, necessarily raises the question of the limits of scientific hermeneutics. This question has been put even more forcefully after the 1960s, when in the field of Humanities the need to free the interpreter from the oppressive bonds of the attempt to achieve objectivity began to be recognized, resulting in the birth of a whole series of new interpretive methods. A common characteristic of all the new interpretive approaches to the Bible is that they are based on methods that have been developed outside the framework of theology<sup>15</sup>, a fact that confirms the change that is taking place in the field of theological research. This change is so rapid that the names of the new methods, indicative of their “secular” origins, are used by scientists all over the world –even by the Germans, who until the middle of the 20th century were considered pioneers and unrivaled in the field

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14. A typical example of an arbitrary interpretation was the attempt of some heretics in the 4th century AD to base their interpretation of the passage in *Prov.* 8, 22 to support their view that the Son, the Holy Trinity’s second person, was created, i.e., He is a creation of the Father. In this particular passage, God’s wisdom appears personified, saying: “*The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old*” («*Κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὄδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ*»). If we combine this testimony with two other passages, *John* –“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning*” («*Ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο...*»)–, and *1 Cor.* 1, 24, where Paul identifies Christ as “*the power of God and the wisdom of God*” («*Θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ Θεοῦ σοφίαν*»), it follows that the Son, insofar as He is identified with the Wisdom and the Word of God, is the Father’s first creation. Such an interpretation, however, contradicts the Church’s belief about the relations that exist among the persons of the Holy Trinity and -consequently- cannot be correct.

15. The main representative of the new trends, which developed in the way of approaching literary and philosophical texts, is Jacques Derrida, [“Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences”, in: R. Macksey and Eug. Donato (eds.), *The Structuralist Controversy, The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1970, pp. 247-265], the proponent of the theory of “deconstruction”.

of biblical science— in English: Poststructuralism, Semiotics, Feminism, Liberation Hermeneutics, Reader-Oriented or Reader-Response Criticism, Psychological and Ecological readings, New Historicism, Newer Literary Criticism, etc. However, the use of English terms also indicates another important change, which is particularly noticeable in biblical studies. In Germany and countries that follow the German organizational model (Greece is one of them), biblical research is developed exclusively within the framework of theological schools as a branch of theology. By contrast, in America, where almost all the new hermeneutical methods originate, in the wider Anglo-Saxon world but also in several European countries (France, Italy), biblical studies are often independent of theological studies, which allows easier communication between biblical scholars and representatives of other disciplines within the realm of Humanities.

All of the above shows that biblical research is facing a challenge described as “the need for a paradigm shift”<sup>16</sup>; interpreters grapple with

16. The term “paradigm”, is also a product of the American science [cf. Th. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1962 and 1970], is used to denote a methodological paradigm, that has gained general acceptance in a particular scientific discipline, with the result that scientific research and debate in that particular field is conducted within the framework established by the paradigm and is dependent on it. In order to understand the paradigm’s function, it is sufficient to mention -by way of example only and without any particular analysis- the case of Julius Wellhausen’s theory, which served as a paradigm in Old Testament studies. For decades, the symbols “J” and “P” were used by scholars without any other explanation or any explicit reference to the problem of the dating and order of the texts marked with these letters. Other indications, such as “earlier” and “later”, the “Israelite period” and the “Jewish period” were also implied by the use of these letters. Although the whole theory was entirely hypothetical, it was so generally accepted that to question it was equated with reality’s denial. This paradigm was so potent, that, even when Herman Gunkel’s studies Herman Gunkel [*Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und ApJoh 12, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1985 and, above all, his Commentary on *Genesis* (first published in 1901)] and especially the studies of Gerhard von Rad [*Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuchs*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1938] and Martin Noth [*Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament, Niemeyer, Halle 1941 and *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1948] substantially overturned Wellhausen’s theory, they continued to operate within the framework established by it. On the issue of the function of the paradigm in biblical research, see in detail: R. Rendtorff, “The Paradigm is changing: Hopes – and Fears”, in: *Biblical Interpretation, A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* I, 1 (February 1993), E. J. Brill, Leiden, pp. 35-53.

multifaceted problems that would have been unthinkable a few years ago<sup>17</sup>. It is sufficient to mention here, by way of example only, that the common feature of the new interpretive approaches to the Bible is that they no longer start from an analysis of the text through a chronological view according to its different levels, sources or counterparts, but attempt to interpret it as a whole in the form it has today.

Faced with this situation, and given the fact that in contemporary European society the Bible, of course outside of the Christian communities' realm, no longer has more authority than the Qur'an or even the internet, and that religion is constantly marginalized in public life, Biblical Hermeneutics has two possibilities: One is to continue operating in an anachronistic way, as if nothing has changed, as if the Bible still plays the role it once had in European society. The other is to try regaining the lost ground by changing its paradigm and opening up to a wider cultural dialogue with other disciplines such as Literary Criticism, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, Literature, Linguistics, Semiotics, Feminist Studies, Sociology, etc.

It is obvious that in the first case the interpretation will turn into a completely private affair of a closed group, which will speak and be heard only within its boundaries. This has already happened today after the historical-critical method's deterioration. The diversity of the new methods that are being proposed and attempt to enrich Biblical Hermeneutics with new energy testifies to the anxious efforts of some biblical scholars to escape from introversion and marginalization and to widen up their horizons. Still, despite the fact that the historical-critical method has continued to serve as a paradigm, none of the new methods has proved capable of replacing it in this role.

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17. If a few decades ago G. von Rad and M. Noth could discuss whether a text belonged to the pre-Amphictionic or post-Amphictionic period of Israel, nowadays not only the theory of the Amphictyony is not discussed, but it is out of question since most of the Old Testament texts are now dated to the post-Amphictionic period. Again, the well-known controversy that broke out in the 1950s between the schools of W. F. Albright and A. Alt concerning the way the Israelite tribes settled in Canaan seems today completely irrelevant, since new theories have been put forward concerning the appearance of the Israelites in Canaan. Finally, the ongoing controversy among scholars as to whether one is obliged to take the Bible into account when writing the history of Israel would have been unthinkable in the 1960s.

Thus, the second possibility, the opening up to the wider cultural dialogue, appears particularly difficult. Nowadays, many University scholars refuse to accept a postmodern interpretation, not because they fear that it may lead to interpretations incompatible with the Church's teachings, but because they fear that it may open the door to interventions of ecclesiastical authorities within University. The use of the historical-critical method, as a scientific and therefore presumably objective method, often serves as a protective shield for academics against interference by church authorities, as long as they do not dare or cannot question the "objectivity" of a scientific investigation. Another fear, which many scholars have about using postmodern interpretive methods, is that, if they accept that their interpretation is subjective and that it is equally legitimate with any other interpretation, the University's stability and status will be shaken. Such fears are understandable, but the example of the so-called positive sciences proves them untenable. For many years supporters of the wave theory and the molecular theory of light were at odds with each other, until it was recognized that both theories, though opposing each other, were correct. The same happened in the field of mathematics, where the acceptance of postmodernism gave birth to computers. Consequently, not only is it not possible today for someone to ignore the reality that has emerged, but such an attitude would ultimately be irresponsible. This means that Biblical Hermeneutics is today obliged to move into spaces that extend beyond the boundaries of religious groups and to open a dialogue with them. Perhaps in this context it is not necessary to search for a new paradigm or at least a monophonic paradigm. Perhaps the new paradigm is precisely the discovery of Biblical Hermeneutics' polyphony, based precisely on the polyphony of the Bible itself. The benefit of adopting the new interpretive methods is the recognition that the Bible may be God's word, but the biblical God has many voices and they all speak simultaneously; God speaks in many voices. In the context of the World Council of Churches this recognition led to the transformation of the original program "Gospel and Culture" into "Gospel and Cultures". The Gospel remains one and it can never become many Gospels, but now it is recognized that it can be expressed through different cultural systems.

Thus, in a constantly changing world, in a planet that evolves into a global village on a daily basis, where all cultures claim and occupy a place,

the only way for the Bible's voice to be heard is for it to speak with many voices<sup>18</sup>.

The developments mentioned above in the field of Humanities in general and the biblical research in particular represent a most serious obstacle for the orthodox interpreter, since the recognition that every interpretation is subjective and every reading of the biblical text is just as legitimate as any other reading could possibly put Church's authority and status into question. The answer to the questions raised by this reflection depends on the way one understands the Bible.

In the Orthodox world, the Holy Scriptures were never understood as a second source of faith parallel to the tradition, as it was in Catholicism's case after the relevant decision of the Council of Trent in the 16th century AD. Instead, throughout the first Christian millennium, the Bible was understood as being part of a wider tradition, which has remained alive and unbroken since Abraham's time. Whenever early church writers invoke the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, they are not referring to some

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18. According to a postmodern biblical approach, there is no right and wrong reading. The reader and the text are part of a larger cultural system. One of the dominant postmodern interpretation "schools" is Reader-Response Criticism. This method is not directed against modern positivism per se, but against those positivistic methods that seek to find the meaning of a text within the text itself, rather than in the author's purpose or the reader's reception of it. The interpreters who use this method argue that, when analyzing the meaning of a text, it is not possible to disregard the reader. They believe that the text does not really exist except as a text, and that the reader is free to make it real through an infinite variety of ways. Fundamental to the understanding of the reader's critical response is the principle of "intertextuality". Some people use this term, but it seems rather inappropriate; it means that each text is part of a context, which includes not only other texts, but the whole history and culture of which the text is an integral part. The text is therefore a product not only of the words themselves or of the author's purpose, but also of all the relations that the text entails. The reader is also part of the text's interwoven relations; he or she is not a Cartesian autonomous self, but a product of a specific cultural context. Thus, the reader and the text are interrelated and this can lead to an infinite variety of meanings. When one reads the Bible, one always does so subjectively, e.g. as a Greek, an Orthodox, an academic, a man, a theologian, etc. A Jew would read the same text differently, just as an uneducated pious person or a Latin American would read it differently, etc. Thus, the goal of the postmodern interpreter is not to answer the question: "What does the text mean?", but to help the reader to constantly arrive at new meanings, since Postmodernism recognizes the legitimacy of all different readings.

objectively reliable source, but to the living tradition of God's people, of which they feel they are a continuation. The phrase "*according to the Scriptures*" is understood as an experiential knowledge that is received and transmitted. This "scriptural" knowledge, however, could not have a place outside the space where reception and transmission is taking place, i.e. the Church. Typical in this case are the words that the Apostle Paul addresses to the Corinthians: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures"<sup>19</sup>.

Therefore, the Church received the entire Jewish scriptural tradition as an authentic testimony of God's revelation in human History and recognized it as her own Bible under the title: "Old Testament". The decisive criterion for the authenticity of a biblical text is the testimony of the community that transmitted the text: behind every biblical text the church writers see a community, which experienced the revelation of God within its history and kept this experience alive in its oral tradition before recording; the same community recognized afterwards this writing down as an authentic testimony of its experience.

The fear response that arises because of such an understanding of the Holy Scriptures –that the status and authority of the Church might be shaken by the acceptance of a subjective interpretation of the biblical text– becomes irrelevant, since, as emphasized above, the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is possible only within the context of the Church. Besides, the goal of the hermeneutical process pursued by modern biblical research, the adaptation of the interpretation to the occasional needs of a specific community of believers, constituted the Church's usual practice from its very beginning and throughout the first Christian millennium. Apostle Paul himself, when he proclaims that Gentile Christians should not be circumcised, is in fact offering a new reading of the Christian tradition up to that time, different from the same tradition's reading offered by other Christian communities. It is worth noting that, when he addressed the historical leaders of

19. 1 Cor. 15, 3-4: «παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις ὁ καὶ παρέλαβον, ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη, καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς». Cf. 1 Cor. 11, 2, 23· 2 Thes. 2, 15; 3, 6.

Christianity, whose reading he was altering, they approved his approach. Furthermore, apostle Paul's example demonstrates how productive the dialogue between different cultural traditions can be. According to the narrative of the *Acts*<sup>20</sup>, Paul interrupted his missionary activity for two years and remained in Ephesus, where, in addition to the synagogue, he visited the Stoic school of Tyrannus daily, listening and teaching there. Therefore, it is no coincidence that in his letters related to Ephesus (*1 Corinthians, Colossians* and *Ephesians*), the Hebrew word *chokmah* (= "wisdom") is adapted to the Hellenistic concept of reason and wisdom, which prepared the ground for the fourth Gospel's prooemion. In the following centuries, when Marcion sought to construct a unisonal, "monophonic" canon, orthodoxy preferred the "polyphonic" Gospels. The entire history of Christianity represents a witness to an evolutionary process, involving controversy and debate and constantly new readings of the biblical text.

Recognizing the Bible's polyphony –and, correspondingly, the polyphonic interpretations– can be beneficial on many levels. On the academic level it means a resistance to exclusive interpretative methods, which lead to a specialization that prohibits other voices from being heard. It also means a readiness to cooperate and to engage in dialogue with other disciplines that will remove the controversies of the past, such as the Bible and the Natural Sciences. Also, at the social level, the recognition of the Bible's polyphony makes biblical scholars the visionary bearers of the possibility and necessity for a dialogue between different cultural groups. The polyphonic Bible can be a new model for the formation of a dialogic society and thus act as a voice of hope that there exists an alternative path between totalitarianism and individualism – both consequences of the globalized economy. But the great advance that is expected to come with the acceptance of postmodern hermeneutics concerns the interchurch and interreligious dialogue. Positivist interpretations of the Bible do, of course, offer a possibility of dialogue –or even agreement– on some issues, but they do not resolve the differences that divide the various communities of believers. Recognizing that each reading of the

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20. *Acts* 19, 8-10.

biblical text is a reading that results from the reader's relevance, leads to the recognition that differences in interpretation are due to different contextualization. In this case, the dialog, instead of dealing with the endless attempt to reconcile the different interpretations, will deal with the different contextual outlooks that produce these interpretations. Such a dialogue could be much more productive than some limited agreement on the results of positivist methods.

From a theological point of view, the plurality of hermeneutical approaches could again be based on the apostle Paul's teachings. As he clearly proclaims in his *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Christians as "deacons of the New Covenant" were claimed by God to serve "not the letter of the law but the Spirit of God"<sup>21</sup>; they were thus enabled through Christ's intercession to have a new God-inspired understanding of Scripture, in the light of which the content of the Old Testament texts acquired a new meaning and made the biblical texts perennially present<sup>22</sup>. This new possibility also legitimizes the adoption by many Church Fathers of the typological interpretation regarding the Bible. Thus, the Bible is no longer understood as a book containing didactic narratives or historical information about persons and events of a remote past, but as a record of the experiences of that community which experienced God's revelation in its own history and interpreted it authentically, so that it could understand for itself and for future generations the will of God and His plan for the world.

The typological interpretation demonstrates how the community interprets the same text in a living and therefore different way each and every time, in order to meet its own needs. Thus, for the Church, the Old Testament is no longer understood as a Jewish book, in which the Messiah is simply announced, but as a Christian book, which bears witness to the Word of God, acting in human history. The same Word of God, to whom the New Testament refers, has been active in History since creation's first moment, and is also mentioned in the Old Testament. The aim of the Holy Scriptures' typological interpretation is therefore to

21. 2 Cor. 3, 5-6: «...ἀλλ' ἡ ἵκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὃς καὶ ἵκανωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καὶ ηῆς διαθήκης, οὐ γράμματος, ἀλλὰ πνεύματος...».

22. Cf. 2 Cor. 3, 12-18.

recognize in the Old Testament the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come” («ὅν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἔρχομενος»)<sup>23</sup>.

Based on the above, the typological interpretation, with its consciously subjective and flexible character, could be a very useful tool for the contemporary study of the Bible; unlike the “objective” methods of the historical-critical research, it offers abundant space for constantly new interpretations and approaches to biblical texts. However, the prerequisite for a modern hermeneutical approach to a biblical text to be characterized as “orthodox” is not that it imitates methods that were once applied by the Church Fathers, nor certainly that it compiles Bible passages by removing them out of their context, but that it responds to the real needs of the community that recognizes this particular text as its Holy Scripture. Certainly, this presupposes the existence of a living community which is in a constant dialectical relationship with its tradition and its Scriptures, since only in the context of such a community is it possible to speak of orthodox interpretation.

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23. *Rev.* 1, 4.