

EASTERN ORTHODOXY'S LACK OF INTEREST IN SYNOPTIC STUDIES, THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM AND Q

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Preliminary remarks

(a) To address any issue, “from an Orthodox perspective,” is not an easy task. On what ground and from what sources can one really establish an Orthodox perspective? The Roman Catholics have Vatican II to draw from; the Orthodox do not. The Lutherans have an Augsburg Confession of their own; the Orthodox do not.¹ The only authoritative so-called “sources” the Orthodox possess are in fact common to the rest of Christianity: Bible and Tradition. How can one establish a distinctly Orthodox perspective on a basis which is common to non-Orthodox as well? In addition, the width and extent of these so-called “sources” is something which is nowadays strongly debated, at least within the scholarly community; not to mention that sometimes they are differently interpreted.

With regard to Tradition, in the second half of the second millennium we Orthodox have unconsciously developed a “negative” identity: we are not what our authentic tradition has left us as a legacy, but what the others, mainly Catholics and Protestants, are not. In other words, without primacy, a visible expression of the Church’s unity, accompanied of course by synodality, and without a binding authority of the Bible, for centuries being viewed exclusively through its interpretation by the Church Fathers. Therefore, for the great majority of Orthodox theologians our Church was erroneously considered more as a “Church of the Fathers” than a “Church of Christ.”²

In Greece, through the entire 20th c. biblical scholars have passionately defended and promoted the autonomy of Bible and its “historical-critical” approach. The example of the Greek biblical scholars was followed by their colleagues in the diaspora in the West, especially in USA, and later in the Antiochian and the Romanian Orthodox Churches, to name the more concerned with the modern paradigm in Orthodox theological scholarship.

However, after my involvement in Q research³ no serious research on the Synoptic Problem or on Q was conducted,⁴ at least to my knowledge.⁵ It was for this reason

¹ The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church that was convened in Crete (2016) did not include any reference to the Bible and to biblical scholarship, although it was a demand to deal with these issues at the preliminary preparatory stages. Orthodox biblical scholars had always been pushing for a conciliar decision on the Orthodox approach to the Bible and to biblical scholarship. There is neither conciliar, nor official canonical or doctrinal authority attached to all these issues as yet. In the original agenda of the Council one biblical item, the canon of the Bible, was for a final settlement. But after it was dropped from its final agenda such an event is not expected in the foreseeable future, unless a truly ecumenical Synod can ever take place. Not to mention, of course, that with the so-called Oriental Orthodox Church the problem of the issue of the canon of the Bible is still more complex even for the NT, ranging from a shorter canon to a much wider one (37 books in the Ethiopian Church). Nevertheless, the Orthodox biblical scholars were quite fortunate not to have been imposed conciliar prohibitions on their job, like their colleagues in the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church.

² I will come back to tradition later on with a more detailed analysis.

³ In addition to my published books (*Η περί της Πηγής των Λογίων Θεωρία. Κριτική Θεώρησης των Συγχρόνων Φιλολογικών και Θεολογικών Προβλημάτων της Πηγής των Λογίων*, Athens 1977; *ΛΟΓΟΙ ΙΗΣΟΥ. Studies in Q*, Scholars Press: Atlanta 1999; *Τα Λόγια του Ιησού. Το Αρχαιότερο Ευαγγέλιο*, Athens 2005; *Θέματα Βιβλικής Θεολογίας* [e-book] <http://www.academia.edu/1924229>) and articles (see below) the following dissertations (at Ph.D and M.Th. level) were conducted under my su-

that I have recently suggested to move to another level, another deeper understanding of the “Gospel,” another way of “approaching” the “Word of God,” even beyond the strictly historical quest for the Historical Jesus, pursued mainly by the Synoptic scholarship!⁶

(b) Another issue that makes an “Orthodox perspective” problematic is that Orthodoxy always appears as something “exotic,” an interesting “Eastern communitarian phenomenon” *vis-à-vis* the “Western” individualistic mentality, provoking perhaps the curiosity and enriching the knowledge of Western believers, theologians and scholars, but very seldom going beyond that. According to an eminent Orthodox theologian this role has been played too much up to now.⁷ Most serious interpreters of Orthodoxy define *Orthodoxia* as referring to the wholeness of the people of God, who share the right conviction (*orthē doxa*=right opinion) concerning the event of God's salvation in Christ and his Church, and the right expression (*Orthopraxia*) of this faith.⁸ Everyone is, therefore, invited by Orthodoxy to transcend confessions and inflexible institutions without necessarily denying them. Orthodoxy is not to be identified only with us Orthodox in the historical sense and

pervision: El. Kasselouri, *The Anointing of Jesus. Modern Hermeneutical Problematic and a Eucharistic Approach to the Gospel Narrative of the Anointing of Jesus (Mt 26:6-13=Mk 14:3-9=Lk 7:36-50=Jn 12:1-8)*, Ph.D Thessaloniki 2000; Z. Terlibakou, *The Gospel Narratives of the Multiplication of the Loaves*, Ph.D Thessaloniki 2006; M. Katsaveli, *The Lord's Prayer: The Origins and Development of the Prayer of the Historical Jesus in the Synoptic Tradition*, M.Th Thessaloniki 2001; Eu. Varvelis, *Jacob the Brother of Jesus, and his Epistle under the Prism of the Primitive Sayings Tradition*, M.Th Thessaloniki 2004; Ev. Velanis, *The Q-Document and the Cynic Philosophy*, M.Th Thessaloniki 2008; Z. Karkafiri, *The Most Recent Scholarly Debate concerning the Theological Characteristics of Q*, M.Th Thessaloniki 2012.

⁴ A Ph.D. dissertation conducted in Athens in 2003 by Stamatia Papastamatiou, under the title: *The Gospel of Thomas and its Relation to the Canonical Gospels*, still unpublished, but available electronically in the National Documentation Center (<https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/>), follows a methodology that defies the modern Synoptic scholarship's “pre-occupations” (p. 11). Very encouraging, however, was the publication, few months ago, by Dr. Evanthia Adamtziloglou of a post-doctoral book on *Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God*, CEMES Publications, Thessaloniki 2019, devoting a considerable part (pp. 219-335) on Q research.

⁵ Out of more than 200 papers delivered in the last International Orthodox Theological Association's conference at Iasi, Romania (9-12, Jan 2019) only 11 were biblical, and almost all of them on Orthodox (Patristic) interpretation: (Matthew C. Briel, “Photios' Exegesis of the Old Testament”; Bogdan G. Bucur, “Exegesis and Theological Interpretation in the Patristic Reception of the Emmaus Story”; Vatamanu Cătălin, “The need to return to the Orthodoxy of faith, from the perspective of biblical prophets”; Constantin Pogor, “When Poetry and Narrative Sing the Glory of the Lord: The Song of Deborah (Judges 4 and 5)”; Athanasios Despotis, “Exegesis, Theology and Philosophy: Reconsidering an Old Issue of Johannine Studies from an Eastern-Orthodox Perspective”; John Fotopoulos, “Patristic Exegesis of Scripture, the Historical Turn, and Contemporary Orthodox Hermeneutics: Articulating an Orthodox Horizon of Expectation”; Ljubica Jovanović, “Canonical Criticism and Orthodox Biblical Hermeneutics”; Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, “The Female Body in the Gospels: From Prejudice to Liberation”; Vild Marian, “Time and Eternity in Pauline Eschatology”; Elena Narinskaya, “Orthodoxy and Feminism: Women and Man in Christ”; Andrei Orlov, “Jesus' Baptism and Transfiguration in the Light of the Two Powers in Heaven Traditions”; Ioan Lucian Radu, “The Woman from Hosea 3:1-3: The Prophet's Wife or a Second Wife?” Olga Zaprometova, “The Formation and Development of the Torah Concept within the Bible”).

⁶ I will come back to this later.

⁷ J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood/New York 1985, 26.

⁸ More in my “Orthodoxy and Ecumenism,” *Eucharist and Witness. Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church*, Geneva/Mass. 1998, 7-28, especially 9ff.

with all our limitations and shortcomings,⁹ especially the scholarly ones. In other words, Orthodoxy has *ecclesial* rather than *confessional*, or even *historical*, connotations.¹⁰

The essence of Orthodoxy¹¹ is rather a way of life, hence the importance rendered to its *liturgical* tradition. It is exactly for this reason that the Orthodox have placed the Liturgy on such a prominent place in their theology. “The Church,” according to a historic statement by the late G. Florovsky, “is first of all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second. The *lex orandi* has a privileged priority in the life of the Christian Church. The *lex credendi* depends on the devotional experience and vision of the Church.”¹² Any doctrinal statement, therefore, concerning the Bible – its canon and authority, hermeneutics, the importance of biblical, and primarily Synoptic and Q, scholarship etc – comes only as the natural consequence of the liturgical, i.e. eucharistic, communion experience of the Christian community.

And it is from this angle that I propose to approach the subject I was asked to present. What I am going to do, as a “personal reflection for further discussion” with the international biblical scholarly community, is the way Orthodox biblical scholarship, and theological discipline in general, address specific questions pertinent to the Bible.

And this brings us to the perennial issue of *hermeneutics* and the important and peculiar concept of *theoria* or *theoptia*, for the way the Orthodox interpret the Bible is related to that concept.¹³ The words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel tradition – no matter whether authentic or not – while very similar both in form and sometimes in content with those of contemporary rabbis, were in fact very different in their profound perspective, at least with regard to the authority of Scripture (Torah). To contemporary Judaism the supreme authority of every single word of the Bible was unquestionable.¹⁴ The historical Jesus on the other hand did not hesitate to critically re-interpret the Scriptures in a very radical way. It was not only that he regarded the whole Bible in the light of the two great commandments (love of God and love of neighbour), or that he established in the six antitheses of the Ser-

⁹ N. Nissiotis, “Interpreting Orthodoxy,” *Ecumenical Review* 14 (1961) 1-27. “We should never forget that this term is given to the One, (Holy, Catholic and) Apostolic Church as a whole over against the heretics who, of their own choice, split from the main body of the Church. The term is exclusive for all those, who willingly fall away from the historical stream of life of the One Church, but it is inclusive for those who profess their spiritual belonging to that stream,” p. 26. Even this interpretation of the Orthodox tradition was an attempt to abandon all traditionalist interpretations of my Church.

¹⁰ In fact, all the functions within the life of the Church pertinent to expressing the faith, determining the truth, and authoritatively preserving it, are related to the *ecclesial* (and more precisely *eucharistic*) identity of the Church, and therefore are the responsibility of the eucharistic community as a whole..

¹¹ The essence of Orthodoxy *vis-à-vis* Western Christianity in its entirety, i.e. Catholic, Anglican and Protestant, is beyond any theological statements or affirmations

¹²G. Florovsky, “The Elements of Liturgy,” in: G. Patelos (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva 1978, 172-182, see 172; cf. also my “Orthodoxy” (cf. above footnote 2) 9.

¹³According to some Orthodox scholars, this concept goes even back to the Early Christian community. Cf. J. Breck, *The Power of the Word*, Crestwood/New York 1986.

¹⁴ This hermeneutical idea is clearly expressed in the tractate *Sanhedrin* of the Babylonian Talmud: “He who says ‘The Torah is not from God,’ or even if he says ‘The whole Torah is from God with the exception of this or that verse which not God but Moses spoke from his own mouth,’ shall be rooted up” (99a).

mon on the Mount a *new* Law; one can even argue that Jesus' messianic interpretation of Scripture was not a novel one, since similar messianic interpretations are to be found also in the Dead Sea Scrolls. What was novel and pioneering is Jesus' revolutionary proclamation, and the early Church's assured conviction, was that the reign of God was at hand; in fact, it was inaugurated in Jesus' own mission. And this was also the main feature of the early Christian hermeneutics: namely its *Christocentric* hermeneutical principle.

The question, of course, is whether Jesus (and his Church thereafter) undermined the authority of the existing at that time Scripture, replacing it with another authority contained in certain written documents. At the beginning of the second century Ignatius of Antioch, although he knew some of the NT books – certainly 1 Corinthians and other Pauline letters, probably John and possibly the Synoptic Gospels, at least some of them – never appealed to them; nor did he make extensive use of the OT. His only authority was Jesus Christ and his saving work and the faith that comes through him (“*emoi ta archeia Christos*”: to me the “characters” are Jesus Christ).¹⁵

This new understanding of authority, beyond the scriptural one, was the result of the early Christian *Pneumatology*.¹⁶ The first Christian method of interpreting the Old Testament, used by the NT writers was generally that of *typology*. However, this method's real meaning and profound significance was lost or at least concealed by the Christological conflict, which arose a hundred years or so later between the exegetical schools of Alexandria and Antioch. The typological method apart from the affirmation of the historical reality of the biblical revelation – a concept which was lacking from the Alexandrian allegorical method – was in fact based on the presupposition that the authority of the Law and the Prophets was somehow limited; for the entire OT looks beyond itself for its interpretation. It was along those lines that the famous Antiochian principle of *theoria* was later developed by some ecclesiastical writers. This term was especially used in Eastern hermeneutical tradition for a sense of Scripture higher or deeper than the literal or historical meaning, based of course firmly on the latter. Its meaning, however, was not exhausted simply in that; it had some further very significant connotation. Acknowledging that in the Church every Christian, and the Holy people in particular, possess under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the privilege and the opportunity of seeing (*theorein*) and experiencing the truth, later Byzantine theologians developed (or presupposed) a concept of revelation substantially different from that held in the West, especially in high scholasticism under the influence of Aristotle. Because the concept of *theologia* in Cappadocian and Antiochian thinking was in-

¹⁵More on this in B. Stoyannos, *Christomatheia. The Christocentric Hermeneutical Principle in St. Ignatius the God-Bearer's Epistles*, Thessaloniki 1976 (in Greek).

¹⁶The doctrine or concept, of course, of the Holy Spirit in the NT and the early Fathers cannot be easily reduced to a system of concepts; actually, this systematization did not happen until the 4th century. However, with this doctrine Christianity opened up new dimensions in the understanding of the mystery of the divine revelation. Of course, this new *Pneumatological* perspective in Christian theology did not replace the normative *Christocentric* one. This new development was in fact a radical reinterpretation of Christology through Pneumatology. By placing the Holy Spirit on an equal status in the trinitarian dogma with the Father and the Son, the Christian theology of the early undivided Church broke the chains of dependence on the past authorities. The conciliar declaration of the divinity of the Holy Spirit was undoubtedly one of the most radical considerations of the mystery of deity – to my view certainly of equal importance with the dogmatic definition of the *homoousion* of the Logos to the Father.

separable from *theoria* (i.e. contemplation), theology could not be – as it was at least in high scholasticism – a rational deduction from “revealed” premises, i.e. from Scripture or from the statements of an ecclesiastical *magisterium*; rather it was a vision experienced by the faithful, whose authenticity was of course to be checked against the witness of Scripture. Evagrius of Pontus went even further: “the true theologian is the one who prays,” and in later Byzantine thinking he was to a considerable extent the one who saw and experienced the content of theology; and this experience was considered to belong not to the intellect alone (the intellect of course was not excluded from its perception), but to the “eyes of the Spirit”, placing the entire human being – intellect, emotions and even senses – in contact with the divine existence.¹⁷

Defining, therefore, revelation as a living truth, accessible to a human experience of God's presence in His Church without the absolute limitations of certain scriptural documents, and in later ecclesiastical theology even of conciliar definitions, the Orthodox Pneumatology has in some sense ignored any idea of a canonical/Biblical binding authority.¹⁸

(c) The whole problem of the centrality of the Scriptures was brought to the attention of the Orthodox only after the tension between Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians more than a century ago.¹⁹ However, the Orthodox perspective in dealing with the Bible has always remained first and foremost *ecclesial*, and to a certain extent *trinitarian*. Trinitarian theology points to the fact that God is in God's own self a life of communion, and that God's involvement in history aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into this communion with God's very life. The implications of these affirmations for the proper way of dealing with the Bible are quite significant: the Bible is not primarily read in order to appropriate theological truths or doctrinal convictions, or to follow moral commands, and social or ethical norms, but in order to experience the life of communion, that ex-

¹⁷ J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York 1974, 5ff. According to him, “this was the initial content of the debate between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam the Calabrian, which started the theological controversies of the fourteenth century (1337-1340),” p. 9.

¹⁸ According to an ancient Byzantine hymn from the feast of Pentecost, still used by the Orthodox, “the Holy Spirit is the source of all donations” (*panta horigei to pneuma to hagion*).

¹⁹ An overview of the entire issue in all (Greek) Orthodox *Introductions* to the New and Old Testaments (K. Kontogonis, *Bible*, Athens 1859; Sp. Papageorgiou, *Old Testament*, Alexandria 1910; B. Antoniadis, *Old Testament*, Constantinople 1936; P. Bratsiotis, *Old Testament*, Athens 1937, ²1975; B. Antoniadis, *New Testament*, Athens 1937; B. Ioannidis, *New Testament*, Athens 1960), and more recent ones (M. Siotis, *New Testament I*, Athens 1971; S. Agouridis, *New Testament*, Athens 1971; I. Karavidopoulos, *New Testament*, Thessaloniki 1983, ²2000; I. Panagopoulos, *New Testament*, Athens 1994; D. Doikos, *Old Testament*, Thessaloniki 1980; A. Hastoupis, *Old Testament*, Athens 1981). A general view of Old Testament studies in Greece in English can be found in B. Vellas, “Old Testament Studies in Modern Greek Orthodox Theology,” *Theologia* 13 (1941-48) 330-39. After the model of the western “confessions”, a number of *omologiai* (Confessions of the Orthodox Faith) from the 17th c. onwards (Cyril, Mitrophanis, Mogila, Dositheos, etc. On all these see I. Karmiris, *Orthodox Ecclesiology*, Athens 1971). With no problem in the content of the NT canon, these statements differ from both Catholic and Protestant only in the OT canon. But these statements, all coming from the period of their indirect engagement with the polemics between Catholics and Protestants, are no longer considered as representing the Orthodox tradition. Cf. G. Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Belmont 1972; also (in Greek translation), *The Body of the Living Christ. An Orthodox Interpretation of the Church*, Thessaloniki ²1981, 15.

ists in God. And historically this was the way the Bible was approached by certain groups in the Orthodox tradition (monastics, ascetics, nyptic women and men etc.): as a means for personal spiritual edification; as a companion to achieve holistic personal growth, to reach *theosis* (deification), in other words to share the communion that exists in God.²⁰

The words of Scripture, while addressed to us human beings personally, are at the same time addressed to us as members of a community. Book and ecclesial community, or Bible and Church, were never separated. In the West the authority of the Bible was imposed or rediscovered (as it is the case in the Protestant and Roman Catholic tradition respectively) in order to counterbalance the excesses of their hierarchical leadership, the authority of the institutional Church. In the East this task – not always without problems, I must confess – was traditionally entrusted to the charismatic, the spiritual, the *staret*. In the West, where more emphasis was given to the historical dimension of the Church, this solution was inevitable; in the East, where Orthodox theology has developed a more eschatological understanding of the Church, it was the people, the members of the eucharistic communities, that were the guardians of faith.²¹

This interdependence of Church and Bible was explained with two arguments: (i) First, Christians *receive* Scripture *through* and *in* the Church. The Church told them what Scripture was. In the first three centuries of Christian history a lengthy process of testing was needed in order to distinguish between those books which were authentically “canonical” Scripture, bearing authoritative witness to the Church’s self-understanding, and above all to Christ’s person and message; and those that were “apocryphal”, useful perhaps for teaching, but not a normative source of doctrine. Thus, it was the Church (in her ecclesial and conciliar rather than institutional form) that had decided which books would form the Canon of

²⁰ This tradition of *lectio divina* is, of course, by no means distinctive of the Orthodox East; it belongs to the entire Christian tradition. A balanced approach to this tradition is in a book written by the (Orthodox) Monks of the New Skete with the title *In the Spirit of Happiness*, New York/Auckland 1999. All these mean that the traditional (Orthodox?) attitude to the reading of Scripture is *personal*. The faithful consider the Bible as God’s personal letter sent specifically to each person. Having said all this, I must make clear that the hermeneutic developed quite recently, and based on the model of the charismatic saint – namely that only the illumined (and glorified through the ascetic life according to the eastern tradition) person can authentically understand the word of God – is a hermeneutic that goes to a rather unacceptable extreme. E.g. by the late J. Romanidis, “Critical Examination of the Applications of Theology,” in S. Agouridis (ed.), *Procès-Verbaux du deuxième Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe*, Athens 1978, 413-441.

²¹ In 1848 the Patriarchs of the East turned down Pope Pius IX’ invitation to participate in Vatican I by saying: “after all, in our tradition neither patriarchs nor synods have ever been able to introduce new elements, because what safeguards our faith is the very body of the Church, i.e. the people themselves.” Thus, they consciously underlined that the ultimate authority of the Church lies neither in doctrinal *magisteria*, nor in any clerical (even conciliar) structure, but in the entire people of God. The only limitation is that this “communal” *magisterium*, the “many” in the Church’s life, cannot function in isolation from the “one,” who is imaging Christ, i.e. the one presiding in love over the local (bishop), regional (*protos* or primate), or universal Church (Pope or Ecumenical Patriarch). And this “one” is the only, and only the, visible expression of the Church. And to relate again to the above-mentioned charismatic hermeneutic, the charismatic claims must be tested out by the communal tradition and the life of the Church as the final criterion. Experience of God belongs to the whole Church and not only to an elite group, which would smack of Gnosticism. Th. Stylianopoulos, has convincingly critiqued the biblical hermeneutic based on the model of the charismatic saint, so widespread among conservative Orthodox, in his *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*, vol. I, Massachusetts 1997, where he warned some Orthodox theologians against some inconsistent and excessive hermeneutical statements, 175ff.

the New Testament. A book is part of Holy Scriptures not because of any particular theory about its date and authorship, but because the Church had treated it as canonical. (ii) Secondly, Christians also *interpret* the Bible *through* and *in* the Church. If it was the Church that told them *what* Scripture was, equally it was she that told them *how* Scripture was to be understood. Going deep into the history of the liturgical life of the Church one immediately realizes that the Bible might be read personally, but not by isolated individuals. It was read by members of a family, the family of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It was read in communion with all the other members of the Body of Christ in all parts of the world and in all generations of time. Orthodox Christianity believes that God did indeed speak directly to the heart of each person during the Scripture readings, but all need guidance, a point of reference. And this point of reference is the ecclesial community, the Church.²²

Because Scripture is the word of God expressed in human language, there is a place for honest critical inquiry in dealing with the Bible. The Orthodox Church has never officially rejected critical inquiry of the Bible.²³ In theory she makes full use of the findings of modern research. In her attempt to grasp the deeper meaning of the word of God she even makes use of a wide range of methodologies. In her struggle to make it relevant to the world it is quite legitimate to accept the contextual approach to the Bible,²⁴ and even a kind of “hermeneutics of suspicion.”²⁵ It is important to note at this point that the Orthodox Church in her long tradition has never allowed any doctrinal statement not clearly rooted in the Bible.

In short, all critical suggestions in the biblical field are legitimate²⁶ and can easily be expressed and even proposed for adoption to the Christian community. However, all individual opinions, whether coming from members within the

²² Of course, we are not talking here about the “intended” or “objective” meaning of certain biblical passages – if objectivity can be achieved – but their ultimate authority.

²³ Of course, in the past – and this is our common history with Western Christianity – the interpretation of certain passages was determined by the *regula fidei*; see on this S. Agouridis, “The *regula fidei* as Hermeneutical Principle Past and Present,” in: Prosper Grech e.a. (eds.) *L’ Interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa. Atti del Simposio promosso dalla Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede*, Vatican 2001, 225-231; also, in more details his *The Hermeneutics of the Holy Scriptures*, Athens ¹1979, ²2000 (in Greek).

²⁴ Taking for granted that “every text has a context”, which is not merely something external to the text that simply modifies it but constitutes an integral part of it.

²⁵ E.g. certain biblical sayings, clearly influenced by the cultural and social environment of the time of their production (e.g. those referring to women, slavery etc.), can be legitimately valued according to, and measured over against, the ultimate reality of the Gospel, the inauguration of the Kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). Cf. my pupils’ scholarly works: D. Passakos, *Eucharist and Mission. Sociological Presuppositions of the Pauline Theology*, Athens 1997; “Eucharist in First Corinthians. A Sociological Study,” *Revue Biblique* 104 (1997) 192-210; E. Kasselouri, “The Hermeneutics of Suspicion and the Epistles to Thessalonians,” in the *Proceedings of the IX Conference of Orthodox Biblical Scholars: The Apostle Paul’s Two Epistles to Thessalonians. Literary, Historical, Hermeneutical and Theological Problems*, Thessaloniki 2000, 209-223; also, her “Der Begriff der Tradition und die Frauenordination. Ein orthodoxer Ansatz,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 51 (2001) 167-177; M. Goutzioudis, *The Epistle to the Hebrews in Ancient Ecclesiastical Tradition and in Modern Biblical Scholarship*, Thessaloniki 2000.

²⁶ Even an “inclusive language” can be legitimated, as long as it does not disaffirm the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Of course, any idea of rewriting the Bible cannot (and will not) be accepted. These suggestions are the inevitable consequences of placing the authority of the Bible over the eucharistic community, exactly as the concept of “Canon within the Canon” was developed by honest Protestant scholars (most notably in the case of Käsemann and others) in an attempt to set up an ultimate criterion to match with Christian doctrine.

Christian communities or from any expert outside them, are to be finally submitted to the Church; not in the form of a juridical or scholarly *magisterium*, but always in view of the eschatological character of the Church as a glimpse and foretaste of the coming Kingdom. In other words, *objectivity* and the *individual* interest are always placed at the service of the *community* and of the ultimate reality of God's *Kingdom*. It is of fundamental importance that the Orthodox approach the Bible, as the inspired word of God, always in a spirit of obedience, with a sense of wonder and an attitude of listening. Hence the clear-cut distinction between the *word of God* and the *Bible*, made of course by all Christians, but more strongly underlined by Orthodox.²⁷

(d) An additional factor that determined Orthodoxy's lack of interest in biblical scholarship in general was the influence of the theology of the *Russian diaspora* after the communist revolution. Previously, the academic theology, especially the Greek biblical scholarship, had adopted the historical critical approach. Even the "return to the Fathers," coined by George Florovsky in 1936, though it positively affected the Orthodox academic theology, had hardly changed its determination towards a critical examination of all written ecclesiastical sources, especially the Bible. It is not accidental that no conciliar decision was ever taken to forbid scientific research, as in pre-Vatican II Catholicism. However, the overall theological thinking, even in Greece, was determined by what is called "Orthodox Theology of the '60s".²⁸ It is not an exaggeration to underline that today "eucharistic theology," (one trend in the theology of the '60s) prevails, even outside the limits of Orthodoxy.²⁹

Nevertheless, despite its dynamic contribution, the theology of the Russian diaspora led to the degradation of the biblical tradition, and the marginalization of the "prophetic" character of Orthodox Christianity, further consolidating the "Patristic" theological identity of Orthodoxy at the expense of its biblical foundation. And this,

²⁷ Those who regularly attend the Eucharist according to the Eastern Orthodox Rite, realize – some perhaps are astonished, or even shocked by the fact – that in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy the Bible normally is not read (though the liturgical rubrics demand "reading=*anagnosma*) but sung, as if the Bible readings were designed not so much in order that the faithful understand and appropriate the word of God, but as if they were designed to glorify an event or a person. The event is the eschatological Kingdom, and the person the centre of that Kingdom, Christ. (cf. D. Staniloae, "La Lecture de la Bible dans l' Eglise Orthodoxe," *Contacts* 30/104 [1978] 349-353). Perhaps, this is the reason why the Orthodox, while always traditionally in favour of translating the Bible (and not only) into a language people can understand (cf. the dispute in the Photian period between Rome and Constantinople over the use in the Church's mission to Moravia of the Cyrillic script, i.e. a language beyond the "sacred" three: Hebrew, Greek, Latin), they are most reluctant in introducing common language translations of the Bible readings in their Divine Liturgy. For in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy it is not only Jesus Christ in His first coming, who speaks through Scripture; it is also the word of the glorified Lord in His second coming who is supposed to be proclaimed. Personally, I have challenged quite recently the view (widely held among Orthodox systematic theologians) that the entire eucharistic liturgy (i.e. both the "Mystery of the Word", or "Liturgy of the Catechumens", and the "Eucharistic Mystery", or "Liturgy of the Faithful") is eschatologically oriented, arguing for the evangelistic character of the Bible readings, as well as of the entire "Mystery of the Word".

²⁸ Cf. P.Kalaitzidis-Ath.N Papathanasiou-Th.Abatzidis (eds.), *Αναταράξεις στη Μεταπολεμική Θεολογία: Η «θεολογία του '60»*. Πρακτικά συνεδρίου (Βόλος, 6-8 Μαΐου 2005), Indiktos: Athens 2009. At that period all other important proposals and personalities, such as S. Agouridis, the Greek biblical scholar, and S. Bulgakov, the Russian philosopher and systematic theologian etc, were either defamed or marginalized.

²⁹ See, e.g. its adoption in the official Orthodox-Catholic theological dialogue.

unfortunately, despite the strong – if not exclusive – hermeneutical engagement of the Fathers of the undivided Church with the Bible³⁰

(e) Despite all I said above, the Orthodox have issued from time to time official doctrinal statements – in addition to their early conciliar decision³¹ – concerning the Bible, which under certain theological conditions can lend authority to the Orthodox perspective of the Bible and biblical scholarship in general. In a joint statement by the Orthodox and the Anglicans, issued in a Conference held in Moscow (1976), it was rightly stated that “the Scriptures constitute a coherent whole.” Its wholeness and coherence lie in the person of Christ. He is the unifying thread that runs through the entirety of the Bible from the first sentence to the last. It is Jesus who meets his people on every page. “*In Him all things hold together*” (Col 1,17). Without neglecting the analytical approach, breaking up each book into what are seen as its original sources, the Orthodox traditionally used to pay greater attention to the way in which these primary units had come to be joined together. The unity of Scripture, as well as its diversity, is equally affirmed; its all-embracing end, as well as its scattered beginnings, are both taken into consideration. But in general the Orthodox prefer for the most part a “synthetic” style of hermeneutics, seeing the Bible as an integrated whole, with Christ everywhere as the bond of union.³² This *Christocentrism*, however, has never developed into a *Christomonism*, which led Christian witness early last century to a kind of “Christocentric universalism”. As I pointed out above, in the Orthodox Church, with few exceptions, Christology was always interpreted through Pneumatology. This “trinitarian” understanding of the divine reality was what actually prevented the Church from intolerant behaviour, allowing her to embrace the entire “oikoumene” as the one household of life.³³

³⁰ All modern theological achievements, e.g. theology of the liberation, contextual theology, feminist theology, the programs of the JPIC and for combating racism, and the relationship between church and society, the decades of solidarity of the churches with women and the fight against violence, did not pass, not only to the core, but not even to the margins of the newer Orthodox theology and hermeneutics. All the above initiatives were based on the authentic biblical tradition. This degradation of the biblical discourse (ultimately the authentic teaching of the Historical Jesus, in relation at least to that of the Fathers) necessarily restricted Orthodox theology to dilemmas of the type: is the Eucharistic or the therapeutic theology the characteristic of the Orthodox self-consciousness? Is the *bishop* the centre of the Church's life or the spirituality of the Orthodox monastics? Is the *theosis* or the *sacraments* basic salvation factors? and so on. The witness to the Gospel in today's world is absurdly absent from this old paradigm of the modern Orthodox theology.

³¹ These are the canons of certain local synods (Laodicea, Carthage etc.) and of some Fathers (Athanasios, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzos, Amphilochios of Iconion), whose canonical status became universal (ecumenical) through the decisions of the famous *Penthekti* (Quinisext) Council in Trullo (691/2 c.e.). But all these canons leave the issue of the number of the canonical books of the OT, (and to some extent also of the NT too [e.g. Apocalypse]) unsettled. It may not be an exaggeration to state that the undivided Church has not solved the issue of, and therefore not imposed upon her members, a canon of the Bible.

³²K. Ware, “How to Read the Bible,” *The Orthodox Study Bible*, Nashville 1992, 762-770.

³³ This Christological, and therefore *incarnational*, perspective in dealing with Scripture – in other word in critically reading, understanding, interpreting, and of course determining the extent and authority of the Bible – has given rise within the Orthodox world, to the legitimacy of a pictorial presentation of the Bible, and at the same time to a witnessing to the Gospel through *icons*. Such a witness to the Gospel through *icons*, especially those of a Byzantine art and technique, has been found exceptionally efficient and effective for the dissemination of the profound meaning of the Christian message, by stressing its trans-figurative and eschatological dimension. For in the Orthodox Church *icons* are not only the “book of the illiterate,” (John of Damascus) but also a “window to the heavens.” What the

Orthodox Q and Synoptic Studies: A Personal and Communal Journey

Half a century ago I set up in a scholarly journey into the mysteries of synoptic scholarship,³⁴ initially being sceptical about the Q-Hypothesis in its widely held form at that time. After almost five years of research, during which I considered the Q-Hypothesis from all literary critical angles, I was won to that hypothesis and became a fervent supporter of it.³⁵

With the situation in modern Orthodox theology I described above, the only way to make the results of the Synoptic scholarship influence my Church's future theological development was to bring them into a constructive encounter and interaction with it. And I did this – among my other theological endeavour – by examining the relationship of Q: (a) with the prominent in the Church's ethical and dogmatic life Pauline theology; (b) with the overall modern condition and its negative perception of tradition; and (c) with the "eucharistic theology" that generally prevails in current Orthodox theology.

icons actually express is not a de-materialization, but a transfiguration of the world. For in the *icons* the material and cosmic elements which surround the holy figures (divine and saintly alike) are also shown transformed and flooded by grace. The Byzantine *icon* in particular reveals how matter, in fact the whole of creation, human beings and nature alike, can be transformed: not just to the original (paradisiac) harmony and beauty they possessed before the Fall, but to a much greater glory they will acquire in the eschaton. Although depicting worldly schemes, *icons* are not concerned with the world we live in but foreshadow the world to come. As in the Eucharist, to which we will refer later, so also in the *icons*, the same interaction of past, present and future is manifest, and the same anticipation by this world of the world to come is present. More in my "The Reading of the Bible from the Orthodox Church Perspective," *Ecumenical Review* 51 (1999), 25-30.

³⁴Cf. my first scholarly contribution "Behind Mark: Towards a Written Source", *NTS* 20 (1974), pp. 52-60.

³⁵In my dissertation, *Η περί της Πηγής των Λογίων Θεωρία*, Athens 1977, I aligned to the view – now accepted in almost all serious biblical scholarship, at least by many more than in the '70s – that St. Matthew and St. Luke had used independently of each other another common source beside Mark. This source, as I argued in a series of articles presented in English immediately after the publication of my dissertation, which is referred to as *Q* or *Q-Source*, but which is better attested as *Q-Document*, was a *single written document*, consisting of about 200 verses which form a literary whole. Cf. my "Did Q Exist?" *Εκκλησία και Θεολογία* 1 (1980) 287-327; "The Nature and Extent of the Q-Document," *NT* 20 (1978) 49-73. (The above articles are an English version of chs. I and II of my doctoral dissertation); "The Original Order of Q. Some Residual Cases", J. Delobel (ed.), *Logia*, Leuven 1982, 379-387. Apart from the historical value of this source, more important for me were its *theological characteristics*. Questions like "What was the document's theological character?" "Was it a document with any Christological significance or was just aimed for purely catechetical purposes?", "Is there any relationship between Q and wisdom tradition?", "Is there any relationship between the Q-Document and the Gospel of Mark, our earliest extant written Gospel?", have fascinated and at the same time puzzled me, as did almost all N.T. scholars for more than two generations. And if scholarly research on the various literary characteristics of the Q-Document went through different and sometimes contradictory stages to reach its almost final statement in the 60s and 70s, with regard to the debate on its theological character and function the process was much more complex. Clues for all the above questions are only internally provided. But two points were particularly important: on the one hand, the prevailing view that Q consists almost entirely of sayings material, and on the other, the complete absence of any material concerning the passion kerygma and the *theologia crucis* in general. Of quite relevant importance is definitely the relationship between Q and Mark, since Mark is considered the best attestation of *theologia crucis*.

(a) *Pauline theology and Q*

There is no doubt that Christian theology is heavily indebted to Pauline theology. What is, however, even more important is that any serious attempt to reconstruct the origins of Christianity depends to a considerable extent on the information and data, which we gain from his authentic so-called proto-Pauline epistles, the earliest extant written documents of Christianity.³⁶ It is my conviction that our Gospel accounts - at least the Synoptic ones and more precisely that of St. Mark - have formed the basis for the quest of the life and teaching of the Historical Jesus. Some isolated sayings, of course, from the Sayings Source (Q) of the Synoptic tradition entered into the scene, but they were always considered within the Marcan framework, which as a matter of fact depends on the theological understanding of the Christ event by that great apostle, more precisely his dynamic interpretation of Jesus' death on the cross, his *theologia crucis*, something absent in the tradition of Q, to say the least.

The undisputed historical fact of Jesus' death, coupled with his eschatological teaching, have undoubtedly played an important part in shaping the fundamental basics of the faith of the early Christian community, which were expanded with secondary contemporary (Greco-roman, Hellenistic, oriental etc.) elements to form what can be very loosely called "Christ cult." However, this picture which dominated biblical scholarship for almost a century has started to be challenged by the most recent N.T. scholarship, the focal point being the great progress that has taken place in the field of the Q research.

Modern biblical theology more and more turn nowadays its attention to Q, and the understanding of Christian and/or Church origins is being undoubtedly determined by the scientific data of the second source of the Synoptic tradition, which in addition to its emphasis on the prophetic/ethical teaching of Jesus it seems to underplay the Death and Resurrection of Christ, thus expounding a radically different theological stance from the mainstream (Pauline?) *kerygmatic* expression of the early Church.³⁷

In fact, the challenge of Q to the conventional picture of Christian origins - and by extension also to the quest of the Historical Jesus - and the predominance of the Pauline interpretation of the Christ event, is more far-reaching than the making of a little room for yet "another gospel", another early Christian community. If Q is taken seriously into account the entire landscape of early Christianity with all that it entails may need to be radically revised, at least thoroughly reconsidered.

Of course, the *theologia crucis*, the story (the Marcan Gospel literary genre), and the soteriological interpretation of Jesus' death, in the course of history eventually overwhelmed the earlier (Q among other traditions) ethical, eucharistic and eschatological understanding of Christian identity. For most of the time the personalistic and soteriological elements overwhelmed the prominent radical social ethical, eschatological and - communion-oriented - ecclesiological ones (Q); not as a deviation and corrupted additional elements, but perhaps as a necessary surviving process.

In fact, Paul's famous *theologia crucis*, a major contribution to Christianity, played a catalytic role. In view of the fact that, it is stories that create nations, and

³⁶St. John Chrysostom, the well-known Antiochene exegete and perhaps one of the greatest theologians of the Church of all time, acknowledges St. Paul the apostle as the most accurate and authentic interpreter of the Historical Jesus. This picture has been actually reinforced with slight variations in our recent critical era.

³⁷H.W. Attridge has rightly stated that recent research on Q "has revealed the complexity of early Christian literary activity and also contributed to a reassessment of the originating impulse(s) of the whole Christian movement" ("Reflections on Research into Q", *Semeia* 55 [1991] 223-34, p. 223).

more precisely stories that can function as a founding element in any religious system, the *story* of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection – and by extension the Gospel narratives – proved to be a significant factor in Christianity, by which its original *eschatological and strongly ethical and prophetic* dimension was able to survive and have a lasting impact in the course of history.

The issue at stake is how the *ritual* developed into a *story*. To put it in different terms, how the Jesus literature moved from an *eschatological*, experiential, ethical, didactic, saying³⁸ pattern, to a *historical* one, of a Markan type; how can we explain the trajectory of Jesus' traditions from a (non-Pauline) *Saying* literary genre (Q and Thomas?), and from the radical ethics (of the Epistle of James), to a *Story* literary genre (Mark and then the rest of our canonical Gospels) with strong *soteriological* nuances.

Previously, before the consolidation of the Q hypothesis, everything was woven around the assumption of a soteriological emphasis from the very beginning of the Christian origins. According to this explanation the trajectory goes as follows:

The soteriological significance of Jesus of Nazareth->Paul->Post-Pauline Christianity (Gospels: Mark etc.-John) -> and then on to Catholic/Orthodox Christianity.

After the consolidation of the Q hypothesis, an alternative explanation can be convincingly advanced. And this explanation places a great deal of importance on the assumption of the priority of the eschatological teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, most evidently expressed in the inaugural teaching of Jesus in Nazareth (Lk 4:16ff), being re-enacted and performed around the “common-meal” eschatological fellowships, and the ensuing “Eucharistic” expression of the Christian community. According to this explanation the early Christian community was developed in two trajectories:

(i) The Kingdom-of-God and radical ethical teaching of the Historical Jesus -> Q -> James -> Didache -> Thomasand then on to marginal Christian groups, especially to Gnostic Christianity, of course in much more perverted form.

(ii) The Kingdom-of-God and radical ethical teaching of the Historical Jesus -> Paul -> Mark -> the rest of our canonical Gospels -> Acts.....and then on to early Orthodoxy.

It is quite interesting that the later Orthodox/Catholic Christianity preserved both the *Eucharistic/eschatological* element, prominent in the first trajectory, and the *soteriological/Christological* one, around which the second trajectory developed.³⁹

(b) The modernity vs Tradition debate and a new understanding of the Gospel

Till quite recently, and especially following the standards of modernity, the gospel, as the good news of salvation, and the Bible as the written “Word of God,” were always understood through a kind of “interpretation.” That is why in the history of the Church, more intensely in the second millennium, it was argued that the gospel is in-

³⁸ My argument in what follows is not affected by the dispute over the priority in Q of the wisdom or apocalyptic element. More on this in J. S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, Philadelphia 1987, whose argument and solution I endorse.

³⁹ For the Markan-Q relations cf. my “Prolegomena to a Discussion on the Relationship between Mark and the Q-Document,” *Deltion Biblikon Meleton* 3 (1975) 31-46, where I concluded that the whole problem needs radical reconsideration, and that “two points at least seem quite clear: Firstly the Q-Document cannot have depended on Mark; and secondly, the relationship between Mark and Q has to be determined on grounds other than literary. The whole problem, therefore, would seem to reduce itself to the following questions: (i) Did St. Mark have any *knowledge of Q-traditions*? (ii) If he did, is there any explicit evidence that he was *acquainted with the Q-Document* itself? (iii) If he was, did he *derive* any material therefrom? and finally (iv) If so, was his attitude to the Q-materials receptive or critical?” (p. 45).

terpreted authentically: (i) either by a “magisterium,” obviously, because some clergy are considered to have been given authority from Christ Himself representing him as the successors of the apostles, especially the bishops, and ultimately the Pope; or (ii) through the Bible itself, as a consequence of a *sola scriptura* authority, which is, of course, a question of proper scientific research, the first stage of which is the historical-critical analysis. And obviously, at this stage the Synoptic studies, the Synoptic problem and the Q Document in particular, are of primary importance.

This “modern” approach, and the interpretative methods implied surely present several problems. For the former (i), the natural question is: why should a bishop be regarded as infallible, or why the bishops' councils are considered infallible, or why the Pope is ultimately infallible! Not to mention that this explanation has a serious pneumatological deficiency. As to the latter (ii), the problem is whether the Bible can be interpreted unambiguously, when all now recognize that the Bible with this hermeneutic is subject to certain historical and cultural influences that do not continue to apply⁴⁰ and certain points cannot be regarded as belonging to the core of word of God and by extension an eternal and unchanging truth. The solution of a “*Kanon im Kanon*” of the Bible virtually denies the cause of taking the Bible as an authority, and especially in a closed canon.

The basic interpretative key to overcoming this impasse, at least for us Orthodox, but not only, is *eschatology*, a term signifying neither a denial of history, nor an addition to history (and to the past). It is rather the invasion of the eschaton in our historical reality. Eschatology “invades” history through the Holy Spirit, and it is in this context that the Gospel, but also “the word of God,” the “Bible,” “biblical scholarship,” and other elements of the life and mission of the Church, acquire their true meaning.

Emphasizing the eschatological perspective in understanding of the Gospel and the Bible in general, is by no means a denial of the conventional scientific research, and a rejection (at a primary stage) of a strictly historical study of the Bible. Simply, the profound understanding of the Gospel becomes more inclusive and integral.

I have argued that the time has come to distance ourselves as much as possible from the dominant to modern scholarship syndrome of the priority of the *texts* over the *experience*, of *theology* over *ecclesiology*. There are many scholars who cling to the dogma, imposed by the post-Enlightenment and post-Reformation hegemony over all scholarly theological outlook (and not only in the field of biblical scholarship or of Protestant theology), which can be summarised as follows: what constitutes the core of our Christian faith, cannot be extracted, but from the expressed theological views, from a certain *depositum fidei*, be it the Bible, the Church (or Apostolic) Tradition, the writings of the Fathers, the canons and certain decisions of the Councils, the magisterium included, etc; very rarely is there any serious reference to the eucharistic/eschatological communion-event that has been responsible and produced these views.

As I hinted above, even from the time of St. Paul, there has been a shift – no matter for what reasons⁴¹ – of the centre of gravity from the (*eucharistic*) *experience* to the

⁴⁰ For the concept of contextuality, see n. 24 above.

⁴¹ D. Passakos in his doctoral dissertation tried to analyse this “paradigm shift” at that crucial moment of early Christianity and claimed that “the Eucharist in Paul was understood not only as an icon of the eschaton, but also as a missionary event with cosmic and social consequences. The Eucharist for him was not only the sacrament of the Church, but also the sacrament of the world. Within the Pauline communities the Eucharist had a double orientation (in contrast to the overall eschatological and otherworldly dimension of it in earlier tradition): towards the world as *diastolic* movement, and

(Christian) message, from *eschatology* to *Christology* (and further and consequently to *soteriology*), from the *event* (the *Kingdom of God*), to the *bearer and centre* of this event (*Christ*, and more precisely his sacrifice on the cross).⁴² Although some theologians consider this second concept, which was mingled with the original biblical/semitic thought, as stemming from Greek philosophers (Stoics and others), nevertheless it is more than clear that the horizontal-eschatological view was the predominant one in the early Church, both in the New Testament and in subsequent Christian literature. The *vertical-soteriological* (and Pauline) view was always understood within the context of the *horizontal-eschatological* perspective as supplemental and complementary.⁴³

Closely, though indirectly, related to the issue discussed above is the proper understanding of tradition. *Tradition* (in Greek *παράδοσις* = *paradosis*), according to modern sociological definition, is the entire set of historical facts, beliefs, experiences, social and religious practices, and even philosophical doctrines or aesthetic conceptions, which form an entity transmitted from one generation to another either orally or in a written, and even in artistic, form. Thus, tradition constitutes a fundamental element for the existence, coherence and advancement of human culture in any given context.

In the wider religious sphere – taking into consideration that *culture* is in some way connected with *cult* – tradition has to do more or less with the religious practices, i.e. with the *liturgy* of a given religious system, rather than with the religious *beliefs* that theoretically express or presuppose these practices, without of course excluding them.

In Christianity, paradoxically, tradition was for quite an extensive period of time confined to the oral form of Christian faith, or more precisely to the non-biblical part of it, both written in later Christian literature or transmitted in various ways from one generation to another. Thus, tradition has come to be determined by the post-reformation and post-Trentine dialectic opposition to the Bible, which has taken the oversimplified form: Bible and/or (even versus) Tradition. Only recently, from the beginning of the ecumenical era, has tradition acquired a new wider sense and understanding, which nevertheless has always been the authentic understanding in the ancient Church. Tradition no longer has a fragmented meaning connected to one only segment of Christian faith; it refers to the whole of Christian faith: not only to Christian doctrine but also to worship.⁴⁴

towards God as a *systolic* movement” (*The Eucharist in the Pauline Mission*, Athens 1997, pp. 187-88). According to Passakos «*the Eucharist for Paul is at the same time an experience of the eschaton and a movement toward the eschaton*” (p. 189).

⁴²Cf. my *Cross and Salvation*, Thessaloniki 1983 (in Greek), an English summary of which can be found in a paper of mine delivered at the 1984 annual Leuven Colloquium Στανρός: Centre of the Pauline Soteriology and Apostolic Ministry”, A. Vanhoye (ed.), *L'Apôtre Paul. Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère*, Leuven 1986, pp. 246-253.

⁴³This is why the liturgical experience of the early Church is incomprehensible without its social dimension (see Acts 2:42ff., 1 Cor 11:1ff., Heb 13: 10-16; Justin, *1 Apology* 67; Irenaeus, *Adver. Her.* 18:1, etc.).

⁴⁴J. Breck, *Scripture in Tradition. The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church*, Crestwood/New York 2001, has recently reshaped this Bible-Church relationship into a Bible-in-Tradition one; for a critical assessment of his approach see Th. Stylianopoulos' review in *SVTQ*. Most contemporary Orthodox speak of the indissoluble unity of Bible and Tradition (cf. N. Nissiotis, “The Unity of Scripture and Tradition,” *GOTR* 11 [1965/66] 183-208).

It is not a coincidence that the two main references in the N.T. of the term in the sense of “receiving” (in Gr. *parelavon*) and “transmitting” (in Gr. *paredoka*), as recorded by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians (ch. 11 and 15), cover both the *kerygma* (doctrine in the wider sense) and the *Eucharist* (the heart of Christian worship).

Thus, the importance of tradition in Christianity underlines a sense of a living continuity with the Church of ancient times, of the apostolic period. Behind it lies the same determination that kept the unity of the two Testaments against the Gnostic (Marcion) attempt to reject the O.T. Tradition in this sense is not viewed as something in addition to, or over against, the Bible. Scripture and Tradition are not treated as two different things, two distinct sources of the Christian faith. Scripture exists within Tradition, which although it gives a unique pre-eminence to the Bible, it also includes further developments – of course in the form of clarification and explication, not of addition – of the apostolic faith, basically preserved in the Bible.⁴⁵

Of course, at first glance the very concept of tradition seems to be a contradiction, since the Holy Spirit who guides the Church to all truth (John 16:13), cannot be limited by traditional values only, for the “*pneuma* blows wherever S/He wishes” (John 3:8). If we take the trinitarian and eschatological principles of Christian faith seriously into account, the Church as a *koinonia* proleptically manifesting the glory of the coming Kingdom of God, i.e. as a movement forward, toward the eschaton, a movement of continuous renewal, then she can hardly be conditioned by what has been set in the past, with the exception of course of the living continuity and of the communion with all humanity – in fact with all the created world – both in space and in time. The consequences of such an affirmation for reconsidering and reassessing the concept of the Bible, its canon and authority, Biblical research etc, are inescapable.⁴⁶

Thus, tradition can hardly be considered as a static entity; it is rather a dynamic reality, it is not a dead acceptance of the past, but a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the present. In other words, it is a *relational* principle, completely incompatible with all kinds of individualism and with the absolute and strict sense of objectivism. “Tradition is the witness of the Spirit; the Spirit’s unceasing revelation and preaching of the Good news ... It is not only a protective, conservative principle, but primarily the principle of growth and renewal”.⁴⁷ And finally, as a result of the above analysis, there is an authentic though “latent” Tradition, which in certain cases is more valuable than the “historically testified” tradition(s).⁴⁸

(c) *Eucharist and Q*

Recent scholarship is questioning the old affirmation that the Christian community originally started as a *faith community*. More and more scholars are now

⁴⁵More in my “Tradition,” *Dictionnaire Oecumenique de la Missiologie. 100 Mots pour la Mission*, Paris/Genève 2001, ad loc. cf. also my “Orthodoxie und kontextuelle Theologie,” *Oekumenische Rundschau* 42 (1992) 119-125; K. Ware, “Tradition,” in: N. Lossky et al. (eds), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva 2003, ad loc.; G. Florovsky, “The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church,” *GOTR* 9 (1963) 181-200.

⁴⁶Cf. my “Orthodoxy and Ecumenism” (cf. above footnote 6), 7-28.

⁴⁷G. Florovsky, “Sobornost. The Catholicity of the Church,” in E. L. Marschal (ed.), *The Church of God*, London 1934, 64ff.

⁴⁸See more in my “The Role of Women in the Church, the Ordination of Women, and the Order of Deaconesses: An Orthodox Theological Approach,” in Petros Vassiliadis, *ANTIΔΩΡON of Honour and Memory I*, CEMES Publication: Thessaloniki 2018, pp. 25-41

inclined to believe that it started as a *communion fellowship* gathered at certain times around a Table in order to foreshadow the Kingdom of God. Of course, this Table was not a Mystery cult, but a foretaste of the coming Kingdom of God, a proleptic manifestation within the tragic realities of history of an authentic life of communion, unity, justice and equality, with no practical differentiation (soteriological and beyond) between Jews and gentiles, slaves and free people, men and women (cf. Gal 3:28). This was, after all, the profound meaning of the Johannine term *aionios zoe* (eternal life), or the Pauline phrase *kaine ktisis* (new creation), or even St. Ignatius' controversial expression *pharmakon athanasias* (medicine of immortality). In short, it was the *ritual* (social, liturgical, even eucharistic, worship) that gave rise to *story* (Gospel and other "historical" accounts etc.), rather than the other way around.

This is by no means a return to a pre-critical approach to the Bible, although I do not hide my discontent with the excesses of extreme modernism, if not for anything else at least because it has over-rationalized everything from social and public life to scholarship, from emotion to imagination, seeking to over-control and to limit the irrational, the aesthetic and perhaps even the sacred. In its search to rationalize and historicize everything, modernism has transformed not only what we know and how we know it, but also how we understand ourselves. Hence the desire of a wide range of intellectuals (not limited to scholars or even theologians) for wholeness, for community, for *Gemeinschaft*, for an antidote to the fragmentation and sterility of an overly technocratic society, and at the end of the road for post-modernism.⁴⁹

Having said all this, it is important to reaffirm what sociologists of knowledge very often point out, i.e. that modernism, counter (alternative) modernism, post-modernism, and even de-modernism, are always simultaneous processes. Otherwise post-modernism can easily end up and evaporate in a neo-traditionalism, and in the end neglect or even negate the great achievements of the Enlightenment and the ensuing scholarly critical "paradigm".⁵⁰ It is with that assumption and with my determination to make Orthodox theology constructively interact with the Q scholarship that I decided to search the Q-Eucharist relations, if there is any, of course.

From the examination of the doubly attested sayings of the Synoptic tradition (Q-Mark), some scholars have argued, that one can almost reach the same conclusion, with the exception perhaps of the Eucharist.⁵¹ I am not so optimistic; and in addition, it seems to me that one should start from exactly the opposite end; and Eucharist and Q are by no means irreconcilable entities.

⁴⁹The phenomenon of Postmodernity and its bearing upon biblical studies and especially upon the mission of the Orthodox Church is being examined in my book *Postmodernity and the Church. The Challenge of Orthodoxy*, Athens 2002 (in Greek).

⁵⁰The rationalistic sterility of modern life, has turned to the quest for something new, something radical, which nevertheless is not always new, but very often old recycled: neo-romanticism, neo-mysticism, naturalism, etc. In fact, all these neo-isms share a great deal in common with the early 18th century reactions to the modernist revolution, which Orthodox Biblical scholarship has unequivocally rejected. Cf. J. D. G. Dunn's book *Jesus Remembered* (vol. 1 of his trilogy *Christianity in the Making*), Grand Rapids 2003, 92ff. Also, my "The Universal Claims of Orthodoxy and the Particularity of its Witness in a Pluralistic World," in E. Clapsis (ed.), *Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*, World Council of Churches, 2004, 192-206.

⁵¹B. Viviano, "The Historical Jesus in the Doubly Attested Sayings: An Experiment," *Revue Biblique* 103 (1996) 367-410.

In my analysis on the Johannine Eucharistic references,⁵² I have argued for the Eucharist as a communion event and a proleptic manifestation of the eschaton, i.e. for its ecclesial and diaconal dimension, and the anti-sacramentalistic character of it at almost the last end of the spectrum of the N.T. literature.⁵³ This understanding of the Eucharist – according to the project of making Biblical (and Q in particular) research relevant and absolutely necessary in my Orthodox theological tradition – I also tested by reference to the other end of the spectrum, the most ancient stage of primitive Christianity, i.e. the Q-Document.⁵⁴

In a survey of the N.T. evidence on the Eucharist in the revised edition of *The Study of Liturgy*,⁵⁵ there is no mention at all of the pre-Pauline Christianity. The common view till very recently was that there is no history, or more precisely *pre-history*,⁵⁶ of Eucharist prior to Paul, i.e. prior to the mid-50s. At a first glance we get the impression that there is no reference to the Eucharist in Q. But in the N.T. we have only a skeletal pre-history of the liturgical praxis of the primitive church, based on small pieces of evidence, to be pieced together “knowing that many of the bits are irretrievably lost”.⁵⁷ But as I argued,⁵⁸ one should consider the place of Eucharist in Q on a different level. The reconstruction of the Q-Document, I had earlier in my academic research attempted, if it is viewed as a guiding principle for uncovering the theological characteristics of the community behind it, can also provide some hints for what we broadly call Eucharist.

Exegetes, as well as liturgists, are still puzzled⁵⁹ about what it appears as a seeming dissimilarity between the N.T. evidence and our earliest account in the post-apostolic period, with regard to the process of events in the celebration of the common Eucharistic meals: first the Eucharistic meal proper and then an extended period of common prayer, praise and teaching (Synoptic Last Supper accounts and Paul, at least in Corinth), or the other way around (Justin, and the church’s practice thereafter). Jones-Hickling have stated that “how and when this reversal took place we do not know; it turned out to be universal, and so it may have happened quite early, early enough to be reflected in Luke 24:25-35 and possibly in John 6, where extended teaching precedes the allusion to the Eucharist (if such it is) at vv. 51-58”.⁶⁰

In my view,⁶¹ the structure of the Q-Document exhibits a striking parallel with the Church’s “celebration” of the Eucharist, as first described by Justin in his *1st Apology* 65, where the celebration was preceded by biblical readings, sermon and intercession. If we take the entire section of Q (see Appendix II) on Jesus’ Teaching together with the one on Response to Jesus’ Teaching as the universal Christian liturgi-

⁵² “The Understanding of Eucharist in St. John’s Gospel,” L.Padovese (ed.), *Atti del VI Simposio di Efeso su S.Giovanni Apostolo*, Rome 1996, 39-52.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 51f.

⁵⁴ Cf. my “Eucharist and Q,” *Scholarly Annual of the Theological Department of the University of Thessaloniki*, vol. 6 (1996) pp. 111-130. Cf. also Bruce Chilton’ book under the title, *A Feast of Meanings. Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles*, Leiden 1994. Chilton argues for a similar understanding of the Eucharist at the earlier stage of its development.

⁵⁵ C. P. M. Jones (revised by C. J. A. Hickling), “The Eucharist: I. The New Testament,” *The Study of Liturgy. Revised Edition*, SPCK London 1992, pp. 184-209.

⁵⁶ A. C. Couratin, “Liturgy,” in *The Pelican Guide to Modern Theology*, vol. 2, *Historical Theology*, 1969, pp. 131-240.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.154f.

⁵⁸ “Eucharist and Q”, pp. 126ff.

⁵⁹ C. P. M. Jones, “The Eucharist,” p. 204.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ “Eucharist and Q”, pp. 127ff.

cal rite which precedes the Eucharist proper, i.e. The Liturgy of the Word, then all one has to find is some connection of the following section (Jesus and his Disciples) with the Eucharistic Liturgy.⁶² It is indeed striking that Jesus' Thanksgiving (*ευχαριστία*) to the Father (Lk 10:21f. par) not only resembles to the liturgical *anaphora* of the later Christian Eucharistic rite, but it is also structured in relation to the *Lord's Prayer* in exactly the same way with the post-anaphora rites. Both in the Q-Document and in the Eucharistic Liturgy the Lord's Prayer follows the *Anaphora*.

The question which arises is whether the evidence allows the argument that the Q-Document is throughout structured according to the primitive Church's Eucharistic practice. The answer to that question should be definitely no; but if we take the Eucharist neither as a cult nor as a ritual, but as "the living expression of the ecclesial identity of the early Christian community as a *koinonia* of the eschaton",⁶³ a proleptic manifestation of the Kingdom of God (an idea that plays a significant part even from the first stage of the Q-Document [Q¹]),⁶⁴ in other words as the vivid act of the community by which the faithful proleptically lived the coming new world, then the answer could be: yes, there is some connection between the most eschatologically oriented document - though not apocalyptic - of the N.T. tradition (Q) and the most eschatological act of the Christian community (Eucharist).

I take for granted that the early Christian communities celebrated common meals in anticipation to the eschatological/messianic reality with a vision of justice that was rooted in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, who drove the money changers from the temple (Mt 21:12), made the weak strong and the strong weak (cf. 1 Cor 1:25-28), redefined the views on poverty and wealth (cf. 2 Cor 8:9), identified himself with the marginalized and excluded people, not only out of compassion, but because their lives testified a rejection to the sinfulness of the systems and structures, and finally said: "*Whatever you did to the least of these you did to me*" (Mt 25:40).⁶⁵

This conclusion is further re-enforced by the Johannine further development of the early Christian Eucharistic theology. If Paul and the Synoptic Gospels underline

⁶² See the Appendix I below.

⁶³ P. Vassiliadis, "The Biblical Background of the Eucharistic Ecclesiology," *Lex Orandi. Studies of Liturgical Theology*, Thessaloniki EKO 9 1994, 29-53, p. 49 (in Greek). In this article, contrary to the wider held scholarly view, I have argued for the "holistic" or "eschatological" consecration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, not for the "linear" one based on the so-called "institutional sayings" of Jesus (p. 50).

⁶⁴ 7-9 times the term appears in Q¹. B. L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel. The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, San Francisco 1993 tried to play down the evidence by paraphrasing it in some places and taking it to mean neutral, non-messianic/eschatological situations (pp.31f).

⁶⁵ After all, there is a growing awareness among most biblical and liturgical scholars working on the original form of the Eucharistic accounts of the N.T., that Jesus' last meal, as well as the other common meals, must have been originally understood in *eschatological* rather than *soteriological* terms, i.e. as anticipation of the banquet of God with his people in the Kingdom of God. Whatever soteriological significance was later attached to them was certainly understood only within this eschatological perspective, never outside it. It is not only (i) the apparent eschatological orientation of the overall "institution narratives" in all their forms (Marcan/Matthaeian and Pauline/Lucan); it is also clear that (ii) the saying of the *cup* in its oldest form was not centered on the content of the cup (the wine, and further through the sacrificial meaning of Jesus' blood, on its soteriological significance), but on the cup as the symbol of the new covenant (cf. my "The Biblical Foundation of the Eucharistic Ecclesiology," *Lex Orandi. Studies of Liturgical Theology*, EKO 9 Thessaloniki 1994, pp. 29ff in Greek); and above all, (iii) the *bread* in its original meaning was not connected with Jesus' crucified body, but had ecclesiological connotations, starting as a symbol of the eschatological community. Justin Taylor, "La fraction du pain en Luc-Actes", in: J. Verheyden (ed.), *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, Leuven 1999 pp. 281-295; cf. also E. Nodet - J. Taylor, *The Origins of Christianity*, pp. 88-123, convincingly arguing for the eschatological importance of the "breaking of the bread" in early Christianity.

the significance of the soteriological/sacramental understanding of the Eucharist, i.e. *via* the Pauline *theologia crucis*, it was John that went beyond this *theologia crucis* and gave it a *life-oriented* understanding. Without losing its connection with Jesus' death (cf. 19:34), the eschatological meal of the community is essentially distanced from death in John and associated rather with life (*"the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world"*, 6:51; see also 6:33,58). The antithesis between bread and manna illustrates perfectly this truth; for whereas the Jews who had eaten the manna in the desert died, those who partake of the true bread will have life eternal (6:58,33).

What I have tried to do is neither an "excessive generality," nor a kind of "*liturgicalism*" and/or "*eucharisticism*", a quasi-hermeneutical key to solve all questions.⁶⁶ It is rather a conscious shift of the centre of gravity in dealing with Biblical scholarship from a *verbal/written* authority to a *communal* and *eschatological* one.

Concluding Remarks

If any conclusion is to be drawn from the above short and very sketchy reflection on Biblical issues, based on a broad understanding of Orthodox theology, in an attempt to respond to the title I was given, this is in fact a questioning of the ultimate authority given to the Bible in the West. By certainly relativizing the authority of the canon, as an issue of cardinal importance and of binding significance for the life of the Church and by seeking to bring other non-rational (experiential) tools in biblical scientific investigation, I do not claim to have offered the final solution to the problem. My views, deliberately emphasizing the peculiarities of the Orthodox tradition, are to be synthesized both with the ecclesiological views widely held among Catholics, which is expressed in a more centralized authority/primacy (though not fully accompanied yet by synodality, at least to the extent this is theoretically practiced by the Orthodox), and with those by the Evangelicals, who have shifted the emphasis from an ecclesial to an individual (or better personal) appropriation of the word of God for salvation.

⁶⁶ See Th. Stylianopoulos' warning in n. 21 above.

APPENDIX I

With regard to the OT – together with the Catholics the Protestants and the Jews – the Orthodox accept the 38 books of the *tanakh* (the Hebrew Scriptures), separating Esra and Nehemiah and making a total of 39. The only difference from all the above is that the official version in the Orthodox Church is not the Hebrew original, called the *Masoretic* text, but the *Septuaginta*. In addition to those – together with the Catholics – the Orthodox Church, following the tradition of the Early Church, has added 10 more books in the canon, which are called *Anagignoskomena* (i.e. *Readable*, namely worthy of reading). As in the Catholic Church, these are neither of secondary authority (i.e. *Deuterocanonical*, a term invented in the 16th century by Sixtus of Siena), nor *Apocrypha* (i.e. *non canonical*, as in the Protestant Churches), a term which in the ancient Christian tradition was given to other books (the Book of Jubilees, the Assumption of Moses, the Martyrdom of Isaiah, etc.) whose authority was rejected by the Church. Those are the books the Protestants normally call *Pseudepigrapha*. Some Orthodox scholars, under the influence of modern scholarship and terminology, apply to them alternately the term (wrongly in my view) *Deuterocanonical*. In view, however, of their wide use in the liturgy their authority can hardly be differentiated from the so-called canonical books of the Bible. It is also to be noted, in addition, that the Orthodox *Anagignoskomena* do not exactly coincide with the *Deuterocanonical* books (only seven) of the Catholic Bible.

In short, (a) with regard to the text the Orthodox accept (and use in Liturgy) the authenticity of LXX, the Greek translation of the *Septuaginta*. (for Oikonomos ex Oikonomon even its inspiration! Cf. his book *On the LXX Interpreters (hermeneutai) of the Old Testament Books Four*, Athens 1844-49)

(b) With regard to the number of the *Anagignoskomena*, these are the Catholic *Deuterocanonical*, plus Maccabees 3 and Esdras, and dividing Baruch from the Epistle of Jeremiah. There are some additional texts that are normally taken up in the Orthodox Bibles, and are either accorded some value (like the Prayer of Manasses and Psalm 151) or added as appendices (like Maccabees 4 in the Greek version alone, or (the Deuterocanonical) Esdras 2 in the Slavonic version alone).

(c) With regard to the sequence, as well as the naming, of the 49 books these are as follows: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (=Pentateuch), Joshua, Judges, Ruth, *Vasileion* (Regnorum) 1 and 2 (=1 and 2 Samuel), *Vasileion* (Regnorum) 3 and 4 (=1 and 2 Kings), *Paralipomenon* 1 and 2 (1 and 2 Chronicles), *Esdras* 1 (=Deuterocanonical), 2 *Esdras* and *Nehemiah* (=the canonical Esra), Esther (together with the Deuterocanonical additions), Judith (=Deuterocanonical), Tobit (=Deuterocanonical), (some editions [e.g. the 1928 Bratsiotis edition] follow the order cod. B and A, i.e. Tobit, Judith, Esther), Maccabees 1 and 2 (=Deuterocanonical), and 3, Psalms (in some editions plus Psalm 151 and the 9 Odes and the Prayer of Manasses), Job (in some editions after the Song of Songs), Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon (=Deuterocanonical), Wisdom of Siracides (=Deuterocanonical), 12 Minor Prophets (starting with Hosea and ending with Malachias), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch (=Deuterocanonical), Lamentations, Epistle of Jeremiah (= Deuterocanonical), Ezekiel, Daniel (together with the Deuterocanonical additions, i.e. Susana, the Prayer of Azariah and the Songs of the Three Youths, and the story of Bel and Dragon), and Maccabees 4 (as an appendix in the Greek versions only, whereas the Slavonic version, probably under western influence, contains also the 2nd Deuterocanonical Esdras).

APPENDIX II

THE STRUCTURE OF Q

(with details of the “Eucharistic” Section)

(N.B.: Text NRSV - Chapters & vv. Lukan/Q)

I. Prologue ...

II. Jesus' Teaching ...

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} (=The Liturgy of the Word?)

III. Response to Jesus' Teaching (

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IV. Jesus and his Disciples

} (=The Eucharistic Liturgy?)

a. *The Mission Charge (Q/Lk 10:2-12)*

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

b. *Woes to towns of Galilee (Q 10:13-16)*

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum,

will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

“Whoever listens to you listens to me,

and whoever rejects you rejects me,

and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

c. *Jesus' Thanksgiving to the Father (Q 10:21-22)* } (=The Anaphora?)

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,

because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent

and have revealed them to infants.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father;

and no one knows who the Son is except the Father,

or who the Father is except the Son

and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

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e. The Lord's Prayer (Q 11:2-4) (=The Post-anaphora Lord's Prayer?)

Father,

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

For we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial

f. God's answering of Prayer (Q 11:9-11)

So, I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

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V. Jesus and his Opponents

VI. The Time of Crisis and Preparation for it....

VII. Epilogue. The Eschatological Discourse (The Coming of the Son of Man).