

## UNIT 2B: NEW TESTAMENT 50: Jude, 2 Peter, Formation of the Canon

### Jude

The letter of St Jude claims to be written by a brother of our Lord, a stepbrother in fact from St Joseph's first marriage. This is neither Jude of the Apostles nor his brother James the Bishop of Jerusalem. Some scholars have supposed a pseudonymous authorship on account of the high literary style of Greek used and the retrospective reference to the apostles in verse 17 which would date the work toward the last third the first century, possibly to A.D. 90, a little time before 2 Peter which incorporates much of its text. However, in the list of calamities in verses 5 to 7, there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in A.D. 70. Thus the date the book was written was sometime in the last half of the first century, but impossible to ascertain more precisely.

The best known verse in the book of Jude is verse 3: "Contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." The 11<sup>th</sup> century Biblical scholar and Archbishop of Ochrid in what is now Bulgaria, St Theophylact, wrote of this verse:

Here Jude reveals what the purpose of his letter is. He is concerned for the salvation of those to whom he is writing and is afraid that in their naiveté they might be seduced by false teachers. In order to combat them, Jude will go on to expose their teachings. Peter had already done the same, but now Jude would give them a fuller exposition.<sup>1</sup>

There is no theology to speak of in the book of Jude, which consists of a single chapter of 25 verses, but rather, as St Theophylact has pointed out, the book is an *ad hominem* attack on various false teachers who are subverting the community by both overtly challenging the authority of its leadership and living an immoral life.

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<sup>1</sup> Theophylact, *Commentary on Jude*, PG 126:89; cited by Gerald Bray (Ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT XI* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); p. 249.

In the course of its argument, the book of Jude reproduces passages from the apocryphal Jewish work, the *Assumption of Moses* (verse 9), as well as a passage (verse 14) from the teaching of Enoch (1 Enoch 1.9), a popular figure in intertestamental Judaism. Both of these references led to further questioning about its authenticity before the book was introduced into the Canon of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> A sharp contrast is drawn between the heretics who are characterised as sensual persons, divisive and not having the Holy Spirit (verse 19) and the believers who are spiritual and called to holiness; charged also with saving those who may be plucked from the fire (verses 20-23).

The Roman Catholic Biblical scholar, Father Raymond E. Brown suggests that “most people [today] find this very brief work too negative, too dated and too apocalyptic to be of much use;” however, he does acknowledge that “Jude does give us a look into how a church authority responded to dangers, real or foreseen...”<sup>3</sup> More positively, a note on verse 12 from *The Orthodox Study Bible* highlights the beautiful metaphors throughout that single verse:

Jude has a gift for using graphic word pictures. “Spots” should be rendered “hidden reefs,” those razor-sharp underwater growths that can damage and sink great ships. The love feast or “agape” was a liturgical banquet tied to the Eucharist. [Although] designed to be a peaceful, joyful meal, it was sabotaged by the false teachers, the hidden reefs in this peaceful ocean of loving friendship. “Clouds without water” are spiritually dry teachers who do not possess what they claim to have. “Carried about by the winds” is the effect of listening to the suggestions of invisible spirits and obeying their own passions. “Twice dead” means they were dead before they believed and dead a second time after they turned their backs on Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See the entry on “Jude, Epistle of St.) in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Eds.), *Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), pp. 907-908. Metropolitan Kallistos “filled gaps in the coverage of Eastern Orthodoxy;” and the resulting 1,786 page volume offers excellent reflections about Orthodox saints and theology.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Doubleday, 1999), p. 748.

<sup>4</sup> Note on Jude 12, p. 1,710 of *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008).

St Jude, whoever he may have been, was determined to face and overcome the dangers confronting the Early Church.

In the readings for Cheese Fare Week in *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, Johanna Manley has selected two passages from the opening chapter of Jude; and both passages highlight the confrontation between idolatry and Truth. St Athanasius of Alexandria writes in *On the Incarnation*:

How, if [Christ] is not risen but is dead, does He drive away and pursue, and cast down those false gods said by unbelievers to be alive and the demons they worship? For where Christ is named and His faith, there all idolatry is deposed... For if it true that one dead can exert no power, while the Saviour daily does so many works ... by the sign of the cross all magic is stopped, all witchcraft brought to nought, and all the idols are being deserted and left, and every unruly pleasure is checked, and everyone is looking up from earth to heaven.<sup>5</sup>

St Jude's juxtaposition of those who do good and those who are evil is also highlighted by the 4th century Egyptian hermit, St Macarius of Alexandria:

There is 'earth,' on which the beasts dwell, and there is an 'earth' in the air, in which the birds live.... In the same way there is a satanic 'earth' and home, where the powers of darkness and the spirits of wickedness live and walk and take their pleasure. That darksome earth cannot be seen with the eyes of this body, nor be felt; neither is the luminous earth of the Godhead felt, or seen by fleshy eyes. But to those who are spiritual both are discernible in the heart's eye.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps St Jude's reflections on how to tackle ancient idolatry still have much to contribute to the contemporary confrontation between Christianity and idolatry.

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<sup>5</sup> St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*; cited by Johanna Manley, *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox: Daily Scripture Readings and Commentary for Orthodox Christians* (Menlo Park, CA: Monastery Books, 1993), pp. 713-714.

<sup>6</sup> St Macarius the Great, *Homily XIV, 4*; cited by Manley, p. 721.

## 2 Peter

The second letter of St Peter was almost certainly written pseudonymously for the following reasons:-

- a) The letter incorporates much of the text of St Jude, which possibly places the writing beyond the death of St. Peter;
- b) It refers to a collection of St Paul's letters (3:15-16) which did not exist as a collection until the end of the first century; and
- c) As with St Jude, this letter is written in a high literary form of Greek generally uncharacteristic of the apostles themselves.

The fact that the Church upheld the canonicity of the second letter of St Peter attests not to its authorship as such but rather to the apostolic reliability of its teachings; and indeed these have a certain conformity with the theology of St Peter both in his Gospel written by St Mark and in his first letter, the authenticity of whose authorship is undoubted. (We shall see in the next section of this lecture how the Canon of Scripture depends on issues wider and deeper than direct personal authorship and identifiable sources).

The essential subject matter of the second letter is a traditional concern with theodicy—reconciling the existence of evil with the just judgements of God and this in the context of the delay (as interpreted by some) of Christ's Second Coming. The writer employs theological arguments that would resonate in both a Jewish Christian and a Greek convert milieu; and these are grafted onto an introduction which incorporates much of St. Jude's polemic against false teachers. The answer given to those who were unsettled by the delay in Christ coming is twofold. God's time is not to be reckoned by human seasons and clocks, but also, the aforementioned delay can be reckoned as God's forbearance in allowing more time for repentance (3:8-9). Nonetheless, the Day of the Lord will come suddenly, without warning, and at that time the Earth and all its works will be dissolved in the cosmic fire of God's judgement. This should not concern the believers for they have God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth in which

righteousness shall dwell (3:10-13). Andreas, a seventh century monk, has pointed out that:

It is not just we, says Peter, but the whole creation around us also, which will be changed for the better. For the creation will share in our glory just as it has been subjected to destruction and corruption because of us. Either way it shares our fate.<sup>7</sup>

In a sense then, believers inherit a profoundly environmentally oriented future.

The valediction contains a touching reference to St Paul, “the beloved brother” whose letters contain things that are “hard to understand” (3:16). Doubtless this has been a great comfort to many Christians then and since! Of even greater comfort is that we can “count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation” (3:15), for as Andreas has suggested, St Peter is quoting St Paul here directly from Romans 2:4, that “the kindness of God [*hesed* in Hebrew] leads you to repentance.”<sup>8</sup>

It is this letter that contains the famous reference to “theosis” or deification (1:4), as St Peter phrases it, that we can each become “partakers of the divine nature.” This “partaking of the divine nature” is made possible by a redemption (resurrection) that has delivered the faithful from the corruption of death and the disordered passions associated with that. It is not, though, a theme that the writer develops in any great depth. It will prove, however, to be a crucial insight for later Christian thought which will examine further and more deeply the redemptive *telos* or fulfilment of human life in Christ.

At the end of the 6th century, St Isaac of Syria offered a profound challenge which links St Peter’s words with the self-awareness and the hopes of every Christian before passing over from this life to the next life:

If something has become deeply united with your soul, you should not only regard it as your possession in this life, but believe that it will accompany

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<sup>7</sup> Andreas, *Catena*; cited by Bray, ACCS NT XI, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas, *Catena*; cited by Bray, ACCS NT XI, p. 161.

you into the life to come. If it is something good, rejoice and give thanks to God in your mind; if it is something bad, grieve and sigh and strive to free yourself from it while you are still in the body.<sup>9</sup>

This linking of “this life” and “the life to come” was of special significance to St Peter, who knew that “the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent” (1:14).

Because St Peter had been with Jesus Christ at the Transfiguration on the Holy Mountain, his understanding of deification was deeply personal—one of the “eyewitnesses of His Majesty” (1:16). Following in the footsteps of St Peter, we should all be encouraged that when Christ enters our lives He reaches out to us, as He did to St Peter, with a Divine Light (1:19) and a power (1:16) that is appropriate for our level of spiritual discernment. Reflecting on the Transfiguration which St Peter witnessed, St Maximus the Confessor wrote:

The Lord does not always appear in glory to all who stand before Him. To beginners He appears in the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7); to those able to follow Him as He climbs the high mountain of His Transfiguration He appears in the form of God, the form in which He existed before the world came to be (John 17:5). It is therefore possible for the same Lord not to appear in the same way to all who stand before Him, but to appear to some in one way and to others in another way, according to the measure of each person’s faith. When the Logos of God becomes manifest and radiant in us, and His face shines like the sun, then His clothes will also look white. That is to say, the words of the Gospel will then be clear and distinct with nothing concealed. And Moses and Elijah—the more spiritual principles of the Law and the Prophets—will also be present with Him.<sup>10</sup>

The lecturers of this second year of the E-Quip course hope that your own ability and willingness to follow Christ “as He climbs the high mountain of His

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<sup>9</sup> St Isaac of Syria, *Directions on Spiritual Training, Text 17, Philokalia*; cited by Johanna Manley on 2 Peter 1 as a reading for Friday, Week of the Publican and Pharisee, p. 662.

<sup>10</sup> St Maximus the Confessor; cited by Johanna Manley, p.1011.

Transfiguration” has increased significantly. A further reflection on 2 Peter 1:3-7 is given in the Biblical template at the end of this lecture. Let us now turn to the Formation of the Canon of the New Testament.

### **The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament**

Before we consider the actual process of the formation of the canon of the New Testament, we need to contrast the Orthodox historical approach to this issue from that which still seems to prevail in the Protestant world, if only because the latter is not always understood very well by Orthodox in the West.

The Protestant doctrine of “Sola Scriptura” has had, from an Orthodox point of view, a disastrous effect on Christian thinking in the West since the Reformation. Sola Scriptura or “by Scripture alone” is the doctrine that the holy Scriptures as a written text, inspired and even in some views dictated by God, is an entirely self-sufficient authority for Christian believing and living, all other teachings and practices being subordinate to it. A more conservative fundamentalist expression of Sola Scriptura would require the text itself to be both infallible and inerrant, whereas a more liberal Protestant approach would surrender infallibility and inerrancy at the bar of Biblical criticism. Yet even this tradition would not surrender the essential principle that only the Bible should inform Christian believing and living in any authoritative sense.

The reason why the Orthodox Church regards Sola Scriptura to be such a wrong-headed and misleading approach to revelation is that it is unhistorical both in its understanding of the process whereby we have received these texts and that it is unscientific and unspiritual in its Gnosticising and individualistic distancing of the text from the Church environment that, by the Holy Spirit, gave it birth. Most Protestant theologians in the aftermath of the Reformation thought that the whole Bible could be distanced from the Church as the Word of God and not the word of men. When that assumption fell apart during the Enlightenment, German

theology particularly, drove the Christian West down the path of supposing and venerating a canon within the Canon, that is, a superior truth to be excavated from within a Bible allegedly compromised in its entirety by the admixture of later and unreliable ecclesiastical traditions. In this manner, Biblical interpretation in the west, particularly in the Protestant tradition was deformed by certain *a priori* anti-ecclesial assumptions that robbed the text of both its history and meaning. Considering how many denominations have been spawned by the disparate Biblical interpretations based on this error, Sola Scriptura truly has been a disaster. In essence, as Father Theodore Stylianopoulos has pointed out, “the canonization of the Bible demonstrates the authoritative role of the Church and its living tradition in the discernment of theological truth;”<sup>11</sup> and it is this exercise of authority which the Protestant tradition has found so unsettling.

From an Orthodox point of view, the truth is much more unsettling to those who subscribe to Sola Scriptura in any form. This asserts, from the historical data, that not one word of the Scriptures can be removed from the thoughts, inclinations, influences and environments of human persons and human societies—in this case, both in the community of Israel and in the Church... Before any such time that these words—spoken, remembered, passed down, written in letters, circulated, edited, adapted—were collected and organised into one volume, a veritable library established by canonical principle, (that is, the Canon), they emerged and derived their relevance from the life situations and contexts of a people and persons within the community of God's care, that is His covenant relationship. This love and care of God for his people, which is the source and fount of all the inspired words that the Holy Spirit ever stirred up in the minds and hearts of his servants as they told stories, wrote letters and sang his praises, is Scripture (the normative written down part) within Tradition (within Tradition that is not alongside it or in substitution for it).

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<sup>11</sup> Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997), p. 9.

What is this *Tradition* then? It is the Holy Spirit active within and, yes, beyond the Church in the world that God created. In one important sense it is the whole stream of human life under God from which Scripture is refined and distilled but it is never, ever, ever (!) to be separated from that life or indeed from the Church, for that life and that Church are its (single) mother.<sup>12</sup> This is why *Sola Scriptura* is nonsensical because in a deeply unhistorical way it treats the Bible like the Koran, dropping down out of heaven as it were from God. Let us recall that it is Christ who descended from heaven from the Father, not a book! Christ is the Word of God, so it is with a deep poignancy and irony that we recall our Lord's own words in St John's Gospel: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40).

As we now move on to consider the actual formation of the Canon, the collection of New Testament writings, these principles of ecclesiastical gestation, that is, the Scriptures' divine birth from within the womb of the Church, will become clearer from the historical process itself. As Father John Anthony McGuckin has pointed out, it is important to recognise that "the canon of the new Testament had more or less already established itself as 'good practice' for worshipping Christian communities far and wide, long before it had ever attracted to itself a theory of why it should be adopted."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, throughout the centuries:

The Gospels were given pride of place, and despite their differences of perspective, each of the four canonical texts shows a substantial reliance on the structure of the ancient apostolic preaching: the kerygmatic proclamation that Jesus' life and saving death were the liberating forces that had redeemed the world under God. For this reason, the Orthodox

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<sup>12</sup> For a further reflection on the relationship of Scripture and tradition, ten years after his earlier work, see Father Theodore Stylianopoulos' essay, "Scripture and tradition in the Church" in Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 21-34. Father Stylianopoulos charitably concludes this essay: "Orthodox scholars have much to learn as they also have much to teach."

<sup>13</sup> John Antony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 9.

regarded the New Testament as the quintessential record of the apostolic tradition. To this day the concept of ‘apostolic faith’ means primarily in accordance with the apostolic doctrine of the sacred Scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

Within this context of a holistic experience in which the Gospels “were given pride of place” with “the apostolic faith” in a continuing firm theological focus on the liberating power of the “life and saving death” of Jesus Christ,” several stages can be discerned in the development of the New Testament Canon. However, these stages and the processes that govern them are by no means neat and tidy. This is to be expected, after all we are dealing with people!

1. In **the first century** what is now called the ‘Old Testament’ was the only definitive collection of Scriptures that Christians possessed. By *these* texts the coming of Christ was to be understood. At the same time and out of the very fluidity of oral tradition and the distributed witness of letters to churches, a Christian testimony developed consisting of Gospel sayings and apostolic **writings**. These were invariably associated with specific Christian communities; so, the Church at Ephesus might have possessed a copy of St John's Gospel together with St Paul's letter and later instructions received by its bishop St Timothy. Other gospels and letters were probably in circulation there and certainly within the wider community of the Church in other places. The coherence and unity of Christian teaching was maintained by the unity of the apostolic college and its successors in the presbyterate and episcopate. Doubtless the apostles, the bishops and the priests shared amongst themselves those sayings and later, other writings that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were deemed to be in conformity with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this basic process of collection and discernment that undergirds the formation of the Canon. The collection of written texts varied from time to time subsequently until it settled down, but the process of discernment did not. The discernment aspect should not

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<sup>14</sup> McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 9.

be thought of as exclusively a consideration of apostolic authorship. Although this was clearly important, it was not the only test of canonicity. The basic more fundamental test concerned whether the writing truly represented the mind of the Church and her teaching. For the most part, until this process concluded, the major witnesses to the Canon and its development are remarkably agreed. Should this surprise us if they were all imbued with the same Spirit? Not it should not!

2. Toward the end of the **second century** and particularly after the seminal contribution of St Irenaeus of Lyons, it is clear that the Church as a whole agreed on the inclusion of the four Gospels, and only these four, as we know them today.<sup>15</sup> This is corroborated by the Muratorian Canon, St Hippolytus in Rome, Tertullian in Africa, St Clement in Alexandria and the Syrian Diatessaron or Four Gospel Harmony. Further back in time, St Justin Martyr (130-163) in his Apology, refers to “the memoirs of the apostles [which] are read in Christian assemblies together with the writings of the prophets.” Even the heretics Marcion and Basilides appeared to refer to these four Gospels as amongst the Orthodox so do St Ignatius of Antioch, the hieromartyr St Polycarp and Papias. To return to St Irenaeus and in connection with the letters of St Paul, he reflects existing Church Tradition that all those letters of St Paul that we now know today (excluding Hebrews as Pauline) are to be included; he leaves out only the letter to Philemon. Once again the Muratorian Canon and the heretic Marcion concur. It also seems that the church at Corinth was instrumental in pulling together the collection of St Paul's letters of which its own epistles, and in particular the first, were deemed to be of prime importance (witness, St Clement of Rome and the Muratorian Canon).

As we move into the **third century**, it is clear that we have four Gospels, 13 Pauline letters, Acts, 1 Peter and the Johannine letters to which are now added the Catholic or Pastoral Epistles and the Revelation of St John the Divine, at

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<sup>15</sup> For a detailed description of the contribution of St Irenaeus, see John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially pp. 111-118.

first in the western later in the East. It was perhaps Origen who compiled probably the same 27 books in his New Testament as we now have although we know at the time that the canonicity of Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John, and Revelation was still disputed in some places. Toward the end of the **fourth century** the collection or Canon acquired a very definite, settled character. In his Easter letter in 367 St Athanasius of Alexandria listed exactly the same books that we now have today and it is he that applied the term Canon to the process and collection. Under St Augustine's jurisdiction, the African Synod of Hippo in 393 approved this same New Testament collection and this decision was confirmed by councils in Carthage in 397 and 419. Pope Damasus' first council in Rome in 382 approved the same list. By the **fifth century** in the East, Revelation had been accepted and the Canon had been formally closed.

In mapping out this process of the formation of the New Testament canon it is quite clear that it was the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who established the limits of the New Testament. It could do so, because even after 500 years, it was the same Church that had been responsible for the emergence of those documents in the first place. The minor divergences in collections merely represented those discrepancies in judgement to be expected in any human process of discernment. The final collection is no less Holy Scripture and inspired by God for the fluidity and longevity of the process of collation and authorisation. According to the Orthodox understanding of the synergy of divine action and human response, the canonical process, both humanly undertaken and divinely guided, inexorably comes to its conclusion. As we might say, "Those whom God has joined together, (Church and Scripture), let no man put asunder!"

## A Concluding Reflection

In finishing these 20 lectures on the Old and New Testament, let us remember the advice of Metropolitan Kallistos [Ware] about how to read the Bible:

Reading Scripture . . . in obedience, as a member of the Church, finding Christ everywhere, seeing everything as part of my own personal story—we shall sense something of the power and healing to be found in the Bible. Yet always in our biblical voyage of exploration we are only at the beginning. We are like someone launching out in a tiny boat across a limitless ocean. But, however great the journey, we can embark on it today, at this very hour, in this very moment.<sup>16</sup>

Having now begun our “biblical voyage of exploration” let us continue for the rest of our lives.

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<sup>16</sup> Metropolitan Kallistos, “How to Read the Bible,” in *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), p. 1766.

# A Template for the Orthodox Interpretation of Biblical Texts

In accordance with the proposal of Fr. Theodore G. Stylianopoulos that Orthodox biblical interpretation ought to have a three-level approach, the following template is offered for preachers, teachers, bible study leaders, catechists and students of the Scriptures generally:<sup>1</sup>

***E-Quip Lecture 50: 2 Peter 1: 3-7:*** “His divine power has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”

Level	Process	In Tradition / Fathers (Theoria)	Applicable Now (Praxis)
<b>Exegetical</b>	<b>Historical / Contextual</b>  <i>(using the full range of critical tools)</i>	For St Peter, the “divine power” of Christ (v. 3) is the means by which we are given the ability to “become partakers of the divine nature” (v. 7). In both these verses the English word “divine” is a translation of the Greek word <i>theias</i> . In Acts 17:29, the same word with a definite article is used to indicate the attributes of the Godhead. For further reflection see the Greek Dictionary of the NT, words # 2304, 2305 and 2320 in <i>The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible</i> (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010) ISBN 978-1-4185-4237-5. (This reasonably priced 3,000-page book gives English transliterations for all Hebrew words in the OT and all Greek words in the NT and is an essential tool for Bible study for those who not know Hebrew or Greek.)	Father Dimitru Staniloae writes: “The Christian grows in God, even in the course of this life . . . [being] filled more and more with the working presence of God.... The goal of Orthodox spirituality is the perfection of the believer by his union with Christ. He is being imprinted to an ever-greater degree by the human image of Christ.” <i>Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Guide for the Scholar</i> (South Canaan, PA: St Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 20002), p. 21.
	<b>Allegorical / Typological</b>  <i>(as derived from Tradition)</i>	St Gregory of Nyssa point out that “the deification of Jesus Christ’s humanity ... begins, strictly speaking, after the Passion and by the Resurrection, when the attributes and energies of human nature are overwhelmed by the divine attributes and energies. It is	As St Cyril of Jerusalem reminds us: “When Christ’s body and blood become the tissue of our members, we become Christ-bearers and ‘partakers of the divine nature’ as the blessed Peter said” [ <i>Mytagogical Lectures 4.3</i> ;

		<p>perfected with the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, as man. This also makes possible our personal deification, understood likewise as an elevation above human attributes and energies to the divine.” [Staniloae, p. 363]. <i>(This writer has certain reservations about the use of the word “overwhelmed” in the above quotation. “Transformed” might be better*)</i>. We can say, however, that .... <b>the theandric (God-Man) Personhood of Christ enables us to participate in the divine nature by the transformative power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.</b></p>	<p>cited by <i>ACCS NT XI</i>, p. 132]. <b>It is, therefore, essential that if we wish to “partake of the divine nature” we go frequently to Holy Communion.</b></p>
Interpretative	Spiritual / Ethical	<p>St Theophylact writes: <b>“Peter lays out here the order which we are to follow to come into full maturity [v 5-7].</b> First of all, comes faith, which is the foundation and source of all good works. Next comes virtue, by which he means good works, for without them faith is dead, as St James said [2:26]. Next comes knowledge . . .an understanding of the secret things hidden in God which are ... revealed ... only to those who continue faithfully in ...work [ACCS NT XI, p. 133].</p>	<p>St Bede writes: “When Peter talks about virtue here, he does not mean the power to perform miracles but the strength to lead a good life, which means putting our faith into practice” [ACCS NT XI, p.133]. <b>Our strength comes from the Divine Power.</b></p>
	Personal / Social	<p>St Hilary of Arles urges: “Just as God stepped out of his nature to become a partaker of our humanity, so are we called to step out of our nature to become partakers of His divinity” [ACCS NT XI, p. 133]. In the process of deification <b>in a strict sense</b> “the operations or energies of human nature cease. They are replaced by divine energies; natural attributes are overwhelmed by divine glory” [Staniloae, p. 368]. <i>Comment: See note* in Allegorical / Typological &gt; Tradition / Fathers.</i></p>	<p>Staniloae explains that “the process of deification <b>in a broad sense</b> “coincides with the process of the development of human powers to their limit, or with the full realization of human nature, but also with their unending eclipse by grace” [p. 363].</p>

<b>Transformative</b>	<b>The Call to Holiness</b>	<p>St Theophylact writes: “Grace and peace are the means by which God gives us everything we need in order to live godly lives... Patience increases our trust in God, which is why godliness comes next” [in ACCS NT XI, p. 132]. St Bede writes: <b>“Self-control requires steadfastness, because whoever has learned to stay away from the pleasures of this world needs the will-power to go on doing so.</b> The person who reaches that point of self-discipline may truly be called godly” [On 2 Peter; in ACCS NT XI, p. 134].</p>	<p>St Bede explains: “The greater your knowledge of God becomes, the more you realize the magnitude of His promises. <b>When God blesses us, He changes our very being</b> so that whatever we were by nature is transformed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that we may truly become partakers of His nature” [in ACCS NT XI, p. 133].</p>
	<b>The Call to Witness</b>	<p>St Bede insists: “You cannot win people to Christ merely by arguing them into the kingdom. It is necessary to practice godliness by prayer and good works.... We cannot love God without loving our neighbour, nor can we love our neighbour without loving God. The love of God is greater than the love of our neighbour which is why we have to practice it with all our heart, mind and strength” [in ACCS NT XI, p. 134].]. <b>Thus we witness to Christ best through our prayer and good works.</b> St Hilary of Arles has written of 1 Peter: “The will of God which we live by is the witness of the Gospel, which kills any interest we may have in human glory” [in ACCS NT XI, p. 112]. <b>Prayer and good works witness to the Gospel.</b></p>	<p><b>“If someone progresses in the virtues which grow from faith and culminate in love, it means that he shows his working love to neighbours and that he strives for the growth of the same faith in them; it means that he grows in communion with everyone in Christ, by the Spirit. But this is the same as working for the strengthening of the Church, by taking a responsibility for it”</b> [Staniloae, p. 63]. <b>Amen.</b></p>

<sup>1</sup> In “*The New Testament, An Orthodox Perspective, Volume 1: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics,*” (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997, Ch. 7), Fr. Theodore sets out three levels serving a sound Orthodox hermeneutical process. These are: **1. Exegetical** - using all critical, contextual, textual and literary methods to determine “the level of understanding of the biblical text in its historical context of literary form and conceptuality ...” (p. 190). **2. Interpretative** – evaluating means derived from the exegetical stage as applicable contextually to the reader’s contemporary issues and concerns (p. 197). **3. Transformative** – experiencing life changing practical applications of insights derived from the previous two stages.

In ALL of these three levels, the Orthodox context must be the Church as the locus of divine revelation and inspiration. Here the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth as manifested in the biblical text, the teachings of the Fathers and the liturgical context. In Ch. 4, p. 115 f., Fr. Theodore explains the historical and spiritual exegetical approaches which, following the Fathers, must be applied throughout. Classically these have concerned the Antiochian emphasis on the “literal” or historical approach and the Alexandrian emphasis on the allegorical and typological interpretations that reveal the inter-connectedness of all Scripture in Tradition at deeper levels of understanding.