

**Scripture and Tradition**  
**Salvation from Religious Individualism**  
**by Makarios Stephanopoulos**

*Foreward: We present here, as an exercise in spiritual discernment for the reader, a heretical writing by an Eastern Orthodox “priest,” Makarios Stephanopoulos. We refuse him the title of “father” based on the commandment of Jesus in Matthew 23:9. As the discerning reader reads through this example of spiritual deception, he will notice the elevation of the “Church” above the Word. He will also note how Mr. Stephanopoulos tries to subject the working of the Holy Ghost to the conventions of Eastern culture and traditionalism. He even goes so far as to suggest that the Word of God could pass away, claiming that it is the “Church” that would re-invent it the way it invented it the first time. He makes no appeal to the Greek of the Word, neither to the Hebrew to help substantiate his treatise. Rather he quotes the so-called “Saint” Irenaeus and another so-called “Saint” Silouan as his authorities, as if they had greater authority than the very Word of God inscribed in ink and parchment. In elevating the Eastern Orthodox Church and its saints above the Word, he elevates the flesh above the Spirit, resulting in soul-killing heresy. In my opinion, the worst statement Mr. Stephanopoulos makes is his suggestion that a Baptist could misunderstand the word as much as a godless Hindu pagan. As the editorial board of **Glossarrhea Review** considered this treatise for publication, the majority objected due to its subtly deceptive heretical tone. But after much prayerful thought, we decided to include it in this “testing the Spirits” issue of **Glossarrhea** in order to confront the discerning believer with some of the worst that hell could muster in order to afford the reader an opportunity for greater spiritual growth in the exercise of spiritual discernment and cult busting.*

—Avery Simpleton, Ph.D.

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Muslims call Jews and Christians “people of the Book.” This is a misnomer. Rather, the Bible is “the Book of the people”—the people of God—the Church of both Old and New Testaments. The Bible emerged

among the people chosen by God; God's people did not emerge from the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible is an Eastern book rather than a Western, European book. To read the Bible outside of its natural context is to misunderstand the Bible or, at best, re-interpret it according to one's own cultural and linguistic prejudices. If one wishes to understand the Bible within its natural, cultural context, one must immerse oneself within the unbroken stream of tradition in which the Bible arose.

Saint Irenaeus (the second-century bishop of Lyons who received the Holy Tradition from Saint Polycarp who had previously received it from the Apostle John) uses the following analogy to describe non-traditional interpretations of Scripture. Interpreting Scripture in a non-traditional way is like disassembling a beautiful mozaic of Christ made out of precious jewels by a skilled artist, then rearranging the gems into the form of a dog and declaring that this mozaic is the true image of Christ constructed by the skillful artist. Those who follow a form of Scripture interpretation discontinuous with Holy Tradition ignorantly accept such teaching because the dog has a meaningful form and because the gems are beautiful. What the ignorant don't see is the process which created the original masterpiece and maintained it, nor do they see the effect of their own break with this creative, self-regulating tradition by which the true, unaltered image of Christ is preserved in the Body of Christ—the Church faithful to the Apostolic Tradition.<sup>i</sup>

There are many ways in which one may read the Bible and also misunderstand it. A Hindu may read it as if it were a Hindu writing, but, in so doing, he will misperceive it. Likewise, a Baptist may read it as if it were a Baptist writing, but, in so doing, he likewise will, in some degree, misapprehend its message. The closer one gets to the stream of tradition in which the Bible was written and interpreted, the closer one will get to genuinely apprehending its message.

As Saint Silouan has said, "Suppose that for some reason the Church were to be bereft of all her liturgical books, of the Old and New Testaments, the works of the holy Fathers—what would happen? Sacred Tradition would restore the Scriptures, not word for word, perhaps—the verbal form might be different—but in essence the new Scriptures would be the expression of that same 'faith which was once delivered unto the saints.'<sup>ii</sup> They would be the expression of the one and only Holy Spirit continuously active in the Church, her foundation and her very

substance.”<sup>iii</sup> Even more fundamental than her relationship with the Scriptures is the Church’s relationship with God. The Church is dependent upon the Holy Spirit and the action of the Holy Spirit is evident in the consistent tradition of the Church in which the Scriptures are expounded in unity according to the Spirit of Truth rather than according to a divisive spirit of error. It is only in the Church that we are certain to hear the voice of God and the proper explication of the Scriptures. As John the Theologian writes, “We belong to God: the one who knows God listens to us; the one who doesn’t belong to God, doesn’t listen to us—that’s how we know the Spirit of Truth, and the spirit of error.”<sup>iv</sup> The following table may be useful in understanding the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Scriptures, and the unbroken line of consistent tradition embodying the fulness of Christ.<sup>v</sup>

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Tradition</b>
<p>The historical context of the Scriptures has always been the worship tradition of God’s people. The original, natural context of the Old Testament was the Tabernacle/Temple Liturgy and the Synagogue Liturgy of the Jewish people. The current, natural context of the entirety of Scripture is the liturgical worship of the Church. In essence, the Bible is a prayerbook shared by the Church and by each member of the Church.</p>	<p>The tradition of the liturgical worship of God’s people is the natural context of the Scriptures. Liturgy means “the work of the people” and is a communal phenomenon. Through liturgy the people of God continually relive/participate in the saving acts of God in history by which He called and separated His people unto Himself. The richest experience of Scripture is found only as a member of God’s distinct people.</p>
<p>The Scriptures are best understood and interpreted within the natural context of the ongoing, living, worship tradition of God’s people within its proper context and under the authority of its God-ordained leadership.</p>	<p>Tradition is not simply a fixed way of doing something. Rather tradition is the lived, meaningful experience of a community passed on from generation to generation in a creative, dynamic process.</p>

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Tradition</b>
The King James Version itself was translated from liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church—the so-called Byzantine “ <i>Textus receptus</i> .”	The very content of the Scriptures—the books canonized by the Church—was determined by a selection process which is itself part of the tradition of the Church.
Scripture is the “right word”—a more sure word of prophecy (II Peter 1:19).	Holy Tradition is the “right reception of that word.”
Scripture can be misunderstood and twisted (II Peter 3:16).	Holy Tradition is the right understanding and application of Scripture within the context of the ongoing unity of the Church.
Scripture alone, apart from the living experience/tradition of the Church, remains a closed book. Scripture by itself is insufficient. There are more words printed in the Sunday edition of the <i>New York Times</i> than there are in the whole New Testament. Scripture must be supplemented by spiritual gifts given to the Church (John 16:13; Ephesians 4:11-14).	In the ongoing tradition of the Orthodox Church, Scripture is properly interpreted not by the authority of a particular faction of the Church such as the Roman Catholic “ <i>magisterium</i> ” or the Pope, but rather by every spiritual Christian living and thinking creatively in an ongoing dialogue with Holy Tradition and humbly as a recipient of the Holy-Spirit-inspired Tradition.
The Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:21; II Timothy 3:16).	Holy Tradition is a communal, Scripture interpretation inspired by the same Holy Spirit and is therefore always consistent both with Scripture and with itself.

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Tradition</b>
<p>Scripture itself is a form of <i>written</i> tradition because it is something “passed down” from generation to generation. Yet the Bible has always been experienced by God’s people as something both written and <i>oral</i>—being recited aloud.</p>	<p>Tradition itself is two-fold, consisting of not only the norms and customs of the Church, but also the very meaning of those norms and customs. In the words of Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna and Bishop Auxentios of Photiki, tradition is both “structure and process, vehicle and content, practice and theory.”</p>
<p>In both historic Judaism and Christianity, not only the written form of the Scripture is passed on, but also the oral interpretation/understanding of the Scripture is passed on.</p>	<p>A break with Christian tradition is a break with Christian interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures.</p>
<p>The faithful transmission of Holy Scripture has always depended upon faithful adherence to Holy Tradition.</p>	<p>The faithful transmission of Holy Tradition (practice and theory) has always depended upon a faithful evaluation and critique in light of Scripture, not in a stiff and rigid way, but in a creative, living way within the current context while remaining consistent with the Holy Tradition as received from previous generations.</p>
<p>In the Orthodox understanding, Scripture and Tradition together constitute the spiritual authority of the mystical Body of Christ, the Church.</p>	<p>In the Orthodox understanding, Holy Tradition along with Holy Scripture is the mystical, ongoing life of the Church.</p>
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<p>Scripture is part of the structure of the Church borne along by the process of spiritual growth in knowledge of Christ and by the process of the Holy Spirit’s guidance/inspiration.</p>	<p>“Tradition is a living power inherent in a living organism. In the stream of its life it bears along the past in all its forms so that all the past is contained in the present and is the present. The unity and continuity of tradition follow from the fact that the Church is always identical with itself.”<sup>vi</sup></p>
<p>The Scriptures are not intended as a collection of rules and regulations to live by, but rather as a living, ongoing word of God to which His people respond in a personal, creative, and communal way.</p>	<p>Holy Tradition is not “a theology of repetition,” but rather “a creative extension of ancient tradition.”<sup>vii</sup></p>
<p>Our own American culture and language, hitherto foreign to the historical, linguistic, and cultural context in which the Scriptures arose, actually interferes with a proper understanding of Scripture.</p>	<p>The same Holy Spirit Who guided the writing of Scripture and the canonization of Scripture also guides and preserves the living practice and interpretation of the teaching embodied in Scripture within the historical, linguistic, &amp; cultural context of God’s people, the Church.</p>

Scripture	Tradition
<p>Most, if not all, Protestant belief systems regard the Bible by itself as being sufficient for living and believing rightly and regard Holy Tradition as non-existent. If Protestant groups admitted that Holy Tradition exists, they would have to return to the ancient and unbroken tradition of Christian belief and practice and, thus, the various conflicting traditions of Protestantism would themselves cease to exist.</p>	<p>In Roman Catholicism, the <i>magisterium</i>—the cardinals together with the Pope—is the ultimate determiner of the meaning of Scripture and also Tradition. Pope Pius IX declared, “I am Tradition.”<sup>viii</sup> In this understanding, tradition is no longer a process involving the organism of the whole Church, but rather an institutional matter of legislative decision-making passed down not from generation to generation, but from hierarchy to laity.</p>

<sup>i</sup> St. Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, edited by Alexander Robers and James Donaldson (New York, 1885), p. 326

<sup>ii</sup> St. Jude 1:3.

<sup>iii</sup> Archimandrite Sophrony, *The Monk of Mount Athos: Staretz Silouan 1866-1938*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (London and Oxford, 1973), p. 55.

<sup>iv</sup> I John 4:6.

<sup>v</sup> Ephesians 1:22-23.

<sup>vi</sup> Bulgakov, Sergei, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 20.

<sup>vii</sup> [Father] Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, p. 114.

<sup>viii</sup> *Evangelische Polemik Gegen die Romische Kirche*, ed. Paul Tschackert (Gotha, Germany, 1885), p. 407, n. 16