

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

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All text in these leaflets is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

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**"The Orthodox Church.....**has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from "Encountering the Mystery."*  
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Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael  
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.  
[www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk](http://www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk)

In the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain.  
Exarchate of Western Europe and Ireland.  
[www.thyateira.org.uk](http://www.thyateira.org.uk)

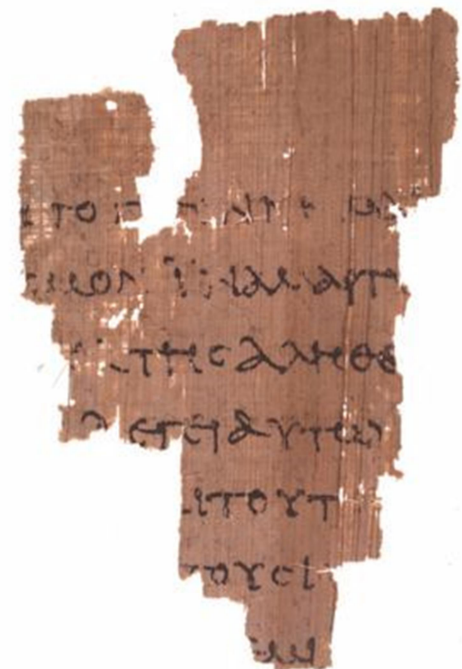
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Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Fr.N.03.15

# Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Holy Scriptures



One of the earliest papyrus fragments from  
the Holy Gospel of John  
8:37-38.  
(The Rylands Fragment).  
A codex - written on both sides.  
(125-150 AD)

The word bible, translated from Greek, means simply book or books (τὰ βιβλία). The Orthodox Christian Bible is a collection of what are called the books of the Old Testament (49) and of the New Testament (27), together often also referred to as the Scriptures.

For the Old Testament, the Orthodox Church uses a translation of something called the Septuagint also known by the Roman numerals LXX since the translation from Hebrew into Greek was completed by seventy Jewish scholars about three hundred years before the birth of Christ. It is this Greek translation which would have been most widely used at the time of his birth. This collection is generally identified as books of: the Law, History, Prophecy and the Psalms.

When, in the New Testament, we read of Jesus and others referring to and quoting the scriptures, those references and quotes relate of course to the Old Testament. After his resurrection Jesus said to Cleopas and his companion whilst walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus (they did not know it was Jesus): **“O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.**” Luke 24.

Shortly after they said to one another: **Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures.**” Luke 24.

Later Jesus said to the Apostles: **“These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.....**” Luke 24.

In response to his detractors Jesus said: **“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.**” St. John’s Gospel, 5:39f.

As Christians then our hearts and minds are opened and illumined to understand the Old Testament only in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ as found in the New Testament written within, interpreted, preserved, and taught by the Church.

**“...we do not read the Bible as isolated individuals, interpreting it solely by the light of our private understanding.....We read it as members of the Church, in communion with all other members throughout the ages. The final criterion for our interpretation of Scripture is the mind of the Church. And this means keeping constantly in view how the meaning of Scripture is explained and applied in Holy Tradition: that is to say, how the Bible is understood by the Fathers and the Saints, and how it is used in liturgical worship.”**

Metropolitan Kallistos: *The Orthodox Church*.

Apostolic teachings, along with the divinely inspired books written by the Lord’s disciples and Apostles, make up Sacred or Holy Apostolic Tradition, which is the basis and the foundation of the doctrine of the Orthodox Faith.

The Holy Gospels and the book of the Acts of the Apostles were of course written after the events they record. That oral tradition was soon written down to become part of the inspired writings of the Church as did the later letters which, having been read by their recipients, became recorded for wider use. To all these was added the Book of Revelation.

The Bible is a fundamental part of Orthodoxy but Orthodox are not Bible fundamentalists. Bibliolatry is an excessive devotion to or reliance upon the Bible without recourse to the Sacred Tradition of the Church of which those inspired writings are part. The texts of services in Orthodoxy draw heavily upon the scriptures including the Psalms.

The collection of both Testaments is often referred to as the **Canon** (Greek - rule) of scripture, that is those books received, interpreted and authorised for use in the worship and teaching of the Church. This does not mean that other writings of the time or subsequently cannot have an approved place in Orthodox theological, liturgical and pastoral life. especially the **Philokalia** and other words of wisdom from the centuries of Christian witness and learning.

From the original **Greek** of the Testaments a **Latin** translation was made in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Some centuries later the first **English** and other language versions appeared including **Cornish**:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Y’n dalleth yth esa an Ger, hag yth esa an Ger gans Dyw, ha’n Ger o Dyw.

St. John’s Gospel verse 1.

**“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”**

2 Thessalonians 2:15.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian priest Saint John of Kronstadt wrote: **“The Holy Scripture is the realm of Wisdom, Word, and Spirit, of God in Trinity; in it he clearly manifests himself.”**