

**BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
IN THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH:
A HISTORICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to identify the issues that are specifically important for an understanding of biblical interpretation within the Russian Orthodox Church. Its purpose is not to advocate *pro* or *contra* Russian biblical scholarship, but to place the emphasis on the history of biblical interpretation in the Russian Orthodox Church and on Orthodox biblical hermeneutics. Two considerations are specifically pertinent to our study of this topic. First, the history of biblical interpretation is surveyed from a sole and specific perspective - from within a historical-dogmatic development of the Russian Orthodox Church from the Kiev period of its history (IX-XIII cc.) till the Synodal period (1721-1917). Second, it is true that once originated, the Biblical Study in Russian Orthodoxy formed its own way and developed its own fundamental principles of interpretation. Although many principles correlated and corresponded with general principles of biblical interpretation, in essence they form "Russian Orthodox Hermeneutics".

Chapter 1 considers the problematic character of the subject and indicates the specific target group of readers, namely the biblical experts outside the Russian Orthodox confessional borders, both in the East and in the West.

Chapter 2 addresses the methodological issues. We considered general ideas as applicable in the historiography and we defined our position with regard to the leading opinions that motivates a discipline of historical research.

Chapter 3 focuses on characteristics and factors that played the main role in determining the inquiry of bible interpretation in the Russian Orthodox Church during the Kiev period (x-xiii cc.) up to the Synodal period (1721-1917).

Chapter 4 examines *selected* anthropological aspects relevant to the Russian Orthodox Church that exercised both a direct and indirect impact upon the Orthodox biblical hermeneutics. This chapter presents a general overview of some key Orthodox anthropological beliefs, followed by an account of several specific features of Orthodox anthropology as examined, such as: (1) the nature of Russian man, (2) the wholeness of man; and (3) the concept of *theurgy* which proved to be particularly helpful in understanding of how the Church's anthropological ideas are not only linked with Orthodox hermeneutics, but actually determine it.

Chapter 5 gives an account of Bogdashevskii's life and scholarship, emphasizing his hermeneutics. A performed case study which focuses on the analysis of the Russian Orthodox hermeneutics according to the work of one particular scholar, is reflected in this

chapter and it serves as an example of the hermeneutical trends as observed in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Chapter 6 summarizes and interprets the fundamental principles and main features peculiar to Russian Orthodox biblical interpretation, using the attestation to these principles in the foregoing study as a basis. The chapter demonstrates that the main hermeneutical features of the Russian Orthodox Church: (1) are deeply influenced by patristic exegesis; (2) show that the Orthodox Church is *a priori* in reading the Bible; (3) place an entire dogmatic premise as a quintessential criterion for the Bible interpretation; (4) exalt the Church tradition as the indispensable guide to the understanding of Scripture; (5) consider Christ as the *beginning-centre-* and *end* of biblical interpretation; (6) base Orthodox exegesis upon cooperation between the Holy Spirit and the human interpreter; (7) demands a critical reading of the Scriptures guided by the Church dogmatics, and a multidisciplined approach to the text which includes proper attention to questions of grammar, logic, history of the text, translations, criticism of editions, and exegesis proper.

Chapter 7 summarizes our discussions, outlines the results of this study and indicates the possible directions for further studies.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of contents.....	iv
Abbreviations.....	viii

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1	The need for this Study.....	3
1.2	The Research Problem and Purpose of this Study.....	6
1.3	Methodology and Limits of this Research.....	7
1.4	The Design of this Study.....	7
1.5	Note on Composition.....	9

CHAPTER 2. THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF HISTORY: METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

2.1	General Remarks	11
	<i>Excursus: Different Orientations in Historical Thought.....</i>	11
2.2	History and Historiography.....	14
2.3	Objectivity and Truth in History.....	15
2.4	Facts, Interpretation and Form.....	17
2.5	Method in History.....	18
	<i>Excursion: The Use of the Russian Orthodox Academic Periodicals in Scholarly Research.....</i>	20
2.6	Modes of Expression.....	21
2.7	Historiographical Representation of Continuity.....	21

CHAPTER 3: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1	Introduction.....	23
3.2.	Kievan Period (X-XIII cc.): Historical Beginning.....	24
3.2.1	The Foundation of the Orthodoxy in Kievan Rus'.....	24
3.2.2	The Bible in Ancient Russia.....	27
3.2.3	The Receiving of the Bible.....	27
3.2.4	The Translation of the Church Fathers Writings.....	29
3.2.5	Non-canonical Literature.....	32
3.2.6	Lack of an Appeal for studying the Bible.....	34
3.2.7	Conclusion.....	37
3.3	The period of Tartar invasion (1280-1480).....	38
3.3.1	Historical Perspective.....	38
3.3.2	The Bible in Public Schooling.....	39

3.3.3.	Initial instructions for interpreting sacred books.....	40
3.3.4	The Text and Canon of the Bible in Ancient Russia.....	43
3.3.5	Conclusion.....	45
3.4.	Ecclesiastic self-establishment (XV-XVIII cc.)	46
3.4.1	Historical-Ecclesiastical background	46
3.4.2	The Gennagy Bible (Gennadievskaiia Bibliia)	49
3.4.3	Maxim the Greek (1470-1555).....	52
3.4.4	Development of Theological Education in Russia.....	55
3.4.5	The Epoch of Disputes	56
3.4.6	Toward the Biblical Studies.....	59
3.4.6.1	The Formation of Field of Biblical Study.....	61
3.4.6.2	Platon's Followers	67
3.4.7	Conclusion	68
3.5	Biblical Interpretation in the XIX c. Russia.....	69
3.5.1	Creation of the Orthodox Theological Consciousness.....	69
3.5.1.1	The Religious- Philosophical Awakening	69
	<i>Excursion: The Main Figures of the Religious</i>	
	<i>Philosophical Awakening.....</i>	71
3.5.1.2	Response to the Philosophical Awakening	76
3.5.1.3	The Consequences of Biblical Criticism for the Orthodox Church	80
3.5.2	Study of the Bible in the First Half of the 19 th Century.....	83
3.5.2.1	The Metropolitan of Moscow Filaret (1783-1867).....	84
3.5.2.2	Aleksandr Matveevich Bukharev (1824-1871).....	87
3.5.2.3	Gerasim Pavskii (1787-1863).....	89
3.5.2.4	Deficit of Further Developments.....	91
3.5.3	Study of the Bible the Second Half of the 19 th Century.....	96
3.5.3.1.	Biblical Hermeneutics.....	99
3.5.3.1 (a)	Savvaitov's Biblical Hermeneutics.....	101
3.5.3.1 (b)	Antonii's "Concerning the Book of Rules of Tyconius".....	106
3.5.3.1 (c)	The case of Ivan Korsunskii (1849-1899).....	110
3.5.3.2	Textual Criticism.....	113
3.5.3.3	The Questions of Introduction.....	115
3.5.3.4	The Orthodox Response to Historical Criticism.....	121
3.5.3.4 (a)	Hostility Toward Historical Criticism.....	122
3.5.3.4 (b)	Occurrence of Historical-Critical Exegesis.....	129
3.5.3.4 (c)	Summary.....	131
3.5.3.5	The Exegetical Works.....	133
3.6	Conclusion.....	136

CHAPTER IV: THE ORTHODOX VIEW OF A MAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

4.1.	Introduction.....	140
4.2.	General Remarks.....	141
4.2.1.	Three Sources of Orthodox Anthropology.....	142
4.2.1.1	The Bible	142
4.2.1.2	Direct Mystical Insights.....	145
4.2.1.2.1	A Description of Orthodox Mysticism.....	146
4.2.1.2.2.	An Outline of Mystical Anthropology.....	148
4.2.1.3	Independent Theoretical Constructions.....	150

4.3	Distinctive Aspects of Orthodox Anthropology.....	151
4.3.1	The Nature of a Russian man.....	152
4.3.2	The Wholeness of Men	153
4.3.3	The Concept of Theurgy	154
4.4	The Hermeneutical Implications	158

CHAPTER V: DMITRII IVANOVICH BOGDASHEVSKII (1861-1933): HIS HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

5.1	The Life of Bogdashevskii.....	163
5.1.1	The Biographical Details	163
5.1.2	His Contribution	166
5.1.3	The Historical Setting of His Life	167
5.2	Fundamental Philosophical Ideas	170
5.2.1	General Remarks.....	170
5.2.2	Bogdashevskii's world-view (Platonism, Epistemology).....	172
5.2.3	Bogdashevskii's world-view (Kantianism).....	179
5.2.4	Bogdashevskii's world-view (Philosophy and Science: The overcoming of the secular orientation).....	184
5.2.5	Conclusion.....	189
5.3	Hermeneutical Assessment of the New Testament investigation	194
5.3.1	Introduction.....	194
5.3.2	Theological Axiomatic Assumptions	194
5.3.2.1	The Matter of Ecclesiology Within Hermeneutical Frame.....	195
5.3.2.2	The Nature of the New Testament	202
5.3.2.3	The Supernatural Element of the New Testament.....	205
5.3.3	Methodological Presupposition.....	207
5.3.3.1	Textual Theory: Language, Communication and History.....	207
5.3.3.2	Origin, Formation and Integrity of the New Testament	211
5.3.3.2 (a)	The Formation of the Gospels.....	211
5.3.3.2 (b)	The Authenticity of the New Testament Writings.....	214
5.3.3.2 (c)	The Restrictions of Historical Inquiry	214
5.3.3.3	The Attitude Toward the Historical-Critical Method	219
5.3.3.4	Acquiring Supplementary Information	220
5.3.3.5	Typological, Allegorical and Symbolical Meanings.....	221
5.3.4	Conclusion.....	226
5.4	The New Testament Ethic and Hermeneutical Strategy.....	230
5.4.1	Introduction	230
5.4.2	The Theological Framework	231
5.4.3	The Anthropological Framework.....	236
5.4.4	Moral Logic.....	238
5.4.5	The Function of the New Testament.....	243
5.4.5.1	Ethnonationalism.....	243
5.4.5.2	Violence.....	246
5.4.6	Conclusion.....	250
5.5	New Testament Hermeneutics.....	251
5.5.1	Introduction	251
5.5.2	The Church as the Interpreter of the New Testament.....	251
5.5.2.1	Tradition and the New Testament.....	254

5.5.2.2	The Nature of the Relationship between Biblical Exegesis and Dogmatics.....	259
5.5.2.3	Church Liturgy and the New Testament.....	264
5.5.2.4	The Appeal to the Fathers as the Interpreters of the New Testament.....	267
5.5.3	Spirit of God as the Interpreter of the New Testament.....	268
5.5.4.	Faith and Reason as Ways of Knowing - Hermeneutical Mode	271
5.5.4.1	Faith.....	271
	<i>Excursion: The Sources for Scepticism and Unfaith.....</i>	<i>273</i>
5.5.4.2	Reason.....	274
5.5.4.3	Synthesis.....	275
5.5.5	The Historical Character of Interpretation.....	277
5.5.6	Against Socio-Critical Hermeneutics of Social Democracy.....	279
5.5.7	The Unity between the Old and the New Testament.....	286
5.5.8	Conclusions.....	287

CHAPTER SIX: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: A HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVE

6.1	Introduction.....	291
6.2	The Hermeneutical Principles.....	292
6.2.1	The Patristic Feature.....	292
6.2.2	The Relationships Between Scripture, Church and Dogma.....	293
6.2.3	Church Tradition.....	295
6.2.4	The Nature of Revelation, Inspiration and Authority of the Bible	297
6.2.5	The Christological Basis of Biblical Interpretation.....	300
6.2.6	The Role of the Holy Spirit in Understanding the Scripture.....	302
6.2.7	The Actualization of the Value of the Scripture in Personal and Corporate Life.....	303
6.2.8	The Scope of the Historical-Grammatical Interpretation.....	305
6.2.9	The Ethical Feature.....	307
6.3	Conclusion.....	308

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1	Summary of the Discussion	310
7.2	The Conclusions on the Orthodox Hermeneutics	314
7.3	The Contribution on this study	316
7.4	The Prospects for further studies	318
APPENDIX 1: Transliteration Table for the Russian Characters.....		320
APPENDIX 2: Nine Rules of Bible Interpretation by the Metropolitan of Moscow Platon (1737-1812).....		321
BIBLIOGRAPHY		322

ABBREVIATIONS

- BT* *Богословские Труды / Theological Works*
- BV* *Богословский вестник/Bogoslovskii Vestnik /Theological Messenger of Moscow Ecclesiastic Academy.*
- ChOLDP* *Chtenia v Obshchestvie Liubutelei Dukhovnogo Prosveshcheniia // Readings of the Society of Lovers of Spiritual Enlightenment*
- Cyprian (Kern)* Cyprian (Kern). *The Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas.* Paris: YMCA-Press, 1950.
- Fedotov* G. Fedotov. *The Russian Religious Mind*, Vol. 1: *Kievan Christianity: The Tenth to the Thirteen Century*; Vol. 2: *The Middle Ages - XIII-XV cc.* John Meyendorff, ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Florovsky, BCT* G. Florovsky. *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View. Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. 1. Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1972.
- Florovsky, Ways: One* Georges Florovsky. *Ways of Russian Theology: Part One.* Gen. ed. Richard D. Hauch. Belmont, Mass. Nordland, 1979.
- Florovsky, Ways: Two* G. Florovsky *Ways of Russian Theology: Part Two.* Gen. ed. Richard D. Hauch. Belmont, Mass. Nordland, 1979. Vaduz: Buchervertriebsantalt, 1987.
- Florovsky, Puti* G. Florovsky. *Puti Russkogo Bogosloviia.* Paris, 1937.
- JBL* *Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JMP* *Journal of Moscow Patriarchate*
- K.* Kiev
- KhCh* *Христианское чтение/ Khristianskoe Chtenie/Christian Reading of St. Petersburg Ecclesiastic Academy*
- Khristianstvo* *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar' [v 3 tomakh] M.: Nauchnoe Izdatel'stvo 'Bolshaia Rossiiskaia Entsiklopediia', 1995*
- M.* Moscow

- Men'* Aleksandr Men'. "K Istorii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Bibleistiki," ["Toward the History of Russian Orthodox Biblical Studies,"] *BT* 28 (1987): 272-289.
- Mikhail (Luzin)* Mikhail (Luzin). *Bibleiskaia Nauka: Ocherk Istorii Tolkovaniia Biblii. Kniiga 1.* [Biblical Science: The History of Bible Interpretation. Book One]. Tula: 1898.
- NTS* *New Testament Studies*
- PO* *Православное Обозрение / The Orthodox Review*
- PS* *Православный Собеседник / Pravoslavnyi Sobesednik/The Orthodox Interlocutor of Kazan' Ecclesiastic Academy*
- RKCB* *Radost' Khristianina pri Chtenii Biblii / Joy of a Christian in reading the Bible*
- SPb.* St. Petersburg
- SVTQ* *St. Vladimir Theological Quarterly*
- TKDA* *Труды Киевской Духовной Академии / Trudy Kievskoi Dukhovnoi Akademii / Proceedings the Kiev Ecclesiastical Academy*
- Zernov* N. Zernov. *The Russians and Their Church*, 3rd ed., Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1998.
- Zen'kovskii* V. V. Zen'kovsky. *A History of Russian Philosophy*, 2 Vols. Eng. trans. by George Kliene. London: Routledge & Kegan Ltd., 1953-67.