

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ORTHODOX VIEW OF MAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines *selected* aspects of the Russian Orthodox view of man that exercise both a direct and indirect impact upon Russian Orthodox biblical hermeneutics. After presenting a general overview of some key Orthodox anthropological beliefs, the chapter will then examine several specific features of Orthodox anthropology particularly helpful to understanding how the Church's anthropological ideas are linked with its hermeneutics.

Before commencing the chapter in earnest, perhaps a few words are in order as to how Orthodox anthropology and its relationship to biblical hermeneutics fit into the general scheme of the present study. *First*, for a better analysis of Orthodox biblical hermeneutics, it is important to narrow the focus from a general historical perspective to a specific theoretical position of the Church that directly relates to the issues of hermeneutics themselves. In other words, attention to a theoretical-dogmatic position will allow for an opportunity to concentrate on Orthodox hermeneutics from a perspective much more closely tied to the internal dynamics of the discipline itself. [A subsequent chapter, CHAPTER FIVE, will proceed even further into the analysis of how a hermeneutical position is actually developed. That chapter will present a case study, limiting analysis to the writings of just one particular scholar.]

The choice of anthropological theoretical construction from among other potential topics for study (for example, Ecclesiology or Pneumatology) is made from the awareness that in Orthodox anthropology the Church is dealing with several importantly interwoven themes that bear directly upon biblical interpretation: (1) the human being *per se*, and his capacity to perceive divine truth; (2) the Church, understood as the corporate body of Christ, and as the people of God; and (3) the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the Church, i.e. who dwells within the people of God. In addition to these three substrands, Orthodox literature also

shows that some important features of Orthodox anthropology not only relate closely to the Church's hermeneutics, but, in fact, actually determine it.

*Second*, the attention to the Orthodox view of man is preconditioned by the observations made in the previous chapter, CHAPTER THREE. There, for example, it was discussed how Orthodox exegetes emphasize that the corporate Body of Christ holds within its hands the living revelation of God himself, and that the power of biblical truth or its understanding derives from God himself through the Body of Christ, the people of God (i.e. in the person of the Holy Spirit who operates both in the individual Christian and in the corporate Body of Christ to assure an accurate and truthful interpretation of Scripture).<sup>1</sup> This central belief of Orthodoxy, of course, leads quite naturally into an inquiry of what the Orthodox believe to be the true concept of the human being and, accordingly, how the individual Christian can act in facilitating his understanding of divine truths. Such an inquiry will help not only to better understand the Orthodox perspective on biblical interpretation, but also indicate how Orthodox anthropological ideas actually determine Orthodox hermeneutics.

*Third*, for decades Orthodox scholars have produced numerous works investigating various anthropological aspects of Orthodox theology. Yet, to date, there has been no formal study undertaken to show the connections between Orthodox anthropology and biblical hermeneutics. This study, then, will hopefully bridge some of those gaps between these two all-important disciplines within the Orthodox tradition.

## **4.2 General Remarks**

Due to its religious context Orthodox anthropology is oriented neither toward the issues of *physical anthropology* (which is primarily concerned with human evolution, human biology, and the study of other primates) nor toward social or *cultural* approaches to anthropology. The Orthodox Church views anthropology as a religious question. It does not consider man solely in terms of relationship to himself or to his world, but deals with every aspect of human life and character in its relationship to God and Christ. As the Russian philosopher and historian of Russian thought Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdiaev (1874-1948) says, "A true anthropology can be found only within the revelation of Christ. The fact of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mitr. Filaret, "Zamechaniia na Rukovodstvo k germenevtike," ["Observations on the Guide to Hermeneutics,"] in *ChOLDP* (M.: 1892), 160.



Christ's appearance in the world is the basic fact of anthropology. A higher anthropological consciousness is possible only after Christ.<sup>2</sup>

It should not be surprising, then, that as an academic discipline Russian Orthodox anthropology lacks systematic character.<sup>3</sup> Associated foremost with a religious mysticism, Orthodox anthropology represents an enterprise that is somewhat beyond that which is of a strictly scientific or rational nature. This approach to the study of man, of course, can be explained with reference to the characteristics peculiar to Russian thought, a way of thinking that is based on intuitiveness rather than on systematic scientific investigation and formulation.

#### *4.2.1. Three Sources of Orthodox Anthropology*

In agreement with Archimandrite Cyprian (Kern), this paper recognizes that there are three authoritative sources from which Orthodox anthropology is formed: "the Bible, direct mystical insights, and independent conjectures."<sup>4</sup> Of the three, the first two are the more significant.<sup>5</sup>

##### 4.2.1.1 The Bible

The biblical anthropology of the Orthodox Church represents a 'Christian anthropology' typical to both Eastern and Western religious understandings of man. In constructing its anthropology here the Orthodox Church subscribes to a biblical understanding of what man is, and not unexpectedly arrives at a radically different conception of humankind than that, for example, embraced by the modern scientific and secularised West.

To the Orthodox faith, the human being represents the capstone of the creative energy of God. In this being, the body represents the validity of God's established physical order and the spirit reflects a divine spiritual order. Man was created after the image of God, and is therefore a creature that bears both the divine image and a concomitant orientation toward God. "The image of God (here) should be understood realistically (of

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<sup>2</sup> N. Berdiaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 78.

<sup>3</sup> On the mode of Russian reasoning and comprehension see S. L. Frank, *Russkoe Mirovoztrenie [The Russian World View]* (SPb.: Nauka, 1996), 161-205.

<sup>4</sup> Cyprian (Kern), 73.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Cyprian (Kern), 73.

course), in a sense of the imitation, rather than the equivalence with the First-Image.<sup>6</sup> The concept of ‘*after the image of God*’ postulates a realistic scenario of a human being cognizant of a cognisable God. As the image of God, man follows the pattern of the Divine nature; in fact, he is God *in potentia*, and because of this divine potentiality he is capable of ‘deification.’<sup>7</sup> As the image of his Creator (cf. Gen. 1:26-28), man, too, is endowed with a certain creativity, and seeks in countless ways to realize himself in the expression of that creativeness. Man was also created to exert dominion over other aspects of creation, and so strives to do in small on this earth what God does on a much grander scale.

Besides teaching that man was created in the image of God, Orthodox anthropology bases its understanding of the general human condition on the biblical testimony about man being created for eternal life (cf. Gen. 2:22-23). Through sin humankind separated itself and its offspring from God; and sin not only separated from God, but also left man severely tainted in every area of life - social, personal, sexual and spiritual. As far reaching as it was in its damaging effects, however, sin did not totally eradicate the image of God in man. However distorted, that image is still there and clearly discernable as such; but its tragedy is that it is now weighed down with the guilt, power, and destructive burden of its own sin. The good news according to the biblical story, however, is that there is a possibility of escape from this condition (*i.e.*, salvation from sin) - the prospect of re-creation, and with it a return to God. This re-creation was provided for in the cosmic and anthropological incarnation of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; 3:18; Eph. 4:24; Gal. 6:15; etc.). Despite the vast differences that exist among individuals in time and place, their solidarity as a race is indisputable on the ground of the biblical understanding of the Adam – Christ archetypal relationship (cf. Rom. 5:12-21). And despite their solidarity, not all people respond to the divine provision for personal recreation. Some accept it; many reject it.

In this context, then, Orthodox anthropology holds to the biblical concept of the duality of the physical and non-physical state of mankind, animated as it is by the breath of life and empowered by the Spirit of God. As to spirit the consensus of Orthodox theologians generally seems to be that the human spirit should not be viewed as a third aspect of the self, as distinguished from body and soul. A clear dichotomy does arise, however, in the Orthodox understanding of the distinction between ‘believer’ and

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<sup>6</sup> S. Bulgakov, *Svet Nevechernii [The Unfading Light]* (M.: Put', 1917; repr. M.: Respublika, 1994), 242.



‘unbeliever’. The distinction here is in the sense of (1) being ‘wise’ or ‘foolish’ (cf. Prov. 2:15-16; 14:16; etc.); (2) living in accordance with sinful human nature (cf. Rom. 8: 5-13; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 7:1, etc.), or living as newly born and recreated by God (cf. John 3; 2 Cor. 5: 17-18; etc.). The differentiation here between the godly and the ungodly is one made primarily in the realm of the spirit, suggesting something about its primacy in the decisions of life that result in eternal consequences.

On the basis of biblical teaching about the inner and outer nature of man (cf. 2 Cor. 4:16), the Orthodox Church sees vastly different qualities in the believer and the unbeliever. Regenerated by the Spirit of God, the spirit of the believer passes from one stage of existence to another; from being a member of unregenerate mankind to being a member of the mystical Body of Christ. He advances from out of the fullness of his own individuality into the fullness of Christ, a condition that enables him to participate in the divine life of the Church (cf. Eph. 1:23; 3:19) and in the eschatological end (cf. esp. 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:14-18, the Book of Revelation). Since mankind lives within a larger divine order than just mere earthly existence, Orthodox anthropology holds to the biblical teaching of the liberation from mortal existence to a life beyond death through the new humanity to be found in Jesus Christ.

The male and female identities within the human race in no way alter the picture here. In the beginning God created two people - a man and a woman who had physical and behavioural differences that distinguished them according to their functions in the reproductive process. The role of sex, or the *sexual characteristics* of man or woman denote all other distinctions between the two sexes. Yet, because the creation of humanity is viewed as a single act of creation, a basic unity transcends the distinction between male and female in or outside of marriage.<sup>8</sup> And it is this unity, as described above, comprised of the physical and the spiritual, and bearing the image of the Creator, that constitutes the biblical basis of the Orthodox anthropological view of man.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: Put', 1917; repr. M.: Respublika, 1994), 243.

<sup>8</sup> The Orthodox view of the role of sex in the divine order for men and woman is explained in S. Bulgakov, "Sex in Man," *Khristianskaia Mysl'* (1916) // Reprinted in S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: Respublika, 1994), 250-265.

#### 4.2.1.2 Direct Mystical Insights

The mystical theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church, viewed as a systematized discipline, is derived from: (1) St. John and St. Paul as the first great Christian mystics; (2) Neoplatonism, through the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite (1st century AD)<sup>9</sup> and St. Gregory Palamas<sup>10</sup>; and (3) from the dynamic lives of many Russian mystics, known for their complete self-renunciation in sobriety, unceasing prayer, confession of thoughts and obedience to their elder monks.<sup>11</sup>

In the Orthodox tradition it is argued that mystical understanding can offer a valid knowledge of God and things divine, because it apprehends God's mysteries about Himself, the world, the beginning and the end of everything - in short, about the things which remain out of reach for the learned theologian.<sup>12</sup> A mystical type of anthropological construction, then, "furnishes the Church with (an additional) awareness<sup>13</sup> about the world and man".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Member of the Areopagus in Athens and convert to Christianity through the preaching of St. Paul, as related in Acts 17:34. Another tradition confuses him with the apostle to France, St. Denis. The works ascribed to Dionysius include *Mystic Theology*, in which the author expounds a form of intuitive mysticism.

<sup>10</sup> See esp. Bishop Alexii (Dorodnitsin), *The Christian Mysticism and its Major Representatives* (Saratov: 1913); Cyprian (Kern), *The Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1950); I. Sokolov, *The State of Monasticism in the Byzantine Church in the 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Kazan': 1894); S. Smirnov, "Ancient Spiritual Guidance and Its Origin," *BV* (1906).

<sup>11</sup> Among the others see Arch. Philaret (of Chernigov), *The Saints of the Southern Slavs* (Saint Petersburg: 1882); I. Sokolov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia served the World* (Holy Trinity St. S. Lavra, 1903); S. Zarin, *Asceticism* 2. vols., (Saint Petersburg: 1907); E. Poselianin, *Russian Ascetics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*, Vol. I (Saint Petersburg: 1910); E. Trubetzkoi, *Icons: Theology in Color* (M.: 1916); George Fedotov, *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality* (New York, 1948); Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood: SVS Press 1976); I. Kontzezevitch, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia* (USA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Cyprian (Kern), "Spiritual Predecessors of St. Gregory Palamas," *Theological Thought* (1942), 26.

<sup>13</sup> For the mystical element in the history of the Russian ecclesiastic consciousness see *Zen'kovskii*, Vol. I, 31-33, 40-41, 108-109.

<sup>14</sup> *Cyprian (Kern)*, 219 [my italics].



#### 4.2.1.2.1 A Description of Orthodox Mysticism

Prior to determining the main features of mystical anthropology, it is first essential to explain the basic characteristics of Russian Orthodox mysticism. Such a description, hopefully, will clear away any possible misconceptions, while at the same time delineating the basis for an understanding of Orthodox anthropology.

Mysticism has always been an integral part of Orthodox thought and practice. According to Bulgakov, mysticism may be defined as the very “air of Orthodoxy... Life, in Orthodoxy, is linked with the vision of other worlds... mystical realism is a total presupposition of Orthodox worship-service.”<sup>15</sup> This mysticism, however, is not to be confused with a state of mind so other worldly that it loses sight of the realities of this world, for, as in Zen’kovskii’s interpretation, a *mystical reality does* recognize empirical reality, but sees *behind* it another reality. Both spheres of being are real, but they are of hierarchically different value.<sup>16</sup> In the Orthodox tradition itself is mystical monasticism, a Church phenomenon which explains mysticism as “*the acceptance of the angelic image*, i.e. the departure from the world and the service to it by prayer and *podvig* [i.e. ascetic exploit, (or) spiritual struggle].”<sup>17</sup> Whatever its form, Orthodox mystical consciousness invariably presupposes the transformation of man, created as the image of God, into the ever growing likeness of its First Image. This transformation is practically reflected in a holy life and ascetic service, obliged to self-renunciation in sobriety and unceasing prayer (and not experienced as some transcendent state or other, free from all individual consciousness or involvement in the physical world).<sup>18</sup> In brief, Orthodox mysticism may be described as “*the reception or the experience of the divine*, which is expressed not in a narrow-minded activity of intellect, but as something embracing the whole being of man...; divinity felt chiefly as a *metaphysical source of a spiritual-physiological process* transpiring within the individual.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodoxy* (Paris: YMCA, 1965), 309.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Zen’kovskii, Vol. I, 27.

<sup>17</sup> S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodoxy* (Paris: YMCA, 1965), 323.

<sup>18</sup> This mysticism should be contrasted with traditional Buddhism’s emphasis, for the purpose of the latter is to achieve not only an enlightenment through spiritual exercise and right living, but also to achieve mystical transcendence in the state of nirvana - a transcendent state free from suffering and individual phenomenal existence, an ultimate religious goal. On the difference between Orthodox anthropology and Hindu religious philosophy, see B. Viasheslavtsev, *The Heart in Christian and Hindu Mysticism* (Paris: 1933).

<sup>19</sup> E. Trubetskoi, *Mirovozrenie V. Solovyeva* [*The World-View of V. Solovyev*] (M.: 1913), Vol. 1, 435 [my italics].

As just mentioned, prominent within traditional Orthodox mysticism have been the monks, who in the course of their devotions have sought to perceive God in the full measure of his reality. Certainly nothing within man would be able of its own power to achieve this level of experience; it must be evoked by some transcendent energy - a quickening Spirit, which comes from beyond the human soul and makes the individual a special residence place or carrier of the Spirit of God. This concept is best rendered by the phrase 'acquisition of the Holy Spirit' or 'aspiration to charismatic disposition.' The spiritual energy of the mystics here is radically different from that of 'ordinary' men. The mystics are the "charismatic prophets"<sup>20</sup> who to some degree experience the way of illumination, a certain fellowship with, but as of yet not complete union with the 'great life of the All'. As the prophet, a mystic "*sees the soul of man, his past, present and future.*"<sup>21</sup> Consequently, mysticism is traditionally understood, first of all, as "*a special charisma of the Holy Spirit*".<sup>22</sup>

Mystical experience in Orthodox life is of an *antirational* character,<sup>23</sup> but should not be identified with *irrational* experience. This is especially true in the duality inherent within the mystical perception. Since a mystic can perceive the supernatural world, there is the possibility of contact with both the powers of good and the powers of evil. Thus at least something of the rational judgment used in human reasoning (*i.e.*, the 'normal' state of mind) is necessary to distinguish between false and true visions.<sup>24</sup> In the history of Russian Orthodoxy, this sober attitude toward mystical experience has been a critical element in distinguishing 'authentic' from 'heretical' mystical knowledge.<sup>25</sup> In the final analysis, however, any conflict between mystical knowledge and the Church's great repository of

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodoxy* (Paris: YMCA, 1965), 318;

<sup>21</sup> I. Kontzevitch, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia* (USA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988), 64 [my italics].

<sup>22</sup> Cyprian, "Spiritual Predecessors of St. Gregory Palamas," *Theological Thought* (1942), 3.

<sup>23</sup> The Orthodox theologian and historian Lev Karsavin (1882-1952), for example, admits that mystical experience is not rationally demonstrable and cannot be rationally grounded. See Lev P. Karsavin, *O Nachalakh [Concerning Principles]* (Paris: 1925), 12.

<sup>24</sup> This is especially true in the so-called concept of *prelest* - spiritual deception or delusion. For the concept of *prelest* see I. Kontzevitch, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*, 59-61. Frank stresses that spiritual sobriety and rational measurement in the ascetic mystical experience constitute a vital component of the Russian mentality. Cf. S. L. Frank, *Russkoe Mirovozenie [Russian World View]* (SPb.: Nauka, 1996), 165.

<sup>25</sup> As early as the eleventh century there was an active resistance to the Christian faith being led by shamans (*volkhvy*) who claimed to possess mysterious knowledge, supernatural powers and the gift of prophesy. On pagan and heretical mysticism see E. V. Anichkov, *Yazychestvo i drevniaia Rus' (Paganism and Ancient Russia)* (SPb.: 1914).



accepted truth is to be settled by an appeal to the authority of the Church, for in matters relating to mystical knowledge ecclesiastic authority is recognized as taking precedence over claims made by any individual mystic.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.2.1.2.2. *An Outline of Mystical Anthropology*

In surveying the anthropology of Orthodox mysticism it is important to bear in mind that it does not allow for the construction of knowledge about man on a strictly rational basis. In addition, it needs to be remembered that the focus of this mysticism is on the Christian man in particular, rather than on man in general.

The mystics recognise that since the creation of mankind, God's image has been reflected in the nature of both the believer and unbeliever alike. However, that image is not deeply rooted in human nature generally. As to its possible development, there are but two options - striving for personal perfection by living without God, or striving for deification in a union with Christ. In this latter case, a man created in the image of God is thus capable of the highest perfection. Original sin has obscured the God-likeness within the human race and separates its members from the Source of life, but the incarnation of Christ, in turn, grants to mankind the prospect for the deification of human nature. This deification is of a saving nature, and may be defined as the "personal path of every mystic, his inner longing and ecstatic experience through self-cleansing."<sup>27</sup> Importantly, there are several anthropological implications that can be directly traced to an analysis of this concept of *saving deification*.

*First*, the major result is the resolution of the tragedy of duality in man. For Orthodox mystics this solution can be explained in a twofold idea of deification: (1) through mystical experience in its many forms, a Christian can be perfected in this earthly life; but (2) at the eschatological end there will be the final and realised association with God's nature in the realm of his presence. Thus, a saving deification pertains to a present and a future experience, a real ontological glorification of the whole human being, now and in the hereafter.<sup>28</sup> It must be remembered here, of course, that when the mystics speak of the deification of man they do not presuppose transformation into the actual state of being God, but only into the likeness of God. Consequently, in Orthodox anthropology there is the

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<sup>26</sup> See Fr. S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: Put', 1917; repr. M.: Respublika, 1994), 60.

<sup>27</sup> *Cyprian (Kern)*, 231.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Cyprian (Kern)*, 239.

concept of a present reality consisting of the *inseparability* of the divine and human worlds. Each of the two worlds remains distinct from the other, but to the mystic's initiated eye the two are seen so closely interrelated that they can only be perceived and understood as an organic whole.

The concept of deification in mystical experience is also connected with the Christology of man, i.e. an attaining of godlikeness in human nature through participation in the image and likeness of Christ - the genuine image and likeness of God. As Berdiaev concludes, "Only the mystics, transcending all times and seasons, have glimpsed the truth of the Christology of man."<sup>29</sup>

*Second*, a present state of deification assumes a level of mystical comprehension of divine knowledge that is beyond mere natural means. As Gregory Palamas says, "Being removed from (the) material, [a mystic] proceeds to the Truth by the unuttered power of the Spirit, and by unutterable spiritual reception he hears unutterable words and sees the unutterable."<sup>30</sup> The divine vision for the Greek Fathers, termed *θεωρία*, is, therefore, an act of receptivity of God's unutterable truth. The experiences of *θεωρία* are also linked to the liturgical dimension of the Church's worship, where the saving power of God's presence and God's word is transcendent.

*Third*, in the concept of deification there is the idea that "man becomes divine by suppressing all that is human, by the disappearance of man and the appearance of Divinity in his place."<sup>31</sup> In the human soul there are three acting powers: (1) the intellect; (2) the passions; and (3) the will. The individual struggles in mind with passions rooted in the soul and needs to distract his attention from these passions by the effort of his will and intellect. "He must actively and firmly resolve to rebut the images of sin assailing him, and not to return to them again."<sup>32</sup> In this vein, ascetic literature stresses a *negative anthropology*, i.e. a doctrine of passions and the liberation from them. This liberation is possible because "the Spirit of God penetrates man's heart through his spirit and acts upon it."<sup>33</sup> In so doing, God influences the organ of the spirit - the intellect. Therefore, the rational power behind the

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<sup>29</sup> N. Berdiaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 81.

<sup>30</sup> Cyprian (Kern), "Spiritual Predecessors of St. Gregory Palamas," *Theological Thought* (1942), 130.

<sup>31</sup> N. Berdiaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 84.

<sup>32</sup> I. Kontzezevitch, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia* (USA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988), 41.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



spirit of man is God. Thus it is that without obtaining strength in prayer and keeping a watchful guard a man is powerless against sinful impulses and temptations and is consequently liable to sin. In the words of mystic Paisii Velichkovskii (d. 1794), “being significantly removed from the loins, it (the mind) can easily alert the burning desire of the flesh which has become inherent in our nature since Adam’s fall into sin.”<sup>34</sup>

*Last*, the deification process is reflected in the ethical concerns of mystical life. All the problems pertaining to the role of the will in the dynamics of spiritual life, labour and effort are given their due attention. Since “the most important thing in a man is not feeling or knowledge, but work,”<sup>35</sup> the moral theory of mystical anthropology is both a significant condition and result of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

In arriving at an understanding of Orthodox anthropology, it is not enough to limit examination to mystical constructs and the concept of deification. An analysis of the Orthodox concept of anthropological dualism as it relates in particular to the concept of the inner and the divine in man deserves further clarification.

#### 4.2.1.3 Independent Theoretical Constructions

A third source of Orthodox anthropology involves a number of independent theoretical constructions offered by various Orthodox thinkers and theologians. For the present purposes an analysis of the idea of *inner man* is selected and discussed in the light of how it is treated in these particular constructs.

A man is of two natures, body and soul. Between these two entities exists a fundamental unity free from any dualistic conflict that places spirit and body within any inherent opposition to each other.<sup>37</sup> The importance of the human spirit in this context is connected to the possibility of a direct and personal communication from God to man. “The

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<sup>34</sup> *The Life and Writings of the Moldavian Elder Paisius Velichkovskii* (M.: 1847), 128; Cf. *Anthology on Prayer* (Valaam: 1936), 124.

<sup>35</sup> A. Khomiakov, *Sochineniia [The Complete Works]* (M.: 1887), vol. VIII, 129.

<sup>36</sup> *Cyprian (Kern)*, 231.

<sup>37</sup> The idea that man is a compound whose body was fashioned by the devil and whose soul was created by God was promoted by well-known medieval heretics in the Balkan Slavic lands, so-called *Bogomils* (after a Bulgarian priest by the name Bogomil). The Orthodox Church fought against this doctrine. For the anthropological theoretical elements of Bogomilism see, in detail, in D. Obolensky, *The Bogomils. A Study in Balkan New-Manichaeism* (Cambridge, 1948).

Spirit [of God] can only be revealed to spirit and this revelation involves inner illumination... [T]he denial of a highest spiritual nature in man, which renders him God-like, is tantamount to a denial of the very possibility of revelation, for there would be nothing to which such revelation could be made.<sup>38</sup> The spirit within man, then, is that which provides him with a direct link to God.

In the history of Orthodox teaching and practice, this concept of a divine component within the human make-up finds its expression in the dynamic idea of spiritual interchange between God and man as being the direct result of man having been created in the image of God. Thus it is true to say, as Orthodoxy emphasizes, that such communion is possible because of *man (being) in God* and because of *God (being) in man*. Consequently, the concept of soul or spirit as divine component in man accords with the Orthodox theology of the Holy Spirit - the Sanctifier of the Church, who leads and guides the Church and its members. The activity carried on by God within man is seen in this guidance of the Holy Spirit. An example of how this inner guidance works is offered by Gregorii Skovoroda (1722-1794) - the first Russian theologising philosopher to link this concept with the interpreting process applied to the Bible. For Skovoroda, to have faith means to be filled with the Spirit and to be transformed within the invisible inner nature. He asks, "What is faith if not the illumination or clarification of the unseen Nature as grasped by the inner heart [of man]?"<sup>39</sup> Thus "a sacred force, a kind of magic" within man is the key for reading and understanding the Bible.<sup>40</sup>

### **4.3 Distinctive Aspects of Orthodox Anthropology**

From this general consideration of Orthodox anthropology it is important to take special note of the Russian Orthodox anthropological construction as represented below in three of its more distinct aspects: (1) the nature of Russian man; (2) the wholeness of man; and (3) the concept of *theurgy*. These three distinctives are closely related to the larger concern here with Orthodox biblical hermeneutics.

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<sup>38</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit* (London: The Centenary Press, 1944), 94-95.

<sup>39</sup> Grigorii Skovoroda, *A Conversation Among Five Travelers* in *Anthology of Russian Philosophy* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), Vol. 1, 55.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Idem.*, 56.



### 4.3.1 The Nature of Russian Man

Since the event of the baptism of Rus' in 988 there was a belief that the conversion of the Russian people was not only marked by the rejection of paganism; it also made Rus' new people, a chosen people of God.<sup>41</sup> The Russian nation consciously assumed the self-appointed role of archetype and guardian of the truth of Orthodox Christianity as early as the years immediately following the collapse of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. Thereafter the theory of Moscow as the 'Third Rome' (after the fall of the first two Romes - Rome and Constantinople) predetermined the ecclesiastical and philosophical disposition of Orthodox anthropology in stressing that the people of the Russian Church had been "elected from above as the guardian of Christ's truth."<sup>42</sup>

This universal rendering of Russian Orthodoxy has historically produced a frame of mind that clearly shows a marked contrast between Eastern and Western Christianity, and invites the inevitable comparison between Russian and Western man. In this comparison, the 'otherness' (discussed below) of the Russian consciousness is not derived from an *ethnic-political* or *national-cultural-historical* basis, but from the perspective of the *religio-metaphysical* character of man. This approach to man carries with it several distinct implications when speaking of Russian man *vis a vis* Western Man. These implications are well summarized by Semen Frank (1877-1950). *First*, there is the uniqueness of the Russian mode of comprehension - from *sum* to *cogito*. Russians perceive the particulars from the whole, but a Western man moves from *cogito* to *sum*.<sup>43</sup> *Second*, Russians, from their more religious viewpoint, cherish only one value in life - holiness and spiritual transformation, while Western man is more accustomed to a variety of spheres and values (*i.e.* religion, ethics, science, law, ethnicity, etc.).<sup>44</sup> *Third*, if Russian man approaches his world from the sole viewpoint of God and man as such, Western man constructs his world-view from the stand point of natural laws and natural order of a "physical nature."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, given the radically different mindsets of these two world views, it is certainly not out of place to conclude that a supernatural and mystical experience of divine truth has a much more natural

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. D.M. Shakhovskoi, "The Significance of the Baptism of Rus' in the Development of Russian Culture," in Giuseppe Alberigo and Oscar Beozzo, eds., *The Holy Russian Church and Western Christianity* (London: SCN Press, 1996), 1-9.

<sup>42</sup> *Zen'kovskii*, vol. I, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. S. L. Frank, *Russkoe Mirovozrenie [Russian World View]* (SPb.: Nauka, 1996), 169.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 183-184.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 187.

affinity to the Russian mind. That mind perceives empirical reality through the higher reality of God-man relationships, and not, as does the West, from the rationalistic view of a '*man-physical nature*' phenomenon.

#### 4.3.2 *The Wholeness of Man*

The emphasis on the pre-eminence of the Orthodox Church over the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches is not based solely on *theocentric* grounds (i.e. from a dogmatic or ecclesiastic consciousness). The formulation of Orthodox anthropology, too, furnishes its own supportive reasons for the substantial difference that lies between the East and West,<sup>46</sup> and the inherent superiority for the former. From the Orthodox point of view the main error of 'Western Christian anthropology' lies in the stress it places on the cognitive faculties of man as *the sole organ for searching out truth*. In contrast to this notion stands the Orthodox idea of the *wholeness of man*.

The doctrine of the *wholeness of man* contains within it the concept of individuality, but relates the individual to the larger context of the Church and nation, within which entities the individual is viewed as but part of the whole. This idea postulates that only within the Church, and only in accordance with the Church's teachings, is the individual able to realize the full potential of his humanity. Orthodox anthropology stresses this understanding of the totality of the human being in terms of its relationships to significant others, rather than the understanding of the nature of the individual in isolation from its proper social and spiritual contexts. Although not completely denying individuality, Orthodoxy emphasizes the understanding of the individual human being in terms of the *whole* - of the whole body of Christians, clergy and laity together, who are empowered by the Spirit to act together in concert as one. The Orthodox philosopher and theologian Alexey Khomiakov (1804-1860) plainly states that Orthodox anthropology rejects any form of radical individualism. He writes,

Each human being finds himself within the Church, not in the impotence of spiritual isolation, but in the strength of spiritual oneness with his brothers and his Savior. In the Church he finds his own self and its perfection; more precisely, he finds there what is perfect in him.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. I. V. Kireevskii, *Izbrannye Stat'i* [*Selected essays*] (M.: 1984), 262.

<sup>47</sup> Alexey Khomiakov, *Works* (M.:1900), Vol. 2, 111. Cf. S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: Put', 1917; repr. M.: Respublika, 1994), 343.



In contrast to the Western worldview, with its foremost I-centeredness, the Russian mentality, then, emphasizes a WE-philosophy, a WE-world view.<sup>48</sup> This is the key element in understanding the epistemology of the Orthodox Church in general, and in understanding Orthodox anthropology in particular. And it is this key that explains why Orthodoxy's interpretation of the Bible is first and foremost an ecclesiastic venture.

### 4.3.3 *The Concept of Theurgy*

This section will examine Orthodox anthropology's approach to creativity - a basic element in many human endeavours, including art, music, literature, and the performing arts. Special attention will be directed to the concept of theurgy, an idea framed by Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1871- 1944)<sup>49</sup> in his essay *Art and Theurgy*.<sup>50</sup> In this essay, Bulgakov makes a serious attempt to deal with the relationship between human creativity [*anthrourgy* from Gr. ἀνθρώπου ἔργον) and the notion of *theurgy* (a term that originated from Vladimir Solovyov's teaching on the performing arts<sup>51</sup>) - the *act of God* in man [Ru. *Bogodeistvie*; Gr. Θεοῦ ἔργον ].

Bulgakov emphasizes that the creativeness expressed by man is a direct reflection of God's nature. On the one hand, this idea is common to all Orthodox theologians and religious philosophers.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, however, Bulgakov expands the concept and raises the question of God's direct *participation-and-guidance* in the creative process itself, especially in a temperament characterized by a distinctly aesthetic and religious bent. *Theurgy*, for Bulgakov, is the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church (in general) and in the

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. S. L. Frank, *Russian World View* (SPb.: Nauka, 1996), 159-160.

<sup>49</sup> On Bulgakov see L. A. Zander, *Bog i mir; mirovozrenie o. S. Bulgakova* [*God and the Worlds: The World view of Fr. S. Bulgakov*], 2.vols., (Paris: 1948); Elena, "Prof. Father Segii Bulgakov," *BT* #27 (1986). The bibliography of his works is compiled by K. Noutov, *Bibliographie des oeuvres de p. Serge Bulgakov* (Paris, 1984).

<sup>50</sup> First published in the journal *Russian Thought* 12 (1916). Recently it was included in Fr. S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: 1994).

<sup>51</sup> Solovyov's concept of *theurgy* was first advanced in his essay *Philosophical Basics of Whole Knowledge*. Theurgy, in Solovyov, is "the mystics' elegant and technical creativeness" taken as the whole of "mystical creativeness." Vladimir Solovyov, *Sochineniia* [*The Complete Works*] (M.: 1988) vol. 2, 156; 320, n. 157.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Arch. Alexander Bukharev says, "the creative forces and the ideas [of a man] are only a reflection of the Word of God" that revealed for us God's creativeness, as shown at the creation of the Universe. Alexander Bukharev, *Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World*, 317. The same conception is also found in the philosophical construction of Fyodor Golubinskii (1797-1854). Fyodor Golubinskii, *Lectures on Philosophy* (M.: 1884), Pt. II, 66.

believer (in particular). He interprets the words of Christ in John 20:21-22 and Acts 1:8 as the promise of a theurgic power, and the Pentecost event he understands as the descent of this power to the Church and the Apostles (see Acts 2:1-4). For Bulgakov, “Pentecost is an absolute foundation of the Christian theurgy.”<sup>53</sup> As understood here the concept of theurgy is directly linked to the sending of the Spirit (πνεῦμα ἅγιον, “Holy Spirit”). The Lukan narrative in Acts 2, in Bulgakov’s interpretation, is an authentic account of the coming of theurgy [the Spirit], when the people of the Church received the power they needed for all operative and creative tasks. Orthodox Christians, then, are to be understood as being moved by an unseen power of theurgy [the Holy Spirit] in “every spiritual activity”: (1) the practice of personal piety;<sup>54</sup> (2) the performance of religious cult (prayer, worship and practices of the ecclesiastic mysteries);<sup>55</sup> and (3) the engagement in creative activities of a religious nature (icon-painting, architecture and music).<sup>56</sup>

Bulgakov further links the concept of theurgy to comprehension in general.<sup>57</sup> Since the holy mysteries divulge themselves only to the spiritual faculties (the mind attuned to the spiritual), Bulgakov specifies how theurgy works if applied to Bible interpretation. *First*, he underscores that the Bible is a God-inspired book. The biblical authors were divinely illuminated. They had “a direct acceptance of God’s power - some kind of transubstantiation of their human nature, that enabled them to record the Word of God.”<sup>58</sup> *Secondly*, Bulgakov stresses that because of the presence of theurgy in the Church, spiritually experienced men understand Scripture both at the level of the “letter” (the *historia*, or narrative meaning) and at the level of “mystery” or “spirit” (the *theoria*, or spiritual meaning). The key for understanding the Holy Bible is “an illuminated eye”, an enlightened understanding which receives its ability to comprehend the Scriptural message from a *theurgic* power (the Holy Spirit). In this way, Bulgakov seeks to construct a hermeneutics that (1) includes the necessity of establishing a proper biblical anthropology and pneumatology (the dwelling of

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<sup>53</sup> Fr. S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: Put’, 1917; repr. M.: Respublika, 1994), 320.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Idem., 325-6.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Idem., 323, 326.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Idem., 326ff.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. with the view of Berdiaev, “In man there is an active creative beginning to which comprehension is connected. Comprehension in itself includes a theurgic element.” N. Berdiaev, *The Kingdom of Caesar and the Kingdom of the Spirit* (Paris, YMCA-Press, 1947; reprint. M.: Nauka, 1995), 295.

<sup>58</sup> See Fr. S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: Put’, 1917; repr. M.: Respublika, 1994), 324.



God's Spirit in believers); and (2) explains the possibility of a correct and proper body of interpretation of the Sacred Bible through the Spirit's illumination. Bulgakov's anthropology, in its synthesis with theological concepts of the Church and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, forms a 'Christian epistemology.' All human creative efforts to know must be made in the name of Jesus Christ, and be inspired by the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup>

In regards to biblical hermeneutics the concept of *theurgy* is linked to the Orthodox conviction that the Bible is of both a divine and human nature. On the one hand, it contains a religious dimension - the revelation of God. On the other hand, the biblical writers who presented the revealed truths of God, organized and presented them in a very human form, shaped by the individual writer's own language, personal identity and historical-cultural context.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the human race is not only a recipient to the Word of God but also, in the persons of the biblical writers, co-author with God of the biblical texts. In other words, mankind is a very active participant in the creation of the Bible. This fact in itself has far reaching methodological and theoretical implications for biblical hermeneutics. (see CHAPTER SIX).

#### **4.4 Hermeneutical Implications**

As important as they are in and of themselves, the distinctive features of Orthodox anthropology nonetheless also hold certain important implications for Church hermeneutics. *First*, in the anthropological difference between *man prior to faith* and *man under faith* can be seen the hermeneutical key for the understanding of the Bible. The understanding of *man prior to faith* operates solely on natural principles and cannot attain unto the spiritual; the nature of *man under faith*, however, apprehends God's divine truth through the Spirit of God. Thus the possibility of understanding the Bible corresponds exactly with the antithesis that lies between the old nature without Christ and the new nature created in Christ. Any study of the Bible conducted without genuine Christian faith, even if it represents a scientific approach to the texts, "cannot open its eternal and religious substance, which is given only to the believing heart [*i.e.* to man under faith]."<sup>61</sup> This understanding constructs a category of

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<sup>59</sup> Fr. S. Bulgakov, *Social Teaching in Modern Russian Orthodox Theology* (Evanston, Ill: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1934), 16.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Antonii, *Dogmaticheskoe Bogoslovie [Dogmatic Theology]* 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (SPb.: 1862), 6; S. Bulgakov *The Orthodoxy [Pravoslavie]* (Paris: YMCA, 1965), 63.

interpretation that is both epistemological and existential in nature, and which signifies new possibilities for humanity to comprehend the Bible.

*Second*, Orthodox anthropology, based as it is on mystical experience, presupposes a fairly free rein on the cognitive search for truth, even striking upon that which goes beyond the material world as perceived by the senses (but which is not necessarily in some kind of opposition to it). Perhaps, this element of mystical experience led Lev Karsavin to the generalized conclusion that “Theology is a *spontaneous* force of *free* cognitive searching.”<sup>62</sup> The mystical component to human cognition presupposes here a direct connection with the highest source of knowledge. The known, in this case, cannot always be rationally demonstrated; for as any Orthodox exegete can attest, the mystical dimension postulates the legitimacy of a particular kind of comprehension that lies outside of any purely scientific investigation of literary text. This is not meant to suggest, of course, that Orthodox theologians argue that mystical understandings of biblical texts lack any rational element to them. Karsavin, for example, writes, “We defend rationally-expressed knowledge of God, which in part is rationally demonstrable.”<sup>63</sup> Bulgakov, too, in arguing that mystical revelation from the Holy Spirit is an open possibility, nonetheless maintains that any such knowledge of a mystical character comes within a distinct rational framework. For him, rational examination of religious revelation must be conducted under the authority of Church tradition – for, as he words it, “personal intuitions [of a mystical nature] have to be measured according to Church tradition, because the Church is seen and understood as the pillar and bulwark of the truth” [cf. 1 Tim. 3:15].<sup>64</sup> He concludes that for the Orthodox theological consciousness both Church authority and personal mystic experience are needed; for only in a balance between the two can the Orthodox Church escape a subjectivity of understanding that is open to suspect because of the lack of outside criteria against which to judge it. Therefore a predominantly mystical bias as the means of a *comprehensive* exposition of the Bible is irredeemably one-sided and ineffective. The one-sidedness of a mystical interpretation, then, would – if it were regarded as the sole comprehensive hermeneutic – be disastrous for Orthodox biblical interpretation and do grave violence any understanding of the Bible. The operative principle of Orthodox hermeneutical theory thus presupposes a much more complex dimension involving the

<sup>61</sup> Fr. S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: Put', 1917; repr. M.: Respublika, 1994), 84.

<sup>62</sup> L. P. Karsavin, *O Nachalakh [Concerning Principles]* (Paris: 1925), 90.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



historical relationship between Church tradition and individual mystical experience. The over-arching and ongoing divine activity of the Holy Spirit demands submission of any individually derived mystical knowledge to the rational exposition of the truth as determined by the great body of corporate truth built up within the Church over the centuries. This principle of interpretation becomes even more evident in the understanding of the anthropological concept of the *wholeness of man* as the existential hermeneutical principle.

*Third*, the Orthodox tendency to view man as part of the much larger *whole* (i.e. the Orthodox Church itself) assumes an agreement and unity as already existing among those within this *whole* – i.e. the whole body of Orthodox Christians. The anthropological concept of the *wholeness of man* is the existential hermeneutical principle here. For Russian Orthodox hermeneutics, solely private interpretation of the Scripture is excluded. Guidance in theology cannot be derived from the authority of only one particular expert, or even from a select group of exegetes, by reason of their exclusiveness leading to the possibility of error. Such guidance is possible and valid only if “it is concluded in the harmony and agreement of all Christian pastors and teachers.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the Orthodox scholar cannot begin his work by taking himself as the sole point of departure in his interpretation, but must always work within the larger context of the Orthodox community itself, and within the unity of the Orthodox worship, liturgy, scholarship, preaching, sacraments and prayer that he discovers there. Because “the universal spirit of the Orthodox Church preserves the interpreter of the Bible from needless individualistic mysticism and heretical misunderstanding,”<sup>66</sup> the corporate element thus plays a critical role as the interpretative context for individual exegetes. Fr. Bulgakov underscores this principle very clearly when he states:

“[T]o understand the word of God solely from within-oneself is in itself a contradictory idea... it means to separate oneself from the whole of mankind, and to place the self alone in a direct relationship with God, who teaches us to appeal to Him not as “*My Father*”, but as “*Our Father*”, converting any human I into the solidarity of WE.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Fr. S. Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light* (M.: Put', 1917; repr. M.: Respublika, 1994), 60.

<sup>65</sup> Antonii, *Dogmatic Theology* (SPb.: 1862), 11.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Pavel Evdokimov, “An Eastern Orthodox Bible Study,” *Student World* XLII/12 (1949): 152.

<sup>67</sup> S. Bulgakov, *Pravoslavie [The Orthodoxy]* (Paris, 1965), 52.

Thus the Church becomes the arbiter for the Scriptural interpretations and beliefs of all Orthodox Christians. In participating in this great body of believers (the so-called concept of *sobornost*'), the individual must subsume into the organic truth of the whole. To be subordinated to this truth of the larger body is the only possible way to experience oneness with that whole. Of course, only a voluntary subordination (*a free union*) is assumed in identifying with the whole of the Orthodox Church. Such a subordinating also presupposes that: (1) *the truth of the whole is of the most absolute surety*, i.e. the individual cannot deviate from this truth, but, conversely, must be either corrected or affirmed by it; and (2) private thoughts or interpretations are validated by the whole only so far as they are admissible to it. In Orthodox anthropology, individualism is conceivable only to the extent of subordinating the ideas and beliefs of the individual to the Orthodox community as a whole. Because the Orthodox Church is the guardian and keeper of divine truth, any individual interpreter of the Bible who claims to be part of the Church, must protect the truth and follow the doctrinal and interpretative criteria established by the Church. This approach provides the direction necessary for the individual interpreter of the Bible to keep himself from error. In the concept of subjecting the one to the truth preserved by the many, the Russian Orthodox Church does not see any restriction being imposed upon human creativity, but rather sees a positive check against any individual straying from the truth. Moreover, Orthodox teaching, in theory, constitutes a unified and organic approach to Bible interpretation, one possible interpretation presupposing another, and the denial of any particular, commonly accepted interpretation leading, as a consequence, to the denial of the basis of all.

*Fourth*, the depth of mystical realism and the ecclesiastical consciousness that stresses the *religio-metaphysical* uniqueness and otherness of the Russian Church, as over and against the Western Church, is also significant in linking the ontological feature of the Russian approach to the matters of understanding Scripture. The otherness of the Russian mind, perhaps only indirectly, implies its "superiority" in understanding and knowing God. This bias has always influenced the way in which Russian Orthodox interpreters have read the Bible. In their view, because the truth belongs to the Russian Church, their way of reading the Scriptures cannot possibly be mistaken; or since Russians are perceived to be a more God-fearing people, divine truths are revealed to them in an indisputable form and essence through the teachings of the Orthodox Church.

*Fifth*, Orthodox anthropology stresses the Spirit's creative energies within the individual and links the concept of understanding with the power of the Holy Spirit (the source of illumination). Thus a man is capable of understanding Scripture in its deepest sense



if the Holy Spirit, the *illuminating agent*, enables him to comprehend the Sacred Bible correctly. The Spirit also restricts the individualistic impulses of the interpreter, thus preventing him from misconceptions. Exegesis, then, is a divine-human enterprise based upon *synergy*, a cooperation between the divine Spirit and the human interpreter. Interpretation of the Bible is possible in the sense of a synthesis of human creative effort and the enabling of the Holy Spirit who dwells within the Church. Thus the exegete must submit himself and his skills to the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit, if his efforts are to bear fruit for the body of Christ. A scholar who approaches Scripture solely on scientific criteria, without any dependence upon the Holy Spirit, is, according to the Orthodox point-of-view, restricted to discovering only a meaning that is limited to the surface of Scripture,<sup>68</sup> not too different, perhaps from the meaning he might derive from the reading of any other literary text.

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. M. N. Nikol'skii, "Our Biblical Science," *Orthodox Review* 1 (1875): 190.