

Sola Scriptura

In the Vanity of Their Minds

An Orthodox examination of the Protestant teaching

by John Whiteford

Editor's Note: John Whiteford is a former Nazarene Associate Pastor who converted to the Orthodox Faith soon after completing his B.A. in Religion at Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma. He first encountered Orthodoxy as a result of his involvement in the local Pro-Life (Rescue) movement, which also included Father Anthony Nelson and several of his parishioners. After over a year of searching the Scriptures and the writings of the early Church; and through the love, prayers and patience of Father Anthony and the Parishioners of St. Benedict's, John Whiteford was received into the Holy Orthodox Church. [When he wrote this article he was serving as a Reader at St. Vladimir's in Houston, Texas and is continuing his studies. He has since been ordained a Deacon and a Priest].

Introduction:

Are Protestants Beyond Hope?

Since my conversion from Evangelical Protestantism to the Orthodox Faith, I have noted a general amazement among many of those who have been raised Orthodox that a Protestant could be converted. This is not because they are uncertain about their own faith, usually they are just amazed that anything could break through a Protestant's stubborn insistence on being wrong! What I have come to understand is that most Orthodox people have a confused and limited grasp of what Protestantism is, and where its adherents are coming from. Thus when "cradle Orthodox" believers have their run-ins with Protestants, even though they often use the same words, they do not generally communicate because they do not speak the same theological language — in other words, they have no common theological basis to discuss their differences. Of course when one considers the some twenty thousand plus differing Protestant groups that now exist (with only the one constant trait of each group claiming that it rightly understands the Bible), one must certainly sympathize with those that are a bit confused by them.

Despite all that stands in their way, there definitely is hope for Protestants. Protestants in search of theological sanity, of true worship, and of the ancient Christian Faith are practically beating on our Church doors (of course to those who are not paying attention, this may sound like a strange claim). They are no longer satisfied with the contradictions and the faddishness of contemporary Protestant America, but when we open the door to these inquirers we must be prepared. These people have questions! Many of these inquirers are Protestant ministers, or are among the better informed laymen; they are sincere seekers of Truth, but they have much to unlearn and it will require informed Orthodox Christians to help them work through these issues — Orthodox Christians who know where Protestants are coming from, but even more importantly, who know what they believe themselves!

Ironically (or providentially) this surge in interest in Orthodoxy among Americans from Protestant backgrounds has come even as the opening of the doors of the former Communist-block has brought upon its Orthodox people an unprecedented onslaught from every religious sect and cult.

At the spearhead, American Evangelicals and Charismatics have been stumbling over each other — with each of its sects seeking to gain the prestigious boast that they too have established themselves even among the Godless Russians! So we Orthodox are now presented with a double urgency — on the one hand, there is the missionary task of presenting the Faith to Protestants here in the West; but on the other hand we must earnestly combat the spread of heresies among the Orthodox, both here and in traditionally Orthodox lands. In either case, the task at hand is to equip ourselves with sufficient knowledge and understanding of the issues that confront us.

Perhaps the most daunting feature of Protestantism — the feature which has given it a reputation of stubborn resiliency is its numerous differences and contradictions. Like the mythical Hydra, its many heads only multiply, and though it is a worthy task to seek to understand and confront these heresies individually, this is not the key to their defeat. In order for one to understand the unique beliefs of each individual sect, it requires a knowledge of the history and development of Protestantism in general, a great deal of research into each major stripe of Protestant theology, worship, etc., as well as a lot of contemporary reading in order to understand some of the more important cross-trends that are currently at work (such as liberalism, or emotionalism). Even with all this, one could not hope to keep up with the new groups that spring up almost daily. Yet for all their differences there is one basic underlying assumption that unites the amorphous blob of these thousands of disparate groups into the general category of “Protestant.” All Protestant groups (with some minor qualifications) believe that their group has rightly understood the Bible, and though they all disagree as to what the Bible says, they generally do agree on how one is to interpret the Bible — on your own! — apart from Church Tradition. If one can come to understand this belief, why it is wrong, and how one is rightly to approach the Scriptures, then any Protestant of any stripe may be engaged with understanding. Even groups as differing as the Baptists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses are really not as different as they outwardly appear once you have understood this essential point — indeed if you ever have an opportunity to see a Baptist and a Jehovah’s Witness argue over the Bible, you will notice that in the final analysis they simply quote different Scriptures back and forth at each other. If they are equally matched intellectually, neither will get anywhere in the discussion because they both essentially agree on their approach to the Bible, and because neither questions this underlying common assumption neither can see that their mutually flawed approach to the Scriptures is the problem. Herein lies the heart of this Hydra of heresies — pierce its heart and its many heads at once fall lifelessly to the ground.

Why Scripture Alone?

If we are to understand what Protestants think, we will have to first know why they believe what they believe. In fact if we try to put ourselves in the place of those early reformers, such as Martin Luther, we must certainly have some appreciation for their reasons for championing the Doctrine of Sola Scriptura (or “Scripture alone”). When one considers the corruption in the Roman Church at that time, the degenerate teachings that it promoted, and the distorted understanding of tradition that it used to defend itself — along with the fact that the West was several centuries removed from any significant contact with their former Orthodox heritage — it is difficult to imagine within those limitations how one such as Luther might have responded with significantly better results. How could Luther have appealed to tradition to fight these abuses, when tradition (as all in the Roman West were lead to believe) was personified by the very papacy that

was responsible for those abuses. To Luther, it was tradition that had erred, and if he were to reform the Church he would have to do so with the sure undergirding of the Scriptures. However, Luther never really sought to eliminate tradition altogether, and he never used the Scriptures truly “alone,” what he really attempted to do was to use Scripture to get rid of those parts of the Roman tradition that were corrupt. Unfortunately his rhetoric far outstripped his own practice, and more radical reformers took the idea of Sola Scriptura to its logical conclusions.

Problems with the doctrine of Sola Scriptura

A. It is a doctrine based upon a number of faulty assumptions

An assumption is something that we take for granted from the outset, usually quite unconsciously. As long as an assumption is a valid one, all is fine and well; but a false assumption inevitably leads to false conclusions. One would hope that even when one has made an unconscious assumption that when his conclusions are proven faulty he would then ask himself where his underlying error lay. Protestants who are willing to honestly assess the current state of the Protestant world, must ask themselves why, if Protestantism and its foundational teaching of Sola Scriptura are of God, has it resulted in over twenty-thousand differing groups that can't agree on basic aspects of what the Bible says, or what it even means to be a Christian? Why (if the Bible is sufficient apart from Holy Tradition) can a Baptist, a Jehovah's Witness, a Charismatic, and a Methodist all claim to believe what the Bible says and yet no two of them agree what it is that the Bible says? Obviously, here is a situation in which Protestants have found themselves that is wrong by any stretch or measure. Unfortunately, most Protestants are willing to blame this sad state of affairs on almost anything — anything except the root problem. The idea of Sola Scriptura is so foundational to Protestantism that to them it is tantamount to denying God to question it, but as our Lord said, “every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a bad tree bringeth forth evil fruit” (Matthew 7:17). If we judge Sola Scriptura by its fruit then we are left with no other conclusion than that this tree needs to be “hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 7:19).

False Assumption # 1:

The Bible was intended to be the last word on faith, piety, and worship.

a). Does the Scripture teach that it is “all sufficient?”

The most obvious assumption that underlies the doctrine of “Scripture alone” is that the Bible has within it all that is needed for everything that concerns the Christian's life — all that would be needed for true faith, practice, piety, and worship. The Scripture that is most usually cited to support this notion is:

...from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Timothy 3:15-17).

Those who would use this passage to advocate Sola Scriptura argue that this passage teaches the “all sufficiency” of Scripture — because, “If, indeed, the Holy Scriptures are able to make the pious man perfect... then, indeed to attain completeness and perfection, there is no need of tradition.” [1]

But what can really be said based on this passage?

For starters, we should ask what Paul is talking about when he speaks of the Scriptures that Timothy has known since he was a child. We can be sure that Paul is not referring to the New Testament, because the New Testament had not yet been written when Timothy was a child — in fact it was not nearly finished when Paul wrote this epistle to Timothy, much less collected together into the canon of the New Testament as we now know it. Obviously here, and in most references to “the Scriptures” that we find in the New Testament, Paul is speaking of the Old Testament; so if this passage is going to be used to set the limits on inspired authority, not only will Tradition be excluded but this passage itself and the entire New Testament.

In the second place, if Paul meant to exclude tradition as not also being profitable, then we should wonder why Paul uses non-biblical oral tradition in this very same chapter. The names Jannes and Jambres are not found in the Old Testament, yet in II Timothy 3:8 Paul refers to them as opposing Moses. Paul is drawing upon the oral tradition that the names of the two most prominent Egyptian Magicians in the Exodus account (Ch. 7-8) were “Jannes” and “Jambres.” [2] And this is by no means the only time that a non-biblical source is used in the New Testament — the best known instance is in the Epistle of St. Jude, which quotes from the Book of Enoch (Jude 14-15 cf. Enoch 1:9).

When the Church officially canonized the books of Scripture, the primary purpose in establishing an authoritative list of books which were to be received as Sacred Scripture was to protect the Church from spurious books which claimed apostolic authorship but were in fact the work of heretics (e.g. the gospel of Thomas). Heretical groups could not base their teachings on Holy Tradition because their teachings originated from outside the Church, so the only way that they could claim any authoritative basis for their heresies was to twist the meaning of the Scriptures and to forge new books in the names of apostles or Old Testament saints. The Church defended itself against heretical teachings by appealing to the apostolic origins of Holy Tradition (proven by Apostolic Succession, i.e. the fact that the bishops and teachers of the Church can historically demonstrate their direct descent from the Apostles), and by appealing to the universality of the Orthodox Faith (i.e. that the Orthodox faith is that same faith that Orthodox Christians have always accepted throughout its history and throughout the world). The Church defended itself against spurious and heretical books by establishing an authoritative list of sacred books that were received throughout the Church as being divinely inspired and of genuine Old Testament or apostolic origin.

By establishing the canonical list of Sacred Scripture the Church did not intend to imply that all of the Christian Faith and all information necessary for worship and good order in the Church was contained in them. [3] One thing that is beyond serious dispute is that by the time the Church settled the Canon of Scripture it was in its faith and worship essentially indistinguishable from the Church of later periods — this is an historical certainty. As far as the structure of Church authority, it was Orthodox bishops together in various councils who settled the question

of the Canon — and so it is to this day in the Orthodox Church when any question of doctrine or discipline has to be settled.

b). What was the purpose of the New Testament Writings?

In Protestant biblical studies it is taught (and I think correctly taught in this instance) that when you study the Bible, among many other considerations, you must consider the genre (or literary type) of literature that you are reading in a particular passage, because different genres have different uses. Another consideration is of course the subject and purpose of the book or passage you are dealing with. In the New Testament we have four broad categories of literary genres: gospel, historical narrative (Acts), epistle, and the apocalyptic/prophetic book, Revelation. Gospels were written to testify of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Biblical historical narratives recount the history of God's people and also the lives of significant figures in that history, and show God's providence in the midst of it all. Epistles were written primarily to answer specific problems that arose in various Churches; thus, things that were assumed and understood by all, and not considered problems were not generally touched upon in any detail. Doctrinal issues that were addressed were generally disputed or misunderstood doctrines, [4] matters of worship were only dealt with when there were related problems (e.g. I Corinthians 11-14). Apocalyptic writings (such as Revelation) were written to show God's ultimate triumph in history.

Let us first note that none of these literary types present in the New Testament have worship as a primary subject, or were meant to give details about how to worship in Church. In the Old Testament there are detailed (though by no means exhaustive) treatments of the worship of the people of Israel (e.g. Leviticus, Psalms) — in the New Testament there are only meager hints of the worship of the Early Christians. Why is this? Certainly not because they had no order in their services — liturgical historians have established the fact that the early Christians continued to worship in a manner firmly based upon the patterns of Jewish worship which it inherited from the Apostles. [5]

However, even the few references in the New Testament that touch upon the worship of the early Church show that, far from being a wild group of free-spirited "Charismatics," the Christians in the New Testament worshiped liturgically as did their fathers before them: they observed hours of prayer (Acts 3:1); they worshiped in the Temple (Acts 2:46, 3:1, 21:26); and they worshiped in Synagogues (Acts 18:4).

We need also to note that none of the types of literature present in the New Testament have as their purpose comprehensive doctrinal instruction — it does not contain a catechism or a systematic theology. If all that we need as Christians is the Bible by itself, why is there not some sort of a comprehensive doctrinal statement? Imagine how easily all the many controversies could have been settled if the Bible clearly answered every doctrinal question. But as convenient as it might otherwise have been, such things are not found among the books of the Bible.

Let no one misunderstand the point that is being made. None of this is meant to belittle the importance of the Holy Scriptures — God forbid! In the Orthodox Church the Scriptures are believed to be fully inspired, inerrant, and authoritative; but the fact is that the Bible does not contain within it teaching on every subject of importance to the Church. As already stated, the New

Testament gives little detail about how to worship — but this is certainly no small matter. Furthermore, the same Church that handed down to us the Holy Scriptures, and preserved them, was the very same Church from which we have received our patterns of worship. If we mistrust this Church’s faithfulness in preserving Apostolic worship, then we must also mistrust her fidelity in preserving the Scriptures. [6]

c). Is the Bible, in practice, really “all sufficient” for Protestants?

Protestants frequently claim they “just believe the Bible,” but a number of questions arise when one examines their actual use of the Bible. For instance, why do Protestants write so many books on doctrine and the Christian life in general, if indeed all that is necessary is the Bible? If the Bible by itself were sufficient for one to understand it, then why don’t Protestants simply hand out Bibles? And if it is “all sufficient,” why does it not produce consistent results, i.e. why do Protestants not all believe the same? What is the purpose of the many Protestant study Bibles, if all that is needed is the Bible itself? Why do they hand out tracts and other material? Why do they even teach or preach at all —why not just read the Bible to people? The answer is though they usually will not admit it, Protestants instinctively know that the Bible cannot be understood alone. And in fact every Protestant sect has its own body of traditions, though again they generally will not call them what they are. It is not an accident that Jehovah’s Witnesses all believe the same things, and Southern Baptists generally believe the same things, but Jehovah’s Witnesses and Southern Baptists emphatically do not believe the same things. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Southern Baptists do not each individually come up with their own ideas from an independent study of the Bible; rather, those in each group are all taught to believe in a certain way — from a common tradition. So then the question is not really whether we will just believe the Bible or whether we will also use tradition — the real question is which tradition will we use to interpret the Bible? Which tradition can be trusted, the Apostolic Tradition of the Orthodox Church, or the muddled, and modern, traditions of Protestantism that have no roots beyond the advent of the Protestant Reformation.

FALSE ASSUMPTION # 2:

The Scriptures were the basis of the early Church, whereas Tradition is simply a “human corruption” that came much later.

Especially among Evangelicals and so-called Charismatics you will find that the word “tradition” is a derogatory term, and to label something as a “tradition” is roughly equivalent to saying that it is “fleshly,” “spiritually dead,” “destructive,” and/or “legalistic.” As Protestants read the New Testament, it seems clear to them that the Bible roundly condemns tradition as being opposed to Scripture. The image of early Christians that they generally have is essentially that the early Christians were pretty much like 20th Century Evangelicals or Charismatics! That the First Century Christians would have had liturgical worship, or would have adhered to any tradition is inconceivable — only later, “when the Church became corrupted,” is it imagined that such things entered the Church. It comes as quite a blow to such Protestants (as it did to me) when they actually study the early Church and the writings of the early Fathers and begin to see a distinctly different picture than that which they were always led to envision. One finds that, for example, the early Christians did not tote their Bibles with them to Church each Sunday for a Bible study — in fact it was so difficult to acquire a copy of even portions of Scripture, due to the time and re

sources involved in making a copy, that very few individuals owned their own copies. Instead, the copies of the Scriptures were kept by designated persons in the Church, or kept at the place where the Church gathered for worship. Furthermore, most Churches did not have complete copies of all the books of the Old Testament, much less the New Testament (which was not finished until almost the end of the First Century, and not in its final canonical form until the Fourth Century). This is not to say that the early Christians did not study the Scriptures — they did in earnest, but as a group, not as individuals. And for most of the First Century, Christians were limited in study to the Old Testament. So how did they know the Gospel, the life and teachings of Christ, how to worship, what to believe about the nature of Christ, etc? They had only the Oral Tradition handed down from the Apostles. Sure, many in the early Church heard these things directly from the Apostles themselves, but many more did not, especially with the passing of the First Century and the Apostles with it. Later generations had access to the writings of the Apostles through the New Testament, but the early Church depended on Oral Tradition almost entirely for its knowledge of the Christian faith.

This dependence upon tradition is evident in the New Testament writings themselves. For example, Saint Paul exhorts the Thessalonians:

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word [i.e. oral tradition] or our epistle (II Thessalonians 2:15).

The word here translated “traditions” is the Greek word *paradosis* — which, though translated differently in some Protestant versions, is the same word that the Greek Orthodox use when speaking of Tradition, and few competent Bible scholars would dispute this meaning. The word itself literally means “what is transmitted.” It is the same word used when referring negatively to the false teachings of the Pharisees (Mark 7:3-8), and also when referring to authoritative Christian teaching (I Corinthians 11:2, Second Thessalonians 2:15). So what makes the tradition of the Pharisees false and that of the Church true? The source! Christ made clear what was the source of the traditions of the Pharisees when He called them “the traditions of men” (Mark 7:8). Saint Paul on the other hand, in reference to Christian Tradition states, “I praise you brethren, that you remember me in all things and hold fast to the traditions [paradoseis] just as I delivered [paredoka, a verbal form of paradosis] them to you” (First Corinthians 11:2), but where did he get these traditions in the first place? “I received from the Lord that which I delivered [paredoka] to you” (first Corinthians 11:23). This is what the Orthodox Church refers to when it speaks of the Apostolic Tradition — “the Faith once delivered [paradotheise] unto the saints” (Jude 3). Its source is Christ, it was delivered personally by Him to the Apostles through all that He said and did, which if it all were all written down, “the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). The Apostles delivered this knowledge to the entire Church, and the Church, being the repository of this treasure thus became “the pillar and ground of the Truth” (I Timothy 3:15).

The testimony of the New Testament is clear on this point: the early Christians had both oral and written traditions which they received from Christ through the Apostles. For written tradition they at first had only fragments — one local church had an Epistle, another perhaps a Gospel. Gradually these writings were gathered together into collections and ultimately they became the New Testament. And how did these early Christians know which books were authentic and which were not — for (as already noted) there were numerous spurious epistles and gospels

claimed by heretics to have been written by Apostles? It was the oral Apostolic Tradition that aided the Church in making this determination.

Protestants react violently to the idea of Holy Tradition simply because the only form of it that they have generally encountered is the concept of Tradition found in Roman Catholicism. Contrary to the Roman view of Tradition, which is personified by the Papacy, and develops new dogmas previously unknown to the Church (such as Papal Infallibility, to cite just one of the more odious examples) —the Orthodox do not believe that Tradition grows or changes. Certainly when the Church is faced with a heresy, it is forced to define more precisely the difference between truth and error, but the Truth does not change. It may be said that Tradition expands in the sense that as the Church moves through history it does not forget its experiences along the way, it remembers the saints that arise in it, and it preserves the writings of those who have accurately stated its faith; but the Faith itself was “once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

But how can we know that the Church has preserved the Apostolic Tradition in its purity? The short answer is that God has preserved it in the Church because He has promised to do so. Christ said that He would build His Church and that the gates of Hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Christ Himself is the head of the Church (Ephesians 4:16), and the Church is His Body (Ephesians 1:22-23). If the Church lost the pure Apostolic Tradition, then the Truth would have to cease being the Truth — for the Church is the pillar and foundation of the Truth (I Timothy 3:15). The common Protestant conception of Church history, that the Church fell into apostasy from the time of Constantine until the Reformation certainly makes these and many other Scriptures meaningless. If the Church ceased to be, for even one day, then the gates of Hell prevailed against it on that day. If this were the case, when Christ described the growth of the Church in His parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32), He should have spoken of a plant that started to grow but was squashed, and in its place a new seed sprouted later on — but instead He used the imagery of a mustard seed that begins small but steadily grows into the largest of garden plants.

As to those who would posit that there was some group of true-believing Protestants living in caves somewhere for a thousand years, where is the evidence? The Waldensians [7] that are claimed as forebearers by every sect from the Pentecostals to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, did not exist prior to the 12th Century. It is, to say the least, a bit of a stretch to believe that these true-believers suffered courageously under the fierce persecutions of the Romans, and yet would have headed for the hills as soon as Christianity became a legal religion. And yet even this seems possible when compared with the notion that such a group could have survived for a thousand years without leaving a trace of historical evidence to substantiate that it had ever existed.

At this point one might object that there were in fact examples of people in Church history who taught things contrary to what others taught, so who is to say what the Apostolic Tradition is? And further more, what if a corrupt practice arose, how could it later be distinguished from Apostolic Tradition? Protestants ask these questions because, in the Roman Catholic Church there did arise new and corrupt “traditions,” but this is because the Latin West first corrupted its understanding of the nature of Tradition. The Orthodox understanding which earlier prevailed in the West and was preserved in the Orthodox Church, is basically that Tradition is in essence unchanging and is known by its universality or catholicity. True Apostolic Tradition is found in the

historic consensus of Church teaching. Find that which the Church has believed always, throughout history, and everywhere in the Church, and then you will have found the Truth. If any belief can be shown to have not been received by the Church in its history, then this is heresy. Mind you, however, we are speaking of the Church, not schismatic groups. There were schismatics and heretics who broke away from the Church during the New Testament period, and there has been a continual supply of them since, for as the Apostle says, “there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest” (I Corinthians 11:19).

False Assumption # 3:

Anyone can interpret the Scriptures for himself or herself without the aid of the Church.

Though many Protestants would take issue with the way this assumption is worded, this is essentially the assumption that prevailed when the Reformers first advocated the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. The line of reasoning was essentially that the meaning of Scripture is clear enough that anyone could understand it by simply reading it for oneself, and thus they rejected the idea that one needed the Church’s help in the process. This position is clearly stated by the Tübingen Lutheran Scholars who exchanged letters with Patriarch Jeremias II of Constantinople about thirty years after Luther’s death:

Perhaps, someone will say that on the one hand, the Scriptures are absolutely free from error; but on the other hand, they have been concealed by much obscurity, so that without the interpretations of the Spirit-bearing Fathers they could not be clearly understood.... But meanwhile this, too, is very true that what has been said in a scarcely perceptible manner in some places in the Scriptures, has been stated in another place in them explicitly and most clearly so that even the most simple person can understand them. [8]

Though these Lutheran scholars claimed to use the writings of the Holy Fathers, they argued that they were unnecessary, and that, where they believed the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers conflicted, the Fathers were to be disregarded. What they were actually arguing, however, was that when the teachings of the Holy fathers conflict with their private opinions on the Scriptures, their private opinions were to be considered more authoritative than the Fathers of the Church. Rather than listening to the Fathers, who had shown themselves righteous and saintly, priority should be given to the human reasonings of the individual. The same human reason that has led the majority of modern Lutheran scholars to reject almost every teaching of Scripture (including the deity of Christ, the Resurrection, etc.), and even to reject the inspiration of the Scriptures themselves — on which the early Lutherans claimed to base their entire faith. In reply, Patriarch Jeremias II clearly exposed the true character of the Lutheran teachings:

Let us accept, then, the traditions of the Church with a sincere heart and not a multitude of rationalizations. For God created man to be upright; instead they sought after diverse ways of rationalizing (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Let us not allow ourselves to learn a new kind of faith which is condemned by the tradition of the Holy Fathers. For the Divine apostle says, “if anyone is preaching to you a Gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:9). [9]

B. The doctrine of Sola Scriptura does not meet its own criteria

You might imagine that such a belief system as Protestantism, which has as its cardinal doctrine that Scripture alone is authoritative in matters of faith, would first seek to prove that this cardinal doctrine met its own criteria. One would probably expect that Protestants could brandish hundreds of proof-texts from the Scriptures to support this doctrine — upon which all else that they believe is based. At the very least one would hope that two or three solid text which clearly taught this doctrine could be found — since the Scriptures themselves say, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (II Corinthians 13:1). Yet, like the boy in the fable who had to point out that the Emperor had no clothes on, I must point out that there is not one single verse in the entirety of Holy Scripture that teaches the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. There is not even one that comes close. Oh yes, there are innumerable places in the Bible that speak of its inspiration, of its authority, and of its profitability — but there is no place in the Bible that teaches that only Scripture is authoritative for believers. If such a teaching were even implicit, then surely the early Fathers of the Church would have taught this doctrine also, but which of the Holy Fathers ever taught such a thing? Thus Protestantism’s most basic teaching self-destructs, being contrary to itself. But not only is the Protestant doctrine of Sola Scriptura not taught in the Scriptures — it is in fact specifically contradicted by the Scriptures (which we have already discussed) that teach that Holy Tradition is also binding to Christians (II Thessalonians 2:15; I Corinthians 11:2).

C. Protestant interpretive approaches that don’t work

Even from the very earliest days of the Reformation, Protestants have been forced to deal with the fact that, given the Bible and the reason of the individual alone, people could not agree upon the meaning of many of the most basic questions of doctrine. Within Martin Luther’s own life dozens of competing groups had arisen, all claiming to “just believe the Bible,” but none agreeing on what the Bible said. Though Luther had courageously stood before the Diet of Worms and said that unless he were persuaded by Scripture, or by plain reason, he would not retract anything that he had been teaching; later, when Anabaptists, who disagreed with the Lutherans on a number of points, simply asked for the same indulgence, the Lutherans butchered them by the thousands — so much for the rhetoric about the “right of an individual to read the Scriptures for himself.” Despite the obvious problems that the rapid splintering of Protestantism presented to the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, not willing to concede defeat to the Pope, Protestants instead concluded that the real problem must be that those with whom they disagree, in other words every other sect but their own, must not be reading the Bible correctly. Thus a number of approaches have been set forth as solutions to this problem. Of course there has yet to be the approach that could reverse the endless multiplications of schisms, and yet Protestants still search for the elusive methodological “key” that will solve their problem. Let us examine the most popular approaches that have been tried thus far, each of which are still set forth by one group or another

Approach # 1

Just take the Bible literally — the meaning is clear.

This approach was no doubt the first approach used by the Reformers, though very early on they came to realize that by itself this was an insufficient solution to the problems presented by the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. Although this one was a failure from the start, this approach still is the

most common one to be found among the less educated Fundamentalists, Evangelicals and Charismatics — “The Bible says what it means and means what it says,” is an oft heard phrase. But when it comes to Scriptural texts that Protestants generally do not agree with, such as when Christ gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins (John 20:23), or when He said of the Eucharist “this is my body... this is my blood” (Matthew 26:26,28), or when Paul taught that women should cover their heads in Church (I Corinthians 11:1-16), then all of a sudden the Bible doesn’t say what it means any more — “Why, those verses aren’t literal...”

Approach # 2

The Holy Spirit provides the correct understanding.

When presented with the numerous groups that arose under the banner of the Reformation that could not agree on their interpretations of the Scriptures, no doubt the second solution to the problem was the assertion that the Holy Spirit would guide the pious Protestant to interpret the Scriptures rightly. Of course everyone who disagreed with you could not possibly be guided by the same Spirit. The result was that each Protestant group de-Christianized all those that differed from them. Now if this approach were a valid one, that would only leave history with one group of Protestants that had rightly interpreted the Scriptures. But which of the thousands of denominations could it be? Of course the answer depends on which Protestant you are speaking to. One thing we can be sure of — he or she probably thinks his or her group is it.

Today, however, (depending on what stripe of Protestant you come into contact with) you are more likely to run into Protestants who have relativized the Truth to some degree or another than to find those who still maintain that their sect or splinter group is the “only one” which is “right.” As denominations stacked upon denominations it became a correspondingly greater stretch for any of them to say, with a straight face, that only they had rightly understood the Scriptures, though there still are some who do. It has become increasingly common for each Protestant group to minimize the differences between denominations and simply conclude that in the name of “love” those differences “do not matter.” Perhaps each group has “a piece of the Truth,” but none has the whole Truth (so the reasoning goes). Thus the pan-heresy of Ecumenism had its birth. Now many “Christians” will not even stop their ecumenical efforts at allowing only Christian groups to have a piece of the Truth. Many “Christians” now also believe that all religions have “pieces of the Truth.” The obvious conclusion that modern Protestants have made is that to find all the Truth each group will have to shed their “differences,” pitch their “piece of Truth” into the pot, and presto-chango — the whole Truth will be found at last!

Approach # 3

Let the clear passages interpret the unclear.

This must have seemed the perfect solution to the problem of how to interpret the Bible by itself — let the easily understood passages “interpret” those which are not clear. The logic of this approach is simple, though one passage may state a truth obscurely, surely the same truth would be clearly stated elsewhere in Scripture. Simply use these “clear passages” as the key and you will have unlocked the meaning of the “obscure passage.” As the Tübingen Lutheran scholars argued in their first exchange of letters with Patriarch Jeremias II:

Therefore, no better way could ever be found to interpret the Scriptures, other than that Scripture be interpreted by Scripture, that is to say, through itself. For the entire Scripture has been dictated by the one and the same Spirit, who best understands his own will and is best able to state His own meaning. [10]

As promising as this method seemed, it soon proved an insufficient solution to the problem of Protestant chaos and divisions. The point at which this approach disintegrates is in determining which passages are “clear” and which are “obscure.” Baptists, who believe that it is impossible for a Christian to lose his salvation once he is “saved,” see a number of passages which they maintain quite clearly teach their doctrine of “Eternal Security” — for example, “For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:29), and “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). But when Baptists come across verses which seem to teach that salvation can be lost, such as “The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression” (Ezekiel 33:12), then they use the passages that are “clear” to explain away the passages that are “unclear.” Methodists, who believe that believers may lose their salvation if they turn their backs on God, find no such obscurity in such passages, and on the contrary, view the above mentioned Baptist “proof-texts” in the light of the passages that they see as “clear.” And so Methodists and Baptists throw verses of the Bible back and forth at each other, each wondering why the other can’t “see” what seems very “clear” to them.

Approach # 4

Historical-Critical Exegesis

Drowning in a sea of subjective opinion and division, Protestants quickly began grasping for any intellectual method with a fig leaf of objectivity. As time went by and divisions multiplied, science and reason increasingly became the standard by which Protestant theologians hoped to bring about consistency in their biblical interpretations. This “scientific” approach, which has come to predominate Protestant Scholarship, and in this century has even begun to predominate Roman Catholic Scholarship, is generally referred to as “Historical-Critical Exegesis.” With the dawn of the so-called “Enlightenment,” science seemed to be capable of solving all the world’s problems. Protestant Scholarship began applying the philosophy and methodology of the sciences to theology and the Bible. Since the Enlightenment, Protestant scholars have analyzed every aspect of the Bible: its history, its manuscripts, the biblical languages, etc. As if the Holy Scriptures were an archaeological dig, these scholars sought to analyze each fragment and bone with the best and latest that science had to offer. To be fair, it must be stated that much useful knowledge was produced by such scholarship. Unfortunately this methodology has erred also, grievously and fundamentally, but it has been portrayed with such an aura of scientific objectivity that holds many under its spell.

Like all the other approaches used by Protestants, this method also seeks to understand the Bible while ignoring Church Tradition. Though there is no singular Protestant method of exegesis, they all have as their supposed goal to “let the Scripture speak for itself.” Of course no one claiming to be Christian could be against what the Scripture would “say” if it were indeed “speaking for itself” through these methods. The problem is that those who appoint themselves as tongues for

the Scripture filter it through their own Protestant assumptions. While claiming to be objective, they rather interpret the Scriptures according to their own sets of traditions and dogmas (be they fundamentalists or liberal rationalists). What Protestant scholars have done (if I may loosely borrow a line from Albert Schweitzer) is looked into the well of history to find the meaning of the Bible. They have written volume upon volume on the subject, but unfortunately they have only seen their own reflections.

Protestant scholars (both “liberals” and “conservatives” have erred in that they have misapplied empirical methodologies to the realm of theology and biblical studies. I use the term “Empiricism” to describe these efforts. I am using this term broadly to refer to the rationalistic and materialistic worldview that has possessed the Western mind, and is continuing to spread throughout the world. Positivist systems of thought (of which Empiricism is one) attempt to anchor themselves on some basis of “certain” knowledge. [11]

Empiricism, strictly speaking, is the belief that all knowledge is based on experience, and that only things which can be established by means of scientific observation can be known with certainty. Hand in hand with the methods of observation and experience, came the principle of methodological doubt, the prime example of this being the philosophy of Rene Descartes who began his discussion of philosophy by showing that everything in the universe can be doubted except one’s own existence, and so with the firm basis of this one undoubtable truth (“I think, therefore I am”) he sought to build his system of philosophy. Now the Reformers, at first, were content with the assumption that the Bible was the basis of certainty upon which theology and philosophy could rest. But as the humanistic spirit of the Enlightenment gained in ascendancy, Protestant scholars turned their rationalistic methods on the Bible itself—seeking to discover what could be known with “certainty” from it. Liberal Protestant scholars have already finished this endeavor, and having “peeled back the onion” they now are left only with their own opinions and sentimentality as the basis for whatever faith they have left.

Conservative Protestants have been much less consistent in their rationalistic approach. Thus they have preserved among themselves a reverence for the Scriptures and a belief in their inspiration. Nevertheless, their approach (even among the most dogged Fundamentalists) is still essentially rooted in the same spirit of rationalism as the Liberals. A prime example of this is to be found among so-called Dispensational Fundamentalists, who hold to an elaborate theory which posits that at various stages in history God has dealt with man according to different “dispensations,” such as the “Adamic dispensation,” the “Noaic dispensation,” the “Mosaic dispensation,” the “Davidic dispensation,” and so on. One can see that there is a degree of truth in this theory, but beyond these Old Testament dispensations they teach that currently we are under a different “dispensation” than were the Christians of the first century. Though miracles continued through the “New Testament period,” they no longer occur today. This is very interesting, because (in addition to lacking any Scriptural basis) this theory allows these Fundamentalists to affirm the miracles of the Bible, while at the same time allowing them to be Empiricists in their everyday life. Thus, though the discussion of this approach may at first glance seem to be only of academic interest and far removed from the reality of dealing with the average Protestant, in fact, even the average, piously “conservative” Protestant laymen is not unaffected by this sort of rationalism.

The great fallacy in this so called “scientific” approach to the Scriptures lies in the fallacious application of empirical assumptions to the study of history, Scripture, and theology. Empirical methods work reasonably well when they are correctly applied to the natural sciences, but when they are applied where they cannot possibly work, such as in unique moments in history (which cannot be repeated or experimented upon), they cannot produce either consistent or accurate results. [12]

Scientists have yet to invent a telescope capable of peering into the spirit world, and yet many Protestant scholars assert that in the light of science the idea of the existence of demons or of the Devil has been disproved. Were the Devil to appear before an Empiricist with pitch fork in hand and clad in bright red underwear, it would be explained in some manner that would easily comport to the scientist’s worldview. Although such Empiricists pride themselves on their “openness,” they are blinded by their assumptions to such an extent that they cannot see anything that does not fit their vision of reality. If the methods of empiricism were consistently applied it would discredit all knowledge (including itself), but empiricism is conveniently permitted to be inconsistent by those who hold to it “because its ruthless mutilation of human experience lends it such a high reputation for scientific severity that its prestige overrides the defectiveness of its own foundations.” [13]

The connections between the extreme conclusions that modern liberal Protestant scholars have come to, and the more conservative or Fundamentalist Protestants will not seem clear to many — least of all to conservative Fundamentalists! Though these conservatives see themselves as being in almost complete opposition to Protestant liberalism, they nonetheless use essentially the same kinds of methods in their study of the Scriptures as do the liberals, and along with these methodologies come their underlying philosophical assumptions. Thus the difference between the “liberals” and the “conservatives” is not in reality a difference of basic assumptions, but rather a difference in how far they have taken them to their inherent conclusions

If Protestant exegesis were truly “scientific,” as it presents itself to be, its results would show consistency. If its methods were merely unbiased “technologies” (as many view them) then it would not matter who used them, they would “work” the same for everyone. But what do we find when we examine current status of Protestant biblical studies? In the estimation of the “experts” themselves, Protestant biblical scholarship is in a crisis. [14] In fact this crisis is perhaps best illustrated by the admission of a recognized Protestant Old Testament scholar, Gerhard Hasel [in his survey of the history and current status of the discipline of Old Testament theology, *Old Testament Theology: Issues in the Current Debate*], that during the 1970’s five new Old Testament theologies had been produced “but not one agrees in approach and method with any of the others.” [15]

In fact, it is amazing, considering the self-proclaimed high standard of scholarship in Protestant biblical studies, that you can take your pick of limitless conclusions on almost any issue and find “good scholarship” to back it up. In other words, you can just about come to any conclusion that suits you on a particular day or issue, and you can find a Ph.D. who will advocate it. This is certainly not science in the same sense as mathematics or chemistry! What we are dealing with is a field of learning that presents itself as “objective science,” but which in fact is a pseudo-science, concealing a variety of competing philosophical and theological perspectives. It is pseudoscience

because until scientists develop instruments capable of examining and understanding God, objective scientific theology or biblical interpretation is an impossibility. This is not to say that there is nothing that is genuinely scholarly or useful within it; but this is to say that, camouflaged with these legitimate aspects of historical and linguistic learning, and hidden by the fog machines and mirrors of pseudo-science, we discover in reality that Protestant methods of biblical interpretation are both the product and the servant of Protestant theological and philosophical assumptions. [16]

With subjectivity that surpasses the most speculative Freudian psychoanalysts, Protestant scholars selectively choose the “facts” and “evidence” that suits their agenda and then proceed, with their conclusions essentially predetermined by their basic assumptions, to apply their methods to the Holy Scriptures. All the while, the Protestant scholars, both “liberal” and “conservative,” describe themselves as dispassionate “scientists.” [17] And since modern universities do not give out Ph.D.’s to those who merely pass on the unadulterated Truth, these scholars seek to out-do each other by coming up with new “creative” theories. This is the very essence of heresy: novelty, arrogant personal opinion, and self-deception.

The Orthodox Approach to Truth

When, by God’s mercy, I found the Orthodox Faith, I had no desire to give Protestantism and its “methods” of Bible study a second look. Unfortunately, I have found that Protestant methods and assumptions have managed to infect even some circles within the Orthodox Church. The reason for this is, as stated above, that the Protestant approach to Scripture has been portrayed as “science.” Some in the Orthodox Church feel they do the Church a great favor by introducing this error into our seminaries and parishes. But this is nothing new; this is how heresy has always sought to deceive the faithful. As Saint Irenaeus said, as he began his attack on the heresies current in his day:

By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them, while they initiate them into their blasphemous opinions....

Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than truth itself. [18]

Lest any be mistaken or confused, let me be clear: the Orthodox approach to the Scriptures is not based upon “scientific” research into the Holy Scriptures. Its claim to understand the Scriptures does not reside in its claiming superior archaeological data, but rather in its unique relationship with the Author of the Scriptures. The Orthodox Church is the body of Christ, the pillar and ground of the Truth, and it is both the means by which God wrote the Scriptures (through its members) and the means by which God has preserved the Scriptures. The Orthodox Church understands the Bible because it is the inheritor of one living tradition that begins with Adam and stretches through time to all its members today. That this is true cannot be “proven” in a lab. One must be convinced by the Holy Spirit and experience the life of God in the Church.

The question Protestants will ask at this point is who is to say that the Orthodox Tradition is the correct tradition, or that there even is a correct tradition? First, Protestants need to study the history of the Church. They will find that there is only one Church. This has always been the faith of the Church from its beginning. The Nicene Creed makes this point clearly, “I believe in... one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” This statement, which almost every Protestant denomination still claims to accept as true, was never interpreted to refer to some fuzzy, pluralistic invisible “church” that cannot agree on anything doctrinally. The councils that canonized the Creed (as well as the Scriptures) also anathematized those who were outside the Church, whether they were heretics, such as the Montanists, or schismatics like the Donatists. They did not say, “well we can’t agree with the Montanists doctrinally but they are just as much a part of the Church as we are.” Rather they were excluded from the communion of the Church until they returned to the Church and were received into the Church through Holy Baptism and Chrismation (in the case of heretics) or simply Chrismation (in the case of schismatics) [Second Ecumenical Council, Canon VII].

To even join in prayer with those outside the Church was, and still is, forbidden [Canons of the Holy Apostles, canons XLV, XLVI]. Unlike Protestants, who make heroes of those who break away from another group and start their own, in the early Church this was considered among the most damnable sins. As St. Ignatius of Antioch [a disciple of the Apostle John] warned, “Make no mistake brethren, no one who follows another into a schism will inherit the Kingdom of God, no one who follows heretical doctrines is on the side of the passion” [to the Philadelphians 5:3].

The very reason there arose a Protestant movement was that they were protesting Papal abuses, but prior to the Roman West breaking away from the Orthodox East these abuses did not exist. Many modern Protestant theologians have recently begun to take a second look at this first millennium of undivided Christendom, and are beginning to discover the great treasure that the West has lost (and not a few are becoming Orthodox as a result). [19]

Obviously, one of three statements is true: either (1) there is no correct Tradition and the gates of hell did prevail against the Church, and thus both the Gospels and the Nicene Creed are in error; or (2) the true Faith is to be found in Papism, with its ever-growing and changing dogmas defined by the infallible “vicar of Christ;” or (3) the Orthodox Church is the one Church founded by Christ and has faithfully preserved the Apostolic Tradition. So the choice for Protestants is clear: relativism, Romanism, or Orthodoxy.

Most Protestants, because their theological basis of Sola Scriptura could only yield disunity and argument, have long ago given up on the idea of true Christian unity and considered it a ridiculous hypothesis that there might be only one Faith. When faced with such strong affirmations concerning Church unity as those cited above, they often react in horror, charging that such attitudes are contrary to Christian love. Finding themselves without true unity they have striven to create a false unity, by developing the relativistic philosophy of ecumenism, in which the only belief to be condemned is any belief that makes exclusive claims about the Truth. However, this is not the love of the historical Church, but humanistic sentimentality. Love is the essence of the Church. Christ did not come to establish a new school of thought, but rather, He, Himself said that He came to build His Church, against which the gates of hell would not prevail (Matthew 16:17). This new community of the Church created “an organic unity rather than a mechanical

unification of internally divided persons.” [20] This unity is only possible through the new life brought by the Holy Spirit, and mystically experienced in the life of the Church.

Christian faith joins the faithful with Christ and thus it composes one harmonious body from separate individuals. Christ fashions this body by communicating Himself to each member and by supplying to them the Spirit of Grace in an effectual, tangible manner.... If the bond with the body of the Church becomes severed then the personality which is thereby isolated and enclosed in its own egoism will be deprived of the beneficial and abundant influence of the Holy Spirit which dwells within the Church. [21]

The Church is one because it is the body of Christ, and it is an ontological impossibility that it could be divided. The Church is one, even as Christ and the Father are one. Though this concept of unity may seem incredible, it does not seem so to those who have gone beyond the concept and entered into its reality. Though this may be one of those “hard sayings” that many cannot accept, it is a reality in the Orthodox Church, though it demands from everyone much self-denial, humility and love. [22]

Our faith in the unity of the Church has two aspects, it is both an historic and present unity. That is to say that when the Apostles, for example, departed this life they did not depart from the unity of the Church. They are as much a part of the Church now as when they were present in the flesh. When we celebrate the Eucharist in any local Church, we do not celebrate it alone, but with the entire Church, both on earth and in heaven. The Saints in heaven are even closer to us than those we can see or touch. Thus, in the Orthodox Church we are not only taught by those people in the flesh whom God has appointed to teach us, but by all those teachers of the Church in heaven and on earth. We are just as much under the teaching today of Saint John Chrysostom as we are of our own Bishop. The way this impacts our approach to Scripture is that we do not interpret it privately (II Peter 1:20), but as a Church. This approach to Scripture was given its classic definition by St. Vincent of Lerins:

Here, perhaps, someone may ask: Since the canon of the Scripture is complete and more than sufficient in itself, why is it necessary to add to it the authority of ecclesiastical interpretation? As a matter of fact, [we must answer,] Holy Scripture, because of its depth, is not universally accepted in one and the same sense. The same text is interpreted differently by different people, so that one may almost gain the impression that it can yield as many different meanings as there are men.... Thus it is because of the great many distortions caused by various errors, that it is, indeed, necessary that the trend of the interpretation of the prophetic and apostolic writings be directed in accordance with the rule of the ecclesiastical and Catholic meaning.

In the Catholic Church itself, every care should be taken to hold fast to what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all. This is truly and properly ‘Catholic,’ as indicated by the force and etymology of the name itself, which comprises everything truly universal. This general rule will be truly applied if we follow the principles of universality, antiquity, and consent. We do so in regard to universality if we confess that faith alone to be true which the entire Church confesses all over the world. [We do so] in regard to antiquity if we in no way deviate from those interpretations which our ancestors and fathers have mani

festly proclaimed as inviolable. [We do so] in regard to consent if, in this very antiquity, we adopt the definitions and propositions of all, or almost all, of the Bishops. [23]

In this approach to Scriptures, it is not the job of the individual to strive for originality, but rather to understand what is already present in the traditions of the Church. We are obliged not to go beyond the boundary set by the Fathers of the Church, but to faithfully pass on the tradition we received. To do this requires a great deal of study and thought, but even more, if we are to truly understand the Scriptures, we must enter deeply into the mystical life of the Church. This is why when St. Augustine expounds on how one should interpret the Scriptures [On Christian Doctrine, Books i-iv], he spends much more time talking about the kind of person the study of the Scripture requires than about the intellectual knowledge he should possess: [24]

1. One who loves God with his whole heart, and is empty of pride,
2. Is motivated to seek the Knowledge of God's will by faith and reverence, rather than pride or greed,
3. Has a heart subdued by piety, a purified mind, dead to the world; and who neither fears, nor seeks to please men,
4. Who seeks nothing but knowledge of and union with Christ,
5. Who hungers and thirsts after righteousness,
6. And is diligently engaged in works of mercy and love.

With such a high standard as this, we should even more humbly lean upon the guidance of holy Fathers who have evidenced these virtues, and not delude ourselves by thinking that we are more capable or clever interpreters of God's Holy Word than they.

But what of the work that has been done by Protestant Biblical scholars? To the degree that it helps us understand the history behind and meaning of obscurities, to this degree it is in line with the Holy Tradition and can be used.

As Saint Gregory Nazianzen put it when speaking of pagan literature: "As we have compounded healthful drugs from certain of the reptiles, so from secular literature we have received principles of enquiry and speculation, while we have rejected their idolatry..."²⁵ Thus as long as we refrain from worshiping the false gods of Individualism, Modernity, and Academic Vainglory, and as long as we recognize the assumptions at work and use those things that truly shed historical or linguistic light upon the Scriptures, then we will understand the Tradition more perfectly. But to the degree that Protestant scholarship speculates beyond the canonical texts, and projects foreign ideas upon the Scriptures — to the degree that they disagree with the Holy Tradition, the "always and everywhere" faith of the Church, they are wrong.

If Protestants should think this arrogant or naive, let them first consider the arrogance and naiveté of those scholars who think that they are qualified to override (and more usually, totally ignore) two thousand years of Christian teaching. Does the acquisition of a Ph.D. give one greater insight into the mysteries of God than the total wisdom of millions upon millions of faithful believers and the Fathers and Mothers of the Church who faithfully served God, who endured horrible tortures and martyrdom, mockings, and imprisonments, for the faith? Is Christianity learned in the comfort of one's study, or as one carries his cross to be killed on it? The arrogance

lies in those who, without even taking the time to learn what the Holy Tradition really is, decide that they know better, that only now has someone come along who has rightly understood what the Scriptures really mean.

Conclusion

The Holy Scriptures are perhaps the summit of the Holy Tradition of the Church, but the greatness of the heights to which the Scriptures ascend is due to the great mountain upon which it rests. Taken from its context, within the Holy Tradition, the solid rock of Scripture becomes a mere ball of clay, to be molded into whatever shape its handlers wish to mold it. It is no honor to the Scriptures to misuse and twist them, even if this is done in the name of exalting their authority. We must read the Bible; it is God's Holy Word. But to understand its message let us humbly sit at the feet of the saints who have shown themselves "doers of the Word and not hearers only" (James 1:22), and have been proven by their lives worthy interpreters of the Scriptures. Let us go to those who knew the Apostles, such as Saints Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp, if we have a question about the writings of the Apostles. Let us inquire of the Church, and not fall into self-deluded arrogance.

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Footnotes

1. George Mastrantonis, trans., *Augsburg and Constantinople: the Correspondence between the Tübingen Theologians and Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople on the Augsburg Confession* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982), 114.
2. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980), "Jannes and Jambres," by A. F. Walls, 733 -734.
3. Indeed this list did not even intend to comprise all the books which the Church has preserved from antiquity and considers part of the larger Tradition. For example, the book of Enoch, though quoted in the canonical books, was not itself included in the canon. I will not pretend to know why this is so, but for whatever reasons the Church has chosen to preserve this book, and yet has not appointed it to be read in Church or to be set alongside the canonical books.
4. For example, there is no place where the question of the inerrancy of the Scriptures is dealt with in detail, precisely because this was not an issue of dispute. In our present day, with the rise of religious skepticism, this is very much an issue, and if the epistles were being written today, this would certainly be dealt with at some point. It would thus be foolish to conclude that since this issue is not dealt with specifically, that the early Christians did not think it was important or did not believe in it.
5. Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 51 ff.
6. And in fact, this is what Protestant scholarship has done. Though Protestantism was founded on its claim of believing the Bible to be the only authority for faith and practice, modern Protestant scholarship is now dominated by modernists who no longer believe in the inspiration or inerrancy of the Scriptures. They now stand above the Bible and only

choose to use those parts that suit them and discard the rest as “primitive mythology and legend.” The only authority left for such as these is themselves.

7. The Waldensians were a sect that was founded in the 12th century founded by Peter Waldo which in some ways anticipated the Protestant Reformation. Due to persecution by the Roman Catholic Church this sect survived primarily in the mountainous regions of northwestern Italy. With the advent of the Protestant Reformation, the Waldensians came under the influence of the Reformed movement and essentially joined forces with it. Many early Protestant historians claimed that the Waldensians represented a remnant of “true” Christians that had existed prior to Constantine. Though today no credible historian would make such an unsubstantiated claim, many fundamentalists and cults like the Jehovah’s Witnesses continue to claim descent from the early church through the Waldensians — despite the fact that the Waldensians still exist to this day, and they certainly do not claim the Jehovah’s Witnesses.
8. Mastrantonis, 115.
9. Ibid., 198.
10. Ibid., 115.
11. The term ‘positivism’ comes from the French word positif, which means ‘sure,’ or ‘certain.’ This term was first used by Auguste Comte. Positivistic systems are built upon the assumption that some fact or institution is the ultimate basis of knowledge — in Comte’s philosophy, experience or sense-perception constituted that basis and thus he was the forerunner of modern Empiricism [See Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1914 ed., s.v. “Positivism,” by S.H. Swinny; and Wolfhart Pannenburg, *Theology and Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 29].
12. For example, one method for determining the reality of past events, among empirically minded scholars, is the principle of analogy. Since knowledge is based on experience, then the way one understands what is unfamiliar is by relating it to something that is familiar. Under the guise of historical analysis they judge the probability of a supposed past event (e.g. the resurrection of Jesus) based upon what we know to take place in our experience. And since these historians have never observed anything which they would consider supernatural they determine that when the Bible speaks of a miraculous event in history that it merely is recounting a myth or a legend. But since to the Empiricist, a ‘miracle’ entails a violation of a natural law, then there can be no miracles (by definition) because natural laws are determined by our observation of what we experience, so were such an Empiricist to be confronted with a modern analogy of a miracle it would no longer be considered a miracle because it would no longer constitute a violation of natural law. Thus empiricists do not produce results that falsify transcendent reality, or miracles; rather their presuppositions, from the very outset, deny the possibility of such things. [see G. E. Michalson, Jr., “Pannenburg on the Resurrection and Historical Method,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (April 1980): 345-359.]
13. Rev. Robert T. Osborn, “Faith as Personal Knowledge,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (February 1975): 101-126.
14. Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 9.
15. Ibid., p. 7.
16. I have discussed Liberal Protestantism only to demonstrate the fallacies of “Historical” exegesis. An Orthodox Christian is much more likely to be confronted by a conservative

- Fundamentalist or a Charismatic, simply because they take their faith seriously enough to seek to convert others to it. Liberal Protestant denominations have their hands full trying to keep their own parishioners, and are not noted for their evangelistic zeal.
17. For a more in-depth critique of the excesses of the Historical-Critical Method, see Thomas Oden, *Agenda for Theology: After Modernity What?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) pp 103-147.
 18. A Cleveland Coxe, trans., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. i, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p 315.
 19. In fact a recent three volume systematic theology, by Thomas Oden, is based on the premise that the “ecumenical consensus” of the first millennium should be normative for theology [see, *The Living God: Systematic Theology Volume One*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), pp ix — xiv.]. If only Oden takes his own methodology all the way, he too will become Orthodox.
 20. *The Holy New Martyr Archbishop Ilarion (Troitsky), Christianity or the Church?*, (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1985), p. 11.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
 23. St. Vincent of Lerins, trans. Rudolph Morris, *The Fathers of the Church* vol.7, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1949), pp. 269-271.
 24. St. Augustine, “On Christian Doctrine,” *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. series 1, vol. ii, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff, (New York: Christian, 1887-1900), pp. 534-537.
 25. St. Gregory Nazianzen, “Oration 43, Panegyric on Saint Basil,” *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, series 2, vol. vii, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (New York: Christian, 1887/1900), p. 398f.
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