

GOD'S WORD IN THE SCRIPTURES – REFERENCE POINTS ON CANONICITY, INTERPRETATION, AND THE LITURGICAL TEXT AS VESTMENT OF THE REVEALED WORD

Abstract

In the present study, we aim to illustrate how the canon of the Old Testament is regarded in the thinking of the Eastern Church, showing first how it formed in the Jewish tradition and then how it was assumed and read by the Church Fathers. We do not aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the composition of the biblical canon or to present the differences between the lists of writings from various translations of the Holy Scripture, but we will focus only on the historical moments which are relevant to the conservation and dissemination of the holy writings. We shall, however, insist on how the text of the Old Testament has been received, interpreted, and used by the Christian Church within its cultic structures. These perspectives will allow us to understand that the holy text is meant to be embodied, read, and interpreted.

Keywords

God's Word, canon, cult, interpretation, Christological reading

Introduction

The books which the Jews considered to be inspired by God were assumed by the Church and were considered essential for maintaining man's relationship with God. The reference point of both rabbis and the Church Fathers was the fact that the final purpose of reading and interpreting the canonical books is man's communion with God. However, in the thinking of the Church, there are some additional specific notes



FR. IOAN CHIRILĂ

Faculty of Orthodox Theology
"Babeș-Bolyai"
University in Cluj-Napoca
ioan.chirila@ubbcluj.ro



BOGDAN ȘOPTEREAN

Faculty of Orthodox Theology
"Babeș-Bolyai"
University in Cluj-Napoca
bogdansopterean94@gmail.com

regarding the holy writings, which are due to the revelation provided by God through His embodiment. Thus, besides being inspired by God, the canonical books of the Old Testament have been read from a Christological, soteriological, Trinitarian, typological and ecclesiastical perspective within the Eastern Church. For this reason, in Eastern Christianity, the believer is offered the possibility of embodying the Word in his/her body by reading and assuming the holy text and by experiencing it in the liturgical space.

To capture how the text of the Old Testament is received in the thinking of the Eastern Church, we will resort to the reflections and perspectives provided by Fathers such as St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher, St. Basil the Great, St. Maximus the Confessor or St. Nicholas Cabasilas in their writings. We will also turn to Eastern biblical scholars or theologians who synthesise the experience of the Church in interpreting the holy text. We are considering Father John Breck, Georges Florovsky and Father Constantin Coman, who adhere to the thinking of Greek biblical scholars.

Canon and Canonicity in the Jewish Thinking of the Old Testament

The meaning we presently attach to the term “canon” (Gr. *kanon*, Heb. *caneh*) in the context of biblical studies is that of the catalogue of books which the Church considers to be normative for faith and inspired books. Nonetheless, before gaining its current form, the canon of the Scripture underwent several distinct stages and, here, we must bear in mind its evolution in the Jewish environment from which it was taken. Therefore, according to internal testimonies, there are several key moments, sometimes called moments of religious reform, in the evolution of the corpus of Jewish canonical writings.

The first such moment is during the time of King David (Miller and Hayes, 1986). He brings the ark of the Covenant to Zion (2 Sam. 6:1-19), he erects the Holy Tabernacle and organises the entire cultic life, which must not be reduced only to psalms or songs. At that time, the Torah was already a daily reading, its central position being underscored by psalms which tackle it as the main subject (Chirilă 2015, 15-32) the one called “the Torah Psalm” (Ps. 119), which is dedicated exclusively to the Torah (Pașca-Tușa 2019, 304-345). King David manages to establish the Torah as a living standard within his kingdom. He proves to be a commendable king for the chosen people since the main reference point of his rule is God’s Law. And, through the decisions he makes during his rule, he succeeds in leading his subjects towards the fulfilment of the Law. Through the psalms he composes, he reminds them of its

provisions and, through the establishment of a single place of worship, he protects them from falling into idolatry (Chirilă 2016, 19-27).

A second similar moment takes place in the 7th century BC (622-621), during the restoration of the Temple when the Book of the Law is discovered. The event takes place during the rule of Josiah, a king who is compared to David (2 Kgs. 22:2) due to his fidelity to God's will. During the restoration works of the Temple of Jerusalem, the High Priest Hilkiah found the Book of the Law, which the king read in front of the whole people, promising to protect "his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant" written in the book (2 Kgs. 23:3). We do not know what the content of the Book of the Law was (it is possible that part of the *Nevi'im* and maybe some writings from the *Ketuvim* were added to the *Torah*), but we must have in mind that, due to that moment, it was rediscovered and reconfirmed in the ears of whole people.

A new religious form, which was meant to re-establish "the book, from the Law of God" (Neh. 8:8) at the centre of the Israeli community, was being practised during the activity of Ezra the Priest and of Governor Nehemiah. They were preoccupied with reorganising the society of the Jews who had returned from the Babylonian exile. One of the central points of their mission was also that of establishing the list of writings which were normative for their faith. Scriptural testimonies do not offer us a list of canonical books. Although the text in 2 Maccabees 2:13 mentions three categories of books – those concerning the kings, the prophets and those of David – which Nehemiah assembles, it does not mention however how many they were or which their title was. In the absence of such data, we believe it is necessary to mention certain testimonies of the Jewish tradition, which provide either the number of books considered to be canonical or a list of books kept in the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

The oldest reference made to the number and grouping of the books of the Hebrew Bible is found in historian Flavius Josephus. In his work, *Against Apion* (1, 8), he shows that – unlike Greeks – Jews did not have countless books to contradict one another, but had only twenty-two books, which encompassed the history of the entire world and which were trustworthy. Out of these books, five belong to Moses and 13 to the prophets (Joshua, Judges and Ruth (one book), the books of the Kings (two books), the books of Paralipomenon (one book), Ezra and Nehemiah (one book), Esther, the four Major Prophets, the 12 Minor Prophets (one book) and Job) and the latter ones

to the writings, four belong to authors who praise God and set moral rules for people (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs). Flavius Josephus underlines their importance and establishes a paradigm according to which one should relate to the profoundly important books. The books might suggest the precariousness/scarcity of Jewish culture but, according to the Jewish historian, they represent more than the Greek works, as they are in harmony.

The final form of the Jewish canon was established at the Sanhedrin of Jamnia (90 AD), under Yohanan ben Zakkai, the founder and first president of the Academy of Jamnia. This would be the list of canonical writings adopted by the Orthodox Church in Laodicea.

The adherence of the Church to the Jewish canon was followed by a long process of defining and crystalising its own hermeneutic “system”, through which the vein of biblical revelation would be extracted from the Scriptures by the teaching of faith of the Church. And this because, according to Orthodox perspective, the Scripture is interpreted in an ecclesiastic environment, the Spirit being the One Who makes the decoding of the message possible (Coman 2002, 13), as He is the interpreter of God's Word. The central point of this hermeneutic system developed in the Eastern space is the act of reading from a Christological point of view, based on the belief of the Church – aptly formulated by Father John Breck – that “the last referent of the syntagm *God's Word* is neither the biblical text nor its interpretation; it is the person of the eternal Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity” (Breck 2003, 70, our translation).

Arguments in Favour of a Christological Reading of the Old Testament

The Eastern Church has granted greater space to divine intervention in history so that the traditional patristic hermeneutics of Orthodoxy does not deem mystery to be separated from rational research. Romanian exegesis is Romanian only through its linguistic form, much the same as the Slavic or Greek one. It remains essentially Orthodox. But Eastern exegesis is pneumatic, being a continuation of Christly exegesis; it is a manifestation of the Spirit of the Ecclesia, thus being ecclesiological; it is a scion of the Liturgy. The scriptural text also has a dynamic side, meaning that it is also the breath of the Spirit, as it is a revealed text, which is why it must speak for past and present times and the exegesis is made for nowadays not for the past. The cultural-religious level of understanding, the current dogmatic framework, the inspiration – the symbolic language – preserve exactly this dynamic side of the message and lead to the

text being received, through temporal transgression into our times, as an eloquent text, as a message which can be interpreted, as a hermeneutic subject, also open, as in the case of the Old Testament, to a “Christly reading”, a “Christological reading” (Lk. 24:27) (Breck 2003, 69-70). In the light of this reading, the border between the Testaments fades away and the dual form of the Scripture is perceived as a strictly formal structure since the message is unique and revealing of the Trinitarian unity of the main and sole author of the revelation (Chirilă 2008,12).

The reading of the Old Testament from a Christological perspective was first done by Jesus Christ our Saviour, Who adheres to texts from the Old Testament concerning His Person and work. Thus, Christ opens the way for this interpretation, encouraging, first of all, the return to the Scriptures: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me [...] For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.[...] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (Jn. 5:39,46,47), a passage in which the testifying nature of the Scriptures is evident. The Gospel of Luke presents an interesting episode which took place after the Resurrection. Our Saviour, walking with His disciples, asking about what had happened in Jerusalem and seeing how deep their concern was, reassured them that all those had been announced in the Scriptures: “And he said to them, «O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?» And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk. 24:25-27).

In the Pauline writings, the presence of the Old Testament is rich. A series of teachings are formulated by referring to texts, events, or characters from the Old Testament (1 Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 3:8; 4:27-30; 1 Cor. 6:15-17; Rom. 9:17-18; 10:7-11). In the words of the Apostle, the image of patriarch Abraham shines bright, being a model, which transgresses centuries: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, «In you shall all the nations be blessed» (Gal. 3:8), being a representative character for how the one who does justice becomes a source of blessing in the world (and for the world). As for the relation between the two Testaments, Saint Paul certifies the mysterious dimension and the element of preparation of the Old Testament and testifies the fully alethic content of the New Law. He says that “the law was our guardian until Christ came” (Gal. 3:24), a Law which had a „shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these

realities” (Heb. 10:1-4) and assumes the responsibility of revealing God’s Gospel, “which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures” (Rom. 1:2). The manner in which this old Law is linked to Christ’s teaching is expressed, in Paul’s words, through the passage from the Law which was “weakened by the flesh” to the liberating law through which the “Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2-5).

Florilegium patristicum on the Holy Scripture

The way we relate to the Scripture in the Eastern space is by the patristic paradigm of understanding and interpretation. The current tendency of going back to the Fathers, as the first exegetes of the Scripture, confirms the validity of their interpreting patterns. This return does not exclude the responsibility of the contemporary interpreter of updating the message but provides the fundamental reference points for an authentic hermeneutic endeavour. Therefore, before putting forward a florilegium of patristic texts, we mention the eight principles of interpretation which were summarised by Father John Breck and to which other Eastern theologians also adhered: ■ The last referent of the syntagm *God's Word* is the person of the Logos (Breck 2003, 69). ■ The Scripture must be understood from a Trinitarian perspective, in the sense that the Three Persons reveal one another (Breck 2003, 69). ■ The Scripture is an environment for the encounter, its message being “the fruit of a synergy, namely of the cooperation between God and human help”. (Breck 2003, 69, our translation). The work of the interpreter takes the form of mediation between God and man. Here comes the hermeneutic filter, which is always new, but along the lines of patristic interpretation, and this approach exceeds spatial-temporal limits: “If the Bible is first of all God’s Word, then the main challenge in understanding it resides not in the obstacles posed by human expression or language – which is indeed subject to that time and environment – but mostly in the possibility of intelligibly receiving God’s Word from the Scripture” (Coman 2002, 14, our translation). ■ The purpose of exegesis is notably soteriological, serving the mission of the Church, which leads man to the saving knowledge of God (Breck 2003, 70). ■ The relation between Bible, Church and Tradition are essential in understanding the authentic call of the Orthodox exegete. The Scripture is interpreted within and by the Church: “If it is separated by the Church and by its ministry *through apostolic succession*, there is no real understanding of God’s Word” (Florovsky 2006, 166, our translation). The Church claims that the writings of the New Testament are normative elements of the Holy Tradition (Breck 2003, 70). ■ A fundamental element of the hermeneutic

instruments is the *typos*, the typological meaning of the Scripture being the most useful one in arguing the unity of the Scripture. “The Church Fathers would claim that the type is characterised by a double meaning, a literal and a spiritual one, which already contains and in a way manifests or reveals the eschatological fulfilment” (Breck 2003, 70, our translation). ■ The Scripture is fully and uniformly inspired by the Holy Spirit. As such, it can be interpreted according to the principle of exegetic reciprocity (Breck 2003, 70). This possibility of interpretation originates in the fact that “the Scripture, meaning true understanding,” (Florovsky 2006, 166, our translation) is accessible only through the Holy Spirit present and active in the Church. Consequently, to offer a lively interpretation of the word of the Scripture, the ecclesiastical experience must be part of the exegete’s life. ■ Father John Breck expresses this idea as an “interpretation from within”, its necessity being based on the fact that the Scripture “prescribes a way of living – *Christ within us*” (Breck 2003, 70, our translation) by participating in the life of the Church and in the life of the Spirit Who blows where He wishes (Jn 3:8).

The prophetic force of the Scripture is a reality which is highlighted in the writings of St. Justin Martyr. In what follows, we would like to put forward a few fragments which are relevant in this respect. Being remarkably familiar with the Scriptures, Saint Justin interprets them firstly for an apologetic purpose, in his effort to demonstrate through internal arguments that they are oriented, in different ways, towards Christ and His work, towards the anticipation and preparation of His coming: “But that it is spoken about our Jesus, even the phrases themselves show. But *your ears are stopped and your hearts are callous* (Is 6:10; Jn 12:40). For as for the phrase, *The Lord sware, and will not repent; Thou art priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek* (Ps. 110:4), God, because of your unbelief, made it clear by an oath that He is High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, that is to say, that just as Melchizedek was written down by Moses as having been priest of God Most High, and was priest of those who were in uncircumcision, and blessed Abraham who was in circumcision and who offered him tithes, so did God make it clear that He who was called by the Holy Spirit His everlasting priest and Lord (Ps 110:1), should be (priest) of those who were in uncircumcision. And those who are in circumcision and go to Him, that is to say, believe Him and seek blessings from Him (Phil. 2:8-9; Lk. 1:52), them too will He accept and bless. And that He will first be a lowly man, and then be exalted, the words at the end of the Psalm make plain. For *of a brook in the way shall He drink*, and, at the same time, *therefore shall He lift up His head* (Ps 110:7)” (Justin Martyr 1930, 65).

In his texts, Saint Justin resorts to a recurrent expression: “these were said about our Christ” (our translation), thus conjuring up scriptural passages and identifying in them the arguments necessary to support his assertion. “And, further, to persuade you that ye have no understanding of the Scriptures, I will mention also another Psalm spoken to David by the Holy Spirit, which ye say is spoken with reference to Solomon who also himself became king. But it too has been spoken with reference to our Christ. Now you deceive yourselves by equivocal forms of speech. For where *the Law of the Lord is said to be blameless* (Ps. 19:8) ye expound it not of that (law) which shall be after the Law given by Moses, but of this itself, though God cries aloud that He will appoint a new Law (Is. 2:3; 51:4; Mic. 4:2) and a new Disposition (Jer. 31:31; Is. 54:3; Heb. 8:7-8). And where there is read: *O God, give Thy judgment to the king* (Ps. 72:1), since Solomon has been king ye say that the Psalm is spoken with reference to Him, though the words of the Psalm distinctly proclaim that it has been spoken with reference to the everlasting King, that is to say with reference to Christ. For Christ is proclaimed as King and Priest and God and Lord and Angel and Man and Chief Captain and Stone and Child born, and liable to suffering at first, then as going up to heaven and coming again with glory and having His kingdom forever, as I prove from all the scriptures” (Justin Martyr 1930, 66).

Saint Justin identifies the correspondence of the texts of the Old Testament to the works of our Saviour mentioned in the New Testament, but also to those which are to come, such as His coming in glory and the inauguration of the Heavenly Kingdom: “And in the *diapsalma* of the forty-sixth Psalm, I said, it is thus spoken of Christ: *God went up with a shout, the Lord with the voice of a trumpet. Sing praises to our God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. Because God is King of all the earth, sing praises with understanding. God became King over the nations; God is seated on His holy throne. Rulers of (many) peoples were together with the God of Abraham, for the mighty ones of earth are God's, they are greatly exalted* (Ps. 47:5-9). And in the ninety-eighth Psalm the Holy Spirit reproaches you, and informs us that He whom you do not wish to be King is in fact King and Lord of both Samuel and of Aaron and Moses and in fact of all the others” (Justin Martyr 1930, 66).

Extremely important from a theological point of view is the text referring to the sheep of the Passover, an image in which, in accordance with the interpretive Tradition of the Eastern Church, Saint Justin sees a prefiguration of Christ's Sacrifice: “The mystery therefore of the sheep, which God has bidden you sacrifice as the Passover, was a type of Christ, with whose blood they who believe on Him anoint their own houses (Ex.

2:7-21), namely themselves, corresponding to their faith in Him. For that the form in which God formed Adam, became the house of the inbreathing that God gave (Gn. 2:7; 1 Cor. 3:16), you can all perceive. And that also this commandment was given only for a season, I will now prove. God does not allow the sheep of the Passover to be sacrificed at any other place than that on which His name has been called, knowing that there would come a time after Christ had suffered when even the place of Jerusalem would be handed over to your enemies, and all offerings should completely cease to be" (Justin Martyr 1930, 79).

The cultic provisions regarding the way in which the sheep of the Passover should be consumed also have a Christological relevance, which Saint Justin details, illustrating how, in this episode, the image of the Cross appears in a mysterious way: "And that sheep which was commanded to be roasted whole was a figure of the suffering of the cross, by which Christ was to suffer. For when the sheep is being roasted it is roasted arranged in fashion like the fashion of the cross" (Justin Martyr 1930, 80). Even in the episode of the scapegoat, the Saint points to a Christological dimension: "And the two goats' at the Fast that are commanded at the Fast (Lv. 16:5 et seq.), which by God's command must be alike, of which one became the Scapegoat, and the other an offering, where an announcement of the two Advents of Christ; of one Advent, in which the elders of your people and the priests, laying their hands on Him and putting Him to death, sent Him off as a scapegoat; and of His second Advent, because in the same place of Jerusalem you will recognize Him who was dishonoured by you. For He was an offering on behalf of all sinners who wish to repent" (Justin Martyr 1930, 80-81).

And again, in the offering of fine flour brought by those cleansed of the leprous disease (Lv. 10:14,21), the Saint sees a prefiguration of the sacramental bread which Jesus Christ our Lord gave us to bring in memory of the Passions He endured for mankind. In the case of the commandment of circumcision, the interpretation makes the transition to a level of spiritual understanding, similarly to the words of Saint Paul, according to whom "circumcision is a matter of the heart" (Rom. 2:29): "Further, the commandment of circumcision, commanding you to circumcise all infants on the eighth day without fail, was a type of the true circumcision, with which we were circumcised from error and wickedness, by Him who rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Jesus Christ our Lord. For the first day of the week, the first indeed of all the days that ever were is further called the eighth according to the number of all the days of their cycle, and thus it ever remains the first" (Justin Martyr 1930, 82).

We believe these fragments of patristic text are sufficient as testimonies of the Christological reading applied by the Eastern Church to the Scripture, starting with the very first exponents of Christian apologetics. These are paradigms of interpretation built around the centrality of Christ, they are models for the contemporary hermeneutic endeavour, which aims to teach the meaning of God's Word through the revelation of the Spirit.

The Liturgical Text – a Vestment of the Word Revealed through the Scriptures

Saying that the Scripture must be interpreted within the Church, although being a fundamental truth for Eastern theology, does not fully cover the relation, the *continuum* which exists between God's Word and the ecclesiastical environment/experience. And this because, often, the liturgical text takes the form of a vestment of the Word revealed through the Scriptures. A representative for this type of remodelling of the biblical rescript and its integration in the liturgical space is Saint Basil the Great, who, in all his works, provided an extensive commentary on the Holy Scripture. Therefore, in what follows, we propose fragments from the text of the Holy Liturgy which bears his name, to argue for the necessity of achieving the *continuum*, the perennial aspect of the Word in the Liturgy.

However, before actually analysing and presenting the synthesis of the biblical foundations on which this liturgical text is based, we would like to mention the fact that Saint Basil perceived the text of the Scripture in its dynamic dimension, he read it incessantly to embody it, as he believed that its interpretation must always be done within the liturgical framework (Basarab 2005, 120) since the Church is the place where the authentic living of the Scripture takes place. Only interpreted in this environment can the Holy Scripture truly become a source of spiritual enlightenment and unfathomable wisdom. Here lies the explanation for the richness of biblical texture of his liturgical creations.

We have opted for an analysis of the liturgical anaphora and we will very briefly present the biblical formulations introduced by Saint Basil in the two prayers. The first one introduces forms of address whose Scriptural origin can easily be identified: *Master, Lord, God* (Acts 4:24), *Father* (Lk. 23:34), *the Almighty* (Apoc. 1:8), *the only true God* (Is. 37:16), *Master of all things, Lord of heaven and earth, and every creature visible and invisible* (Acts 4:24), *one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven* (Heb. 8:1), *behold the depths* (1 Tim. 1:31), *You have given us to know Your truth* (2 Tim. 2:25). God is *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Rm. 15:6) or simply *Father* (1 Pt. 1:17), *true God* (Jn. 17:3), *Through Him the Holy Spirit was manifested* (Jn. 14:26), *Who*

is the spirit of truth the gift of Sonship (Jn. 14:17) and the source of sanctification (Jn. 7:37-39). Jesus Christ our Saviour is *our hope* (1 Tm. 1:1), *great God* (Tob. 3:16), the *image of Your goodness* (Wisd. of Sol. 7:26) and the *One revealing in Himself You* (Jn. 14:9).

The doxological content of the prayer conjures up new scriptural passages when Saint Basil calls God *invisible* (Col. 1:15), *unchanged* (Jas. 1:17), *word of God is living* (Heb. 4:12), *the life* (Jn. 14:6), *The true light* (Jn 1:9), *sanctification* (1 Cor. 1:30) and when he asserts man's lack of power in *that I may recount all your praises* (Ps. 9:14), *until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come* (Ps. 71:18), *at all times* (Ps. 34:1).

In what way does man and the entire creation, both seen and unseen, relate to God? Every creature *serves you* (Sir. 35:17), *You eternal glorification* (Jud. 15:14), *for all things are subject* (Apoc. 7:15), *You are praised by the angels* (Pr. of Man. 1:15), *Roundabout You stand the Seraphim, one with six wings and the other with six wings; with two they cover their faces; with two they cover their feet; with two they fly, crying out to one another with unceasing voices and every resounding praises: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with Your glory* (Is. 6:2-3). The responsibility of the human being who is in front of God is summarised in a few formulations taken especially from the book of Psalms: *to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name* (Ps. 92:1), *I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift my hands* (Ps. 63:5), *to stand in front of Him with a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart* (Ps. 51:17).

The prayer preceding the anamnestic moment could be considered a synthesis of the history of salvation, starting with the creation of man in the image and after the likeness of God and up to his salvation from death through the work of Christ our Saviour. The text of the prayer begins with a series of doxological formulations: *his greatness is unsearchable / are no bounds to the majesty of Your holiness* (Ps. 145:3,5), *You are holy in all Your works, for with righteousness and true judgement You have ordered all things for us* (Tob. 3:2). Then, the fundamental reference points of the history of salvation are being gradually introduced, the first being the moment when God, *having made man by taking dust from the earth* (Gn. 2:7), *having honoured him with Your image* (Gn. 1:27), *You placed him in a garden of delight* (Gn. 2:8.15), *promising him eternal life and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings in the observance of Your commandments* (Gn. 2:16-17). But our proto parents chose to disobey Him: *But when he disobeyed You* (Gn. 3:11) *and was led astray by the deception of the serpent* (Gn. 3:13), *For the wages of sin is death / becoming subject to death through his transgressions* (Rom. 6:23), *expelled him*

from paradise into this world (Gn. 3:24), that your rules are righteous (Ps. 119:75) and returning him to the earth from which he was taken (Gn. 3:19).

The punishment for sin is followed by the announcement of the possibility of salvation through *a second birth*, as man's mistakes cannot surpass God's infinite mercy: *nor did You forget the work of Your hands (Is. 64:7), You visited him in various ways (Is. 4:31).* The preparation for the advent of our Saviour was made *in many ways by the prophets (Heb. 1:1), the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes (Ps. 19:8), spirits sent out to serve (Heb. 1:14).* But when the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4), *he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (Heb. 1:2), Who, being the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Heb. 1:3), thought it not robbery to be equal with You, God and Father (Phil. 2:6-7), being God before all ages (Jn. 1:1-2), He appeared on earth and lived with humankind (1 Tim. 3:16), Becoming incarnate from a holy Virgin (Mt. 1:25).*

The Son of God's work of salvation is presented in detail: *that He might change us in the likeness of the image of His glory (Phil. 3:21), Your only begotten Son, who is in Your bosom (Jn. 1:18), had to be born of woman, born under the law (Gal. 4:4), to condemn sin in His flesh (Eph. 2:15), so that those who died in Adam may be brought to life in Him (1 Cor. 15:22), He lived in this world, and gave us precepts of salvation (Jn 3:17), Releasing us from the delusions of idolatry (1 Tim. 1:9), He acquired us for Himself, as His chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9), having cleansed us by water (Eph. 5:25).* The work of our Saviour reaches its climax in His death, Resurrection and Assumption: *He gave Himself as a ransom to death (Eph. 5:2), descending into Hades through the cross, that He might fill all things with Himself (1 Pet. 3:18-19), He loosed the bonds of death (1 Cor. 15:25-26), He rose on the third day (1 Cor. 15:4), having opened a path for all flesh to the resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20) since it was not possible that the Author of life would be dominated by corruption (Acts 2:27), he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3), He will render to each one according to his works (Rom. 2:6).* The end of the prayer conjures up the willing death of Christ our Saviour (Jn. 18:4), Who left us memories of His Passion (Lk. 22:19), thus introducing the anamnestic moment (1 Cor. 11:23-24).

We have resorted to this manner of presentation to be able to easily observe how naturally Saint Basil introduces in the anaphora this succession of formulations taken alternatively from the Old and from the New Testament. For us, this is precisely the strong argument in favour of understanding the Holy Scripture as a unitary reality,

due to the conviction of the Fathers that, both in the Old and in the New Testament, it was the same Spirit Who spoke. Nonetheless, in the case of the two prayers, we have the possibility of noticing that the liturgical act makes us contemporary and subject to this wonderful history of salvation, allowing us to distinguish in the profane history the eschatological meaning of the created existence.

The presence of the Old Testament in the liturgical anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil represents an argument for the presence of the Scripture in the Eastern liturgical practice. However, the possibility of partaking in God's Word can also be seen in the other moments of the Holy Liturgy. St. Nicholas Cabasilas speaks about them and their function within the Liturgy. His interpretations regarding the presence and the meaning of Scripture readings within the Liturgy are explicit and give testimony of the organic connection which exists between the revealed Word and the Holy Liturgy. St. Nicholas Cabasilas asserts that the biblical elements introduced in the liturgical order cleanse the eyes of the heart from the fog of materiality: "The readings from the Holy Scripture, which teach us God's goodness and love for people, as well as His justice and judgement, sow and trigger in our souls not only the love for Him but also the fear of Him, thus making us more ardent in the keeping of His commandments." (St. Nicholas Cabasilas 2004, 2, our translation). But St. Nicholas Cabasilas believed these songs and readings from the Holy Scripture, which were introduced in the order of the Holy Liturgy, had a double role; being "godly scriptures and words inspired by God, they sanctify the one who reads and sings them; yet, since they were chosen and ordered in a certain way, they also serve the other purpose, namely that of picturing the advent and life of Christ." (St. Nicholas Cabasilas 2004, 24, our translation) The Holy Gospel announces Christ, but it also embodies Him (St. Nicholas Cabasilas 2004, 29). Thus, "... nothing prevents them (the songs and writings from the Holy Scripture) from doing both things, meaning, on the one hand, from sanctifying the faithful and, on the other hand, from symbolising the *oikonomia* of Christ" (St. Nicholas Cabasilas 2004, 24, our translation).

The importance of reading the Gospel is overwhelming: the praise which both precedes and follows it is given by the faithful as people who know the Holy Gospel embodies Christ and that encountering Him represents the very purpose of our existence. It is towards this climax of encountering Christ that the readings from the Holy Scripture lead us, as they "prepare and cleanse us beforehand for the great sanctification of the Holy Sacraments" (St. Nicholas Cabasilas 2004, 32, our translation). And the end of the liturgical order is also enriched by words taken from the Holy Scripture: "Blessed

be the name of the LORD... and the others (Ps. 113:2; Dn. 2:20), which are followed by a psalm full of glory and gratitude: *I will bless the LORD at all times...* (Ps. 34:1 et seq.) (St. Nicholas Cabasilas 2004, 78, our translation).

Saint Maximus the Confessor writes on the reading of the Apostle within the Holy Liturgy, he believes that, by reading the Apostle within the Holy Liturgy, “we find what our duties are”, “we learn the laws of blessed godly fights, by which battling, we are found worthy of being crowned with triumph in the Kingdom of Christ” (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000, 18, our translation). Moreover, the reading of the Gospel “shows, to those who endeavour, the problems they will have for the word. Then, coming upon them from the sky, the Word of contemplation and knowledge, like a High Priest, removes the thought of the body as the sensitive world, chases away their thoughts which are directed towards the earth and makes them look towards the spiritual.” (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000, 19, our translation)

Conclusions

The text of the Holy Scripture is an accomplishment, a presence, and a partaking of the Spirit. The Scripture is thus an introduction in the scope of the Holy Spirit throughout history, both in the past and in the present, it accompanies us towards knowing God and towards testifying this eternal truth: a truth which the Jewish thinking and, later, the Church confirmed by stating the canonicity of the books of the Holy Scripture. Therefore, we read them – just like the Church Fathers ever since the beginning of the Church – in Christ’s light, it is Him that we find/recognise hidden in their words, it is of Him that we partake in the liturgical space by reading the Scripture – the Word of all words.

References

Basarab, Mircea. *Interpretarea Sfintei Scripturi în Biserica Ortodoxă* [Interpretation of the Holy Scripture in the Orthodox Church]. Cluj-Napoca: Alma Mater, 2005.

Breck, John. *Sfânta Scriptură în tradiția Bisericii* [The Holy Scripture in the Tradition of the Church]. Translated by Ioana Tămăian. Cluj-Napoca: Patmos, 2003.

Chirilă, Ioan. “Le Psautier de David – La Torah sous forme lyrique?” *Studii Teologice* [Theological Studies] 4 (2015): 15-32.

Chirilă, Ioan. “Teologia Sionului – ca element de fundamentare a comuniunii și a comunității credinței” [The Theology of Zion – as an Element for the Founding of

Christian Communion and Community]. In *Misiunea parohiei și a mănăstirii într-o lume în continuă schimbare* [The Mission of the Parish and of the Monastery in a World Undergoing Continuous Change]. Edited by Vasile Stanciu and Cristian Sonea, 19-27. Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2016.

Chirilă, Ioan. Foreword to *Studii de teologie biblică* [Studies on Biblical Theology], by Konstantin Nikolakopoulos, Translated by Ioan-Vasile Leb and Ilie Ursa, 10-14. Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2008.

Coman, Constantin. *Erminia Duhului. Texte fundamentale pentru o ermineutică duhovnicească* [The Interpretation of the Spirit. Fundamental Texts for a Spiritual Hermeneutics]. Bucharest: Bizantină, 2002.

Florovsky, Georges. *Biblie, Biserică, Tradiție. O perspectivă ortodoxă* [Bible, Church, Tradition. An Orthodox Perspective]. Translated by Radu Teodorescu. Alba-Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2006.

Justin Martyr. *The Dialogue with Trypho. Translation, introduction, and notes*. Translated by A. Lukyn Williams. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930.

Liturghier [Service Book]. Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2012.

Miller, J. Maxwell, and John Hayes. *A history of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986.

Pașca-Tușa, Stelian. "Psalmul 119 [118] – elogiul liric al Torei: de la Scriptură spre Liturghie" [Psalm 119 [118] – the Lyrical Laudatory Speech of the Torah: from the Scripture to the Liturgy]. In *Imnografia liturgică bizantină. Perspective critice* [Byzantine Liturgical Hymnography. Some Critical Perspectives]. Edited by Alexandru Ioniță, 304-345. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2019.

St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher. *Dialogul cu iudeul Trifon* [Dialogue with Trypho]. In *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești 2* [The Fathers of the Church 2]. Translated by Olimp Căciulă. Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1980.

Sf. Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia, cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii* [Mystagogy, Cosmos and Soul, as Images of the Church]. Translated by Dumitru Stăniloae. Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2000.

St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *Tâlcuirea Dumnezeieștii Liturghii* [A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy]. Electronic edition. Apologeticum, 2004.