

STUDYING THE BIBLE

It is curious to note that, while the Bible is the hottest-selling book in America, it is the least read! One theologian recently commented that more people read TV Guide on a daily basis than the Bible!

No doubt many Orthodox Christians possess a variety of Bibles. They make great Church School

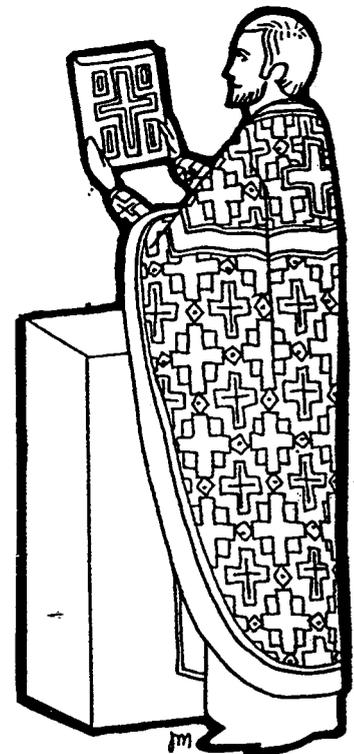
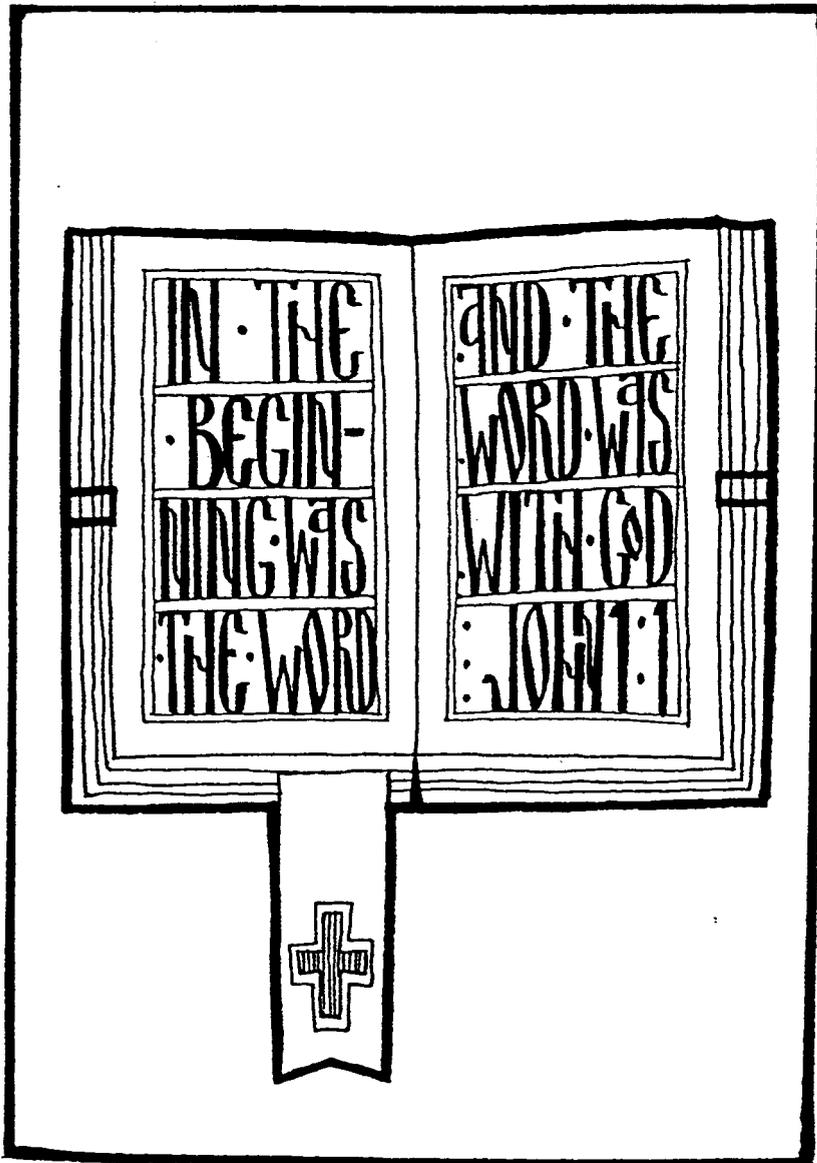
perfect attendance awards and Christmas gifts. Yet they often collect dust on the shelf while TV Guide is literally fought over on a nightly basis.

While we enjoy calling ourselves "people of the Book," we often neglect reading "the Book" which we so avidly proclaim, and in the

process we fail to fully grasp the meaning of our faith.

How can we overcome this syndrome and make our actions speak as loudly as our words? Dr. George Cronk, author of *The Message of the Bible*, lists several reasons why Orthodox Christians should study the Scriptures.

• According to Holy Tradition,



open your bible

What does 2 Timothy 3:16 say about the Scriptures? (Underline the correct answer.)

- a.) Some of the Bible is inspired by God.
- b.) There are a few parts that are not inspired.
- c.) All of it is inspired by God.
- d.) Only the parts that speak to us in a personal way are inspired by God.

In 1 Corinthians 2:13

- a.) How did Paul learn and speak the mysteries of God? _____
- b.) Did the Holy Spirit teach general ideas or actual words? _____

How did God give us His written Words? (2 Peter 1:20-21) _____

From Jeremiah 30:1-2 and Isaiah 30:8

- a.) What were these Prophets told to do? _____

- b.) How did they learn what to speak and write?

Of what can we know about God's Word?

- a.) Proverbs 30:5 _____
- b.) Psalm 111:7-8 _____
- c.) 1 Peter 1:24-25 _____

The Bible is the most remarkable book ever written. The writing was done by about 40 individuals of several countries and many occupations. They wrote over a period of about 1500 years and in 3 languages — Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Yet the Bible is a well-organized unity with one great theme and central Figure — Jesus Christ. All of this would be impossible unless the Bible had one Author — and it did — the Holy Spirit Himself.

the Bible is divinely inspired. It is the authentic record of God's revelation of Himself and His will to His creation. The message found in the Scriptures is divine. The church received, acknowledged and authenticated it, testifying to its truthfulness and genuineness. Because the Scriptures are the primary source of truth concerning the nature of God, those who speak Truth must study the Bible.

- The Bible is the inspired record of God's revelation — His Word to humanity concerning Himself and His Kingdom — specifically addressed to His people, the Church. Not only is the Bible addressed to God's people, it was produced by them as well. It is significant that the Bible is the creation of an entire community of believers. Each author was inspired by God, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and stirred to record the message which God revealed.

- The Bible, as the verbal icon of God, is unique because it is God's Word written in human form. It is a spiritual message, a divine call relevant to all time and all people, recorded by humans. As such, we can read and study God's Word. We can pray over it and meditate upon it. The Bible is relevant to all times and all people because, even though society progresses in many ways, human nature remains the same. Our relationship with the Creator is unchangeable. Therefore, the Bible can never be called outdated.
- The liturgical life of the Orthodox Church is rooted in and expressive of Holy Scripture. In fact, the Divine Liturgy alone contains 98 quotations from the Old Testament and 114 from the New. The Bible is read almost constantly during the services. In addition, the Gospels are placed on the altar table, testifying to the belief that

everything in the Bible is fulfilled and perfected in Jesus Christ. One's understanding of and participation in Orthodox worship is enhanced by the study and understanding of the Holy Bible.

- The Bible is the foremost expression of Holy Tradition, the living experience of God's people. To avoid being cut off from Orthodoxy, one must strive to comprehend the Church's doctrinal foundations and express them by way of a living faith. Basic comprehension demands the serious study of the content and meaning of the Bible.

THE CHURCH'S BOOK

The Bible is the Book of the Church — not a book about the Church. The Bible reflects that which transpired between God and His people, authorized, edited and authenticated by the Church. In short, the Bible was composed *in* the Church, *by* the church and *for*

ne Church.

The Bible is also considered the Book of books for two reasons.

• **The Bible is actually a collection of books**, compiled and edited in Hebrew and Greek by about 40 different authors over approximately 1500 years. God, however, is its divine Author.

• **The Bible is the primary record of God's revelation**, the unmatched testimony of the faith held by God's people. It has no equal in value and authority. As the foremost product of Holy Tradition, it is the basic source of Orthodox teaching and life. While it contains a certain amount of historical data, its chief function is to reveal God's love and man's response to that love.

HEAVENLY RECORDS

It is important to remember that as a book, the Bible is the record of God's revelation, but not revelation itself. *Someone*, not *something*, is revealed, and that someone is Jesus Christ. This distinction allows us to see in the Bible a dynamic relationship and interaction between the Word of God and the words of men. We recognize the relationship between the spirit and the letter of the Bible. The record of God's revelation neither exhausts nor excludes other records of experiences with God and, as such, the Bible is not the only source of our faith. God did not stop conver-

sing with us after the Bible was completed.

In addition to the Bible, Orthodoxy acknowledges other sources by which God reveals Himself to us. Among them are the liturgical worship, the hymns and art of the Church, the doctrinal and moral formulations of the seven Ecumenical Councils, the writings of the Holy Fathers, and the lives of the saints. While the Bible is the primary source of God's revelation, at the center of both liturgical and theological life, it is not the only source.

THE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE

In a nutshell, the Bible's message is *salvation*. Throughout all the many and diverse books which make up the Bible, God's plan for the salvation of mankind is outlined and revealed.

In the first chapters of Genesis, we learn about God's original plan for creation. Humanity, created in God's image and likeness, had the potential for perfect communion with God. But instead of pursuing this potential, humanity freely cut itself off from the Source of Life, thereby rejecting God's will and love. All creation fell; evil, sin, and death entered the world.

From this point on, the power of evil played a great role in human history. The Bible recounts the continual struggle for spiritual survival in a world ruled by evil.

God did not abandon His crea-

tion, however, and promised to send a Savior or Messiah to restore communion with Him. Creation was in need of salvation, salvation by God Himself.

Throughout the Old Testament, God prepares His people for His fullest revelation, the coming of His Son, the promised Savior. The New Testament records this most perfect revelation. Christ came into the world as a human being, thereby identifying completely with His creation. He suffers and dies in order to abolish suffering and death; He is raised from the dead in order to reveal God's ultimate plan of salvation for all of us; and He sends the Holy Spirit to abide with His renewed creation until He comes again.

SPEAK TO ME, LORD!

Those who recorded God's revelation were guided in their writing by God Himself. They were divinely inspired. Hence, Orthodoxy recognizes the Bible as free of error or contradiction.

However, it must be understood that Orthodox Christians do not insist upon a literal interpretation of every statement contained in the Scriptures. Certain historical or scientific data contained in the Bible is of little significance. In other words, how or when something happened is not nearly as important as why it did.

Convinced? Then throw away that *TV Guide* and open your Bible! ■

HUNGRYMIND

List some of the reasons why Orthodox Christians should study the Bible on a regular basis.

Why is the Bible the revealed Word of God? Who is its author?

What do we mean when we say that the Bible "was composed in the Church, by the Church, and for the Church"?

How does St. Paul describe the value of the Bible in 2 Timothy 3:14-17? What can we learn from the Bible?

What does the word "gospel" mean? What is the meaning of the word, "epistle"? How is the Word

of God described in the following passages: Psalm 33:4-9, Psalm 118:81-105; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Matthew 8:16.

What do these passages tell us about the Bible: Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 John 1:1-2,5; Colossians 1:16-17.

Why were the Epistles written?

Read John 20:30-31; 21:24-25. What two important criteria are established for the writing of the Gospel?

What is the overall message of the Bible?

Outline God's plan of salvation as revealed in the scriptures.