



Abstracts

Fourth Annual Academic Symposium

This portion of the Symposium is open by invitation only. Scholars and students interested in attending the presentations and discussion on October 17 & 18 are asked to email the organizers at symposium@svots.edu.

Fr. George Parsenios

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology; PhD, Yale

Characters in the Divine Drama of Salvation

Biblical interpretation is normally understood as an exercise in abstracting meaning from the biblical text in the form of a homily, a lecture, or a book. A more primary form of biblical interpretation, however, is a life lived in accordance with the message of Scripture. One's daily existence becomes an interpretation of the Gospel message, where the interpretive struggle is not centered on the effort to master ancient languages or ancient history, but on the need to modify ingrained habits and incorrigible shortcomings. By examining the *Letters to Olympias* by St. John Chrysostom, the *Kontakia* of St. Romanos the Melodist, and chapters 1–4 of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, this paper will explore different ways in which Sts. Paul, Chrysostom, and Romanos use characters and events from Scripture in order to forge a Christian character in their listeners and disciples. Paul, Chrysostom, and Romanos help their listeners to understand themselves anew, no longer as people whose “story” is delimited by their lives in Corinth, Antioch, or Constantinople, but as characters playing their proper role in a different narrative—the divine drama of salvation expressed in Scripture.

Lydia Gore-Jones

St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College; PhD, MacQuarie

Liturgical Setting as the Sitz-im-Leben of Biblical Interpretation: Using Scripture in Orthodox Lent as an Example

One essential aspect of Orthodox Christian biblical scholarship is the dynamic interaction between text and context, or more specifically, between Scripture and liturgy. This is because the liturgical context is the predominant—if not the only—life-setting, the *Sitz-im-Leben*, within which biblical texts are heard and interpreted by Orthodox Christians. An ideal example to illustrate this dynamic relationship is the Lenten season. Scripture use in Orthodox Lent can be observed as in four ways: 1) *tota lectio*, i.e., reading Genesis, Isaiah, and Proverbs as whole texts; 2) tropological interpretation or moral application, such as through the *Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete*; 3) hymnic adaptation of scriptures, such as the chanted Isaiah verses in “God is with us”; and 4) hagiographical interpretation, or scriptures personified in the life of saints, such as the Life of St. Mary of Egypt, which is read liturgically. This case study intends to demonstrate how scriptures give meaning to feasts and celebrations, while the liturgical setting in turn interprets scriptures definitively to make texts “make sense.” It is also the liturgical context that creates tangible connections with other contexts in which texts are encountered: their historical context, their literary context, and their reception history, including patristic, hymnographical, and hagiographical interpretations of biblical texts.

Fr. Silviu Bunta

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Before Method: On Coherence as the Limit of Orthodox Exegesis

This talk argues that, contrary to common expectations and assumptions, Orthodox exegesis (by which I don't mean exegesis happening in the Church, but happening as Church) frustrates any quest for procedure or method. Furthermore, although examples of this frustration abound, this paper, which proceeds theoretically (in the etymological sense of the word) and syntactically rather than experimentally and analytically, points to the conclusion that this exegesis, in its greatly varying forms—icons, hymnography, commentary, etc.—is closed off to etic approaches. Such approaches will obscure what the language in front of them wishes to do precisely to the extent to which they—by their own standards—will succeed. The only clarity to be gained from without is coherence but not method or system.

Fr. Michael Azar

University of Scranton; PhD, Fordham

“Beyond what the Law Requires”: The Metabolic Telos of Orthodox Biblical Scholarship

While emphasizing that Orthodox Christianity does not, by and large, share the environment and conceptual canons that gave rise to modern biblical studies, this paper suggests that the most consequential moments of conflict for Orthodox biblical scholarship arise not in the tools or methods of interpretation per se (here, the Orthodox can learn from the precision/*akribeia* of biblical criticism), but in the telos or terminus of the act of interpretation itself. For the Orthodox biblical scholar, the chief terminus is not in analytically fixing meaning in the text but in metabolizing the text—the raw ingredients of Scripture—into nourishment for the spiritual formation of the people of God. This metabolic telos becomes the guide for adopting or setting aside—with *akribeia*—the canons of modern biblical scholarship. Having a telos that is beyond a mere faithfulness to the canons of modern biblical criticism, Orthodox biblical scholarship, as Basil of Caesarea says of Christian approach to Torah, does not necessarily act in neglect of salient standards but goes “beyond what the law requires.”

Fr. Eugen Pentiu

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology; PhD, Harvard

MT and LXX in Tandem: Searching for the Hebraica Veritas

As the phrase “in tandem” used in the title intimates, my paper tries to show the mutual benefits of an intense, deep conversation between MT and LXX, the two main “textual witnesses” of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Since there is no extant autograph or “original,” but only copies on all textual transmission tracks, I prefer “witnesses” over the older term “versions”—MT, LXX, S, V are simply textual witnesses of a lost “original” Hebrew Bible. The physical artifact (manuscript) or “original wording,” rather, are thought experiments. The current paper deals with two case study texts, Gen 4:7 and Ps 22/21:16/17, as attested by MT and LXX. The paper is not an exclusivist endorsement of either of the two textual witnesses discussed here (i.e., MT, LXX), even though the “original language” (Hebrew, for the Old Testament) in which the divine revelation has been distilled plays an important role. Instead, this paper wants to be a stimulus for a dispassionate conversation among various textual witnesses (the more, the better—with the further addition of S, V, and others) aimed at the reconstruction of the “original wording” of the Hebrew Scriptures viewed as a multifaceted diamond (see EBAF’s new series B.E.S.T.), hence the title inspired by Jerome, “Searching for the Hebraica Veritas.”

Michael C. Legaspi

St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary; PhD, Harvard

On the Use of History in Biblical Interpretation

In the discipline of biblical studies, history is not merely a component of responsible interpretation but rather the basic, underlying frame of mind from which various interpretive strategies derive their shape and coherence. It is not an *element* of scholarship as much as the *idiom* in which scholarly arguments about the Bible are expressed and adjudicated. Academic biblical interpreters may go beyond historical analysis in their interpretive work, but most contend, at some basic level, with the what-ness and historical depth of the Bible. Recognizing that Orthodox engagement with Scripture is not “pressured” by historical analysis in the same way, this paper considers whether “history” is or need be a determining factor in academic Orthodox biblical interpretation. It asks whether the prominence of pattern and figural reading in the Tradition problematizes notions of “biblical historiography” and, relatedly, whether biblical texts themselves bear witness to a distinctive, non-historicistic way to conceive our relation to the past.

Fr. Daniel York

Orthodox Church in America Diocese of the West; PhD, Durham

The Mother of the Light: Toward a Marian Reading of the Genesis Priestly Creation

The Genesis priestly creation may be read along the lines of a birth. In some sense the light becomes the firstborn of the earth, thus making the coming forth of creation birth-like. Through this quasi-birth, the earth becomes the mother of the light. In this way, Genesis frames and patterns how the Gospel accords itself to Israel's Scriptures even as it fills out the same theological subject matter once "the true light comes into the world" (John 1:9). Thus, that the light should come into the world through birth need not be surprising for readers of Genesis. In its own discrete voice and semantic potentiality, Genesis shines light on how the church speaks about Mary as the Mother of the Light. But reading Genesis in a Marian key also helps us to apprehend better how the priestly creation figures a kind of primeval birth. In the end, the paper exemplifies in practice what Orthodox biblical interpretation may constructively look like.

Rebecca Luft

St. Herman Theological Seminary; PhD, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago

Old Testament Law and the Mystagogy of Priestly Ordination

The sharp division between theology and Bible in the modern academy means that a patristic interpretation of biblical texts is not accepted as a legitimate approach to biblical exegesis, unless it is located within the subcategory of Reception History. Nevertheless, the field of Biblical Studies tends to minimize the value of patristic interpretation because it is mostly based on the Greek text of the OT and the typological and allegorical methods de-historicize the OT. In other words, the Fathers are not viewed as legitimate scholars in the modern sense because they do not use historical-critical methods. The academic discipline thus functions as gatekeeper who prevents the encroachment of outsiders. This presentation traces the trajectory of a biblical scholar as she develops a self-reflexive "Orthodox" biblical hermeneutics centered, not on the Fathers, but on apocalyptic, the ancient Israelite cult, and ancient and modern theories of visibility.

Fr. Cosmin Pricop

Bucharest/Zürich; PhD, Bucharest

Orthodox Biblical Exegesis between Biblical Criticism, Patristic Interpretation, and Liturgical Reception

The starting point of this paper is the observation that, today, biblical exegesis within the Orthodox tradition—or the exegesis carried out by contemporary Orthodox biblical scholars—faces three significant and interrelated challenges. The first is biblical criticism, particularly the historical-critical method with its well-known developments, refinements, and diverse ramifications. The second is the patristic interpretation of Scripture, that is, the continuous recourse to the exegesis of the Holy Fathers as a source of theological authority and hermeneutical guidance. The third concerns the liturgical reception of biblical texts, or, more concisely, the dynamic relationship between the Bible and the Liturgy. Engaging with each of these three areas, Orthodox biblical scholarship can extract constructive insights that reinforce its distinctive exegetical tradition. At the same time, it is invited—and indeed challenged—to rethink, reexamine, and reformulate other aspects of its interpretive approach, ensuring that its reading of Scripture remains both faithful to tradition and responsive to contemporary scholarly discourse.

James “Bru” Wallace

Christian Brothers University; PhD, Emory

Does an “Orthodox Perspective” on Exegesis Illumine or Avoid Evidence? First Corinthians 15:23-28 as a Test Case

An “Orthodox perspective” should not become a blinder for ignoring or dismissing the evidence that has emerged from critical study of the Bible. Orthodox biblical scholars should cultivate an “Orthodox Perspective” insofar as we draw on a distinctive set of traditions, resources, and habits of thought that might help all interpreters find new evidence, construe old evidence in new ways, and challenge prejudices that really are just that—prejudices with little to support them. Our own conclusions should not, however, be protected by a sacrosanct veil conjured by the words “Orthodox” or “tradition,” but be open to rigorous debate and challenge. This paper will interrogate the promises and pitfalls of an Orthodox perspective on exegesis through an examination of 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, which suggests that Christ will eventually hand His kingdom over to God. The Nicene Creed, however, explicitly rejects any suggestion that Christ’s reign will be limited. Church Fathers such as St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. John Chrysostom developed interpretations that vigorously defended the eternity of Christ’s kingdom—although by radically different arguments. What perspectives on the text do their interpretations provide? And if modern criticism provides better evidence for an interpretation that is at odds with the Creed, what are Orthodox scholars to do?