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Toward Understanding the Bible - Part 2 - New Testament

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1. The Historical Background.

The people among whom Jesus lived prided themselves on being children of Abraham and of Israel. The fortunes of the patriarchs, the growth of Jacob's family in Egypt into the nation of Israel, the deliverance of this family-nation from Egyptian bondage, the divine care for it during the forty years in the wilderness, the giving of institutions of worship and a code of moral and civil law, the settlement in the land which had been promised to their fathers —

these events along with the numerous miracles of those early ages were matters of common knowledge. They were familiar also with the exploits of the judges, the rise of the kingdom and the age of David, the erection of the first temple under the agency of Solomon, the division of the kingdom — permitted because of Solomon's sins, the continued sinfulness of the people and the preaching of the prophets to give warning, the captivity of the northern kingdom into Assyria and later of Judah, the southern kingdom, into Babylon, and the restoration of Judah, when Cyrus, the Persian who had conquered Babylon, permitted Jews under Zerubbabel to return to their homeland, to restore Jerusalem, and to build the second temple. Moreover, many of the reforms under Nehemiah, who was the last Old Testament political leader, persisted as social customs until the days of the New Testament.

Throughout the Old Testament the nation Israel is seen as a chosen people, separated from the rest of the world. Their advanced moral and civil code, the system of sacrifices given to them at Sinai — especially the sin offerings, the greater accountability in which they were held for waywardness from the high standards they had learned, the captivities into which they were permitted to go because of their lapses into idolatry, and withal the way in which the Jewish people were preserved — all these, as they are set forth in the Old Testament, make an important background of history for a study of the life and mission of the Lord Jesus.

But the New Testament is not just a continuation of the Old. A political situation vastly different from that described in the Old Testament Scriptures and a greatly changed social order are observed at the beginning of the New Testament. An intertestamental interval of more than 400 years came between the time of Nehemiah (last writer of Old Testament Scriptures) and that of John the Baptist. Governmentally this era falls into four epochs: the Persian, the Greek, the Maccabaeen, and the Roman.

The Persian Epoch. At the time of Nehemiah, the Persians were ruling over the Jews who had resettled in Palestine; and their rule continued until the fall of the Persian empire to Alexander the Great, or at least until the entry of Alexander into Jerusalem in 333 B.C. During this epoch the High Priest began to exercise civil as well as religious functions, and there first appeared the jealousy and the cleavage between the Jews and Samaritans. Also, the scribes, who became influential interpreters and the teachers of the Mosaic law, made their appearance as a distinct class during this epoch.

The Greek Epoch. This era lasted from the conquest of the land by Alexander until the heroic exploits of the Maccabaeen family, who achieved political independence for the Jewish community in Palestine. Under Alexander the Jews lived in comparative peace and prosperity. After the conqueror's death in 323 B.C., Judaea was first made a part of the Greek kingdom in Egypt whose capital was Alexandria, and whose kings are known in history as the Ptolemies. Their rule was sometimes tolerant and beneficent and sometimes cruel and tyrannical. The second Ptolemy was interested in the Jewish sacred books and had the Old Testament translated from Hebrew into Greek, which translation is known as the *Septuagint*. After 125 years under Egypt, the Jewish people and their homeland were seized by the Greek kings of Syria whose capital was Antioch. This epoch was brought to a close in a series of most violent oppressions and persecutions with much bloodshed, inflicted by Antiochus Epiphanes, known as one of the cruelest tyrants in all history and the prototype of the Antichrist. Many thousands of Jews were slain, and other thousands were sold into slavery. The temple at Jerusalem was desecrated and closed, and the Jewish people were forbidden to worship Yahweh or observe their religious customs, but were commanded to offer sacrifices to the Greek gods.

The Maccabaeen Epoch. The oppression and persecution inflicted on the Jews by Antiochus could not do otherwise than arouse resentment on the part of the faithful ones and inspire resistance at the first opportunity. In the little town of Modin, Mattathias, an aged priest, dared to refuse to offer a heathen sacrifice, as the king's officers had ordered him, and in open defiance of the tyrannical rulers, struck dead an apostate younger priest who volun-

teered to officiate. Then Mattathias and his five sons, aided by their fellow-townsmen, turned on the Greek officers and slew them all. Immediately the challenge went forth to all who were zealous for their traditions and the worship of Yahweh to rally to the hills around the brave old priest, with thousands responding. But Mattathias soon succumbed to the hardships of the camp and the infirmities of age; and leadership of the band of patriots passed to Judas, his third son, known in history as Judas Maccabaeus (Judas the Hammerer). Without doubt, Judas was the most illustrious figure in Jewish history between David and Jesus. Against overwhelming odds this praying genius of battle, won five of the most brilliant victories recorded in history. After one of these victories he led an army of rejoicing citizens into Jerusalem (165 B.C.) to reopen the temple, which had been closed for three years, to cleanse it and its furnishings from the defilement which Antiochus had put upon them, and to dedicate it anew to the service of the true God. At last Judas fell in battle with an overwhelming Syrian-Greek horde, but the fight for freedom went on, led by his undaunted brothers. Jonathan, youngest of the five, a shrewd diplomat, having taken the reins of leadership, secured important concessions for his people from a rival claimant to the throne in Antioch who later came into power.

When Jonathan was treacherously assassinated, Simon, the oldest of the sons of Mattathias, took up leadership in the cause. In 144 B.C. he achieved for his oppressed people full freedom from the Greeks, both through his bravery in battle and by his wise statesmanship. As these heroes were of the priestly family, they served in a double capacity — as political rulers, and as high priests in the cleansed and restored temple. At length Simon, like his brother Jonathan, was betrayed and slain along with two of his sons; but a third son, John Hyrcanus, was quick to take the reins of leadership. After successful struggles to establish his power in the face of the Greek sympathizers, this ruler led a series of expeditions against hostile neighboring tribes, particularly the Idumaeans to the south and the Samaritans to the north. Later he suppressed the unfriendly activities of the tribes that lived east of the Jordan. By these operations he extended the boundaries of his country until they embraced all the lands of the Old Testament twelve tribes.

But succeeding generations were not always as unselfish in spirit or as genuinely patriotic as Mattathias and his sons. A son of Hyrcanus assumed the title King of the Jews with royal pomp, at the same time retaining the high priest's office and function. There were family jealousies and murder in the scramble for the throne and the high priesthood, and at times the people were sorely oppressed.

It was about this time that the sects, the *Sadducees* and the *Pharisees*, appeared. Fundamentally, the difference between these groups was religious; but during the Maccabean epoch they became more or less political parties, the Pharisees being the party of the common people and the supporters of the revolution, and the Sadducees the party of the wealthy aristocrats and sympathizers with the Greeks.

The Roman Epoch. For centuries the power of the Romans in the west had been rising. Their victorious armies were subduing kingdoms around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and far into the interior, bringing them under Roman rule; nor was the little kingdom of the Jews to escape. A quarrel between two brothers for the high priesthood and the Jewish throne was the occasion for the Romans to seize the country and establish their power over it. When Pompey, the Roman general, came into the country, each of the brothers appealed to the invader for aid on his side of the quarrel. Before Pompey rendered a decision, the younger of the two brothers, who was the more aggressive and in many respects the stronger, seized the city of Jerusalem and fortified it against the Romans. After a long and bloody siege the Romans entered the city. They took the ambitious younger brother and his two sons as prisoners, and making Judaea a Roman province, named the older of the brothers, and the more peace-loving, as high priest and *ethnarch*. This latter appellation was an empty title, for the real ruler of the country was Antipater, a crafty Idumaeen chieftain who never lost an

opportunity to increase his own power or advance the interests of his family. He was soon given the title procurator, that is, guardian of the country for the Romans.

Upon the death of Antipater by assassination in 43 B.C. his son **Herod** (known in history as Herod the Great) became the ruler. After six years of bloody war with the last claimant of the Maccabean throne and with the invading Parthians, Herod was named King of Judaea by the Romans. His reign was marked by insane jealousy and ruthless bloodshed. He did not hesitate to put to death any who opposed him, or who seemed to obstruct or hinder his rule or his purposes. Among those executed were three of his own sons, his favorite wife, Marianne, and her brother, whom he had shortly before appointed high priest. He was the king when Jesus was born; and his action in having all the young boys of Bethlehem put to death, in order to be rid of One who was reportedly born King of the Jews, is well known. Herod was a builder: he rebuilt many of the cities which had been ravished in the wars. Best known of his building projects was the replacing of Zerubbabel's temple, erected five centuries before, with the magnificent structure which was in use during the life of Jesus.

According to the provisions of Herod's will, his kingdom was to be divided among three of his sons: Archelaus was to be king in Judaea and Samaria, Antipas (the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded) was to be tetrarch in Galilee and Peraea, and one Philip tetrarch in Itruraea and Trachonitis, a region east of the Sea of Galilee. When he died in 4 B.C., the Roman senate confirmed this arrangement, except that Archelaus was named *ethnarch* of Judaea instead of king.

Archelaus was a weakling, as cruel as his father, but not so efficient as a ruler. After ten years of misrule the Romans found it necessary to remove him; and at the request of many Jews, Judaea was put under a procurator — or governor — sent directly from Rome. **Pontius Pilate**, who gave the death sentence against Jesus, was the fifth such governor sent to Judaea.

Political Situation During the Ministry of Jesus. In Luke 3:1 there is a general, though not quite complete, statement of the political situation during the active life of Jesus. The territory ruled by Pilate embraced Judaea and Samaria, all of which lay between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River; that ruled by Herod Antipas included Galilee west of the Jordan valley and Peraea east of that valley (spoken of in the Gospels as the region beyond Jordan). The tetrarchy of Philip lay east of the Sea of Galilee and the upper Jordan. Within the territory of Antipas and of Philip was a group of cities, inhabited mostly by Greeks, which were free from rule of the tetrarchs. Originally there were ten of those, joined in a loose league known as Decapolis. All of them were east of the Jordan.

The Religious Background.

The Jewish people of our Lord's day were intensely religious. Their history, as it appears in the Old Testament had been written altogether from a religious viewpoint. Their most brilliant heroes of the Intertestamental period were priests, who led the revolt against foreign tyrants for religious reasons, and whose loyal followers were religious enthusiasts. In the years of oppression and bloodshed during the administration of Antipater as governor and the reign of Herod as king, many devout Jews, losing all hope that their nation would gain political freedom gave themselves to a study of the prophecies in their Scriptures and fondly indulged the hope of a coming Messiah-King. Their religious life was expressed in a system known today as Judaism which had been developed during the Intertestamental period from the Mosaic law and the prophets and the interpretative comments of the scribes.

Places of Worship.

In our Lord's day the Jewish people maintained two institutions of worship — the **temple** and the **synagogue**. There was one temple located at Jerusalem in which the priests

officiated at sacrifices and offerings. But there was a synagogue in which the Scriptures were read and interpreted in every town or village and even in many foreign cities.

The Temple. In the Old Testament, worship was largely by sacrificial offerings and ceremonial rites. There was very little congregational worship — singing public prayer or public reading of the Scriptures; and formal preaching was unheard of. The first central place of worship was the movable tabernacle built in the wilderness under the supervision of Moses about 1497 B.C.; it was followed by the temple of Solomon (1012-586 B.C.); and this in turn by the temple of Zerubbabel which was erected in 516 B.C. and endured until Herod the Great dismantled it in 23 B.C. so that he might erect a new one. In the new structure the temple proper was completed in a year and a half (22 B.C.), and the courtyards eight years later. The entire structure was not finished until A.D. 64, just six years before it was totally destroyed by the Romans.

The exact plan on which it was built is not known for certain, though many reconstructions of it have been drawn from information found in Josephus and in the Talmud. The whole area enclosed by the outside porch was about twenty-six acres. It included a Court of the Gentiles, a Court of the Women, a Court of the Israelites, a Court of the Priests, and the temple building proper. That building was the heart of the whole institution containing the holy place and the most holy place or Holy of Holies as did the tabernacle and the two temples before it.

As one “went up into the temple” from any direction he first entered the Court of the Gentiles through a porch supported by marble colonnades which surrounded the entire structure. The porch on the south end which was known as the Royal Porch had four rows of massive columns; those on the other three sides had only two. The colonnade on the east side which was backed by the east wall of the city was known as Solomon’s Porch (John 10:23; Acts 3:11; 5:12). The area immediately enclosed by these porches was called the Court of the Gentiles, because non-Jews might enter into it, but could proceed no farther into the temple. Without doubt, it was in the Court of the Gentiles that a market for sacrificial animals had been set up, along with tables for the money-changers, whose operations Jesus drove out on two occasions. Four gates opened into this court from the outside on the west, one on the north, one on the east, and according to most authorities, one on the south.

Within the Court of the Gentiles was the sacred enclosure, entered by nine gates — one on the east and four each on the north and the south. The gate on the east, leading into the Court of the Women, was the Beautiful Gate referred to in Acts 3:2-10. At each of these gates was a stone with a carved inscription warning all Gentiles, on pain of death, not to enter. The eastern part of the sacred enclosure was the Court of the Women, on a level nineteen steps higher than that of the Court of the Gentiles. In this court, of which the area has been estimated at from one to one and three fourths acres, were the treasury and chambers for storing facilities for various temple operations. Into this court both Jewish men and women might come, but it was as near to the altar or the House of God as the women could approach. On the west of the Court of the Women, and on a higher level, was the Court of the Israelites. Before the gate between the two courts within the Court of the Women were fifteen semicircular steps. The Court of the Israelites (men’s court) was little more than a corridor surrounding the Court of the Priests, from which it was separated by a low stone wall. In the Court of the Priests, which contained the large Altar of Burnt Offerings and the laver, the ritual of animal sacrifices was conducted.

Within the Court of the Priests, on the peak of Mount Moriah, twelve steps higher than the surrounding court, was the House of God, the temple proper. It had three parts: the porch and the chambers, which together surrounded the other two parts, the Holy Place, entered from the porch, and the Holy of Holies, behind the Holy Place. The walls, including those of the porch, were said to be 150 feet high. The Holy Place contained the table of shewbread, the golden candlestick (or lampstand), and the golden altar of incense, just as the Holy Place of the tabernacle of Moses had done. But there was no Ark of the Covenant in the

Holy of Holies; for that article, which had been the most sacred object in the tabernacle and in the temple of Solomon, was probably consumed in the flames that destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 B.C. In the Holy of Holies of Herod's temple (as of Zerubbabel's temple) there was only a flat stone, on which the high priest placed his censer and sprinkled the blood of the sin offering on the annual Day of Atonement, which was the only occasion on which that room was entered. It was separated from the Holy Place by a veil. It was this veil which was torn in two from top to bottom at the time of the death of our Lord.

As a place of worship the temple was designed for sacrificial ceremonies. Only during the feast seasons did people gather in the courts in considerable numbers, and no provision was made in it for congregational worship. Individuals would come to the temple for private prayer whenever they felt the need of it (Luke 18:10), and groups would gather in prearranged places for prayer meetings (Acts 3:1). The teaching done in the temple usually took place when interested crowds would gather around a teacher to ask questions or to hear what he had to say (Luke 20:1).

The Synagogue. Not all of the worship was centered in the temple. During the intertestamental period the synagogue had arisen, a local institution to which the Jewish people of each community came to worship — not with sacrifices, but with prayers and eulogies and the reading and interpreting of the law and the prophets. No mention of the synagogue is found in the Old Testament, but in the time of our Lord there was one in every town in Palestine, and in foreign cities where there were as many as ten Jewish households. The officials of the temple were the priests, but those of the synagogue were the synagogue-ruler, the elders, and the attendant. The synagogue-ruler arranged for the services. He appointed the leader for each service and selected the one who would read the law and the one who would read the prophets and those who would recite the interpretations of these Scriptures. The elders seem to have formed a sort of advisory board to assist the synagogue-ruler. The attendant combined the work of sexton and teacher, and usually executed the decisions of the other officers.

The order of the services seems to have been eulogies, benedictions, reading and interpretation of the law, reading and interpretation of the prophets, sermon, and benediction. The interpretations were stereotyped translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into the current Aramaic; they were usually given by a scribe if one was present. Any man might be called on to read the different portions of the Scriptures or for a sermon or exhortation, or a man might ask for the privilege of preaching. The benediction was usually pronounced by a priest if one was present; if not, by anyone. We learn from Luke 4:16 that the Lord Jesus was accustomed to regular attendance at the Synagogue in Nazareth and could be depended upon to take a part in the worship.

Times of Worship.

The important times of worship for the Jews of New Testament days were the weekly Sabbath and the annual feasts

The Sabbath. In the days of the Lord Jesus, and indeed throughout the Intertestamental Period, the Jews had great reverence for the Sabbath as a day of worship, particularly worship in the synagogues. Moses had delivered to the people of Israel rather stringent commandments concerning the Sabbath day (Exod. 20:6-11; 31:14-17; 35:2-3; Lev. 23:3; Num. 15:32-36), but the emphasis in these commandments was on resting on the Sabbath day rather than worshipping. In actual practice, it seems that from the settlement in the land of Canaan until the Babylonian Exile people were lax, if not negligent, in observance of the Sabbath. But it is very probable that during the Exile groups would gather on the Sabbath day for Scripture study, Psalm singing, and prayer. After the restoration of the people to their homes in Palestine, the reforms under Nehemiah reemphasized the Sabbath as a day of rest (Neh. 13:15-22); and with the institution of the Synagogue, it came to be a day of worship, also.

Before the time of the Lord Jesus many of the scribes, in emphasizing the law of the Sabbath, had gone to extremes in the matter of burden bearing and laboring on the Sabbath, and had laid down many rigid rules, and then had provided ways of escape from their own rulings by means that were just as foolish. One prominent cause of conflict between Jesus and the synagogue authorities was the disregard on His part for those Sabbath regulations which had been set forth by the scribes, but which were not in the law given through Moses.

The Feasts.

The Jews of New Testament times observed many religious feasts and fasts. We shall discuss six feasts and one fast, of which four of the feasts and the fast had their beginning in the law of Moses. The other feasts were of later origin.

The Feast of the Passover. (Exod. 12:1-20; Lev. 23:5-8; Num. 28:12-25). This was the oldest of the Jewish feasts, having been inaugurated in Egypt at the time of the Exodus. It celebrated the deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The people were commanded to meet from year to year in the city of the central place of worship (tabernacle or temple) and repeat the activities of the last night in Egypt. After making sure that no leaven was in the house where they were staying, they would kill the lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month (Abib, or Nisan), roast its meat, and as a group eat it that evening with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. By New Testament times the Jews had made changes in the details of observing the feast. The people would eat at ease rather than in haste, signifying that they were no longer in bondage to the Egyptians; they would pass a cup of wine around the table at intervals, and each one would take a sip from it; the sprinkling of the blood on the door posts and lintels seems to have been discontinued; and they would sing from Psalms 113-118 (the Hallel) during and after the meal.

Since the Jewish day ended, and a new day began at sunset, the actual eating was during the early hours of the fifteenth day of the month. The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed the Passover proper and lasted eight days, during which there were special sacred meals and sacrifices. The first day of the feast and the last day were holy convocations, regardless of what day of the week they fell on. Sometimes the whole occasion was spoken of as the Passover. The time of the year was March-April. Since Jesus was crucified at the time of the Passover and was raised from the dead on the third day thereafter, the Jewish Passover and the Christian Pascha, which celebrates the resurrection, come at the same season of the year.

The Feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-20 Num. 28:26-31). This was a feast of the first fruits of grain, coming fifty days after the Passover. It was a thanksgiving for the crops ready for harvest, and a presentation of the first fruits of the harvest to the Lord and to His priests. It is sometimes called the Feast of Weeks, because it came seven weeks — a week of weeks — after the Passover. The celebration was at the tabernacle or temple and lasted only one day. That day also was the anniversary of the giving of the law (the Ten Commandments) by the Lord God from Mount Sinai. To Christians it is familiar because on the day of this feast the Holy Spirit came with power upon the group of disciples who were the nucleus of the early Jerusalem church (Acts 2:1).

Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23-25; Num. 29:1-6). Every time this occasion is mentioned in the Bible, it is said to be the first day of the seventh month, but it has long been observed by the Jewish people as New Year's Day (Rosh Hashanah, Head of the Year). Probably even before the time of the Exodus from Egypt it had been celebrated as the beginning of the crop year, because it came after the harvest of the previous year's crops and before the sowing of the crops for the coming year. According to their civil calendar it was the beginning of the year, but according to their religious calendar it was the beginning of the second half of the year. It was a one-day feast observed at home.

The Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:1-34; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11). This day, probably the most sacred of the year for a devout Jew, was observed the tenth day of the seventh

month. The people remained at home, abstaining from food throughout the day (presumably occupied in confession, repentance, and prayer) while the high priest offered sin offerings to make atonement for the sins committed by the people during the past year. It was the only day during the year when he went into the Holy of Holies taking the blood of the sin offering.

The Feast of Tabernacles (Exod. 23:16; Lev. 23:34-44; Num. 29:12-40; Deut. 16:13-15 cf. Neh. 8:13-18). This was an eight-day feast beginning the fifteenth day of the seventh month in the religious calendar. Thus the people generally had just enough time to go from their homes to the tabernacle or temple after the Day of Atonement. Its purpose was probably twofold. It was a thanksgiving for the crops already gathered. It was therefore sometimes called the Feast of Ingathering (Exod. 23:16; 34:22). To this feast they would take the tithes of the previous year's harvest and increase of cattle. It also celebrated God's care for the Israelites during the forty years of wandering in the desert. Three practices engaged in during the week commemorated the providential care for their fathers. During the week the people dwelt in booths in imitation of their fathers dwelling in tents in the wilderness (Lev. 23:40-43; Neh. 8:14-15). Great candelabra with many lights were erected in the Court of the Women in commemoration of the pillar of fire which guided the people in the wilderness by night. On the last day of the feast a pitcher of water was brought from the pool of Siloam by the multitude and poured out with great ceremony at the foot of the altar in the Court of the Priests in commemoration of the water which the Israelites had received from the Lord out of the rock (Exod. 17:5-6; Num. 20:11). John has given an account of one Feast of Tabernacles which Jesus attended (ch. 7).

The Scriptures.

The Jews of New Testament times, including Jesus, regarded the Old Testament as the word of God (John 10:35). At that time they had come to think of their Scripture as composed of three groups of books: the Law, the five books of Moses; the Prophets, including many books of history as well as most of the books of prophecy; and the Writings, including the Psalms and many other books of our Old Testament (Luke 24:44). In their minds the books of the Law came from God through Moses (John 7:19, 9:28-29). Moses was insistent that the commandments and the other things he wrote should be received and kept as coming from God (Deut. 6:6; 31:9-13, 24-26) and from the time of the settlement in the land of Caanan these books of Moses were regarded as God's law (Josh. 1:8; 8:32-36). There were, however, long periods of neglect of the law. At the time of the captivity the Jews must have been permitted to take with them to Babylon copies of the law and of other treasured books — history and prophecy and the Psalms and books of wisdom. A new interest in the study of the law was stirred during the Babylonian Exile. At that time the Jewish captives, being in a strange land and deprived of their temple and their sacrificial system would gather in groups for a study of the law, the singing of the Psalms and prayer (Ezek. 8:1; Ps. 137).

Ezra who lived first at Babylon and then at Jerusalem shortly before the close of the Old Testament period, is credited with bringing together the books of the Old Testament. He was of the priestly family and he also designated himself "a ready scribe" (Ezra 7:1-6, 12). When he migrated to Jerusalem he aroused a lively interest in studying the sacred books so that from his days the Scriptures were the principal influence among the Jewish people.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew except for small portions of Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezra which were written in Aramaic — a language closely resembling Hebrew. About 250 B.C. a translation into Greek was made at Alexandria (Egypt) known as the *Septuagint* because the work was done by seventy scholars. That translation was made from a Hebrew text which differed slightly at many places from the text accepted by the scribes (the *Masoretic* text), but the Septuagint was very influential in New Testament times. In making quotations from the Old Testament, Jesus and the apostles would sometimes quote from the Hebrew and sometimes from the Septuagint, and that fact accounts for some differ-

ences between New Testament quotations from the Old Testament and the way those passages read in our Old Testament.

Many Jews in the days of Jesus had come to give to traditional interpretations of the law by the scribes equal weight of authority with the law itself. These are referred to in Matt. 15:2 and Mark 7:5 as the tradition of the elders. This tradition was gathered together in the third century A.D. in a work known as the Mishnah. By the end of the fourth century it had been enlarged with much other material into a voluminous work known as the *Talmud*, which has been authoritative for Jewish rabbis down to the present.

The fourteen books which we know as the *Apocrypha* or *Deuterocanonical* were in existence in the days of Jesus. First Maccabees probably sets forth authentic history and portrays inspiring examples of courageous loyalty to true religion; but the other books of this collection are of little historical or religious value. It is possible that they influenced to some extent the thought of the people of New Testament times. The early Christians, though they permitted these books to be read for edification, considered them not so important as the Canonical books.

Religious Sects and Classes of People.

Some of the influential groups or parties of the people mentioned in the Gospels were the priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the publicans, and the Samaritans. Besides these, there were the Essenes and other similar groups, who are not mentioned in the Bible, but who are thought by some Bible scholars to have been influential among the people during New Testament times.

The Priests. At the beginning of the history of Israel as a nation Aaron, the brother of Moses, of the tribe of Levi, was named high priest, and his sons were named priests with him. After that the priesthood and the high priesthood were hereditary in the family of Aaron. There came to be so many priests, that in the days of David they were grouped into twenty-four courses (I Chron. 23:1-10). A priest without special favor might serve in the temple only a few times in his life, and many who were of the priestly family never had an opportunity to serve. Apart from their function in the temple, there was doubtless an honor and dignity attached to priestly lineage. In Old Testament times one consecrated as high priest would normally serve for life but during the Intertestamental Period the foreign powers exercising rule began to claim the prerogative of appointing the high priest — of course confining the appointments to members of the priestly families. During the Maccabean epoch the high priest had significant political power; and after the Romans seized the country the high priest continued to exercise great influence, being *ex-officio* president of the Sanhedrin. Consequently the Roman rulers took to themselves the authority to appoint and to remove high priests. A high priest might (and many did) lose favor with a Roman ruler so that he would be displaced by another after serving only a short time.

Mention is frequently made in the Gospels of chief priests who were members of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was comprised of the high priest at the time, any person who had previously occupied that office, and probably also the heads of the twenty-four courses of priests.

The Scribes. The scribes as a class probably first appeared during the Babylonian Exile (Ezra 7:6). At first they were professional writers who made copies of the law for those who desired them. Since they would naturally soon know more about the law than anyone else they came in time to be teachers of the law and its interpreters. From among their number came the lawyers and the professional rabbis. The most learned among them were doctors of the law. The tradition of elders which was so highly regarded by the Pharisees was composed largely if not altogether of the interpretations of the law which the learned scribes had made.

The Pharisees. This group was doubtless the most influential of the religious sects of the time of Jesus. The roots of some of their practices may be seen in the reforms and the

prayers of Nehemiah (Neh. 13:14), but they had their beginning as a group with the struggles against the paganizing Greeks in the days of Mattathias and Judas Maccabaeus. At first they were called *Chasidim* (Separatists) because of their determination to keep themselves (and the nation as much as possible) from contaminating foreign influences. During the time of Jesus their distinguishing characteristic was the great emphasis they put on keeping the law. By their selfish *credit-seeking* conformity to legal requirements they sought to bring God under obligation to themselves. They regarded the interpretations by the scribes (the tradition of the elders) as equally authoritative with the written Law itself. They looked on themselves as righteous (and sometimes were so regarded by their fellows) and were highly critical of others. Those who disregarded their rules and standards were called sinners. They believed in the existence of angels, in life after death, and in a future resurrection of the unjust and the just. In general, they were the conservative element of Judaism.

The Sadducees. The Sadducees were opposed to the Pharisees. For the most part, they were priests who were willing to compromise their Jewish principles for favors from the foreign rulers. Probably they began to appear as a separate class during the closing years of the Greek period. They took their name from Zadok, the priest who was faithful to David and Solomon when Abiathar, the other priest, fell away to Adonijah (I Kings 1:32-34). Their distinguishing doctrines and characteristics were: they denied the existence of angels, the immortality of the soul, and any idea of a future resurrection. They rejected the "tradition of the elders" and the so-called oral law, accepting as authoritative only the written Old Testament. They were severe in their judgment, and were not very popular with the common people.

The Publicans. When the Romans conquered Judaea and made it a part of the Empire, they imposed Roman taxes on the people. The publicans were Jews who collected those taxes for the Romans. Ordinarily, tax collecting was a lucrative employment, because the collectors paid a stipulated amount to the Romans and took from the people what they saw fit, or what they could. But the publicans were hated by the people generally because they were collecting the taxes for the foreign conquerors, and they frequently extorted from the people more than was due, and consequently were rich. Of course, the publicans did not pretend to keep the Jewish law with any degree of exactness, and they were usually classed with the sinners. Jesus was called a friend of the publicans because He was willing to receive those that came to Him, and to accept the hospitality of those who invited Him into their homes; but of course He did not condone their extortion.

The Samaritans were a mixed race. They were descended from those Israelites of the northern kingdom who were left in the country when northern Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians, and of the foreigners that came to live around the city of Samaria. They worshipped Yahweh, but in their worship they mingled many heathen ideas. During the Persian epoch they built a temple on Mt. Gerazim, in which their priests officiated for about 275 years. This temple was destroyed by John Hyrcanus (121 B.C.) and was never rebuilt; but the Samaritans continued to worship on and around Mt. Gerazim. The Jews despised them because of the impurity of their race and because of the readiness with which they made religious compromises with the Greeks and other foreigners. They are still in existence today, but their number has dwindled to a few hundred. They possess a very ancient manuscript of the books of Moses, which is of great value in the study of the Old Testament.

The Essenes. Josephus, the historian, and Philo, the philosopher, tell in their writings of a Jewish sect known as Essenes, who lived during the first century. These people are not mentioned in the Bible. Some of them lived in groups or quarters to themselves in many of the cities and villages of the land, but those about whom most has been written lived like monastics, withdrawn from the world on the west shore of the Dead Sea, supposedly near the town of Engedi. In some matters the teachings of these people resembled those of the Pharisees, but they renounced worldly wealth and followed a rigid schedule of holy living. They did not practice animal sacrifices but sent other gifts to the temple in Jerusalem. The greater part of them renounced marriage and all activities for pleasure. New members were put

through three years of rigorous trial during which at intervals certain secret knowledge was imparted to them. In fact, in some respects, they resembled a secret order.

Interest in this group has been revived by the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* in 1947 and later, which has brought to light a similar group that lived at Qumran, a considerable distance north of Engedi but also near the Dead Sea. Some scholars maintain that these were the Essenes, and that Qumran was their place of residence rather than Engedi. But the customs and teachings of that group differ considerably from those related by Josephus and Philo. Some scholars have held that John the Baptist came under the influence of these groups. But evidence for such a view is far from convincing — indeed, to me, some of the conclusions suggested seem to be arbitrary and unrelated to the evidence offered.

The Sanhedrin.

The word Sanhedrin is not found in our English New Testament, but in the Greek original repeated mention is made of a council or court composed of the chief priests, elders, and scribes. This council is not spoken of in the Old Testament; it probably arose during the Intertestamental Period, possibly in the Maccabaeon epoch. It included seventy-one members chosen from the three groups most influential with the people. The high priest was always one of its two presidents. The place of its meeting is not certain; the Talmud indicates that it was the Hall of Hewn Stone in the temple, but Josephus mentions the meeting place as outside the temple. The membership included both Sadducees and Pharisees.

During New Testament times it had authority in religious and most civil matters, and limited authority in criminal matters. In cases involving capital punishment, approval of the Roman procurator, or governor, was required before execution of the sentence. Regularly there were no sessions at night, or on a Sabbath day. A sentence of capital punishment could not be passed on the day of the trial. The decision of the judges had to be examined on the following day.

The Messianic Hope.

Many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah or Christ are found in the Old Testament. Sometimes the prophecies are dim, but understandable to us when we view them through the New Testament records as glasses, as in Gen. 3:15, where it is merely stated that *the Seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent while the serpent would merely bruise the heel of the promised Seed*; but in many of them the promise is clear and assuring. A great many of the prophecies promise a glorious kingdom presided over by a God-sent King who would deliver His people from their enemies and reign in righteousness; and repeatedly it was foretold that this king would be of the lineage of David (Ps. 89:3-4; Isa. 11:1-10; Jer. 23:5-6). The Jews of the Intertestamental Period, suffering from misrule and oppression of the Greeks and the Romans, found comfort and inspiration in anticipation of the promised King and His Kingdom; and many of the scribes gave themselves to a careful study of those prophecies. As a result of that study some of the scribes had outlined a program of the messianic age. From Matthew 16:14 and John 1:21, it is evident that their program included the appearance of an Old Testament prophet, the reappearance of Elijah, and the appearance of the Messiah.

Before the time of Jesus false messiahs had arisen (Acts 5:36-37), who, while enticing multitudes of followers, came to disastrous ends. The scribes could readily inform Herod that the Christ would be born at Bethlehem (Matt. 2:5-6), and without hesitation they answered Jesus that the Christ would be a descendant of David (Matt. 22:42). At the time of the ministry of John the Baptist the people were in expectation (Luke 3:15), which was shared even by the Samaritans (John 4:25). There were many pious ones who were waiting for the redemption of God's people; notably Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38), and Joseph of Arimathaea (Luke 23:50-52).

Besides those prophecies which promised a royal Messiah, there are others (Ps. 22:1-21; Isa. 53, and others) which portray a *suffering One*, who would bear the sins of the people. Christians confidently identify that One as the Christ, who was promised to be both King and Savior. It is noteworthy also that Ps. 22:22-31, Ps. 110:2-3, and Isa. 53:10 suggest a *spiritual* Kingdom, in contrast with the glorious visible Kingdom pictured in the other prophecies. But the self-righteous Pharisees and the politically-minded Sadducees did not recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of their cherished messianic prophecies. Accordingly, they condemned Him to death, and thus they unknowingly fulfilled prophecies about the Messiah. But Christians recognized Jesus of Nazareth to be the fulfillment of all messianic prophecies — they trusted Him as Savior, they acknowledged Him as spiritual Lord and King in their lives.

The youth of Christianity.

Christianity is relatively young. Compared with the course of mankind on the earth, it began only a few moments ago. No one knows how old man is. That is because we cannot tell precisely when a creature which can safely be described as human first appeared. One estimate places the earliest presence of what may be called man about 1,200,000 years in the past. A being with a brain about the size of modern man may have lived approximately 500,000 years ago. In contrast with these vast reaches of time the less than two thousand years which Christianity has thus far had are very brief. If one accepts the perspective set forth in the New Testament that in Christ is the secret of God's plan for the entire creation, and that God purposes to "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth," Christianity becomes relatively even more recent, for the few centuries since the coming of Christ are only an infinitesimal fraction of the time which has elapsed since the earth, not to speak of the vast universe, came into being.

When placed in the setting of human civilization Christianity is still youthful. Civilization is now regarded as having begun from ten to twelve thousand years ago, during the last retreat of the continental ice sheets. This means that Christianity has been present during only a fifth or a sixth of the brief span of civilized mankind.

Moreover, Christianity appeared late in the religious development of mankind. It may be something of this kind which was meant by Paul when he declared that "in the fullness of time God sent forth His son." We need not here take the space to sketch the main outlines of the history of religion. We must note, however, that of those faiths which have had an extensive and enduring geographic spread, Christianity is next to the latest to come to birth. Animism in one or another of its many forms seems to have antedated civilization. Polytheisms have been numerous, and some of them, mostly now merely a memory, are very ancient. Hinduism in its earlier aspects antedates Christianity by more than a thousand years. Judaism, out of which Christianity sprang, is many hundreds of years older than the latter. Confucius, the dominant figure in the system which the Occident calls by his name, lived in the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ. The years of the founder of Buddhism, although debated, are commonly placed in the same centuries. Zarathustra, or, to give him the name by which English readers generally know him, Zoroaster, the major creator of the faith which was long official in Persia and which is still represented by the Parsees, is of much less certain date, but he seems to have been at least as old as Confucius and the Buddha and he may have been older by several centuries. Only Manichæism and Islam were of later origin than Christianity. Of these two, Manichæism has perished, Christianity is, therefore, the next to the youngest of the great religious systems extant in our day which have expanded widely among mankind.

That Christianity emerged in the midst of a period in which the major high religions of mankind were appearing gives food for thought. Most of these faiths came into being in the thirteen centuries between 650 B.C. and A.D. 650. Of those which survive only Judaism and Hinduism began before 650 B.C. Here was a religious ferment among civilized peoples

which within a comparatively brief span issued in most of the main advanced religions which have since shaped the human race. This occurred with but little interaction of one upon another. Only Christianity and Islam are exceptions. Both of these were deeply indebted to Judaism, and Islam was influenced by both Judaism and Christianity.

The youth of Christianity may be highly important. It might conceivably mean that, as a relatively late phenomenon, Christianity will be transient. The other major religions have risen, flourished, reached their apex, and then have either entered upon a slow decline or have become stationary. Hinduism is not as widely extended as it was fifteen hundred years ago. Not for five centuries have important gains been registered by Buddhism and during that time serious losses have occurred. Confucianism has achieved no great geographic advance since it moved into Annam, Korea, and Japan many centuries ago, and at present it is disintegrating. Islam has suffered no significant surrender of territory since the reconversion of the Iberian Peninsula to Christianity, a process completed about four centuries ago, and in the present century has pushed its frontiers forward in some areas, notably in Africa south of the Sahara. Yet its advances have been much less marked than in the initial stages of its spread. It might be argued that Christianity is to have a similar fate and the fact of its youth may mean that for it the cycle of growth, maturity, and decay has not reached as advanced a stage as has that of other faiths. To this appraisal the fact of the emergence of the high religions, including Christianity, in the comparatively brief span of thirteen centuries may lend support. The grouping of their origins in one segment of time and the progressive weakening of so many of them might be interpreted as an indication that all religions, in the traditionally accepted use of that term, and including even Christianity, are a waning force in the life of mankind. Some, indeed, so interpret history and declare that the race is outgrowing religion. The losses in Europe in the present century might well appear to foreshadow the demise of Christianity.

On the other hand, the brief course of Christianity to date may be but a precursor to an indefinitely expanding future. The faith may be not far from the beginning of its history and only in the early stages of a growing influence upon mankind. As we are to see more extensively in subsequent chapters, the record of Christianity yields evidence which can be adduced in support of this view. As we hinted in the preface and will elaborate more at length later, the faith has displayed its greatest geographic extension in the past century and a half. As the twentieth century advances, and in spite of many adversaries and severe losses, it has become more deeply rooted among more peoples than it or any other faith has ever before been. It is also more widely influential in the affairs of men than any other religious system which mankind has known. The weight of evidence appears to be on the side of those who maintain that Christianity is still only in the first flush of its history and that it is to have a growing place in the life of mankind. In this Christianity is in striking contrast with other religions. Here are much of its uniqueness and a possible due to its significance.

The limited area of early Christianity.

The cultural area in which Christianity arose, that of the Mediterranean Basin, was merely one of the centres of contemporary civilization and embraced only a minority of mankind. It is important that this fact be recognized if we are to see the history of the faith in its true perspective. Since during the past four and a half centuries the Occident and its culture have been progressively dominant throughout the globe, and since in connection with it Christianity has had its world-wide spread, we are inclined to regard that condition as normal. In view of the circumstance that during its first five centuries Christianity won the professed allegiance of the Roman Empire, which then embraced the Occident, many have thought of it as having at this early date conquered the world. This is entirely mistaken. East of the Roman Empire was the Persian Empire which for centuries fought Rome to a stalemate. Its rulers regarded Christianity with hostile eye, partly because of its association with their chronic rival, and fought its entrance into their domains. India, although not united into

one political realm, was the seat of a great culture which influenced the Mediterranean area but which, in spite of extensive commercial contacts, was but little affected religiously by the Occident. China had a civilization all its own. At the time when the Roman Empire was being formed, China was being welded into a political and cultural whole under the Ch'in and the Han dynasty. In area it was about as large as the Roman Empire. In wealth and population it may not have equaled its great Western contemporary, but in cultural achievements it needed to make no apology to India, Persia, or Rome. In the Americas were small beginnings of civilized states-In its first five centuries neither China nor America was reached by Christianity. These civilizations, even when taken together, occupied only a minority of the surface of the earth. Outside them were the vast masses of "primitive" mankind, almost untouched by Christianity until after its first five centuries were passed. It is against this background that we must see the rise and early development of Christianity. In its initial centuries the geographic scope of Christianity was distinctly limited.

The unpromising rootage of Christianity.

When we come to the area in which Christianity began, we must remind ourselves that even there, in that geographically circumscribed region, the roots from which it sprang appeared to promise no very great future for the faith. It is one of the commonplaces of our story that Christianity was an outgrowth of the religion of Israel. Israel was never important politically. Only for a brief time, under David and Solomon, between nine hundred and a thousand years before Christ, did it achieve a domain of considerable dimensions. Even then it did not rank with the major empires. That realm soon broke up into two small states, the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, insignificant pawns in the contests among the great powers in the valleys of the Nile and of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Except for what came through its religion, Israel was of slight consequence culturally. When contrasted with its neighbours in Mesopotamia and Egypt it occupied a small and infertile area in the Palestinian uplands. Its cities were diminutive and its buildings unimpressive. Its art was not distinguished. Today the monumental ruins of Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, and even Syria dwarf those of Israel's past and make clear the relative insignificance, from the political and economic standpoint, of the land in which was the stock from which Christianity sprang.

In this respect Christianity was in striking contrast with those faiths which became its chief rivals. The polytheisms which it displaced in the Mediterranean Basin had the support of old and politically powerful cultures and states. Zoroastrianism was associated with Persia, for centuries one of the mightiest empires on the globe. Hinduism was indigenous to India, one of the major cultural centres of mankind. Buddhism was also a native of India and early won wide popularity in the land of its birth. Both Hinduism and Buddhism owed much of their extension outside India to the commerce and the cultural prestige of that land. Confucianism was for two thousand years so closely integrated with China, one of earth's mightiest civilizations, that its spread on the periphery of that realm seemed assured. Islam early brought unity to the Arabs and within a century of its origin was supported by one of the three largest and strongest empires of the day. At its outset Christianity had no such potent associations to commend it. Not until, after more than three centuries, it had, through its first amazing victories, become dominant in the Roman Empire did it achieve such an influential cultural and political alliance as these other faiths early possessed.

It is sometimes said that Israel owed its unique religious development to the fact that it was of the family of Semitic peoples and was on the land bridge between the great civilizations of Egypt and of Mesopotamia and so was stimulated by contributions from each of them. But there were other Semitic peoples who were in much the same favored position, the Phoenicians among them, and it was only in Israel that the religious development occurred which issued in Judaism and Christianity.

Moreover, it was in a minority, even within the comparatively obscure people of Israel, that the stream which issued in Christianity had its rise and its early course. The

prophetic monotheism which was the source of Christianity long commanded the undivided support of only a small proportion of Israel. The loyal minority were sufficiently numerous to cherish and hand down the writings of the prophets. Through them came the main contributions of Israel to the world. Within this minority we find the direct antecedents of Christianity. Yet the majority of Israel either rejected the prophets outright or devitalized their message by compromise. Even among the relatively insignificant people within which Christianity arose, only the numerically lesser part could be counted in the spiritual ancestry of the faith. Fully as significantly, it was largely those who believed themselves to be in the succession of that minority who so opposed Jesus that they brought him to the cross.

Christians have seen in this story the fashion in which God works. They have believed that always and everywhere God has been seeking man and has been confronting man with Himself and with the standard which He has set for man. Yet man, so they have held, persistently rebels against God and becomes corrupt. God, of His mercy and love, has wrought for man's redemption. This He has not done in the way which men would have predicted. Even those whom men have accounted wise have been so blinded by sin, especially by pride and self-confidence, that they could not clearly see or hear God. For reasons known only to Himself, so Christians have maintained, God chose as His channel for man's salvation a small, insignificant minority among the people of Israel, themselves of slight consequence in physical might. As the culmination of His revelation of Himself and His redemption of man, He sent His son, who, the heir of this humble minority and building on the foundations laid by them, became the centre of the Christian faith.

The story, as seen from a Christian standpoint, might also be put in the following fashion. God has always, from the beginning of the human race, been seeking to bring men into fellowship with Himself and into His likeness. He has respected man's free will and has not forced Himself on man. Only thus could He produce beings who are not automata, but are akin to Himself. In response to God's initiative, men everywhere were stimulated to grope for God. As a result of their seeking, various religions arose. All of these, clouded by man's sin, were imperfect and could not meet man's need or fulfil God's purpose. For some inscrutable reason, God found among the people of Israel a minority who responded to Him and, therefore, was able to disclose Himself fully through one who came out of that succession and through him made possible the salvation of man.

2. The Gospels.

Introduction.

The word Gospel (from *god* and *spell*) means *good message* or *news*. This name designates the first four books of the New Testament which narrate the life and teachings of the incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ — all He did to establish a virtuous way of life on earth and to save sinful mankind.

Jesus Christ said to His contemporaries: "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9). Until the coming of the Son of God on earth, people perceived God as the almighty Creator, the stern Judge residing in unapproachable glory. Jesus Christ gave us a new understanding of God: that of a close, compassionate, and **loving Father**. Truly, all of Christ's features, His every word and gesture were permeated with unending compassion. He was as a physician amongst the sick. People, sensing His love for them, were attracted to Him by the thousands. No one ever heard a refusal. Christ ministered to all. He cleansed the conscience of sinners, healed the weak and the blind, comforted the despairing, and exor-

cised those possessed by demons. And simultaneously, when the circumstances required, He displayed His divine and sovereign power. Then, everything — nature and the death itself — obeyed His almighty Word.

Through this booklet, we will acquaint the reader with the times and circumstances in which the Gospels were written and will introduce selected teachings of our Savior. It is our goal that the reader will delve more deeply into the life and teachings of our Savior, because the more we read the Gospels, the stronger our faith becomes and the more clearly we see the purpose of our earthly existence. Also as we acquire more experience in spiritual matters, we begin to perceive more obviously the nearness of our Savior. Then He truly becomes our Good Shepherd Who leads us toward salvation.

Especially in our time, when we hear and read about so many contradicting and unfounded opinions, it would be wise to make the Gospels our reference book. Indeed, while all other books contain the opinions of mere mortals, the Gospels reveal to us the eternal Truth.

History of the Gospel Texts.

All the Sacred books of the New Testament were written in the vernacular Greek, an Alexandrian dialect, called *koine*. This language was spoken, or at least understood, by all the educated inhabitants of the Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire. It was the language of all the cultured people of that time. The Evangelists wrote in Greek rather than in Hebrew, in which the books of the Old Testament were written, in order to make the New Testament books accessible to a maximum number of people.

At that time only the capital letters of the Greek alphabet were used in writing, without diacritics, punctuation, or separation between words. Lower case letters appeared only in the ninth century, together with spacing between words. Punctuation marks were introduced only with the invention of the printing press in the 15th century. The present separations of chapters was introduced by Cardinal Hugo in the 13th century, and the separation into verse was done by the Parisian typographer Robert Stephen in the 16th century.

Through its learned bishops and priests, the Church always concerned itself with preserving the texts of the Sacred Books in their original purity. This was especially important before the introduction of the printing press, when the texts were copied by hand, and errors could easily infiltrate the new copies. It is known that several Christian scholars of the 2nd and 3rd centuries such as Origen; Isih, the Bishop of Egypt; and Lukian the priest of Antioch, labored with great diligence over the amendment of the Biblical texts. With the invention of the printing press, careful attention was given to the reproduction of the Sacred New Testament Books to ensure that they were copied according to the most ancient and reliable manuscripts. During the first quarter of the 16th century there appeared two publications of the New Testament texts in Greek: the “Complete Book of Writings” published in Spain, and the edition of Erasmus of Rotterdam in Basel. By the end of the last century, the scholar Tischendorf completed an important critical edition, for which he compared approximately nine hundred manuscripts of the New Testament.

These conscientious critical works, as well as the untiring efforts of the Church, filled and guided by the Holy Spirit, assure us that presently we possess the original and unadulterated Greek text of the Gospels. It may be fairly said that the genuineness of these books rests upon better evidence than that of any other ancient writing.

The Slavic and Russian translations. During the second half of the 9th century, the Sacred Books of the New Testament were translated into Slavonic by Saints Cyril and Methodius, who enlightened the Slavic people. This language, a Bulgaro-Macedonian dialect, was more or less understood by all of the speakers of Slavic dialects and the people living in the region

of Thessalonica, the birthplace of the brothers. The oldest manuscript of this Slavonic translation was preserved in Russia under the title of the *Ostromirov Gospel* since it was written for the Mayor of Novgorod by deacon Gregory Ostromirov circa 1056-57. With time, the Slavonic text was subjected to some Russification. The contemporary Russian translation was made during the first half of the 19th century.

English Translations. Despite the many English translations of the Bible in whole or in part undertaken during the Middle Ages, it is not until the 16th century that the history of the English Bible as we know it actually begins. The New Testament of William Tyndale, published in 1525-26, was translated directly from the Greek original rather than from the Latin translation known as Vulgate, as its predecessors had been.

The Hampton Court conference in 1604 proposed a new translation of the Bible, and 54 translators were invited to undertake the work at Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster. Their translation, dedicated to King James I, was published in 1611 in large folio volumes. This translation, known also as the *Authorized Version*, has so embedded itself in the religious and literary history of the English-speaking peoples that its secure place has been challenged only by revisions of it, not by replacements for it. Such revisions came in the British Revised version of 1885, followed by the American Standard Version of 1901. This later was more drastically revised by the Revised Standard Version (1946-52).

The Amplified Bible (1954) is a literal translation with multiple expression using associated words to convey the original thought. This version is intended to supplement other translations. The *Jerusalem Bible* (1966) is a translation from the Hebrew Masoretic text, the Greek Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and accepted Greek and Aramaic New Testament texts. In making the *New American Bible* (1970), a Catholic translation, all the basic texts were consulted, and the work was 26 years in the making. The *Living Bible* (1971) is a popular paraphrase edition and is the work of a single translator, Kenneth L. Taylor. The *New American Standard Bible* (1971) was translated by an editorial board of 54 Greek and Hebrew scholars and required nearly 11 years to complete. The *New King James Bible* (1979-82) is a version in conformity with the thought flow of the 1611 King James Bible. It is based on the Greek text used by Greek speaking churches for many centuries, known presently as the *Textus Receptus* or *Received Text*.

There are more than a dozen English Bible translations available today, each with its merits and its weaknesses. Some of them are more literal and, consequently, more difficult to understand; while others are much more readable and understandable, but less accurate. A serious Bible student might want to compare several of these translations in order to get a better understanding of the original text. The great variability among modern Bible versions testifies to the fact that **translating is essentially interpreting**. In other words, to do a good job, the translator must know both the original and the language being translated into quite well. The translator must understand the subject, and, what is extremely important, grasp the idea the author intended to convey and the sense in which he intended it to be conveyed. And since the ultimate author of Sacred Scripture is the Holy Spirit, the translator needs His illumination and inspiration to correctly convey His message. St. Peter pointed to this requirement when he wrote: "*No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Pet 1:20-21). And here lies the main problem with some of the modern Bible translations. The scientists who did them, with all their knowledge of ancient languages and sincere efforts to do the best job, were often far from the Church and hence never understood its teaching. So at the present time, the King James Bible and its more contemporary version, the New King James Bible, although neither is perfect, seem to convey most accurately the original meaning of the Bible as it was always understood by the Church.

Time of Writing.

The precise time at which each of the books of the New Testament was written cannot be exactly determined. However, there is no doubt that they were written during the second half of the first century. This is evident from the fact that a series of second-century writings — such as the *Apologies* of the holy Martyr Justin the Philosopher, written in the year 150, the poetical works of the pagan author Celsus, written in the middle of the second century, and especially the epistles of the Bishop-martyr Ignatius Theophorus (the God-Bearer), of Antioch, written circa 107 A.D. — all make numerous references to the books of the New Testament.

The first books of the New Testament were the epistles of the Apostles, brought about by the need to strengthen the faith of the newly founded Christian communities. Soon, however, there also developed a need for a systematic documentation of the earthly life and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter how extensively the so called “contradictory critics” have tried to undermine belief in the historical authenticity and originality of our Gospels and other Sacred Books, referencing their origin to a much later time (e.g. Bauer and his school), the newest findings in ecclesiastical literature (especially works of the ancient Church’s Fathers), give full support to the conviction that all four Gospels were indeed written in the first century.

Through many inferences, one concludes that the Gospel of St. Matthew was written prior to the others and no later than 50-60 years after the birth of Christ. The Gospels of Sts. Mark and Luke were written somewhat later, but in any event, before the destruction of Jerusalem, that is, before 70 A.D. St. John the Theologian wrote his Gospel later than the others, and most probably at the end of the first century — late in life, when he was over 90 years old. Somewhat earlier, he wrote the Apocalypse or the book of Revelation. The Acts of the Apostles was written shortly after the Gospel of St. Luke, and as indicated by its preface, serves as a continuation of the Gospel according to St. Luke.

The Significance of the Gospels.

All four Gospels harmoniously narrate the life and teachings of Christ the Savior, His miracles, His sufferings on the Cross, His death and burial, His glorious resurrection from death and ascension into heaven. Mutually supplementing and clarifying each other, they represent a single, whole book, without contradictions or variances in essentials and fundamentals.

The mysterious chariot seen by the prophet Ezekiel at the river Chebar (Ezekiel 1:1-28), with four creatures, whose likenesses were reminiscent of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle, serves as a symbol for the four Gospels. These likenesses, taken separately, became emblems for the evangelists. Beginning with the 5th century, Christian art represents Matthew with a man or angel, Mark with a lion, Luke with an ox, and John with an eagle.

Besides our four Gospels, there were up to 50 other similar writings during the first centuries which referred to themselves also as “gospels” and claimed to be of Apostolic origin. The Church designated these as *apocryphal* — that is, non-credible, repudiated books. These books contain distorted and dubious narratives. Such apocryphal gospels include: “the first gospel of Jacob,” “the story of Joseph the carpenter,” “the gospel of Thomas,” “the gospel of Nicodemus,” and others. In these “gospels” one finds most of the oldest legends relating the childhood and youth of Jesus Christ.

The Relationship of the Gospels.

Of the four Gospels, the content of the first three, those of Matthew, Mark and Luke, conform closely to each other in format and content. In this respect, the fourth Gospel, that of John, remains unique, significantly distinguishing itself from the first three. For this reason, it is customary to refer to the first three Gospels as *synoptic*, stemming from the Greek word *syn-opticos* meaning, viewed with the same eye, concordant. But while the first three Gospels are similar in format and content, each still remains unique.

The synoptic Gospels narrate almost exclusively the deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ in **Galilee**, while that of St. John speaks of our Lord's activities in **Judea**. The synoptics relate mainly the miracles, parables and events of our Lord's life, while St. John's Gospel discusses the deeper meaning of our Lord's life and cites only His most elevated discourses.

The Gospels, for all their variations, do not contain inherent contradictions. In reading attentively, one easily finds clear signs of agreement between the synoptics and St. John. Although St. John narrates very little about the Lord's ministry in Galilee, he is undoubtedly aware of His repeated, lengthy sojourns there. The synoptics relate nothing concerning the early activity of the Lord in Judea and in Jerusalem itself, although hints of these activities frequently occur. Therefore, according to their observations, the Lord had friends in Jerusalem as well as disciples and followers, such as the owner of the rooming house where the Last Supper took place, and also Joseph of Arimathea. Especially important in this respect are the words quoted in the synoptics, "*Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often did I wish to gather your children.*" This expression clearly suggests multiple visits of the Lord to that city.

The fundamental difference between the synoptics and St. John lies in their documentation of the Lord's speeches. In the synoptics, these speeches are simple and easy to understand, while St. John's are deep, mysterious and often difficult to understand, as if they were not intended for the multitude but for a more select circle of listeners. This is very true. The synoptics present the Lord's speeches as directed to the simple, ignorant people of Galilee. St. John in general, conveys mainly the Lord's speeches as directed to the learned Scribes and the Pharisees, people who were well acquainted with the Law of Moses, and who more or less stood among the upper echelons of that Jewish society. Besides, as we shall see later, the Gospel of St. John had a special goal, perhaps to more fully and deeply reveal the Divinity of Jesus Christ. This theme, of course, is much more difficult to comprehend than the easily understood parables of the synoptics. Even here though, there is no big divergence between the synoptics and St. John. If the synoptics bring out the more human aspect of Christ and St. John predominantly His Divine nature, it does not mean that the synoptics lack the Divine side, or that St. John fails to show the human side. In the synoptics, the Son of Man is also the Son of God, to whom was given all power in heaven and on earth. Equally, the Son of God, according to St. John, is also a true man, Who accepts an invitation to a wedding feast, speaks as a friend with Martha and Mary and weeps at the grave of His friend Lazarus.

Thus, the synoptics and St. John mutually enhance and complement each other, and only in their unity do they reveal Christ's personality as a perfect God and a perfect Man.

The Orthodox teaching has always maintained that while the Holy Scriptures were a result of Divine inspiration given to the writers, imparting to them thoughts and words, the Holy Spirit did not restrain their individual intellects or suppressed their personal attributes. The descent of the Holy Spirit did not stifle the human spirit, but rather cleansed and elevated it above its ordinary limits. Therefore, while representing in themselves a single unity in interpretation of God's truth, the gospels differ from each other in the personal characteristics of each evangelist, distinguishing themselves in structure, style and form of expression. They also differ as a result of the circumstances and conditions under which they were written, as well as in the objectives which each evangelist set for himself.

That is why, for a better explanation and understanding of the gospels, it is essential for us to more closely familiarize ourselves with the personality, character and life of each of the four evangelists and the circumstances during which each gospel was written.

The Gospel According to St. Matthew.

The Evangelist Matthew, who also bore the name Levi, was one of the twelve apostles of Christ. Until his calling, he was a publican or Roman tax collector, and as such was disliked by his compatriots, the Jews. The Jews scorned and hated the publicans because they served the infidel rulers of their people and created hardships by levying taxes, frequently overcharging in the process.

St. Matthew narrates about his calling in the 9th chapter of his Gospel, referring to himself as “Matthew,” while Mark and Luke call him “Levi.” It was customary for the Jews to have several names.

Moved deeply by the Lord’s mercy in not loathing him, in spite of the scorn from the Jews and especially from their leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew wholeheartedly accepted Christ’s teachings. He profoundly understood the superiority of Christ’s message over the paltry opinions and traditions of the Pharisees. They only looked righteous, but were selfish, cruel and despised simple people. That is why Matthew presents in such detail the accusatory speech of the Lord against the scribes, Pharisees and other hypocrites (see the 23rd chapter of his Gospel). One must assume that for the same reason Matthew took so close to his heart the issue of salvation of his own people saturated with false teachings of scribes. That is also why he wrote his Gospel preeminently for the Jews. There is a basis for assuming that originally he wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, and then some time later had it translated into Greek for the rest of the Church.

In writing his Gospel, St. Matthew’s main objective was to prove to the Jews that Jesus Christ is precisely that **Messiah** Whom the Old Testament prophets had predicted, and that the Old Testament Scriptures become clear and assume their wholeness only in the light of Christ’s teaching. That is why he begins his Gospel with Christ’s genealogy, showing the Jews His descent from David and Abraham. He makes a considerable number of references to the Old Testament (over 100) in order to prove Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The designation of this first Gospel as “for the Jews” can be seen also in the fact that St. Matthew, unlike the other Evangelists, mentions Jewish customs without explaining their reason and meaning. Similarly, he includes several Aramaic words used in Palestine, without explaining their meaning.

In his Gospel, Matthew gave special emphasis to our Lord’s kingly relations and activities. His favorite term for designating the rule of the Messiah was the phrase *Kingdom of Heaven*. Matthew showed that the Messiah inaugurated His kingdom with all authority in Heaven and on earth being given to Him (ch. 28:18). For the present age, to be sure, that Kingdom must be seen in the loyal submission of His people to Him and their obedience to His rule. The Messiah’s kingdom is no less real because it is spiritual. Moreover Matthew assured that the King will return in the regeneration and sit on the throne of His glory while “*you [Apostles] who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (ch. 19:28).

He also warned his readers that the benefits of the Kingdom would extend beyond the limits of the Jewish race. Disciples are to be made during the present age from among all the nations (ch. 28:19), while the Kingdom grows as a mustard tree grows from a tiny seed (ch. 13:31). In the age to come all the nations will be gathered before the King and the faithful ones invited to inherit the Kingdom (ch. 25:32-34). In this Kingdom people will come from the east and the west and the north and the south and sit down with the patriarchs while the unfaithful sons of the Kingdom (the unbelieving Jews) will be cast out (ch. 8:11-12). Matthew certainly had in mind also to impress upon his Jewish brethren that the mission of

the King was to save the people of the Kingdom from their sins — therefore the King’s name was *Jesus which means “savior”* (ch. 1:21). In order to save His people, the King gave His life as a ransom (ch. 20:28); His blood was poured out for the remission of sins (ch. 26:28). His power to deliver His subjects from their enemy (the Devil) was demonstrated first by vanquishing him in all his temptations (ch. 4:1-11) and second by coming victoriously alive from the dead (ch. 28).

After preaching in Palestine for a long time, St. Matthew traveled to other nations to spread the Gospel, and ended his life with a martyr’s death in Ethiopia.

The Gospel According to St. Mark.

The Evangelist Mark also bore the name “John.” He too was a Jew by birth, but did not belong to the Twelve. For this reason, he could not have been a constant listener and travel companion to Christ as St. Matthew had been.

He wrote his Gospel based on conversations with St. Peter and under his guidance. In all probability, he was an eyewitness only to the last days of the Lord’s earthly life. Only the Gospel of Mark mentions a youth who, throwing a cloak over his own naked body, followed the Lord when He was taken prisoner in the garden of Gethsemane, but left his cloak and fled naked when the guards grabbed him (Mark 14:51-52). Ancient tradition perceives this youth as St. Mark himself, the author of the second Gospel. His mother, Mary, is mentioned in the book of Acts as one of the women most devoted to Christ. In her home in Jerusalem the faithful gathered for prayer. It is very likely that the upper room where Jesus ate the last Passover with His disciples and instituted the Eucharist (Holy Communion) was in Mark’s home.

Mark later traveled with St. Paul on his first missionary journey; the other traveling companion was Barnabas, a maternal uncle to Mark. Mark was with the Apostle Paul in Rome when he wrote the epistle to the Colossians.

Later, apparently, St. Mark became a fellow traveler and collaborator with St. Peter, which is substantiated by the words of Apostle Peter himself in his first Epistle in which he writes: “*She who is in Babylon, elected together with you, greets you, and so does Mark my son*” (1 Peter 5:13). Most likely *Babylon* was used as another name for Rome). Prior to his departure, St. Paul summons him again and writes to Timothy: “*Take Mark with you, for I need him to serve*” (2 Tim. 4:11). According to ancient tradition St. Peter designated St. Mark the first Bishop of the church in Alexandria where St. Mark ended his life as a martyr.

According to Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis, as well as that of St. Justin the Philosopher and St. Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Mark wrote his Gospel based on discussions with St. Peter. St. Justin refers to it directly as the “written recollections of Peter.” Clement of Alexandria claims that the Gospel of St. Mark essentially represents a written version of St. Peter’s sermons, which St. Mark documented at the request of Christians living in Rome. The very context of St. Mark’s Gospel testifies to the fact that it was designated for gentiles who converted to Christianity. It minimally references the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Old Testament and even fewer quotations are cited from the Old Testament Scriptures. Additionally, we find Latin words, such as *speculator* and others. Even the Sermon on the Mount, which serves as an explanation of the superiority of New Testament Law over the Old Testament, is omitted.

Instead, St. Mark’s main objective is to present in his Gospel a strong and clear narration of Christ’s miracles, emphasizing through them God’s heavenly greatness and omnipotence. In his Gospel, Jesus is not “a descendant of David” as in that of Matthew, but the *Son of God*, Lord and Master, Universal King.

The Gospel According to St. Luke.

The ancient historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, states that St. Luke came from Antioch, and this gives rise to the assumption that St. Luke was a gentile or *proselyte* — a gentile converted to Judaism. By vocation he was a physician, as seen in the Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians. Ancient tradition adds to this that St. Luke was also an artist. The contents of his Gospel explaining in detail the Lord's instructions to seventy disciples, lead us to conclude that he was one of the seventy. His unusually dynamic narration of the Lord's appearance to two disciples on their way to Emmaus, where he refers only to Cleopas by name, attest to his being one of the two disciples deemed worthy of the Lord's appearance (Luke 24:13-33).

Also from the Acts of the Apostles, it is evident that with the second journey of the Apostle Paul, St. Luke became his constant collaborator and an almost inseparable fellow traveler. He was with Apostle Paul at the time of Paul's first imprisonment during which the Epistles to the Colossians and Philippians were written. He was also with him during the second imprisonment when the second Epistle to Timothy was written, and which ended with a martyr's death. It is known that after the death of St. Paul, St. Luke preached and died a martyr's death in Achaia (Greece). During the mid-4th century his holy relics and those of St. Andrew the Apostle were transferred to Constantinople.

As is evident from the preface of the third Gospel, St. Luke wrote it at the request of a prominent man, the *most excellent Theophilus*, who lived in Antioch and for whom he then wrote the Acts of the Apostles, a seeming continuation of the Gospel narratives (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1-2). Incidentally, he not only made use of eye witnesses' accounts of the ministry of Christ, but also of already existent writings relating to the Lord's life and teachings. In his own words, he thoroughly scrutinized and compared those writings. Therefore, his Gospel distinguishes itself by its exceptional accuracy in designating times and places of events and strict chronological succession.

The *most excellent Theophilus*, for whom the third Gospel was written, did not live in Judea nor did he visit Jerusalem; otherwise it would not have been necessary for St. Luke to make geographic clarifications, e.g., that mount Olivet is near Jerusalem, about a Sabbath's walk, etc. On the other hand, it seems that he was familiar with Syracuse, Phrygia, Puteoli in Italy, the Appian Square and the Three Inns in Rome, all of which were mentioned in the book of Acts and for which St. Luke gives no explanations. According to the assertion of Clement of Alexandria (writing at the beginning of the 3rd century), Theophilus was a rich and well-known resident of Antioch (Syria), who professed faith in Christ and whose house served as a church for Antiochian Christians.

St. Luke's Gospel clearly shows the influence of St. Paul with whom St. Luke collaborated and traveled. As the *Apostle to the Gentiles*, St. Paul tried most of all to disclose the great truth, that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, came to earth not only for the Jews but also for the gentiles and is the Savior of all the world and all people.

In conjunction with this fundamental idea, which is clearly conveyed throughout the entire third Gospel, Jesus Christ's genealogy is traced to the first ancestor of all mankind, Adam, and to God Himself, in order to emphasize His significance for the entire human race (Luke 3:23-38).

Certain passages, such as the mission of Elijah to the widow in the region of Sydon, the curing of Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:26-27) from leprosy by the prophet Elisha, the parable of the prodigal son, and that of the publican and the Pharisee are found in tight, inner cohesion with particular development of the teaching of Apostle Paul regarding the salvation not only of the Jews, but also of the gentiles, and of man's acquittal before God not by means of the law, but by God's grace, given exclusively through boundless mercy and God's love of mankind. No one had so clearly portrayed God's love for repentant sinners as did St. Luke, placing in his Gospel a collection of parables and events on this subject. In addition to the parables just mentioned, one also remembers the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the good Samaritan, the repentance of the chief of the publicans, Zacchaeus, and other sec-

tions, as well as the profound words that “*happiness exists for God’s angels in the repentance of one sinner*” (Luke 15:7).

The time and place of the writing of St. Luke’s Gospel can be derived through deduction, that it was written prior to the Acts of the Apostles, which seemingly provided a means for the Gospel’s continuation (Acts 1:1). The book of Acts ends with a narrative of St. Paul’s two year ministry in Rome (Acts 28:30). This took place approximately 63 years after the birth of Christ. Consequently, the Gospel of St. Luke could not have been written later than this, and presumably was written in Rome.

The Gospel According to St. John.

The Evangelist St. John the Theologian was a beloved disciple of Christ. He was the son of a Galilean fisherman, Zebedee, and Salome. It appears that Zebedee was prosperous since he had workers, and was also a rather prominent member of the Jewish community. His son John was acquainted with the high priest. John’s mother, Salome, is mentioned with the ranks of women who served the Lord with their material resources. She traveled with the Lord to Galilee, followed Him to Jerusalem for the last Passover, and participated with the other myrrh-bearing women in obtaining fragrant oils to embalm Christ’s body. Legend has it that she was the daughter of Joseph the hoop maker.

St. John was at first a disciple of St. John the Forerunner. After hearing his testimony to Christ as the Lamb of God who took upon Himself the sins of the world, he and Andrew immediately followed Christ (John 1:37-40). St. John later became a steadfast disciple of Christ when, following a miraculous catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee, the Lord Himself summoned him and his brother James. Together with his brother James and Peter, John was worthy of a special closeness to the Lord, finding himself with Him during the most important and triumphant moments of His earthly life. As such, he merited being present at the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus, seeing the Lord’s transfiguration on Mount Thabor, listening to the discussion concerning the signs of the Lord’s second coming, and witnessing His prayers at Gethsemane. At the Last Supper, he was so close to the Lord that, in his own words, he rested on Jesus’ chest (John 13:23-25), and from this stemmed the name *bosom friend*, later becoming a designation for someone close. Humbly, without calling himself by name, he nevertheless refers to himself in his Gospel as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*” The Lord’s love for him became apparent when the Lord, while hanging on the cross, committed His Most Blessed Mother to John’s care, saying: “*Behold your Mother.*”

Ardently loving Jesus Christ, John was full of indignation against those who were hostile towards Him or distanced themselves from Him. That is why he prohibited those who did not follow Christ from casting out demons in the name of Jesus Christ (Luke 9:49), and asked the Lord for permission to cast fire on the inhabitants of a Samaritan village because they did not accept Him when He journeyed through Samaria (Luke 9:54). For this, the Lord named him and his brother James *boanerges*, which means “sons of thunder.” Feeling Christ’s love for him but not yet having been enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, he concurs with his mother when she asks on behalf of her sons for the closest place to the Lord in His future Kingdom. In response they receive the prophecy of the forthcoming cup of suffering (Matthew 20:20-23).

After Christ’s Ascension, we frequently see St. John with St. Peter. He together with St. Peter and St. James are considered as *pillars* of the Church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). Following the destruction of Jerusalem, St. John resides and ministers in Ephesus, in Asia Minor. During the reign of Emperor Domitian, he was exiled to the island of Patmos where he wrote the Apocalypse or Revelation (Rev. 1:9-19). Returning to Ephesus from his exile, St. John wrote his Gospel and died a natural death (the only Apostle to do so) at a very old age in approximately 105 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Trajan.

Tradition claims that St. John wrote his Gospel at the request of the Ephesian Christians. They brought him the first three Gospels and asked him to review them and supplement with the Lord's speeches which he had heard. St. John verified the truth of all that was written in the first three Gospels but found that it was necessary to supplement their narratives and to especially expound and clarify the teachings regarding the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that with time people would not think of Him as just the Son of Man. This was particularly necessary since by this time, heretics — Ebionites, Gnostics, and the heretic Cerinthus — had emerged and denounced the Divinity of Christ. St. Irenaeus of Lyon wrote about these circumstances around the middle of the 3rd century.

It is clear that the objective of the fourth Gospel was to supplement the narratives of the other three Gospels. Distinct from the first three Gospels, it was named the *Spiritual Gospel*.

The Gospel of St. John begins with the exposition of Jesus' Divinity and further contains an entire series of the most spiritually elevating speeches of the Lord, in which are revealed His Divinity and the deepest mysteries of faith. For example, the conversation with Nicodemus about the birth from above with water and Spirit and the mystery of salvation; the discussion with the Samaritan woman regarding living water and of worship of God in spirit and in truth; the discussion on bread descended from heaven and on the mystery of the Eucharist; the discussion about the good shepherd, and especially touching the farewell conversation with the disciples during the Last Supper, and its wonderful conclusion with the so called *High-priestly* prayer of our Lord. Here we find a whole series of references by the Lord Himself as the true Son of God. For unveiling these most profound truths and mysteries of the Christian faith, St. John received the respected name of *Theologian*.

The primary purpose of John in writing the Gospel is stated in chapter 20:31: "*These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, you may have life in His name.*" This statement is partly in answer to the teachings of the Gnostics, a heretical group of John's time who posed as Christians, but who included in their teachings some elements of Greek philosophy, some of the teachings of the Jewish philosopher Philo, and elements of those pagan religions known as the *mystery cults*, as well as some teachings based on the Old Testament. The Gnostics held generally that the God of the universe was so high and holy that it was impossible for Him to create a material world or to have any dealings with persons possessed of material bodies, that there were innumerable intermediary beings or *aeons* (some superior spiritual beings, similar to angels), one of whom created the world; and another called the Logos or Word of God, was the only channel through whom God could reveal Himself to the world. Some of them said Jesus was the Logos and therefore of an order of life somewhere between God and man. Obviously such teaching would do great harm to true Christianity. John answered these and other wild claims of that sect by affirming: that the Word (*Logos*) who reveals God is as eternal as God, that He has fellowship with God, that indeed He is of the same essence as God. John affirmed also that He was made flesh (that is took the nature of mankind including a material body) and lived on the earth as Jesus the only begotten Son of God; that life was in Him; and that He was the light which overcame the darkness (just as He overcame death in His resurrection) and that salvation is to be had in consequence of faith in Him rather than by acquiring a system of hidden knowledge. In setting out the purpose of his work, John declared: "*These things are written that people might have faith in Him as the anointed Savior and the true Son of God and that in consequence of this faith they might have life through His name.*"

Pure of heart, having devoted himself to the Lord, and loved by Him in return with a special love, St. John penetrated deeply into the mystery of Christian love. No other Apostle unveiled so profoundly and convincingly as he in his Gospel and three Epistles the Christian teaching of the two fundamental commandments of God — of love for God and of love for neighbor; that is why he is also referred to as the *Apostle of Love*.

Another unique quality of John's Gospel is that, while the first three Evangelists narrate the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ primarily in Galilee, St. John describes events and preaching in Judea. Through this, one can determine the length of the Lord's public ministry and the duration of His earthly life. Preaching primarily in Galilee, the Lord journeyed to Jerusalem for all major feast days. As evidenced in the Gospel of John, there were three such trips to Jerusalem before Passover. Prior to the fourth Passover of His public ministry, the Lord accepted His death on the Cross. It follows that the Lord's public ministry lasted nearly three and a half years, and that He lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years (as He entered the public ministry on the thirtieth year of His birth, as attested by Luke 3:23).

Conclusion.

The Lord Jesus Christ came in order to establish the Kingdom of God among men — a virtuous way of life. He taught us to care about this and beseech: *“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* However, He did not wish to impose this Kingdom by artificial or compulsory means. Therefore He avoided any interference in the political administration of the country, but called men toward repentance or change of heart — toward a spiritual rebirth. This in turn would lead to improvement of all phases of community life.

In reading the history of the spread of Christianity, we see that gradually, as people embraced the teaching of the Savior, favorable social and economic changes evolved in their communities. Truly, Christianity facilitated the abolishment of slavery, elevated the position of women, strengthened family unity, formed charitable organizations, and brought to mankind the highest moral and humanitarian principles. We see a total disparity in countries where non-Christian ideas, such as Fascism or “scientific” materialism, are propagated. There, instead of the promised earthly paradise, something akin to hell exists, where, rather than honoring God, a created cult honors the political leader.

Since only God knows all the inadequacies and weaknesses of the human race damaged by sin, only He can help man overcome his bad inclinations and resolve personal, family and community problems. Therefore, one must seek in the teaching of the Savior a directive for aspiration and deeds. His teaching places faith in God and love of neighbor as fundamentals of life. It teaches non-covetousness, compassion, humility and meekness. It calls on all to do good and to develop all the abilities given by God. Christ's teaching brings peace and happiness to the soul. It teaches that man was created for eternal bliss in the Heavenly Kingdom and assists him in attaining it. That is why a Christian must, with concentration and a prayerful attitude, constantly read the Gospels, drawing from them heavenly Wisdom.

Selected Teachings of the Savior.

Charity: “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom... For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matthew 25:34-36; also see Luke 14:12-15, Luke 21:1-4).

Chastity and Marital Fidelity: (Matthew 5:27-32, 19:3-12).

Courage: “Watch therefore for you do not know when the master of the house is coming — in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning —

lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping” (Mark 13:33-37, see also Luke 11:24-26 and 21:34-36 and Matthew 8:28-33, parable of the unclean spirit).

Faith: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have life everlasting” (John 3:16); “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes” (Mark 9:23); “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29, also see Matthew 16:17, Luke 17:5-10, Mark 16:16).

Fasting: “However this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21; see also Mark 2:19-22, Matthew 6:16-18, Mark 9:29).

Good Deeds: “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.” (Matthew 7:12); “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16); “Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42; also see Luke 19:11-27, Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 10:25-37, parable of the Good Samaritan, also the parable of the barren fig tree, Luke 13:6-9).

The Grace of the Holy Spirit: “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit...” (John 3:6); “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14); “If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13); “The comforter, the Spirit of truth...He will guide us into all truth.” (John 16:13, also see John 7:37-39 and 14:15-21, also Mark 4:26-29, the parable of the growing seed; Matthew 13:31-32, the parable of the mustard seed; Matthew 25:1-13, the parable of the ten foolish virgins).

Holy Communion: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:27-58; Luke 22:15-20).

Humility: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3); “Whoever exalts himself will be abased and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11); “Learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29); “Whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:26; see also Luke 10:21, Luke 18:9-14, Mark 10:42-45, John 13:4-17, Matthew 20:1-16, the parable of the workers in the vineyard).

Love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength... you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:28-34); “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13); “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father ...and we will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:15-23); “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35); “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13, see also Matthew 5:42-48, John 13:34-35).

Non-Judgment: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged...” (Matthew 7:1-2)

Narrow Path: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14); “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12); “He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38; also see Luke 13:22-30, Mark 8:34-38, Luke 14:25-27, John 12:25-26).

Patience: “In your patience save your souls” (Luke 21:19); “He who stands to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22); “Bear fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15); “... remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but

now he is comforted and you are tormented.” (Luke 16:19-31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus).

Prayer: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7-11); “And all things whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (Matthew 21:22); “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24, see also Matthew 6:5-15, Matthew 18:19-20, Mark 11:23, John 16:23-27, Mark 14:38, Luke 11:9-10, Luke 18:1-8, the parable of the unjust judge).

Prudence: “Take heed that no one deceives you” (Matthew 24:4, see also Luke 14:28-33, Luke 16:1-13, the parable of the unjust steward).

Purity of Heart: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8); “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts ... These are the things which defile a man” (Matthew 15:19-20); “...Those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word and retain it” (Luke 8:15); “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will by no means enter it” (Mark 10:15); “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” (John 15:3, Mark 7:15-23).

Reconciliation and Forgiveness: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matt. 6:14); “forgive up to seventy seven times seven” (Matt. 18:22, see also Matt. 5:23-26, Luke 23:34, Matt. 18:23-35; the parable of the unforgiving servant).

Righteousness: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6); “Then the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43); “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

Rejoicing in God: “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12); “Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30); “I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28); “your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22).

Repentance: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2); “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13); “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. If the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34-37); “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (like those crushed by the tower in Jerusalem) (Luke 13:3-5; see also Matthew 4:17, John 5:14, Luke 7:47, Matthew 18:11-14, the parable of the lost sheep, Luke 15:11-32, the parable of the Prodigal Son; Luke 18:9-14, the parable of the publican and the Pharisee).

Temptations: “If your hand makes you sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go into hell.” (Mark 9:43-49); “Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” (Matthew 18:7, Luke 17:1-2).

Thankfulness: “Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?...arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well!” (The story of the ten lepers, Luke 17:11-19).

Tongue: “How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:34-37, Matthew 5:22).

Trust in God: “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs on your head are all numbered, Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7); “Let not your heart be

troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1); “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27); “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Truth: “For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37; also see Matthew 13:44-46, the parable of the treasure).

Unity: “There will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16); “That they all may be one, as You Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21); “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

Virtues. The development of good qualities was a constant teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. For example refer to His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7) and the Beatitudes, in which are traced the path towards total fulfillment (Matthew 5:3-12). The parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23); and especially in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) state the importance of development and of the abilities which God gave us. The combination of gifts of grace with the development of abilities (talents) comprises the original wealth of man; that is why it is said that “the Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).

Will of God: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...” (Matthew 6:10); “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven...” (Matthew 7:21).

Worldly Cares: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:19-34); “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26); “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:24, see also Luke 10:41-42, Mark 10:17-27, Luke 12:13-21, parable of the rich fool).

A Prayer before reading the Gospels.

Make to shine in our hearts, O Master who lovest mankind, the incorrupt light of Thy divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind to the comprehension of the preaching of Thy Gospel. Implant also in us the fear of Thy blessed commandments that, trampling down all carnal desires, we may pursue a spiritual way of life, both thinking and doing all things well-pleasing unto Thee. For Thou art the enlightenment of our souls and bodies, O Christ God, and unto Thee do we send up glory, together with Thy Father, who is without beginning, and Thine all-holy, and good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

3. The Book of Acts and Ecumenical Epistles.

Preliminary information.

Because of the increasing diffusion of Christian communities throughout the extensive Roman Empire, it was natural that the Christian mind began to raise questions of religious/moral and practical nature. Unable to attend to these queries personally, at the point

of their origin, the Apostles responded to them through letters-epistles. Consequently, while the Gospel embodies the very fundamentals of the Christian faith, the Apostles' Epistles unveil the different aspects of Christ's Teachings in finer detail and indicate its practical application. Because of the Apostles' Epistles, we have a living witness of their Teachings and how the first Christians developed and lived within their communities. The Church always considered the Apostles' Epistles as the word of the Holy Spirit and as the pure source of the Truth (Luke. 12:12, John. 16:13, 17:17-19). Albeit living conditions change continuously and each year presents new problems, essentially these are the same problems that existed in apostolic times and throughout the ages of mankind's existence. That is why in these Apostolic Teachings, one can find correct guidance toward resolving personal problems as well as discovering the ageless treasures of Christian teachings on faith and life.

This brochure will acquaint the reader with the authors and under what circumstances the Book of Acts and Apostolic Epistles were written. At the conclusion, we shall cite some selected teachings from these Holy Books.

The Book of Acts.

This Book of the Holy Apostles emerges as a direct continuance of the Gospel. Its author's aim is to describe events that occurred following the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and outline the inaugural establishment of Christ's Church. This Book narrates in especial detail the missionary efforts of Apostles Peter and Paul. In his discourse on this Book, St. John Chrysostom explains the great meaning this Book has for Christianity, as the lives of the Apostles contain facts which confirm the truth of the Gospel's teachings: "The actual Book contains within itself the essential truth of the Resurrection." That is why on Easter night in church, before the Resurrection of Christ is hailed, a number of chapters are read from the Acts. It is for this same reason that during the period from Easter to Pentecost, the whole Book is read in sections during daily Liturgies.

By the Acts' author's own citation (Acts 1:1-3), this is his second Book written for Theophilus, who lived in Antioch. From this, one can conclude that the Book of Acts was, by its nature, written as a *continuation of the third Gospel*, and its author appears to be Evangelist Luke, former fellow-traveler and colleague of Apostle Paul. There is also a stylistic likeness between The Gospel according to Luke and the Acts. Reference to the Book of Acts can be found in the writings of the early writers like St. Ignatius Theophorus (God Bearer), St. Polycarp, and St. Justin the Martyr. Through the works of the second century writers – St. Irenaeus of Lyon, Clement of Alexandria, Tertulian, Origen – as well as in the ancient Syrian translation of the Bible known as "Peshito."

The Book of Acts describes the events from the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to the arrival of Ap. Paul in Rome, and covers an almost 30-year period. Chapters 1-12 deal with Ap. Paul's activities among the Jews of Palestine; ch. 13-28 deal with Ap. Paul's activities among the heathens, outside the Palestinian boundaries. The narrative of the Book concludes with the indication that Ap. Paul spent 2 years in Rome, without any restrictions, preaching Christ's teachings (28:30-31). No mention is made of the Apostle's martyr's death that followed 2-years later under the reign of Emperor Nero, in the year 67 AD. It is clear from Church tradition, that after being acquitted in Caesar's court, Ap. Paul performed his fourth missionary journey by travelling again to Jerusalem. From this, it can be concluded that the Book was completed in Rome around the years 63 or 64 AD. St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon mentions Luke as being with him in Rome. In this way, the Book of Acts paints a picture of how Christ's Church, having asserted itself among the Jews in Palestine (in accordance with God's prophesy) amid stubborn disbelief from the majority of the Jewish people, subsequently transgressed into the world of heathens and slowly spread throughout Asia Minor and eastern Europe.

In the Book of Acts, we see the fulfillment of the Savior's prophecies concerning those miracles, which the Apostles will perform in His name, and the triumph of Christ's faith over the world. We observe, how notwithstanding human weaknesses, having no apparent material means or possessions for disseminating the Gospel's teachings, after the Holy Spirit descended upon them, the Apostles became as if different people. Notwithstanding all the persecutions, they fearlessly, with great valor and self-sacrifice, preached the teachings of Christ throughout the four corners of the then cultured Greco-Roman world, establishing many Christian communities in a short period of time. The Book of Acts clearly testifies that the Apostles' sermons are not the work of man, but the work of God. (Let us remember the wise Gamaliel's counsel to the Jews about not persecuting Christ's followers, Acts 5:38-39). The narratives on the life of the early Christians that "*were of one heart and one soul,*" is especially instructive, as they ran contrary to the lives of the then rest of the world, which was drowned in egoism and every type of sin and iniquity. To the pastors of Christ's Church, this Book is important in that it gives them an archetype of Church life and its management on the principles of "through council" (Acts ch. 15). Through narrative and direct instruction, it indicates what type a person should be that serves the Church (Acts 20:18-35).

However, the most important content in this Book is that, unlike any other, it witnesses about the greatest Christian truth: **Christ's Resurrection**. Indeed, the truth of Christ's Resurrection is best proven through miracles performed in His name, and the Book of Acts, in the main, narrates the miracles performed by the Apostles.

Catholic Epistles.

The name *Catholic* (universal) is applied to the seven Epistles written by the Apostles: 1 by James, 2 by Peter, 3 by John the Theologian, and 1 by Jude. In the arrangement of the New Testament of Orthodox publication, they follow immediately after the Book of Acts. Even in early times the Church called them *Catholic* or *Ecumenical*. "*Catholic*" in a sense meaning "circular," because they are not directed to private individuals but to all Christian communities in general. The first time the whole arrangement of the Catholic Epistles was called as such was by Eusebius (beginning of the 4th century AD). The Catholic Epistles are distinct, in as much as they carry somewhat general and basic educational directives of faith, while the Apostle Paul's subject matter was adapted to local churches at which they were directed, and have more special character. While the Apostle Paul's writings are conspicuous in revealing his personal character and the circumstances in his apostolic work, the Ecumenical Epistles enunciate the general mandatory rules and piety for all Christians, and contain hardly any biographical data.

Epistle of St. Apostle James.

The author calls himself "*James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" In the history of the New Testament, there are three known individuals named James: 1) James, son of Zebedee – one of the Twelve and brother of St. John the Theologian; 2) James Alphaeus, brother of St. Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, and also one of the Twelve; and 3) James, called "*brother of the Lord,*" being one of the Seventy disciples of Christ and whose brothers were named Joses, Judas and Simon (Matt. 13:55). He later became the first Bishop of Jerusalem and earned from the Jews the name "Just." In contrast to the other two that belonged to the Twelve, he was called "the Less."

St. James Zebedee's early death came about through martyrdom (around the year 44 in Jerusalem, according to Acts 12:2). St. James Alphaeus preached among the heathens. Aside

from that, James's Catholic Epistle was directed at the Jews, scattered throughout the lands, (1:1) although Church tradition ascribes this letter to the third James – "*brother of the Lord*," first Bishop of Jerusalem. Because of his righteousness, he enjoyed great respect from all the Jews (including the non-faithful), and in his role as Bishop of Jerusalem, could regard all Christian Jews, wherever they may be, as under his hierarchical direction.

It is known that James, "brother" of our Lord, led a very strict ascetic life, was chaste, didn't drink wine or any other alcoholic drinks, did not eat meat, wore linen clothing, strictly observed the laws of Moses and would often isolate himself for prayer, in the Temple of Jerusalem. He was the eldest son of Joseph (who was betrothed to the Blessed Virgin) and his first wife. According to tradition, he accompanied Joseph, Mary and the infant Christ during their flight to Egypt. Initially, like his brothers, he did not fully believe in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. However, subsequently he came to believe with all his heart, for which our Lord, upon His Resurrection, honored him with His extraordinary appearance (1 Cor.15:7). Enjoying enormous respect among the Apostles, he presided over the first Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts ch. 15). It has to be assumed that all his activities were concentrated in Palestine. Around the year 64, he met a martyr's death, being thrown from the top of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Jewish leaders. In enumerating the reasons for the fall of Jerusalem through the war with Rome, the noted Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, stated that the Lord punished the Jews for killing James the Just. Tradition ascribes the composition of an ancient form of Divine Liturgy to St. James, and to this day in Jerusalem and elsewhere, on his commemorative day (23 Oct.), this liturgy is performed throughout many churches.

The Epistle of St. Apostle James was reserved for the Jews: "*To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*," which did not exclude the Jews living in Palestine. The time and place of issue of the Epistle is not indicated. Apparently, it was written not long before his death, probably between 55 and 60 A.D. The place of its composition was probably Jerusalem, as that is where he resided.

The motive for the Epistle were those sorrows which the scattered Jews endured at the hands of heathens, and especially from their own disbelieving brethren. These ordeals were so great that many became dispirited and wavered in their faith. Some complained against the outward misfortunes and against God Himself, although they continued to see that salvation will emanate from Abraham. They had an incorrect view on prayers, underestimated the meaning of good deeds, yet willingly became teachers of others. With this, the rich elevated themselves above the poor and brotherly love began to cool. All this prompted St. James to give them essential, moral therapy in the form of an Epistle.

The second chapter of St. Apostle James's Epistle contains invaluable instructions on the essence of faith, which must be made up not of some abstract acknowledgment of Christian truths, but rather through living acts of compassion. The 5th chapter speaks of the designation and power of the Sacrament of Chrismation.

Epistles of St. Apostle Peter.

Apostle Peter, formerly known as Simon, was the son of a fisherman named Jonah from Bethsaida in Galilee (John 1:42-45) and brother of Andrew the "First-called," who was the one that brought him to Christ. St. Peter was married and had a house in Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29-31). Having being called by Christ the Savior while fishing on the lake of Genesaret (Sea of Galilee; Luke 5:1-8), he always expressed extraordinary loyalty and zeal, for which he earned, together with the Zebedee brothers, an exceptional closeness to Christ (Luke 9:28). Being strong and ardent of spirit, he naturally assumed an influential role among Christ's Disciples. He was the first to resolutely acknowledge Lord Jesus as Christ — i.e., Messiah (Matt. 16:16) — and for this, earned the name *Rock* (Peter). It was on this rock

of Peter's faith that Christ promised to build His Church, which even the gates of Hell would not prevail against (Mat. 16:18). Peter's three renunciations of Christ (on the eve of Christ's Crucifixion) were washed away with bitter tears of repentance. Consequently, after His Resurrection, Christ reinstated his apostolic standing thrice, matching the number of his renunciations, charging him to "feed my lambs" and "tend My sheep" (John 21:15-17). After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Apostle Peter was the first to assist in the spread and affirmation of Christ's Church by making a fiery speech on Pentecost and converting 3000 souls to Christ. Shortly after, having cured a man "lame from his mother's womb," Peter's second sermon converted an additional 5000 Jews to Christianity (Acts ch. 2-4) From the 1st chapter through to the 12th the Book of Acts narrates his apostolic activities. However, after his miraculous release from prison by an Angel, and being forced to hide from Herod (Acts 12:1-17), he is mentioned only once and that is in the passages about the Apostolic council (Acts ch. 15). Other data on Peter has been preserved only in the Church tradition records. It is known that he preached along the shores of Mediterranean sea, in Antioch (where he ordained Bishop Evodius). Apostle Peter preached also to the Jews and Proselytes (pagans that have converted to Judaism) in Asia Minor, and later – in Egypt, where he ordained Mark (the author of the Gospel "according to Mark," transcribed from Apostle Peter's words; Mark was not one of the twelve Apostles) as the first Bishop of the Alexandrian Church. From here he crossed over to Greece (Achaia) and preached in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12). He then evangelized in Rome, Spain, Carthage, and Brittany. Toward the close of his life, Apostle Peter returned again to Rome where he accepted martyrdom in 67 AD, by being crucified upside down.

Apostle Peter's **First General Epistle** is directed "to the pilgrims dispersed in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" – provinces of Asia Minor. It must be understood that "pilgrims" would, in the main, be converted Jews as well as converted heathens that were part of the Christian communities. These communities were established by Apostle Paul. Apostle Peter's reason for writing the Epistle was his wish to "strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32) when disagreements arose in these communities, and also when they were persecuted by the enemies of Christ. Internal antagonists in the form of false teachers appeared among the Christians. Taking advantage of Apostle Paul's absence, they began to distort his teachings on Christian freedom and began patronizing every type of immoral profligacy (1 Peter 2:16, 2 Peter 1:9, 2:1).

Apostle Peter's aim for this Epistle was to encourage, comfort, and confirm the Asia Minor Christians in their faith as he himself points out: "By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand" (1 Peter 5:12).

The place of the first Epistle is shown as Babylon (5:13). In the history of the Christian Church, the Babylonian Church in Egypt is well known where, apparently, St. Peter wrote his Epistle. At that time, both Silvanus and Mark were with him after leaving Apostle Paul, who was sent to trial in Rome. That is why the data of the first Epistle is dated to be between the years 62 and 64 AD.

Apostle Peter's **Second General Epistle** is written for the same Asia Minor Christians. In this second Epistle, Apostle Peter cautions the faithful with particular vigor against the corrupt false teachers. These false teachings resemble those that Apostle Paul discloses in his Epistle to Timothy and Titus, as well as Apostle Jude in his General Epistle. These false teachings posed a threat to the faith and morals of the Christians. At that time, there was a swift spreading of Gnostic heresies, which imbued into themselves elements of Judaism, Christianity, and various pagan teachings. (In essence, gnosticism is theosophy, which in turn is a fantasy clothed in philosophy). In real life, the adherents of these heresies were conspicuous in their immorality, and prided themselves in the knowledge of the "mysteries."

The second Epistle was written by Peter shortly before his martyr's ending: *"I know that shortly I must leave my temple, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me."* These writings can be put down to the years 65-66. Apostle Peter's final years were spent in Rome, from which it can be concluded that the second Epistle was written there in the nature of a "death-bed" testament.

Epistles of the Evangelist John the Theologian.

The style and individual expressions remind us of the Gospel according to John, while ancient tradition regarded him as a beloved disciple of Christ. St. John was the son of Galilean fisherman Zebedee and his wife Salome, who according to tradition, was the daughter from Joseph's betrothed first marriage. Consequently, according to the surrounding residents, he was regarded as Christ's cousin. His elder brother James was also one of the 12 Apostles. Because of the strength of their spirit, Christ called them *"Sons of Thunder"* – *"Boanerges"* (Mark 3:17). Submitting himself to Christ's summons (Mat. 4:21 and Luke 5:10), John left his parents' home, and together with Peter and James became one of His closest disciples (Mark 5:37; Mat. 17:1;). John was honored by the Lord with a special love: he rested his head on Christ's bosom at the Last Supper, and at the Cross was given by Christ unto His Blessed Mother, as Her son (John 13:23-25; 19:26). Although not naming himself, St. John speaks of himself as the disciple that Christ loved (John 19:26). Of all the disciples, only John did not leave his Teacher and stood on Golgotha at the Cross itself.

After Christ's Ascension and Descent of the Holy Spirit, St. John continued to live in Jerusalem for the next 15 years until the glorious Assumption of the Mother of God. Together with Peter and James, he took an active part in the establishment of the Jerusalem Church and together with them, was regarded as its pillar (Gal. 2:9). He and St. Peter traveled to pray for the newly baptized Samaritans so that they could receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-15). Later, he turned to Asia Minor with his sermon, established himself in Ephesus, from where he administered all the churches in Asia Minor. After being thrown into a vat of boiling oil and remaining miraculously unscathed, he was banished from Ephesus by emperor Domitian to an island called Patmos. During exile, he wrote his Apocalypse – Revelations. Later, he returned to Ephesus and at the end of the 1st century, wrote his Gospel and 3 Epistles. He remained chaste and unmarried, and at the beginning of the 2nd century died a somewhat mysterious death in Ephesus. Not naming himself in his Epistles, St. John writes about himself as an eyewitness to the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-4).

The First General Epistle was written by John after he wrote the Gospel — *"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you"* (1 John 1:1-4) — and apparently in Ephesus at the end of the 1st century.

It was written for the long established Asia Minor churches, whose congregations were mainly made up of former pagans. During this time, the teachings of gnosticism – which Apostles Jude, Peter, and Paul fought against — had increased throughout Asia Minor, replacing the rites of Judaism and crude paganism. The Gnostic false teachers rejected the Divinity of Jesus Christ and His Worthiness as the world's Savior, rejected the validity of His Incarnation, and treated iniquities lightly, contending that knowledge gives the individual full freedom and the right to moral dissipation.

Because of this, the tone of the Epistle is admonishing and accusatory. The aim of the Epistle is to verify the faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, so that all will receive eternal life through Him and dwell in Truth and Love.

The Second General Epistle. There are no authentic data to indicate the designation of this Epistle apart from those that are contained within the writing itself. Who “*the elect lady and her children*” were by name is not known. The only thing clear is that they were Christians. As to the time and place when the Epistle was written, one might think that this occurred at the same time as when the first Epistle was written in Ephesus. John’s second Epistle contains only one chapter. In it, the Apostle expresses his joy about the chosen lady’s children “walking in truth,” promising to visit her and exhorting not to associate with false teachers.

The Third General Epistle is addressed to Gaius. The exact identity of this person is unknown. From the Apostles’ writings and from Church tradition, it is known that there were a number of individuals that bore that name (Acts 19:29, 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14 etc), but to which one it was written cannot be determined. Apparently this Gaius did not hold any hierarchical capacity but was a pious and hospitable Christian. As with the second Epistle, it can be assumed that the third Epistle was written at the same time and place, i.e. Ephesus, where Apostle John spent the last years of his life on earth. This Epistle is also made up of one chapter only. In it, the Apostle praises Gaius for his benevolent life, firmness in his faith in God and for his “*walk in the truth*” – especially his benevolent attitude toward travelling strangers and his generous relationship with the preachers of the Word of God. He also censures power-loving Diotrefes, conveys some news, and sends his greetings.

Epistle of St. Apostle Jude.

The author of this Epistle refers to himself as “*Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.*” From this, it can be concluded that this is the same Apostle Judas of the Twelve, who was also called James, as well as Lebbaeus and Thaddaeus (Mat. 10:3; Mark 3:18; John 14:22). He was the son of Joseph (Blessed Virgin Mary’s betrothed) from his first real wife, and brother to Joseph’s other children: James (who subsequently became Bishop of Jerusalem and was known as “The Just”), Joses, and Simon who subsequently also became the Bishops of Jerusalem. According to tradition, his first name was Judas. When he was baptized by John the Baptist, he was named Thaddaeus, and when he became one of the Twelve Apostles, he was called Lebbaeus, perhaps to distinguish him from the betrayer, Judas Iscariot.

According to tradition, after Christ’s Ascension, St. Jude’s apostolic service saw him at first preaching in Judea, Galilee, Samaria and Idumea, and then in Arabia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Armenia, where he received a martyr’s death being crucified and shot with arrows.

By referring to his Epistle (verse 3) it can be seen that St. Jude’s concern was “common salvation” and alarm at the intensification of false teachings. In a straightforward manner, St. Jude states that he writes because impious people have crept into the Christian community, converting Christian freedom into a reason for immorality. Undoubtedly, these false preacher-agnostics, believing that the world was not God’s creation but that of lower forces hostile to Him, encouraged corruptness under the guise of “mortifying” the flesh. These are the same Simoniacs and Nicolaitans that are exposed by St. John in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of his Apocalypse. The purpose for the Epistle was to warn the Christians not to be captivated by these false teachings that seduce emotions. While the Epistle was written for all Christians, it can be seen by its content that it was designed for those circles of individuals that have been accessed by the false teachers. It can be assumed with certainty that this Epistle was primarily directed to those Asia Minor churches, to whom Apostle Peter wrote at a later date.

Undoubtedly this Epistle was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in the year 70, and in describing all the remarkable manifestations of God’s judgments, St. Jude would not have failed to mention this most astonishing event. The similarity

of this Epistle with that of Apostle Peter's gives rise to the thought that it was written after Peter's, and that St. Jude took advantage of St. Peter's descriptive characteristics of the false teachers by applying them nearly verbatim.

The General Epistle of St. Jude is made up of one chapter and represents one continuous address, directed against the false teachers.

Selected Teachings.

Here we present selected Apostolic instructions in alphabetical order.

Abiding in God: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6). "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28). "If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:12-13).

Born from above: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves Him who is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1).

Conscience: "And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God" (1 John 3:19-21).

End of the World, Judgment: "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9). "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

Faith: "And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23). "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe in God has made Him a liar, because he had not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:10-11). "But let him ask with faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:6-7). "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works ... You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble! ... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:14-26).

Family: "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not

afraid with any terror. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:1-7).

God, trust in Him and His love: “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7). “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1).

Good deeds and righteousness: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). “As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness... giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:3-9). “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29). “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (3 John 1:11).

Knowing God: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4). “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things... But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1 John 2:20 and 27).

Life: “The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (1 John 1:2). “And this is the promise that He has promised us – eternal life” (1 John 2:25). “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1 John 3:14).

Light: “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:9-11).

Love: “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the Apostles gave witness to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the Apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:32-35). "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5). "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:16-18). "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:17-21). "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2-3). "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it" (2 John 6).

Mercy: "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

Obedience (serving): "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to Whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Passions: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'" (2 Peter 2:19-22).

Piety: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Prayer: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:21-22). "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him,

that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

Repentance: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:8-10).

Salvation: “... knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10 and Osee 2:23). “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:18 and Proverbs 11:31).

Sicknesses: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:13-15).

Sin: “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:15).

Temptations and sorrows: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing...Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (James 1:2-4, 12-14).

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7). “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:20-21). “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1-2). “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter” (1 Peter 4:12-16).

Tongue, control of: “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (James 1:26). “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2). “Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles” (James 3:5). “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit” (1 Peter 3:10 and Ps. 34:12-16).

Truth: “I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father” (2 John 1:4). “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:9-11). “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4).

Wisdom: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

The World steeped in evil: “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4). “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5). “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).

Wrath: “For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

Conclusion.

In summarizing the Book of Acts and the Apostolic Epistles, both Ecumenical as well as Apostle Paul’s (about which there will be a discourse in the next brochure), it must be said that they all doggedly persuade Christians to abide with spiritual solidarity in the blessed community called Church, that was established by the Savior. The path to salvation is open to all those that believe in the incarnate Son of God, Lord Jesus Christ, Who shed His blessed blood for the redemption of mankind’s sins and gave His Church the Comforter. In order to be saved, man must follow the path shown by Christ. As well, he must not go alone but together with other salvation seekers, availing himself of assistance from the blessed community and receiving the necessary directions from its pastors. The main attributes of the community of salvation seekers are: a) New life, acquired by them from communion with God through Lord Jesus Christ; and b) Abiding in a spiritual light – i.e., in the purity of the

Gospel's Truth and in mutual love. Outside the Church, there is nothing but the darkness of ignorance, sin, and hatred. This is the realm of the Devil, prince of this world. In living a blessed life of the Church, a Christian expands spiritually, grows more complete and for his acts, patience, and good deeds, and becomes deserving of eternal life.

4. Epistles of Apostle Paul.

Foreword.

Of all the New Testament holy authors, Apostle Paul — having written some 14 Epistles — stands out as being the most prolific in expounding instructions on Christian living. Because of the significance of their contents, they are rightfully regarded as the “second Gospel,” attracting attention from both thinkers-philosophers and the ordinary faithful. The Apostles themselves did not ignore the works of their “beloved brother,” who was last to convert to Christ, yet equal to them in spirit and sanctified gifts (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Presenting themselves as an important and necessary appendix to the teachings of the Gospel, the Epistles of the Apostle Paul should be the subject of an attentive and earnest study of every person that seeks a deeper understanding of the Christian faith. These Epistles are outstanding in their remarkably elevated religious thoughts, reflecting the Apostle Paul's extensive knowledge and scholarship of the Old Testament, which were equal to his profound understanding of Christ's New Testament teachings. In trying to express his deep thoughts and not finding the necessary words in the contemporary Greek lexicon to do this, Apostle Paul was compelled to create his own expressions by blending existing words to give them a new meaning. Later, these new words were widely used by Christian writers in their literary works.

Correlation between Apostle Paul's teachings and his life.

The Epistles of Apostle Paul are the fruits of his Apostolic endeavors to uncover the teachings of Christ. They are remarkable because the Apostle does not do this in an abstract manner, but rather through a close link with the development of the churches established by him, and through his personal Apostolic labors and personal sufferings. Because the teachings outlined in his Epistles are closely interwoven with his personality, an understanding of his life and character would assist in comprehending them. That is why we shall now acquaint the reader with those aspects of Apostle Paul's life — which he himself pointed out — which served as his source in determining questions relating to the Christian teachings on faith and morality. “ For I am the least of the Apostles, who am not worthy to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:9-10). This is how this great “Apostle of tongues” characterized himself and who was recorded in the annals of the history of the Christian Church as the “heathen's Apostle.”

Endowed from birth with abounding mental capabilities, he was brought up and educated along strict Pharisee principles and by his own words, was more advanced than many of his contemporaries and in his youth, was exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers (Gal. 1:14). Consequently, when God selected him in his mother's womb and called him to Apostolic ministry, he devoted all the energy and towering strength of his great spirit toward preaching in the name of Christ among the heathens. This action forced him to suffer much

sorrow from his fellow countrymen that were blinded with disbelief in their animosity toward Christ.

In studying the life and works of Saint Paul through the Book of Apostolic Acts, it is truly impossible not to be astonished at the extraordinary, inexhaustible energy of this great “Apostle of tongues.” It is difficult to imagine how a person lacking in health and physical strength (Gal. 4:13-14), could sustain so many extraordinary hardships and dangers as Apostle Paul had to endure, for the glory of Christ. What is especially remarkable is the fact that as these difficulties and dangers grew, instead of his impassioned zeal and energy weakening, they increased and became stronger.

Compelled to remember his labors in order to enlighten the Corinthians, the Apostle writes: “Are they ministers of Christ? — I speak as a fool — I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness...” (2 Cor. 11:23-27).

In comparing himself to the other Apostles, his humility prompts him to call himself as the “least” among them, even though he would have been fully justified in declaring: “But I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Indeed, without God’s grace no ordinary human being could undertake such tasks and accomplish so many deeds. As much as Apostle Paul presented himself before kings as strong, forthright and unshakeable in his beliefs, so was he decisive and sincere in his relations with his fellow-brother Apostles. Once, in the city of Antioch — capital of the heathens in Asia Minor — he did not hesitate to accuse Apostle Peter of hypocrisy when that Apostle’s motive for censure was flawed (Gal. 2:11-14). This fact is also important in that it clearly denounces the false assertion of the Roman Catholics that Apostle Peter was designated by Christ as the “prince above all other Apostles” and as the substitute for Christ Himself (hence the Roman Popes appropriated the title “vicar of the Son of God”). Being the last to become an Apostle and having formerly persecuted the Christian Church, would Apostle Paul dare to accuse the “substitute” of the Lord Jesus Christ? This is absolutely unlikely. Apostle Paul accused Apostle Peter as an equal, as a brother.

Life and works of Apostle Paul.

Saint Paul, carrying at first his Hebrew name Saul, belonged to the tribe of Benjamin and was born in the Cilician town of Tarsus (in Asia Minor), which was then renowned for its Greek academy and for the scholarship of its citizens. Because he was a native of this city and descended from Jews freed from Roman slavery, Paul had the rights of a Roman citizen. Paul received his initial education in Tarsus, and probably became familiar with the pagan culture, since his acquaintance with gentile writers is clearly shown in his speeches and writings (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12). He received his final education in Jerusalem from the famous teacher Gamaliel in the acclaimed rabbinical school. Gamaliel was considered an expert on the law and despite belonging to the party of Pharisees, was a freethinking person (Acts 5:34) and an admirer of Greek wisdom. Here, according to the accepted custom of the Jews, young Saul learned the art of tent-making, which later provided him with the means to live from his own labors (Acts 18:3; 2 Cor. 11:8; 2 Thes. 3:8.).

Evidently young Saul was preparing for a rabbinical career, since directly after finishing his education and training he emerged as a strong zealot of pharisaic traditions and persecu-

tor of the Christian faith. Perhaps by the appointment of the Sanhedrin, he was a witness to the death of the first martyr Stephan (Acts 7:58, 8:1) and then received official authority to persecute the Christians beyond the borders of Palestine in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2.).

The Lord, seeing in him a “chosen vessel,” called him to Apostolic service by miraculous means on the road to Damascus. During his journey, a bright light enveloped Saul, from which he fell to the ground blind. A voice resounded from the light, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul asked, “Who are you?” Jesus answered, “I am Jesus, Who you are persecuting.” The Lord commanded Saul to go to Damascus, where he would be instructed on what to do further. Saul’s companions heard the voice of Christ, but they did not see the light. After being led by the arm to Damascus, Paul was taught the faith and on the third day was baptized by Ananias. The moment Saul was submerged in the baptismal water, he regained his sight. From that point on, he became a zealous preacher of the teachings he had formerly persecuted. He went to Arabia for a short period and then returned to Damascus to preach about Christ.

In 38AD, angered by his conversion to Christ, the vehemence of the Jews forced him to flee to Jerusalem (Acts 9:23), where he joined the community of believers and was introduced to the Apostles. Because of an attempt on his life by the Hellenists, he left for his native Tarsus. From there, around 43 AD, he was called by Barnabas to preach in Antioch, followed by a journey together to Jerusalem, bringing aid to the needy (Acts 11:30.).

Soon after his return from Jerusalem, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, Saul and Barnabas left on their first missionary journey, lasting from 45 to 51 AD. The Apostles traveled throughout the entire island of Cyprus, and by the time Saul converted the proconsul Sergius Paulus, he was already known as Paul. During the time of Paul and Barnabas’s missionary journey, Christian communities were founded in the Asia Minor cities of Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. In 51 AD, Saint Paul took part in the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem where he heatedly opposed the necessity for gentile Christians to follow the traditions of Mosaic law.

Returning to Antioch, Saint Paul in the company of Silas undertook his second missionary journey. At first he visited the churches that he had founded earlier in Asia Minor, and then crossed over to Macedonia, where he founded congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. In Lystra, Saint Paul gained his favorite pupil Timothy, and from Troas he continued the journey with the recently joined Apostle Luke. From Macedonia saint Paul crossed over into Greece, where he preached in Athens and Corinth, remaining in the latter city for one and a half years. His 2 Epistles to the Thessalonians was sent from here. The second journey lasted from 51 to 54 AD. In 55 AD Saint Paul left for Jerusalem, visiting Ephesus and Caesaria on the way and from Jerusalem, went to Antioch (Acts 17 and 18.).

After a short stay in Antioch Saint Paul undertook his third missionary journey (56-58 AD), at first visiting, according to his custom, churches that were founded earlier in Asia Minor, and then stopping at Ephesus, where he preached daily for two years in the school of Tyrannus. He wrote his letter to the Galatians (because of the insurgence of a faction of Judaists there) and his first letter to the Corinthians (because of the upsurge of agitators and also to respond to a letter to him from the Corinthians). A local riot, stirred up against Paul by a master silversmith named Demetrius, forced the Apostle to abandon Ephesus and leave for Macedonia (Acts 19). On the way he received news from Titus about the state of the Corinthian church and about the favorable reaction to his Epistle. Consequently, he sent a second Epistle to the Corinthians from Macedonia with Titus. Shortly after, he came to Corinth himself where he wrote a letter to the Romans, intending to later leave for Rome and further west, after going to Jerusalem.

Bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders in Miletus, he arrived in Jerusalem. Because of a riot that sprung up against him, Paul was taken under guard by the Roman authorities and ended up in prison, at first under Proconsul Felix and then under his successor, Proconsul Festus. This happened in 59 AD. In 61 AD Paul, as a Roman citizen, was granted his request

to be sent to Rome to the court of Caesar. Enduring a shipwreck in Malta, the Apostle arrived in Rome only in the summer of 62 AD. Because the Roman authorities held Paul in such a high esteem, he was able to preach freely. Thus end the details of his life in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 27 and 28). In Rome Saint Paul wrote his letters to the Philippians (with gratitude for the financial aid sent to him with Epaphroditus), to the Colossians, to the Ephesians, and to Philemon, a citizen of Colossus (concerning his slave Onesimus, who had run away). All three of these Epistles were written in 63 AD and were sent with Tychicus. Here too, the Epistle to the Palestinian Hebrews was written in 64 AD.

The further fate of Apostle Paul is not known with any certainty. Some think that he stayed in Rome and by the orders of Nero died a martyr's death in 64 AD. But there is evidence that suggests that after a two year imprisonment, Paul was given his freedom and he took on a fourth missionary journey, which was indicated by his "Pastoral Epistles" to Timothy and Titus. After defending his actions before the Senate and the Emperor, Saint Paul was freed from bondage so he could again travel to the east. Spending a long time on the island of Crete, he left his pupil Titus to ordain elders throughout all the cities (Titus 1:5), which shows that Titus was ordained by Paul to be the bishop of the church in Crete. Later in his letter Paul instructs Titus on how to go about his duties as a bishop. From this letter it is clear that Paul intended to spend that winter of 64 in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), near his native Tarsus.

During the spring of 65 AD, he visited the rest of the churches in Asia Minor and in Miletus, he left the sick Trophimus. Earlier, the people in Jerusalem rioted against Paul because of Trophimus, bringing about Paul's first imprisonment (2 Tim. 4:20). Whether Saint Paul went through Ephesus is not known. He said that the Ephesian elders would not see his face again (Acts 20:25), although at the time, it appears that he ordained Timothy as bishop of the Ephesian church. Later the Apostle went through Troas, where he left his bishop's mantle (the outer layer of liturgical clothing) and books (probably also liturgical books, 2 Tim. 4:13) with a certain Carpus, and then left for Macedonia. Upon hearing about the strengthening of false teachings in Ephesus, he wrote his first letter to Timothy from there. After spending some time in Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20) and meeting Peter on the way, they continued their journey together through Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10) and Italy. They arrived in Rome where in 66 AD, Peter remained while Paul continued further to the west, probably reaching Spain.

After his return to Rome, he was imprisoned (for the second time), where he remained until his death. There is a tradition that upon his return to Rome, he preached at the very door of the emperor Nero and converted his favorite concubine to Christ. For this he was condemned and even though by God's mercy — in his own words — he was "delivered from the lion's mouth," that is from being devoured by animals in the circus (1 Tim. 4:16-17), he was yet again in prison. During this second imprisonment he wrote his second letter to Timothy in Ephesus, inviting him to Rome for a last meeting, sensing death was at hand. Tradition doesn't say whether Timothy managed to find his teacher alive, but it does say that the Apostle did not have to wait long for his martyr's crown. After a nine-month imprisonment he was beheaded as a Roman citizen, not far from Rome. This happened in 67 AD during the 12th year of Nero's reign.

A general observation of Apostle Paul's life shows that it is sharply divided into two halves. Before his conversion to Christ, Saint Paul (then Saul) was a strict Pharisee, fulfiller of the law of Moses and the traditions of his fathers, thinking that he could be justified by the works of the law and his zeal for the faith of his fathers, reaching even fanaticism. After his conversion, he became an Apostle of Christ, totally committed to the task of spreading the gospel, fortunate in his calling, yet recognizing his own impotence for fulfilling this eminent ministry and attributing all of his deeds and merits to the grace of God. All of Paul's life before his conversion was driven by a deep conviction toward deviation and sin, which led him towards condemnation instead of justification, and only the mercy of God saved him from

this destructive delinquency. From that moment on, Saint Paul tries to be worthy of God's grace and not turn away from his calling. Therefore there cannot be any talk of personal merit — all of it was God's doing.

All of Saint Paul's teachings revealed in his Epistles, being a full reflection of his life, carry this very fundamental thought: man is justified by faith, independent of deeds of the law (Romans 3:28). However, it cannot be concluded from this that Apostle Paul rejects any significance of good deeds (See for example Gal. 6:4, Eph. 2:10 or 1 Tim 2:10 and others). According to his Epistles, the understanding of "works of the law" does not mean "good deeds" in general, but ritualistic observance of the Mosaic Law. It must be remembered that during the time of his evangelistic work, Paul needed to carry out a bitter struggle against the opposition of the Judaists and Judean Christians.

Upon becoming Christians, many of the Judaists held the view that it too was necessary for Christians to strictly observe all the ceremonial instructions of Mosaic Law. They deluded themselves with conceited notions that Christ came to earth to save the Jews only, and therefore gentiles wanting to be saved, needed to undertake circumcision and observe all of the Jewish rituals. This delusion impeded the spread of Christianity among the gentiles so strongly, that the Apostles were obliged to convene in 51 AD the Jerusalem Council, which removed the requirements of the ceremonial decrees of the law of Moses for Christians. However, even after this Council, many Judean Christians continued to stubbornly hold to their former views and as a consequence, split from the Church by establishing their own heretical society. These heretics opposed Apostle Paul personally and injected disturbances into the life of any church, where Paul was absent. That's why Saint Paul needed to continually underline in his Epistles that Christ was the Savior of all humanity — for Jews just as well as for gentiles — and that a person was not saved by fulfilling the ceremonial deeds of the law, but only through faith in Christ. Unfortunately, Luther and his successors — the Protestants — distorted these thoughts of Apostle Paul, because to them Paul had repudiated the importance of every good deed for salvation. If this were so, then he would not have written in his first Epistle to the Corinthians in the 13th chapter that "if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2, NIV), because this love would immediately manifest itself in good deeds.

List of Apostle Paul's epistles.

On the basis of credible witnesses, the common voice of the Church attributes fourteen Epistles to Apostle Paul's authorship, which appear in the Bible in the following order:

- Epistle to the Romans,
- First Epistle to the Corinthians,
- Second Epistle to the Corinthians,
- Epistle to the Galatians,
- Epistle to the Ephesians,
- Epistle to the Philippians,
- Epistle to the Colossians,
- First Epistle to the Thessalonians,
- Second Epistle to the Thessalonians,
- First Epistle to Timothy,
- Second Epistle to Timothy,
- Epistle to Titus,
- Epistle to Philemon,
- Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Epistles are not in any chronological order, but are arranged according to their significance and magnitude of their circulation, and by the relative importance of the Church and its people to whom they are addressed. The Epistles to the three individuals follow those Epistles to the seven Churches. The Epistle to the Hebrews is last because it was the last to be authenticated. Usually, Apostle Paul's Epistles are separated into two uneven groups: 1) Epistles of a general Christian nature and 2) Pastoral Epistles. The Epistles to Timothy and Titus belong to the second category, because they indicate the basis and rules of good pastorship.

Certain sections of Apostle Paul's Epistles gave rise to thoughts that he had written other Epistles that have not reached us eg. 1 Cor. 5:9, also Col. 4:16. While the correspondence with an unknown philosopher Seneka, brother of pro-consul Gallio (as mentioned in Acts 18:12) was attributed to Paul, this could not be authenticated.

Outline of Apostle Paul's teachings.

The Epistles of Apostle Paul carries great importance in the composition of the New Testament, because it is in them that we find a deep and all-encompassing revelation and elucidation of the mysteries of the Gospel's teachings. Apart from Apostle Paul's individual, especially-loved mysteries of Christ's faith, for example: the meaning of the Old Testament law in relation to the New Testament, the corruption and decay of human nature, the only means of justification before God is through faith in Jesus Christ, it can be said that there is not one point in the whole of Christian dogma that did not have its beginnings and affirmation in his Epistles. The bulk of the Epistles are structured on the one and only plan. They begin with a greeting to the readers and expression of gratitude to God for His providential activity about the place it is addressed to. Further on, the Epistle is usually divided into two parts — religious instructions (doctrinal) and moral directives. In conclusion, the Apostle touches upon private matters, charges persons with commissions, discusses his personal circumstances, expresses his kind wishes and sends greetings of peace and love. His language is lively and bright — reminiscent of the ancient Prophets, and reflects a profound understanding of the Old Testament.

Selected text from his teachings.

Because the opportunity to give a more detailed account of St. Paul's many faceted Christian teachings is constrained by time and space, we will limit ourselves to citing extracts from his Epistles, which are essentially of a moral nature. As we will see in them, the Apostle explains what constitutes a true spiritual life — that what every Christian should strive for. For convenience sake, we bring these excerpts by subject order — in alphabetical sequence — so that the reader may easily refer to them in Apostle Paul's Epistles.

The grace of God and spiritual gifts: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:14-16). “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit...But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individ-

ually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:4-11). “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying of godliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:11-13).

See also: Rom. 5:2; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; 2 Cor. 3:5; 4:7; 6:1-2; 8:9; Gal. 3:5; Ephes. 4:7-12; Philip. 2:13; Heb. 4:16; 12:15.

About attitudes toward riches: “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (Heb. 13:5). See also: 1 Tim. 6:9-11.

Life is spiritual warfare: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on a breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephes. 6:11-17). See also: 1 Thes. 5:4-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Colos. 2:14-15.

Faith and its meaning: “through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). “For we walk by faith not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). See also: Rom. 3:28-30, 14:23; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:16, 3:26; Eph. 6:16; Heb. 11:1.

On resurrection of the dead: 1 Cor. 15:12-57; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; Phil. 3:10-11, 3:20-21; Heb. 2:14-15, 4:1-11.

On the Second Coming of Christ: 1 Thes. 5:1-3; 2 Thes. 1:6-10.

On celibacy and marriage: 1 Cor. 7:1-17.

On good deeds: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:9-10). “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephes. 2:10). “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:16). See also: Ephes. 6:8; Phil. 2:4; Col. 4:17; 1 Thes. 5:15; Titus 3:14; Heb. 13:1-3.

On gratefulness to God: “Now godliness with contentment IS GREAT GAIN. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction

and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:6-10). “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:17-19).

Spiritual renovation and Christian life: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”.... “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 3:27-29; 5:16). “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ Who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, unseemliness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him”

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things, The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:4-9).

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thes. 5:14-22).

Baptism is death to sin: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Jesus Christ, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the

Spirit of life in Jesus Christ has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2). “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:5-10). See also: Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 5:7-8; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:27-29, 5:16-26, 6:8, 6:15; Ephes. 2:1-6, 2:14-15, 3:16-17, 4:22-5:11, 5:14; Col. 3:1-17, 3:23-24; Phil. 2:14-15, 3:8-15, 3:17, 3:20-21, 4:4-9, 4:11-13; Thes. 5:14-22. About death to sin and baptism, see also Rom. 6:1-7, 8:1-17, 8:32-34; Gal. 2:19-20 and 3:27; Col. 2:11-14; 2 Tim. 2:11-13.

Singularity of the faithful: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:1-5). “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another” (Gal. 5:15). “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). See also Ephes. 4:1-5, 4:13; Phil. 1:27.

Deeds of the law does not justify a person: Rom. 3:19-5:2 and the Epistle to the Galatians.

Life and death: Phil. 1:21-24.

Redemption through Christ and about the Cross: 1 Cor. 1:18-24, 2:2; Gal. 6:14; Phi. 3:18-19; Rom. 5_10; Col. 1;20_23; Heb. 5:1-9; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Gal. 3:13-14; Ephes. 1:7, 2:16; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:11-28, 10:5, 10:14-22.

Qualifications and responsibilities of the God’s servants: Bishops (1 Tim.3:1-7), Priest (Titus 1:5-9) and Deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

Meekness and forgiveness: “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:18-21). “Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5). See also: Gal. 6:1; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:25.

Love towards God: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’ (Psalm 43:23). Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor Angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39).

Love toward your neighbor: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails, but whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away” (1 Cor. 13:1-8). “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Gal. 5:14). See also 1 Thes. 4:9; 1 Tim. 1:5-6.

Prayer: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2) See also: Rom. 8:26-27; Ephes. 5:19-20, 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1-3; Heb. 13:15.

God’s wisdom in man’s salvation: 1 Cor. 2:4-16, 3:18-21; Ephes. 1:17-19, 3:18-19, 5:15-17; Col. 1:9, 2:3, 3:16.

Manhood: “And not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God” (Phil. 1:28). See also: 1 Cor. 16:13.

On worthlessness of those who live idle lives: Heb. 6:4-8, 10:26-31.

Reward for good deeds: Romans 2:6-17.

Justification by faith and grace: Gal. 2:16-21, 3:18-26; Titus 3:4-7.

Responsibility: Romans 2:6-17.

Christ and His two natures: Col. 1:15-20, 2:9; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-4; Heb. 2:7-11.

Last days and antichrist: 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-5.

Ordeals, Lent and the deadening of sinful flesh: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2). “Do you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:24-27). “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24).

Holy Gospel Divinely inspired: 2 Tim. 3:15-16; Heb. 4; 12.

Knowing God: Rom. 1:19-32.

Help for the needy: “But this I say: he who sows sparingly (donates sparingly) will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give

as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever' (Psalm 111:9). Now may he who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the Saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor. 9:6-12). See also: 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:11-15.

Examples of faith of past righteous fathers: Heb. 11:1 — 12:3.

On happiness: "For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace" (Gal. 5:22). "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 3:1, 4:4; 1 Thes. 5:16).

Christian freedom: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.....For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:1, 5:13). "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Cor. 8:9-13). See also Rom. 14:13.

Piety: "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people' (Lev. 26:12). Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you (Isa. 52:11) I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Mighty' (Jer. 3:19, Hos. 52:11). Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 6:16 — 7:1). "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor" (1 Thes. 4:3-4). See also: 1 Cor. 6:15-20; 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1; Ephes. 1:4; Col. 1:22-23; 1 Thes. 4:3-4; Heb. 10:10, 10:14, 12:14-15.

Family and about the responsibilities of its members: Ephes. 5:22-23, 6:1-4; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Tim. 2:9-15.

Tribulations and temptations: "Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:2-4). "For consider Him Who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives' (Proverbs 3:11-12). If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we

may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed” (Heb. 12:3-13). See also: Rom. 5:2-4; 2 Cor. 4:8-18, 1:3-6, 7:10, 12:10; 1Thes. 3:3-4; 2 Thes. 1:6-7; 2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 2:18, 4:15, 12:3-13.

Humility: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3). See also: Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:26-31; Col. 3:12.

Condescension and help one another: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1-2).

Conscience: “This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophesies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck” (1 Tim. 1:18-19). See also: Heb. 9:14, 10:22.

Do not litigate or altercate: 1 Cor. 6:1-7.

Christians — sons of God: Gal. 4:7; Ephes. 2:18.

Patience: “But as for you brethren, do not grow weary in doing good” (2 Thes. 3:13). “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Tim. 6:11). “For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Heb. 10:36, 12:1; Rom. 5:3).

Industriousness: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thes. 3:8-12). See also: 1 Thes. 4:10-12; 1 Tim. 5:8).

Significance of Apostle Paul’s epistles.

Consequently, Apostle Paul’s Epistles emerge as a profound source of spiritual wisdom and inspiration. It would appear that there is not one religious truth that has not been illuminated and elucidated by his works. Moreover, these truths are presented not as some abstract, theological perception, but as a reality of faith that stimulates a person toward righteous living. Responding to the actual problems that confronted the early Christians of the first century, Apostle Paul’s Epistles serve as valuable additions to the New Testament. They explain in practical terms how to master the unavoidable ordeals in life, how to realize high Christian ideals, and what constitutes the essence of Christian endeavor. They describe in a living voice, the way of life and endeavors of the first Christians, the establishment of Christian communities, gives the characteristics of the purpose of Christ’s Church in Apostolic times.

Apostle Paul’s Epistles are equally valuable in their autobiographical notations. They show how in his own personal life, the Apostle applied these high Christian principles that he preached. As a consequence, this assisted him in his missionary work from which he drew his spiritual strength. The first element of success in Apostle Paul’s missionary activity was his capability to concentrate his enormous talents, his spiritual and physical powers toward one goal — serving Christ. The second element was his total commitment to Christ’s direc-

tive grace, which inspired him and gave him strength to overcome all outward obstacles and personal weaknesses. God's grace helped him to convert a significant part of the Roman Empire to Christ.

Through the prayers of Apostle Paul, may Christ enlighten and be merciful to us!

5. The Book of Revelation.

The significance of the Apocalypse.

The Apocalypse ("apocalupsis" in Greek, means revelation) of St. John the Theologian is the only prophetic book of the New Testament. It foretells the impending fate of mankind, the end of the world, and the beginning of eternal life, and it is, therefore, naturally placed at the end of the Holy Scripture.

The Apocalypse is a book of mystery, and its comprehension is difficult. At the same time, it is the very mysterious character of this book that draws to it the interest of believing Christians, as well as that of simply inquisitive thinkers, striving to resolve the meaning and significance of the visions described therein. There are a great number of books about the Apocalypse, among which are found quite a few absurd publications, especially those which are associated with contemporary sectarian literature.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in understanding this book, spiritually enlightened Fathers and Teachers of the Church have always treated it with great reverence as a book which had been inspired by God. Thus, St. Dionysius of Alexandria writes: "The darkness of this book does not prevent one from being astonished at it. And even if I do not understand everything in it, that is only because of my incapability. I cannot be a judge of the truths which are contained in it or measure them with the poverty of my mind, being guided more by faith than by understanding. I find them only surpassing my understanding." The Blessed Jerome expresses himself in the same manner regarding the Apocalypse: "In it there are as many mysteries as words. But what am I saying? Every praise of this book will be beneath its worth."

The Apocalypse is not read during the Liturgy because in ancient times the reading of Holy Scripture at the Liturgy was always followed by an explanation of it, whereas the Apocalypse is quite complex to explain.

The author.

The author of the Apocalypse refers to himself as John (Rev. 1:1, 4 and 9, and 22:8). In the opinion of all the Holy Fathers of the Church, he was the Apostle John, the beloved disciple of Christ, who had received the distinctive name "*Theologian*" because of the extent of his studies regarding the Word of God. His authorship of the Apocalypse is substantiated in factual basis in the Apocalypse itself, as well as by many internal and external signs. To the inspired pen of John the Theologian belongs one of the Gospels and also three Epistles to the churches. The author of the Apocalypse states that he was on the island of Patmos "*for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ*" (Rev. 1:9). It is known from Church history that of all the Apostles, only St. John the Theologian was subjected to incarceration on this island.

The proof of authorship of the Apocalypse by St. John the Theologian is in the similarity of this book with his Gospel and the Epistles, similarity not only in spirit, but also in the writing style, and especially in certain characteristic expressions. Thus, for example, the Apostolic sermon is referred to here as “*witnessing*” or “*testimony*” (Rev. 1:2-9; 20:4; also see John 1:7; 3:11; 21:24; 1 John 5:9-11). The Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as “*the Word*” (Rev. 19:13 and John 1:1-14 and 1 John 1:1) and “*the Lamb*” (Rev. 5:6 and 17:14; also see John 1:36). The prophetic words of Zechariah, “*Then they will look on Me Whom they have pierced*” (Zech. 12:10), both in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse are quoted in the same manner, according to the Greek translation of the “*Seventy*” (Rev. 1:7 and John 19:37, Septuagint translation). Some differences can be seen in the language between the Apocalypse and other writings by the Holy Apostle John. They are explained as being differences in context as well as in circumstances of origin of the Holy Apostle's writings. St. John, being a Jew by birth and, although having a command of the Greek language, finding himself incarcerated and away from living, spoken Greek, naturally imprinted on the Apocalypse the influence of his native tongue. It is evident to the unbiased reader of the Apocalypse that its total content bears the mark of the Apostle's great spirit of love and contemplation.

St. John's disciple St. Papias of Hierapolis refers to the writer of the Apocalypse as “*John the Elder,*” just as the Apostle refers to himself in his Epistles (2 John 1:1 and 3 John 1:1). Of great importance is also the opinion of St. Justin Martyr, who lived in Ephesus prior to his conversion to Christianity, where the Apostle John had also lived many years before him. Many Holy Fathers of the second and third centuries quote from the Apocalypse, as from a God-inspired book written by St. John the Theologian. One of them was St. Hippolytus, a Roman pope and student of Irenaeus of Lyons, who wrote an apologia on the Apocalypse. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen also acknowledged St. John as the author of the Apocalypse. Other, later Fathers of the Church are equally convinced in this: Sts. Ephraem the Syrian, Epiphanius, Basil the Great, Hillary, Athanasius the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Didymus, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine the Blessed, and Jerome the Blessed. The thirty-third canon of the Council of Carthage, by attributing the Apocalypse to St. John the Theologian, places it in the ranks of other canonical books of Holy Scripture. Especially of great value is the attestation of Irenaeus of Lyons regarding the authorship as being that of St. John the Theologian because St. Irenaeus was a student of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, who in turn was a student of St. John the Theologian, heading, under his Apostolic guidance, the Church of Smyrna.

The time, place, and intent of writing the Apocalypse.

Ancient tradition places the writing of the Apocalypse toward the end of the first century. For example, St. Irenaeus writes as follows: “*The Apocalypse appeared not long before this and almost in our time, at the end of the rule by Domitian.*” The historian Eusebius (at the beginning of the fourth century) informs us that pagan writers contemporary to his time mention the exile of St. John to Patmos for witnessing to the Word of God, placing this event at the fifteenth year of Domitian's rule (81-96 A.D.).

Thus, the Apocalypse was written at the end of the first century, when each of the seven churches of Asia Minor to whom St. John directed his letters already had its own history and in one way or another had determined the direction of its religious life. Christianity among them was already not in its original state of purity and truth, and pseudo-Christianity was attempting to compete with the true one. Evidently, the activities of St. John, who had spent a long time preaching in Ephesus, were a matter of the distant past. Church writers of the first three centuries concur in the designation of the place where the Apocalypse was written, which they acknowledge to be the island of Patmos, mentioned by the Apostle himself as the

place where he received the Revelation (Rev. 1:9-11). Patmos is located in the Aegean Sea to the south of the city of Ephesus and during ancient times was a place of exile.

In the first lines of the Apocalypse, St. John indicates the purpose of the Revelation: to foretell the fate of Christ's Church and of the whole world. The mission of Christ's Church was to revive the world with Christian sermons, to plant in men's souls a true faith in God, to teach them to live righteously, and to show them the way to the Heavenly Kingdom. However, not all received Christian teachings with good will. Already during the first days after Pentecost, the Church encountered hostility and a conscious opposition to Christianity, at first from Jewish priests and scribes, and later from the unbelieving Jews and pagans.

Even during the first year of Christianity, there started a bloody persecution of the preachers of the Gospel. Slowly these persecutions began to take on an organized and systematic form. Jerusalem turned out to be the first center of the fight with Christianity. Beginning with the middle of the first century, Rome, with Emperor Nero (54-68 A.D.) as its leader, joined the hostile camp. The persecutions then began in Rome, where the blood of many Christians was spilled, including that of the pre-eminent Apostles Peter and Paul. From the end of the first century, the persecution of Christians intensified. Emperor Domitian decreed the systematic persecution of Christians, at first in Asia Minor and then in other parts of the Roman Empire. St. John the Theologian, having been summoned to Rome, was there thrown into a kettle of boiling oil and remained unscathed. Domitian then exiled St. John to the island of Patmos, where the Apostle received the Revelation regarding the fate of the Church and the whole world. With but a few interruptions, the bloody persecutions of the Church continued to the year 313, when Emperor Constantine proclaimed the Edict of Milan, allowing the free practice of religion.

In view of the beginning of the persecutions, the Apocalypse was written for Christians in order to console, teach, and strengthen them. It uncovers the secret intentions of the enemies of the Church, whom it personifies in the beast emerging from the sea (as the representative of the hostile secular power) and in the beast emerging from the earth, the false prophet (as the representative of the hostile pseudo-religious power). It discloses the main overseer of the fight against the Church, the devil. This ancient dragon amasses the godless forces of mankind and directs them against the Church. However, the sufferings of the faithful are not in vain. Through their loyalty to Christ and their patience, they receive their earned reward in Heaven. At a time designated by God, the hostile forces against the Church shall be delivered to judgment and punishment. After the Last Judgment and the punishment of the impious, an eternal blessed life shall begin.

The purpose of writing the Apocalypse was to portray the forthcoming battle of the Church against the forces of evil; to show the means by which the devil, with the cooperation of his slaves, wages war against goodness and truth; to give guidance to the faithful on how to overcome temptations; to portray the perdition of the enemies of the Church; and to show the final triumph of Christ over evil.

The contents, plan, and symbolism of the Apocalypse.

The Apocalypse always drew the attention of Christians to itself, especially at a time in which various calamities and temptations of singular strength began to disrupt the community and Church life. In addition, the imagery and the mysteries of this book make it extremely difficult to understand and, therefore, always pose a risk for imprudent interpreters in deviating outside the parameters of truth toward impossible hopes and beliefs. For example, the literal understanding of the images in this book provided the motive for, and even now continues to give rise to, the false teaching of so-called "chiliasm," the thousand-year reign of the Kingdom of Christ on earth. Already in the first century, some Christians, interpreting the lu-

city of the Apocalypse while experiencing the horrors of persecution, held to the belief that the “Last Days” were at hand and that the Second Coming of Christ was close.

During the past twenty centuries, there has been a multitude of the most varied types of interpretations of the Apocalypse. All these interpretations can be categorized into four classes. The first ascribes the visions and symbols of the Apocalypse to the “Last Days,” the end of the world, the emanation of the antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ. The second attributes to the Apocalypse a purely historical meaning and confines its visions to historical events of the first century: persecution of the Christians by the pagan emperors. The third tries to find the realization of Apocalyptic predictions in the historical events of the time. In one such interpretation, for instance, the pope of Rome is the antichrist and all the Apocalyptic calamities in reality emanate against the Church of Rome, and so on. Finally, the fourth sees the Apocalypse only as allegory, holding that the described visions therein do not have so much a prophetic as a moral sense. As we shall see, these points of view on the Apocalypse do not exclude but rather supplement each other.

The Apocalypse can be properly understood only in the context of all of Holy Scripture. The principle of uniting several historical events in one vision shows itself as a special characteristic of many prophetic visions, both of the Old and New Testaments. In other words, spiritually related events, separated one from the other by many centuries and even by millennia, merge into one prophetic picture, uniting within itself the elements of various historical epochs.

As an example of such a synthesis of events, one can refer to the prophetic discussion of the Savior about the end of the world. In it, the Lord talks simultaneously about the destruction of Jerusalem, which would occur some thirty-five years later, and about the time preceding His Second Coming (Matt. ch. 24, Mark ch. 13, Luke ch. 21). The reason for such a unification of events consists in that the first illustrates and explains the second. In not a few instances, Old Testament prophecies speak simultaneously about the beneficial changes in human societies during the time of the New Testament and about the new life in the Heavenly Kingdom. In this case the first acts as the source for the second (Is. 4:2-6, 11:1-10, chs. 26, 60 and 65; Jer. 23:5-6, 33:6-11; Hab. 2:14; Zeph. 3:9-20). The Old Testament prophecies regarding the destruction of Chaldean Babylon speak simultaneously also of the annihilation during the reign of the antichrist (Is. ch. 13-14, and ch. 21; Jer. chs. 50-51). There are many similar examples of the merging of events into one prophecy. Such a method of merging events by signs of their inner unity is used in order to help the believer **understand the essence** of the events on the basis of what is already well known to him, leaving aside secondary details and historical details that explain nothing.

As we shall see, the Apocalypse consists of a number of compositionally multi-layered visions. The Seer presents the future in a perspective of the past and of the present. Thus, for instance, the many-headed beast in chapters 13-19 is the antichrist himself and his predecessors, Antiochus Epiphanes (vividly described by the prophet Daniel and in the books of the Maccabees) and the Roman emperors Nero and Domitian (who persecuted Christ's Apostles), and subsequent enemies of the Church.

The two witnesses for Christ in chapter 11, possibly Enoch and Elijah, are the accusers of the antichrist, as are their prototypes, the Apostles Peter and Paul, and all other preachers of the Gospel fulfilling their mission in a world hostile to Christianity. The false prophet in chapter 13 is the personification of all the propagators of false religions (Gnosticism, heresy, Islam, materialism, Hinduism, etc.) among which the most vivid representative will be the false prophet in the time of the antichrist. In order to understand why the Apocalypse united different events and various people in one image, one must take into account the fact that it was written not only for contemporaries but also for Christians of all times, who were to endure similar persecutions and sorrows. St. John discloses the common methods of seduction and shows the true way to avoid them in order to be true to Christ until death.

In a similar manner, the judgment by God, which the Apocalypse mentions repeatedly, is the Last Judgment of God, as well as all separate judgments of God over different nations and individuals. Included in this is the judgment of all mankind during the time of Noah and the judgment of the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah during the time of Abraham and the judgment of Egypt during the time of Moses and the twice-repeated judgment of Judea (600 B.C. and again during the seventh decade A.D.) and the judgment of Nineveh, Babylon, the Roman Empire, Byzantium, and, somewhat recently, of Russia. The reasons that evoked God's righteous punishment were always the same: people's lawlessness and lack of faith.

In the Apocalypse there is a noticeable specific non-synchronization of events: being above time or beyond time. This is due to the fact that St. John contemplated the fate of mankind not from the earthly but from a Heavenly perspective, to which God's Spirit had elevated him. In the ideal world, the flow of time stops at the throne of the Almighty and the Spiritual Gaze encompasses simultaneously the present, past, and future. Evidently, this is the reason that the author of the Apocalypse describes some future events as those of the past and those past as in the present. For instance, the war of the angels in the Heavens and the expulsion of the devil from there, events which had occurred prior to the creation of the world, are described by St. John as though they had happened at the dawn of Christianity (Rev. ch. 12). However, the resurrection of the martyrs and their reign in Heaven, which encompasses the whole of the New Testament epoch, is placed by him after the judgment of the antichrist and the false prophet (Rev. ch. 20). Thus, the participator in the mysterious disclosures does not narrate according to the chronological sequence of events, but rather reveals the essence of that great war of good versus evil, which is ongoing simultaneously on several fronts and touches upon the material as well as the angelic world.

Undoubtedly some of the Apocalyptic prophecies have already come to pass (for example, the fate of the seven Churches of Asia Minor). Fulfilled prophecies should help us understand the remaining ones that must yet be fulfilled. However, in applying the Apocalyptic visions to those or other specific events, one must take into account that such visions contain within themselves elements of various epochs. It is only with the conclusion of all of the fates of the world and with the punishment of the last of God's foes that all the details of the Apocalyptic visions will be realized.

The Apocalypse was written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Mankind's departure from faith and true Christian life leads it toward dulling of the mind and a total loss of spiritual outlook, thereby making very difficult any correct understanding of the Apocalypse. Contemporary man's total devotion to sinful passions serves as the reason why some contemporary interpreters of the Apocalypse want to see in it only allegory and even begin to teach a metaphoric (rather than actual) understanding of the Second Coming of Christ. Historical events and individuals convince us that to see allegory alone in the Apocalypse is to be spiritually blind, for so much of what is happening today reminds us of the terrifying images and visions of the Apocalypse.

The method of interpretation of the Apocalypse is shown in the accompanying diagram. As one can see in it, the Apostle simultaneously opens several spheres of existence. To the highest sphere belongs the angelic world, the triumphant Church in Heaven, and the persecuted Church on earth. Heading and directing this sphere of goodness is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of men. Below is found the sphere of wickedness, the unbelieving world, sinners, false prophets, those who consciously fight against God (Theomachists), and devils. Directing all of these is the dragon, the fallen angel. Throughout all of the existence of mankind, these spheres have been at war with each other. St. John, through his visions, gradually discloses to the reader the various facets of the battle between good and evil and discloses the process of the spiritual self-realization of mankind, as a result of which some stand on the side of good, while others go on the side of evil. During the development of world conflict, the judgment by God constantly takes place over individuals and nations. By the end of the world, evil will increase tremendously, and the Church on earth

will be extremely weakened and diminished. Then the Lord Jesus Christ will come to earth, all people will be resurrected, and the world will experience God's Last Judgment. The devil and his cohorts will be condemned to eternal torture, but the righteous will begin eternal blessed life in Paradise.

The reading of the Apocalypse in sequence can be divided into the following parts:

1. The introductory picture of the Lord Jesus Christ made manifest, instructing John to write the Revelation for the seven churches of Asia Minor (ch. 1).
2. The letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor (chs. 2 and 3), in which, simultaneously with instructions to these churches, there are outlines of the fate of Christ's Church from the time of the Apostles up until the end of the world.
3. The vision of God enthroned, the Lamb of God and the Heavenly Divine Liturgy (chs. 4 and 5). This Heavenly Divine Liturgy is supplemented by visions in the succeeding chapters.
4. From the sixth chapter on, there begins the revelation of the fate awaiting mankind. The breaking of the seven seals of the mysterious scroll by Christ, the Lamb of God, serves as the beginning of the description of the various phases of war between good and evil, between the Church and satan. This war, which begins in the soul of man and spreads to all aspects of man's life, becomes greater and increasingly frightening (up to ch. 20).
5. The blast of the angels' seven trumpets (chs. 7-10) heralds the beginning of the calamities which must befall mankind for its unbelief and sins. The damage to nature and the manifestation of evil forces in the world are described. Before the onset of these misfortunes, the faithful will receive upon their brows (the forehead) a blessed mark, saving them from moral evil and from the fate of the impious.
6. The vision of the seven signs (chs. 11-14) depicts mankind divided into two opposing and irreconcilable camps of good and evil. The good forces are concentrated within the Church of Christ, represented here in the form of a Woman clothed with the sun (ch. 12), and the evil forces — in the kingdom of the beast, the antichrist. The beast rising from the sea is a symbol of evil secular rule, and the beast rising from the earth is a symbol of the deteriorating religious power. In this part of the Apocalypse, a global evil being, i.e., the dragon-devil who organizes and directs the war against the Church, is clearly shown for the first time. The two witnesses of Christ symbolize here the preachers of the Gospel who battle with the beast.
7. The visions of the seven chalices (chs. 15-17) paint a dire picture of global moral decay. The war against the Church becomes extremely tense (Rev. 16:16), with unbearably difficult trials. This war is referred to as Armageddon. The image of Babylon the harlot represents mankind, which has forsaken God and which is concentrated on residing in the capital of the kingdom of the beast, the antichrist. The evil force spreads its influence into all areas of life of sinful mankind, after which begins God's judgment against the forces of evil (here God's judgment against Babylon is described in generalities, as a form of introduction).
8. In the following chapters (18 and 19), the judgment of Babylon is described in detail. Here is shown the perdition of those guilty of causing evil among men — the antichrist and the false prophet, representatives of civil and heretical anti-Christian authorities.
9. The twentieth chapter is a summation of the whole spiritual war and world history. It tells of the devil's being defeated twice and of the reign of the martyrs. Having suffered physically, they were victorious spiritually and are already

blissful in Heaven. Here, beginning with Apostolic times, the whole period of existence of the Church is encompassed. Gog and Magog personify the union of all forces fighting against God, both earthly and those of the nether regions, who throughout Christian history fought against the Church (Jerusalem). They are exterminated by the Second Coming of Christ. Finally, it speaks of the eternal punishment of the devil, this ancient serpent, who began all the lawlessness, lies, and sufferings in the Universe. The end of the twentieth chapter is a description of the universal resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, and the punishment of the unfaithful. This short description summarizes the Last Judgment of mankind and of the fallen angels and sums up the whole drama of the universal war between good and evil.

10. The final two chapters (21 and 22) describe the New Heaven, the New Earth, and the blessed life of the saved. These are the most joyous and glorious chapters of the Bible.

Every new part of the Apocalypse usually begins with the words “*And I saw,*” and ends with a description of God's Judgment. This description depicts the end of the previous topic and the beginning of a new one. Between the main parts of the Apocalypse, the Seer sometimes interjects some intermediate observations that act as a binding link between them. The diagram used here vividly shows the plan and divisions of the Apocalypse. For the sake of brevity we combined the intermediate observations together with the main ones. Moving horizontally through the diagram, we see that gradually and more fully the following segments are revealed: the Heavenly World, the Church (persecuted on earth), the sinful and God-fighting world, the nether regions, the war between them, and God's Judgment.

The significance of the symbols and numbers. Symbols and allegories enable the Seer to speak of the essence of earthly events on a very high level of generalization; therefore, they are extensively used. Thus, as an example, the eyes symbolize knowledge, and many eyes symbolize perfect knowledge. A horn is the symbol of power or might. Long attire denotes the clergy; a crown, imperial worthiness; and whiteness, cleanliness or purity. The city of Jerusalem, the temple, and Israel are symbols of the Church. The numbers also have a symbolic meaning: three symbolizes the Trinity; four is the symbol for the world and order in the world; seven denotes completion and perfection; twelve denotes God's people and fruition of the Church (the numbers derived from 12, such as 24 and 144,000 have the same meaning). One-third denotes some relatively small part; three and a half years, the time of persecutions. The number 666 will be specifically dealt with below.

Events during the New Testament are often portrayed in the framework of comparable Old Testament events. Thus, for instance, the persecution of the Church is described in the framework of the sufferings of the Israelites in Egypt, the temptations at the time of the prophet Balaam, persecution on the part of Queen Jezebel, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. The saving of believers from the devil is depicted in the framework of the saving of the Israelites from the pharaoh during the time of the prophet Moses. The rule of the godless is presented in the imagery of Babylon and Egypt. The punishment of the forces fighting against God is presented in the language of ten Egyptian executions, and the devil is identified as the serpent who had tempted Adam and Eve. The future Paradisical blessing is depicted as the Garden of Eden and the tree of life.

The main task of the Apocalypse consists of showing the way the forces of evil work and who organizes them and directs them in the fight against the Church and of teaching and strengthening the faithful in their loyalty to Christ, portraying the complete defeat of the devil and his servants and the beginning of Paradisical Bliss.

For all the symbolism and mystery of the Apocalypse, the religious truths contained therein are revealed in an extremely clear way. Thus, for example, the Apocalypse points to

the devil as being the culprit for all the temptations and tribulations of mankind. The tools with which he tries to lay waste to mankind are always the same: unbelief, disobedience to God, pride, sinful desires, lies, fear, doubt, etc. In spite of all his cunning and experience, the devil is not able to lay waste to those people who are devoted to God with all their heart because God protects them by His blessings. The devil enslaves to himself more and more sinners and those who have withdrawn from God and thrusts them into various abominable acts and crimes. He directs them against the Church and through them causes all violence and wars in the world. The Apocalypse clearly shows that in the end the devil and his servants will be vanquished and punished and that Christ's truth will triumph and that in the renewed world there will begin a blessed life, which will be endless.

Having thus made a cursory review of the contents and symbolism of the Apocalypse, we shall now consider some of its most important parts.

Letters to the Seven Churches.

(Chs. 2-3)

The Seven Churches — those of Ephesus (2:1-7), Smyrna (2:8-11), Pergamos (2:12-17), Thyatira (2:18-29), Sardis (3:1-6), Philadelphia (3:7-13), and Laodicia (3:14-22) — were located in the southwestern part of Asia Minor, today's Turkey. They were founded by the Apostle Paul in the fourth decade of the first century. After St. Paul's martyric death in Rome around the year 67 A.D., St. John the Theologian took over the care of those churches and ministered to them for a period of about forty years. Having become incarcerated on the Island of Patmos, St. John wrote letters from there to these churches in order to prepare Christians for the oncoming persecutions. The letters are addressed to the “angels” of these churches, i.e., to the bishops.

A careful study of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor brings to mind that in them are outlined the fate of Christ's Church, from the Apostolic period up to the time of the end of the world. Included is the imminent path of the New Testament Church, this “New Israel,” which is depicted against the background of the most important events during the existence of Old Testament Israel, beginning with the fall in Paradise and ending with the times of the Pharisees and Sadducees during the days of the Lord Jesus Christ. St. John writes of events of the Old Testament in the form of examples for the fate of the New Testament Church. Thus, the three following elements are interwoven in the letters to the seven churches: a) the prevailing conditions current in the author's days and the future of each Church of Asia Minor, b) a new and more in-depth interpretation of Old Testament history, and c) the forthcoming fate of the Church. The combination of these three elements in the letters to the seven churches are summarized here in the diagram.

Note: The Church of Ephesus was the most populous and had the status of being the Metropolitan See in relation to the other neighboring Asia Minor Churches. In 431 A.D. the Third Ecumenical Council took place in Ephesus. Just as St. John predicted, the light of Christianity in the Church of Ephesus gradually died. Pergamos was the political center of the western part of Asia Minor. It was dominated by paganism with an elaborate cult of deified pagan emperors. On a hill close to Pergamos towered a magnificent pagan sacrificial monument that is mentioned in the Apocalypse as “*Satan's throne*” (Rev. 2:13-17). The Nicolaitans were ancient heretic-Gnostics. Gnosticism became a dangerous temptation for the Church in the early centuries of Christianity. The syncretic culture of the time came to be a favorable ground for the development of Gnostic ideas. It evolved within the empire of Alexander of Macedonia (Alexander the Great), which amalgamated the East and the West. The religious perceptions of the world in the East, with its belief in the eternal battle between good and evil, spirit and matter, body and soul, light and darkness, along with a speculative method of Greek philosophy, fermented various Gnostic systems, which characteristically taught that everything in the world emanates from the “Absolute,” and that there is a multitude of subsequent steps in creation, uniting the world with the “Absolute.” It is only natural that with the spread of Christianity in the Hellenistic world there arose a perilous threat of its interpretation in Gnostic terms and the transformation of Christian teachings into one of the religious-philosophical Gnostic thought systems. Jesus Christ was perceived by the Gnostics as one of the intermediaries (channelers) between the Absolute and the world.

One of the first to spread Gnosticism among the Christians was a certain Nicolai (Nicholas), hence the name Nicolaitans in the Apocalypse. (It is thought that this was the Nicolai who was among the six men chosen and ordained by the Apostles into the rank of deacon; see Acts 6:5.) In distorting the Christian faith, the Gnostics encouraged a moral decadence. Starting with the beginning of the first century, several Gnostic sects flourished in Asia Minor. The Apostles Peter, Paul, and Jude admonished Christians not to be ensnared by these heretic debauchers. Prominent representatives of Gnosticism were the heretics Valentinus, Marcio, and Basilides, against whom the apostolic learned men and early Fathers of the Church spoke out.

The ancient Gnostic sects have long disappeared, but Gnosticism as an amalgamation of heterogeneous philosopho-religious schools still exists in our time in theosophy, cabala, freemasonry, contemporary Hinduism, yoga, and various other cults.

The vision of the Heavenly Liturgy.

(Chs. 4-5)

St. John received the Revelation on “The Lord’s Day,” that is, on Sunday. One must surmise that on that day, as was the Apostles’ custom, he performed “the breaking of bread,” i.e., the Divine Liturgy, received Communion and therefore “was in a state of Grace,” meaning he was in a special state of inspiration (Rev. 1:10). And so, the first thing that is revealed to him is the continuation of the Liturgy just performed by him, the Heavenly Divine Liturgy. It is this Heavenly Divine Liturgy that St. John describes in the fourth and fifth chapters of the Apocalypse. An Orthodox Christian recognizes here the familiar traits of the Sunday Liturgy and the most important attributes of the altar: the Holy of Holies, the seven-branched candelabrum, the censer with smoking incense, the golden chalice, etc. (These items were shown to Moses on Mount Sinai and were also used in the temple of the Old Testament.) The Sacrificial Lamb of God, as seen by the Apostle, reminds the faithful of Communion in the form of bread laid on the altar. The souls of those martyred for the Word of God, under the heavenly altar evoke the antimins, the special cloth placed in the middle of the altar and into which are sewn relics of the holy martyrs. The elders clad in white garments with golden crowns upon their heads are like an assembly of the clergy con-celebrating the Divine Liturgy. It should be noted that the very proclamations and prayers heard by the Apostle in Heaven express the quintessence of the exclamations and prayers which the clergy and the choir recite during the main part of the Liturgy — the Eucharistic Canon. The whitening of the garments of the pious by the “*blood of the Lamb*” (Ch. 7) alludes to the consecration of the souls of the faithful through the Sacrament of Communion. In this manner the Apostle begins the revelation of the fate of mankind with the description of the Heavenly Divine Liturgy by which he stresses the spiritual meaning of this Liturgy and the necessity of the saints’ prayers for us.

Note: The words “*Judah is a lion’s whelp*” refer to the Lord Jesus Christ and remind us of the prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob regarding the Messiah (Gen. 49:9-10). The “*Seven Spirits of God*” refer to the plenitude of God’s blessed gifts of the Holy Spirit (Is. 11:2 and Zech. ch. 4). A multitude of eyes symbolizes omniscience. The twenty-four elders correspond to the twenty-four priestly successions established by King David for service in the temples, having two intercessors for each generation of the New Israel (1 Chron. 24:1-18). The four mysterious creatures surrounding the throne are similar to the creatures seen in a vision of the prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 1:5-19). They evidently are the creatures closest to God. These images are of a man, a lion, a calf, and an eagle, taken by the Church as symbols for the four Evangelists.

In the later description of the heavenly world, we encounter many things that are incomprehensible to us. In the Apocalypse we learn that the angelic world is extremely vast. The bodi-

less spirits, the angels, are created as man is by the wise Creator, possessing an intellect and a free will, although their spiritual capabilities far exceed ours. The angels are completely devoted to God and serve Him by prayer and fulfillment of His will. Thus, for example, they carry to the altar of God the prayers of the saints (Rev. 8:3), they assist the righteous in attaining salvation (Rev. 7:3, 14:6-10, 19:9), they sympathize with those who are suffering and with the persecuted (Rev. 8:13, 12:12), and following God's commands, they punish sinners (Rev. 8:7, 9:15, 15:6, 16:1). They are endowed with power and have sovereignty over nature and its elements (Rev. 10:1, 18:1). They wage war with satan and his demons (Rev. 12:7-10, 19:19, 20-2-3), and they take part in the judgment of God's enemies (Rev. 19:4).

The teaching of the Apocalypse regarding the angelic world basically pulls out by its roots the teaching of the ancient Gnostics, who accepted the presence of intermediaries (channelers) between the Absolute and the material world who were completely self-reliant and independent of Him who ruled the world.

Among the **saints** whom St. John sees in Heaven, two groups, or two “images,” stand out. These are the **martyrs** and the **virgins**. Historically, martyrdom is the first order of holiness, and that is why the Apostle begins with the martyrs (Rev. 6:9-11). He sees their souls beneath the Heavenly Sacrificial Altar, which symbolizes the redemptive meaning of their suffering and death, by which they participate in Christ's sufferings and somehow complement them. The blood of the martyrs can be compared to the blood of the victims in the Old Testament that flowed under the sacrificial altar in the temple of Jerusalem. The history of Christianity testifies to the fact that the sufferings of the ancient martyrs served as a moral rejuvenation of the apathetic pagan world. The ancient writer Tertullian wrote that the blood of the martyrs serves as seed for new Christians. The persecution of the faithful will sometimes wane and sometimes flourish during the subsequent existence of the Church, which was the reason that it was revealed to the Seer that new martyrs will supplement the number of the early ones.

Later St. John sees an innumerable throng of people in Heaven, a number that no one is able to count, from all the tribes, generations, nations, and tongues. They stood in white garments holding palm branches (Rev. 7:9-17) in their hands. The common factor of this innumerable assembly of the righteous was that “*they all came from great afflictions.*” For all these people the path to Paradise is the same — through sorrows. Christ is the first Sufferer, who took upon Himself the sins of the world as the Lamb of God. The palm branches are symbols of victory over the devil.

In a special vision the Seer describes the virgins, i.e., those people who denied themselves the solace of conjugal life for the sake of complete service to Christ. They are the voluntary “*eunuchs*” for the sake of the Heavenly Kingdom (Matt. 19:12, Rev. 14:1-5). In the Church this feat was usually achieved by following the monastic way of life. The Seer sees written upon the foreheads of the virgins the “*name of the Father,*” which points to their moral beauty, reflecting the perfection of the Creator. The “*new hymn*” that they sing and that no one could repeat expresses the spiritual elevation that they attained through the feats of fasting, prayer, and chastity. This purity is unattainable to those living a worldly way of life.

The song of Moses that is sung by the pious in the next vision (Rev. 15:2-8) calls to mind the hymn of gratitude sung by the Israelites when, after crossing the Red Sea, they were saved from Egyptian bondage (Exodus, ch. 15). Likewise, the Israel of the New Testament is delivered from the rule and influence of the devil, having passed over into a state of grace by means of the Sacrament of Baptism. In the following visions, the Seer again describes the saints several times. The precious white flaxen garment that they wore is a symbol of their righteousness. In the nineteenth chapter of the Apocalypse the wedding song of the saved tells of the nearing of the “*marriage*” between the Lamb and the saints — of the coming of the closest communion between God and the righteous (Rev. 19:1-9, 21:3-4). The book of Revelation ends with the description of the blessed life of the saved peoples (Rev.

21:24-27, 22:12-14 and 17). These are the most glorious and joyful pages of the Bible, showing the Church triumphant in the Kingdom of Glory.

Thus, by gradual disclosure of the fate of the world, St. John's Apocalypse slowly directs the spiritual attention of the faithful towards the Heavenly Kingdom — to the ultimate goal of our earthly wanderings. He speaks of the gloomy events in the sinful world as if he is obliged to do so, and with unwillingness.

The Removal of the seven seals the vision of the four horsemen

(Ch. 6)

The vision of the seven seals acts as an **introduction** to the subsequent revelations of the Apocalypse. The removal of the first four seals presents the four horsemen, who symbolize four factors characterizing the complete history of mankind. The first two appear as a reason, and the second two, as a consequence. The crowned rider on the white horse “*emerged in order to be victorious.*” He personifies those good beginnings, innate and blessed, with which the Creator endowed mankind: the image of God, moral purity and innocence, aspiration toward goodness and perfection, the ability to believe and to love, and individual “talents” with which man is born, as well as the blessed gifts of the Holy Spirit which man receives in the Church. In the Creator's plan, these good beginnings should have been victorious; they should have been able to define a happy future for humanity. However, already in Eden, man had fallen prey to the Tempter. His nature, corrupted by sin, was passed on to his descendants; that is why already from a very young age people are inclined to sin. Through repeated sinfulness, bad tendencies are reinforced. Thus, man, instead of growing spiritually and perfecting himself, falls under the ruinous influence of his own passions, succumbs to various sinful desires, and begins to envy and to show enmity. All of the crimes in the world arise from the internal strife within man (violence, war, and every sort of misfortune).

The ruinous actions of the passions are symbolized by the **fiery red** horse and rider, who took “*peace away from man.*” Succumbing to his disorderly sinful desires, man squanders all his God-given talents, and he becomes impoverished in body and soul. Within the life of society, enmity and wars lead to a weakening and a breakdown of the community and to the loss of its spiritual and material resources. This internal and external impoverishment of mankind is symbolized by the **black** horse and rider, who holds a pair of scales in his hand. Finally, the complete loss of God's blessings leads toward a spiritual death and as a final consequence of enmity and wars comes the ruin of society and the death of mankind. This sorrowful destiny of mankind is symbolized by the **pale** horse.

The four horsemen of the Apocalypse depict in the simplest way the history of mankind. At first, the blessed life in Eden of our forefathers, called upon to “rule” over nature (the white horse); then their fall from grace (the fiery red horse); after which the lives of their descendants were filled with various sorrows and mutual annihilation (the black and the pale horses). The horses of the Apocalypse also symbolize the life of the various individual kingdoms, with their periods of prosperity and decline. Here also is the path of the life of each man: his childhood purity and innocence, his big potential possibilities, which are obscured by a tempestuous youthfulness in which a man dissipates his vigor and health, and in the end he dies. Here is the history of the Church: the spiritual persecution of Christians during the Apostolic times and the efforts of the Church to renew human society. However, in the Church itself there arise heresies and schisms, and the pagan community forces upon it its persecutions. The Church weakens and retreats into the catacombs, and some of the local churches totally disappear. Thus, the vision of the four horsemen sums up the factors which characterize the life of sinning mankind. This subject will be developed more fully in further

chapters. By the removal of the fifth seal, the Seer shows the brighter side of mankind's calamities. Christians who have suffered physically were victorious spiritually: they are now in Paradise (Rev. 6:9-11)! Their feats bring them eternal rewards and they rule with Christ, as described in the twentieth chapter. The transition to a more detailed description of the hardships of the Church and the fortification of the godless is symbolized by the removal of the seventh seal.

The seven trumpets, the marking of the chosen, and beginning of calamities.

(Chs. 7-11)

The trumpets of the angels foretell mankind's calamities, both physical and spiritual. But before the beginning of these, St. John sees an angel conferring a mark upon the foreheads of the sons of the New Israel (Rev. 7:1-8). "*Israel*" is the Church of the New Testament here. The marks symbolize selection and blessed protection. This vision brings to mind the Sacrament of Chrismation, during which the "mark of the gift of the Holy Spirit" is conferred upon the brow of the newly baptized. It brings to mind the sign of the cross, which protects "against the foes." People who are not protected by the blessed mark suffer harm from the "*locust*" that has emanated from the bottomless pit, i.e., from the devil's power (Rev. 9:4). The prophet Ezekiel describes the same imprint on the righteous citizens of ancient Jerusalem before it was taken by the Chaldean forces. Then, as well as now, the mysterious mark was placed with the purpose of saving the just from the fate of the impure (Ezek. 9:4). At the counting by name of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. ch. 7), the tribe of Dan was purposely omitted. Some see in this the indication that the antichrist came from this tribe. This thought is based on the enigmatic words of the Patriarch Jacob regarding the future descendants of Dan: "*a serpent on the way, a viper by the path*" (Gen. 49:17).

Thus, the present vision serves as an introduction to the subsequent description of the persecution of the Church. The measuring of the temple of God in the eleventh chapter has the same meaning as the marking of the sons of Israel: the preservation of the children of the Church from evil. The temple of God, like the Woman clothed in sunshine, and the city of Jerusalem are different symbols of the Church of Christ. The basic thought of these visions is that the Church is Holy and is dear to God. God allows the persecutions for the sake of achieving moral perfection of the faithful but protects them from enslavement by evil and from the same fate as the godless.

Before the removal of the seventh seal there is a silence "*for approximately a half hour*" (Rev. 8:1). This is the calm before the storm that will rock the world during the time of the antichrist. (Does not the current process of disarmament resulting from the break-up of communism appear to be an intermission, which is given to mankind for his conversion toward God?) Before the onset of calamities St. John sees the saints ardently praying for mercy upon mankind (Rev. 8:3-5).

Calamities of nature. Following this, the sound of the trumpets reverberates from each of the seven angels, after which various calamities begin. At first, a third of the vegetation dies, then, a third of all the fish and other marine creatures, which is followed by the poisoning of rivers and water sources. There will be a falling upon earth of hail and fire, a flaming mountain, and a glowing star. This seems to point allegorically, in other words, to the vast dimensions of these calamities. Does this not appear as a prophecy of the global contamination and the destruction of nature that we are observing in our time? If so, then the ecological catastrophe foretells the coming of the antichrist. By further defiling within themselves the

image of God, mankind ceases to value and love God's beautiful world. With mankind's own refuse it pollutes the lakes, rivers, and seas. With oil spills it jeopardizes vast expanses of shoreline. It destroys forests and jungles, and it annihilates many species of animals, fish, and birds. In poisoning nature the perpetrators become ill and perish from their own actions, as do the innocent victims of their cruel greed. The words "*the name of the third star is Wormwood . . . and many perished from the water because it became bitter*" remind us of the catastrophe at Chernobyl because "Chernobyl" means "Wormwood." But what does the damage of a third of the sun and of the stars and their eclipse mean (Rev. 8:11-12)? Evidently this is a discourse regarding the pollution of the air to such an extent that the light of the sun and stars reaching the earth appears less bright. (For instance, due to air pollution in Los Angeles, the sky appears to be of a dirty-brown color, and sometimes at night, with the exception of the brightest, the stars are hardly visible.)

The narrative of the locusts (the fifth trumpet, Rev. 9:1-11), which emanated from the bottomless pit, talks of the strengthening of demonic powers among people. Heading it is "*Apollyon*" which means "the destroyer," referring to the devil. To the degree to which man by his non-belief and sins depletes God's blessings, a spiritual void forms within him, which is filled more and more by demonic strength, which in turn torments him with doubts and various passions.

The Apocalyptic wars. The trumpet of the sixth angel brings into motion a great army beyond the Euphrates River due to which a third of mankind is lost (Rev. 9:13-21). In Biblical representation, the river Euphrates denotes the boundary beyond which the nations hostile to God are concentrated, threatening war and annihilation to Jerusalem. For the Roman Empire, the Euphrates River served as a rampart against attack from eastern peoples. The ninth chapter of the Apocalypse is written against the backdrop of the cruel and bloody Judeo-Roman war of 66-70 AD that was still fresh in the memory St. John. This war had three phases (Rev. 8:13). The first phase of the war in which Gaius Flor headed the Roman forces lasted five months, from May to September of 66 (five months of the locusts, Rev. 9:5 and 10). Soon the second phase of the war began, from October to November of the 66th year, in which the Syrian governor Cestius headed four Roman legions (four angels by the Euphrates River, Rev. 9:14). This phase of the war was especially ruinous for the Jews. The third phase of the war under the command of Flavius Flavianus lasted three and a half years, from April, 67 A.D., to September, 70 A.D., and ended with the fall of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple, and the scattering of captive Jews throughout the Roman Empire. This blood-letting Judeo-Roman war became the prototype of the terrible wars of later years, which the Savior pointed out in His sermon on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:7). In the attributes of hell's locusts and the Euphrates' hordes, one can recognize contemporary weapons of mass extermination, tanks, cannons, fighter planes, and nuclear missiles. The following chapters of the Apocalypse graphically describe the increasingly larger wars of recent times (Rev. 11:7, 16:12-16, 17:14, 19:11-19, and 20:7-8). The words "*the waters of the Euphrates River dried up, so that the way of the kings from the East might be prepared*" (Rev. 16:12) may point to peril from further east in Asia. In conjunction with this, one must consider that the description of the Apocalyptic wars bears the characteristics of real wars, but in the final summation it refers to a spiritual war, and the proper names and dates have an allegorical meaning. Thus St. Paul explains: "*For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:12).

The name *Armageddon* is composed of two words: "Ar" (meaning level ground in Hebrew) and "Megiddo" (an area in the North of the Holy Land, near Mt. Carmel, where in ancient times Barrack defeated the armies commanded by Sisera and the prophet Elijah executed more than five hundred priests of Baal) (Rev. 16:16, 17:14; Judges 4:2-16; 1 Kings 18:40). In light of these biblical events, Armageddon symbolizes Christ defeating the godless powers. The names Gog and Magog in chapter 20 remind us of the prophesy of Ezekiel re-

garding the invasion of Jerusalem by an indeterminate number of regiments under the leadership of Gog from the land of Magog (south of the Caspian sea; Ezek. chs. 38 and 39; Rev. 20:7-8). Ezekiel attributes this prophecy to the times of the Messiah. In the Apocalypse, the siege of “*the camp of the saints and the beloved city* [the Church]” by the regiments of Gog and Magog and the destruction of these regiments by the Heavenly fire must be understood in the sense of the total defeat of the godless forces, both human and demonic, by the Second Coming of Christ.

Concerning the physical calamities and the punishment of sinners that are often mentioned in the Apocalypse, the Seer himself explains that God allows them as a lesson in order to bring sinners to repentance (Rev. 9:21). However, the Apostle mentions sorrowfully that mankind does not heed God's call, continues to sin, and serves the demons. As if having taken “*the bit in their mouths,*” people are rushing toward their own perdition.

The vision of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:2-12). The tenth and eleventh chapters occupy an intermediary place between the visions of the seven trumpets and the seven signs. In the two witnesses of God, some Holy Fathers see the Old Testament righteous ones Enoch and Elijah, who will come to earth before the end of the world in order to disclose the falsity of the antichrist and to call mankind toward loyalty to God. Or the two might be Moses and Elijah. It is known that both Enoch and Elijah were taken up alive to Heaven (Gen. 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11). The capital punishment that these witnesses will impose on mankind brings to mind the miracles performed by the prophets Moses, Aaron, and Elijah (Exo. chs. 7-12, 1 Kings 17:1, 2 Kings 1:10) The Apostles Peter and Paul, who had recently suffered in Rome under Nero, could have served as examples (prototypes) of the two witnesses for St. John. Evidently, the two witnesses in the Apocalypse are a symbol for other witnesses of Christ who spread the Gospel in a hostile pagan world and often seal their preaching with a martyr's death. The words “*Sodom and Egypt, where even our Lord is crucified,*” point to the city of Jerusalem, in which our Lord Jesus Christ suffered, as well as many prophets and the first Christians.

The seven signs, the Church, and the kingdom of the beast.

(Chs. 12-14)

The further one reads, the more precisely the Revelation to the Seer divides humanity into two opposing camps — the Church and the kingdom of the beast. The preceding chapters began to acquaint the reader with the Church, speaking about the marks, the temple of Jerusalem, and the two witnesses. The twelfth chapter shows the Church in all its Heavenly glory and simultaneously discloses its greatest foe, the dragon-devil. The vision of the Woman dressed in the sun and of the dragon makes it obvious that the war between good and evil goes beyond the borders of the material world and extends into the world of angels. The Apostle describes the existence of a cognizant evil being in the incorporeal world, who in desperation wages war against those who are committed to God, both angels and men. This war between good and evil, which seeps into the very essence of mankind, already began in the angelic world before the creation of the material one. As we have stated, the Seer describes this war in various parts of the Apocalypse, not in chronological sequence but in various bits and pieces.

The vision of the Woman reminds the reader of God's promise to Adam and Eve about the Messiah (the Seed of the Woman) Who will bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). It could have been assumed that the reference to the Woman in the twelfth chapter refers to the Virgin Mary. However, from further references in which the distant descendants of the Woman (Christians) are discussed, it is evident that here the Woman must be consid-

ered to be the Church. The radiance of the sun surrounding the Woman symbolizes the moral perfection of the saints and the blessed illumination of the Church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The twelve stars symbolize the twelve tribes of the New Israel — that is, the unity of the Christian peoples. The agony of the Woman during labor symbolizes the exploits, deprivations, and suffering of the servants of God (the prophets, apostles, and their successors) borne by them during the spreading of the Gospel throughout the world and during the confirmation of Christian virtues among its spiritual children (those who were baptized). St. Paul called the Galatian Christians: “*My children, for whom I painfully labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you*” (Gal. 4:19).

The First Born of the Woman “*For Whom it was meant to rule all nations with a rod of iron*” is the Lord Jesus Christ (Psalms 2:9, Rev. 12:5 and 19:15). He is the New Adam, having become the Head of the Church. The “*rapture*” of the child obviously points to the ascension of Christ into Heaven, where He took his place at the “*right hand of God*” and since which time He governs the fate of the world.

“*The dragon with its tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth*” (Rev. 12:4). Scholars understand the stars to be angels whom Daystar, the devil in his pride, incited to rebellion against God, as a result of which war erupted in Heaven. (This was the first revolution in the universe!) The Archangel Michael stepped forth as the head of the good angels. The angels revolting against God experienced losses and could not hold on to staying in Heaven. Having fallen away from God, they turned from good angels into demons. Their kingdom is the nether regions, known as the bottomless pit or hell, which became a place of darkness and suffering. In accordance with the opinion of the Holy Fathers, the war described by St. John occurred in the angelic world before the creation of the material world. This is introduced here to the reader in order to explain that the “*dragon*” that will persecute the Church in subsequent visions of the Apocalypse is the fallen “*Daystar*” (“*Lucifer*”) — God’s foe from time immemorial.

Thus, having suffered defeat in Heaven, the dragon with all its raging fury arms itself against the Woman (the Church). Its weapons are the various temptations which it directs at the Woman that resemble a wild river. However, she saves herself from temptation by fleeing to the desert; that is, by a voluntary refusal of life’s benefits and comforts, which the dragon tries to use to charm her. The two wings of the Woman are prayer and fasting, with which Christians become spiritual and become immune to the entrapments of the dragon, who goes crawling about the world as a snake (Gen. 3:14; also see Mk. 9:29). It behooves us to recall that many zealous Christians from the first centuries onward had already literally migrated into the desert, leaving the noisy towns that were full of temptations. In remote caves, in hermitages and monasteries, they gave all their time to prayer and thoughts of God and were able to attain spiritual heights that modern Christians cannot fathom. Monasticism flourished in the East during the fourth through the seventh centuries, when in the desert regions of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor many hermitages and monasteries were formed, numbering some hundreds and thousands of monks and nuns. From the Near East, monasticism overflowed into Athos, and from there into Russia, where in pre-Revolutionary time there were many thousands of monasteries and hermitages.

Note: the expression “*times, time and half a time*” — 1260 days and 42 months (Rev. 12:6-15) — corresponds to three and a half years and symbolically means the period of persecutions. The public ministry of Christ continued for three and a half years. The persecutions took approximately the same length of time during the reign of King Antiochus Epiphanes and Emperors Nero and Domitian. Nevertheless, the dates of the Apocalypse must be understood allegorically (see above).

The **beast who came from the sea** and the **beast who came out of the earth** (Rev. chs. 13-14). The majority of the Holy Fathers understand “*the beast from the sea*” to be the antichrist and “*the beast from the earth*” to be the false prophet. The sea symbolizes the unbelieving mass of humanity, which is always restless and turbulent with passions. From further

narrative about the beast and from a parallel narrative of the prophet Daniel (Dan. chs. 7-8), it follows that the beast is the whole godless empire of the antichrist. In their outer appearance the dragon-devil and the beast coming from the sea, to whom the dragon passed on its rule, resemble each other. Their external attributes denote their slyness, cruelty, and moral indecency. The heads and the horns of the beast symbolize the godless states that comprise the empire of antichrist, as well as their rulers (kings). The revelation of the mortal wounding of one of the heads of the beast and of its healing is enigmatic. In their time the events themselves will shed light on the meaning of these words. The historical basis for this allegory might be provided by the conviction of many contemporaries of St. John that the slain Nero came back to life and that he would soon return with the Parthian forces which were to be found beyond the Euphrates River (Rev. 9:14 and 16:12) in order to take revenge upon his enemies. It could be that here is an indication of the partial defeat of godless paganism by the Christian faith and an indication of the rebirth of paganism during the period of general apostasy from Christianity. (Refer to details about this in our booklet “End of the World and Eternal Life”).

Note: there are common traits between the beast of the Apocalypse and the four beasts of the prophet Daniel that personified the four ancient pagan empires (Daniel ch. 7). The fourth beast referred to the Roman Empire, and the tenth horn of the last beast symbolized the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes — as a prototype of the forthcoming antichrist, whom the Archangel Gabriel called the “contemptible one” (Dan. 11:21). The characteristics and the deeds of the apocalyptic beast have much in common with the prophet Daniel's tenth horn (Dan. 7:8-12, 20-25, 8:10-26, 11:21-45). The first two books of the Maccabees serve as a vivid illustration of the times before the end of the world.

Subsequently, the Seer describes the beast that had come from the earth and that he later calls the false prophet. Here, the earth symbolizes the total absence of spirituality in the teachings of the false prophet, which are completely permeated with materialism and the gratification of pleasure-loving flesh. The false prophet seduces people with false miracles and forces them to bow down to the first beast. “*He had two horns like a lamb, and spoke like a dragon,*” (Rev. 13:11); that is, he appeared to be meek and peaceful but his speeches were filled with flattery and lies.

As in the eleventh chapter, the two witnesses symbolize all the servants of Christ. It is evident that the two beasts in the thirteenth chapter symbolize the union of all who hated Christianity. The beast from the sea symbolizes the civilian godless authorities and the beast from the earth means the union of the false prophets and all the deviant Church authorities.

As during the time of the Savior's life on earth, both of these powers — the civil and the religious, in the persons of Pilate and the Jewish high priests — united in sentencing Christ to be crucified, so throughout all of the history of mankind, these two powers often unite in their fight against faith and in the persecution of believers. Examples are the prophet Balaam and the Moabite king, Queen Jezebel and her priests, the false prophets and princes before the destruction of Israel and later Judea, “apostates of the Holy Covenant,” king Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8:23, 1 Macc. and 2 Macc. ch. 9), and finally the followers of the law of Moses and the Roman administrators during the time of the Apostles. During the early centuries of Christianity, heretics and false teachers undermined the Church with their schisms and thus aided in the successful conquests by the Arabs and Turks who flooded and ruined the Orthodox Christian East. Russian free-thinkers and populists paved the way for the revolution, and contemporary pseudo-prophets corrupt unsteady Christians into various sects and cults. They all manifest themselves as false prophets collaborating for the success of the powers fighting against God. The Apocalypse vividly discloses the mutual support between the dragon-devil and both beasts. Each one here is full of his own selfish plans: the devil thirsts for obeisance to him; the antichrist seeks power; and the false-prophet seeks his material gain. As the Church calls on people to have faith in God and to fortify their virtues, the Church becomes an obstacle to them and they fight together against her.

The seal of the beast (Rev. 13:16-17, 14:9-11, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4). In the language of Holy Scripture, to bear upon oneself a seal (or a mark) denotes belonging to or being subordinate to someone. We have already mentioned that the mark (or the name of God) on the forehead of the faithful denotes their being chosen by God and consequently having God's protection over them (Rev. 3:12; 7:2-3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). The activity of the false prophet, which was described in the thirteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, convinces us that the kingdom of the beast will be of a religious-political nature. In creating the union of various governments, it will simultaneously propagate a new religion instead of the Christian faith. Therefore, the submission of oneself to the antichrist (allegorically speaking, by taking upon one's forehead or right hand the mark of the beast) will be tantamount to renunciation of Christ, which will result in the forfeiture of the Kingdom of Heaven. (The symbol of the mark is drawn from ancient customs, according to which warriors burned upon their arms or their foreheads the name of their commander, and slaves, either voluntarily or by force, were branded with the seal of their master's name. Pagans devoted to some deity often bore upon themselves the tattoos of that particular divinity.)

It is quite possible that during the time of the antichrist a perfected computerized registration system will be introduced which would be similar to modern bank credit cards. This state-of-the-art registration will have an invisible computerized code imprinted not on a plastic card as it is now, but directly on the body of the individuals. This code, read by an electronic or a magnetic "eye," will be transmitted to a central computer that will contain all pertinent personal and financial information regarding that person. Thus, the imprinting of personal codes directly on individuals will replace the need for money, passports, visas, tickets, checks, credit cards and other personal documents. Thanks to individual encoding, all monetary operations such as payment of salaries and payment of debts can be performed directly in the computer. In the absence of money, robbers will have nothing to take. It will be pre-eminently easier for the government to control crime because people's movements will be known thanks to the central computer. It appears that the positive aspects of this system of personal encoding will be used to introduce the system. In practice, however, it will also be used for religious-political control over people "*when no one shall be able to buy or sell, except those who have such an imprint*" (Rev. 13:17).

Of course the idea of stamping codes on people is speculation. The essence is not in electromagnetic markings but in fidelity to Christ or our betrayal of him! Throughout the history of Christianity, pressure on believers from antichristian authorities has taken on the most varied of forms: the bringing of a formal sacrifice to an idol, the acceptance of Islam, the joining of a godless or an anti-Christian organization. In the language of the Apocalypse, this acceptance of "*the seal of the beast,*" is the acquiring of temporary advantages at the price of the renunciation of Christ.

The number of the beast is 666 (Rev. 13:18). The meaning of this number remains a mystery to this day. Evidently, it will be deciphered when circumstances enable us to do so. Some scholars see the number 666 as a diminution of the number 777, which in its own right designates threefold perfection or completeness. In the context of this understanding of the symbolism of the number, the antichrist, who strives in every way possible to show his superiority over Christ, in reality will be imperfect in every way. In ancient times the numeric count of a name was founded on the idea that all letters of the alphabet had a numerical meaning. For instance, in the Greek language (and in Church Slavonic), "A" is equal to 1, "B" to 2, "G" to 3, and so on. Similar numeric meanings of the letters of the alphabet exist in Latin and Hebrew. Each name could be mathematically totalled up by the addition of the numeric values of the letters. For instance, the name Jesus written in Greek equals 888 (possibly denoting the highest perfection). There are a number of proper names that in the sum of their letters translated into digits equal the number 666. An example of this is the name of Nero Caesarius written in Hebrew. In that case, if the proper name of the antichrist were

known, then calculating his numerical meaning would not require any special wisdom. Perhaps one must look for the solution to the puzzle in the area of method, although it is not clear in which direction that is to be done. The beast of the Apocalypse refers to both the antichrist and his kingdom. Could it be that in the time of the antichrist there will be the introduction of initials designating a new global movement? By the will of God the proper name of the antichrist remains hidden from idle curiosity until its time. When the time comes, those who should do so will decipher it.

The talking image of the beast. It is difficult to understand the meaning of the words about the false prophet that *“He was granted power to instill the spirit into it, to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would both speak and act so as to have killed each one not worshipping the image of the beast”* (Rev. 13:15). A motive for this could have been Antiochus Epyphanes' demanding that the Jews bow to the statue of Jupiter that he had erected in the temple at Jerusalem. Later on, the Emperor Domitian demanded that all citizens of the Roman Empire bow down to his own image. Domitian was the first emperor who demanded for himself a godly reverence even during his lifetime and demanded that he be addressed as *“our lord and god.”* Sometimes, for greater effect, priests would hide behind the statues of the emperor and prophesy in his name. It was decreed that all Christians who did not bow down to the image of Domitian were to be executed, while others who obeyed were to be rewarded. It may be that in the prophecy of the Apocalypse the discourse deals with some apparatus similar to a television set that would transmit the image of the antichrist and simultaneously watch how the people react to it. In any case, at the present time movies and television are widely used to propagate antichristian ideas in order to accustom people to cruelty and banality. Daily, indiscriminate watching of television kills the goodness and holiness in man. Is television not the forerunner of the speaking image of the beast?

Seven bowls, the strengthening of the godless powers, and the judgment of the sinners.

(Chs. 15-17)

In this part of the Apocalypse, the Seer describes the kingdom of the beast, who has reached the apogee of his power and his control over the lives of mankind. Abandonment of the true faith spreads throughout almost all of mankind, and the Church drops to the edge of exhaustion: *“it was granted to him to do battle with the saints and to be victorious over them”* (Rev. 13:7). In order to encourage the believers who remained faithful to Christ, St. John directs their vision toward the heavenly world and shows them the great multitude of the Righteous Ones, who, like the Israelites who were saved from Pharaoh during the time of Moses, sing the song of victory (Exodus chs. 14-15).

However, just as Pharaoh's rule came to an end, so the days of the antichrist's rule will be terminated. The following chapters (16-20) paint God's judgment against the godless with brilliant strokes. The destruction of nature in the sixteenth chapter is similar to the description in the eighth chapter; however, here it reaches global proportions and makes a horrifying impression. Evidently, as before, the destruction of nature is brought about by mankind itself through wars and industrial waste. Increased suffering may be linked to the destruction of the ozone layer in the stratosphere and to the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. According to the prophecy of the Savior, during the last year before the end of the world, conditions for life will be so unbearable that *“if God had not shortened those days, no flesh would have been saved”* (Matt. 24:22).

The description of the judgment and the punishment in chapters 16-20 of the Apocalypse follows the pattern of successively **increasing guilt** of God's enemies. The first to be subjected to punishment are those guilty people who had accepted the mark of the beast and the capital city of the antichristian empire ("Babylon"), then the antichrist and the false prophet, and finally the devil himself.

The narrative regarding the fall of Babylon is given twice: at first in general terms at the end of the sixteenth chapter, and then in more detail in chapters 18-19. Babylon is depicted as a harlot sitting on the beast. The name Babylon brings to mind the Chaldean Babylon, in which godless power was concentrated in ancient times. (It was the Chaldean forces that destroyed the ancient city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.) In describing the lavish extravagance of the "harlot," St. John imagined rich Rome with its harbor city. However, many traits attributed to Apocalyptic Babylon are not applicable to ancient Rome and evidently refer to the capital of the antichrist.

The angel's detailed explanation at the end of the seventeenth chapter regarding the "secret of Babylon" that concerned the antichrist and his kingdom is equally enigmatic. Probably these details will be understood in the future when the proper time comes. Some of the metaphorical expressions are taken from the description of Rome as standing on seven hills and of its godless emperors. "*Five kings (heads of the beast) fell*" refers to the first five Roman emperors, from Julius Caesar to Claudius. The sixth head is Nero and the seventh is Vespasian. "*And the beast which was and which is not now, is the eighth, and (he is) from the number of seven*" speaks of Domitian, the resurrected Nero in people's minds. He is the antichrist of the first century. However, the symbolism in the seventeenth chapter will likely have a new explanation at the time of the last antichrist.

The judgment against Babylon, antichrist, and the false prophet.

(Chs. 18-19)

The seer paints in vivid and brilliant colors the picture of the fall of the capital of the godless kingdom, which he calls Babylon. This description is similar to the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah regarding the fall of Chaldean Babylon in 539 B.C. (Isa. ch. 13-14; 21:9; and Jer. ch. 50-51). There is a lot of similarity between the past and future centers of the world's evil. The punishment of the antichrist (the beast) and the false prophet is described in a special manner. As mentioned before, the beast is a specific personality of the last antagonist of God and simultaneously the general personification of any power that is anti-God. The false prophet is the last false prophet (a helper of the antichrist), who is also the personification of any pseudo-religious or corrupt church power.

It is important to understand that in the narrative of the punishment of Babylon, the antichrist, the false prophet (chs. 17-19), and the devil (ch. 20), St. John does not follow a chronological order but rather uses a method of interpretation according to a principle, that we will now explain.

In its aggregate Holy Scripture teaches that the kingdom that is antagonistic to God will end its existence during the Second Coming of Christ, when the antichrist and the false prophet will perish. God's Last Judgment against the world will take place in the order of increasing guilt of the defendants ("*The time has come for judgment to begin with the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the Gospel of God?*" 1 Peter 4:17; Matt. 25:31-46). At first the faithful will be judged, then the unbelievers and sinners, and then the conscious foes of God, and finally, the main culprits of all the godlessness in the world, the demons and the devil.) In that order, St. John narrates regarding the judgment over God's foes in chapters 17-20. In addition, the description of the

judgment of every category of sinner (those fallen away from God, antichrists, false prophets, and finally the devil) is preceded by the Apostle's description of their guilt. Therefore, the impression arises that at first there will come the destruction of Babylon. At some later time there will be the punishment of the antichrist and the false prophet, after which the reign of the saints will come on earth. And only after a very long time the devil will emerge in order to seduce the nations and then will be punished by God. In actuality, however, the discourse in the Apocalypse is describing parallel events. This method of presentation by St. John needs to be taken into account to interpret the twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse (see "The insolvency of Chiliasm" in the booklet about the end of the world).

The thousand-year kingdom, the judgment of the devil, the resurrection, and the last judgment.

(Ch. 20)

The twentieth chapter, while speaking about the kingdom of the saints and the twice-occurring defeat of the devil, encompasses the whole period of existence of Christianity. It sums up the drama in the twelfth chapter regarding the pursuit of the Woman-Church by the dragon. The first time the devil was defeated by the Savior's death on the cross. At that time he was deprived of power over the world, "*fettered*" and "*confined to the bottomless pit*" for a thousand years; that is, for a very long time (Rev. 20:3). "*Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out,*" so said the Lord before His sufferings (John 12:31). As we know from the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse and from other sources of the Holy Scripture, the devil, even after the Savior's death on the cross, had the ability to seduce the faithful and to set traps for them, although he no longer had power over them. The Lord said to His disciples: "*Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and on all the powers of the enemy*" (Luke 10:19).

Only before the very end of the world, when as a result of mass abandonment of the faith by mankind "the deterrent" would be taken from the midst (2 Thess. 2:7), the devil once again will dominate sinful humanity, but only for a short time. He will then lead the final terrible war against the Church (Jerusalem), directing against her the armies of "Gog and Magog," but he will be defeated by Christ for the second and final time. "*I will build My Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*" (Matt. 16:18). The armies of Gog and Magog symbolize the union of all the godless (theomachistic) forces, both human and those from the nether regions, which the devil will unite in his insane war against Christ. In this way, the ever accelerating war against the Church throughout history ends in the twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse with the total defeat of the devil and his servants. The twentieth chapter summarizes the spiritual aspect of this war and shows its end.

On the bright side of the persecution of the faithful is the fact that although they suffered physically they were victorious over the devil spiritually because they remained loyal to Christ. From the moment of their martyred deaths, they reign with Christ and "judge" the world, participating in the fates of the Church and all of mankind (Rev. 20:4). (This is the reason we turn to them for help, and this is the basis for the veneration of the saints by the Orthodox.) On the glorious participation of the sufferers for the sake of faith, the Lord said: "*he who believes in me, though he may die, he shall come back to life*" (John 11:25). The "first resurrection" in the Apocalypse is the spiritual rebirth that begins with the moment of Baptism of the believer, is strengthened by his Christian deeds, and reaches its highest state at the moment of a martyr's death for Christ's sake. The following promise pertains to those spiritually reborn: "*The time is high and has already come, when the dead shall hear the*

voice of the Son of God, and having heard shall be revived.” The words of the tenth verse of the twentieth chapter are the concluding words: the devil, having deceived mankind, “*is cast into a lake of fire.*” Thus concludes the narrative regarding the condemnation of the godless, the false prophet, the antichrist, and the devil.

The twentieth chapter ends with the description of the Last Judgment. Before it is to take place, there must be the universal resurrection of the dead; that is, a physical resurrection, to which the Apostle refers as the “second” resurrection. All people will be physically resurrected, both the righteous ones and the sinners. Following the universal resurrection, “*the books were opened and . . . those dead were judged according to the entries in the books.*” Evidently, it is then, before the throne of the Judge, that the spiritual state of each person will be manifested. All dark deeds, angry words, secret thoughts and desires, all that was carefully hidden and even forgotten, will suddenly be brought to the surface and will become evident to all. It will be a terrifying sight!

As there are two resurrections, so there are two deaths. The “first death” is the state of unbelief and sin in which those who did not accept the Gospel dwelt. The “second death” is to be doomed to eternal estrangement from God. This description is very concise because the Apostle had already spoken previously about the Last Judgment (Rev. 6:12-17, 10:7, 11:15, 14:14-20, 16:17-21, 19:19-21, 20:11-15). Here the Apostle sums up the Last Judgment (the prophet Daniel having touched briefly on this in the beginning of the twelfth chapter). With this brief description, St. John concludes the writing of the history of mankind and moves on to the description of the everlasting life of the righteous.

The new earth, eternal beatitude.

(Chs. 21-22)

The last two chapters of the book of the Apocalypse contain the most glorious and most joyful pages of the Bible. They describe the beatitude of the righteous in the rejuvenated world, where God will dry each tear from the eyes of the sufferers, where there no longer will be death, nor weeping, nor cries, nor sickness. Life, to which there will be no end, will begin.

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Thus, the book of the Apocalypse was written during the time of increased persecution of the Church. Its aim was to strengthen and comfort the faithful in the face of forthcoming strife. It discloses the methods and artifice by which the devil and his servants attempt to destroy the believers. It teaches how one can overcome the temptations. The book of the Apocalypse sends an appeal to the faithful to be attentive to their spiritual state, to have no fear of suffering and death for the sake of Christ. It shows the happy life of the saints in heaven and calls to us to join them. Although believers sometimes have many enemies, they have many more defenders in the form of angels, saints, and especially Christ, the Victor.

The book of the Apocalypse more vividly and more descriptively than any other book of Holy Scripture reveals the drama of the battle between good and evil in the history of mankind and demonstrates more fully the triumph of Good and Life.

Church Subject	Ephesus Rev. 2:8-11	Smyrna Rev. 2:12-17	Pergamos Rev. 2:12-17	Thyatira Rev. 2:18-29	Sardis Rev. 3:7-13	Philadel Rev.3:7-13
Praise	Worked fervently, had patience, repudiated the corrupt.	Bore sorrow and poverty.	Did not renounce faith.	Good works, love, faith. The last greater than the first.	Did not defile your garments.	Although weak, true to Christ.
Censure	Cooled in love.	— — — —	Allow heretics into your midst.	Allow heretics to sow enticements.	You appear alive, but you are dead.	— — — —
Advice	Remember from whence you fell and repent.	Be faithful till death.	Repent.	Protect what you have.	Be alert, for you are close to death. Repent.	Protect your spiritual wealth.
What comes	"I shall remove your lamp stand" (I shall reject).	— — — —	— — — —	— — — —	I shall come unexpectedly.	— — — —
Reward	You will eat from the tree of life.	You will elude everlasting death.	You will partake of hidden manna and get a new name.	You will subjugate pagans.	You shall receive a white garment.	You will be strengthened. You will bear witness of God.
Old-Testament period	Life in Eden (Gen. 2:9)	Slavery in Egypt (10 plagues; Ex. ch. 7-12 .)	Wandering in the Sinai desert. Balaam seduces Israel (Num. 25:1, 31:16)	Enticement of paganism during the time of Jezebel (3 Kgs.16: 31, 21: 21-26)	God's judgement over Israel and Judah (Ex. 1:9; 8th-6th cent. B.C.)	Babylonian bondage. Extreme weakness. Emergence from bondage. Restoration of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of David (Key of David)
New-Testament period	Time of Apostles. (1 st cent.)	Persecution of Church by Roman emperors. (2-4 cent.)	War with heresies. Ecumenical Councils. Monasticism. (4-7 cent.).	Iconomachism. Christianization of new peoples (Slavs) "Rule over pagans." (7-12 cent.)	Flourishing of Church art. Formalization of religion. The fall of Byzantium. Russian Revolution. (13- 20 cent.)	Pressure from the world. Church weakness. Conversion of the world. (20 th cent.)
Characteristics of the given periods	At first, spiritual zeal and innocence; then- a cooling.	Cleansing through mourning and sorrow.	War with heresy, mental temptations.	Attainment of spiritual maturity.	Outer ceremonial piety. Punishment.	Loyalty to God. Difficult circumstances.

Table 2. Plan of the Apocalypse.

Visions and chapters	Seven seals. Heavenly Adoration. Four horsemen. (4-6)	Seven horns. First calamities. Redemption of the faithful. (7-10)	Seven signs. The Church and the kingdom of the beast. (11-14)	Seven bowls. Judgement of sinners. (15-17).	Judgement of Babylon. Antichrist & false prophet. (18 -19).	1000-year kingdom of the saints. Judgement of the devil and the Last Judgement. (20)
The Church triumphant in Heaven.	Heavenly liturgy (4-5). First Martyrs (6:9-11).	The just of all nations (7:9-17). Strength of Saint's prayers (8:3-6). Adoration of God (11:16-19).	Foretaste of victory by Saints (12:10-12). The innocents (14:1-5).	Hymn of those saved from the beast (15:1-4).	Preparation for the marriage of the Lamb and the Church. The marriage Hymn of the saints (19:1-10).	Martyrs did not perish; they reign with Christ (20:4-6).
Persecuted Church on earth.	The imminent suffering of the faithful (6:11).	Identifying the chosen prior to calamities (7:1-8).	Measuring the temple (11:1-2). Deeds of two witnesses (11:3-14). Woman clothed with sun (12:1-6 & 13-18). Patience of the Saints (13:10, 14:12-13).	Blessed is the courageous (16:15).	-----	-----
The world of sinners and their punishment.	4 horsemen. Passions at war within man. Hence enmity, poverty, & reciprocal extermination (6:1-8).	First calamities. Partial obliteration of nature (8:7-13).	Sinners seduced and made subject to the beast. Mark of the beast (13:8 & 16-17).	Greater punishment of sinner. Total destruction of nature (16:1-12).	-----	-----
Theomachistic world. Antichrist. False prophet.	-----	-----	Evil increases. Beast from the sea- antichrist (13:1-10). Beast from the earth- false prophet (13:11-18).	Kingdom of the beast (16:10-12). Harlot of Babylon- center of universal evil (17:1-18).	Casting down of Babylon. Joy in Heaven (18:1-24).	-----
The nether regions- devil and demons.	-----	Emanation of devilish forces in the world. Devil- the destroyer of souls (9:1-12).	The dragon persecutes the Woman- Church (12:3-4) Plants seeds of temptation (12:10-13 & 12:15-17).	Evil spirits entice people to serve the beast (16:13-14).	Evil force is strengthened in the kingdom of the beast (18:2).	The fountain of all evil- devil. He suffers defeat twice & is punished for eternity (20:1-10).
Physical and spiritual war. Regiments of evil.	World's calamities emanate due to discords within man (6:1-8).	Angels at the river Euphrates. First phase of war (9:13-21).	War in Heaven (12:7-10). Confrontation of the devil with two witnesses (11:7).	Before the final conflict (16:12). Armageddon (16:16). Christ's victory (17:14).	Christ annihilates antichrist & his armies (19:11-21).	Summation of universal wars against the Church. Defeat of Gog & Magog (20:7-9).
Description of the end of the world and Judgment.	Fear of the sinners before the Judge (6:12-17).	Comprehension of God's mystery (10:7).	Kingdom of the world becomes the Kingdom of God (11:15). The harvest (14:14-20).	Judgment of pagans (16:17-21).	Total annihilation of Babylon. Punishment of the beast and false prophet (19:19-21).	Judgment against the devil (20:10). Universal resurrection and Last Judgment (20:11-15).
Main theme.	Introduction. Heavenly Liturgy. Disclosure of reasons for worldly conflicts. Meaning of martyr's suffering.	Growth of Heavenly Church & increase of calamities on earth. God protects the faithful.	Deeds of the witnesses of the church. The devil directs theomachistic forces against the Church.	Kingdom of evil increases, but God brings it to ruin. Judgment begins with the sinning world. The saved exult.	Judgment of theomachists, antichrist, and false prophet. Center of universal evil is abolished.	Summary of the war between good and evil. Devil is twice defeated. Those who died for Christ reign in Paradise. Universal resurrection and Last Judgment.