

which the Holy Spirit inspired the Christian community to discern God's will and to reach a consensus on doctrinal and practical matters. The definitions, creeds, and canon laws produced by these Councils are accepted as genuine expression of the Faith.

THE WRITINGS OF THE FATHERS

In addition to the Holy Scriptures, certain other writings are regarded as inspired. Foremost among them are the writings of the Church Fathers who defined and defended the Faith in the face of false teachings. Many of their writings explain and amplify the truths found in Scripture.

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

The saints responded to God's presence in their lives in an exemplary way. The Church has experienced the personal holiness of the saints at all times and in all places. Their lives bear witness to God and inspire us to respond to His presence in our own lives.

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Prayer and worship are essential for every Orthodox Christian. Through prayer we

- ✧ communicate with God;
- ✧ praise and thank Him for His gifts and blessings;
- ✧ ask Him to help and guide us; and
- ✧ commit ourselves to Him.

Christians are challenged to maintain a personal rule of prayer which is intimately linked to the Church's corporate worship, or liturgy. Liturgy is the common work of God's People and an encounter with God Himself.

THE LITURGICAL ARTS

God's People have always employed their talents to express and share their Faith and experience. Through liturgical music, art, and hymnography, the Faith is shared and expressed creatively.

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SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

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THE PRODUCT OF THE CHURCH

The Church produced the New Testament, and it alone determined what constitutes its contents.

“How can this be,” you may ask, “when we continually hear that the Christians of the first century faithfully lived every word and passage of the New Testament?”

The fact is that they didn’t! The New Testament was written during the first century, but so were countless other so-called gospels and epistles and mystical writings of rather questionable origin. It wasn’t until the fourth century that the New Testament was “edited” into its present form. Many dubious writings, such as the *Gospel of Saint Thomas*, were rejected as being uninspired or downright malicious; other valid writings, such as the *Protoevangelion of Saint James*, were rejected because they were not felt to be fully inspired. Living in an era during which the New Testament was still to be fully recorded, the early Christians maintained their link with the apostolic experience through Holy Tradition—those things which are essential for Christian life.

MORE THAN WORDS

The New Testament, as we know it, is the foremost product of the Church’s

unbroken Tradition. Still, there are many today who would try to offer Jesus Christ without His Church and its Holy Tradition, who accept the Bible alone. They forget that Jesus did not write a book and promise to put everything into it. Rather, He proclaimed the establishment of a living, loving community of believers who are guided through space and time by the Holy Spirit. The Church recorded some of Jesus’ words and teachings, but only some. As Saint John writes, “*There are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written*” (Jn 21:25).

Further, there are even some people who attempt to separate and isolate Scripture from Tradition, claiming that the Church and its Tradition actually contradict the New Testament. That, in itself, is a contradiction!

A LIVING EXPERIENCE

The Bible cannot prove or interpret itself. It relies on the living experience of God’s People. Reject the community of believers and you reject the Scriptures’ “sponsor.” To say the Bible doesn’t need interpreting because “it simply means what it says” is to interpret and misinterpret it at the same time. It is an attempt to reduce absolutely everything in the Scriptures to factual historical prose. But the Scriptures contain

more than prose, and the biblical notion of history is radically different than that of ours today. These accepted facts alone stress the need for discriminate scriptural interpretation.

While Scripture is an essential source of our faith, it is not the only source, and it cannot be isolated from the ongoing life of God’s people—Holy Tradition. Faith, after all, is not blind. Only faith that maintains the essential balance between Scripture and Holy Tradition—offers us a balanced vision and experience of Jesus Christ and the life He continues to share with us.

There are several other sources of the Faith which are a part of Holy Tradition and in full harmony with Scripture. These include

- ✧ the Councils and Canons;
- ✧ the writings of the Fathers;
- ✧ the lives of the Saints;
- ✧ prayer and worship; and
- ✧ the Liturgical Arts.

THE COUNCILS AND CANONS

Throughout the church’s history, many difficult issues have had to be faced. In order to distinguish what was necessary for the salvation of God’s People from what was secondary, Councils were held during