Introduction

The idea for the present volume originated in a conference held at Princeton Theological Seminary and Princeton University, February 15–16, 2013, sponsored by the Fr. Georges Florovsky Orthodox Christian Theological Society of Princeton University. The conference, which was the third annual Florovsky Symposium held at Princeton, examined the theme of the doctrine of Scripture. Five of the papers contained in this volume were originally offered at that conference: those written by Fr. John McGuckin, Dr. Paul Blowers, Dr. Michael Legaspi, John Taylor Carr, and Nikolaos Asproulis. Given the success of the conference and the broad interest in the topic, when a published volume was suggested, the idea arose to invite other capable and sympathetic scholars to contribute additional papers on other figures not touched upon at the conference.

The patristic doctrine of Scripture is an understudied topic. Recent scholars have shown considerable interest in patristic exegetical strategies and methods (e.g., rhetoric, typology, and *theoria*); far less attention, however, has been paid to the fathers' understanding of the nature of Scripture itself.

In interpreting the Scriptures, the fathers made use of all the ordinary philological and hermeneutical tools that could be drawn from the learned culture of their day. Yet they did so in the conviction that what they were interpreting was no ordinary text, but the very Word of life and salvation, the self-revelation of God, given in the form of human words.

The patristic doctrine of Scripture, however, goes far beyond this fundamental principle. Especially from the time of Origen, there has been a persistent tendency to speak of Scripture as analogous to the incarnation of the Word itself: the scriptural medium of human speech and written language is likened to the humanity of Christ, the "garment of words" to the "garment of flesh." Saint Ephrem the Syrian, for example, reflects on Scripture by observing that the Lord "put on our names" and "by means of what belongs to us did He draw close to us: He clothed Himself in our language, so that He might clothe us in His mode of life" (*Hymns on Faith* 5.7, 31.7). The Bible's words are the clothing of the Word, the garments illumined on the mountain of transfiguration. Not just the "experience" to which Scripture testifies, then, but also the very form and medium of Scripture itself constitute a key *topos* in the economy of God, who wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of God's embodiment (cf. Saint Maximus, *Ambigua* 7). It is in this way that we ought to hear and understand Scripture as "speaking [to us] in the person of God" (*legousa ek prosopou theou*; Saint Athanasius, *De incarnatione* 3.4).

The purpose of the present volume is to reopen a consideration of the *doctrine* of Scripture for contemporary theology rooted in the tradition of the fathers, an endeavor inspired by the theological vision of one of the twentieth century's foremost Orthodox Christian theologians, Fr. Georges Florovsky; that is, our interest here is not in mere description of historical uses of Scripture or interpretive methods, but rather in the very nature of Scripture itself and its place within the whole economy of creation, revelation, and salvation. Further, our focus is not limited to a "golden age" of patristic figures. While we do have essays on some of the greats—Origen, Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Maximus the Confessor—we have made the deliberate choice to pass over other obviously important figures, such as Saint Irenaeus and Saint Augustine, in order to examine patristic writers who might not spring to mind quite so readily, and we have pushed the inquiry into recent decades by treating modern theologians whose vision springs from a deep reading

of the patristic tradition. In making these two rather unusual choices, we hope to open vistas in patristic theology beyond the familiar, and to push the discussion beyond the comfortable confines of historical study into a more contemporary and constructive theology, inspired by the fathers and enriched by voices in both the Christian East and West.

Accordingly, the present volume is divided into two parts: the first deals with approaches in the Christian East, and the second with modern approaches inspired by the fathers that are also intentionally engaged with contemporary questions in theology, history, science, and philosophy.

Fr. John McGuckin's essay, the first in this volume, explores the massive contribution to Christian interpretation of the Bible offered by Origen of Alexandria, who knew well that such interpretation, especially as applied to the New Testament, ought to be entirely Christocentric, soteriological, and illuminatory. After outlining the complicated history both of Origen's reception by other theologians and exegetes and of the controversies in which his thought has been implicated, McGuckin sets out the fundamental terms, axioms, and principles of Origen's exegetical approach and explores the ways in which his exegesis fits into the broader context of his *philosophia theologiae*. Notable within this discussion is McGuckin's exposition of what he terms the "double axis" of Origen's hermeneutic—the "psycho-soteriological" and the "metaphysical-eschatological"—and the interrelations between soteriology, eschatology, illumination, and communion with God in Origen's thought.

In his essay on Saint Sarapion of Thmuis, Fr. Oliver Herbel points to the fourth-century monastic saint as an example of the flexibility and holistic character of certain precritical methods of biblical interpretation. Drawing on two of Sarapion's works, a polemical treatise against the Manichaeans and a letter he wrote to monks, Herbel shows that, for Sarapion, the Bible possesses an essentially functional nature—"functional" insofar as it reveals the one true God in the light of the incarnation of the Word. The Lord's economies

constitute the proper hypothesis of Scripture: both the Old and New Testaments proclaim the same message and are fitted to one another in such a way that they jointly bear witness to the same incarnate Lord. The Manichaeans' rejection of the Old Testament Scriptures shows that they did not operate with the correct hypothesis. They failed to grasp the interdependence of the two testaments and so could not enter the "Christian hermeneutical circle," whereby the exegete is able to perceive the twofold movement through the Law to the Gospels and from the Gospels back to the Law in order to open up the latter's meaning. Turning to Sarapion's letter to his fellow monastics, Herbel shows that Sarapion understood correct Christocentric interpretation of the Bible to consist not merely in intellectual activity but in a whole way of life. Since the words of the Bible are those of the Word himself, when monks grasp that the Lord speaks both to and about them, they then bring the meaning of the biblical words to bear directly on their own monastic *tropos* and collapse the distance between themselves and the biblical figures.

Fr. Matthew Baker, who served as the co-chair of the original conference before his untimely death in 2015, was the main intellectual force behind the Florovsky Society. His contribution to the present volume examines Ephrem the Syrian's treatment of Scripture as a whole through the lens of what Baker calls Ephrem's "incarnational hermeneutic." Central to Baker's essay is his exposition of the way in which the Syrian poet and theologian relates biblical revelation to the structures of creation, showing that, for Ephrem, the intrinsic significances of both Scripture and creatures are ordered toward their fulfillment in the incarnation of the Word of God. Baker examines such key elements of Ephrem's theological vision as divine ineffability, his doctrine of revelation, the unity between Scripture and the natural world, and his approach to language as a created reality whose function is ultimately symbolic rather than exhaustively comprehensive of that which to which it points. Having laid that foundation, Baker then focuses more precisely on Ephrem's "incarnational hermeneutic" as an expression of how all created

symbols, whether scriptural or natural, anticipate and participate in the humanity of Christ—a hermeneutic that finds its key and center in the cross.

Bradley Nassif's essay examines the works of Saint John Chrysostom in his search for the driving theological principles that shaped Chrysostom's understanding of the nature of divine revelation and of the task of biblical exegesis. As Chrysostom offered no direct, comprehensive exposition of his own theory of biblical hermeneutics, Nassif collates numerous passages, mostly from Chrysostom's homilies, in order to sketch out its main contours. Several key concepts structure Nassif's discussion: Chrysostom's understanding of salvation history (*oikonomia*); divine accommodation (*synkatabasis*) to human limitations, especially those of the biblical authors themselves; the incarnation as a model for divine revelation and the key to our understanding of it; and the interplay, in the exegetical enterprise, between higher contemplation (*theoria*) and regard for the literal meaning (*historia*) of the biblical text.

The essay by Alexis Torrance examines the letters of the sixth-century Gaza ascetics Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheos with an eye to what they can tell us about their authors' theological perspective on the Bible as a whole and on its rightful place in the life of the Christian ascetic. Torrance explores two primary elements of his authors' understanding of Scripture: first, their anagogical approach to the Bible, and second, what Torrance calls their "refracted exegesis." According to the first, the Bible's chief purpose is to lead its readers, through their deep reading and continual contemplation of it, to its author, Jesus Christ. The Gaza ascetics warn against the dangers of allowing exegetical speculation to become a distraction from the goal of the Christian life and from the aim of Scripture itself. The second element, "refracted exegesis," is what Torrance describes as "the refracting of scriptural texts that traditionally or explicitly refer to Christ onto the saints, applying the text to them in an equivalent way." Scripture is refracted *through Christ*, showing that the Gaza ascetics stand firmly in the early Christian tradition of Christocentric reading

of the Bible; and it is refracted *onto Christ's holy ones*, showing that the Gaza ascetics understood Scripture to be living and powerful, by no means a dead text.

In his essay on Saint Maximus the Confessor, Paul Blowers examines Maximus's treatment of the transfiguration narrative as the key both to scriptural interpretation and to the dynamics of divine revelation. While some of the Confessor's predecessors had privileged the Sinai theophany in its bearing on the whole mystery of divine revelation, Maximus, like Origen, gave more prominence to the transfiguration. In Blowers's estimation, this was likely due to the fact that in the transfiguration, the dynamics of revelation are already incarnationally situated. Unlike the deferred (and ultimately alienated) *logos* of Derrida, Maximus's Logos is elusive precisely by virtue of the overwhelming intensity and immediacy of the gracious self-presencing manifested in the transfiguration. The revelatory "moment," the eschatological "present," of the transfiguration gives way to a dialectics of concealment and disclosure that illuminates all the "incarnations" of the divine Logos. Marion's concept of "saturated phenomena" provides an interpretive framework within which Blowers elucidates Maximus's vision of the transfiguration. This vision entails a dialectics of disclosure and concealment, of immanence and transcendence, that operates in function of the diastemic distance between Creator and creature, and it provides the matrix for what Blowers calls the "interpretive dance," that is, "the playful performance that is scriptural exegesis." As he unpacks this notion of "interpretive dance" in the context of Maximus's hermeneutical theology, Blowers ably shows that, for Maxmius, scriptural interpretation "is never a matter of individualistic apprehensions enthroning the human subject, but of a thoroughly ecclesial and multifaceted orientation to the transfiguring Logos, grounded in . . . a profoundly dialogical—and indeed eucharistic—ontology that elicits a radically new realism in creatures' encounter with the life-giving, saturating, and deifying Word of God."

Brock Bingaman's contribution explores the centrality ascribed to

Scripture in the eighteenth-century compilation of earlier Orthodox texts known as the *Philokalia*. Bingaman shows how the authors of those texts urge continual scriptural reading and meditation as integral to one's search for God, for purification of heart, and for growth in love for God and one's neighbor. These authors exhort their readers to discover the hidden meanings of Scripture, what Bingaman calls "the mystical character of the Bible." This process of discovery is fundamentally Christocentric in orientation: it is through the lens of the incarnation of the Logos "enfleshed in the words of Scripture" that Scripture must be read and understood. Bingaman traces out the connection in the *Philokalia* between deep reading of Scripture and theosis. On this view, reading and understanding Scripture are viewed not as ends in themselves but as means to the attainment of the deified life in Christ. Accordingly, the particular character and depth of one's understanding of Scripture is measured against one's spiritual maturity—how far along one is on the path toward deification. Bingaman outlines the crucial link in the *Philokalia* between scriptural interpretation and praxis: one cannot be said to understand the teachings of Scripture unless one is formed by them and puts them into practice. According to Bingaman, this is among the more significant elements of the doctrine of Scripture articulated in the *Philokalia*.

The essay by Nikolaos Asproulis opens the second part of this volume. In it, Asproulis considers the understanding of Scripture found in the work of Fr. Georges Florovsky as the crux and foundation of his whole theological program. As Asproulis interprets, the Bible is for Florovsky the witness to God's mighty deeds of creation and salvation, the inspired record of the *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history, the economy of salvation) taking place in both covenants and united in the historic person of Jesus Christ. The essentially biblical character of Florovsky's program Asproulis finds in several characteristic notes: the self-revelation of God in history as the foundation of Christian theology; patristic theology as a "theology of facts," at the heart of which is meditation upon, and exegesis of, Scripture; the church as the body of Christ; and inaugurated eschatology. In Asproulis's view,

"following and developing further and deepening this *revelatory*, *historical, Christocentric*, and *ecclesial*—in summary, *biblical*—character of theology" as underlined by Florovsky is "the only way for Orthodox theology to be faithful to the apostolic *kerygma* and to the patristic ethos." Moreover, Florovsky's understanding of theology as a continuing hermeneutical reflection upon historic events via historic witnesses provides a way beyond both a rigid "theology of repetition"—a mere parroting of patristic texts—and the antirealism, jettisoning of history, and separation of fact and meaning entailed in John Behr's more recent hermeneutical proposal for a "text-based" understanding of revelation.

Vladimir Cvetković's essay introduces the reader to the place of Scripture in the thought of an important twentieth-century Serbian theologian and spiritual "Abba" little studied outside his home country: the recently canonized Saint Justin Popović (1894–1979). Cvetković stresses how Justin regarded all the words of Scripture as words of Christ, thus making not only the whole New Testament but even the whole Bible "the Gospel," with a special place given to the Pauline letters as "the fifth Gospel." In the Bible is found everything that God has found necessary to say to humans; likewise, the biography of every human person is found within its pages. Justin's vision of Scripture is deeply personalistic, and his exegesis highly "associative," being drawn along by the connections within the text itself. Human beings cannot pose more questions than there are answers in the Bible, says Justin; in it, we find answers even to questions we have not yet asked. There is a close correlation between Scripture and the divine economy itself, and Justin stressed the comprehensive character of the Bible. Cvetković underscores how Justin, as an "evangelical" theologian, viewed everything within the life of Orthodoxy—its liturgy, dogmas, disciplines, and so on—in terms of Scripture. He counseled frequent reading of the Bible accompanied by prayer and the practice of the evangelical virtues, especially faith, hope, and love. With regard to interpretation, he warned against two temptations: rationalism and the abandonment of reason. The most crucial elements in good

exegesis, according to Justin, are faith and love toward the person of Christ himself. However, he also underlines, faith must never be separated from the reasoning capacity. The fallen reason must die but then be reborn, regenerated in faith. Like Georges Florovsky, Justin was an Orthodox theologian who held to the Augustinian and Anselmian ideal of *credo ut intelligam*, and in fact, he goes further, suggesting that in the last stage of the illumination of reason by faith, *intellige ut credas* holds sway.

The essay by John Taylor Carr examines T. F. Torrance's response to the crisis of modern biblical hermeneutics. Carr describes Torrance's contribution as a "realist hermeneutics," one that views the Bible "as a coherent narrative in rational, ordered speech reflecting the inherent order and rationality in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and its continuation in the apostolic church." The crisis to which Torrance's realism responds can be traced back to biblical scholars' uncritical appropriation of certain core ideas of early modern science and philosophy—specifically a cosmological dualism derived from Newton and an epistemological dualism inherited from Kant. Schleiermacher and Bultmann serve as case studies in tracing out these genealogical connections. In Torrance, Carr finds both a creative retrieval of Greek patristic thought, which was able to overcome the dualisms of its own milieu, and an engagement with a contemporary scientific outlook rooted in the thought of Einstein. Those two sources lay the groundwork for the way modern theology and biblical hermeneutics can overcome the damaging dichotomies and dualisms with which they have been operating within both "Augustinian-Newtonian" and "Augustinian-Aristotelian" cultures.

In his essay on modern biblical criticism, the last in this volume, Michael Legaspi points to the rift, in contemporary approaches to the Bible, between the world of academic scholarship and the world of faithful, theological readings. Instead of rejecting either approach outright, Legaspi offers a third way that incorporates the benefits of both, holding "churchly understandings of the Bible in creative tension with academic criticism." In formulating this third option, Legaspi first

recounts the rise of modern biblical scholarship as a professional, academic enterprise with its roots in the European Enlightenment. Examining the career of Johann David Michaelis in particular, Legaspi relates the history of the installment of biblical studies as a discipline in modern universities and traces out the social and political dimensions inextricably bound up with that development. Bringing the discussion up to the present, Legaspi finds an encouraging rise in the regard for specifically theological concerns in contemporary study of the Bible. This postcritical paradigm shift entails a preference for traditional theological and ecclesial categories, derived from creeds and patristic models, over the exclusive use of "ancient history, critical philology, and general hermeneutics." Taking Augustine as a patristic model for properly theological and ecclesial readings of Scripture, Legaspi notes that such an approach, while still being able to reap the benefits of critical biblical scholarship, is able to "generate readings with direct relevance to a range of doctrinal, liturgical, and ecclesiological concerns."

The essays presented in this volume treat a wide array of patristic figures, cultures, and epochs—much ground is covered. What links them together is their common search for a doctrine of Scripture as such, whether it be in the writings of the fathers or in the writings of those who take the fathers as their inspiration on this point. The aim of this volume is not to add yet another piece of secondary literature to the already overwhelming abundance of studies dealing with particular biblical interpretations, exegetical styles, or rhetorical strategies employed by any number of exegetes over the Christian centuries. Its ultimate aim, rather, is to make a valuable, if modest, contribution to the task of approaching anew the question of how Scripture as a whole—as an integral deposit and medium of God's revelation to humankind—is to be understood. It is the hope of this volume's editors that it achieves that end, and that it models the kind of theological inquiry practiced by Father Florovsky: at once patristic and yet contemporary, at once historical and yet constructive, in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus (cf. Eph. 4:21).