



## OLD TESTAMENT CANON AND TEXT IN THE GREEK-SPEAKING ORTHODOX CHURCH

**Miltiadis Konstantinou**  
**University of Thessaloniki**

### Introduction

The place and the authority of Scripture within the whole system of Orthodox theology, as well as its role in the daily life of Orthodoxy, constitute one of the most controversial and thorny problems. However, the problem of the translation of Scripture appears to be even more difficult and complex, since the historical and cultural conditions under which the Church was formed during its first centuries and the subsequent development of the various orthodox ecclesiastical communities play a much more important role, than do the theological issues involved. Especially regarding the issue of the translation of the Old Testament, its approach requires extensive analysis of the whole spectrum of the problems that the Church faced, especially in the East, from her birth up to the present. Although the problems differed in each period (for example, confrontation with Judaism, dealing with heresies, rejection of missionaries, etc.), all of them helped shape Orthodox self-identity in general, and its understanding about Scripture and its translations in particular.

Closely connected with the issue of the Old Testament text is the problem of canon, which the Church ultimately accepted. It is a well-known fact that during the period of her inception the Church did not face the problem of the Old Testament canon, since this issue had not yet emerged, at least not in the form and intensity in which it did later, nor, for that matter, as it did in the Jewish Synagogue.

## Canon Among the Jews

The first data regarding a fixed Jewish canon are provided by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, whose writings date from the end of first century A.D. In his apologetic work *Against Apion* (1.37-46), Josephus mentions 22 “accredited” (πεπιστευμενα) books, written in the period from Moses to Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.). If one allows for the fact that some books were regarded as single units (e.g., 1 + 2 Samuel, 1 + 2 Kings, 1 + 2 Chronicles, Ezra + Nehemiah, Judges + Ruth, Jeremiah + Lamentations) and that the Twelve Minor Prophets which were counted as one book, one can arrive at the number of 22 –with the result that the number of the books equaled the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. All books written after Artaxerxes I, according to Josephus, lacked the degree of accreditation of those written earlier, since by that time the era of the prophets had passed. From Josephus’ testimony it may be inferred that towards the end of I A.D. the Jews made a clear distinction between “canonical” books and the rest, using as a criterion their alleged time of writing.

Similar information derives from the book of 4 Ezra written ca. A.D. 100<sup>1</sup>. According to its author (14:19-48)<sup>2</sup>, the canon was composed by Ezra himself and contained 24 books (v. 45). Although the 24 books are not mentioned by name, it is probable that they were the books included in today’s Jewish canon (based on the numbering described above provided Judges, Ruth, Jeremiah and Lamentations are counted separately in order to equal the number of the Greek alphabet). Though the attribution of the canon’s formation to Ezra lacks historical foundation, the mention of a specific number of books corroborates that, when 4 Ezra was written, a clearly formed canon was in existence. Despite the canon of 24 books, the author not only did not suppress the existence of other sacred books, but attributed their composition as well to Ezra. This was a collection of 70 additional books (v. 46), whose sole difference from the 24 books was that the former were not “made public” by Ezra but handed over by him to “the wise among [the] people” (v. 47).

It is characteristic of the above witnesses that, whilst a specific number of sacred books is mentioned and a clear distinction is made between these and the remaining works of Jewish religious literature, there is nowhere any reference to the existence of an institutional body charged with the acceptance or non-acceptance of a given book to the canon. Consequently, only hypotheses can be put forward on this question. The information contained in the Talmud that the “men of the Great Synagogue”, who are identified with Ezra and his associates, worked towards the establishment of the canon, lacks a firm historical foundation<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, the insistence of all Jewish sources on the attribution of the canon’s formation to Ezra favours the view that it was not based on a decision taken by an institutional entity.

The absence of an institutional body with the final decision on canonicity, based on strict criteria, explains the uncertainty of Jewish authors of I A.D. regarding their assessment on the books not included in the canon. Thus, whilst at the end of I A.D. the canon of the Jewish Bible appears to have been formed and the canonical books were clearly distinguished from other works of Jewish religious literature, the latter

<sup>1</sup> Damianos Doikos, *Introduction to the Old Testament, Thessaloniki 1985, p. 100 (in Greek)*.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol I, New York 1983, pp. 517-559*.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolaos Papadopoulos, *The deuterocanonical pieces of the book of Daniel, Athens 1985, pp. 6-7 (in Greek)*.

were not rejected nor were they condemned as spurious. Indeed, the author of 4 Ezra endowed them with Ezra's authority, while Josephus used them as sources in his own writings and cited them verbatim (e.g., the Additions to Esther [*Antiquities of the Jews* XI.216-219, 273-283], 1 Maccabees [*Ant.* XII.237-386, 389-432 and XIII.1-57] and 1 Ezra [*Ant.* XI.75] and appears to accept them as "sacred"<sup>4</sup>.

The rabbinical Synod of Jamnia in Palestine (A.D. 90/100) seems to have played an important role in the demarcation of the Jewish canon. The synod did not initiate the formation of a canon but, accepting it as a given, dealt with matters concerning the public reading of specific books or parts of them, their place within the canon etc. It is a fact, however, that after this synod the books which were not included in the canon were considered *ouv kei,mena* ("non at hand") that is, non-existent<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the rather tolerant stance of Jewish writers towards the non-included books began to alter after I A.D. The establishment of the Christian Church and the spread of Christianity played an important role in this development. The widespread use of the Septuagint Translation among Greek-speaking Jews of the dispersion facilitated the Christian mission. This resulted in the adoption of the Septuagint (LXX) by the Church as her holy Bible, without, however, any clear notion regarding the number of the books it contained. Nevertheless, the adoption of the Septuagint by the Christians led the Jewish Synagogue, due to its antagonism towards the Church, to the rejection and, ultimately, the condemnation of the LXX, and, consequently, of the books not included in the Jewish canon. The first indication of disapproval of the LXX by Judaism comes from the Christian apologist Justin Martyr in his work *Dialogue with Trypho*<sup>6</sup>. Approximately during this same period (end of II A.D.) the list of the 24 canonical books with the names of their "authors" surfaced in talmudic tradition (*Baba Bathra* 14b-15a).

Despite the formation of the canon, the issue as a whole was far from resolved. The Talmud has preserved many disagreements among the rabbis related to the problem of public reading of certain books, such as Song of Solomon (*Jaddajim* III 5, *Megilla* 7a), Ecclesiastes (*Jaddajim* III 5, *Sabbath* 30a.b), Proverbs (*Sabbath* 30a.b), Ezekiel (*Sabbath* 13b, *Chagiga* 13a, *Menachot* 45a), Esther (*Sanhedrin* 100a) and Ruth (*Megilla* 7a). On the other hand, during the next several centuries the implicit recognition by Judaism of the books not included in the canon also continued, as is demonstrated by the Talmud, which often quotes and comments upon non-canonical books<sup>7</sup>.

From the above it is evident that, in Jewish literature, when mention is made of the canon of sacred books it is stated explicitly that it contained only 22 or 24 books (=39). In practice, however, there is an implicit recognition of additional books as being sacred.

## Canon During the First Millennium of Christianity

A similar practice to that of the Jewish Synagogue appears to have been followed by the Christian Church, although in this case the process to establish an Old

<sup>4</sup> See further: N. Papadopoulos, *The deuterocanonical....*, pp. 9-13.

<sup>5</sup> Elias Oikonomos, *Die Bedeutung der deuterokanonischen Schriften in der orthodoxen Kirche*, in Siegfried Meurer (ed.), *Die Apokryphen im ökumenischen Horizont*, Stuttgart, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> PG 6,636A, 641B.

<sup>7</sup> See further: N. Papadopoulos, *The deuterocanonical....*, pp. 13-16.

Testament canon seems to have been more complex. The widespread use of the Septuagint by the New Testament authors and the obvious influence upon them of books that were not part of the Jewish canon testify to the fact that, for the earliest Christian Church, a rigidly fixed and closed Old Testament canon was not an issue. The same is true for Christian authors of the first four centuries A.D., almost all of whom make indiscriminate use of the Old Testament canon as well as of the books not included in it. Both of these groups were regarded as Scripture. From this observation it might be concluded that the ancient Church accepted a broader canon than that of the Synagogue, or that she simply did not insist on a canon. Nevertheless, the few but characteristic exceptions raise several questions.

Melito of Sardis (ca. A.D. 180) was the first to refer to an Old Testament canon in a letter to Onesimus, preserved by Eusebius in his *Church History*<sup>8</sup>. The list Melito quotes contains the same number of books as the Jewish canon, although he substitutes Wisdom of Solomon for Esther.

In the confrontation between Judaism and Christianity, mentioned above, the polemic of the Jews against certain books created suspicions among Christian writers regarding their authenticity. Julian Africanus (III A.D.), for example, rejected Susanna<sup>9</sup>, which in the Septuagint appears together with Daniel, a fact which precipitated a reaction from Origen. Origen's answer to Africanus<sup>10</sup> is especially interesting, since it clarified for the first time the meaning of the term "apocrypha", which later came to be used for the books not accepted as belonging to the canon of Scripture. Origen used this term, as well as its synonym "secret", to label the texts not intended for public use or reading, without, however, directly questioning their authenticity or trustworthiness<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, he counseled against their use by Christians in their discussions with Jews<sup>12</sup>. It is thus clear that, at least up to that time, the issue of biblical canon had not yet arisen for the Church –except in the context of her dialogue with Judaism. The positions of synods and ecclesiastical writers on the subject varied with the problems which, at each occasion, emerged.

The issue of the canon of the Scripture was discussed for the first time on a synodical level at the local synod of Laodicea, ca. A.D. 360. In canons 58 and 60<sup>13</sup> the synod forbade the reading in the church of the "non-canonical" books and enumerated the canonical ones. The Old Testament canon was stated to be comprised of 22 books, that is to say, the entire Jewish canon (according to current numbering), but with the inclusion of Baruch and The Letter of Jeremiah, counted with Jeremiah and Lamentations respectively.

A few years later, Athanasius in his Festal Letter of the year A.D. 367 returned to the issue of the canon of the Scriptures, and also determined the number of Old Testament books to be 22<sup>14</sup>. The list of books compiled by Athanasius is identical to that of the Synod of Laodicea, that is to say, it includes Baruch and The Letter of

<sup>8</sup> PG 20,396C-397A.

<sup>9</sup> BEPES (=Library of Greek Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers) vol. 17, pp. 167-168 (in Greek).

<sup>10</sup> BEPES (=Library of Greek Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers) vol. 16, pp. 350-362 (in Greek).

<sup>11</sup> E. Oikonomos, *Die Bedeutung...*, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> BEPES (=Library of Greek Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers) vol. 16, p. 353 (in Greek).

<sup>13</sup> G. A. Rallis – M. Potlis, *Compilation of the Divine and Holy Canons of the Holy and Venerable Apostles and of the Holy Ecumenical and Local Councils and of the Holy Fathers*, Vol. 3, Athens 1853, p. 225 (in Greek).

<sup>14</sup> PG 26,1176B-1180A and 1436B-1440A; cf. PG 28,284A-289D, 296A-384C.

Jeremiah, but excludes Esther. The number remained 22, since Judges and Ruth were counted separately. However, for the sake of “greater accuracy”, as he characteristically notes, he also mentions Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Esther, Judith and Tobit, books which he characterized as *ouv kanonizo,mena me,n( tetupwme,na de. para. tw/n pate,rwn avnaginw,skesqai toi/j a;rti prosercome,noij kai. boulome,noij kathcei/sqai to.n th/j euvsebei,aj lo,gon* (“non-canonical, but quoted by the fathers as books which are to be read by the new-comers wishing to be trained in the piety”). From this phrase derives the word *avnaginwsko,mena* (“those which are to be read”) for books not included in the Jewish canon. These books were clearly distinguished by Athanasius from the rest, called “apocrypha”. From that period onwards the term “apocrypha” did not only denote those books which were merely excluded from public use or reading, but also books of unknown origin and therefore without authority<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, despite the limit of 22 for the Old Testament canon, Athanasius himself in his writings used almost all *avnaginwsko,mena* without discrimination<sup>16</sup>.

The Synod of Rome in A.D. 382, convened during the reign of Pope Damasus I (A.D. 366-384), moved in a completely different direction and issued the *Decretum de libris recipientis et non recipientis*<sup>17</sup>. In this text, known as the *Decretum Gelasianum* (due to its erroneous attribution to Pope Gelasius [ca. 492]), one finds enumerated as canonical, for the first time, books which were not included in the Jewish canon, with the exception of 1 Ezra and 3 Maccabees.

The above decision obviously had regional scope and authority, as did the pronouncement of the Synod of Laodicea in the East. Thus, Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 312-386), two years later (in A.D. 384), in his *Fourth Catechism*<sup>18</sup>, returned to the issue of the canon of Scripture, repeated the list of the Synod of Laodicea, noting nonetheless, *ta. de. loipa. e;xw kei,sqw evn deute,rw |* (“but let the rest stand outside, in second place”). From this statement “deuterocanonical” was derived, a term which became widely used in the West for the books not included in the Jewish canon. The same view was held by Gregory the Theologian (A.D. 328-390)<sup>19</sup> and Amphilochius of Iconium (A.D. 342-395)<sup>20</sup>, both of whom cite the Athanasian list. In practice, however, these writers likewise made no distinction among sacred books they used in their writings. Also, Epiphanius of Salamis (Constantia), on Cyprus (A.D. 315-403), following the tradition of Gregory and Amphilochius, mentioned an Old Testament comprising 22 books in which Baruch and The Letter of Jeremiah were included. Of the rest he mentioned only Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach, which he declared to be “useful” and “profitable”, but not included among the canonical books<sup>21</sup>. Finally, even more radical was the view of Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 350-428), who accepted a shorter canon than the Jewish one, excluding from it Job, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther<sup>22</sup>.

In the West, the narrow Old Testament canon also had important supporters. Thus, Hilary of Poitiers (Piktavion) (A.D. 315-367) enumerated 22 Old Testament books,

<sup>15</sup> E. Oikonomos, *Die Bedeutung...*, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> See further: N. Papadopoulos, *The deuterocanonical...*, pp. 45-47, n. 169.

<sup>17</sup> PL 19,791-793 and 59,157-159 and 166-168.

<sup>18</sup> PG 33, 493C-501A.

<sup>19</sup> PG 37,472A-474A or PG 138,924ABC (and PG 38,841-844).

<sup>20</sup> PG 37,1593A-1598A or PG 138,925C-928D.

<sup>21</sup> PG 41,213AB. 42,560D-561A. PG 43,244AC.

<sup>22</sup> N. Papadopoulos, *The deuterocanonical...*, p. 49.

but also noted the view held by his contemporaries, that Tobit and Judith were to be added to these, to make the total equal to the 24 letters of the Greek alphabet<sup>23</sup>. The same preference for the narrower canon is shown by Rufinus (A.D. 315-411), who distinguished the canonical books from the rest read in the church, and which he called “ecclesiastical” (...et alii libri sunt, qui non canonici sed ecclesiastici...) <sup>24</sup>. Jerome (A.D. 345-420), appears to adopt an even more restrictive view, and unequivocally labeled the books not included in the Jewish canon “apocrypha” (quidquid extra hos est, inter apocrypha esse ponendum)<sup>25</sup>, but noted the ecclesiastical practice of reading the books not included among the canonical, such as Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, Tobit, and Maccabees<sup>26</sup>. It was on Jerome’s view that later protestant tradition came to rely for naming these books “apocrypha”.

Despite the expressed preference in the East for the Jewish canon (with minor variations) and despite similar views expressed by Latin ecclesiastical writers, a preference for a broader canon began to emerge in the West. Thus, almost ten years after the Synod of Rome, which had recognized a greater number of books as canonical, a new synod was held at Hippo which, in order to counter the view based on Jerome that books not included in the Jewish canon were apocryphal, recognized them as canonical and holy (canon 36). This canon of the Synod of Hippo was ratified a few years later, in A.D. 397, by the Third Synod of Carthage (canon 47). Unfortunately, the original form of the resolutions by those synods is not known with certainty. Thus, all that can be said is that these synods accepted a broader canon than the Jewish Old Testament canon<sup>27</sup>. Ultimately, the resolutions of the synods of Hippo and Carthage were ratified by a new synod, again held in Carthage, in A.D. 419, which issued a new list of Scriptural books (canon 24/32)<sup>28</sup>. The precise extent to which this list is identical to that of previous synods cannot be determined with certainty<sup>29</sup>. Nonetheless, the resolution of this specific synod had a special significance for the history of the Scriptural canon, since in it was clearly expressed the resolve of the participants to put an end to the discussions and thus to prohibit the public reading of any book “as holy scripture”, if it was found “outside the canonical scripture” enumerated by the synod. Nevertheless, from this list no reliable conclusion concerning the number of the Old Testament books can be drawn, due to the ambiguities it contains and the discrepancies between its Greek and Latin versions<sup>30</sup>. Thus, the only certain conclusion that remains is that the Synod of Carthage of A.D. 419 accepted a canon broader than the Jewish Old Testament canon, but excluding Sirach and 3 Maccabees.

<sup>23</sup> *Prolegomena in Psalmos*, PL IX,241.

<sup>24</sup> Rufini, *Aquileiensis presbyterii, Commentario in Symbolum Apostolorum* 37, PL XXI, 373C-374B.

<sup>25</sup> *Praefatio Hieronymi in librum Tobiae*, PL XXIX,23.

<sup>26</sup> S. Eusebii Hieronymi, *Praefatio in libros Salomonis*, PL XXVIII,1306-1308. *Epistolae* 53, *Ad Paulinum* 8, PL XXII,545-549; cf. *Synopsis divinae bibliothecae ex epistola Hieronymi ad Paulinam desympta*, PL XXVIII, 173-178.

<sup>27</sup> See: Panagiotis Mpoumis, *The Canons of the Church on the Canon of the Holy Scripture*, Athens 1986, p. 23, n. 2, 6 and p. 105 (in Greek).

<sup>28</sup> G.A. Rallis –M. Potlis, *Compilation...*, pp.368-369.

<sup>29</sup> P. Mpoumis, *The Canons...*, p. 24, n. 4.

<sup>30</sup> In particular, the synod clearly recognised as canonical, books not included in the Jewish canon, such as 1 Ezra, Tobit and Judith. It is rather possible that the synod recognised, although it does not name them, Baruch and The Letter of Jeremiah, something which results from the fact that it does not name the book Lamentations, but it mentions the general title, “Jeremiah”. Finally, there is also an uncertainty concerning the books 1 & 2 Maccabees, which are included in the Latin version of the resolution text, but are omitted in the Greek one. See further: P. Mpoumis, *The Canons...*, p. 106ff.

In the same period (V A.D.) the so-called *Canons of the Holy and Venerable Apostles* also decided in favour of a broader canon, not only for the Old but for the New Testament as well, including in the latter one the Epistles of Clement and the Apostolic Ordinances (canon 95).

Nevertheless, during the following centuries and despite the Synod of Carthage, the issue continued to remain open. Thus, Junilius Africanus (ca. A.D. 550) agreed with the view of Theodore of Mopsuestia concerning a canon narrower than the Jewish canon<sup>31</sup>. Half a century later, Pope Gregory the Great (A.D. 590-604) returned to the issue by dividing Old Testament books to “canonical” and “libros non canonicos sed tamen ad aedificationem Ecclesiae editos”<sup>32</sup>.

The Trullan Synod of Constantinople in A.D. 691 (i.e. the continuation of the Fifth [553] and Sixth [680] Ecumenical Councils) finally brought to an end the discussion regarding the canon of Scripture, without, however, coming to a clear decision on the canon of the Old Testament. Specifically, the synod in its second canon endorsed the so-called *Apostolic Canons*, the canons of the synods of Laodicea and Carthage, as well as the canons of Athanasius, Gregory the Theologian and Amphilochius of Iconium, but without discussing the differences among them and without enumerating the books of the Old Testament. This means that the Synod effectively erased the canon of the Old Testament as an issue, seeing that it endorsed all extant traditions, without any effort at harmonization.

Nevertheless, the ancient, eastern preference for a narrower canon continued after the Trullan Ecumenical Synod. John Damascenus (A.D. 680-755) devoted a chapter of his work *Accurate Restatement of the Orthodox Faith* to the issue of Scripture, where he enumerated the Old Testament books, linking their system to the letters of Hebrew alphabet<sup>33</sup>.

From the above historical overview it is clear that, during the first millennium of Christianity, the Old Testament canon was never an internal problem for the Church. Rather, the Church admitted the entire spiritual treasure of pre-Christian Judaism, and interpreted it christologically. The issue of the canon surfaced only in the context of the Church’s confrontation either with Judaism, early on, or with heterodoxy, later. The relevant resolutions were shaped by prevailing conditions in any given region at any one time, as well as by specific problems that needed to be solved. Thus, whilst the Church, internally, did not face any problem regarding the canon of Scripture, in her external expression she was no doubt induced to limit the number of books, either for the purpose of her dialogue with Judaism or to avert the propagation of heretical teachings, based on unknown works or those of dubious and spurious origin. This is proven by the fact that even those who favoured the narrow Jewish canon, in their writings, addressed to the flock of the Church, made use of all the Jewish scriptures, regardless of whether or not they belonged to the canon which they themselves upheld. The fact that many of the festivals instituted by the Church were based on events described in works that were never accepted, even in the broader canon, leads to the same conclusion. The same applies to the hymnography and iconography of the Church, often inspired by and drawing on books that were not part of the canon. On the other hand, the fact that the East was the region where most of the theological

<sup>31</sup> Junilii, *Episcopi Africani, De partibus divinae legis, lib. 1,6ff, PL LXVIII,19ff.*

<sup>32</sup> *Moralium Libri sive expositio in Librum b. Job XIX 21,13, PL LXXXVI,119.*

<sup>33</sup> John Damascenus, *Accurate Restatement of the Orthodox Faith, Text-Translation-Introduction-Commentary by Nikos Matsukas Thessaloniki 1976, p. 400 (in Greek).*

discussions took place and most of the heresies appeared, explains the preference for a narrower canon, something that can be observed in the writers of the region.

### **The Great Schism and its Aftermath**

The great schism between the eastern and western Church and the tragic events for the East which followed (e.g., the crusades and Turkish domination) left no room for discussions about a canon of the books of the Old Testament. Moreover, a millennium of Christianity was long enough for the consolidation of local traditions. The issue of the Old Testament canon was raised again in the West during the 16th century, because of the Protestant Reformation. A century later it re-appeared in the East, but under completely different circumstances from those of the past.

In the West, the zeal of the reformers for a return to the authentic sources of faith led the Protestant Churches to recognise the Hebrew Old Testament text as the only authoritative one and, therefore, to adopt the narrow Jewish canon. The books not included in this canon but recognised by the Western Church were labelled “apocrypha” and the rest “pseudepigrapha”. In spite of this development and notwithstanding the deprecatory label “apocrypha”, Lutheran tradition did not altogether proscribe the reading of these books, which to date are often included in editions of the Bible as addenda. At the opposite end of the scale, other protestant traditions, such as the Calvinists and the Puritans of Scotland, took a more rigid stance, something which led to the famous “apocrypha controversy” within the British Bible Society, resulting in the adoption, for a period of time, of the narrow Jewish canon by the Society.

The attitude of Protestantism occasioned the definitive solution of the problem of canon in the Roman Catholic Church. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) in its decree *Sacrosancta* of 1546 essentially endorsed the ancient Roman tradition by officially recognising the broad Old Testament canon (with the exception of 1 Ezra and 3 Maccabees). The books included in the Jewish canon were labeled “canonical” and the rest was designated “deuterocanonical”, having equal authority with the former. The First Vatican Synod (1869-1870) ratified this decision, thereby definitively concluding this issue for the Roman Catholic Church.

In the Orthodox Church the matter of Old Testament canon was raised again, not as an internal problem, but as a reflection of the related discussions that were going on in the West. By the end of the sixteenth century, many Orthodox were going to the West to study theology. Western theology, however, at that time, was being shaped to a large degree by the confrontations between Protestants and Catholics<sup>34</sup>, and many Orthodox theologians were influenced by that climate. Thus, one may observe the phenomenon of Orthodox theologians turning against Roman Catholicism using arguments that reveal protestant influence, or vice versa: they turned against Protestantism using doctrinal positions coloured by Catholicism. As representatives of this practice, Metrophanes Critopoulos, patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril Lucar, patriarch of Constantinople, and Dositheus, patriarch of Jerusalem may be mentioned.

Around the end of the sixteenth century the patriarch of Alexandria, Meletius Pigas, sent to Poland the eminent theologian and clergyman Cyril Lucar of Crete, in response to the demand of orthodox folk there, to assist them in their struggle against

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. N. Matsoukas, *Ecumenical Movement, History - Theology, Thessaloniki 1986*, pp. 207ff (in Greek).



the activities of Jesuits, an event which led to the formation of the first Uniatic Church (Synod of Brest 1596)<sup>35</sup>. In this struggle Cyril Lucar requested support from Protestant communities in Poland. Later on, Lucar, as patriarch of Alexandria (1602-1622), sent Metrophanes Critopoulos (who later succeeded him as patriarch) to England, Germany and Switzerland, mainly to study Protestant theology and church policy. Protestant influence on the theology of Metrophanes Critopoulos is apparent in his *Confession of Faith*<sup>36</sup>, which he compiled in 1625 and by which he tried to enlighten Protestants about the content of Orthodox faith and, especially, to ally with them against Roman Catholics. On the issue of the Old Testament canon, Metrophanes put forward a view based on the resolution of the Synod of Laodicea and on the related views of Gregory the Theologian, Amphilochius of Iconium and John Damascenus, namely, that the books not included in the narrow canon had never been regarded by the Church of Christ as canonical and authoritative. As a result, the Orthodox did not seek support for their doctrines in them. Notwithstanding, he did not consider these books as subject to refutation, since their content has a notable benefit for the soul.

Four years later, in 1629, Cyril Lucar, as patriarch of Constantinople, published in Geneva his own *Confession of Faith*, characterised by vehemence against Roman Catholics. In this confession the patriarch adopted clearly Calvinistic positions, a matter which caused alarm among the Orthodox. Concerning the issue of the canon, Cyril based his case on the resolution of the Synod of Laodicea and adopted the narrow canon.

In reaction to Lucar, a series of local synods against Protestantism were held<sup>37</sup>. One of these, the Synod of Constantinople of 1642, put forward, on the issue canon, a view based on the resolutions of the synods of Laodicea and Carthage. Thus, although it viewed the books not included in the Jewish canon as “non canonical”, it added that they should not be treated as being subject to refutation.

In addition to synodical resolutions, Lucar’s work gave rise to new Confessions of Faith, such as those of Peter Mogila, bishop of Kiev (1638/42), and Dositheus, patriarch of Jerusalem (1672). Especially in the latter, Roman Catholic influence is clearly in evidence, as the patriarch defended the doctrine of transubstantiation, the teaching concerning the satisfaction of divine justice, and to some degree the use of indulgences. Moreover, he forbade the reading of the Scriptures by non-professionals<sup>38</sup>. On the issue of the Old Testament canon Dositheus adopted a most extreme view in favour of the broader canon. He maintained that all books had been recognised by the tradition of the Church as authoritative components of the Scriptures. Consequently, the rejection of some was bound to have an adverse effect on the others. He therefore concluded that all the Old Testament books were to be recognised as canonical and as Holy Scripture.

Although the above-mentioned view ultimately prevailed in Orthodox circles, contrary opinions did not cease to be heard. An example is the tendency –albeit of limited scope– to underestimate the authority of the books not included in the Jewish canon. This trend appeared in Russian theology of the eighteenth century, apparently

<sup>35</sup> N. Matsoukas, *Ecumenical Movement...*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>36</sup> About the confessions of that era see: John Karmiris, *The Dogmatic and Symbolical Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church*, Vol. II, Athens 1953 (in Greek).

<sup>37</sup> *Synods of Constantinople 1638, 1642, 1672, 1691, Iassi 1642 and Jerusalem 1672.*

<sup>38</sup> N. Matsoukas, *Ecumenical Movement...*, pp. 208-209.

as an influence from Protestantism. Be that as it may, the views which were formulated in that period, even the synodical resolutions, were fuelled by the confrontation of Catholicism with Protestantism. They therefore cannot claim to be binding solutions of the problem for the Orthodox Church.

### **The Pan-Orthodox Conference of 1961 and Beyond**

The issue of the canon of Scripture for the Orthodox Church was raised most recently as a result of her involvement in the modern Ecumenical Movement. The Pan-Orthodox Conference, held in Rhodes in 1961 –in order to pave the way for the so-called “Great Synod” of Orthodoxy– included the issue of canon in its agenda for the forthcoming synod. However, the relevant discussion that ensued did not yield concrete results, because of a flawed methodology for reaching a solution. Consequently, the issue was in the end erased from the agenda of the Great Synod. Erroneously the proposed solution focused exclusively on the tradition of the first Christian millennium, without taking into consideration the fact that, in more recent times, the problem was based on altogether different presuppositions, and mainly due to failing to take into account the situation which came into being during the last two centuries, which was irreversible.

As is apparent from the above historical overview of the second Christian millennium, the new presuppositions on which the issue of canon was being raised anew had been set by the confrontation of Protestantism with Catholicism, which changed radically the understanding of the first millennium about the relationship between Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition. In particular, the Council of Trent, reacting to the challenge of the Reformation, formulated a doctrine about two sources of Christian faith, namely, Scripture and Tradition. This clear juxtaposition of Bible and Tradition now occurred for the first time in history and was to influence theology as a whole, including Orthodox theology, not to mention hermeneutics, which was soon to develop into an independent science. Subsequently, Protestant orthodoxy of the seventeenth century would absolutize Holy Scripture to such a degree, that it became an unshakeable and objective criterion for Christian truth.

Within this new context Holy Scripture was no longer understood as a part of a broader tradition, within which a canon of its books would have been essentially meaningless, since the works which were excluded from the so-called canon had never ceased being part of the same reliable and sacred tradition within which the books of Holy Scripture originated. On the contrary, when the ancient writers of the Church called upon the testimony of tradition, they were not referring to some objectively reliable source, but to the living witness of the people of God, with which they felt themselves to be on a continuum. The formula “in accordance with the Scriptures” was understood to be referring to a collection of data, received and transmitted. Nevertheless, this collection could have no authority apart from the realm of their reception and transmission, that is, the Church<sup>39</sup>. The words of apostle Paul to the Corinthians are very telling in this regard: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Matsoukas, *Holly Scripture and Tradition According to the Hermeneutical Principles of the Ancient Church*, *Bulletin of Biblical Studies*, Vol. 4 (N .S.)/Jul. - Dec. 1985 (Vassilis Stogiannos in Memoriam), p. 44, (in Greek).

Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3)<sup>40</sup>. But if Scripture is made distinct from the tradition of the Church –even if “tradition” be considered co-authoritative with Scripture (as in Catholicism and Orthodoxy)– it nevertheless becomes an autonomous and objective source of faith. And at that point “Roman Catholic” and “Orthodox” do not differ from “Protestant”. Scripture as a source, however, has meaning only when it is specific and, consequently, the issue of canon becomes today an essential one. Of course, the Orthodox Church, could at least claim that she perpetuates the ancient tradition, but in that case she would have to review the tradition of the past four centuries, whatever this might entail for modern theological production, programmes of study in theological schools, relations of Orthodoxy with other Churches etc.

### **Old Testament Text in Early Christianity**

This extensive survey of the matter of the canon of the Old Testament was indispensable not only for an understanding of Scripture's position in contemporary Orthodoxy, but also because, frequently, there is a confusion in Orthodox bibliography between the Septuagint text and the books which are contained in the specific collection under the title of “Septuagint Translation”. Specifically, the fact that the Eastern Church since New Testament times has used as “Old Testament” a text basically that of the Septuagint has led to the conclusion that she has also accepted as her canon the books contained in this corpus. This conclusion in turn has led, in relation to the new understanding of Scripture as source of faith, to the absolutizing of the Septuagint as the sole authority for the text of the Orthodox Old Testament.

The above conclusion, however, is proven to be inaccurate for three main reasons. 1. As has been stressed above, the issue of canon was never faced by the Eastern Church, as an internal problem, and therefore could not have obliged her to be tied to a specific textual tradition. 2. Even the church writers who raised the issue of the canon of the Old Testament and opted for the narrow Jewish canon, also made use of the Septuagint as text without being bound thereby to accept all the books of this corpus. 3. The canon of 49 books said to be valid for the Orthodox Church, contained fewer books than the Septuagint. Indeed one book of this corpus, Daniel, does not come from the Septuagint, but from the translation of Theodotion. This last observation alone would have been sufficient to prove that the Church never tied herself slavishly to a specific textual tradition, but freely, and with a critical spirit, chose the text which could best serve her needs.

Therefore, the reasons that led the Church to the adoption of the Septuagint text were not theological but practical. As practical reasons, one might mention, on the one hand, the ignorance of Hebrew and, on the other, the suspicion towards the Jews of possible falsification of the Hebrew text. Furthermore, at the time in question, Greek was, for the East, the lingua franca, and the interest of most Christian writers was not scientific but pastoral. Therefore in their writings they could refer to and comment upon a text that was understood by all.

Nonetheless, the writers of the Church were fully conscious of the fact that, by quoting the Septuagint text, they were offering a translated text with all the shortcomings that this might involve-something they never tried to disguise.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 11:2, 23. 2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6.

Indicative for our present argument are the views of Gregory of Nyssa, who, in order to counter the alleged intelligibility of the Old Testament, stressed that difficulties in understanding the Old Testament text were due to deficient renderings of Hebrew syntax into Greek, and he pointed out that the problem would have been solved, if those who leveled the charges had had sufficient knowledge of Hebrew<sup>41</sup>. John Chrysostom was on the same wavelength as Gregory, maintaining that the reason for difficulty in understanding the Old Testament lay in problems of semantic transfer, from the source text into another language<sup>42</sup>. Much later as well, during the 9th century Patriarch Photius returned to the subject in question and enumerated ten shortcomings of the translation vis-a-vis the original text<sup>43</sup>.

The above examples demonstrate that the Church not only did not reject the original Hebrew Old Testament text, but that the Church writers in fact frequently referred to it when trying to find solutions to hermeneutic problems or to elucidate ambiguities in the Septuagint. The extant tables for transcribing the Hebrew alphabet into Greek, dated from the fourth to the tenth century, lead to the same conclusion. It is noteworthy that in these tables the recording of the alphabet is done by the teaching method of the time, namely, memorization—a fact which testifies to the interest by church officials in the teaching and learning of Hebrew. The study of Professor Elias Oikonomos on this topic, *The Hebrew Language and the Greek Fathers*<sup>44</sup>, from which these examples have been taken, is especially illuminating.

To the illustrations noted by Oikonomos might be added, as an example, that of Procopius of Gaza (A.D. 465-527)<sup>45</sup>, since it is typical. Procopius when translating Isa 9:6 (“and his name will be called ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’”), quotes the various translations of the passage from the ancient translators Symmachus, Aquila and Theodotion. It is interesting that Procopius not only cited the various translations of the passage but also attempted to interpret them. Thus, he attributed the omission of the name of God by the three latter translators to psychological reasons: “they were awed to place the name of God to a born child”. He went even farther and, in order to defend the Septuagint, went back to the original Hebrew text. After having presented several passages where the Hebrew word **la** is rendered by “God” he reached the conclusion that the Septuagint translators were correct in translating **rwbg la** as “Mighty God”<sup>46</sup>. The same practice was followed by Procopius in all his work.

The above items, besides the demonstrative character of their presentation, suffice to support the view that the Church during her first millennium, did not tie herself to a specific textual tradition of the Old Testament, nor did she ever reject the original Hebrew text. It was for purely practical reasons that she used the Septuagint text.

The question of Old Testament text was raised in the East, after the seventeenth century, at the same time and under the same circumstances as the issue of the canon was raised. The reverberations of the confrontation between Roman Catholics and

<sup>41</sup> BEPES (=Library of Greek Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers) vol. 66, p. 130 (in Greek).

<sup>42</sup> PG 56,178.

<sup>43</sup> PG 101,816ABC.

<sup>44</sup> *Bulletin of Biblical Studies*, Vol. 13 (N.S.)/Jan. - Jun. 1994 (Vassilios Vellas in Memoriam), pp. 29-47, (in Greek).

<sup>45</sup> PG 87, 1817-2718.

<sup>46</sup> PG 87, 2005-2008A.

Protestants created for the East a climate of tension among the supporters of both texts, Hebrew and Septuagint. It is obvious that, in a similar climate of confrontation, a preference for the one or the other text form was based on purely subjective criteria. There is no need to refer extensively to the views of Adamandios Korais in favour of the introduction of Hebrew to the schools of the nation, nor to his proposal in 1808 to the British and Foreign Bible Society for a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, since prior to the establishment of the new Greek state, all speculation occurred –despite the intensity of confrontations– on a purely theoretical level. Indeed, at that time the main proponent of the views of Korais was Constantine Oikonomos, who later became a strong opponent of the translation of the Old Testament.

### **State Church and Scripture**

With the establishment of the new Greek state the issue of Scripture was placed on an entirely new footing for Greek Orthodoxy. Therefore, in order to understand the issue, what is needed is a careful analysis of the era and especially of the place of the Orthodox Church within the new Greek state<sup>47</sup>. The establishment of the new Greek state was founded upon the principles of the Enlightenment, which stressed the importance of law as the foundation of an ideal state, without, however, placing a similar emphasis on other principles, such as those of justice, equality, and freedom. In this phase the Church, which, due to her struggles during the war of independence, enjoyed the confidence of the people, was used by the central government as an instrument of instruction for the people. Consequently, the people obeyed the law and the authorities. The Church, which knew from her tradition that all power derives from God, adapted herself easily to this role. Thereby being Orthodox became a feature of Greek identity. Whoever was not Orthodox could not be a true Greek.

This situation was intensified by the arrival in Greece of its first king, Otto von Wittelsbach of Bavaria. Otto was crowned as “king of Greece by the grace of God”. The Church now became “The Church of Greece”, separated from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and her Holy Synod became “the highest ecclesiastical authority of the state”, under obligation to legitimate the authority of the king. Theocratic interpretation of history became the basis for understanding social reality. This situation hardly changed under the next king, George I, when the form of the regime changed to become a democracy governed by a king. George derived his authority from the nation. However, the nation was now described in terms borrowed from the Old Testament as “the chosen people of God” and “holy nation”. Greeks were the people of God, who spoke in their language and had invested them with a special mission, to preserve Orthodoxy “undefiled” and to spread it to other peoples, so that they might also be saved. George I was no longer the “king of Greece” but the “king of the Greeks”, who were now to be understood as the holy nation of God. In this way the Church was identified with the nation and with national aspirations<sup>48</sup>.

In the support of the Church’s role in Greek society, an important part was played, already from the time of Turkish occupation, by the so-called missionary movement. The first Protestant missionaries came to Greece during 1810. Initially, they were

<sup>47</sup> For the place of the Orthodox Church within the new Greek state see: Ioannis S. Petrou, *Church and Politic in Greece (1750-1909)*, Thessaloniki 1992, pp. 141-190 (in Greek).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. I. Petrou, *Church and Politic...*, pp. 170-182.

favourably received. Indeed, ecumenical patriarchs, such as Cyril VI (1814) and Gregory V (1819), displayed a positive attitude to their work and, especially, toward their efforts to distribute the Scriptures. Unfortunately, these evangelical missionaries had a completely erroneous understanding of the Eastern Churches. They considered the Orthodox Church as a Church long dead, of which nothing remained except her ritual, reminiscent of idolatry more than of Christian worship. Thus, they turned their missionary activity not towards Muslims or “the infidel”, but towards Orthodox Christians. The first Old Testament translation from Hebrew into Modern Greek was published in 1834. The widespread distribution of this translation by Protestants forced the Orthodox Church to be on the defensive, with especially negative consequences for the spread of Scripture in Greece. As a result, the divine inspiration of the Septuagint was now stressed, and one of the tasks of the Holy Synod became the preservation of the New Testament text in the language “which God spoke”. The anxious effort of Constantine Oikonomos to prove, in a voluminous work<sup>49</sup>, the divine inspiration of the Septuagint is a typical example. Despite its failure<sup>50</sup> this effort constituted, by its massive undertaking, a monument to the climate that prevailed. The Church became the self-declared protector of national traditions, including those of ancient Greece; and due to the identification of the nation with the Church, as stated above, every action turned against the Church was now considered anti-national. It is noteworthy that from 1911 onwards every constitution of Greece proscribed the translation of Scripture and proselytism. Protestants reacted to this situation with aggressive proselytizing towards the Orthodox Church, something that was in any case part of their tradition and their missionary understanding. This resulted in such a climate of suspicion that every activity of Protestants, even today, is regarded by the Orthodox as proselytizing.

Perhaps the best proof of the political nature of the confrontation regarding the translation of Scripture may be seen in the incidents that took place in Athens in November of 1901, well known as “Evangelikiaka”. The whole matter began with the desire by Queen Olga, who was of Russian descent, to boost the religious sentiment of the people by encouraging the translation of the New Testament into Modern Greek, a task which was begun in 1898 and completed within a year by her secretary Ioulia Soumaki, under the supervision of her uncle, Professor Pandazidis. Interest in the case is centred on the fact that the metropolitan of Athens, Procopius, although aware of the project since its inception, failed to raise any objection with the queen. When, however, she asked for the approval of the Holy Synod for her translation, things changed radically. Newspapers presented the matter as a devilish plan by the Slavs, aimed at creating strife among the people and religious feuds that would help win over Macedonian Greeks by the Bulgarian Exarchate<sup>51</sup>. After this fury, the Holy Synod in March 1899 denied the request of the queen for approval. When she asked for arbitration by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, she again received a negative answer.

Tempers became frayed and the situation got out of control when later on the newspaper *Acropolis* began to publish excerpts from another translation, done by Alexandros Pallis in hyper-demotic Greek. Once again, the reaction involved no theological argumentation. In a resolution of students there appeared the phrase

<sup>49</sup> *Four Books on the LXX Interpreters of the Old Holy Scripture, Athens 1844-49 (in Greek).*

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Panagiotis Bratsiotis, *Introduction to the Old Testament, Athens 1937, 21975, p. 548ff (in Greek).*

<sup>51</sup> *History of the Greek Nation (Ekdotiki Athinon) Vol. XIV, p. 175 (in Greek).*

“ridicule of the most precious national treasures”; and professors of theology published a memorandum demanding that the publication be stopped. Opposition newspapers, such as *Scrip*, *Kairoi* and *Embros* expressed similar sentiments, and by the beginning of October 1901 they accused the supporters of Demotic of being godless, traitors, tools of the Slavs, and recipients of bribes in “Russian rubbles”. During the demonstrations and the unrest which followed on November 5, 6 and, especially, 8 of the year 1901, the argumentation was again purely political. The chief demand-in addition, of course, to the excommunication of the translators-was the resignation of government of Prime Minister Theotokis, with the common slogans of “Down with the Slav woman” and “Long live the heir”. The result of the unrest was 11 dead (3 students and 8 civilians) and nearly 80 wounded. After the incidents the chief slogan again was “Down with the government of murderers”<sup>52</sup>. It is noteworthy that the target in the entire affair was not the translation itself but the queen. This is evidenced by the fact that, although the translation of Queen Olga had been withdrawn and Pallis' translation had become the reason for the incidents, nevertheless, the ire of the demonstrators was turned exclusively against the queen<sup>53</sup>.

The encyclical of the Holy Synod, however, in which the translations of the Gospel were deplored, is especially interesting. Here too, the absence of theological argumentation is noteworthy. The encyclical begins<sup>54</sup> by declaring that from the time when the Gospel was written until the middle of the 17th century no one had ever thought to translate it. The document then refers to the translation of 1629, regarded as the work of a Dutch Calvinist priest, and to its failure. The Holy Synod boasted that the Greek Church was the only Church which was privileged to be in possession of the original text. It viewed the newer translations as being in a language “terribly vulgar, which shamefully and scandalously defaces the modest beauty of the divinely inspired original text”. The sole theological reason cited against translating the Gospel was the danger of perverting the original meaning, which had been developed and formulated into dogmas by the ecumenical synods. For the understanding of the Gospel the study of the interpretations of the Fathers was recommended. Nevertheless, the practical but very real problem of how to gain access to the works of the Fathers and how to understand them does not appear to have preoccupied the Holy Synod, nor was it demonstrated just how a Gospel translation might pervert the doctrines formulated by ecumenical synods. The encyclical continued by referring to the practice of the Church, up to that time, of not translating Scripture, even during the period of Turkish domination, when linguistic barriers created particular difficulties for the understanding of the original. The main argument of the Synod was that now “that our national language is advanced, and slowly but surely and happily is on the course of recapturing its ancient acme and magnificence...” there was no need for a translation. Thus, the encyclical concluded with disapproval and condemnation of every translation. This encyclical, although making no reference to the translation of the Old Testament, has nonetheless great importance for the issue examined here, since it verifies most strikingly the notion of Church's hierarchy of that time as being defenders of national tradition and of the Greek language.

<sup>52</sup> *History of the Greek Nation....*, p.174-177.

<sup>53</sup> *History of the Greek Nation....*, p. 408.

<sup>54</sup> Nr.3171/7.11.1901.

## Conclusion

From the whole examination of the matter one may draw the conclusion that the options and practices of the recent past cannot offer a model for solving the problem of the position of the original Old Testament text in the Orthodox Church. But neither should the practice of the ancient Church be used as a basis for the solution of the problem since, as it has been underscored repeatedly, the understanding concerning Scripture in more recent times differs radically from that of the first Christian millennium. A mere survey of contemporary orthodox writings validates the above thesis. When reference is made to the ecumenical and free spirit of Orthodoxy, the translation work of Cyril and Methodius is praised at the same time as the West is being condemned because of its doctrine concerning sacred languages. On the other hand, when modern Scripture translations are mentioned, the role of the Church in the preservation of the Greek language, the importance of the text of the Septuagint, and the role of missionaries are emphasized.

It is obvious, therefore, that today there is a need for a completely new and sober handling of the problem with purely scientific criteria, but also with a sense of responsibility. Such an approach cannot disregard the literary, religious and theological value of the Septuagint. Its literary value has to do with the fact that it preserves a text, based on a Hebrew parent text that is more ancient by many centuries than the Masoretic text, the latter beginning to be systematised after V A.D. and completed as late as the 14th century. This fact offers an important comparative advantage to the Septuagint, the testimony of which may be valuable as much for the critical restoration of the Masoretic text as for the clarification of its difficult passages. The religious significance of the Septuagint, however, should not be overlooked either, provided it is taken to be the Holy Bible of the Church rather than a literary production of antiquity. From this point of view it is indisputable that the Septuagint constituted the Bible of the undivided Church, the text on which the apostles and the church fathers depended, in order to present their theology, the text which facilitated beyond any other the spread of Christianity in the Graeco-Roman world, the text which assumed the role of the original for a multitude of other ecclesiastical translations and became the source of inspiration for the hymnography and iconography of the Church. But also as a witness of a particular hermeneutic approach, which was dominant at the time of Christianity's emergence, the Septuagint has a special importance, from a theological point of view, for the understanding of the New Testament.

All the above combine in making the Septuagint text precious for the theological research and the religious consciousness of the Orthodox Christians, without in any way justifying a theological or literary underestimation of the original Hebrew. Moreover, in addition to the value the Septuagint may have, the possibility of an important divergence of its text from the original due to likely copying errors or translation tendencies, should not be, at any event, overlooked.

Therefore, to the extent that, as has been argued above, nothing today compels the Orthodox Church to favour a text of a particular form, she must recognise as her own heritage both texts, the Hebrew and the Septuagint, encouraging their study and research. From this point of view, the decision of the Greek Bible Society to proceed with the translation of the Masoretic text of the Old Testament into Modern Greek,



without excluding from publication the books not included in the Jewish canon, and at the same time to plan for the first time in history the publication of a translation from the Septuagint text, is absolutely correct and praiseworthy.