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## The Vision of the Old Testament Canon in the Russian Orthodox Church

### *Is there a canon in the East?*

It is well known that the New Testament canon is the same in all the churches (with the exception of the Ethiopian Church) while the Old Testament canon exists in two versions, broader and narrower. It is also common practice to associate the broader version with Catholics and the narrower version with Protestants. What about the Orthodox? The West usually views them in terms of the Catholic – Protestant controversy: they are just like Catholics, but with some differences (married priests, no pope, etc.) which makes them a bit like Protestants too. The same seems to be true with the Old Testament canon. It does seem so, but is it true?

If we open a Bible printed by the Russian Orthodox Church, we will see in the Old Testament section the following books besides those which are accepted by all: 1 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Letter of Jeremiah, Baruch, 1, 2 and 3 Maccabees and 2 Esdras at the end. Then, whenever the Septuagint (LXX) has a longer version of a certain book than the Masoretic text (MT), the Synodal always follows LXX (this is especially important for Esther and Daniel), but otherwise the Synodal version prefers MT to LXX (for instance, in Jeremiah or Proverbs).

Names can be tricky as well. These are the names of the books associated with Ezra as they appear in the different traditions:

<b>English</b>	<b>Latin</b>	<b>Greek</b>	<b>Russian</b>
Ezra	1 Esdras	2 Ἔσδρας (1 – 10)	1 Ездры
Nehemiah	2 Esdras	2 Ἔσδρας (11 – 23)	Неемии
1 Esdras <i>(apocryphal)</i>	3 Esdras <i>(apocryphal)</i>	1 Ἔσδρας	2 Ездры
2 Esdras <i>(apocryphal)</i>	4 Esdras <i>(apocryphal)</i>	<i>(does not exist)</i>	3 Ездры

We immediately see that the Greek and Russian versions of the Bible actually disagree with each other as regards the number, division and names of the books. The Greek and Russian Orthodox also disagree with both Catholics and Protestants, who consider 1 and 2 Esdras apocryphal books. One of them is included in Greek and Russian Bibles, the other is present only in the Russian Orthodox editions (needless to say, Russian Protestants have the same canon as their Western counterparts). In addition, in Russian Bibles 2 Esdras is

printed not after 1 Esdras, where it would seem most appropriate, but after Maccabees, at the very end of the Old Testament, so that it is placed rather “on the margin” of the Bible, set apart from the other books. Moreover, in the Russian Synodal version all the books that were absent from the Jewish/Protestant canon were marked by a special footnote stating that they were translated from Greek or Latin and not from Hebrew. It makes their status somewhat special, too, although they are not separated from the books translated from Hebrew.

One might have expected that the exclusion or inclusion of certain books has been the subject of intense discussion resolved by a certain authority. This was not the case, however. Neither any council nor any patriarch has ever discussed why 1 Esdras should be included but 2 Esdras excluded, or how many Maccabees should be present. (Of the four books of Maccabees that exist, Russians have three, while the Greeks put the fourth one in an appendix.) Here we are going to investigate how this happened, why the Orthodox attitude to the biblical canon does not replicate either the Catholic or the Protestant model, and what difference it makes for Bible translators.

In the West, when we discuss the canon we inevitably take the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation as our starting points. Indeed, it was then that the Reformers took the existing Hebrew text of the Bible as the original Old Testament (an opinion that is now seriously doubted by scholars) while the Council of Trent (1545-46) confirmed the broader list of books coming from the fourth century. In addition, the Vatican I Council (1869-70) canonised a particular version of the Bible, namely, the Vulgate. Although Protestant denominations have not formalised it, we see that in practice the prestige attributed by them to the Masoretic Text was quite close to the position of an officially canonised version of the Bible. Nothing of this kind has ever happened within the Orthodox church which has always acknowledged the co-existence of several authoritative versions of The Scripture, as will be demonstrated below.

In a word, both variants of the canon became closely associated historically with the debate between the two opposing groups within the Christian West. Such a debate never took place in the East, so there was no reason to form a standard text, both concerning the fixed number of books and a particular version. Even the word ‘apocrypha’ is used differently in the Orthodox world. Normally it is applied to books that were never considered a part of the Bible, like the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. The books that Protestants call apocryphal in Russia would normally be referred to as non-canonical or, less often, deuterocanonical. The latter term seems erroneous since it is based on the decisions of the Council of Trent which had no authority over the Orthodox world. Besides, the very term ‘second canon’ looks a bit awkward. Canons, i.e. rules accepted by the community of believers, can be changed, of course, but it would be more logical to assume that there is only one canon for each community at any given moment in time.

In a typical Orthodox Bible one will also find among other basic reference materials an anonymous article entitled “About canonical and non-

canonical books.”<sup>1</sup> It clearly identifies the canon with the Hebrew Bible and still insists that “the Russian Orthodox Bible, as well as the Slavonic Bible, contains all 39 canonical and 11 non-canonical books of the Old Testament”. Obviously, here the canon is not the same as the content of the Bible, however strange it may seem to a Westerner. The main criterion is the succession of tradition: modern editions contain the same amount of text as the ancient ones, not only those that form the canon.

In that case, what is the canon? If we take a look at its history we will see that the early fathers never intended to give lectures on canonical criticism. Whenever they offered a list of biblical books they were responding to a particular challenge rather than proposing a universal model. In those days a believer who opened a holy book could easily find within its cover anything from an ecclesiastically accepted text to a heretical document, so the church leaders occasionally had to pronounce a judgement on which books were part of Scripture.

The 39<sup>th</sup> Festal Letter of St. Athanasius is usually quoted as the very first document that contains the biblical canon. It does have this concept indeed, but alongside with ‘canonised’ (κανονιζόμενα) books Athanasius mentions those that “were not canonised but were recommended by the fathers for reading” (οὐ κανονιζόμενα μὲν, τετυπώμενα δὲ παρὰ τῶν πατέρων ἀναγινώσκεισθαι). In this transitional category which is quite close to the concept of non-canonical books within the Bible he includes Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, Tobit, Judith and Esther (sic), together with the Didache (the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) and Hermas. However, he does not list other books that should not be read in the church. Of course, Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah may have been considered as integral parts of the book of Jeremiah but we cannot know for sure.

The supreme theological authority in the Orthodox world belongs to the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. It is amazing that none of them ever made a decision concerning the biblical canon. The Council in Trullo (691 – 692), which in fact was rather a committee that collected and systematised the acts of the previous councils, is usually referred to in this respect. Among its own documents, however, we do not find any list of biblical books. The second act<sup>2</sup> just affirms a number of previous documents *in toto*, without discussing any details. Among those documents we find three that concern the biblical canon. These are the Apostolic Constitutions and the acts of the local councils from Laodicea and Carthage. All of these documents appeared in the second half of the fourth century. Let us now look at them in more detail.

The final form of the so-called Apostolic Constitutions dates back to the end of the fourth century. Its 85<sup>th</sup> chapter, the very last, says: “Let the follow-

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *Библия. Книги Священного Писания Ветхого и Нового Завета*. (Казань: Казанская епархия, 1991), 1000.

<sup>2</sup> J.D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio* (vol. XI; Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlangsanstalt, 1961; repr. Florentiae: Expensis Antonii Zatta Veneti, 1763), 939-42.

ing books be esteemed venerable and holy by you, both clergy and laity (ἔστω δε ὑμῖν πᾶσι κληρικοῖς καὶ λαικοῖς βιβλία σεβάσματα καὶ ἄγια). Of the Old Covenant: the five books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; one of Joshua the son of Nun, one of Judges, one of Ruth, four of the Kingdoms,<sup>3</sup> two of Chronicles, two of Ezra, one of Esther, one of Judith, three of Maccabees, one of Job, one hundred and fifty psalms; three books of Solomon – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs; sixteen prophets. And besides these, take care that your young persons learn (προοιοτορευέσθω μαθάνειν ὑμῶν τοὺς νέους) the Wisdom of the very learned Sirach.”<sup>4</sup> Again, we see a transitional category on the border of the canon (in the NT, the chapter also mentions Constitutions of Clement in eight books which are “dedicated only to the bishops because of the mysteries contained within them”).

The Laodicean Council took place around the year 360, its acts are extant in several copies which are not identical. Some contain 60 chapters, some have only 59. The 60<sup>th</sup> chapter (the authenticity of which is therefore doubtful) deals with the question of the biblical canon. It gives a list of books that “should be read” (ὅσα δεῖ βιβλία ἀναγινώσκεισθαι). It is in general the same as the narrower Protestant canon, although it explicitly mentions that Jeremiah goes with Baruch, Letter and Lamentation.<sup>5</sup> The NT list lacks Revelation.

The Third Carthaginian Council took place in 397. Its 47<sup>th</sup> chapter requires that nothing be read in church under the name of Divine Scripture (*ut praeter scripturas canonicas nihil in ecclesia legatur sub nomine divinarum scripturarum*) apart from a certain number of books which actually coincides with the modern Catholic canon, deuterocanonicals included.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that this obvious difference between canons remained unnoticed in the East may seem striking to a modern expert. B. Metzger suggests, for instance, that the fathers of the Council in Trullo were not attentive enough to see it.<sup>7</sup> Formulating it more accurately, one can say that they did not attribute much importance to this issue so they did not need any separate statement about it. We also see that both the Apostolic Constitutions and the Laodicean Council dealt with the biblical canon as the very last item, after many other matters that we would now consider secondary. One may ask why.

The answer seems to be quite simple. The fathers did not decide what was the Bible and what was not. Rather, they were compiling a sort of “reading

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<sup>3</sup> Greek and Russian tradition refers to Samuel and Kings as 1-4 Kingdoms.

<sup>4</sup> M. Metzger, ed., *Les Constitutions Apostoliques* (vol. III; Sources Chrétiennes 336; Paris: CERF, 1987), 306-9. See a partial translation into English in B. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament. Its Origin, Development and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 313.

<sup>5</sup> J.D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio* (vol. II; Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlangsanstalt, 1961; repr. Florentiae: Expensis Antonii Zatta Veneti, 1759), 573-74. See a partial translation into English in Metzger, *The Canon*, 316.

<sup>6</sup> J. D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio* (vol. III; Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlangsanstalt, 1961; repr. Florentiae: Expensis Antonii Zatta Veneti, 1759), 891. See a partial translation into English in Metzger, *The Canon*, 314-315 (instead of the 47<sup>th</sup>, Metzger erroneously quotes it as the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter).

<sup>7</sup> Metzger, *The Canon*, 216.

list” for practical needs, so they saw no problem if a few slightly different versions of such a list were circulated. The fathers of the Council in Trullo might have been quite happy to see two coexisting lists of the Old Testament books, the narrower (Laodicean) and the broader (Carthaginian). This was another aspect of the variety in the life and worship of many local communities who were united by the same faith. However, they would not have tolerated the inclusion of any Gnostic or Arian writings in such a list. For them the main distinction was not between Scripture and Tradition, but rather between orthodoxy and heresy.

If we do not have a fixed list, perhaps we should try to find some other criteria like patristic quotations or liturgical usage? This does not really help because the early Christians usually felt free to use any texts they found appropriate for their purposes. As a result, even the canonical Epistle of Jude contains a clear reference to the apocryphal Assumption of Moses in verse 9. As for the liturgy, some clearly canonical books (like Leviticus and Ruth) are never read at an Orthodox service while the Wisdom of Solomon is largely present in Russian *Parimiyniks*,<sup>8</sup> i.e. collections of Old Testament passages for liturgical readings. This is actually the only non-canonical book present there.

We have to acknowledge, then, that the boundaries of the Bible were not indisputably fixed in the Christian East, and some transitional category of books (“not part of the canon but part of Scripture”) was fairly often introduced.

The situation in the West was different, perhaps due to the general tendency of the Roman Church to pay more attention to the formal side of affairs than did the Greeks, who, in turn, were always more concerned with theological debates. We see that a fixed list of books first appeared at the Third Carthaginian Council of 397, and later it was confirmed by a number of other official statements from Rome. The narrower canon simply no longer continued to exist, until it was revived by the Reformers. Even the Catholics had to face this challenge and to reaffirm the old canon of the Bible, which was actually done at the Council of Trent.

Now the question of the canon became crucial. With the “Sola Scriptura” principle the border between Scripture and non-Scripture needed delimitation. When the Catholic Church referred to 2 Maccabees 12:39-45 as an argument supporting prayers for the dead, the main question was not whether 2 Maccabees was good or bad but whether it was a part of the Bible.

An Orthodox theologian would not need this argument; the Church prays for the dead because it has always done so, and 2 Maccabees is just another proof of this practice, alongside the liturgical tradition etc. Historically, Orthodox theologians may have agreed with Protestants in their polemics against Catholics and *vice versa*, but that does not really mean that Orthodox theology is just a mixture of both.

The case of Cyrill Lukaris, patriarch of Constantinople in the seventeenth

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<sup>8</sup> иг. Иннокентий Павлов, *Славянская традиция Священного Писания и Острожская Библия*, in *Острожская Библия. Сборник статей* (Moscow, 1990), 25.

century, is an illustration. He actively engaged in theological discussions with the Calvinists, whom he obviously regarded as allies against Roman expansion (he was born in Crete under Venetian rule which may well explain his antipathy towards Catholics). Gradually, he simply accepted many Calvinist doctrines, which he revealed in his profession of faith (published in 1629 in Geneva). This became widely known among the Orthodox clergy. In the end two councils of Constantinople (1638 and 1640) went through the 28 chapters of this document and denounced most of them as heretical. Later this judgement was affirmed by a number of other local councils. As for the biblical canon, they made reference to the narrower Laodicean canon and still insisted that other books should not be excluded from the Bible!

The most explicit manifestation of this position we find in the Catechism by St. Philaret of Moscow, published in 1822. In the introduction, after listing 22 Old Testament books (the traditional number) he literally says: “this list of the Old Testament books does not include the Wisdom of Sirach and some others because they do not exist in the Hebrew language (their Hebrew original did not survive). But we should accept these books, too. St. Athanasius the Great says about them: ‘they are destined by the fathers for those who enter the church’.” So the vision is essentially the same: the Laodicean canon is just the contents of the Hebrew Bible while Christian Scripture includes some other books. He does not even provide a list of these books (it would have immediately led to a disagreement with the Greeks).

From both the Catholic and Protestant point of view it is common to refer to Scripture and tradition as two separate domains; for an Orthodox theologian, biblical books are not separated from the tradition because they are part of this tradition. I think that the image of concentric circles<sup>9</sup> is one of the most adequate symbols to describe it. The Gospel lies at the very centre of Christian doctrine; as we move from the centre to the periphery we see other books of the New Testament, then Old Testament, then some later texts and practices, and so on. The border between Scripture and non-Scripture is not essential in this vision. Instead, one should take care that the more peripheral circles agree with the centre and do not take its place.

The Orthodox tradition, of course, regards Scripture as the product of a special divine revelation. But the Holy Spirit, who revealed mysteries to the biblical authors, has never left the Church; He was and still is active in it. God speaks to us from the pages of the Holy Book; although we cannot compare ourselves with the authors of the Bible, this is still the continuation of the same process. The famous legend about the 72 elders who ended up with 36 identical versions of the Greek Bible now known as the Septuagint (LXX) is historically inaccurate and quite naïve, of course.<sup>10</sup> But it clearly shows that

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the keynote brochure A.B. Карташев, *Ветхозаветная библейская критика* (Paris, 1947). It should be said, however, that the author was severely criticised by some more conservative Orthodox readers for his moderate acceptance of certain prepositions expressed by biblical criticism.

<sup>10</sup> Besides, it is absent from the earliest available account on LXX, i.e. the anonymous *Letter of Aristaeas*.

the task of translating the Bible was as much associated with direct divine revelation as the original composition of it. In other words, this legend insists that both the Hebrew and the Greek versions are equally inspired.

This vision of the canon recognises the diversity of different Christian communities within certain limits, so one may wonder if it has some future in an ecumenical perspective. It is also important to notice that such an attitude pays homage to the variety of the extant versions of the Scripture. It is not enough to say that, for instance, Esther is a biblical book. Which Esther, then? Hebrew or Greek? The Orthodox answer will be that both are fully legitimate, and this has important implications for the practice of Bible translation, which we are now going to look at in more detail. Mainly, it concerns the choice of a base text for new translational projects. Although it may seem strange after all that has been said above, there are very few active translation projects in Russia or the CIS that aim to translate non-canonical books of the Old Testament (personally, I know of Chuvash and Udmurt). Perhaps the reason is that none of these projects posit themselves as exclusively Orthodox.

### *The Russian Synodal version: deliberate eclecticism<sup>11</sup>*

When the Slavonic tribes were Christianised in the ninth century, the Bible of the Byzantine world was basically, although not exclusively, the Greek Bible. Saint Cyril and Methodius, “the Thessalonian brothers,” who initiated the process of Bible translation among the Slavs, also belonged to the Greek-speaking Byzantine world. Confronted by the influence of German clergy, they highly valued their Greco-Slavonic identity, and so did their immediate successors. Naturally, therefore, the corpus of the Slavonic biblical texts which were the result of their translation activity, represented a certain form of the Byzantine text-type, although modern scholars may disagree about its exact origin. For the Old Testament, that meant they were based on the Septuagint (LXX). These texts remained the main, if not the only, Bible in Russia for many centuries.

Nevertheless, other forms of the Old Testament were neither completely unknown nor deliberately rejected in Russia. The first ever complete Slavonic Bible was published in Novgorod in 1499 under the auspices of Archbishop Gennady. Remarkably, it contained some portions translated from the Vulgate or even from MT, as was obviously the case with the book of Esther. The region of Novgorod had seen more fighting against knights under Catholic banners than other Russian regions, and Archbishop Gennady himself is reported to have been one of the most fervent fighters against a heresy known as the “Judaizers.” Yet none of these circumstances prevented him from using the main texts of his opponents as his base texts. I suspect there was the feeling that the task of translating the Scripture was more important than the current interconfessional situation he faced.

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<sup>11</sup> An earlier version of this part of the article was published in *The Bible Translator*: “LXX as Base Text for OT Translation in Russia,” *BT* 56/4 (2005): 245-52.

This episode can also be referred to as the beginning of a long tradition of textual eclecticism which was to flourish in Russia in the centuries to follow.

A new page in the history of Bible translation in our country was opened in the early nineteenth century when the Bible Society movement was active in the Russian empire for a brief period. The Russian language had by now developed a highly elaborate literary form, completely distinct from old Slavonic. The question of translating the Bible into Russian was in the air. In this period of time, most translation activities were carried out by Protestants who naturally tended to use MT as their only base text. For them, MT was the original and LXX just a translation of it, however venerable and old. This point of view has dominated Protestant attitudes but has been revised by modern scholarship, especially in the post-Qumran era.

When the Russian Psalter was published in 1814 by the Russian Bible Society, the editorial preface stated that “not only the Greek version was taken into account, but the very Hebrew original as well ... The translators, without any doubt, had to adhere to the exact Hebrew wording.” The version itself was rather eclectic, mixing MT and LXX variant readings together.

This Psalter had a very short history: the Russian Bible Society was dismissed soon and its editions were burned. The idea, however, never died. Some enthusiasts continued their work on this project. As far as the Old Testament is concerned, Archimandrite Makary Glukharev, “the apostle of Altay,” has to be mentioned, as well as Protopriest Gerasim Pavsky. Both of them deliberately chose MT as their source text although Makary also suggested that another Russian translation should be prepared from LXX. It has to be said that this dream still has not come true.

Their personal activities, however, were not welcomed by the Church officials. It took decades before their drafts were revised and the complete Russian Bible, known today as Synodal, was published in 1872. During this process of revision, their drafts were checked against LXX and the Slavonic version. Not only were the parts missing from MT incorporated into the translation, but many exegetical decisions were made to follow LXX as well. To illustrate the eclectic nature of the Synodal text, it will be enough to give just two examples from the book of Genesis.

In 2:2, MT says: “And on the *seventh* day God finished the work that he had done” (NRSV). LXX, however, suggests a reading which is in a better agreement with the Sabbatical law: “And on the *sixth* day God finished the work that he had done.” The Synodal version has chosen a rendering which was closer to the Hebrew in form but definitely followed the meaning of the Greek: “*by the seventh day*,” implying that this day was actually free of any work. The same was done later in the NIV.

The second example concerns the well-known fact that chronology in the book of Genesis looks rather different in the Hebrew and Greek versions. The Synodal editors decided to translate the Hebrew numbers in plain words while giving Greek numbers in brackets with figures. So 5:6-7 runs as follows: “When Seth had lived one hundred and five [205] years, he became the father

of Enosh. Seth lived after the birth of Enosh eight hundred and seven [707] years, and had other sons and daughters.” One can only wonder how an ordinary reader looks at this schizophrenic arithmetic. Nevertheless, the main base text was still MT.

Larger insertions from LXX were marked with brackets. Later, when the Synodal Bible was reprinted by Protestants, they excluded all the bracketed passages, but this definitely did not result in a “LXX-free” Russian version. To eliminate all the exegetical choices influenced by LXX one would have to re-write the whole translation verse by verse, carefully comparing it to the Hebrew text. Such a project has never been launched, nor is it very likely to be launched in the foreseeable future. In any case, there seems to be no need for it, since Russian-speaking Protestants are quite happy with the Synodal version as it stands.

Why do we find such eclecticism in the Synodal Bible? One rather theoretical explanation was provided by Metropolitan Filaret Drozdov in his report to the Holy Synod in 1848,<sup>12</sup> long before the actual editing started. He suggested that all the three version known in Russia – MT, LXX and Slavonic – should be taken into consideration. In his opinion, the main base text should be MT while LXX and, to a lesser degree, Slavonic should provide help for exegetically or textually unclear passages and also serve as guides where a dogmatic interpretation was to be considered (as in Isa 7:14). In fact, this very program was fully implemented by the editors of the Synodal Bible, largely due to the fact that Filaret was one of the most influential bishops of his age and also the main promoter of the project.

His position, however, did not remain undisputed. In the same period other views were also presented in the Russian Church. The development of the discussion was well summarised in a book by Prof. Illarion Chistovich.<sup>13</sup> Some, of course, insisted that no modern translation was needed at all, which seems to be the usual case with almost every new translation. People who admitted the necessity, or at least the permissibility of a vernacular version of the Scripture, were usually divided into two groups: those who favoured MT and those who preferred LXX. Most of the arguments from both sides have not yet completely lost their validity, so it may be worth listing them here in brief.

The main arguments in favour of MT were as follows:

*Hebrew is the original language of the Old Testament.* This is undoubtedly true, but now there is much less certainty about the uniqueness of MT than there was a century and a half ago. It appears now that MT was just one of the text-types which coexisted for some period of time, and that LXX was derived from another type. None of these types can be com-

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<sup>12</sup> Published in *Журнал Московской Патриархии*, 1992, № 11-12.

<sup>13</sup> И.А. Чистович. *История перевода Библии на русский язык* (St.-Petersburg 1899; repr. Moscow: РБО, 1997).

pletely identified with the original, although it could well be argued that MT did represent the mainstream. At least the statistical distribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls hints that this was the case in New Testament times.

*LXX cannot be fully understood without reconstructing its Hebrew original.* This is true as well; a translation done from MT makes things easier for the translator.

*The church fathers occasionally used MT as well.* As was shown by Prof. Miltiadis Konstantinou,<sup>14</sup> the Fathers preferred to use the language they knew well, i.e. Greek, since the knowledge of Hebrew was extremely rare even among the most educated Christian scholars in the Middle Ages. But they never completely rejected MT as corrupt or alien to Christendom. Gennady's Bible, as stated above, presents another example of this.

*The reader should not be allowed to make the wrong assumption that the translators have concealed the "true" Hebrew text of the Bible.* As soon as a translation from MT was completed this political argument became invalid for the Russian audience, but it may be worth taking it into consideration in some other contexts where the first translation of OT is discussed. Personally, I do not find it as strong as the other arguments.

In addition, one can say that now MT is a very handy text for translators: it is well studied, and is published in numerous types of editions with only minor differences between them, so that it seems logical to translate the text just "as it is". With LXX, the situation is rather different in almost every respect.

The main pro-LXX arguments were as follows:

*LXX is the ecclesiastical text.* This is true, but we should also remember that, unlike the Vulgate in the West, LXX was never the *only* ecclesiastical text in the Christian East. The fact that LXX traditionally has been the *predominant* version of Scripture reflects first of all the exceptional role of the Greek language as the original language of the New Testament and most of the patristic writings and liturgical texts. The Byzantine theologians, however, were very far from making Greek the only sacred language, as can easily be seen from the example of Saints Cyril and Methodius. On the other hand, it is natural that the Orthodox Church should prefer a translation of the text which it has been using since its birth.

*MT is alien to the Christian tradition.* This development of the preceding argument is also true to some extent, since MT was fixed and preserved within the Jewish community of faith, that clearly identified itself as opposed to Christianity. Nevertheless, as stated above, it did not prevent

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<sup>14</sup> M. Konstantinou, "Old Testament Canon and Text in the Greek-speaking Orthodox Church," in: *Text, Theology & Translation: Essays in honour of Jan de Waard* (ed. S. Crisp and M. Jinbachtian; United Bible Societies, 2004), 89-107, esp. 101-2.

Christians from using this text, usually as a supplemental source, whenever *hebraica veritas* (“Hebrew truth,” as it was called by Jerome) was required.

*Jews are reported to have intentionally corrupted MT in order to eliminate all references to Christ.* To support this opinion, such passages as Isa 7:14 are usually referred to. This assumption, however, has proven to be more mythological than historical, as are many other assumptions about Jewish-Christian relations. There is no direct proof of such a corruption, and even the Dead Sea Scrolls, written long before such a corruption could have taken place, do not support this claim. What is true is the fact that neither LXX nor MT in their present shape can be considered confessionally neutral, and confessional texts sometimes support certain beliefs of their congregations more strongly than do other texts. It is no wonder that Christian and Jewish scribes tended to choose from all the existing variant readings those ones which were in complete agreement with their theology. Neither is it strange that an ordinary believer should opt for such readings in a modern translation as well.

Thus, the decision of Metropolitan Filaret and his co-workers was a compromise open to criticism from both sides. The Synodal version was born amidst hot debates about its principles. But it also at about the same time as some other translations of the Old Testament books, like the Pentateuch published in London in 1860 and the complete Hebrew-Russian Bible printed in Berlin in 1872. All these translations were done exclusively from MT. They received no approval from the Orthodox Church authorities in Russia (in fact, they were designed for audiences other than Orthodox ones) and before long they fell out of use.

From the other side, only two LXX-based editions appeared before the revolution of 1917. First of all, Bishop Porfiry Uspensky translated the books of Genesis, Proverbs, Psalms, as well as 1 and 2 Maccabees.<sup>15</sup> Later, Prof. Yungorov translated some books afresh from which the Psalter was published as a separate book in 1915 in Kazan.<sup>16</sup> He could not have chosen a more suitable book as the Psalms are much more important for both liturgy and individual worship than any other Old Testament book; and at the same time, their Masoretic version does not always suit the traditional liturgical context of the Orthodox Church, which is based exclusively on LXX. These versions, however, were more academic than liturgical in nature. Perhaps the best way to use them would be to imagine a worshiper who hears the Slavonic text at a service or recites it in his private prayer and then refers to this book to learn

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<sup>15</sup> Published in *Труды Киевской Духовной Академии*, 1869, №№ 2, 4, 5, 6; 1873, №№ 3, 9. These versions were never reprinted and became a rarity.

<sup>16</sup> П. Юнгеров. *Псалтирь в русском переводе с греческого текста LXX, с введением и примечаниями* (Kazan 1915; repr. Sergiyev Posad 1997). Other books, published in *Православный Собеседник*, were Proverbs (1908), Isaiah (1909), Jeremiah with Lamentations (1910), Ezekiel (1911) Daniel (1912), Minor Prophets (1913), Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs (1916).

the exact meaning of a difficult passage. Uspensky's version is almost completely forgotten now, but reprinted copies of Yungеров's text still circulate among Orthodox believers.

The appearance of the Synodal version also stimulated and influenced the process of translating the Bible into minority languages of the Russian empire. From our distance in time it is difficult to judge the exact textual principles that lie at the basis of all these versions, especially because Old Testament portions appeared only in a very few projects, often without any explanatory preface at all. For instance, a quick glance at the Tatar Psalter, published in 1914 in Kazan by the Orthodox missionary society<sup>17</sup> shows that it was done from LXX rather than MT, perhaps through the mediation of the Slavonic text.

Two years after the publication of Yungеров's Psalter, Russia experienced the 1917 revolution and its aftermath, events that made the dispute about the preferences of MT vs. LXX absolutely irrelevant for decades to come. Under other circumstances one might have expected a new Russian translation to be done directly from LXX, as was desired by many including Prof. Chistovich, who wrote: "One cannot avoid the desire to see separate translations of the Bible from the Hebrew and from the Greek."<sup>18</sup>

The reality was different. Under the pressure of the atheist regime believers from all denominations could only dream of even getting a Bible of any kind. The only one available almost always happened to be the Synodal version. This translation itself became a symbol of survival for the Christians of all the denominations, and its every feature was now precious in their eyes, including the textual eclecticism. The Bible was Synodal, and no other. This is especially true for Protestants, while the Orthodox at least retained the Slavonic version too.

### *The present situation*

Long before the decline of the communist regime became obvious, the translation of the Bible into the languages of USSR was recommenced, both by academicians inside the country who even managed to publish separate Old Testament books as pieces of "ancient Hebrew literature," and some enthusiasts abroad. Among them were the founders of the Institute for Bible Translation where I have the privilege to work. Almost always the Old Testament books are translated from MT although LXX may have been used as the source of variant readings for difficult places. This was definitely the reflection of the standard practice used by Bible agencies all over the world. The new Russian translation of the Old Testament – a project of the Bible Society in Russia on which I served as a translator a number of years ago – also takes MT as the source text and refers to LXX among other sources only when MT is evidently corrupt.

Since most translators into minority languages know little or no Hebrew they usually use a Russian version (mostly the Synodal) as their base text.

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<sup>17</sup> *Псалтирь на татарском языке* (Kazan 1914; repr. Stockholm: IBT, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> Чистович, *История перевода*, 340.

Normally, this is a Protestant edition where all the insertions from LXX are omitted, but I know of two projects, namely Chuvash and Udmurt, where the decision was taken to use the broader version, non-canonical books included. The translations are being done from the Russian Synodal version because this is exactly the Bible that the local Christian communities want to have in their own language. Both projects are partnership projects between the Institute for Bible Translation and the Bible Societies; in both cases the target audience has a strongly Orthodox background. This was probably the reason why it was decided to make those two translations as close to LXX as possible. One of the Chuvash translators, Eva Lisina, told me once that she would like to translate the Psalms from Yungеров's version as the nearest equivalent to LXX. The only obstacle was the total absence of most other books translated from LXX into Russian, so just for the sake of uniformity she had to stick to the Synodal.

The Synodal Bible became a mediator between ancient texts and modern translations, thus establishing a tradition of its own and, for better or worse, passing on its eclectic nature to translations for other languages and cultures.

Strangely enough, there are very few modern LXX-based translations in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (which include most of the former Soviet republics), even after the collapse of the Soviet system, when local Orthodox churches found themselves in a respected and independent position. For instance, both of the new Georgian translations follow MT, even to the extent of using the shorter version of Esther. The only full Old Testament translated from LXX which I know of is the Ukrainian translation recently initiated by Catholics of Byzantine rite and completed by the Ukrainian Bible Society, which, as far as I know, is soon to be published.

In Russia we have another remarkable example – the third LXX-based translation of the book of Psalms recently prepared by Hieromonk Amvrosy Timrot.<sup>19</sup> In a private exchange, he told me that this translation appeared as a result of his mixed experience of prayer and scholarly studies. It is designed for worship and so is even accompanied by the standard prayers which normally go with the reading of the Psalter. Its language is in a high style, with a certain number of archaic Slavonic words, but the translator tended to avoid any expressions which may seem obscure or too pretentious. Because the text is intended to be read aloud, the translator took care over the euphony of the wording. As for the content, he opted for compatibility with the traditional patristic exegesis. This also meant preserving the ambiguity of expressions where both the Synodal team and Yungеров went for just one possible interpretation. In my opinion this is a good model to follow whenever an ecclesiastical translation from LXX is to be done. Fr. Amvrosy hopes to continue this work and to translate some other parts of the Old Testament which are read at Orthodox Church services.

Now would seem to be the right moment to ask the question: are such translations needed in Russia nowadays? Not less, I think, than in the days of

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<sup>19</sup> Амвросий Тимрот, trans., *Псалтирь. Новый перевод с греческого текста 70 толковников* (Москва 1999).

Glukharev and Chistovich. For the Orthodox churches, LXX remains the traditional ecclesiastical text. Besides, general readers who do not belong to a particular denomination are becoming more acquainted with different Bible translations. When I speak in public about the Bible, one of the most frequent types of questions I am asked by the audience is about the astonishing variations between different versions. Most of these can be explained as variant readings between different text-types. So it would be rather useful to have two different translations prepared from the two most influential versions of the Old Testament, i.e. MT and LXX.

I am thinking firstly about Russian translations. A Bible Society project under the direction of M. Seleznev currently has a qualified team of scholars translating a complete Russian Old Testament from MT. It is hoped that this Old Testament will be published within a decade, bringing to fulfilment one part of the dream shared with Glukharev and Chistovich by many other scholars and simple readers.

Today we live in a culture which accepts the Bible in a variety of versions. An ordinary Orthodox worshiper goes to church where he or she listens to the words of the prophets and psalmists in Slavonic, i.e., in a LXX-dependent version. Then they come home and open their Synodal Bibles where they find sometimes a version that is totally different from what they have just heard, simply because this text is based on MT, and, with the exception of the Psalter, nothing can be done about it. It would be rather strange to keep this imbalance for ages.

As we see from Fr. Amvrosy's example, there are not only people who would benefit from such a translation but also those who could actually prepare it. Unfortunately those who are interested in such a translation are mostly individuals, not organisations. For the Institute for Bible Translation, translating the Bible into Russian is out of the question because of our general policy: we work with non-Slavonic languages. The Bible Society in Russia seems to be too busy with other projects, and so is the Patriarchal and Synodal Bible Commission.

Nevertheless, I think it is essential that a new Russian translation of LXX appear in the immediate future – or at least a partial one which includes the most important books. If the Bible agencies do not get involved, it is likely that this work will be done by somebody else without their assistance, with a great risk of inaccuracy or incompatibility with our general principles. This is already happening in some regions of Russia: I have seen “home-made” translations of biblical books into Tuvian and Avar languages done directly from the Synodal version by local believers without much expertise.

As far as the translations into minority languages are concerned, I think we should seriously consider the recognition of LXX as a text-type not inferior to MT which can also serve as a base text for translators. In some languages with a stronger Orthodox presence we may even think of parallel versions: for instance, a complete Old Testament translation from MT and separate books (first of all, Psalms) translated from LXX for liturgical usage. This is not in our

current planning but if we try to look ahead I think we should not disregard such an option.

We are told that there are many dwelling places in the house of our Father (John 14:2), and the variety of the extant versions of the Bible is yet another aspect of this wonderful truth.