

SCRIPTURE, CANON, AND CANONICITY

Contemporaneity has forgotten the foundations on which it was based as God's creation and it has placed man at the centre of all its preoccupations, man, who searches for himself only within creation, disregarding or forgetting about the Creator. From this position, we could put forward all sorts of theories and nothing would remove the appearance of a dead-end, of a closed road, which the perspective of such thinking would generate. Which can be the major cause of such a situation or, in the words of a liturgical song, why have we been given over unto corruption and why have we been wedded unto death? The most simple answer is: by forgetting the life-giving word, by no longer noticing the One Who brings us the supreme Revelation, Christ, the One Who gives us the possibility of seeing God. If one does not get to see God, even in His creatures, one does not see anything, that is to say, one sees only the nothingness that, with limited powers, one does daily. Yet I shall not say that we have lost Him for good; He awaits us all, the prodigal sons, he waits for us to recover from the reverberation of the anamnesis which reminds us of the beauty, the harmony, the hesychia and the goodness/richness found in His Father's house. Not all memories have been erased; when ill-fortune duly comes upon us, we remember how good it was to be in Your house, o God Almighty, and then, the angel's wing comforts us with the breath of the Spirit, which helps us come to our senses.

There are moments in the life of each one of us when we have to try to rebuild the framework of our existence starting from the base, from the foundation of the cultural and cultic creation of the Christian people. And now, when we try to speak about the Scripture from the Orthodox perspective and practical point of view, I believe that, more than ever, we are doing such an exercise; we are going back to the act of establishing the foundations of Christianity. However, we are also doing it for apologetic reasons, since, lately, there have been many voices claiming that the act of establishing the Christian scriptural canon was political and imperial rather than ecclesiastical. But facts, from a strictly chronological point of view, do not give testimony of such a thing.



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And this is why. However, before giving a possible answer to this “why?,” I would like to insert an internal clarification of the meaning of the Scripture for the East: Saint Paul claimed that: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and Saint Peter considered that man had to be aware of the fact that “there are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their destruction, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Pt. 3:16) and, nonetheless, the Scripture, as “the manifold wisdom of God” must “now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10). We can also think about the words of Saint Peter of Damaskos: “For there are many mysteries hidden in the divine Scriptures, and we do not know God’s meaning in what is said there. . . . And no one knows the meaning of the passage in question except by revelation” (St. Peter of Damaskos 1976, 165-167), that is by partaking of the Holy Spirit, or we can call to mind the verses adopted by Pavel Florensky: “blessed is he who has preserved the customs of the fathers, their dark tradition, who answers with a tear the singing of the psalm; who, having with his will torn away from the mind’s doubt, reads the Holy Bible with tender devotion” (Florensky 1999, 45). The Eastern Church relates to the Scripture as to a “letter expressing God’s love for man” (St. John Chrysostom, *PG* 53, 28; 54, 582, our translation). Written through the Holy Spirit’s revelational action over a long period, this letter provides man with the possibility of getting to know its Sender.

The present volume is dedicated to canon and canonicity. We propose five studies and two reviews. In the first study, we offer you the possibility of getting acquainted with the history of canon in the Jewish environment and with how it was received, read, interpreted, and assumed by the Christian Church. We will bring to your attention a study which raises the issue of inspiration and canonicity from an Orthodox perspective. Then, we will also enter a fascinating area of the taboo, in which we will present a few episodes from the books of the *Anagignoskomena* and the *Apocrypha*, which caught the attention of the Christian writers from the past. We will also offer the possibility of understanding the historical context which leads to the use of two traditions regarding the reception of the biblical canon in the Romanian space by comparing two editions of the Bible (Samuil Micu – 1795 and the Bible of Șaguna – 1856-1858), which emerged in the multid denominational space of Transylvania. The section dedicated to studies will be closed by the speech given by Fr. Prof. Eugen Pentiu from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox

School of Theology when he received the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* of Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca.

References

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Sf. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*. PG 53, 28; 54, 582.

St. Peter of Damaskos, “Învățăături duhovnicești” [Spiritual Teachings]. In *Philokalia* 5. Bucharest: IBMO, 1976.