

## GREEK PHILOSOPHICAL ELEMENTS IN SOME JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN PRAYERS

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**Abstract.** In book 7 of the Apostolic Constitutions (from late-fourth century Antioch) one finds a remarkable set of six originally Jewish prayers that have undergone Christian editing. In spite of all their biblical terminology and flavour, the composer of these prayers has adopted quite a number of ideas and concepts that have their origin in the Greek philosophical tradition. In the present article several of these ideas are discussed in order to show how biblical faith is here synthesized with Greek philosophy.

**Keywords:** Greek philosophy; prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions*.

An intriguing set of ancient prayer texts is to be found in the 7th book of the *Apostolic Constitutions* (hereinafter: AC), a late-fourth-century church order, most probably compiled in Syrian Antioch in the 80s of that century.<sup>1</sup> In AC 7:33-38 we find six prayers in Greek that are now generally regarded as christianized versions of six originally Jewish prayer texts, namely, the first six of the Seven Benedictions for the Sabbath morning service. The existence of these benedictions is attested already in the earliest rabbinic literature (Mishnah, *Rosh ha-Shana* 4:5; early third century CE)<sup>2</sup> and they consist of the first three and the last three benedictions of the *Shemoneh Esreh* (the Eighteen [Benedictions]), also called the *Tefillah* (= *the Prayer par excellence*), plus a middle benediction for the sanctification of the day. So the first prayer (§33) corresponds to the first benediction of the Eighteen Benedictions, *Avoth*; the second prayer (§34) to the second benediction, *Gevuroth*; the third prayer (§35) to the third benediction, *Qedushat ha-Shem*; the fourth (§36) to the extra middle benediction for the sanctification of the day, *Qedushat ha-Yom*; the fifth (§37) to the seventeenth benediction, *Avodah*; the sixth (§38) to the eighteenth benediction, *Hoda'ah*; the seventh prayer is lacking for unknown reasons. Scholars are unanimous that these now Christian prayers were originally the Jewish Seven Benedictions for the Sabbath and this conviction is based on the fact that not only every single one of these Greek prayers has some verbal correspondence with its Hebrew counterpart, but also that their order corresponds exactly. To give just one

<sup>1</sup> The most recent and best critical edition of the AC is the one by M. METZGER, *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, 3 vols. (Sources Chrétiennes 320, 329, 336), Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985-1987. Vol. 3 contains the Greek text and French translation of book 7 into which the prayer texts under discussion here have been incorporated. The most recent commentary is by P.W. VAN DER HORST & J.H. NEWMAN, *Early Jewish Prayers in Greek* (CEJL 6), Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008, 1-93. A good study of the AC is E.M. Synek, "Dieses Gesetz ist gut, heilig, es zwingt nicht ..." *Zum Gesetzesbegriff der Apostolischen Konstitutionen*, Vienna: Plöchl-Druck, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> See P. FIEBIG, *Rosch ha-schana* (Die Mischna II/8), Giessen: Töpelmann, 1914, 101-102 with notes.