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Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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BQ 923 – No. 28/2026

The New Testament is being reorganized

Thomas Schirmmacher welcomes the fact that the anniversary edition of the UBS Greek New Testament places the general epistles of the New Testament before the Pauline epistles

(Bonn, 06.05.2026) The United Bible Society's edition of the New Testament's original text was first published in 1966. This year, therefore, marks its 60th anniversary, and it brings readers some surprising changes, described in the latest issue of the magazine Themelios as "most significant update to the UBS edition in fifty years".

Peter J. Gurry goes on to write in Themelios: "The largest change is not to the edition itself but to the team that is responsible for it. ... To the best of my knowledge, this represents members from Protestant (Anglican and Lutheran), Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches." Besides numerous changes, such as in the presentation of the text and the critical apparatus, the most striking innovation is probably the reordering of the New Testament writings.

Prof. Dr. theol. Dr. phil. Thomas Schirmmacher says about this: "In most modern editions, the New Testament appears in this order: the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul, the General Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. This is the familiar order found in many Bible editions in the Western world and seems 'normal' today, but historically it is not the only one. From the beginning of the fifth century at the latest, the Western Church essentially followed the canonical order confirmed by Athanasius.

The sixth edition of the UBS, however, follows the order found in many ancient Greek manuscripts, such as the Codex Vaticanus or the Codex Alexandrinus: after the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles follow first the Catholic Epistles, then the Pauline Epistles together with the Epistle to the Hebrews (considered Pauline), and finally the

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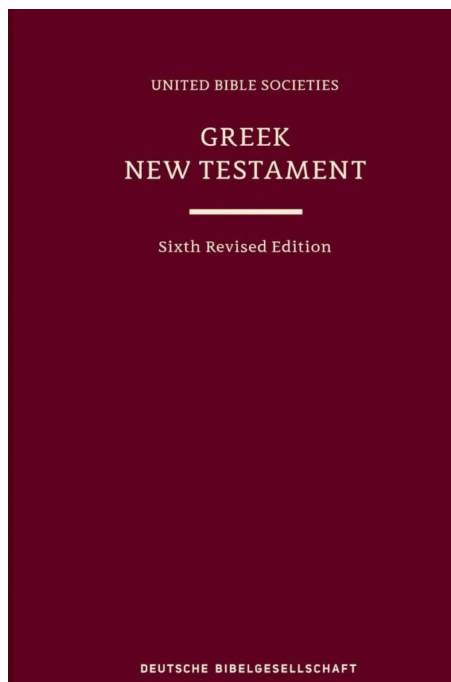
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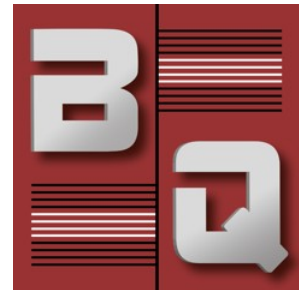
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Book of Revelation. The ancient Greek order is not arbitrary, but reflects the tradition of transmission or the conviction that the ‘general’ or ‘Catholic’ epistles – that is, the seven letters by James, Peter, John and Jude – are closer to the Gospels and the Jesus tradition, so that they are transmitted together in many manuscripts. The Pauline epistles are thus placed after this collection.

The Orthodox and Ancient Oriental Churches have retained the Greek order in their modern translations of the New Testament. These include, in particular, the Greek Orthodox, Syriac and Coptic traditions. Only the modern Russian translations are arranged partly according to the Greek tradition and partly according to the Latin tradition.”

Schirmmacher welcomes this change because “the Greek manuscripts are, after all, the basis of the UBS – so why not adopt their order rather than that of the Latin Church? Moreover, the UBS has long been an ecumenical project, with Greeks, Copts, Syrians and others also contributing to it. And in terms of content, this also makes sense for those who are faithful to the Bible, as it is assumed that the Epistles of James, Jude and Peter are letters from the Church of Jerusalem and that the names of the epistles refer to the actual authors; they therefore belong between the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. Only the Acts of the Apostles is then linked both to the Gospels and the Church of Jerusalem, as well as to Paul, and follows directly after the Gospels.”

Downloads and Links:

- Themelios Volume 51 – Issue 1: “The Greek New Testament, 6th Revised Edition” reviewed by Peter J. Gurry: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/?p=666218>
- German Bible Society – The Sixth Edition of the Greek New Testament (UBS6): <https://die-bibel.de/en/the-sixth-edition-of-the-greek-new-testament-ubs6>

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