

Biblical Scholarship and the Church

A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority

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ASHGATE

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Chapter 1

The Roots of the Problem

Most versions of the Bible have been the work of anonymous translators (usually of many translators) who have given concrete expression in their work to the intellectual assumptions of their age and their culture, the religious and other opinions which they adhere to or respect, the prejudices and concerns which they adopt consciously or unconsciously, their education, their ability to express themselves, the conceptual range of the language they are translating into, and many other factors.¹

This chapter will examine how the question arose in the early church of the nature of the authority of a translation of sacred scripture, and in particular the effects of differing views concerning the issue on the origins of the Vulgate. The question will be explored in relation to the ‘First Bible of the Church’, the Septuagint, which first gave rise to it; secondly, in relation to Origen’s defence of the Septuagint as a divinely inspired translation; and, thirdly in relation to Jerome’s Latin version, which, in the form of the Vulgate, replaced the Greek Septuagint in the western church. The related question of the canonical status of books treated as scripture by the Christian church, but not found in the Jewish Canon, will also be touched on. The issues will be investigated on the basis of extant primary sources: the account in the *Letter of Aristeas* of the origin of the Septuagint translation, the writings of Origen in which he defended its divine inspiration, and the writings of Jerome, especially his correspondence with Augustine of Hippo concerning his revision of the Latin version on the basis of the original languages. The issue of authority in interpretation will also be introduced in relation to Book IV of Origen’s *On First Principles*, the first systematic Christian treatment of the interpretation of scripture, which set out the approach that remained dominant until the sixteenth century.

The First Bible of the Church: The Septuagint

The Greek version of scripture that came to be known as the Septuagint (‘Seventy’) is the earliest surviving translation of a major corpus of sacred writings into another language. It was produced when, following the conquests of Alexander the Great in the previous century, Greek had become the *lingua franca* of the Eastern Mediterranean and knowledge of Hebrew was declining among Egyptian-born Jews.² Later tradition, epitomized by the *Letter of Aristeas*, ascribed its origin to the desire

1 Würthwein (1980), p. 47.

2 On the origins of the Septuagint, see Jellicoe (1968), Harl, Dorival and Munnich (1994), Peters (1992), pp. 1093–1104, Jobes and Silva (2000), Collins (2000), Fernández Marcos (2001), Hengel (2002), Honigman (2003), Dines (2004).

of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (c. 287–245_{BCE}) for a translation of Jewish scripture for the renowned library of Alexandria, and attributed its production to Jewish scholars sent from Jerusalem for the purpose.³

The translation ascribed to ‘the Seventy’ was in fact only that of the Hebrew Torah (the Pentateuch), but within the Christian tradition the term ‘Septuagint’ came to be applied to the wider corpus of the Christian Old Testament.⁴ It included the so-called ‘apocryphal’ or ‘deutero-canonical’ books such as Ecclesiasticus (Ben Sirach), Wisdom, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, and the additions to Daniel, none of which were included in the canon of Jewish scripture. The canonicity of these books remained problematic until the sixteenth century.⁵ By the time the Council of Trent in 1546 pronounced in their favour, however, reformed churches had either excluded them or collected them into a separate ‘Apocrypha’, a practice which is often followed today.

As early Christianity spread beyond the confines of Judea and Galilee and took root in the wider Graeco-Roman world, the Septuagint in effect provided ‘the first the Bible of the church’.⁶ Indeed, for most Christians it would have been the only version of the Old Testament that they knew. From it came a great number of the scriptural citations in the New Testament which are used to explain the significance of Jesus,⁷ including, for example, the term ‘virgin’ (*parthenos*) in Matthew 1:23 which came from the Septuagint’s rendering of the Hebrew ‘young woman’ (*‘almah*) in the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Because of its widespread use in the New Testament, the Septuagint could be claimed to have the authority of the apostles and evangelists. As the canon of the New Testament developed within the church, the Septuagint was no longer alone in conveying scriptural teaching in translation, since the gospel writers, too, conveyed the teaching of Jesus not in its original Aramaic, but in Greek. The earliest complete copies of the Christian Bible, the fourth century uncial manuscripts, notably the Codex Vaticanus, the Codex Alexandrinus, and the Codex Sinaiticus, were entirely in Greek, with the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew providing the text of the Old Testament.⁸

Inevitably, because sacred scripture was determinative for life and faith, the adoption of a particular translation gave rise to the question of its status and authority in relation to that of its original. Did ultimate authority lie in the wording or sense of the original, or could a translation claim equal authority and, if so, what criteria did the translation need to fulfil? The question gained in force when, towards the end of the first century *CE*, synagogue broke with church, and Judaism stipulated the Hebrew

3 See Collins (1992), (2000), pp. 56–7 for the precise date of 281_{BCE}.

4 On the different application of the term ‘Septuagint’, see Peters (1992), pp. 1093–4, Ulrich (1999), pp. 205–6.

5 On the complexities of the issues concerning the Christian and Jewish canons, see Sundberg (1964), Barrera (1998), Chap. 2, and Hengel (2002).

6 See Müller (1996) who takes this as the title for his book.

7 See Moyise (2001).

8 For a list of the books they contain and their order, see Swete (1900), pp. 201–202. It is these uncials that provide the basis for later editions, but there is considerable uncertainty as to how closely they represent the original texts, or those in existence before Origen’s revision.

text alone as its authoritative version. Within the church itself, two views developed. One, later represented by Augustine, held the Septuagint to be divinely inspired and thus to have independent authority.⁹ The other, represented by Jerome and later by Erasmus, emphasized the authority of the original.¹⁰ The earliest document to defend the authority of the Septuagint was the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*.

The Letter of Aristeas

The *Letter of Aristeas* purports to be a letter from Aristeas, a Jew of Alexandria, to his 'brother' Philocrates, giving him an account of events that took place during the time of Ptolemy II (c. 287–245BCE), of which Aristeas was both eyewitness and participant. It includes a diversity of material, including detailed descriptions of the gifts sent by the king to the High Priest Eleazar in Jerusalem, Aristeas' impression of the city and of the awesome sight of the High Priest leading worship in the Temple, a lengthy account of the banquet in Alexandria at which the king tested the wisdom of the Jewish elders sent to by Eleazar in response to Ptolemy's request, and it culminates in the account of their translation of the Jewish Torah into Greek.¹¹

Scholars have struggled to provide an explanation of the purpose of *Aristeas* which does justice both to the centrality of the concern with the translation and to the other material which forms the bulk of the narrative. The connecting thread is the story of the translation of the Jewish Torah into Greek by the 72 Jewish scholars sent for the purpose, and the fact that the story of the translation itself, extracted from the large document, was later frequently retold suggests that it was considered to have an important bearing on the issue of the status of a translation of scripture.¹² Indeed, it has recently been claimed that one of the main purposes of *Aristeas* was in fact to claim authority for the Greek translation it describes.¹³ In any event, the story of the translation throws important light on the factors involved in establishing the authority of a translation of the Bible. Six factors stand out particularly strongly:

9 For a consideration of modern arguments in favour of this see Dubarle (1965) who finds the arguments inconclusive.

10 For the subsequent development of what he has termed the 'inspirational' and 'philological' principles, see Schwartz (1955).

11 Greek text: Swete (1900), *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, Cambridge: University Press, pp. 519–74; parallel Greek-English edition: Moses Hadad (1951), *Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas)*, New York: Harper; critical edition by Pelletier (1962), *Lettre d'Aristée à Philocrate*, Paris. English translations: R.H. Charles (1913), *Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2, pp. 83–122 (trans. H.T. Andrews), Clarendon, Oxford; J.H. Charlesworth (ed.) (1985), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2, pp. 7–34 (trans. R.J.H. Shutt), London: DLT. For a detailed study, see also Honigman (2003).

12 Recent research on the nine fragmentary Septuagint related manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls or in the Judean desert has been argued to exclude the theory of Kahle that there was a variety of earlier translations, and to favour the view that there was a single original. See Ulrich (1992), pp. 74f, Peters (1992), pp. 1096–7.

13 Honigman (2003).

Royal patronage The question of whether or not the Greek translation was actually the product of Ptolemy's efforts is one on which scholars remain divided, but the persistence of the tradition that a Gentile king should be responsible for the translation of Jewish scripture suggests that it may well be historically accurate.¹⁴ In any event, the writer of *Aristeas* accorded the king a vital role, especially in ensuring the quality and careful preservation of the resultant translation (317).

The quality of the original text The translators brought with them manuscripts of the Hebrew books to be translated, which are noted to be 'valuable parchments, on which the law was inscribed in gold in Jewish characters' (176), a description which attests that they were of the highest possible quality.

The sanction of the religious authority The vital role of the High Priest in the translation project needs little emphasis. He selects and sends suitably qualified translators and ensures that they work from acceptable manuscripts.

The religious credentials of the translators Because of the sacred character of what they were translating, there is emphasis throughout *Aristeas* on the religious credentials of the translators. The king himself recognised that they needed not only to be skilled in translation but also familiar with the Jewish Torah themselves, and accordingly he asked for elders of exemplary lives, skilled in the Torah and in the ability to interpret it (39). There was a fundamental recognition that the translation of holy scripture is best undertaken by those who practice the religion concerned.

The scholarly credentials of the translators It goes without saying that those entrusted with the translation needed expertise in both the languages involved, and such was indeed the case. In *Aristeas*' words, 'They were men who had not only acquired proficiency in Jewish literature, but had studied most carefully that of the Greeks as well' (121–22).

It is important to note moreover that in the earliest version of *Aristeas* translation was a scholarly procedure and the collaborative work of a group of experts. The translators divided up the tasks among themselves, and 'they set to work comparing their several results and making them agree' (302). The precise way in which they did this, whether by majority or consensus, is not specified, but there is no suggestion of direct divine guidance or inspiration of the sort introduced into later versions of the story.

The approval of the religious community The translators were selected by the High Priest in the presence of the whole assembly (46). Upon the completion of the translation its credentials were established by the approval of the entire company of

14 Collins (2000) who also argues that the widespread assertion that the translation was made for the religious needs of the Alexandrian Jewish community is without any evidential basis. Nor is it unlikely that a ruler should have taken interests in laws which governed the lives of a good number of his citizens; see Schürer (1986), p. 474, Barrera (1998), p. 303 and the references there.

Jews called together to hear it read. They affirmed it as an accurate translation and attested that work of the translators preserved the sacred character of the original (310–311). The work of the translators was thus subject to the consensus of the religious community, not only as regards to its language, but also for the way that it conveyed the religious content of the Torah.

The criteria set out in the *Letter of Aristeas* as attesting the authority of the translation fall into two categories. First, there are those which are common to all translation, namely: the quality of the manuscripts of the text in its original language and the scholarly credentials of the translators, including their competence in both languages. Second, there are those criteria which are specific to sacred writings: the sanction of the religious leadership, the religious credentials of the translators both in terms of personal holiness and also of their understanding of religious matters, and approval by the religious community. These factors remained pertinent to consideration of the authority of all subsequent translations of sacred scripture, and most of them continue to do so today. Royal patronage, which was linked to the particular political circumstances of Alexandria was less pertinent to subsequent history, though it can be traced in Charlemagne's support for a standardized text of the Latin Bible and in the later situation in England where vernacular translations were placed in churches by order of the king.

As Jerome was later to argue, the original version of the *Letter of Aristeas* clearly embodied the principle that translation was strictly a matter of linguistic scholarship. Within the Christian tradition, however, the story of the translation extracted from *Aristeas* was enhanced to suggest miraculous agreement by the translators working independently, and this tradition was used by early Christian writers in order to claim the authority of divine inspiration for the Septuagint as a translation.¹⁵ Both the 'philological principle' and the 'inspirational principle', as Schwarz has termed them,¹⁶ recurred in sixteenth-century controversies concerning the Vulgate, and it was Erasmus' conviction of the overriding authority of the philological principle that provoked the most opposition to his revision of it. Many of the factors *Aristeas* identified as of importance in establishing authoritative credentials for a translation recurred in ensuing debates concerning the authority of the Vulgate, and also continued to have a bearing on the issue of the authority of vernacular translations.

15 It is found first in Philo, and is then taken up by early apologists like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus who sought to defend the Septuagint against alternative Jewish translations, and it became a point of disagreement between Jerome and Augustine. For subsequent elaborations of the *Aristeas* legend, see Jellicoe (1968), pp. 38–47; Schwarz (1955), pp. 22ff; Sundberg (1964), pp. 171–76; Müller (1996), pp. 68ff; Fernández Marcos (2001), pp. 35–50; Collins (2000), pp. 144–64 (Philo and Josephus).

16 Schwarz (1955), pp. 15–16.

Translation and interpretation

Although Aristeas claimed great accuracy for the Septuagint, there are in practice inherent difficulties in translating from one language into another, and at the time that the Septuagint was produced there was no agreed basis as to how this should be done. In the Graeco-Roman world it was usually carried out by native speakers of the original language, and later, in the early church, Origen and Jerome were unusual in learning a foreign language in order to translate from it.¹⁷ As the translator of Ben Sirach pointed out in his Preface (dated by its reference to the thirty-eighth year of the reign of King Euergetes of Egypt to 132BCE):

what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. Not only this book, but even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original (NRSV).

The translator would have been aware in writing this that Hebrew has a different grammatical structure from Greek, a different range of vocabulary, and different ways of expression. Translation thus had to achieve a fine balance between slavish literalness and over-free rendering for the sake of intelligibility in the receptor language.¹⁸ Sometimes a concern to maintain a close degree of correspondence between the translation and the original could mean words or idioms in the original finding their way into the translations, as happened for example, when *ecclesia* and *presbyter* were taken over from Greek into the Latin Bible.

In addition to the technical challenges inherent in its nature, translation made additional demands when the two languages concerned were rooted in different cultures. There was a greater bridge to cross when translation was between Hebrew and Greek than between Hebrew and Aramaic or Syriac. In this case, in addition to scholarly skill in the original language and felicity of expression in the language of the translation,¹⁹ translation also required an understanding of the subject matter concerned. In translating this into terms intelligible to readers belonging to a different culture, a degree of interpretation was inevitable. What is more problematic is determining the extent to which translators consciously re-interpreted the sense of the original in accordance with their particular cultural circumstances or religious convictions. It may be too much to claim that the Septuagint ‘takes its place among the masterworks of philosophy’ for the way that it transposes Hebrew thought into Greek,²⁰ but modern studies have shown that to a greater or lesser degree the Septuagint was interpretative in its translation, and in places deliberately so.

When in Isaiah 9:11–12 ‘the Syrian on the east and the Philistine on the west’ of the Hebrew became in the Septuagint ‘the Syrian from the rising of the sun, and the Greeks from the setting of the sun’, translation even introduced re-interpretation

17 Brock (1969), pp. 547ff. Both did however receive considerable help from Jewish scholars.

18 On the translation techniques of the Septuagint, see Fernández Marcos (2001), pp. 22ff.

19 See Jobes and Silva (2000), pp. 86–93.

20 A. Neher, quoted by Lamarche (1997), p. 23.

in the light of later events. This differentiated the translation of scripture from documents which remained of interest primarily for what they revealed of the past. Because sacred scripture continued to make claims on the lives of those of those who accepted it as authoritative, in later generations, when the original circumstances which gave rise to it no longer prevailed, there was an inherent tendency to translate it in ways that enhanced its relevance.

As long as a translation was the only one in use by a religious community such adjustments remained unnoticed. The Septuagint with all its interpretative renderings had the full authority of the early church, but once comparisons were made with the original the question could not be avoided of whether authority in respect of meaning lay with the original or with the translation, or even with both. It was a question which gained in force from the work of Origen in defence of the Septuagint by comparing it with the Hebrew and from Jerome's revision of the Latin version on the basis of the original languages. With the humanist revival in the sixteenth century of the philological principle of according primacy to the text in its original language, it resurfaced at the heart of the debate between Erasmus and his conservative critics, and in that between the Italian scholars Catharinus and Cajetan, in both of which it was inextricably bound up with the question of the authority of the Vulgate as a translation.

Origen (c. 185–254CE) and the Defence of Christian Scripture²¹

Origen and the authority of the Church's Bible

As the Septuagint became established as the Bible of the Christian church throughout the Greek speaking world it came under increasing criticism from Jewish quarters, and by the end of the second century CE three alternative translations or 'Rescensions' attributed to Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion were in use within Jewish circles.²² When Origen of Alexandria settled permanently in Caesarea around 231CE what was to be a flourishing school of rabbis was developing in the city, and his encounters with Jewish scholars led the Greek speaking theologian to try to learn Hebrew for himself and to study the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text.²³ The outcome was his monumental *Hexapla* of some 6,500 pages, the only complete copy of which was subsequently lost. In it Origen set out the text of the Septuagint in parallel columns with those of the three Recensions, together with a transliteration

21 Almost everything that is known about Origen's life comes from the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea, Book 6; see NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 1. For a critical assessment of information available from Eusebius and other sources, see Nautin (1997). On the life and thought of Origen, see also Danielou (1955), Crouzel (1989), Kannengiesser and Petersen (1988), Trigg (1985), Trigg (1998), McGuckin (2004).

22 De Lange (1976), pp. 49ff.

23 On Caesarea and Origen's contact with Jewish scholars, see De Lange (1976).

of the Hebrew and the Hebrew text itself; additional columns were also added where Origen had other texts to hand.²⁴

Probably with the help of Jewish scholars and by comparing the other Greek translations, especially the very literal rendering of Aquila, Origen in the *Hexapla* produced in effect a revision of the Septuagint in which its differences from the Hebrew were systematically noted. Phrases in the Septuagint which were not found in Hebrew were marked in one way, and phrases which he himself added from the Hebrew (usually in the form found in one of the Recensions) were marked in another way. The resulting ‘Hexaplaric’ text was often copied separately, and by the time of Jerome the textual tradition of the Septuagint had become further complicated by two other revisions, by Hesychius in Alexandria and Lucian in Constantinople. The *Hexapla* marked the summit of Origen’s achievement as a textual scholar, and within the Christian tradition it was a pioneering work in comparing a translation of scripture with the text in its original language. It was primarily undertaken, however, in defence of the church’s use of the Septuagint translation as its scripture.

In his *Letter to Africanus* Origen writes of the labour he had expended in comparing the church’s Greek version of the Old Testament (which he ascribes to ‘the Seventy’) with the Hebrew text, and of how he had noted numerous passages in the Christian version which were not in the original, and many passages in the Hebrew which were not in the church’s version. His purpose in doing this was not, however, to bring the Christian scriptures into conformity with the Hebrew, but to equip himself with a collation of material which would enable him to defend the authority of the Christian Septuagint against Jewish claims that it was an inaccurate translation:

And I make it my endeavour not to be ignorant of their various readings, lest in my controversies with the Jews I should quote to them what is not found in their copies, and that I may make some use of what is found there, even although it should not be in our Scriptures. For if we are so prepared for them in our discussions, they will not, as is their manner, scornfully laugh at Gentile believers for their ignorance of the true reading as they have them.²⁵

Origen does not regard the Hebrew as superior, and defends the Christian version despite its differences from the original. He distinguishes between the ‘Jewish scriptures’ and ‘ours’, and scorns the idea that because of the differences:

we are forthwith to reject as spurious the copies in use in our Churches, and enjoin the brotherhood to put away the sacred books current among them, and to coax the Jews, and persuade them to give us copies which shall be untampered with, and free from forgery!²⁶

24 On the *Hexapla*, see Jellicoe (1968), Ch. 5; Würthwein (1980), pp. 53–7; Nassif (1998), pp. 55–6. Surviving fragments are found in Field (1875) and Baars (1968). On Origen’s contribution to the text of the Septuagint see Ulrich (1999), pp. 202–23.

25 *Letter to Africanus*, para. 5. Citations in what follows are from ANF, Vol. 4.

26 *Letter to Africanus*, para. 4 ANF, Vol. 4.

In his commentaries and sermons Origen continued to comment primarily on the Septuagint text, though he did mention also variations in the Hebrew.²⁷ For him the Septuagint remained the church's Old Testament and had the supreme authority of divine inspiration. When he succeeded Clement as head of the catechetical school in his native Alexandria in 203CE he would have been familiar with the version of the *Aristeas* legend which depicted the translation as divinely inspired. The tradition went back to Philo of Alexandria (c. 25BCE–40CE) and was recounted by Clement of Alexandria, who took it to apply to the translation of the whole of 'the law and of the prophets'.²⁸ At the request of Ptolemy, Clement writes:

... the people of Jerusalem ... being the subjects of the Macedonians, selected from those of highest character among them seventy elders, versed in the Scriptures, and skilled in the Greek dialect, and sent them to him with the divine books. And each having severally translated each prophetic book, and all the translations being compared together, they agreed both in meaning and expression. For it was the counsel of God carried out for the benefit of Grecian ears. It was not alien to the inspiration of God, who gave the prophecy, also to produce the translation, and make it as it were Greek prophecy.²⁹

In similar vein, Origen in his *Letter to Africanus* defended the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew as due to divine providence:

Are we to suppose that that Providence which in the sacred Scriptures has ministered to the edification of all the Churches of Christ, had no thought for those bought with a price, for whom Christ died ...?³⁰

Origen's main aim in revising the Septuagint and marking it as he did was not, then, to bring the Septuagint translation into conformity with the original Hebrew, but to provide 'a text which the Christian could thus safely and authoritatively use in his controversies with Jews'.³¹ It was left to Jerome in the following century to take the further step of revising the Old Testament on the basis of the original Hebrew. Initially Jerome sought to resolve differences between manuscripts of Latin version current in his own day by using Origen's revised text of the Septuagint, but the complexity of the task was such that before long, 'stimulated to undertake the task by the zeal of Origen' he turned to the Hebrew.³²

27 For a survey of those which survive, see Nassif (1998), pp. 54–60.

28 Philo: *De Vita Mosis* ii.26–42; the text is give by Barrett (1958), pp. 210–13. See also Jellicoe (1968), pp. 39–41, Schwarz (1955), pp. 21ff, Müller (1996), pp. 61–64, Dines (2004), pp. 65–70. See Jellicoe (1968), p. 44, Hengel (2002), p. 40. According to Torjesen (1999), pp. 642–3, Origen also adopts Philo's account in *Epistle* 41 (PG 11, pp. 57ff).

29 Clement, *Stromateis*, 1, 22, ANF, Vol. 2, pp. 334–5.

30 *Letter to Africanus*, para. 4, ANF, Vol. 4, p. 387.

31 Brock (1970), pp. 215–6, followed by Nassif (1998). In addition, in his *Commentary* on Matthew 15:14 he writes of disagreements between copies of the Septuagint which he had sought to resolve on the basis of the other Greek versions; see Court (2003), p. 12.

32 Jerome, *Apology*, Book II.25; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 3, p. 515.

Jerome records that he consulted the *Hexapla* in the library in Caesarea, but the scale of the work was such that it was unlikely ever to have been copied in its entirety, and only fragmentary evidence of its text has survived. The invention of printing in the fifteenth century, however, opened up new technical possibilities for the comparison of texts, and the format of the *Hexapla* was in effect followed by printed polyglot Bibles. In the sixteenth century Origen was commended by Erasmus for his careful textual work,³³ and his method of comparing the text of the Septuagint translation with the original Hebrew may have provided a model for Erasmus' own comparison of the Vulgate with the Greek of the New Testament. It was a procedure that was to have fateful consequences for the western church in the sixteenth century.

Origen and authority in interpretation

In addition to his pioneering textual work, Origen was the first Christian scholar known to have set the Christian interpretation of scripture on a theoretical basis. Written about 229CE as he was coming to the end of his time in Alexandria, Book IV of his comprehensive treatise on theology, *On First Principles*, set out and defended interpretation which looked beyond the literal sense to a deeper and hidden spiritual meaning.³⁴ He thereby laid out the hermeneutical foundation for the 'allegorical' approach to interpretation, which was subsequently taken up by Jerome and by Augustine who embodied a similar rationale in his *On Christian Doctrine*.³⁵ It dominated the western church throughout the medieval period, though in a more elaborate form, and continued to be strongly advocated by Erasmus in his prefaces to the New Testament of 1516.

The controlling guide for interpretation was for Origen, like Clement of Alexandria and others before him, the church's rule of faith 'which was delivered by Jesus Christ to the apostles and which they delivered in succession to their followers who teach the heavenly Church'.³⁶ At that time a number of essential doctrinal issues which were later to be dealt with by councils of the church had yet to be resolved, and Origen's views on some of these opened him up to later charges

33 See Erasmus, *Apology against Latomus*, Para. 69; CWE71, p. 67.

34 The text (*Peri archōn*) is known in Greek only from the *Philocalia* of Gregory Nazianzus and Basil the Great, and in Latin (*De principiis*) from the translation by Rufinus, though the latter may have been subject to some 'correction' of his doctrinal views. The Greek text of the *Philocalia* was published by Robinson (1893). English translations in G.W. Butterworth, trans. (1973), *Origen on First Principles*, repr. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith with the Greek and Latin in parallel; Rowan A. Greer, trans. (1979), *Origen. An Exhortation to Martyrdom, etc.*, London: SPCK, pp. 171–216 (Book IV only), translated from the Latin with variations in the *Philocalia* given in the footnotes.

35 There is less emphasis in this on allegory, but Augustine nevertheless employed it extensively in his expositions of scripture. On the meaning of 'allegory' for ancient Greek thinkers, see Edwards (2002), pp. 126ff. On allegorical interpretation, see also, Louth (1990), Ward (2000).

36 Greer (1979), p. 180. On Origen's and the rule of faith, see Chadwick (1966), pp. 79ff, Blowers (2004).

of unorthodoxy.³⁷ Nevertheless the principle he affirmed of the church's supreme authority in interpretation by means of the rule of faith remained fundamental and unquestioned until the sixteenth century.

Origen's approach to interpretation was based on the fundamental distinction he drew between the literal and the spiritual senses of scripture.³⁸ He grounded this on the distinction drawn by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6 between the letter and the spirit,³⁹ a passage that was frequently used in this way, and also on the analogy of the dual nature of Christ as both human and divine.⁴⁰ He was also influenced in according greater value to the unseen by Platonism, which had been a strong influence in his formative years. It is clear that for Origen it was the spiritual sense that carried the greater authority, and in some cases he denied that there was any meaningful literal sense at all (IV.2.5).⁴¹

As a preacher and commentator on scripture, with an immense output of *scholia*, commentaries and homilies,⁴² Origen's primary aim was not to expound scripture in order to demonstrate the truths of doctrine, but to open up its inner meaning so that Christian believers could draw upon its nourishment to grow spiritually – an aim in which he was later to be followed by Erasmus. On the basis of Proverbs 22:20–21, he introduced the three-fold distinction made both by Plato and by Paul between body, mind and spirit (IV.2.4) and he understood the aim of interpretation to be to enable progression from realm of the flesh, subject as it was to imperfection and sin, to the pure intellectual contemplation of the godhead.⁴³ Origen himself, however, did not set out systematically how his approach was to be implemented in practice,⁴⁴ nor is it possible to identify it in detail with the four-fold sense, as it had developed by the medieval period.

Origen also held that to penetrate and comprehend the spiritual sense of scripture was not possible without the right key, and that 'the key of knowledge' was held by skilled teachers. For Origen it was the godly scholar who held greatest authority in interpretation, and in this respect, he saw the authority of the teacher as greater than that of a bishop. In principle he acknowledged the honour due to episcopal office, though he could also, probably due to his own treatment at the hands of the bishop of Alexandria, be very scathing about its exercise,⁴⁵ but in practice, he maintained a dual view of authority within the church.⁴⁶ In the church as a visible, earthly entity

37 See Prat (1911), Crouzel (2000), p. 504, and for the revival within the Roman Catholic church of a more positive attitude to his biblical scholarship, see Margerie (1993), pp. 114–5.

38 For Origen's approach to interpretation, see Hanson (1959), Wiles (1970), pp. 465ff, Young (1990b), Hall (1998), pp. 142–55, Court (2003), pp. 10–21.

39 See Chau (1995), pp. 12ff.

40 Simonetti (1994), p. 43.

41 References are to the translation of Greer (1979), pp. 178ff.

42 See Nassif (1998), pp. 52–60. For a list of his scriptural writings and modern editions, see McGuckin (2004), pp. 26–32, 41–44.

43 See Torjesen (1985) (1986), Trigg (1998), p. 33.

44 See Wiles (1970), pp. 467ff, Simonetti (1994), pp. 38–48.

45 See Jakab (2001), pp. 198–214; McLynn (2004), pp. 70–72.

46 Jakab (2001), p. 198.

he recognized the authority of its hierarchy. In the spiritual realm, however, he considered authority to be vested in the spiritually enlightened who had attained the greatest sanctity and comprehension of the divine mysteries. This is well illustrated by his interpretation of Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16ff. This was a passage often referred to in later tradition in defence of the supreme authority of the pope as the successor of Peter, but in Origen's interpretation Peter is rather the model for all to whom God grants 'the revelation which carries up to heaven'.⁴⁷

The approach to the interpretation of scripture which Origen set out systematically for the first time articulated parameters for interpretation that were still firmly in place at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In particular, interpretation was subordinate to the authority of the church's magisterium set out in its rule of faith, and its practice required skilled theologians and teachers able to penetrate its hidden spiritual meaning, which by that time had developed into the four-fold scheme: 'The letter teaches events, allegory what you should believe, Morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for'.⁴⁸ Following his introduction to the work of Origen in 1501 by his friend Jean Vitrier,⁴⁹ Erasmus gave fresh life to Origen's approach to scripture. His *Enchiridion* written later the same year, in which he set out his 'philosophy of Christ', closely echoed many of the ideas in Origen's foundational work,⁵⁰ and Erasmus was still working on a complete edition of Origen's works when he died in 1536. When Thomas More defended interpretation in accordance with the rule of faith his words echoed those of Origen who saw the rule as safeguarding the tradition handed down by Christ through the apostles and their successors. When in 1543 Ambrosius Catharinus set out in the *Claves Duae* his guide to interpretation, many of the points he made have evident parallels with Origen's *On First Principles*. On the other hand, in Erasmus' eyes the harmony of theology, scripture and spirituality which had been epitomised by Origen had been severely weakened by the scholastic subordination of scripture to Aristotelian philosophy and logic, and its spiritual nourishment encased in a hard shell of dogma. His answer was to follow Origen in seeking to release its transforming power by penetrating its inner spiritual meaning. That of Tyndale and the reformers, on the other hand, was to reject the dogma, and with it the authority of the church over scripture, as well as the necessity of an allegorical approach to its interpretation.

Origen and the canon of scripture

Origen's study of Aquila's translation made him aware that the Greek version of the Old Testament used by the church contained a number of books which did not appear in the Hebrew canon. In the *Letter to Africanus* he discussed in particular the

47 *Commentary on Matthew*, Book 12, 10–11, ANF, Vol. 10, pp. 455ff. See Documents A.

48 Cited by Lubac (1998), p. 1 from Nicholas of Lyra, c. 1330CE: *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*. On the influence of Origen in the medieval period, see Lubac I (1998), pp. 161ff.

49 Warden of the Franciscans at St Omer. See Ep. 1211: CWE8, pp. 226–7.

50 See Godin (1982), pp. 21–118.

status of the story of Susanna, one of the additions to the Book of Daniel; he notes that ‘the History of Susanna, which is found in every church of Christ in that Greek copy ... is not in the Hebrew’ and that the same is true of the other additions.⁵¹ Later he mentions also Tobit and Judith as books which were not used by the Jews. He sometimes quotes from these books, Wisdom for instance, as if scriptural, but does not discuss their status in any systematic way beyond noting whether they were used by the church or among the Hebrews.⁵²

Origen’s writings also throw into relief the continuing fluidity of at least the periphery of the New Testament Canon at this period. He notes the disputed status of 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Jude, and seems uncertain about James, and, despite recognising them as disputed, he also quotes from the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, as well as from *1 Clement*. Origen is aware of the contents of other gospels, many of which had Gnostic tendencies: ‘the church possesses four gospels, heresy a great many’. He is firm in his view that ‘only the four gospels’ should be accepted’. Unlike the many other gospels, Matthew, Mark, John and Luke were ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ in writing, but what is decisive is that it is these alone that the church recognises: ‘we have approved solely what the church has recognised’.⁵³ As a literary scholar sensitive to style and expression he argues that Hebrews cannot have been written by Paul, and comments that ‘who wrote the Epistle in truth, God knows’. Yet, he bows to the authority of the church: ‘if any church holds that this Epistle is by Paul, let it be commended for this also’.⁵⁴ For Origen, then, it was recognition by the church that was determinative for canonical status.

In the sixteenth century doubts were still being aired concerning some of the books about which Origen was uncertain, and Catharinus, for instance, wrote in defence of the canonicity of Jude and of the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. On the other hand, the principle to which Origen held, that it was recognition by the church that was determinative for canonical status, was in turn to provide the basis for the claim by Thomas More and others that the catholic church also had ultimate authority in the interpretation of the Bible.

Jerome (c. 340–420CE) and the Authority of the Linguistic Scholar

Origen’s method of comparing a translation with the original was followed in the next century by Jerome whose revision of the Latin Bible provided the basis of the Vulgate, which subsequently provided the authoritative text of the Bible for the Roman church. Born about 340CE of Christian parents in N.E. Dalmatia, Jerome as a young man experienced a call to the ascetic life, which eventually led to him

51 *Letter to Africanus*, para. 2; ANF, Vol. 4.

52 See De Lange (1976), pp. 51–5.

53 *Homily on Luke* (1:1) cited from Glenn Davis, <http://www.ntcanon.org/Origen.shtml> (accessed 24 March 2007).

54 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.11–14, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 1. See further Glenn Davis, *ibid.*

settling in Bethlehem where he founded his own monastery in 386CE.⁵⁵ Jerome was native Latin speaker, and was educated in Rome. He first became exposed to a Greek speaking environment when he left Rome for Syria about 372CE, and he quickly mastered the language.⁵⁶ During his trial of the eremitic life in the desert at Chalcis, he also took the opportunity, with the help of local teachers, of learning Hebrew and Aramaic.⁵⁷ He seems to have been the only western scholar of his day to have mastered the biblical languages, and after his return to Rome following the Council of Constantinople in 381CE he was employed as a secretary by Pope Damasus, probably to deal with correspondence from bishops of Greek speaking churches.

Jerome's ad fontes method

In view of doctrinal controversies which turned upon the interpretation of particular texts of scripture, Damasus, after returning from the Council of Constantinople, was troubled by variations between manuscripts of the Old Latin version of the Bible,⁵⁸ and commissioned Jerome to produce a standard text of the New Testament gospels. Jerome took the radical step of basing his revision on the original Greek, and by the time that Damasus died in December 384, his version of the gospels was complete. It seems unlikely, however, that he was himself responsible for the revision of the remainder of the New Testament.⁵⁹

In a dedicatory *Preface* to the pope, Jerome reveals that he anticipated criticism on two counts – both of which were to be echoed in responses to new translations in later periods. The first was for daring to change the familiar language of scripture, and the second for claiming to correct the sacred text.⁶⁰ His answer to critics was that his work had been commissioned by the supreme pontiff, and that variant readings could not all be right. In words later echoed by Erasmus in his own defence of his revision of the Vulgate, he wrote in the *Preface*:

For if we are to pin our faith to the Latin texts, it is for our opponents to tell us *which*; for there are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies. If, on the other hand, we are to glean the truth from a comparison of *many*, why not go back to the original Greek and correct the mistakes introduced by inaccurate translators, and the blundering alterations of confident but ignorant critics, and, further, all that has been inserted or changed by copyists more asleep than awake?⁶¹

55 For details of his life see Kelly (1975), Rebenich, (2002). Kelly (pp. 337–9) argues for 331 CE as the year of his birth.

56 See Kelly (1975), pp. 33f, 39.

57 Jerome, *Letter 125*, 12 (411 ce); NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 248. See also Kelly (1975), p. 50. He needed Aramaic for the Book of Daniel, since Daniel 2:4b – 7:28 is in Aramaic; see *Preface to the translation of Daniel*, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, pp. 492–3. Citations from Jerome's Prefaces in what follows are from this volume.

58 On the Old Latin version, see Würthwein (1980), pp. 87–9.

59 See Gribomont (1962), p. 531, Sparks (1970), pp. 519–520; Kelly (1975), p. 88.

60 *Preface to the Four Gospels*, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, pp. 487–8.

61 *Preface to the Four Gospels*, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, pp. 487–8.

In justification of his recourse to the original Greek Jerome also wrote: ‘now that the stream is distributed into different channels we must go back to the fountainhead’, and in *Letter 27* he responded to critics of his revised version of the gospels by a similar appeal: ‘if they dislike water drawn from the clear spring, let them drink of the muddy streamlet’.⁶² Thus the *ad fontes* method of going back to the text in its original language came to be applied explicitly by Jerome to the translation of Christian scripture.

In his work on the gospels, however, Jerome did not consider himself to be making a new translation, but rather a revision of the old. Thus he writes:

to avoid any great divergences from the Latin which we are accustomed to read, I have used my pen with some restraint, and while I have corrected only such passages as seemed to convey a different meaning, I have allowed the rest to remain as they are.⁶³

In other words, his method was only to depart from the familiar Old Latin renderings where these did not accord with the underlying Greek.⁶⁴ It was this that in the sixteenth century enabled Erasmus to defend his revision of the Vulgate on the grounds that it was not Jerome’s work in its entirety.

Jerome and the ‘true Hebrew’ of the Old Testament

After his work on the gospels, Jerome on his own initiative began also to revise the Latin text of the Old Testament. At first he based his revision on the Septuagint, but as the work progressed the realisation grew that the best basis for the Old Testament was the *hebraica veritas*. It may be, as Kamesar has argued, that it was his growing realisation of the nature of translation that led him to the conclusion that it was particularly unsatisfactory to have the Old Testament at third hand,⁶⁵ but even so he had already adopted in his revision of the New Testament the method of returning to the original source.⁶⁶ It was but a small step in principle to apply the same process to the revision of the Old Testament, though a much bigger one in practice, because it required a proficient knowledge of Hebrew.⁶⁷ With the help of Jewish scholars at Bethlehem Jerome began the work in 390 and by 405^{CE}, he had produced a complete Latin version of the Old Testament from the Hebrew.

62 Jerome, *Letter 27*, 1 (384^{CE}), NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 44.

63 *Preface to the Four Gospels*, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, pp. 488.

64 This later enabled Erasmus to defend himself against charges of being disrespectful to Jerome by arguing that the changes to the Vulgate which he suggested related to texts that Jerome had left unchanged from the earlier translation.

65 Kamesar (1993), pp. 43–8.

66 In a reply to Pope Damasus’ enquiry about the meaning of ‘Hosanna’ in the gospels (Matthew 21:9, etc.), he had written that, in view of the range of opinions, ‘it remains, therefore, to forsake the rivulets of opinion and hasten back to the source whence it was taken by the Evangelists’ (*ad ipsum fontem, unde ab evangelistis sumptum est*). *Letter 20*, 2; Mierow (1963), p. 104.

67 On Jerome’s acquisition of Hebrew, see Kamesar (1993), pp. 41f.

The Septuagint and 'the original authority'

Jerome's decision to revise the Latin Old Testament on the basis of the Hebrew brought him into dispute with Augustine of Hippo (354–430CE). The two scholars never met, but they corresponded in mutually respectful terms, and we are fortunate in having both sides of their correspondence,⁶⁸ as well as Jerome's *Apology* (c. 402CE) and Augustine's *City of God*, both of which also deal with a number of the issues concerned. The common ground between them was the confusing degree of variation between Latin manuscripts of the Old Testament, with the Book of Job as a particularly bad case.⁶⁹ The seriousness of the situation was such, Augustine noted, that the authority of the Old Testament was being greatly weakened.⁷⁰

Augustine had welcomed Jerome's revision of Job based on the Septuagint,⁷¹ but was perplexed as to why Jerome chose to produce a further revision on the basis of the Hebrew. He would prefer him to provide a Latin translation of the Septuagint, because the Septuagint 'has no mean authority, seeing that it has obtained so wide circulation, and was the one the apostles used'.⁷² Once he had decided, however, 'to correct the faults, which evidently teem in the Greek and Latin copies, by a reference to the original authority',⁷³ Jerome stood by his decision. At the same time he was adamant that his work was not meant as a disparagement of the Septuagint.⁷⁴ It remained worthy of honour as the first translation of the Old Testament in Greek and because of its use by the church.⁷⁵ In arguments to be echoed by Erasmus in relation to the Vulgate, he defended his work on the grounds that no-one was compelled to use his version,⁷⁶ and that 'for the service of the tabernacle of God each one offers what he can'.⁷⁷

In preferring the Hebrew to the Septuagint as the basis for a new Latin version, Jerome's stated purpose was not only 'to recover what is lost, to correct what is corrupt', but also 'to disclose in pure and faithful language the mysteries of the Church'.⁷⁸ He believed that because the Jewish translators were translating before the advent of Christ, their understanding of the deeper meaning of the text and its relationship to Christ was necessarily limited, and that what understanding they did have of its prophecies of a coming Messiah they deliberately concealed, lest Ptolemy

68 See White (1990).

69 Jerome, *Preface to the Translation of Job*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 491.

70 Augustine, *Letter 71* [= Jerome, *Letter 104*], Chap. IV.6; NPNF Series 1, Vol. 1, p. 327.

71 Augustine, *Letter 71*, Chap. II.3; NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 1, pp. 326–7.

72 Augustine, *Letter 71*, Chap. II.3, Chap. IV.6; NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 1, p. 327.

73 *Preface to Hebrew Questions on Genesis*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 486.

74 *Preface to Hebrew Questions on Genesis*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 486.

75 Jerome, *Letter 57*, 11; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 118.

76 Jerome, *Letter 112* to Augustine (404CE) [= Augustine, *Letter 75*, Chap. VI, 20; NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 1, p. 342, from which it is cited.]

77 *Preface to the Translation of Samuel and Kings* (391CE); NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 490.

78 *Preface to the Translation of Job*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 492.

doubt their monotheism.⁷⁹ Jerome was in a position, as they were not, to bring out its Christological significance. Thus he writes: ‘They translated before the Advent to Christ, and expressed in ambiguous terms that which they knew not’.⁸⁰ He gives as an example the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, which Matthew sees as being fulfilled in the circumstances of the birth of Jesus and cites as ‘out of Egypt have I called my son’ (Matthew 2:15). This accords with the Hebrew, whereas the Septuagint has ‘When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called his sons out of Egypt’. Jerome’s eagerness to correct such deficiencies can be seen in his own renderings. The clearest example is perhaps that of Habakkuk 3:18, where the Septuagint’s ‘in the God of my salvation’, an exact rendering of the Hebrew, becomes in Jerome’s translation ‘in God my Jesus’ (*in Deo Iesu meo*).

Augustine’s defence of the authority of the Septuagint

Augustine, for his part, had strong reservations regarding revision on the basis of the Hebrew. As a bishop and pastor his concern was for harmony both between and within churches. He had been disturbed by a report of the effects on the laity of changing the translation with which they were familiar, and gives a graphic account of how a certain bishop in north Africa who introduced Jerome’s version almost lost his congregation. Jerome’s rendering of the plant in Jonah 4:6 (as ‘ivy’ rather than ‘gourd’),⁸¹ was he wrote ‘a very different rendering from that which had been of old familiar to the senses and memory of all the worshippers, and had been chanted for so many generations in the church’, and it produced a great tumult in the congregation, especially among the Greek speakers familiar with the Septuagint’.⁸²

A second concern of Augustine was the potential effects of Jerome’s revision on relations with the Greek churches which continued to use the Septuagint. To this Jerome responded that ‘it is not despised even by the Greeks now that it is retranslated into their language’.⁸³

Thirdly, although Augustine was not opposed to scholarly investigation and commended Jerome’s revision of the gospels, he put his finger on a crucial point when he raised the issue of obscurities in the original Hebrew. Since church leaders in the west did not know Hebrew, how was anyone to judge whether Jerome’s translation was better than that of the Septuagint or not, especially since it was the work of one man? If Jews were asked to pronounce, there was no certainty that they would do so honestly, and if they disagreed with Jerome, who then could decide between them? If, on the other hand, Jerome gave an exact Latin translation of the Septuagint there

79 *Preface to Hebrew Questions on Genesis*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 486. *Preface to the Translation of Genesis*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, pp. 515–16. This was a rabbinical tradition which Jerome adapted to his own purpose; cf. Hayward (1995), pp. 95f, Kamesar (1993), p. 66.

80 *Preface to the Translation of Genesis*, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 3, p. 516.

81 The translations are those of Jerome’s reply (*Letter 112*) in NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 1.

82 Augustine, *Letter 71*, 5, NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 1, p. 327.

83 Jerome, *Apology*, 2.24, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 3, p. 515.

were sufficient Greek speakers to weigh it for themselves, as Augustine had done in the case of the New Testament.⁸⁴ Augustine's thinking on this point seems to have been that if a translation was to be authoritative, it needed to be subjected to the scrutiny of a body of scholars, and to have the approval of the church's hierarchy. Later, he was to note that the Septuagint was a translation authorised, according to the *Letter of Aristeas*, by the religious authorities in the person of the High Priest Eleazar, and was the unanimous product of a group of scholars. Even if the translators had sometimes erred, he wrote 'still the churches of Christ judge that no one should be preferred to the authority of so many men'.⁸⁵

Jerome, however, objected the claim that the translation produced by 'the Seventy' was divinely inspired:

I do not know whose false imagination led him to invent the story of the seventy cells at Alexandria, in which, though separated from each other, the translators were said to have written the same words. Aristeas, the champion of that same Ptolemy, and Josephus, long after, relate nothing of the kind; their account is that the Seventy assembled in one basilica consulted together, and did not prophesy. For it is one thing to be a prophet, another to be a translator. The former through the Spirit, foretells things to come; the latter must use his learning and facility in speech to translate what he understands.⁸⁶

This was a fundamental point,⁸⁷ for if, as Jerome believed, translation was best done according to the sense rather than word for word, there could be different ways of translating the same text, as indeed the variations between the Septuagint and the Jewish recensions showed.⁸⁸ He was accordingly free to offer his own translation, without necessarily denying the validity of that of the Septuagint.

In addition to using the historical argument that in the original form of the *Letter of Aristeas* there was no basis for the inspiration of the Septuagint, Jerome also brought into play, what for him seemed, a theological *reductio ad absurdum*. The argument turned on the differences between the Septuagint translation and that of many of the citations of the Old Testament in the gospels. It was that the Holy Spirit would have had to 'quoted the same books in one sense through the Seventy Translators, in another through the Apostles'.⁸⁹ Augustine, however, put forward a more nuanced view which accommodated this. If there was anything in the Hebrew text that was not in the Septuagint, he claimed, it was because the Spirit of God did not choose to say it through the Seventy, but only 'through the prophets', that is, the authors of the original Hebrew. Conversely, whatever was in the Septuagint that was not in the Hebrew was there because the Spirit chose to say it only through the Seventy, thus

84 Augustine, *Letter 71*, 6, NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 1, p. 327.

85 Augustine, *City of God* (413–416CE), Book 18, Chap. 43, NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 2, p. 386.

86 Jerome, *Preface to the Translation of Genesis* reproduced in *Apology* (401CE), Book 2, 25, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 3, p. 516.

87 See Schwarz (1955) for a full discussion of the differences between the inspirational and scholarly views of translation, and for its expression by Augustine, pp. 37–44.

88 *Preface to Hebrew Questions on Genesis*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 487.

89 *Preface to the Translation of Genesis*, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 3, p. 516.

showing that both they and the Hebrew writers were ‘prophets’. Furthermore, since it was the same Spirit who inspired both, they could also be inspired ‘to say the same thing differently’.⁹⁰ It remained Augustine’s view that, despite its differences from the Hebrew, the Septuagint was inspired as a translation, and accordingly had as great an authority as the original. In the sixteenth century an analogous view of the inspiration of the Vulgate was to be claimed by defenders of its authority.

Jerome and the canon of the Old Testament

A further point at which Jerome differed from Augustine concerned the canon of the Old Testament, since that of the Septuagint, supported by Augustine, was more extensive than that of the Hebrew Bible. In the *Preface to the Translation of Daniel* (c. 392CE), Jerome notes that the Greek version has additions not found in the Hebrew, namely the history of Susanna, the Hymn of the Three Youths, and ‘the fables’ of Bel and the Dragon. He relates how he heard ‘a certain Jewish teacher’ mock these ‘apocryphal fables’, and he established the practice, still found today, of separating them off into an appendix:

because, however, they are to be found everywhere, we have formed them into an appendix, prefixing to them an obelus, and thus making an end of them, so as not to seem to the uninformed to have cut off a large portion of the volume.⁹¹

Jerome also points out that Daniel:

in Hebrew is not found among the prophets, but amongst the writers of the Hagiographa; for all scripture is by them divided into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa, which have respectively five, eight, and eleven books ...⁹²

This recognition of the more limited scope of the Hebrew Canon when compared with the Septuagint, allied to his commitment to the original Hebrew text, led Jerome to reject the canonicity of the extra books. He makes this clear at the outset of the first of his Old Testament translations, in the *Preface to Samuel-Kings*, which served as a ‘helmet’ defending the principles which covered them all. There he lists in full the books of the Hebrew Scriptures, and writes that books like Wisdom, Ben Sirach, Judith and Tobit ‘are not in the canon’, but are to be placed in the ‘apocryphal books’. Despite this theoretical position, however, Jerome recognised that the books were in use within the church, made translations of a number of them, and continued to cite them in his own writings. His view was that they should be made use of only

90 Augustine, *City of God*, Book 18, Chap. 43, NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 2, p. 386.

91 *Preface to the Translation of Daniel*, NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 493.

92 The number of canonical books was sometimes reckoned to be 22, corresponding with the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. In the *Preface to Samuel-Kings*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, pp. 489–90, Jerome notes that 24 is achieved by counting Ruth and Lamentations separately among the Hagiographa, and relates it to the 24 elders worshipping before the heavenly throne in Revelation (Revelation 5:8ff).

‘for the edification of the people, not to give authority to doctrines of the church’.⁹³ The issue concerning the extent of the canon of the Old Testament that was raised by Jerome’s reliance on the Hebrew remained, however, unresolved, until the sixteenth century.

What lay at the heart of the disagreement between Jerome and Augustine was the authority of the Septuagint as the church’s version of the Old Testament. Augustine, like Origen, believed the Septuagint to be divinely inspired, even in those passages not found in the Hebrew. Jerome, on the other hand, emphatically denied the inspiration of the Septuagint and strongly maintained that translation was solely a matter of scholarship. His decision to go back to the text of the Old Testament in its original language seems however, like his revision of the gospels, to have been a matter of empirical methodology rather than of overriding principle, since he continued to make use of the Septuagint in his commentaries.

Although the debate between Jerome and Augustine turned on the authority of the Septuagint, the question at issue was in effect that of the authority of the Old Latin versions,⁹⁴ as opposed to a new untested translation by a single scholar. The Old Latin had no formal authorization, and gained the esteem in which it was held only through the familiarity of long use, especially within worship. In relation to his revision of the gospels Jerome could claim the formal authorization of the pope, but his version of the Old Testament carried only the authority of his own scholarship.

Jerome’s approach to translation

Following accusations of introducing changes when he translated a letter sent by Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, to John, Bishop of Jerusalem, concerning the theology of Origen, Jerome produced a lengthy defence of his method of translation, in *Letter 57*. The letter, written to Pammachius (c. 395), also reveals Jerome’s thinking concerning translation in general and the translation of scripture in particular.

Letter 57 shows that Jerome’s fundamental principle of translation from Greek was that he rendered ‘sense for sense and not word for word’.⁹⁵ In justification of this he pointed out that there are differences between languages in vocabulary, grammatical and syntactical constructions, idiom and style which mean that word for word translation would fail to do justice to the original. He quotes what he had previously written in the Preface to one of his first translations from Greek into Latin, the *Chronicle of Eusebius*:

93 *Preface to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 492. The position was later re-affirmed by the Church of England, see Article VI of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* (1563), which cites the authority of Jerome.

94 See Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 2 Ch. 15; NPNF, Series 1, Vol. 2, p. 542. ‘Old Latin’ is used as a collective term, since in practice there were probably several versions, but the point is not affected. See Würthwein (1980), pp. 87–8.

95 *Letter 57*, 5; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 113.

... it is hard to preserve in a translation the charm of expressions which in another language are most felicitous. Each particular word conveys a meaning of its own, and possibly I have no equivalent by which to render it, and I make a circuit to reach my goal, I have to go many miles to cover a short distance. To these difficulties must be added the windings of hyperbata, differences in the use of cases, divergencies of metaphor; and last of all the peculiar and if I may so call it, inbred character of the language. If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator ...⁹⁶

The freedom from word for word rendering which Jerome so strongly defends appears at first sight, however, to be qualified by him in the case of scripture 'where even the order of the words is a mystery'.⁹⁷ These words should not, however, be read in isolation (nor is it clear whether they are to be restricted to translation from Greek alone), since he discusses a number of instances where the evangelists seem to have translated more according to the sense than following the letter. He notes, for example, that Jesus' words *talitha cum* in Mark 5:41 which mean 'damsel, arise', are translated by the evangelist as 'damsel, I say unto you, arise', with the words 'I say unto you' added 'to give the impression of one calling and commanding'.⁹⁸ This suggests that even in translating scripture Jerome was prepared in practice to translate 'according to the sense'.

At the same time, given the peculiar nature of scripture in making authoritative demands on the lives of those who accepted it as sacred writing, Jerome considered it valid to bring to its translation the understanding of its subject matter that he had gained as a Christian. He wished to convey what he understood to be the meaning of scripture as the living voice of God, even if this meant giving expression to matters that would not have been known to the original translators.

When it came to his work on the Old Testament, the outcome of Jerome's revision on the basis of the Hebrew was of mixed quality. In Sparks' judgement:

Jerome's version from the Hebrew is thus a curious mixture. In many respects it is conservative and in some places a slavishly literal rendering of the original. In other places we can discern the influence of the Old Latin and, behind the Old Latin, the Septuagint or one of the other Greek translators (especially Aquila). Occasionally a piece of Jewish lore obtrudes (as in the description of Goliath as a *vir spurius* in 1 Sam. 17:4, 23), or a passage may be given a definitely Christian 'twist' (as when 'I will joy in the God of my salvation' at Hab. 3:18 is rendered *exsultabo in Deo Iesu meo*). Even Jerome's habit of variation in renderings poses a problem: some of the variations ... are demonstrably studied; but others appear quite arbitrary.⁹⁹

96 Cited from *Letter 57*, 5; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 114. The *Preface* is also to be found on pp. 483–4.

97 *Letter 57*, 7; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 113.

98 *Letter 57*, 7; NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 6, p. 115.

99 Sparks (1970), pp. 525f. See also North (1990).

The development of the Vulgate

Jerome's revision of the Old and New Testaments eventually came to replace Old Latin manuscripts as the standard edition of the Bible in the western Church. It was only gradually over the next 400 years, however, that Jerome's version finally gained ascendancy over the Old Latin versions, and in the process it was subjected to varying degree of conformity to the older versions.¹⁰⁰ One of the earliest references to a complete copy of Jerome's version comes from the *Institutes* of Cassiodorus who, in the sixth century, presented his monastery in Italy with three complete copies of the Bible: a nine volume edition of the Old Latin, an edition of Jerome's revision based on the Hexaplaric Septuagint, and an edition of his version from the Hebrew.¹⁰¹

At the instigation of Charlemagne who saw it as a means of promoting cultural uniformity throughout his realms, Alcuin, abbot of Tours from 796CE, produced a standardised edition of Jerome's version.¹⁰² His alterations were mainly stylistic, but his work established Jerome's version as the standard text of France. The presentation of a copy to Charlemagne at his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in 800CE in effect marked the beginning of the supremacy of the Vulgate in the western church. The unquestioned authority which it subsequently enjoyed was aptly symbolised when in 1455 it appeared from the press of Johannes Gutenberg at Mainz as the first substantial book ever to be printed in Europe.¹⁰³ By the sixteenth century the version was universally known as the 'Vulgate', though by Jerome himself the term *vulgata* was used both of the Old Latin translations which preceded his own and also of the Greek text of the Septuagint in common use before Origen produced his critical edition in the *Hexapla*.¹⁰⁴

Although the Vulgate was invested with the authority of Jerome as a Doctor of the Church, what Jerome had in fact provided was not a new translation, but a revision of the Old Latin version, which he claimed kept the wording of the older version when it accorded with the original, despite, in some places, evident stylistic awkwardness or ambiguity. The Psalter included in the Vulgate was Jerome's earlier 'Gallican Psalter', a revision based on the Septuagint, and several 'ecclesiastical' books never translated by Jerome were included in their Old Latin versions, namely Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, 1 and 2 Maccabees and Baruch.¹⁰⁵ The Vulgate also continued to bear the stamp of the Septuagintal origins of the Old Latin version in its inclusion of books not found in the Hebrew canon, in the names given to the Old Testament books, and in the forms of the personal names of many of the biblical characters. The Septuagintal practice of substituting 'Lord' for the Hebrew divine name 'Yahweh'

100 For a detailed account, see Loewe, (1970), pp. 102–154. See also Gribomont (1962), pp. 531–532; Würthwein (1980), pp. 93–5; Parker (1992), pp. 861–862.

101 See De Hamel (2001), pp. 32–3.

102 See De Hamel (2001), pp. 34–7.

103 See De Hamel (2001), pp. 190–215; a more popular account is given by Man (2002).

104 Gribomont (1962), p. 530a.

105 See Sparks (1970), p. 522.

was followed by the Vulgate, and the Vulgate also adopted into Latin a number of key terms, including *ecclesia* and *presbyter*.

The authority of the Vulgate

As the first instance of the translation of a major corpus of sacred writings from the language of one culture into that of another, the Septuagint opened up the question of the authority of a translation in relation to its original. In the early church the authority with which the Septuagint was invested came under challenge directly from Judaism, which repudiated the authority of the Septuagint in favour of the original Hebrew, and indirectly from Jerome's revision based on it. The withdrawal of religious authority from the Septuagint by the Jews was met within the church by the claim of its divine inspiration as a translation. This was denied by Jerome who argued that, as in the original version of the *Letter of Aristeas*, translation was solely a matter of scholarship.

Although Augustine in his correspondence with Jerome was explicitly defending the authority of the Septuagint as inspired, the matter at issue was the authority of Jerome's new Latin version based on the Hebrew. While Augustine assumed that the authority of the Septuagint carried over to the Old Latin, Jerome accorded higher value to the text in its original language.

Two factors in particular concerning the authority of a translation stand out from Jerome's debate with Augustine. The first concerned Jerome's scholarly credentials as one of the very few Christians to know Hebrew, and Augustine's view that, however proficient in the language Jerome may have been, the work of a single translator needed to be tested by a wider body of scholars acting on behalf of the church. The second was the weight of authority that a translation of its scriptures was accorded by the religious community on account of the familiarity of its use in the liturgy and as a basis for the church's teaching and preaching. This was to become a recurrent factor in resistance to new versions.

It was the inherent conservatism of customary use within the church that resulted in it taking 400 years for Jerome's version, decisively helped by the imperial authority of Charlemagne, to gain ascendancy over the Old Latin throughout the western church. As Erasmus was later to point out, apart from the gospels, the Vulgate never received formal authorization by the church. The authority which was claimed for it in the sixteenth century debates rested to a large degree on the fact of its long use.

At the same time, the *Aristeas* legend of the divine inspiration of the translators of the Septuagint continued to remain popular, and over 20 medieval manuscripts are known.¹⁰⁶ It kept alive the question of whether translation was solely a matter of scholarly endeavour and thus always secondary in importance to the text in its original language, or whether a translation could itself be seen as divinely inspired and thus of equal or greater authority than the original. It came into printed form for first time in 1471, in a Latin translation by Matthias Palmerius of Pisa, as part of the first Latin Bible to be published in Rome, perhaps with a view to suggesting similar

¹⁰⁶ For detailed references to its occurrence, see Harl, Dorival and Munnich, (1994), Ch. 2.

inspiration for the Vulgate. The historical veracity of *Aristeas* was challenged by the Spanish scholar Luis Vives (Joannes Ludovicus de Vives), in a commentary on Augustine's *City of God*, which was encouraged by Erasmus,¹⁰⁷ and published by Froben of Basel in 1522. Even so a printed edition of the Greek text of *Aristeas* was first published at Basel in 1561.¹⁰⁸

By the sixteenth century two further factors had come into play to reinforce the authority of the Vulgate. The first was the power of the printing press. It was of the nature of printing, by making available a large number of identical copies, to give the impression that variations no longer existed and to introduce 'a new concept of the text as authoritative'.¹⁰⁹ Printing imparted a veneer of authority to the particular text to which the imprint gave wide circulation, while, until the rise of critical editions, unintentionally providing an efficient means of canonising errors.

As well as the rapid spread of printed copies of the Vulgate, the revival of interest in biblical languages during the Renaissance also brought in its train printed editions of the Hebrew and Greek Bibles. A Hebrew Bible was printed at Naples by the Soncino Press in 1492,¹¹⁰ probably as a result of Jewish demand, and the first complete text of the Greek Bible to be printed was also produced in Italy, published in Venice in 1518 by Aldo Manuzio (Aldus Manutius). In the meantime, at the instigation of Cardinal Ximenes who founded a trilingual college at Alcalá (Latin, *Complutum*) in Spain, the Complutensian Polyglot, printed the text of the Vulgate alongside that of the Septuagint and Hebrew of the Old Testament, and in parallel with the Greek of the New Testament. The Complutensian Polyglot was not, however, published until 1522, so that the New Testament of Erasmus, first published in 1516, was the first ever printed Greek text of the New Testament.

The second factor was the widespread cult of St Jerome. The cult of Jerome as an ascetic, which was particularly popular in the middle ages, had become supplemented by the beginning of the sixteenth century by veneration for Jerome the scholar,¹¹¹ so that in addition to the authority it had acquired by long use, the Vulgate gained that of the saintly Doctor of the Church whose work it was believed to be. Artists down to the seventeenth century continued to depict Jerome as divinely inspired in his work of translation.¹¹² For Erasmus, Jerome was both his model for biblical scholarship and also his authority for basing the translation and interpretation of scripture on its original languages. Even so, when in his New Testament Erasmus demonstrated that the Vulgate, commonly ascribed to Jerome, differed in many places from the original Greek, this was seen by the conservative theological establishment as posing a grave threat to the authority of the Vulgate, and in consequence to the authority of the church itself. His revision of the Vulgate on the basis of the Greek re-opened the question, unresolved in the early church, of the relationship between the authority of a translation and that of the original.

107 Ep. 1613, CWE11, pp. 279–81.

108 See Jellicoe (1968), pp. 30ff.

109 Parker (1997), pp. 189–90.

110 Roth and Wigoder (1977), p. 958.

111 Rice (1985), Chapters 3 and 4.

112 Rice (1985), p. 173.