Problems Related to the Old Testament Canon

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Those who know me well know that I am not a theologian; those who know me better despair of my ever being one, and these facts are always present in my mind when I'm invited to come and address theologians. You have asked me to talk about the canon and I have deliberately limited myself to certain problems relating to the Old Testament canon.

The scope and aim of this lecture

The subject of the Old Testament canon can conveniently be divided into two main parts, the first of which you might call *the Jewish canon* and problems relating thereto. That is to say, the question of which books the Jews in ancient times regarded as canonical. As you will know, there is remarkably little disagreement on this topic. Remarkably little in the present and remarkably little in ancient times; even though scholars like Origen, who argued for the larger canon—in some quarters called *the Alexandrian canon*—are witness to the fact that official Judaism did not accept the larger canon.

Moreover, if we confine our attention to the Jews themselves in Palestine, there was likewise comparatively little uncertainty about which books should be included in their Jewish canon, and which should be excluded. So that the main interest in the Old Testament Jewish canon lies, first of all, in tracing the stages of its growth; secondly, on the ordering of its contents, and in particular upon the threefold division of the Old Testament canon and the question of the date at which it was closed.

Let me just remind you that in this latter connection, opinion seems to be moving away from the idea that it was only at Jamnia, or Yavneh[1] that the canon was closed, towards the suggestion that it was closed much earlier.

Moreover, more recent writers have urged us to think that we need to pay closer attention to the exact meaning of the rabbinical terms used in the discussion. What did the rabbis mean when they talked about certain books 'defiling the hands'? What do they mean by the term 'withdraw' or 'store away'? Do they mean that the book is of doubtful canonicity? Do they not rather mean that its canonicity isn't in doubt, but for one reason or another it oughtn't to be read by the general public? And, again, we are exhorted by more recent scholars to check our references to make sure which of these terms is in fact used by the rabbis in any particular passage about some of those books that were disputed.

Again, a more recent suggestion is that in Judaism books could be regarded as canonical without being regarded as inspired. The inspiration of a book and the canonicity of a book are not one and the same thing, and holy Scripture was comprised of books that were both inspired and canonical. Judaism may well have regarded some books as canonical, but not inspired. And that last observation may serve to remind us that the term 'canon' is not anyway a biblical term, and therefore can be used in different senses by different people.

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[1] A small town located along Israel's southern coastal plain between Jaffa and Ashdod.

Another more recent idea, as you will know better than I myself, is that which bids us see the origins of the concept of a canon in the rehearsing of the covenant given to Israel; for instance as you see historically in the book of Deuteronomy.

So for these observations, (if you've numbered them, they are those four to six) go especially to Dr Leiman's book.[2] For the rest, an excellent account of things is to be found by Professor G. W. Anderson in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Volume one, pages 113 to 159. I do not propose here to relate to you in my broken English what you have doubtless already read in Professor Anderson's lucid prose.

Therefore, and with no more ado, I am going to leave the subject for the moment, and for the most part the Jewish canon, and devote most of my remarks to the second part of this subject, the once so-called *Alexandrian canon*.

Under these titles, people used to refer to the fact that the so-called *Septuagint* contains more books than the Hebrew Old Testament contains: the so called *Apocryphal*, or *Deuterocanonical,* or even *pseudepigraphical* books. Not only more books than the Hebrew Old Testament but, within some of the books that are regarded by the Jews as canonical, the Septuagint has additions within the books, and sometimes not so much. Notable additions, for instance, are to be found in the Greek translation, or shall I say *translations*, of the book of Esther. Also, additions in both the translations of Daniel; for there are, as you know, two Greek translations extant from the ancient world of Daniel.

The next fact that gave rise to this notion of an Alexandrian canon, is that many of the early church fathers accepted these extras as Bible. They read them in the Greek; and then when the early Latin translations were made (that is, the so-called *Old Latin* translations, as distinct from the *Vulgate*), they were based on the Septuagint translations; and therefore contain the additions and extras because they were following the Greek.

If those are the facts, let us now consider the subsequent history

Second and Third centuries

Christian scholars became aware very early on that the Greek Bible that was circulating contained matter that was not in the Hebrew, and therefore they questioned the authority of these bits and pieces.

For example, the learned scholar Sextus Julius Africanus, who organized the library in the Pantheon for Emperor Alexander Severus, wrote a letter to Origen round about AD 240. He complains about the book *Susanna*. He notices that it contains a pun; but a pun on two Greek words that don't go back to the Hebrew. He argues, therefore, that the authority of the Greek is drawn solely from the Hebrew of which it is a translation, and therefore parts that don't go back to the Hebrew must be rejected as not genuine and authoritative. Origen replied, saying, 'Remove not the landmarks established by your fathers,' quoting from the book of Proverbs (22:28). Namely, that if the Church now for some generations has read the Old Testament in the Greek, and accepted all these additional books and extras and pluses,

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[2] Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence*, Archon Books, Hamden, Conn., 1976.

then it's not for anybody like Sextus Africanus to remove the landmarks that have been set by the Fathers.

Origen in his writings does in fact admit that the Jewish canon is different from what he and his contemporaries, or many of them, accepted. In fact, he wrote down the Jewish canon for his fellow Christians; though, to be fair, we must observe that in writing it down—and therefore incidentally being a witness to what the Jewish canon was—Origen does not accept it as binding. He wrote it simply as information. It is *informative*, as Barthélemy says, and not *normative*.

Origen is saying, 'You Christians had better know what books the Jews regard as canonical; it's no good you quoting bits of the Greek Bible that aren't in the Hebrew, because they'll laugh at you. You'd better know about the bits that are in their Bible but not in the Greek Bible, otherwise they'll say, "Well, what's the good of you Gentiles talking about these things? You just don't know what you're talking about." So you'd better know what's in the Jewish Bible.'

Hence, his great *Hexapla*. He doesn't thereby accept the Jewish canon as authoritative. He still holds to his principle that you mustn't remove the landmarks that your fathers have set; that is to say, some of the earlier church fathers accepted the so-called Alexandrian canon. And he openly tells Africanus, 'Look here, the Jews don't accept *Toviyah*.[3] So what? The Church does, and that's an end of the matter.'

Augustine and Jerome

After Origen there came Augustine, and alongside Augustine, Jerome; but a terrible argument broke out between them.

Called upon by the Pope, Jerome began to revise the Old Latin translation, but he gave up in despair because of its unsatisfactory and impossible nature. The Old Latin was based upon the Septuagint; Jerome had learned Hebrew and perceived that the Septuagint was vastly different from the Hebrew and contained a lot of additional stuff. So Jerome in the end abandoned the task of revising the Old Latin, and set himself to translate a new Latin translation based directly on the Hebrew, and in natural consequence rejected all that had been in the Greek translations that was not to be found in the Hebrew.

Augustine protested loudly that this was a very bad thing to do. Augustine, you should remember, didn't know Hebrew, but he objected on various grounds, and we shall think about them later on.

Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

If you follow the history beyond Jerome and Augustine, you find that Jerome's new translation, direct from the Hebrew, was accepted by the Church and it became what is still known as the *Vulgate*. He didn't even bother to revise the many books of the Apocrypha; they remain in the Old Latin.

Before the Reformation many great authorities even in the Church were against the Apocrypha, and would have sided with Jerome and his verdict. I'm talking about Cardinal

[3] The Apocryphal book of Tobias.

Francisco Ximénes, Santes Pagnino and Cardinal Thomas Cajetan, for instance. (And later, Johannes Petræus, 1649-1733.)

But the *Council of Trent* (1545-63) in the end came down on the side of retaining the Apocryphal books; not all, only some. And also of retaining some of the additions within the canonical books that are to be found in the Septuagint, though not in the Hebrew. Witness the Council of Trent trying to do the splits. Take, for instance, what they did to the additions to the book of Esther that are to be found in the Greek translations. They wanted to keep them, and keep them they did. That would have pleased Augustine, and highly displeased Jerome, had he known about it; but they took these additions and left them where Jerome had put them. Taking them out from the book of Esther, they put them at the end of the Old Testament in a little packet by themselves where they don't make any sense. There they are to this day, as the writer to the Chronicles would say.

Twentieth Century

I pass now rapidly to more modern times, to the statements of Pope Pius XII.[4] Writing a letter to certain bishops, he discouraged the over evaluation of the Vulgate which, by our modern times, had come to be accepted by the Church itself as equally inspired as anything else. Pope Pius began to put the brake upon these things and directed the attention of Roman Catholic people away from the Vulgate back to the authority of the original Hebrew.

In his encyclical *Divino afflante* in 1943, he made the point and laid down the principle that, by virtue of the fact that the original text was written by the sacred author himself, it possesses an authority and a weight superior to every translation, however excellent.[5] In 1945 the same Pope recommended a new Latin translation of the Psalms, to be based on the original Hebrew. What Augustine would have said about that Pope, I know not!

I do not now need to remind you of what Protestant churches have done with the topic of the canon; you will be aware of Luther and Calvin, the Anglicans, and all sorts of other people. You will be aware also of the modern trends of unbelief. Not accepting the canonical books of Scripture as the inspired word of God, they talk about 'a canon within a canon'. In the end, like the pigs on the mountains of Gadara, they plunge into a state of mind that doesn't regard anything in particular as canon at all and jettisons the whole idea of any canonical authority.

The Orthodox Churches

We should pause, however, because later it will become important, to reflect upon what has been the attitude of the Orthodox Churches. We might suppose that the argument was simply between Augustine and Jerome, but there were others, of course. All the array of Greek-speaking Fathers and their traditions, going on until the Reformation and beyond. If you enquire about them, you will find that their attitude has been far from certain; and definitely not monolithic.

Here I have to confess my indebtedness to other scholars, such as Bruce Metzger and my colleague in the Greek department, Margaret Mullet. In the fourth and fifth centuries, it

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[4] Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli, born 1876. Pope from 1939 until his death in 1958.

[5] My paraphrase of his words.

would appear that Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Amphilochius of Iconium, for instance, drew up and formed lists of Old Testament scriptures in which the Apocrypha does not appear.

The *Council of Nicaea* (AD 787)—the seventh of that name, pronounced for the Apocrypha; as did also the *Council of Constantinople* in 869.

The great and famous Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 296-373) was for the Hebrew canon, and later John of Damascus (AD 675-749), and Nicephorus of Constantinople likewise (he lived in the 1300s).

After the Reformation

As a result of the Reformation there came further disputes. The Synod of Jassy in 1642 and the Synod of Jerusalem in 1672 proclaimed themselves for the Apocrypha. In more recent times the Russian Orthodox Church, having been for it originally, became against it. In the present day the Greek Orthodox Church appears to allow catechisms to circulate that hold differing views over this matter, and they don't seem to mind what their clergy teach the people on this score.

You should then be listening to Augustine and his arguments about what the majority of the churches held; and you should be aware of that grey section of Christendom, the Orthodox Church, that has been far from united at any one stage on this matter of the canon.

With that unduly long introduction, let me come to the meat, or at least what meat there is, in the main part of this lecture.

The arguments of Dominique Barthélemy

Perhaps I shall test your patience as I seem to go off into what, to you, may seem irrelevancies. To me they are matters of immediate relevance, because I look at these things through glasses tinted with the Septuagint—as is natural, I suppose. In recent times, that great and famous Septuagintalist, Dominique Barthélemy no less, has issued two articles that return to this matter of the canon. He has done more than any living scholar to give us a clearer understanding of the history of the texts of the Septuagint.

If I could manage to pronounce French words, I would read the first article in French, but I think I'd better translate it: *The Place of the Septuagint in the Church*. The other one is entitled, *The Old Testament Matured in Alexandria*—if that's the right translation of *mûri*. The latter article was published in 1965 and the former one in 1967. In these two articles, Professor Barthélemy, being a Catholic himself, goes very strongly counter to the direction in which the theologians of his own Church had been going in these recent years. He revives the older view. Though well aware that the statements of the Pope, to whom I referred earlier, go in a contrary direction, Barthélemy returns to the older view, that the Septuagint and, therefore, all the Apocryphal additions and additional books are equally inspired as the original Hebrew.

And so two extremes meet, as the ancient Catholic view is revived and wants to regard the Apocrypha as inspired; and liberal Protestantism, abandoning the notion of canon, is quite happy to have the Apocrypha printed along with the Old Testament in one volume.

In these articles, Professor Barthélemy advances many strong arguments. Do not begin to suppose that I am pouring scorn upon them. Many of them are powerful; though not all of them equally powerful, at least in my judgment. It is because I believe that some of them are strong arguments—at least at first sight, that I bring them before you today. I shall presently be giving you my reaction to them, and then asking you what your reaction is. I'm given to understand that, having paid for my supper by giving this lecture to you, I am also being allowed to question you when this lecture is finished, to ascertain how you, the theologians, would react to Professor Barthélemy's arguments!

His two basic principles

NUMBER ONE

> That which the Church as a whole has recognised as holy Scripture cannot thereafter be rejected as inauthentic by biblical criticism.

The one half of me wants to rejoice in that statement, but then the other half says, 'what are you talking about as "holy Scripture"?' The point of his principle, as he then goes on to define it, is this:

> If one can establish beyond doubt that a passage has truly formed a part of the Greek Bible, as the Church as a whole read it in the first four centuries of the Christian era, one must consider the contents of that passage as holy Scripture. If that passage has not adequate foundation in the Hebrew text, one must recognise that the Greek Bible has an authority beyond that of a simple translation; it is equally inspired as the original Hebrew.

NUMBER TWO

> The most authoritative form of the word of God is that which came from the pen of the inspired writer.

If that seems to suggest that it is the Hebrew original that must be given the prior authority because it came from the pen of the inspired writer and is, therefore, the most authoritative form of the word of God, that would indeed appear to conflict with Barthélemy's first principle—that if the Churches accepted the Greek translations, even if those Greek translations don't have a base in the Hebrew, nevertheless they are to be accepted.

But if you perceive that apparent conflict, so does Professor Barthélemy; and his response would be, 'Who is really to be regarded as the author of a book, and in particular of a *biblical* book? The author? The sources from which he took his material? The author, or the subsequent editor or editors of his work?' We shall come back to that in a moment.

Professor Barthélemy will hold that you should look for true authorship, not at the beginning of the process but at the end. Therefore, the Septuagint translators were equally inspired as the original authors, and what you have in the Septuagint is the Holy Spirit reinterpreting the Old Testament to make it suitable for the Gentiles and to prepare the way for the eventual Christian mission among the Gentiles. This reinterpretation of the Old

Testament, being as Barthélemy would claim by the Holy Spirit, is as much from a sacred author as the original Hebrew was.

Some general remarks by Professor Barthélemy

With those two principles, he proceeds to some general propositions and remarks, such as that the fully canonical form of a book is not found at the beginning but at the end of the process that brought it to its final state.

Thus, the *Pentateuch*; and here you must understand that Professor Barthélemy would accept the documentary hypothesis that behind our Pentateuch are many sources, J and E, and D, and P, and H, and each of them to the power of one, two, three, four, and so forth. Therefore, if you ask who is the author of the Pentateuch, according to Barthélemy you would have to reply, 'Not Moses,' or at least, 'Not only Moses'.

Then you would have to look forward. And here again Barthélemy assumes that Ezra the scribe brought around an edition, at any rate, of Moses's work, which Professor Barthélemy appears to think was a very radical revision. So that, to go no further, what we now have in our Bibles is not what Moses wrote, but an edition of his work by Ezra.

Barthélemy wants to say, 'Now, what would you like to argue there? Which is the inspired author? Which is the more authoritative form? Will you try and push back behind Ezra to get to Moses, and behind Moses to get to his sources?' Barthélemy would hold that the book we now have, whoever edited it, is inspired as it stands.

Or take *Samuel-Kings*: according to Barthélemy, Samuel-Kings was later reissued, radically edited, and added to and interpreted under the name of *Chronicles*. He thinks, therefore, that the same questions rightly apply here. Will you deny that the author of Chronicles was inspired, when his work, according to Barthélemy, is simply a reissue, an edition and an interpretation of *First and Second Kings* and *First and Second Samuel*?

Or he will point to *Second Maccabees*—and you should remember that by his principles he regards Second Maccabees as an inspired book. But as everybody knows, Second Maccabees is an epitome of another history and a much larger history book by *Jason*.

Says Professor Barthélemy, 'Which will you regard as inspired?'

I should say 'neither'. But he does regard Second Maccabees as inspired, and therefore he says, 'One of these days, should you find the original history of which Second Maccabees is an epitome, what then would you do? Would you scrap Second Maccabees, and say, "No, that's no longer inspired, but the original book by Jason . . ."'?

Well, I shan't make much comment on that because, as you see, I think the first presupposition is mistaken anyway; but you see the analogy upon which he argues.

And then he comes over to the *New Testament*, and says, 'Ponder the Gospel of Matthew'. According to Barthélemy, it is a translation in part of an earlier Aramaic source. Suppose you found a papyrus in the sands of Egypt that turned out to be the Aramaic source that Matthew used. Which would you say was inspired: that source, or Matthew?

Professor Barthélemy, therefore, urges this as a proper analogy that we should apply to the Greek translation of the Old Testament. He wants to argue that, just as you would regard our present book of Matthew as inspired—whatever Aramaic sources may lie behind

it; so you should regard the Septuagint translation as inspired—even though it is only a translation of certain Hebrew books.

Further general remarks

Professor Barthélemy observes that there was a reaction in Palestine among the Palestinian Jews against the Bible in Greek, and this reaction took the form of emphasizing the importance and prior authority of the Hebrew. It resulted in many attempts to revise the Greek translation and make it conform more nearly to the Hebrew, and of those processes we know a great deal nowadays. We have copies of the revised *Septuagint*; revisions which were done in times BC and in the early years of the present era to make it better conform to the Hebrew.

He further says that the learned Aristeas, who wrote an account of the origin of the Septuagint in his *Letter to Philocrates* (second century BC), was in fact protesting as an Alexandrian Jew in favour of the Greek translation against these other Jews from Palestine who said that the Greek translation wasn't authoritative; it should be revised or scrapped and they should go back to the original Hebrew, which was authoritative. According to Barthélemy, Aristeas is protesting against this in the name of Alexandrian Judaism, who wish to hold that their Greek translation is equally as authoritative as the original Hebrew.

And then Professor Barthélemy notes that, in Christian times, the Jews argued against the Christians and the Christians against the Jews. When the Christians quoted the Greek Septuagint, the Jews said, 'No, that bit you're quoting isn't in the original' and in the end the Jews ditched the Septuagint and made themselves other translations direct from the Hebrew.

'But,' said Augustine and Origen, 'it would be wrong to give in to the Jews like this, and to let the Synagogue dominate what the Christian Church should think. Therefore, we refuse to bow to the Synagogue and we accept the authority of the Church and all those church fathers who gave us these Greek books.'

Barthélemy likewise says that we should adopt the same attitude. He exhorts us to recognize or to believe that the Holy Spirit was doing a new thing in the Jews of Alexandria; reinterpreting the Old Testament in a living fashion, so that it wasn't just a translation of the Hebrew, but in many respects a thorough reinterpretation and adaptation of the Hebrew in order to fit the needs of the Gentiles. The Jews in Palestine were a reactionary crowd and against this. Therefore, we should not follow the reactionary Jews of Palestine; we should follow the good Jews of Alexandria, who Barthélemy believes were inspired in the task they did.

My reactions to Professor Barthélemy's arguments

Well, as I have said, not all Barthélemy's arguments appear to me to be equally forceful, but I put them before you as arguments that you should take seriously. At any rate, they come from a great Septuagint scholar. I am going to give you at least some of my reactions to them and I shall be interested to find how you react, remembering that you are theologians and I am not.

1. My reaction to his basic principle, that what the Church has accepted as Bible cannot later be invalidated by biblical criticism.

That basic principle seems to me to be, at one level, simply a matter of faith—a statement of Barthélemy's faith, and as such there's an end of the matter. If he believes it, he believes it. An article of faith that he regards, in other words, as axiomatic, self-evident, not accepted on logical grounds, but on intuitive grounds as being self-evidently true. And if that is so, there I leave it with him.

But I must notice that Barthélemy has to add, not, what 'the Church' accepted, but what 'the Church as a whole', or 'the majority of the Churches' accepted. Of course, it is precisely here that there is a difficulty. Not all the early Christian scholars were at one on the topic. And what do you mean by 'the Church' anyway? The man who got his Greek translation, or the man who got his Latin translation of the Greek translation but couldn't read a word of Hebrew?

In these matters, what would you regard as the Church? All those vast multitudes of Christians who can read the Authorised Version, but can't read Greek or Hebrew? They have never pondered this matter seriously, but they accept, in the sense in which such people talk (and we understand what they mean), that the Authorised Version is the word of God. Is that what you mean by the Churches at large, or are you talking about the scholars who could read Hebrew, or knew of the Hebrew? If it is the latter, they were not by any means all agreed.

2. If this principle is true, I must ask why must one limit oneself to the first four centuries? What's so magical about the number 'four'?

Well, of course, there is the plain fact—and I'm not being facetious, that if you go beyond the first four, you'll run into the great controversies of Jerome and all such other scholars who sided with Jerome against the view that Barthélemy holds.

And anyway, what about that large number of English-speaking churches that have adhered to the Authorized Bible for many years? Does that not count? I must come to something more basic and I'm not going to say what the Churches accepted in the first four centuries. Is there not a distinction, as a matter of *fact*, between the attitude observable in the New Testament and that observable in many of the scholars like Tertullian, Origen and Augustine?

What about the writers of the New Testament?

Augustine, and certainly Origen, would have accepted the Greek translations as authoritative and inspired. What about the writers of the New Testament? We observe, for instance, that they do quote the Septuagint, but not always. In particular, there is this interesting thing. In New Testament times there were two translations of the book of Daniel. There was the so-called Septuagint translation and another, called (perhaps wrongly) *Theodotion's translation*, in AD 150. They weren't both Septuagint. What their relation is the one to the other is still a matter of discussion and investigation; but sometimes the New Testament quotes the one and sometimes it quotes the other. It cannot, therefore, be established that the New Testament writers regarded the so-called Septuagint translations as always the authoritative ones to the exclusion of any others.

And why would some of the writers of the New Testament quote, not Septuagint of Daniel, but Theodotion of Daniel? They don't tell us why, of course, but it is plain to see that

Theodotion's translation in certain crucial verses of Daniel is much nearer the Hebrew than is the Septuagint translation. In some places the Septuagint translation of Daniel is not much more than deliberate gibberish.

And if, therefore, some of the New Testament writers and others would have preferred Theodotion's translation because it was nearer the Hebrew, then have we admitted the very principle that Barthélemy would wish to banish? Moreover, it wasn't just one or two writers in the New Testament; it would appear that the vast majority of Christians in New Testament times later eventually abandoned the Septuagint translation of Daniel altogether and took over the Theodotion one.

Barthélemy knows that, of course. On his principle that you accept what the Church accepted, he accepts Theodotion; but that shouldn't relieve us from inquiring why they preferred Theodotion, more nearly representing the Hebrew than the Septuagint, which was wide of the Hebrew.

The Jewish revision of the Septuagint

Then, as we know, the Jews revised their Septuagint; so that some so-called Septuagint manuscripts are no longer original Septuagint, but Septuagint as revised by Jews to conform nearer to the Hebrew. Now, which manuscript did the Church accept? They accepted one that was nearer the Hebrew. What are we to deduce from that? Barthélemy's answer is that we accept the texts of Septuagint that the major centres of Christendom accepted.

But then the Jews eventually translated, direct again from the Hebrew, other translations. For instance, Aquila's (circa AD 130) and that of Symmachus (late second century). Did the Church not know about these other translations? Yes, they knew; even Augustine knew about them. What does Augustine say about these other translations by the Jews, then? Well, he tells the people to read them, use them, and profit by them as they may; but in the last analysis they must accept the Septuagint translations. Why would he prefer Septuagint to these other Jewish translations?

'Well,' says Augustine, 'Aquila and Symmachus were a one-man effort; whereas the Septuagint was translated by seventy men. If it comes to choosing between them, you couldn't put any one man's authority over against the authority of seventy ancient expert translators.' Alas for the argument, for here Augustine is dependent on the most unreliable legend. There weren't seventy translators, which Barthélemy knows. It's a difficulty, isn't it?

What did Augustine do when the manuscripts differed?

And then there was another difficulty that Augustine had to face: the Septuagint had been translated into Old Latin. What do you do when the Old Latin manuscripts disagree? As they did; for the Old Latin translations existed in all sorts of revisions. So, when the revisions disagreed, what did you do?

Says Augustine, 'You must consult the Greek from which they were translated, for the Greek from which they were made is the authoritative thing.'

But someone would have said, 'Well, now you must apply the same argument to the Greek, and what do you do when the Greek manuscripts differ?'

Logic would have had it that you consult the Hebrew; but not Augustine. We come with Augustine, as with Barthélemy, to what really is their basic principle. It's simply this, that

the church fathers accepted the Septuagint, and there's an end of the matter. Beyond them, they would not go.

Why did Augustine think that the Septuagint was inspired?

The answer is that the idea didn't originate with him; it originated with certain Jews in Alexandria, and notably Philo (25 BC–AD 50). He held that the translators were all inspired. Miraculously, they all produced the same thing. Though they were shut up in pairs in different cells, they all produced the same thing, word for word; and Augustine takes over from him the notion that the translators of the Septuagint were inspired.

But if you listen to Philo, he will tell you that the evidence that they were inspired is as follows. Philo didn't know the original language, but those who did, and could read both the original and the Greek, would tell you, says Philo (get out your handfuls of salt to take with this next statement!), that the Greek corresponds with the original language word for word, noun for noun, verb for verb exactly. And for Philo that's the evidence that it is inspired.

The earlier account of the origin of the Septuagint given to us by Aristeas, the duke, doesn't even claim it was inspired; but demands for it certain canonicity as an authoritative translation because all the elders in Alexandria have said so. But if you ask Aristeas, 'why is it to be regarded as authoritative?' he will tell you that the translation was made by great scholars and was absolutely exact. It represents the Hebrew perfectly, and, what's more, it was based on an exceedingly reliable text, because they got it from Jerusalem from the high priest. The men who did the translation were authorised by the high priest of Jerusalem. So their translation was authorized from Palestine; it was one hundred percent correct, and the Greek translation represents exactly what the Hebrew said. Hence it is authoritative.

Augustine takes the notion, then, from Philo, that the Hebrew was inspired, and turns it on its head. It's not now, as with the Jews, 'it's inspired, because it is an exact translation of the Hebrew.' With Augustine it's, 'it's inspired and therefore it doesn't matter whether it represents the Hebrew or not.' Well, that's a funny twist in the argument, and a very difficult twist to follow.

The Septuagint

Now I come finally to the nature of the Septuagint; and in particular its relation to Hebrew Old Testament, and to such things as targums[6] and midrashim[7].

First of all, Jews like Philo and Aristeas, particularly Aristeas, never did claim even canonicity, let alone inspiration, for anything more than the Greek translations of the Pentateuch. As we have seen, Augustine wanted to claim it for all the Greek translations of the whole of the Old Testament, and the Apocrypha as well. No Jew ever did that, not even in Alexandria. Why didn't they do it? When Aristeas was claiming canonicity for his Old

[6] A targum is an ancient Aramaic paraphrase or interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, of a type made from about the first century AD when Hebrew was ceasing to be a spoken language.

[7] A midrash is an early Jewish interpretation of, or commentary on, a Biblical text.

Testament Greek translation of the Pentateuch, he must have known of the existence of other translations of other bits of the Old Testament, but he didn't make any claim for them.

A near contemporary of Aristeas, the grandson of Ben Sira, told the world that the rest of the books, as of the law itself, contains a lot of very poor translation. When he translated his grandfather's work into Greek, he said, 'Please excuse it, because it's very difficult to put it into Greek.' When we now begin to recover some of the Hebrew original behind Ben Sira's translation, we find what the man is talking about. It differs from the Greek considerably. He apologized because he found it very difficult to put the meaning of the original Hebrew into Greek, but Augustine and Barthélemy would wish us to accept that translation as inspired. It's a little difficult, isn't it, when the actual translator says it isn't very good?

Barthélemy's references to Second Maccabees that I quoted earlier are difficult, are they not? For the author of Second Maccabees tells us himself that it's a very poor thing that he's done. He was writing, perhaps from Palestine, to the Jews of the Dispersion in Alexandria, and he confesses that his book is very poor. No Jew of Alexandria would have taken it as inspired when they got it, with that thing at the end (see page 7.) It is very difficult now, later, just because certain church fathers accepted it, to believe it is inspired, when the writer himself virtually tells you it isn't. And the same could be said of First Maccabees, as you well know and therefore I'll leave it.

There are in the Greek versions various degrees of targumic translation and of midrash and I end with this. I would want to say that what you find in the Septuagint is a very different thing from what you find in the books of Chronicles. Chronicles may indeed have taken material over from the books of Samuel and Kings and issued this in new form; but when you look at the books of Chronicles you will discover that they are a literary work *in their own right*. They never did purport to be a translation of First and Second Samuel and Kings; they didn't even claim to be an edition of it. It can be demonstrated by their literary structure that they are a literary work in their own right.

In the same way, it seems to me, as our Gospels. Whatever view you hold of the synoptic problem; whether you still hold to the view that Matthew depends on Mark, or Mark on Matthew, and Luke on somebody else; you will observe from the literary structures of these books that they are literary works *in their own right*, and that, of course, is how they have been taken.

The Greek translations of the canonical books never pretended to be anything of the sort. They are translations and commentaries, sometimes on targumic translations, and in places midrashic commentary upon Old Testament Scripture. And, therefore, I would want to urge that the analogy between them and the book of Chronicles and our Gospels is not valid.

All sorts of other things I was going to say, but the clock tells me I must not; and therefore, approaching the season of Lent, I must fast and restrain myself from the length of my lectures. I now look forward to hearing what you have to say—and I mean that sincerely; and how you react as theologians to some of the arguments that Barthélemy has adduced.

About the Author

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