



Biblical Scholarship and the Church

A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority

Edited by

Allan K. Jenkins

and

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ASHGATE e-BOOK

BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND THE CHURCH

Conflicting claims to authority in relation to the translation and interpretation of the Bible have been a recurrent source of tension within the Christian church, and were a key issue in the Reformation debate.

This book traces how the authority of the Septuagint and later that of the Vulgate was called into question by the return to the original languages of scripture, and how linguistic scholarship was seen to pose a challenge to the authority of the teaching and tradition of the church. It shows how issues that remained unresolved in the early church re-emerged in first half of the sixteenth century with the publication of Erasmus' Greek-Latin New Testament of 1516. After examining the differences between Erasmus and his critics, the authors contrast the situation in England, where Reformation issues were dominant, and Italy, where the authority of Rome was never in question. Focusing particularly on the dispute between Thomas More and William Tyndale in England, and between Ambrosius Catharinus and Cardinal Cajetan in Italy, this book brings together perspectives from biblical studies and church history and provides access to texts not previously translated into English.

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Biblical Scholarship and the Church

A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority

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List of Abbreviations

- ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1994 (1885).
- ASD *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1969–.
- BBKL Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexicon
[www.bautz.de/bbkl].
- CHB1 *The Cambridge History of the Bible. Vol. 1 From the beginnings to Jerome*, edited by P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- CHB2 *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 2. The West from the Fathersto the Reformation*, edited by G.W.H. Lampe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Contemporaries* *Contemporaries of Erasmus. A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, 3 vols, edited by Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas Deutscher, University of Toronto Press, 1985–7.
- CT *Concilium Tridentinum: diariorum, actorum, epistolarum, tractatum nova collection*, ed. Societas Goerresiana, Freiburg in Breisgau, Herder, 1961–.
- CWE *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969–.
- CWM *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961–.
- Ep. Epistle
- KJV *King James Version*, 1611.
- NPNF *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Edinburgh: T&T Clark/ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1996 (1892).

NRSV

*New Revised Standard Version, 1989.**OxfordDNB**Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com>].

PG

Patrologia Graeca, edited by J.P. Migne, Paris, 1857–66.

PL

Patrologia Latina, edited by J.P. Migne, Paris, 1844–64.

Introduction

Pilate wrote his title, and put it on the crosse: The wrytynge was, Jesus off nazaret, kynged off the iewes ... And it was written in hebrue, greke, and latyn
(John 19:19–20; William Tyndale's *New Testament*, 1526)

At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Latin Vulgate had enjoyed unrivalled authority as the Bible of the western church for over 800 years. Its supremacy was aptly symbolised when in 800^{CE} the first Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne, was formally presented with a copy of it at his coronation, and its continued dominance was demonstrated by the fact that it was the first book ever to be printed in Europe, in Gutenberg's magnificent edition of the early 1450s. When the rise of renaissance humanism led, in the sixteenth century, to claims that the Vulgate should yield its supremacy to the original languages of scripture shock waves reverberated throughout Europe. The question of whether as a translation the Vulgate could have greater authority as Christian scripture than the text in its original languages became a point of sharp disagreement between traditionalists and followers of the new learning, and was one on which opposing views were taken by the catholic church and the newly formed churches of the Reformation.

The issues which troubled the western church in the sixteenth century, concerning the translation and interpretation of the Bible were, however, not new. They were endemic to Christianity from the time that it first took root in the Greek speaking world and adopted as its own a Greek translation of sacred scripture. The Septuagint or 'Seventy', as it came to be known, originated in the third century ^{BCE} as a translation of the Jewish Torah from Hebrew into Greek, but in subsequent Christian use the term came to include the whole of the church's Old Testament. The translation of the Torah (Pentateuch) into Greek was the first translation of a major corpus of sacred scripture into the language of another culture and, given the authority invested in the Torah, it gave rise to the question of what authority could be accorded to a translation, and on what basis. The adoption of the Septuagint as the church's canonical scripture led, in turn, to the same question being asked concerning the authority of the Christian Bible in translation, namely, was it possible for a translation to have as great an authority as the original? The question arose first in relation to the Greek Old Testament and then in relation to the Latin version of the whole of the Bible.

The question was first addressed by the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*, which purported to give an eyewitness account of the origin of the Septuagint. In the original version of *Aristeas* the translation was described as the product of scholarly consensus, but in subsequent versions of the story the claim was introduced of

miraculous agreement between the 70 translators working independently, thus according to the translation the authority of divine inspiration.¹

Following the breach between Judaism and Christianity, Judaism had, by the end of the first century CE, committed itself to the supreme authority of its sacred scriptures in their original language of Hebrew (or for parts of Ezra and Daniel, Aramaic), but within the Christian church the continuing use of the Septuagint was strongly defended. Drawing upon the enhanced version of *Aristeas* it was claimed by Origen (c. 185–254CE) and by Augustine of Hippo (354–430CE), that the Greek translation was inspired in its own right, even where it differed from the Hebrew. Jerome (c. 340–420CE), on the other hand, held to a minority view that translation was a matter of linguistic scholarship rather than inspiration, and in his Latin version of the New and Old Testaments he adopted the *ad fontes* procedure of according controlling authority to the original languages. These differing views of whether a translation of scripture could be authoritative in its own right remained unresolved in the early church and re-emerged with new force in the sixteenth century in relation to the Vulgate, when humanists revived Jerome's claim of primacy for the original languages.

The question of whether greater authority should be accorded to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament or to the Septuagint also led to divergent views as to whether the Old Testament canon should be restricted to that of the Hebrew scriptures, or should include the additional 'apocryphal' books included in the Septuagint. Jerome, who saw authority as vested in the original languages, inclined to the former: Augustine, who defended the church's tradition, held to the latter. Although in practice the additional books continued to be included in the Latin Vulgate, this also was a matter which remained unresolved in principle until the sixteenth century, when the additional books were pronounced canonical by the Catholic church at the Council of Trent in 1546, but rejected or given only limited acceptance by churches of the Reformation. Likewise the canonicity of certain books of the New Testament, notably, 2 Peter, 2–3 John and Jude and the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, matters which were disputed in the early church, were again raised in the sixteenth century in debates between humanist scholars and defenders of the church's traditional acceptance of their authenticity.

The claim that the authority of scripture was vested in the text in its original language also had implications for interpretation that was based on a translation, especially where the translation differed from the original. Perhaps because Jerome's was practically a lone voice in claiming ultimate authority for the text in its original language this never became a serious issue in the early church, and when it came to interpretation, even Jerome himself had continued to make use of the Septuagint in his commentaries. It was not until the sixteenth century that the claim that in matters of interpretation it was the text in its original language that had over-riding authority caused serious difficulties for the church. By then the universal use of the Vulgate in the western church over many centuries had gained for it a position of supreme authority, with some even claiming that it was inspired in its own right as a

1 See Schwarz (1955) who in his study of the subsequent development of the two views labelled them as 'philological' and 'inspirational'.

translation. A number of doctrines and practices had been defined on the basis of its wording, and claims by humanist scholars that its translation was in places defective had serious consequences for its authority and for the authority of the church which based its teaching upon it. When, following the revival of interest in ancient languages by renaissance humanism, Erasmus in his Greek–Latin New Testament of 1516 applied Jerome’s *ad fontes* method to both translation and interpretation, not only was the authority of the Vulgate called into question, but also that of the church itself, which had for so long based its doctrine and teaching upon it. Reformers were quick to exploit this to support their rejection of beliefs and practices that were not rooted in scripture in its original languages.

Alongside the revival of interest in the original languages of the Bible, there was also in the early sixteenth century a renewed interest in the works of the early Christian writers. Erasmus in particular was involved in the production of new printed editions of the writings of many of the leading thinkers of the early church, including Origen, Jerome, and Augustine. This was in furtherance of the aim of restoring the Bible, and especially the New Testament as the source of all truth, to the heart of Christian theology. In order to foster an inner renewal of the life of the church, humanists sought to get behind medieval scholasticism to the integration of biblical interpretation and spirituality which they saw exemplified in the early Christian writers. They deplored what they regarded as the subordination of scripture to abstract theological discussion and to the precise definitions of logic and dialectic by the scholastic theologians who were the church’s official arbiters of interpretation. Instead, they found in the early church a manner of interpretation which linked the interpretation of the Bible with spiritual growth and moral development, from which they believed all could benefit, at least to some degree.

Consequently Erasmus also advocated universal access to the Bible by means of vernacular translation. Despite the fact that it was to facilitate widespread access to scripture in the vernacular that both the Septuagint and the Vulgate were first produced, in the medieval period unmediated access to scripture by the uneducated had not been encouraged within the western church. Unauthorized vernacular translations, like those of John Wycliffe and his followers in fourteenth-century England, were ruthlessly suppressed, and manuscript copies could only be afforded by the better off who had the benefits of education. By the sixteenth century, however, the printing press was making possible the mass production of affordable vernacular translations. The church found it increasingly difficult to prevent direct access to scripture by an increasingly literate laity, or to suppress translations deemed heretical, especially that of Tyndale in 1526 against which Thomas More took up his pen. Translations which allowed lay people to judge for themselves whether or not the traditions and practices which the church held to be essential for salvation had any basis in scripture were a challenge not only to the Vulgate, but also to the claim of the catholic church to have sole authority in the interpretation of scripture. That claim was rejected by the reformers. They likewise rejected the equal authority that the catholic church accorded to unwritten tradition alongside scripture, and took their stand on the authority of scripture alone.

There have been numerous studies of the crucial role of the Bible in this turbulent period of the history of the church in western Europe. They have tended, however, to concentrate either on the impact of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, or on the detailed history of texts and translation. Less has been written concerning the challenges to authority of the new philological approach of according primacy to the original languages of scripture, of vernacular translation, and of the freeing of interpretation from the control of medieval scholastic theology.² As Duerden has put it:

We still prefer to discuss early translations of the Bible as if they were rendered in a separate realm of aesthetics and language alone. In our modern treatises on the translations of the sixteenth century, particularly in our discussion of early English Bibles, we too have talked primarily about philological accuracy and stylistic beauty in the texts, while all around and through those texts swirl the perils and promises of conviction – of both kinds – and of ideology, authority, and power.³

Accordingly, it is to the issue of authority in relation to the translation and interpretation of the Bible that the present study is devoted. It seeks to show how the early church's use of scripture in translation opened up questions concerning authority in relation to translation and interpretation that remained unresolved at the time. It traces how these questions resurfaced in Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century when renaissance humanism, typified by Desiderius Erasmus, sought to restore primacy to the original languages of the Bible. It then gives detailed attention to developments in England where the ensuing debate became entangled in Reformation issues, and to that in Italy between Thomas de Vio Cajetan and Ambrosius Catharinus which centred more on the clash between the new linguistic approach and the church's traditional teaching.

In Part I, Chapter 1 explores how the use of scripture in translation by the early church opened up the question of authority in relation to translation, and introduces the related question of authority in interpretation. It looks first at the Septuagint and its defence as a translation in the *Letter of Aristeas*, and then examines how the work of Origen and Jerome in relation to scripture in its original languages gave rise to further issues concerning the locus of authority in translation and interpretation.

Chapter 2 introduces the pivotal work of Erasmus epitomised by his New Testament of 1516, and Chapter 3 examines the issues involved in his debates with traditionalist critics. The chapters show how the question of where ultimate authority lay in the translation and interpretation erupted with new force in consequence of his adoption of the philological approach of renaissance humanism, and they demonstrate the challenge that the return to the original languages of scripture represented to the authority both of the church's official theologians and also of the Vulgate.

2 A notable exception is Evans (1992). Certain aspects of the issue are also discussed by Bainton (1972), Duerden (2000) and McGrath (2004), especially pp. 121ff.

3 Duerden (2000), p. 9.

Chapter 4 studies the English debate between William Tyndale and Thomas More concerning Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament, while Chapter 5 considers the related issue of Tyndale's denial of the inerrant authority of the catholic church in the interpretation of scripture and More's response.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the issues of authority in relation to vernacular translation and the return to the original languages of scripture in Italy, the fount of renaissance humanism. They trace disagreements between the fellow Dominicans Ambrosius Catharinus and Thomas de Vio Cajetan engendered by the latter's publication of commentaries based on the original languages of the Bible, as well as considering arguments concerning vernacular translation.

Chapter 8 draws out the conclusions which emerge.

The study draws extensively on the writings of the scholars concerned. Whereas there is an abundant material available in English concerning the writings considered in Chapters 1 to 5 (by Allan Jenkins), this is not however the case with those of Catharinus and Cajetan. Because very little of their work is accessible in English, in Chapters 6 and 7 (by Patrick Preston) a more detailed account is given of the documents examined, and Part II presents a selection of them in English translation by Patrick Preston, as well as two key texts of Erasmus not so far available in English. It also includes a set of extracts relating to the interpretation of Matthew 16:16–19, a key text concerning the authority of the pope, by various of the scholars studied.

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PART I
THE DEBATES

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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 given 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 *exultabo 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.

Chapter 2

Erasmus and the Return to the Original Languages of Scripture

When Desiderius Erasmus (c.1467–1536)¹ published his *Novum Instrumentum* in 1516 it represented the crowning achievement of his concern to bring renaissance humanism into the service of the Christian religion. It contained the first printed edition of the New Testament in Greek ever to be published, it set out in a parallel column his own revision of the Vulgate on the basis of the Greek text, and it included a set of detailed annotations explaining his emendations. The edition was widely welcomed by like-minded humanists, but Erasmus' revival of Jerome's *ad fontes* approach of according primacy to the original languages of the Bible was seen by the theological establishment to pose a grave threat to authority of the church and of its official teachers.

In the first place, the Greek text, and more particularly Erasmus' own Latin version of it,² posed a challenge to the Vulgate, which had hitherto enjoyed undisputed authority in the western church. Furthermore, according greater authority to the Greek where it differed from the Latin threatened to undermine teachings and doctrines of the church which depended upon the wording of the Latin translation. As Pierre Cousturier was later to put it:

... if in one point the Vulgate were in error the entire authority of Holy Scripture would collapse, love and faith would be extinguished, heresies and schisms would abound, blasphemy would be committed against the Holy Spirit, the authority of theologians would be shaken, and indeed the catholic Church would collapse from the foundations.³

Secondly, the publication of the New Testament was intended by Erasmus to restore the Bible to the heart of Christian life, to return theology to its biblical roots, and to free the interpretation of scripture from the deadening grip of scholastic philosophy. This wider aim was set out in the first of the four Prefaces, the *Paraclesis*, in which Erasmus also advocated widespread vernacular translation in furtherance of what he termed the 'philosophy of Christ'. It issued in his own *Paraphrases* of the New Testament and his commentaries on a number of psalms. Scholastic theologians,

1 For a discussion of the place, date of birth and parentage of Erasmus, see Schoeck (1990), Ch. 2 and App. A, and for other details of his life the biographies by Huizinga (2001) [1924], Halkin (1993) [1969], Bainton (1972), Tracy (1972), Augustijn (1991), McConica (1991), Tracy (1996), and the literature surveyed in Mansfield (2003).

2 See Jonge (1984) who argues that the inclusion of the Greek text was incidental to his purpose of presenting the Latin New Testament in a revised form.

3 Pierre Cousturier [Petrus Sutor], cited by Bainton (1972), pp. 167–8.

however, who regarded themselves as the only properly qualified interpreters of scripture, saw the proposal that uneducated laity should have unmediated access to scripture as endangering the church's teaching and undermining its authority. Although Erasmus did not himself produce any vernacular translation, his advocacy of it was taken up by the reformers, with William Tyndale in England, like Luther in Germany, using Erasmus' Greek text as the basis for his translation of the New Testament.

It was never, however, Erasmus' intention to question the authority of the church, nor to rupture its unity as the reformers were to do by claiming supreme authority for scripture alone. With others of his generation, he was eager to see the catholic church reform itself, but he remained loyal to it throughout his life. What drove him was a passionate conviction that the Bible made possible a personal encounter with Christ that could bring about personal transformation and an inner renewal of the life of the individual Christian, of the church, and of society.

Humanism and Biblical Scholarship

When Erasmus later looked back on his early life, he wrote of a natural inclination he had felt in his school days towards 'humane studies': 'a sort of inspiration fired me with devotion to the Muses, sprung not from judgment (for I was then too young to judge) but from a kind of natural feeling'.⁴ Such an inclination does not seem to have been encouraged by the Brethren of the Common Life from whom he received his education.⁵ Yet his attraction to the elegant Latin style of classical writers, especially Cicero, and his delight in Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae* could not be suppressed, and he became convinced of the value of 'good letters' for Christian theology. He also retained, throughout his life, an appreciation of the wisdom of ancient classical writers in their understanding of human life, and frequently cited them as authorities in his own writings.

The Brethren of the Common Life was a lay order with a particular concern to promote knowledge of the scriptures. At their hands Erasmus was nurtured in the *Devotio Moderna* and its spirituality of the imitation of Christ, the continuing influence of which is evident from his subsequent writings.⁶ At the same time, it may well have been the Brethren of the Common Life, sometimes known as 'Hieronymiani' or 'the order of St Jerome' for their devotion to the saint,⁷ who introduced Erasmus to the work of Jerome. So deep was the admiration that Erasmus developed for Jerome's Ciceronian eloquence and linguistic ability that he seems consciously to have modelled his own scholarly image on him.⁸ By invoking the writings of Jerome, whose authority as a doctor of the church was universally accepted, Erasmus could also claim unassailable precedent for pressing pagan classical literature into

4 Preface to the *Antibarbarians*, Ep. 1110, written in 1520; CWE7, p. 305.

5 Cf. Schoeck (1990), Ch. 5.

6 See Mandrow (1979), pp. 66–77.

7 On the cult of Jerome during the Renaissance, see Rice (1985), Chapter 3.

8 See Hall (1970), pp. 82ff; Rice (1985), pp. 132–3; Jardine (1993), pp. 73ff, Olin (1994).

the service of Christian piety, and for integrating Christian piety with eloquence of style. Yet essentially Jerome was a biblical scholar, and it was not long before Erasmus was also looking to Jerome as an authority for careful study of the original text of scripture and for accuracy in its translation. The work of freeing the text of Jerome's letters from corruptions and errors which had accumulated through years of manuscript copying was carried on by Erasmus alongside his work on the Greek text of the New Testament, and his edition of Jerome's letters was published in the same year as his New Testament. Time and again, when facing criticism, he claimed Jerome as an authoritative precedent for his own revision of the New Testament on the basis the earlier scholar's *ad fontes* method.

Biblical interpretation: Erasmus' debate with John Colet

It seems to have been his meeting at Oxford with John Colet (c. 1467–1519) during his first visit to England in 1499 that provided the catalyst for the synthesis Erasmus was seeking between humanist studies and Christian scholarship. During a break from the study of scholasticism at Paris, with its disdain of good Latin style and preoccupation with logic and dialectic,⁹ it came as a liberating experience for Erasmus to be welcomed into a circle of like-minded humanists. He described them as 'profound and learned and classical, in both Latin and Greek', and he struck up lifelong friendships with Thomas More and John Colet.¹⁰ In his first surviving letter to John Colet after leaving England, he wrote in 1504 that:

I am now eager, dear Colet, to approach sacred literature full sail, full gallop; I have an extreme distaste for anything that distracts me from it, or even delays me ... Hereafter I intend to address myself to the Scriptures and to spend the rest of my life upon them.¹¹

John Colet had come to Oxford in 1496 after studying with humanist scholars in Italy, and his lectures on Romans were attracting a great deal of interest.¹² Erasmus became deeply engaged in discussion with him concerning the interpretation of Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Their discussion of it, which was initially continued in correspondence, was later worked up by Erasmus into a published tract, *A short debate concerning the distress, alarm and sorrow of Jesus*.¹³ This was Erasmus' first venture in print into biblical interpretation and it is of importance in revealing an approach to exegesis which was to remain characteristic of his treatment of scripture in his later writings.

9 Ep. 64 to Thomas Grey in 1497; CWE1, pp. 135–138.

10 Ep. 118; CWE1, pp. 235–6. On his friendship with More, see Reynolds (1965).

11 Ep. 181; CWE2, p. 86.

12 See J. Colet, *Works*, ed. and trans. J.H. Lupton (1867–76). On Colet, see Trapp, *Contemporaries*, Vol. 1, pp. 324–8, *OxfordDNB* (2004) and the biographies by Lupton (1887) and Gleason (1989).

13 Eps. 109, 110, 111; CWE1, pp. 206–19. The tract *Disputatiuncula de taedio, pavor, tristitia Iesu* [= *De taedio*], translated into English and annotated by Michael J. Heath is published in CWE70, pp. 1–67.

The issue concerned the interpretation of the agonised prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, when, on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus asked God to remove from him the cup of suffering.¹⁴ For Colet, Christ's acceptance of death on the cross was integral to his saving purpose, and it was inconceivable that he would shrink from it; to show fear would mean his love was less than perfect. He maintained that Jesus was not seeking to avoid martyrdom, but was praying for the Jews who would be incurring guilt and bringing destruction upon themselves if they put him to death. For Erasmus, the meaning was more straightforward and the passage showed Jesus as sharing the human fear of suffering.¹⁵ Both Colet and Erasmus appealed to the authority of earlier theologians. Erasmus had most of them on his side, including Ambrose, Augustine and Athanasius. Colet could appeal only to Jerome's commentary on Matthew,¹⁶ but even so this meant that the matter could not be conclusively resolved by the appeal to past authorities. Reasoned argument, insofar as it was based on the understanding of human life, also produced stalemate. For Colet, since many Christian martyrs had faced death bravely, it seemed unlikely that Christ would not match up to their standard. For Erasmus, with his devotion to the imitation of Christ, the picture of Christ sharing in human weakness was more appealing.

The decisive factor for Erasmus was his judgement that Colet's explanation in terms of Christ's sorrow over the Jews was implausible when the text was read in relation to its context or 'circumstances'. Thus, he writes, 'no preceding or simultaneous or subsequent fact gives occasion for even the shadow of any such inference, but on the contrary all the circumstances unite to proclaim a very different conclusion'. He drives home the point by comparing other instances of the use of 'cup', all of which relate to the cup of suffering which Jesus had to drink.¹⁷ Colet's view, on the other hand, had no support in the context, and flew 'in the teeth of the very words of the text'.¹⁸ Similarly, in *De taedio* Erasmus counsels Colet to 'Take the rhetoricians' advice and summarize what happened earlier, what took place at the time and what followed'.¹⁹ This was a principle which Erasmus was to set out explicitly in the *Methodus*, the second preface to his New Testament of 1516. Whatever the balance of past authorities for or against an interpretation, what carried the greatest authority for Erasmus was the actual wording of the text when read in relation to its context.

14 Mark 14:36; cf. Seebohm (1869), pp. 116–25, Lupton (1887), pp. 101–104, Rabil (1972), pp. 42–43, Bainton (1972), p. 76, Lochman (1989), Schoeck (1990), pp. 227–31.

15 Ep. 109; CWE1, pp. 206–11.

16 Ep. 111; CWE1, pp. 213–14. Jerome's interpretation is based on the parallel passage in Matthew 26:39.

17 Ep. 111, CWE1, pp. 215–16.

18 Ep. 111, CWE1, p. 217.

19 *De Taedio*, CWE70, p. 18.

Biblical interpretation: Application to life

Despite their disagreement, Erasmus shared with Colet, and perhaps derived from him, a manner of interpretation which might be termed ‘rhetorical appropriation’. Recent work on the history of interpretation has traced the development in the late medieval period of a rhetorical manner of interpretation in which readers are drawn into the text in subjective ways, so that ‘Any well-intending reader could insert himself into the conversation of God, prophets, apostles, and saintly commentators, inserting himself into a textual scene’ and hoping to ‘experience its very emotions’.²⁰ Colet in his commentaries presented Paul in human terms with which anyone could connect, sometimes moving explicitly from Paul’s thought to its application to ‘us’. So, for example, commenting on 1 Corinthians 5:8, he writes, ‘Led *us* feed, therefore, on the sincerity of Christ; let *us* imitate him and walk as he walked, wisely, simply, with justice and innocence ...’.²¹ A similar approach can be seen in Erasmus’ expositions of the psalms.²² In his *Exposition of Psalm 1* (1515), for instance, he concentrated on drawing out the moral application to Christian believers, while his commentary on Psalm 14, entitled *A Deliberation Concerning War with the Turk*, is related to a pressing political issue of the day.

Such an approach was ‘rhetorical’ in the double sense of relating a biblical text both to its literary context and also to the experience of life of those for whom the commentary was intended.²³ It stood in sharp contrast to the dialectical approach of scholasticism, which often took texts out of context as proofs for pre-determined doctrines. As Seebohm put it:

The scholastic divines, holding to a traditional belief in the *plenary* and *verbal* inspiration of the whole Bible, and remorselessly pursuing this belief to its logical results, had fallen into a method of exposition almost exclusively *textarian*. The Bible, both in theory and in practice, had almost ceased to be a record of real events, and the lives and teaching of living men. It had become an arsenal of texts; and these texts were regarded as detached invincible weapons to be legitimately seized and wielded in theological warfare, for any purpose to which their words might be made to apply, without reference to their original meaning or context.²⁴

However, while such an approach may have characterized the handling of scripture in doctrinal works of scholastic theologians, a fairer comparison can be

20 Ocker (2002), p. 217.

21 O’Kelly and Jarrott (1983), pp. 118–19; italics added.

22 Erasmus published works on 11 of the Psalms between 1515 and 1536; see J.B. Payne in McKim (1998), p. 188. For his interpretation of the Psalms, see Béné (1978); Dominic Baker-Smith, CWE63, pp. xiii–lxxii; Jenkins (2000); Heath (2001).

23 The ‘seminal nature’ of Erasmus’ rhetorical procedures is pointed out by Shuger (1998), pp. 19–21. The part played by rhetoric in Erasmus’ approach to scripture is analysed in detail by Hoffmann (1994). See also the earlier studies of Aldridge (1966), Bouyer (1969), Payne (1969), Torrance (1989).

24 Seebohm (1869), p. 29. Seebohm’s remarks apply primarily to the use of scripture in the theological writings of the scholastics. In their biblical exegesis the contrast is less stark.

made with actual commentaries. Thomas Aquinas produced a considerable number, the study of which has been eclipsed by that of his doctrinal works,²⁵ and it is instructive to compare his handling of the psalms with that of Erasmus. Both Aquinas and Erasmus were concerned with the application of the psalms to their own day, but whereas Aquinas inclined towards instruction of the intellect, Erasmus sought to transform the hearts of his readers. The difference in emphasis can be seen, to take but one example, in their respective commentaries on the opening words of Psalm 1: 'Blessed is the man who has not departed into the counsel of the wicked'.²⁶

Aquinas' approach is systematic, characterised by numbered points and sub-points. The connections established in this way are derived from the structure and content of the psalm, but they are organized in a logical fashion and expressed in abstract categories in a detached academic style:

In the way of evil men, three things are to be considered.

First, deliberation about sin, and this is in cogitation.

Second, there is consent and execution.

Third, inducing others to something similar, and this is the worst.

First he presents the counsel of evil men, where he says 'Blessed the man' etc.

He says, 'who does not go out', because as long as a man is deliberating, he is going.²⁷

Erasmus makes a much more immediate connection with the experience of his readers. He links the description of wickedness to be avoided to the human inclination to turn away from God, but counterbalances it with the positive ideal of imitating him:

'blessed is the man who has not departed'. When we imitate God, we draw nearer to him; when we do not, we drift away from him; our inclinations are like feet that carry us towards him or away from him. That explains why the prodigal son, at odds with his father, 'departed' into a distant land.²⁸

In part the differences between the two commentators are due to different readerships, with Aquinas addressing an academic audience and Erasmus having a wider application in mind. More fundamentally, however, they reflect differing understandings of the place of scripture in Christian life and consequently of the aims of interpretation. Aquinas' analysis of sin as involving deliberation, consent and execution sets out an intellectual understanding of the process involved, whereas Erasmus links what the psalm portrays to behaviour and inclinations known to his readers from human examples and personal experience.

25 See K. Froehlich in McKim (1998), pp. 86ff; Weinandy (2005).

26 *Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum ...* Both Aquinas and Erasmus base their comments on the Vulgate's *abiit* 'go from' rather than the Hebrew 'walk' (*halak*).

27 Translated by Hugh McDonald; <http://www.niagara.edu/Aquinas>.

28 CWE63, p. 15.

In the *Praise of Folly* (1509) Erasmus presented a parody of a sermon based on the scholastic approach,²⁹ and in the commentary on Psalm 1 he contrasted it with his preferred approach in very negative terms:

Those who approach the mystic writings seeking ammunition for their frivolous debates are not ‘meditating on the Lord’s law’. Those who grow old among their niggling, inquisitive, and never-ending *quaestiones* are not ‘meditating on the Lord’s law’. But someone who disregards everything else and approaches the fountain-head that is Holy Scripture, thirsting only to improve himself, to be transformed into Christ, to drink in his Spirit, seeking high and low, yearning for the Spirit alone: such a person truly ‘meditates on the law of the Lord’.³⁰

Underlying the two approaches were different concerns regarding salvation. The scholastics believed that right belief was essential for the salvation of the believer and for the safeguarding of the church from the danger of heresy, and they interpreted scripture in ways which related it to the truth of essential doctrines.³¹ For Erasmus, the more pressing need for Christians in his day was inner renewal, and he saw scripture as a primary means of access to the transforming power of Christ.³²

Erasmus’ encounter with Colet at Oxford resulted in his first public expression of a view of scripture and an approach to its interpretation which he subsequently developed in the *Enchiridion* and the prefaces to his New Testament. Its emphasis on moving the heart rather than instructing the mind, of inculcating moral transformation rather than right belief, was to set him in lifelong conflict with scholasticism and with the theological establishment which claimed sole authority in the interpretation of scripture. Within a few years of their first meeting, however, Erasmus came to diverge significantly from Colet over the necessity of studying the New Testament in its original language. In the meantime, he published what has been described as his greatest tribute to Colet, the *Enchiridion*.

The Philosophy of Christ: The *Enchiridion militis christiani*

Erasmus’ first published statement of his conviction of the authority of scripture for Christian life was the *Enchiridion militis christiani*, ‘The Handbook of the Christian soldier’,³³ which was published in 1503 in the same volume as *De taedio*. This was

29 *Praise of Folly*, trans. Betty Radice (1971), pp. 169ff.

30 CWE63, p. 30.

31 On the different aims of scholastics and humanists in interpretation, see Amos (2003).

32 For Erasmus’ treatment of language as praxis primarily aimed at moving the reader to action, see Barnett (1996).

33 The *Enchiridion* was first published in the *Lucubratiunculae* by Martens of Antwerp in February 1503. See CWE2, p. 51, which also describes the circumstances of writing. English

the first public expression of his vision of a theology which re-integrated scripture with the practice of Christian discipleship, his ‘philosophy of Christ’ (*philosophia Christi*) as he was to call it. It took as its starting point St. Paul’s metaphor of the armour and weaponry of the Christian soldier in Christ’s service (Ephesians 6:11–17),³⁴ and, in typical Erasmian fashion, *enchorion* could mean either a ‘handbook’ or a ‘dagger’.³⁵ It has been described as ‘the first announcement of a message ... to which Erasmus was to remain absolutely constant throughout his life’:³⁶

It stated all his future policy: his vision of the classical world as preparing the mind for the revelation of God, his vision of a practical Christianity based on knowledge of the Gospel and the spiritual understanding of a purified heart, his denunciation of the worldly and profiteering elements in the religious organisations of his day, especially of the monastic orders, his conviction that religion is an attitude of mind and an ethical code based on reverence of a Person, his insistence on the practical outcome of all belief.³⁷

The introductory letter (Ep. 164), later incorporated into the printed work, sets out in essence the main lines along which Erasmus developed his philosophy of Christ. Its aim was the attainment of ‘a state of mind worthy of Christ’, to ‘grow up in him and come to perfect manhood’, after the image of Christ himself. Fundamental to this ‘road to virtue’ is the reading of Scripture, and spending time in the company of ‘the holy prophets and Christ and the apostles’, especially Paul.³⁸

Erasmus described the work as setting out ‘a way of life, not a programme of study’,³⁹ but there is nevertheless at the outset a programmatic statement of the importance of scripture and of his understanding of the proper method of interpretation.⁴⁰ Apart from this ‘digression’ the bulk of the manual consists of an analysis of human nature and practical guidance for the avoidance of vice and pursuit of virtue, set out as a series of 22 longer or shorter rules and a series of ‘remedies’ against lust, ambition, arrogance and revenge.

After the battlefield has been mapped out in terms of the struggle with temptation within and the assaults of evil from without, scripture is introduced together with prayer as one of two principle weapons in the Christian’s armoury:

translations by Ford Lewis Battles in Spinka (1953), pp. 295–379, Raymond Himelick (1963), John P. Dolan (1964), pp. 24–93, Anne M. O’Donnell, SND (1981) and by Charles Fantazzi (1988) from the 1519 Schürer edition in CWE66, pp. 24–127.

34 CWE66, pp. 37f.

35 For the evidence of the identification of the courtier for whom it was intended with Johann Poppenrutyer of Artois, an armaments manufacturer, see Ferguson, CWE2, p. 51.

36 Phillips (1949), pp. 47–8; see also Bainton (1972), p. 86. O’Malley notes also that Erasmus ‘never thought any substantial revision or retraction of it necessary’, but points out that it remained an early work in that his later pleas for peace and for the poor are barely found; CWE66, pp. xlii–xliv.

37 Phillips (1949), p. 53.

38 Ep. 164; CWE2, pp. 52–3.

39 CWE66, p. 36.

40 CWE66, pp. 30–38.

if you dedicate yourself entirely to the study of the Scriptures, if you meditate day and night on the law of the Lord, you will have no fear, day or night, but you will be protected and trained against any attack of the enemy.⁴¹

The value of scripture lay in providing ‘knowledge’, and the source of this knowledge, like the manna with which Israel was fed in the wilderness, is God.⁴² Scripture thus reveals ‘heavenly wisdom’; it consists of ‘oracles ... that have issued from the holy of holies of the divine mind’.⁴³ This wisdom was made known on earth by the incarnate Christ, embodied in his person, and exemplified by his cross – itself a potent demonstration that what the world counted as wisdom was folly in the sight of God.⁴⁴

As knowledge scripture works in two ways. First, in relation to outward conduct and the attitudes which motivate it, ‘it fortifies the intellect with salutary opinions’,⁴⁵ that is, it provides the mind with a storehouse of ideas with which to combat temptations to worldliness and sin. It also gives access to the teaching and example of Christ as the model of piety to imitate: ‘Our example is Christ, in whom alone are all the patterns of the holy life. You may imitate him without any exception’.⁴⁶ Second, it inwardly illuminates the mind with the knowledge of the highest good, and can lead to pure intellectual contemplation of God, which brings about inner transformation.⁴⁷ As a practical guide to Christian living rather than a devotional manual, it is moral conduct that is the predominant concern of the *Enchiridion*, but there is also reference to the power of scripture, to make its reader feel ‘inspired, moved, swept away, transfigured in an ineffable manner’.⁴⁸

Scripture, because of its divine origin, is the touchstone of truth: ‘Be assured that there is nothing so true, nothing so certain and beyond all doubt ... than what you read in these writings’.⁴⁹ Scripture is thus the standard by which the insights of pagan classical writers must be judged. These continue to have value because all truth is Christ’s,⁵⁰ but only in so far as the truth they embody conforms to scripture. Thus, ‘the authority of the philosophers would be of little effect if all those same teachings were not contained in the sacred Scriptures, even if not in the same words’.⁵¹ The *Enchiridion* thus marked a decisive step in Erasmus’ quest to integrate the wisdom of classical antiquity with Christian revelation.

41 CWE66, p. 33; see also p. 32.

42 CWE66, p. 32.

43 CWE66, p. 34.

44 CWE66, pp. 38–9, 55.

45 CWE66, p. 31. See also, pp. 84ff for the ideas of the mind as the driving force of moral conduct.

46 CWE66, p. 86, see also p. 84.

47 See, for instance, CWE66, pp. 65ff, 84.

48 CWE66, p. 34.

49 CWE66, p. 55.

50 CWE66, p. 36.

51 CWE66, p. 47.

For Erasmus ‘All sacred scripture is divinely inspired and has proceeded from God, its author’.⁵² It provided a means of penetrating the mind of Christ:

Just as nothing is more like the Father than the Son, the word of the Father emanating from the innermost recesses of his spirit, so nothing is more like Christ than the word of Christ uttered in the innermost sanctuary of his most holy mind.⁵³

Its authority therefore derived from that of Christ himself.

As well as setting out his conviction of the primacy of scripture for the life of a Christian, the *Enchiridion* also gives a brief sketch of what Erasmus considered to be the best method of interpretation for those who turned to scripture as a source of spiritual nourishment rather than as material for academic debate.⁵⁴ In particular, if the power of scripture to nourish and transform Christian life was to be effective, it was essential to penetrate beyond the husk into the spiritual core of scripture. In this respect, Erasmus advises following the interpreters ‘who depart as much as possible from the literal sense, such as, after Paul, Origen, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine’.⁵⁵ He recognises that there may be those who ‘for lack of mental capacity’ are unable to move beyond the literal sense of scripture, but they should not be despised while those endowed with ‘good mental abilities’ should seek, with Christ’s help, to do better.⁵⁶ The *Enchiridion* shows that for Erasmus spiritual interpretation meant more than seeking out the traditional four senses of scripture. It was linked also, as for Origen, with the soul preferring ‘higher things’ and allowing itself to be lead heavenwards.⁵⁷

The Philological Principle: The Return *ad fontes*

By the time that Erasmus began to write the *Enchiridion* in 1501 he had already embarked on the study of Greek.⁵⁸ A letter written earlier in the year (Ep. 149) contains his earliest explicit reference to the need to return to the original languages of scripture. ‘Latin scholarship, however elaborate’, he wrote:

is maimed and reduced by half without Greek. For, whereas we Latins have but a few small streams, a few muddy pools, the Greeks possess crystal-clear springs and rivers that run with gold.⁵⁹

The metaphor that he uses here points to his adoption of the same *ad fontes* principle that governed the work of his exemplar Jerome on whose writings he was

52 CWE66, p. 32.

53 CWE66, p. 72.

54 CWE66, p. 35.

55 CWE66, p. 34.

56 CWE66, pp. 35–6.

57 See, for example, CWE66, pp. 41ff, 67.

58 See his letter to Jacob Batt of 11 December 1500; Ep. 138; CWE1, p. 295.

59 Ep. 149 to Antoon van Bergen; CWE2, p. 25.

working at the time.⁶⁰ Writing to John Colet in 1504 he gave the need to improve his Greek as the main reason for abandoning his commentary of Romans, even though it had by then extended to four volumes,⁶¹ and he also expressed his belief that knowledge of Greek was important for the study of scripture because ‘it is one thing to guess, another to judge; one thing to trust your own eyes, and another again to trust those of others’.⁶²

Henceforth, for Erasmus authority in interpretation was to be dependent on interpreting scripture on the basis of its original languages, and on the exercise of scholarly judgement in the application of textual and linguistic study. His conviction of the necessity of such an approach received further impetus from his chance discovery in 1504 of the annotations on the New Testament by the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla (c. 1406–1457), which he published the following year.⁶³

Valla's annotations

In seeking to resolve the many variations and errors which had over the centuries crept into manuscripts of the Vulgate, Valla gave precedence to Greek manuscripts. Secondly, even when there were no variations in the Latin, Valla proposed corrections when he judged that the Latin was a mistranslation of the Greek, or to improve upon it when he considered that the Vulgate translation obscured the sense. Thirdly, he found the key to accurate meaning in the philological study of words in their historical context, that is, in their use by ancient classical authors and the early Christian writers. Valla's approach was enthusiastically embraced by Erasmus, and used in his own revision of the Vulgate published in his New Testament of 1516.

One of the criticisms against which Erasmus defended Valla was the ‘intolerable presumption in a grammarian ... to let his impertinent pen loose on Holy Scripture itself’.⁶⁴ This was a criticism later directed against himself, and he argued that there could be no question that the ‘whole business of translating scripture is manifestly a grammarian's function’. He contested the view ‘that the whole business of interpretation depends on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit’.⁶⁵ Against such a view he brought to bear no less an authority than Jerome himself:

60 Ep. 139, to Batt of 12 December 1500; CWE1, p. 295.

61 Ep. 181; CWE2, pp. 86–7.

62 Ep. 181 to John Colet in 1504; CWE2, pp. 88–9.

63 On Valla see Charles Trinkhaus, *Contemporaries*, Vol. 3, pp. 371–5 and the literature cited there. Shortly after publishing his *Elegantiae* of 1442, which had so impressed the young Erasmus, Valla turned his attention to the New Testament. In 1444 Valla first circulated his notes as *Collatio novi testamenti*, but while at Rome between 1453 and 1457 he produced a revised edition which became better known. On his annotations see Bentley (1983), Chapter 2, pp. 32–69; see also Schwarz (1955), pp. 132ff, Holeczek (1975), pp. 82–9, Bentley (1977). Erasmus's Preface was also published separately as Ep. 182; CWE2, pp. 89–97.

64 Ep. 182, CWE2, p. 93.

65 Ep. 182, CWE2, p. 94.

it is one thing to be a prophet, another to be a translator. In the one case the Holy Ghost prophesies the future; in the other scholarship, together with the resources of language, conveys the meaning it apprehends.⁶⁶

Erasmus also defended Valla from the disrespect he was accused of displaying towards revered past authorities, and from charges of ‘savaging’ writers of his own day whom he considered lacking in sound scholarship. In his support Erasmus argued against the acceptance without question of the views of contemporary writers simply because of their popularity or prestige, or because of a desire to flatter or please. Authority for Erasmus rested upon sound learning rather than simply office or reputation. Over against the unquestioning acceptance of the authority of past scholars he set the authority of scholarly judgement, informed by constructive debate between scholars committed to seeking the truth on the basis of evidence. Running through Erasmus’ preface, therefore, there are clear indications of a fundamental paradigm shift in the nature of authority in general, and, less explicitly, the issue of where authority lay in the interpretation of scripture in particular.

Valla’s work also marked what has been described as ‘a sort of paradigm shift’ in New Testament scholarship by inaugurating the philological tradition,⁶⁷ but it was not until the publication of his work by Erasmus that the importance of his historical and philological methods for biblical scholarship gained wider recognition.⁶⁸ Despite, or perhaps because of, Erasmus’ defence of Valla’s approach, during the counter reformation Valla’s *Adnotationes* was nevertheless, like some of Erasmus’ own works, placed on the 1559 Roman *Index of Prohibited Books*.

Erasmus’ acceptance of Valla’s philological approach to the New Testament meant that all the principles that were to govern his own future work on the Bible were established.⁶⁹ For Erasmus, scripture was the source of Christian truth and of transforming power in Christian life. It was to be translated on the basis of its original languages, and in the case of the New Testament that meant that its interpretation was to be determined on the basis of the meaning of the Greek words in their historical context. Translation was not a matter of inspiration but of linguistic scholarship, and both translation and interpretation were to be determined by the exercise of scholarly judgement on the basis of empirical evidence.

66 Ep. 182, CWE2, p. 94. See above, p. 20.

67 Bentley (1983), pp. 68–9; see also Bentley (1977), p. 28.

68 Nauert (1995), p. 40.

69 Holeczek (1975), pp. 85ff.

The New Testament of 1516

Erasmus' edition of the New Testament, a book of some one thousand folio pages was published by Froben of Basel on 7 March 1516.⁷⁰ This first edition was entitled *Novum Instrumentum*, perhaps to distinguish it from the Vulgate, which many thought of as *the* New Testament.⁷¹ Despite the production being rushed it was a considerable achievement, which made available for the first time a printed edition of the New Testament in Greek,⁷² alongside which in a parallel column was Erasmus' own revision of the Vulgate based upon it. An opening dedication to Pope Leo X (1513–1521),⁷³ set the whole enterprise within the context of Erasmus' philosophy of Christ, and was followed by three further prefaces addressed to readers, the *Paraclesis*, the *Methodus*, and the *Apology*.

A set of explanatory *Annotations* with its own preface formed a second part of the work.⁷⁴ They put Erasmus' textual and philological research into the realm of public scholarship, and provided a helpful tool for those with less knowledge of Greek. They were also intended to prevent further corruption of the Latin text by recording the evidence for Erasmus' revisions. Subsequent editions, renamed *Novum Testamentum*, followed in 1519, 1522, 1527, and, with only minor alterations, 1535. In the 1519 edition, the *Methodus* was substantially expanded into the *Ratio verae theologiae*,⁷⁵ and Erasmus added a new preface *Against his morose and captious critics*.⁷⁶ The edition of 1522 provided the basis for Luther's German New Testament and for William Tyndale's English translation. Although he did make some changes to the Greek and Latin texts in the later editions, it was the annotations that continued to form the main thrust of Erasmus' subsequent work; he went on expanding and developing them up to the time of his death, partly by the incorporation of additional textual material and partly in response to points raised by his critics.⁷⁷

70 For a summary of the process, see James K. McConica, CWE3, pp. 216–21.

71 Screech, pp. xvii–xviii in Reeve (1986).

72 The New Testament volume of the *Complutensian Polyglot* was already printed but not published until 1522.

73 On Leo X and Erasmus' correspondence with him, see D.S. Chambers in *Contemporaries*, Vol. 2, pp. 319–22.

74 The first explicit reference to Erasmus' New Testament *Annotations* comes in a letter of 1514, in which he writes that he had revised the whole of the New Testament from Greek and Latin manuscripts and had annotated it in over a thousand places; Ep. 296; CWE2, p. 300. These notes, which he brought with him to Basel that year, had been put together over a number of years by comparing such Greek and Latin manuscripts as were available to him, and it seems likely that Erasmus was set on the path of producing his own following his discovery and publication of Valla's manuscript. On the genesis of the *Annotations*, see Rummel (1986), pp. 20–26; Screech, pp. ix–xiv in Reeve (1986); McConica, CWE3, pp. 195–8.

75 A summary is provided by Hoffmann (1994), pp. 32–9, though with barely a mention of the necessity of biblical languages.

76 *Capita argumentorum contra morosos quosdam ac indoctus*. For a discussion, see Rummel (1988).

77 See Rummel (1986), pp. 181–5.

The Dedication to Pope Leo X

Erasmus had received a friendly welcome from the future Leo X, Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, when he reached Rome in 1509 after receiving his doctorate from the University of Turin. They shared a common enthusiasm for the revival of classical learning, and, as Pope, Leo continued to be a leading patron of the arts and humanities; he made provision for the teaching of Greek in Rome and was responsible for the first book in Greek to be printed in the city. Erasmus had received permission in 1515 to dedicate to him his edition of Jerome,⁷⁸ but in a last minute change of mind Erasmus dedicated the edition, published shortly after the New Testament in the summer of 1516, to the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham,⁷⁹ and instead, dedicated his New Testament to the Pope.

In the dedication, Erasmus set out three inter-related aims: The first was the furtherance of his philosophy of Christ by which he hoped to restore scripture to the heart of theology and Christian life:

our chiefest hope for the restoration and rebuilding of the Christian religion, our sheet-anchor as they call it, is that all those who profess the Christian philosophy the whole world over should above all absorb the principles laid down by their Founder from the writings of the evangelists and apostles ...⁸⁰

These writings, however, were, Erasmus believed, much more than a record of past events. They provided the means for a living encounter with Christ himself, for in them:

that heavenly Word which once came down to us from the heart of the Father still lives and breathes for us and acts and speaks with more immediate efficacy, in my opinion, than in any other way.⁸¹

Secondly, Erasmus enunciated the principle of returning to the original sources:

I perceived that that teaching which is our salvation was to be had in a much purer and more lively form if sought at the fountain-head and drawn from the actual sources than from pools and runnels.⁸²

On the basis of this *ad fontes* principle, he continues:

I have revised the whole New Testament (as they call it) against the standard of the Greek original, not unadvisedly or with little effort, but calling in the assistance of a number of manuscripts in both languages, and those not the first comers but both very old and very correct.⁸³

78 Permission was sought in May 1515, Ep. 335; CWE3, pp. 99ff. It was granted in a letter of 10 July 1515, Ep. 338; CWE3, pp. 139ff.

79 The dedication was also published separately as Ep. 396; CWE3, pp. 252–66.

80 Ep. 384; CWE3, p. 222.

81 Ep. 384; CWE3, p. 222.

82 Ep. 384; CWE3, p. 222.

83 Ep. 384; CWE3, pp. 222–3.

Thirdly, he explained that he had set out the reasons for his changes:

I have added annotations of my own, in order in the first place to show the reader what changes I have made, and why; second, to disentangle and explain anything that may be complicated, ambiguous, or obscure; and lastly as a protection, that it might be less easy in future to corrupt what I have restored at the cost of scarcely credible exertions.⁸⁴

By this means he was enabling other scholars to exercise their independent judgement on the basis of empirical evidence.

William Warham was quick to let Erasmus know of his approval of the dedication to the Pope.⁸⁵ If it was important for Erasmus to be able to claim the support of the Pope for his New Testament when it was first published, however, such authoritative backing became all the more important after 1517 when critics accused Erasmus of lending support to Luther. Accordingly, when Leo's formal approval of the *Novum Instrumentum* was sent in September 1518, it was given a prominent position at the front of later editions.⁸⁶

The *Dedication to Leo X* was followed by a series of further prefaces in which his three aims were developed. The first, the *Paraclesis*, set out Erasmus' philosophy of Christ. The next, the *Methodus*, expressed the *ad fontes* principle of according ultimate authority to the original languages of the Bible for its translation and interpretation. The third was an *Apology* which anticipated criticism from the conservative establishment, of which he had received warning shortly before publication from the Louvain theologian Martin Dorp; many of its points were echoed in the preface to the *Annotations* which followed the text of the New Testament.

The Paraclesis – scripture as the source of the philosophy of Christ

In the *Paraclesis* Erasmus set out his conviction of the centrality of scripture for the Christian life, and exhorts all Christians to devote themselves to the study of it.⁸⁷ The *Paraclesis* has been described as 'one of the great classic statements of Erasmus' biblical humanism'.⁸⁸ It is undoubtedly biblical, since it is devoted to commending the universal study of scripture, but is humanist only in a qualified sense, with faith taking its place alongside learning. It opens with a dazzling display of humanist eloquence, in which Erasmus demonstrates his mastery of classical learning. The purpose of this, however, was to convince his readers that any truth found in classical writings is at best partial, and that the fullness of truth lies in 'the philosophy of Christ' as revealed in scripture. Erasmus deplores the fact that while other writings, whether of pagan philosophers or Christian theologians, were studied with diligence, the study of scripture was neglected. Yet it is Christ who alone brings salvation

84 Ep. 384; CWE3, p. 223.

85 Ep. 387; CWE3, p. 229.

86 Ep. 864; CWE6, pp. 106–108.

87 English translation in Olin (1987), pp. 97–108, from which citations are taken in what follows. Olin's translation is from the Latin edition of Holborn (1933), pp. 139–49. The Latin text with French translation is also available in Delègue and Gillet (1990), pp. 66–89.

88 Olin (1987), p. 97. See also Carrington (2002), pp. 37–9.

from heaven, his teaching is found only in scripture, and it requires faith rather than learning for it to bring about transformation in human life.

For Erasmus, there can be no other foundation for human life than Christ himself. He is the source of heavenly teaching and the model for human life, and it is scripture that gives access to his teaching. Christ and scripture are thus the twin themes which lie at the heart of the *Paraclesis*. Of Christ, he writes that ‘He alone was a teacher who came forth from heaven ... the sole author of human salvation ... He alone is able to grant whatsoever He has promised’.⁸⁹ He describes Christ’s teaching as ‘a new and wonderful kind of philosophy’ because ‘in order to transmit it to mortals, He who was God became man, He who was immortal became mortal, He who was at the heart of the Father descended to earth’.⁹⁰ His thoughts here echo key points of the Nicene Creed, and show that his understanding of scripture was, in effect, governed by the Rule of Faith.⁹¹

At the same time, it was scripture alone that gave access to the teaching of Christ. It ‘may be drawn’, he continues, ‘from its few books as from the most limpid springs’, with much less labour than is expended on the conflicting interpretations of Aristotle.⁹² Christ did not teach ‘such intricate doctrines that they could scarcely be understood by very few theologians, or as if the strength of the Christian religion consisted in men’s ignorance of it’.⁹³

The fundamental ideas of this philosophy of Christ had already been set out in the *Enchiridion*, but the *Paraclesis* goes further in recognising the need for vernacular translations, and in advocating that they should become widely available:

I would that they [the Gospels and Pauline Epistles] were translated into all languages so that they could be read and understood not only by Scots and Irish but also by Turks and Saracens . . . Would that, as a result, the farmer sing some portion of them at the plow, the weaver hum some parts of them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveler lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind! Let all the conversations of every Christian be drawn from this source.⁹⁴

This rhetorical flourish might seem to suggest that Erasmus considered the perspicacity of scripture to be such that even non-Christians could read it with profit. His position was, however, not quite so simple, and in the *Paraclesis* it is qualified in two ways. First, there may not be need for great learning in order to understand Christ’s teaching, but there was need of piety: ‘Only bring a pious and open mind, possessed above all with a pure and simple faith’.⁹⁵ Secondly, lack of learning was

89 Olin (1987), p. 99.

90 Olin (1987), p. 100.

91 For Erasmus’ exposition of the essential articles of faith, see his colloquy, *Inquisitio de Fide* (1524); Thompson (1950) and his *Explanation of the Apostles’ Creed* (1533); CWE70, pp. 231–387.

92 Olin (1987), p. 100. See, for example, the four commentaries of Cajetan on Aristotle, published in 1506, and his refutation of the Averroist interpretation; cf. Wicks (2002), pp. 270–71.

93 Olin (1987), p. 101.

94 Olin (1987), p. 101.

95 Olin (1987), p. 100.

compensated for by Christ's ability to match his teaching to the level of those who received it. Christ's teaching 'accommodates itself to all, lowers itself to the little ones, adjusts itself to their measure, nourishing them with milk, bearing, fostering, sustaining them, doing everything until we grow in Christ'.⁹⁶

It was his view of scripture as a means of enabling all Christians growing to maturity in Christ that governed Erasmus' desire to free scripture from the grip of scholastic theologians. He was not, however, advocating vernacular translation in order to provide the laity the means by which to judge the clergy, or arguing for the centrality of scripture in order to challenge the doctrine of the Church, as Luther and Tyndale were to do, but because of his desire that scripture should bring about transformation in the lives of individual Christians and inner renewal of the life of the Church. Thus he writes that:

he is truly a theologian who teaches not by skill with intricate syllogisms but by a disposition of mind, by the very expression and the eyes, by his very life that riches should be disdained, that the Christian ... must rely entirely on heaven, that a wrong should not be avenged, that a good should be wished for those wishing ill ...

In the paragraph from which these words are cited, Erasmus provides a model of Christian living drawn in summary form from the teaching of the New Testament. He concludes that 'if anyone exemplifies this doctrine in his life itself, he is in fact a great doctor'.⁹⁷

Such words were a challenge to the authority of the church's official teachers, to theologians who claimed that they alone had the necessary theological expertise to interpret scripture, as well as to preachers invested with the power to expound scripture for the laity in accordance with doctrinal orthodoxy. By emphasising the application of scripture to life and by extending the title 'doctor' to all Christians who sought to put scripture into practice in their lives, Erasmus was undermining the claim of official theologians to sole authority in scriptural matters. He was also setting out a different approach to salvation. For scholastic theologians unmediated access to scripture by uneducated laity was likely to lead to errors in interpretation, thus putting in peril their own salvation and exposing the church to the danger of heresy. For Erasmus, however, it was scripture rather than 'syllogistic propositions' that held the key to salvation,⁹⁸ both because it gave sole access to the teaching of Christ during his earthly life and, above all, because it provided the medium for a transformative encounter with Christ in the present. He ends the *Paraclesis* with a call to value scripture and be transformed by it as containing 'the living and breathing likeness' of Christ:

these writings bring to you the living image of His holy mind and the speaking, dying, rising Christ Himself, and thus they render Him so fully present that you would see less if you gazed upon Him with your very eyes.⁹⁹

96 Olin (1987), p. 100.

97 Olin (1987), p. 102.

98 Olin (1987), p. 103.

99 Olin (1987), p. 108.

Such a view of the essential place of scripture in salvation relativised all claims to exclusive authority over its interpretation by theologians. It also located supreme authority in scripture, as in effect bearing the authority of Christ himself. By the devout study of the philosophy of Christ embodied in scripture humans, from the simple to the most learned, could be transformed by Christ who is both its supernatural source and is also revealed in its pages as a model to imitate.¹⁰⁰ Faith and piety rather than formal theological training were necessary for this to happen.

The Methodus – the right method of biblical interpretation

In the *Paraclesis*, Erasmus made an appeal to all classes of people to imbibe scripture as the living source of the truth that was in Christ. In the *Methodus* he sets out a programme of education for ‘a theologian of the people’, a programme that is rooted in the study of scripture, and which equips the student with skills not only of translation but also of understanding and interpretation.¹⁰¹ As in the *Enchiridion*, a fundamental requirement for the right interpretation of scripture is a pure mind, free from ‘the tumult of desires’, and a ‘thirty soul’. Likewise the aim of studying the sacred mysteries, ‘the food of the soul’, is spiritual transformation: ‘Make this one vow to be changed, to be seized, to be inspired, to be transformed in those things which you are learning’.¹⁰²

At the head of the programme of studies, and here Erasmus moves beyond the programme earlier sketched in the *Enchiridion*, is the requirement of the study of the three biblical languages Latin, Greek and Hebrew, ‘because it is agreed that all the mystery of Scripture is made known by them’. He does not advocate great expertise in the biblical languages, but sufficient competence to make sound judgements: ‘Nor do we demand that you are taken forwards by the miracle of eloquence: it is enough if you progress towards a certain neatness and discrimination, a mean, which suffices for making judgements’.¹⁰³ No-one advanced in years should despair of achieving this; at the age of 49, Erasmus himself was still returning to Hebrew. Anyone who was too old should nevertheless be prudent enough to draw upon the support of those who were skilled in languages.¹⁰⁴

The basic argument of Erasmus for the necessity of competence in the original languages of scripture was that ‘understanding what is written is impossible if we do not know the language in which it is written’.¹⁰⁵ This was the fundamental principle on which he took his stand in the controversy that ensued. It was a principle which cut to the heart of scholastic theology, which based its interpretation and the articulation of the church’s doctrine on the Vulgate, and it implied that those without the knowledge

100 For the power of the printed word to transform lives and fashion identity, see Greenblatt (1980), pp. 86–7.

101 An English translation by Patrick Preston is provided in the Documents Section below. The Latin text with French translation is given by Delègue and Gillet (1990), pp. 96–123.

102 *Methodus*, para. 3.

103 *Methodus*, para. 4.

104 *Methodus*, para. 7.

105 *Methodus*, para. 4.

of biblical languages had less authority in biblical interpretation than those who did. That conservative scholars were already aware of this threat to their authority had already been signalled by a cautionary letter from Martin Dorp. Accordingly, Erasmus goes on to justify the need for biblical languages with a combination of empirical reasons and more apologetic considerations.

In response to those who said 'Jerome's translation is enough for me', Erasmus argues that Jerome himself had pointed out that each language has linguistic peculiarities 'that cannot be expressed in a different language so as to retain the same light, their native grace and equal emphasis'. So, too, return to the original sources is necessary because there are 'certain things that are too minute' for translation and the changes Jerome made cannot be sufficiently understood without knowing the evidence in the original languages. In addition, there were 'many things which, restored by Jerome have been lost by the injury of time'.¹⁰⁶ He invokes the authority of 'papal decrees' that the truth of the Old Testament is to be sought in its Hebrew sources and of the *New Testament* in the Greek, even though Jerome's translation was already in existence,¹⁰⁷ and he asks why, if Jerome's translation were sufficient, so many theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, had fallen into error.¹⁰⁸ Although, in the manner of the time, Erasmus invokes past authorities, his arguments rest predominantly on the basis of empirical evidence, to the extent that he is prepared to criticise so esteemed a figure as Aquinas.

After justifying the need for trilingualism, Erasmus goes on to commend a number of ancillary disciplines which might be of use to 'the young man destined for theology'. The list comprises 'dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, astrology, and 'the knowledge of natural things'. Particular importance is accorded to natural sciences and to rhetoric. Knowledge of biblical locations and historical context brings scripture to life, illuminating 'not only the situation but also the origin, customs, laws, religion and character of the peoples about whom the action is narrated or to which the apostles write'.¹⁰⁹ Rhetoric is commended for its power of judgement and the appreciation it enables of biblical figures of speech and poetics.¹¹⁰ Further, he argues that to arrive at a true understanding of scripture requires attention to literary context:

it is not sufficient to be able to select four or five words. He [the interpreter] must examine where what is said originated; to whom it is said; when; on what occasion; in which words; what went before it; and what came after. For, assembling and pondering these things one may grasp the exact meaning of what is said.¹¹¹

106 *Methodus*, para. 5.

107 *Methodus*, paras 5. The reference is apparently to the decrees of Clement V, following the Council of Vienne in 1312. This was often used by Erasmus as a claim for pontifical authority for using scripture in its original languages, for example in Epistle 149, CWE2, p. 26 and Ep. 182; CWE2, pp. 95–6, but the three languages were Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean (Aramaic).

108 *Methodus*, para. 6.

109 *Methodus*, para. 9.

110 *Methodus*, paras 10, 12.

111 *Methodus*, para. 20.

The method of biblical interpretation which Erasmus sets out in the *Methodus* is deliberately contrasted to that of scholastic theologians. In Erasmus' view their approach to interpretation meant subordinating the authority of scripture to their own preconceived ideas, or distorting scripture in defence of customary practices. He urges the would-be theologian not to imitate them:

And let him not imitate certain men who are not ashamed to twist the oracles of divine wisdom to strange meanings, sometimes completely opposite. There are some men who carry around decrees and force the sacred scripture into subservience to these, when the decrees of the soul are to be sought from scripture.¹¹²

By rejecting the subordination of scripture to philosophical schemes, and arguing that it is scripture properly interpreted in relation to its original language and context that should rather form the basis for Christian theology, Erasmus was again challenging the position of the scholastic theologians who claimed supreme authority over the interpretation of scripture.

The programme which is set out in the *Methodus* is not simply one for biblical interpretation, but is seen by Erasmus as a programme for the education of a theologian. The foil for Erasmus' educational programme for a Christian theologian was, as ever, scholasticism. At various points, he draws scathing comparisons between the type of theology represented by his own philosophy of Christ, rooted in scripture and issuing in pious living, 'engaged with those things which really breathe out Christ, which burn, which live, which teach and exhibit true piety', with the continual preoccupation of scholasticism with 'things meagre, frigid, meretricious, thorny or squabbling'.¹¹³ The source of true theology was scripture; from the fountains of the sacred writings 'the entire theology – the only real theology – gushes forth'.¹¹⁴ To those who objected that his programme of theological education was insufficient preparation for the 'scholastic wrestling school', he responded that not all the questions with which scholasticism was concerned were essential to salvation, and he questioned whether 'by the nicest minutiae and the subtlest subtleties of the moderns one pagan had been converted to faith in Christ, or one heretic had been reconquered and transformed'.¹¹⁵ If it were not possible for both scholasticism and the philosophy of Christ to be mastered then, Erasmus confessed, 'I would prefer to be a pious theologian with Jerome than to be an unconquered theologian with Scotus'.¹¹⁶ He concluded the *Methodus* with:

He whom the scholastic contests please should follow what is accepted in the schools. But if someone more desires to be instructed in piety than in disputation he should first and foremost be very well versed in the sources, and well-versed in these writers who most closely drank from these sources. What has been lost in syllogisms prayer will counterbalance.¹¹⁷

112 *Methodus*, para. 18.

113 *Methodus*, para. 23.

114 *Methodus*, para. 22.

115 *Methodus*, paras 24–26.

116 *Methodus*, para. 25.

117 *Methodus*, para. 26.

Although Erasmus does not in the *Methodus* directly reject scholastic theology, the programme for biblical interpretation which is set out in the *Methodus* relegated scholasticism to third place after his own Christian philosophy and the theology of the Fathers,¹¹⁸ and posed a threefold challenge to the authority of the theological establishment. First, it challenged reliance on the Vulgate without reference to the original languages of scripture, and subordinated scholastic expertise to that of linguistic scholars. Second, it called in question the scholastic approach to interpretation, which often took scripture out of context and subordinated it to the non-Christian philosophy of Aristotle. Third, he saw its approach to salvation as smacking of impiety in its lack of concern either to move the heart of the believer or renew the inner life of the church.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, for Erasmus it was not biblical scholarship in itself that conveyed authority, but scholarship allied with godliness and piety, which opened the heart of the interpreter to the transformative effects of the philosophy of Christ. The source of that philosophy was scripture in its original languages.

The Greek and Latin texts of the New Testament

By modern standards the Greek manuscripts available to Erasmus were not very good, and the defects of his Greek text only too apparent. The manuscripts available in Basel for the printers to follow were few and the production rushed.¹²⁰ Erasmus was aware of its deficiencies and sought to make improvements in subsequent editions. The publication of a Greek text was, however, ancillary to his purpose of revising the Vulgate and, that was done on the basis of the annotations he had put together from a much wider range of sources over a number of years. Even so, none of the Greek manuscripts on which he drew pre-dated the tenth century, and almost all represented the Byzantine tradition, now regarded as the least reliable.¹²¹ When it first appeared, however, there was nothing as widely available with which to compare Erasmus' text, and as the first to become available in printed form it was generally welcomed, particularly by humanist scholars. Despite the status it was later accorded, however, it was not intended as a critical edition in its own right.¹²² It nevertheless established the principle, now universally regarded as authoritative, that translation of scripture should be based on the best available evidence of texts in their original languages,¹²³ and it formed the basis of the vernacular translations of Luther and Tyndale.

The publication for the first time of the Greek text of the New Testament was widely welcomed, especially by humanist scholars. The Latin text which was printed alongside it, however, because of the claim that it was closer to the original and more

118 *Methodus*, para. 11.

119 *Methodus*, para. 25.

120 See Hall (1970), pp. 96ff; Bentley (1983), pp. 118–22; Hall (1990), pp. 96–7.

121 Vaganay and Amphoux (1991), pp. 130–2. For the manuscripts used by Erasmus, see Bentley (1983), pp. 125–39; Rummel (1986), pp. 35–42.

122 Screech, pp. xii–xiii in Reeve (1986), *contra* Bentley (1983), p. 114, n.9.

123 See Long (2001), p. 126.

accurate than the Vulgate, roused great controversy. Erasmus was later to plead that he included it only at the last minute and under pressure from his friends. Many scholars subsequently regarded this as a defensive ploy to deflect criticism, but more recent review of the evidence has substantially removed any grounds for doubting it.¹²⁴ Whatever the truth of the matter, it was Erasmus' revision of the received Latin text that brought down upon him the full weight of the conservative establishment in defence of the authority of the Vulgate.

The philological principle defended: The Apology

Even before the publication of the *Novum Instrumentum*, Erasmus had some intimation of criticism in a cautionary letter from Martin Dorp, sent on behalf of the Louvain theologians. Thus after setting out his positive programme for the philosophy of Christ in the *Paraclesis* and for the study of scripture in the *Methodus*, Erasmus turned in the *Apology* to the scholastic establishment itself.¹²⁵

Erasmus' defence of what he was offering scholars in his New Testament was grounded on the premise that ultimate authority is vested in scripture in its original languages and not in translation. He appeals to theologians to recognise the assistance which his work renders those who do not have time to learn the ancient languages 'without which sacred scripture cannot be fully understood',¹²⁶ and makes the point that failure to take account of the original language of the text could lead to error, and he gives specific examples of this.¹²⁷ In response to the accusation of impiety for daring to improve the gospels, Erasmus points out that he fully accepts the authority of the gospels, and that he is making no change to them. His work had to do rather with the translation and transmission of scripture,¹²⁸ and he regarded his restoration of the original text as fully in accordance with the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit had allowed humans a part in the translation and transmission of scripture, so he also allowed scholars to restore on the basis of the original what had subsequently become corrupted.¹²⁹

In the *Apology* Erasmus anticipates that the primary objection to his work will come from those who fear that 'that the authority of the sacred scriptures will be put in doubt if the least change is made' to the Vulgate.¹³⁰ This charge is countered by Erasmus with a battery of empirical evidence. Variations between both past and present manuscripts are undeniable, whether accidental or made deliberately for doctrinal reasons, or as the result of pious additions. Historically, disagreements and

124 Brown (1985), pp. 371–5, followed by Screech p. xxiv in Reeve (1986), Rummel (1986), pp. 23–5.

125 There is currently no English translation. The Latin text with French translation is given by Delègue and Gillet (1990), pp. 128–49.

126 *sine quibus divina scriptura penitus intelligi non possit*; Delègue and Gillet (1990), p. 130.

127 Delègue and Gillet (1990), p. 147.

128 Delègue and Gillet (1990), pp. 141ff.

129 In a section added in 1527; Delègue and Gillet (1990), p. 139.

130 *ne sacrarum literarum autoritas vocetur in dubium, si quid usquam variaverit*; Delègue and Gillet (1990), p. 134.

even contradictory readings in the writing of the early Christian commentators did not damage their unity within the Christian fellowship. Nor was the church plunged into danger when Jerome revised the translation of the Old and New Testaments from the Hebrew and Greek, or when others later put scripture into verse or chant.¹³¹

Erasmus, however, was well aware of the esteem in which the Vulgate was held, both in the affections of those accustomed to hearing it read in worship and by those whose theology was based on the detail of its actual wording. Accordingly he makes the point that he is not seeking to replace the Vulgate, but only to clarify it, and that those who wished to use it in school or church still could.¹³² In this he may, like Jerome, have been seeking to soften the impact of his work, but his whole enterprise was nevertheless driven by his conviction that when compared with the Greek the Vulgate was at some points in error. Whether such errors were due to accidental slips during copying or to faulty translation, for Erasmus, it was the Greek that represented the true text. The inescapable corollary of the principle of according primacy to the Bible in its original languages rather than to a translation was, therefore, to deny the exclusive authority which the Vulgate had enjoyed for so many centuries in the western church.¹³³ This, as subsequent reaction made clear, was anathema to many within the theological establishment.

The *Apology* opens in a manner suggestive of a court room defence against such criticism and, as in the *Preface to the Annotations*, Erasmus makes a strong appeal that his work should not be condemned out of hand without being read.¹³⁴ He pleads that even those who disagree with him should examine the evidence which he set out in the annotations and the authorities he cited, and that if anyone considered his conclusions erroneous they should point it out in a spirit of constructive scholarship. This was in accord with his whole approach of setting out empirical and historical evidence, so that individual readers could exercise their own judgement and reach their own conclusions.¹³⁵ It was an approach which was the antithesis of the procedure of the church's official theologians which, in the exercise of judgements which they believed they alone were equipped to make, was to censure categorically opinions they held to be in error, often without any explanation. By allowing place to the exercise of individual judgement, Erasmus was undermining from another angle the authority exercised by scholastic theologians by virtue of their office.

The Preface to the Annotations

'I have taken what they call the New Testament and revised it ... checking it in the first instance against the true Greek text'.¹³⁶ Thus Erasmus summarised the essence of

131 Delègue and Gillet (1990), pp. 135ff.

132 Delègue and Gillet (1990), pp. 139ff.

133 See McGrath (2004), pp. 121–37.

134 Delègue and Gillet (1990), pp. 129ff.

135 On 'judgement', see Evans (1992), pp. 78–80.

136 Ep. 373 (*Preface to the Annotations*); CWE3, p. 198.

his work on the New Testament, and at the heart of that work were the annotations.¹³⁷ The *Annotations* were keyed to the text of the Vulgate and set out the evidence for the changes Erasmus had made to it. A number of points in the *Preface* reiterate what had already been set out in the *Apology*, but in doing so they give emphasis to key features of his method.

In the *Preface* Erasmus justified his *ad fontes* method on the basis of his philosophy of Christ, arguing that the Greek of the New Testament is the closest it is possible to get to his own words. In correcting evident corruptions in the Vulgate text, he had not, however, he explained, relied entirely on Greek manuscripts, but had also consulted earlier Latin manuscripts, quotations in the early Christian writers, and, with the help of a Hebrew scholar, the underlying Hebrew of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. In addition, he had improved the Latin where its style was poor or its meaning obscure. In the notes, in accordance with the philological principle of determining the meaning on the basis of the original language, when the textual evidence for variant readings was inconclusive or the original Greek ambiguous he set out all the possible meanings.¹³⁸ He also introduced a distinction between Jerome and the Vulgate referring rather to ‘the translator, whoever he was’ in the belief that Jerome left much that he found in the older Latin version unchanged.¹³⁹

One of the reasons that Erasmus gave for setting out the evidence and the various possibilities of interpretation in this way was that he was ‘leaving the final decision to the reader’.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, in relation to the various possible meanings of Romans 1:4, for instance, he writes in the annotation: ‘The right to pass judgement on them and the power of choosing among them both belong to the reader’.¹⁴¹ Unlike scholasticism which sought to give definite answers to disputed matters, he was enabling his readers to exercise their own judgement on the basis of the evidence. At the same time, as the annotations expanded in later editions they continued to be characterised by frequent references to universally approved authorities, principally the early Christian Latin and Greek commentators.¹⁴² His purpose in this, Erasmus wrote in the *Preface*, was ‘that when the intelligent reader has perceived that in certain definite places my correction and their opinion coincide, he may give me his confidence in other places too’.¹⁴³ When, however, the evidence did not support the conclusions of earlier scholars, Erasmus did not refrain from criticism, however great their authority.¹⁴⁴ In taking his stand on the ultimate authority of scholarly judgement based on empirical evidence, Erasmus was calling into question the

137 The annotations are extensively discussed by Rummel (1986). See also the introduction by Hovingh (2000), pp. 1–36 in ASD VI.5. Developments are traced in the facsimile of the Latin text edited by Reeve (1986, 1990, 1993), and in ASD VI.5, VI.6, VI.8.

138 Ep. 373; CWE3, pp. 198–200.

139 Ep. 373; CWE3, p. 200.

140 Ep. 373; CWE3, p. 200.

141 As translated by Rabil (1972), pp. 126–7.

142 For details, see Rummel (1986), Chapter 2.

143 Ep. 373; CWE3, p. 199.

144 Rabil (1972), p. 121. For the use made by Erasmus of the authority of the early Christian writers, see pp. 119–21.

scholastic approach of allowing no ambiguity or any discussion of interpretation by those not qualified as theologians.

Although Erasmus suggests in the *Preface* that his notes would provide all theologians with a useful tool in their work of interpretation, he also asserts the importance of the ‘minutiae’ with which they deal. Questions of essential doctrine could turn upon such detail, and he cites the instance of the importance of a single Greek letter in a dispute in which Cyril of Alexandria was involved in the early church.¹⁴⁵ More controversially, he claimed that he had found it necessary to deal not just with the wording, but also ‘from time to time to open the meaning in its full force’¹⁴⁶ – the work solely, as they saw it, of accredited theologians. The fact that, for Erasmus, the meaning was to be determined on the basis of the Greek meant that in some cases the traditional interpretation based on the Vulgate could not be sustained. This, in practice, was a challenge to the authority of the Vulgate, and it was also perceived as undermining the authority of the church when the interpretation of texts traditionally used as proofs for key doctrines was denied to have any basis in the original Greek. Much of the subsequent controversy of Erasmus with scholastic critics was to turn on detailed matters of this sort.

For Erasmus, ultimate authority rested firmly on the evidence of the Greek text. He affirmed that when differing interpretations of the Greek were possible the one which accorded with the teaching of the church should be preferred.¹⁴⁷ He distinguished, however, between essential articles of belief for which church teaching was authoritative, and matters on which different opinions might be held, and he limited the former to the doctrines enshrined in the Apostles’ Creed.¹⁴⁸ In a number of places, nevertheless, he pointed out that the text did not in its Greek form support the theological position or dogma for which it had traditionally been cited as an authority.¹⁴⁹

Erasmus’ work on the New Testament was driven by his conviction that the source of all truth was Jesus Christ, and that the primary source of Christ’s teaching was scripture. Erasmus believed, therefore, that direct access scripture should not be restricted to qualified theologians able to interpret it in accordance with doctrinal truth, but that the spiritual nourishment contained in the New Testament should be openly available to all, so as to bring about transformation of life in accordance with the teaching and example of Christ. Because the New Testament is the closest it is possible to get to the words of Christ himself, it is the original Greek that is determinative for its meaning and interpretation, and so by extension is Hebrew for the Old Testament. For those not able to learn the biblical languages for themselves, scripture should be made available in vernacular translation.

145 Ep. 373; CWE3, p. 202.

146 Ep. 373; CWE3, p. 202.

147 Annotation on Romans 9:5; see Rabil, p. 126. See also *Methodus*, para. 23.

148 See Thompson (1950), pp. 42–4.

149 See Hovingh (2000), p. 11. Specific examples will be discussed in connection with criticism of Erasmus.

Erasmus' enterprise challenged authority on a number of fronts. His emphasis on the practical application of the Bible to Christian life was a challenge to scholastic preoccupation with right belief and the manipulation of biblical interpretation in accordance with doctrines formulated on the basis of pre-Christian philosophy. His insistence on the primacy of the original languages meant a controlling function in interpretation for 'grammarians', linguistic scholars who may or may not have recognized theological qualifications. His method of setting out the evidence for others to judge for themselves weakened the claim of the theological establishment to the exclusive right of pronouncing upon the true interpretation of scripture. His advocacy of unmediated access to scripture by the laity, and his belief that Christ could grant even to the uneducated a measure of understanding of his teaching, undercut the claim of theological establishment to sole authority in the interpretation of the Bible. Furthermore, Erasmus' claim that when judged by the 'true Greek' the Vulgate could be in error undermined the authority of the catholic church whose councils and theologians had relied upon the precise wording of the Latin for the definition of doctrinal orthodoxy; it disturbed the faith of ordinary believers familiar with its hallowed words from the church's liturgy and teaching, and it outraged both conservative scholars and the less educated who believed the Vulgate to be the inspired work of the saintly Jerome. All of these points were tackled in one way or another by critics from within the conservative theological establishment, and after 1517 the issues became more sharply defined as Erasmus was accused of preparing the ground for Luther to challenge the authority of the catholic church on the basis of scripture.

Chapter 3

Erasmus' Debates with Traditionalists

Criticism and Defence: (1) The Authority of the Vulgate

The first intimation of resistance to Erasmus' revision of the New Testament, even before its publication, came in an exchange of letters with a rising young Louvain graduate, Maarten Dorp (1485-1525).¹ Writing in September 1514 on behalf of the theological faculty, Dorp commended Erasmus' work on Jerome and anticipated that his annotations would be of assistance to theologians, but expressed two fundamental concerns. The first was the damage done to the reputation and authority of the church's official teachers by Erasmus' biting satire in the *Praise of Folly* (1509) of their obsession with abstract philosophical subtleties to the neglect of the application of scripture to life.² The second was the effect on the authority of the Vulgate of according primacy to the Greek text of the New Testament. Dorp shared Erasmus' pleasure in good Latin and had no problem with his improving the Latin style of the Vulgate, but he considered that to suggest on the basis of the Greek that the Vulgate was in error at any point would gravely undermine its authority.³

In response, Erasmus was robust in maintaining his criticism of the direction theology had taken at the hands of the scholastics,⁴ and he was joined in this by Thomas More who wrote to Dorp in his support.⁵ Erasmus urged the younger scholar to take up the study of Greek for himself, but Dorp remained adamant that if it came to a choice between the text of the Vulgate and that of the Greek he would accept the Vulgate as authoritative.⁶ Following the publication of the New Testament in 1516, the concerns heralded by Dorp were taken up by a number of conservative

1 On Dorp and his relations with Erasmus, see Jozef Ijsewijn in *Contemporaries*, Vol. 1, pp. 398–404, and on his controversy with Erasmus see Rummel (1989), Vol. I, pp. 1–13.

2 *Praise of Folly*, para. 53; Radice (1971), pp. 152–163.

3 Ep. 304, September 1514; CWE3, pp. 17–23.

4 Ep. 337, May 1515; CWE3, pp. 111–39. The letters will be referred to from their English translation in CWE3. Ep. 337 is also available in English translation in Olin (1987), pp. 67–96 and by Radice (1971) with the *Praise of Folly*; it is an expanded printed version of the original shorter letter now lost, published by Froben in 1515. From 1516 it was printed with early editions of the *Praise of Folly*. Extracts of Dorp's two letters relating to the New Testament, with Latin text and French translation are also found in Delègue and Gillet (1990), pp. 223–35.

5 October 1515. The Latin text with English translation is given in CWM15, pp. 2–127; see also the Introduction by Kinney, pp. xix–xxviii. An English translation is also included in Rogers (1961), pp. 6–64.

6 Ep. 347, August 1515; CWE3, pp. 154–67. Erasmus never made public his reply to this second letter of Dorp.

theologians. Their disputes with Erasmus will be considered in relation, first, to the authority of the Vulgate, and, second, to the defence of the scholastic methodology and its approach to the interpretation of scripture.

The Vulgate and ecclesiastical authority

A recurrent feature of the defence of the authority of the Vulgate by Erasmus' opponents was that it had the inerrant backing of church councils. As Dorp put it:

For it is not reasonable that the whole church, which has always used this edition and still both approves and uses it, should for all these centuries have been wrong. Nor is it probable that all those holy Fathers should have been deceived, and all those saintly men who relied on this version when deciding the most difficult questions in general councils, defending and expounding the faith, and publishing canons to which even kings submitted their civil power. And that councils of this kind duly constituted never err, in so far as they deal with the faith, is generally agreed among both theologians and lawyers.⁷

Erasmus accuses Dorp of writing like those theologians who 'habitually attribute anything that has slipped somehow into current usage to the authority of the church'.⁸ In response to his challenge to produce 'one synod in which this version has been approved', Dorp admits that the Vulgate had not been approved by a specific council, but argues that all councils relied on 'this edition and no other'. He considered it probable that out of all the Latin versions circulating in the early church it was the one corrected by St. Jerome that alone was selected, so that 'the faithful might not waver when they saw the variations in the texts'.⁹

After the publication of the *Novum Instrumentum* in 1516 Erasmus took up the issue again in response to a report from a Cambridge friend, Henry Bullock, that critics at one college had claimed that it was unlawful to revise the Vulgate without the authority of a General Council.¹⁰ In his reply Erasmus denied the necessity for this on the grounds, as in his letter to Dorp, that the Vulgate had not itself been 'undertaken by a translator authorised by a General Council', but had 'slipped into circulation by being used and gradually gathered strength as time went by'.¹¹

Erasmus also contested the claim that the Vulgate was the version of Jerome himself. Against the contention of an unnamed critic of his *Annotations*,¹² that 'The Roman church herself confesses that her version is Jerome's', Erasmus responded that 'The Church of Rome has never pronounced on this point, and it is the consensus

7 Ep. 304; CWE3, p. 21.

8 Ep. 337; CWE3, p. 135.

9 Ep. 347; CWE3, pp. 161–2.

10 The points to which Erasmus responds in Ep. 456; CWE4, pp. 43–54 to Bullock suggest that the brief letter from Bullock published as Ep. 449; CWE4, pp. 33–4 was not the only one he had received from him.

11 Ep. 456; CWE4, p. 45.

12 Erasmus' response comes in Ep. 843 of May 1518 to Maarten Lips, a fellow Augustinian canon at Louvain; CWE6, pp. 3–26. The critic is not named, but is often identified with Edward Lee.

of scholars that this version is not Jerome's'.¹³ The further claim that Jerome himself only dared to produce a version of scripture on the orders of Pope Damasus, Erasmus dealt with by pointing out that it was only the New Testament that Jerome revised at Damasus' request, and that in his prefaces to some of his Old Testament books Jerome had himself identified other people at whose request he translated those books.¹⁴ (In fact, as has been seen, it seems likely that it was in fact only the gospels that Jerome was commissioned to revise.) Moreover, Erasmus did not let the matter of formal authorisation rest at that point. He first added that 'it is not known that he [Damasus] approved Jerome's revision', and then that it was as bishop of Rome where Jerome was ordained that Damasus entrusted him with the task and not as 'supreme pontiff of the world'.¹⁵

Erasmus himself, on the other hand, could claim the approval of the supreme pontiff, as he had already done in response to the Cambridge critics.¹⁶ He had informed Leo X of his intention, and been encouraged by him by letter to undertake it. Erasmus had dedicated his work to Leo; the pope had read much of it for himself, and he had given it the highest praise to the cardinals and scholars with him at the time.¹⁷ Leo's letter of commendation was subsequently included in the second and subsequent editions of Erasmus' New Testament,¹⁸ presumably in the hope of silencing his critics on this score.

The point raised by the unnamed critic reflected a similar concern to that of Augustine regarding Jerome's revision of the Old Testament on his own initiative and as a scholar working alone. As Erasmus' critic put it, 'A private person without authorization cannot make a new translation or correct an old one'. Erasmus' defence was vigorous: even if he had no authority, did this mean that while 'the ignorant were free to corrupt the sacred text', he could not correct it unless a synod had first been summoned? Even if he were a bishop or a cardinal himself, that would be irrelevant, since 'The business in hand calls not for a mitre or a red hat, but for skill in the tongues'.¹⁹ Here was an unequivocal claim, based on the unshakeable conviction that primacy must be accorded to the original Greek of the New Testament, and that ultimate authority in translation lay with the linguistic scholar rather than the ecclesiastical establishment.

The inspiration of the Vulgate

A further line of defence of the authority of the Vulgate was that it bore the authority of divine inspiration as a translation. Erasmus' unnamed critic, for instance, had apparently claimed that the Latin translator worked under the inspiration of the Holy

13 Ep. 843; CWE6, p. 14.

14 Ep. 843; CWE6, pp. 20–21.

15 Ep. 843; CWE6, p. 21.

16 Ep. 456; CWE4, p. 52.

17 Ep. 843; CWE6, pp. 15, 19.

18 Ep. 864; CWE6, pp. 106–108.

19 Ep. 843; CWE6, pp. 14–15.

Spirit,²⁰ and, more generally, that no-one can translate scripture without the gift of the Spirit.²¹ Erasmus' response in both cases was to refer to Jerome's own view that translation was a purely scholarly activity, pointing out that as one who translated both testaments, Jerome should know. It also seems his critic had supported his point with reference to the legend of the 70 translators of the Septuagint miraculously arriving at agreement despite working in separate cells, and again Erasmus cited Jerome against him.²² Similar use was made of the legend of the Seventy by Pierre Cousturier in his *De translatione Bibliae* of 1524, as part of the traditionalist's defence of the Vulgate; Cousturier likewise held a strong view of its inspiration, which he understood as extending to the detail of its wording.²³

In denying the inspiration of the Vulgate as a translation Erasmus was able to call upon the powerful support of Jerome himself. In addition, it was also typical of his response to doctrinaire claims to counter them with empirical facts. Thus he points out that Jerome had found fault with some of the readings still found in the Vulgate edition,²⁴ and suggests that to claim inspiration for the current Latin version would not only mean ascribing solecisms to the Holy Spirit, but also errors which had subsequently come into the text.²⁵

The popular authority of the Vulgate

As Erasmus noted, the authority of the Vulgate rested mainly upon its long and widespread use. Erasmus' revision could in consequence appear to be devaluing what had become hallowed by familiarity in schoolroom, pulpit and liturgy. The Vulgate was the only translation with which the majority of worshippers in the western church would be familiar, and the claim that the text was corrupt and in need of correction and the translation sometimes obscure and in need of clarification was disturbing and likely to confuse the laity. Preaching orders, especially Franciscans and Dominicans opposed to Erasmus' work took advantage of this to stir up popular sentiment against him.²⁶ In 1517, for example, Erasmus wrote of an unnamed preacher, who:

before an audience of ordinary folk, in a sermon in fact, lamented in a voice breaking with emotion that sacred literature was finished ... now that men had appeared who corrected the holy Gospels, and even the Lord's Prayer itself.²⁷

Similarly in 1519 he wrote of a Carmelite who accused him of emending the Lord's Prayer and the Magnificat, and deplored the use of 'dramatic language to rouse the superstitious multitude'.²⁸ The same year Henry Standish, provincial of the English

20 Ep. 843; CWE6, p. 8.

21 Ep. 843; CWE6, p. 20.

22 Ep. 843; CWE6, p. 15.

23 Holeczek (1975), pp. 221ff.

24 Ep. 843; CWE6, p. 8.

25 Ep. 843; CWE6, p. 12.

26 See Rummel (1989) Vol. I, Chapter 6.

27 Ep. 541 to Wolfgang Capito; CWE 4, p. 265.

28 Ep. 948 to Petrus Mosellanus; CWE6, p. 315.

Franciscans and later Bishop of St. Asaph, preached against Erasmus in a sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral in London.²⁹ Standish took exception in particular to the change made in the second edition of the New Testament to the traditional wording of the opening of St John's Gospel, which Erasmus rendered *In principio erat sermo* instead of using the familiar *verbum*. In a later, and doubtless biased account, Erasmus described how Standish 'began to rave against my name and reputation, maintaining that the Christian religion faced utter destruction unless all new translations were instantly removed'.³⁰

In appealing to popular sentiment the preachers were exploiting the sense of authority invested in the Vulgate by virtue of the familiarity of long use, which as Augustine had discovered was in practice a potent force against change. Erasmus, for his part, deplored what he saw as an instrument for scholarly purposes being exposed to common people in this way. He claimed that all he was doing was translating the Greek, and affirmed more than once that 'the old version is still there for all men's use, as it always was'.³¹ Yet insofar as Erasmus held that the Greek was authoritative not only for translation but also as the basis for interpretation, the authority of the Vulgate was inevitably called into question when it differed from the Greek. The old version may still have been there, but once Erasmus had exposed its deficiencies it could never again command exclusive authority.

Defence of the Latin text

A further line of defence of the Vulgate was to dispute that its text was so corrupt as to need correction on the basis of the Greek. Dorp, for instance, considered that the Vulgate was selected by 'the church of God and the holy Fathers ... to be handed down to us, because it is the most faithful', and thus had the authority of the church as the true version.³² An even more extravagant claim on behalf of the accuracy of the Vulgate was later made by the Paris trained theologian Pierre Cousturier who held the mistaken belief that the Vulgate in current use was identical with Jerome's original divinely inspired and authentic version which survived in the Vatican Library.³³ Such claims, however, flew in the face of the empirical evidence of numerous variations between manuscripts, which at the very least justified Erasmus' view that some revision was necessary.

Dorp was on stronger ground when he challenged the principle of according primacy to the Greek by raising questions about the reliability of Greek manuscripts.³⁴ Erasmus dealt with these on empirical grounds,³⁵ and in the *Preface*

29 Rummel (1989) Vol. I, p. 123. On Standish and Erasmus' attitude to him, see R.J. Schoek in *Contemporaries*, Vol. 3, pp. 279–80.

30 Ep. 1126 to Hermannus Buschius; CWE8, p. 8.

31 Ep. 843; CWE6, p. 15.

32 Ep. 347; CWE3, pp. 161–2.

33 His arguments in defence of the Vulgate were substantially those dealt with by Erasmus in his correspondence with Martin Dorp. See Rummel (1989) Vol. II, pp. 62ff; Holeczek (1975), pp. 203ff.

34 Ep. 304; CWE3, pp. 21–2.

35 Ep. 337; CWE3, pp. 134–5.

to the *Annotations* he pointed out that his method was to weigh up the evidence from the best sources available, including ancient Latin manuscripts and the writings of the early Christian commentators.³⁶ Whatever the value of Greek manuscripts, Dorp differed fundamentally from Erasmus on the principle of according them greater authority than the traditional text of the Vulgate. If it is contended, he wrote, 'that a sentence as rendered by the Latin translator varies in point of truth from the Greek manuscript, at that point I bid the Greeks goodbye and cleave to the Latins'.³⁷

In putting the scholastic viewpoint Dorp adopted a doctrinaire position concerning the authority of the Vulgate, and fashioned supporting arguments based on empirical evidence accordingly.³⁸ That many of these arguments were unsustainable, and that the weigh of empirical evidence lay on Erasmus' side was something he later came to accept; he also came to accept the advantages of knowledge of the original languages for the interpretation of scripture, and to recognize that the Vulgate derived its authority only from long usage and not from any synodical decree.³⁹

The authority of the Vulgate text in question

For those who considered the authority of the church and the truth of Christian teaching to be integrally bound up with the authority of the Vulgate, it was important to maintain, as Dorp put it, that the Vulgate contains 'no error and no falsehood'.⁴⁰ He believed that even if Erasmus were simply to show where the Greek manuscripts he had examined differed from the Latin, this would sow the seeds of doubt concerning 'the integrity of the Scriptures', and that to suggest 'the least scrap of falsehood' would be to destroy its authority.⁴¹ Dorp cited in support the view of Augustine in a letter to Jerome: 'If falsehoods were admitted into Holy Scripture even to serve a useful purpose, what authority can they still retain?'⁴² Erasmus denied asserting that 'there is any falsehood in Holy Scripture', and again pointed out that 'the facts cry out' that 'often the true and genuine reading has been corrupted by ignorant scribes'.⁴³ To restore the Latin text where manuscript variations indicated that it had become corrupt was, however, one thing: to change it on the basis of the Greek, even where Latin manuscripts agreed, was quite another.

In some cases the changes made by Erasmus did not materially affect the sense, but in other cases they concerned texts which had traditionally been used to give support to essential doctrines of the church and thus were seen to pose a challenge to the authority of the church's teaching itself. The best known example of this was the omission from 1 John 5:7–8 of the so-called 'Johannine Comma', which was one of the basic texts used against Arianism: 'For there are three which bear record in

36 Ep. 373; CWE3, pp. 198–200.

37 Ep. 304; CWE3, p. 22.

38 See Delègue and Gillet (1990) p. 223 who emphasise the strong influence of *a priori* ideas and of the weight of tradition in Dorp's arguments.

39 Rummel (1989) Vol. I, pp. 11f.

40 Ep. 347; CWE3, p. 160.

41 Ep. 304; CWE3, p. 22.

42 Ep. 304; CWE3, p. 22.

43 Ep. 337; CWE3, p. 134.

heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one'.⁴⁴ Despite being widely accused of thereby undermining the doctrine of the Trinity, Erasmus refused to restore it solely for this reason. He had not found it in the Greek texts available to him, and only when a manuscript containing the words was produced did he restore it.⁴⁵ Erasmus thus maintained his principle of according primacy to the Greek text of the New Testament, even on a matter of such vital concern as the doctrine of the Trinity.

A further example is provided by the change made by Erasmus to 1 Corinthians 15:51 which led to the accusation by Henry Standish during a discussion at court that he was denying the resurrection.⁴⁶ The basis of the accusation was that in place of the Vulgate's 'we shall all rise again, but we shall not all be changed', Erasmus read on the basis of the Greek 'we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed',⁴⁷ thus removing the Vulgate's direct reference to the resurrection. Following similar criticism by the Carmelite Nicholas Baechem, who from 1520 was assistant inquisitor of the Netherlands, Erasmus published an *Apologia*.⁴⁸ In it he argued that there was no essential contradiction: both renderings expressed from different perspectives what would happen to those still alive when the world ended. Erasmus stridently rejected accusations of heresy, protested his orthodoxy, and argued that essential doctrines depended on more than a single text. As far as the Vulgate was concerned, however, either it was accurate in its record of Paul's words or it was not. By insisting on the primacy of the Greek, Erasmus, whether he admitted it or not, was questioning the reliability and thus the authority of the church's version.

The authority of the Vulgate translation in question

Even when the text was not in question, Erasmus' application of the philological principle of interpreting in the light of the Greek could still provide a serious challenge to what the church taught on the basis of the Vulgate. This was of particular concern to critics when Erasmus revised the Latin translation accordingly, but they also took issue with points in his annotations that discussed interpretations which did not accord with traditional teaching. The first to challenge the use made by Erasmus of his Greek scholarship was a young English priest at Louvain, Edward Lee (c. 1482–1544), later to become Archbishop of York. Erasmus reacted negatively to being corrected by beginner in the field and an acrimonious controversy ensued,

44 Tyndale's translation from the 1526 Worms edition with spelling modernised.

45 Rummel (1989) Vol. I, p. 105; see also Rummel (1986), pp. 131–3, Bentley (1983), pp. 44–5. H.J. de Jonge ASD IX.2, p. 12, n.46. Jonge contests the often repeated view that the restoration rested on Lee's production of a Greek manuscript containing the words; see also Jonge (1980), pp. 381–9.

46 Ep. 1126; CWE8, p. 11.

47 So Tyndale 1526. Vulgate: *omnes quidem resurgemus sed non omnes immutabimur*; Erasmus: *non omnes quidem dormiemus, omnes tamen immutabimur*.

48 *Apologia de loco "Omnes quidem resurgemus"*. On Baechem see Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle in *Contemporaries*, Vol. 1, pp. 81–3, and on his controversy with Erasmus see Rummel (1989) Vol. I, pp. 135–42.

into which Thomas More was also drawn.⁴⁹ When the seasoned linguistic scholar Jacobus Stunica (Diego López Zúñiga, d. 1531) entered the lists, however, his views could not be dismissed so easily.

Stunica was one the team of linguistic experts gathered by Archbishop, later Cardinal, Ximénez (1436–1517) at the University of Alcalá (Latin *Complutum*), which he founded around 1500 for the study of the three biblical languages.⁵⁰ Stunica had a good knowledge of Greek, Hebrew and Arabic and had worked since in 1502 on the Complutensian Polyglot.⁵¹ (The New Testament volume with the Greek and the Vulgate in parallel columns, was printed in 1514,⁵² but not published until 1522.) When Erasmus' New Testament reached Alcalá in 1516, Stunica began work on a critique, particularly of Erasmus' annotations. In his *Annotations against Erasmus* (1520)⁵³ he listed 212 points in which he defended both the Latin of the Vulgate and its correspondence with the Greek against Erasmus' translation or annotations.⁵⁴ Erasmus responded in 1521,⁵⁵ leaving none of Stunica's points unchallenged and substantially maintaining his own conclusions.⁵⁶

Stunica was a conservative scholar and considered himself better qualified than Erasmus both in theology and in languages. He was of the opinion that Erasmus ought neither to have questioned the traditional translation or to have published his own,⁵⁷ and he was particularly concerned at the way that Erasmus challenged the Vulgate translation of passages which served as proof texts for important doctrines of the church or suggested alternative interpretations. Three passages in particular may be taken as illustrative of how Erasmus' interpretation on the basis of the Greek seemed to Stunica to offer support to heretical views: John 1:1, Acts 4:27 and Ephesians

49 On Lee, see Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle in *Contemporaries*, Vol. 2, pp. 311–14. For an account of the dispute, see Rummel (1989), Vol. I, Ch. 5, pp. 95–120 and Vanautgaerden (1997) who also provides a French translation of Erasmus' *Apologia* against Lee.

50 On Stunica, see William B. Jones and Thomas B. Deutscher in *Contemporaries*, Vol.2, pp. 348–9.

51 He almost certainly provided part of the interlinear Latin translation of the Septuagint, as well as collating Greek manuscripts of the gospels with old texts of the Vulgate; H.J. de Jonge, ASD IX.2, pp. 15–16.

52 The four Old Testament volumes printed in parallel columns the Hebrew, Vulgate and Septuagint, and the Septuagint column also contained an interlinear Latin translation of the Greek; in addition the Aramaic Targumim with a parallel Latin translation were included at the foot of each page. See De Hamel (2001), pp. 221–4.

53 *Annotationes contra Erasmum Roterodamum in defensionem tralationis Novi Testamenti* (Alcalá, 1520). Stunica was initially restrained by Cardinal Ximenes from publicly criticising Erasmus.

54 Jonge, ASD IX.2, pp. 20–21.

55 *Apologia respondens ad ea quae Iacobus Lopis Stunica taxauerunt in prima dumtaxat Novi Testamenti aeditione* (Martens: Louvain, 1521). The text, edited by H.J. de Jonge is in ASD IX.2.

56 Jonge, ASD IX.2, pp. 48–9.

57 Jonge, ASD IX.2, p. 19.

5:32.⁵⁸ In the case of John 1:1 Stunica took issue with Erasmus' annotation; in the other two cases he objected also to Erasmus' changes to the Vulgate translation.

In his annotation on John 1:1 ('the Word was God'), Erasmus had questioned whether Christ had ever been called 'God' and thus laid himself open to the accusation of Arianism by seeming to deny the full divinity of Christ.⁵⁹ In Acts 4:27 ('your holy child/servant, Jesus, whom you anointed'),⁶⁰ on the other hand, Erasmus' rendering of the Greek *pais* as 'son' rather than 'servant' was suggested by Stunica as reflecting Apollinarius' denial of the full humanity of Christ. In both cases, Erasmus' response was that he was simply discussing the linguistic issues involved in translation. In John 1:1 he was examining biblical usage: the subject matter was not at issue. In Acts 4:27, the issue was a philological one, as to which of two possible translations of the Greek *pais*, which could denote both 'servant' and 'son', best suited the context, and he maintained his position in the third edition of his annotations in 1522.⁶¹

The issues raised by John 1:1 and Acts 4:27 were in effect theoretical, since there were few, if any, contemporary proponents of the ancient heresies concerned, and Erasmus' rejection of both was not in doubt.⁶² In the case of Ephesians 5:32, however, the issue was a current one. Erasmus' replacement of the traditional *sacramentum* by the more literal *mysterium* led to the charge of denying that marriage was a sacrament, and thereby providing support for the views of Luther who denied its sacramental nature.⁶³ Erasmus' response was to affirm that he fully accepted marriage to be a sacrament, but that he did not consider that it could be proved from this particular passage. The Latin *mysterium* was closer in meaning than *sacramentum* to the Greek *mysterion*, and Erasmus saw no danger 'in enlightening Latin readers about the meaning of the Greek word'.⁶⁴

Despite the often insulting tone of both scholars in responding to the work of the other, much of what passed between them was in the nature of scholarly debate on the basis of evidence, and some of Stunica's criticisms were taken into account by Erasmus in later editions of the New Testament, though sometimes, so Stunica complained, without acknowledgement.⁶⁵ Yet, while he substantially shared Erasmus'

58 Stunica's annotations on these passages were defended by another Spanish scholar Carranza (Sancho Carranza de Miranda, d. 1531) in an *Opusculum* published in Rome in 1522. *Opusculum in quasdam Erasmi Roterodami annotationes*, (Rome, March, 1522). The text was reprinted in Erasmus' reply. For a full record of the written exchanges of Erasmus and Carranza, see Jonge, ASD IX.2, pp. 41–3. On Carranza, see also William B. Jones, *Contemporaries*, Vol. 1, pp. 273–4.

59 See also Rummel (1986), pp. 132–4.

60 Vulgate: *sanctum puerum tuum Jesum, quem unxisti*.

61 Rummel (1989) Vol. I, p. 154.

62 See, for example, his warning against such heresies in the *Commentary on Psalm 1*; CWE63, pp. 16–17.

63 Rummel (1989) Vol. I, pp. 158–9. The charge was repeated by Stunica in a letter to Leo X accompanying his *Blasphemiae*, and in a further pamphlet published in 1522; see Jonge, ASD IX.2, pp. 25–6, Rummel (1989) Vol. I, pp. 165ff.

64 Erasmus, *Apologia ... Caranza* (LB IX 429D), cited from Rummel (1989) Vol. I, p. 160.

65 Rummel (1989) Vol. I, pp. 176–7.

philological approach, Stunica devoted his own language skills to defending his prior assumption that, save for obvious corruptions, the Vulgate was always correct in its translation, and that to suggest otherwise impugned the authority of the church's teaching. When a range of translations was possible on the basis of the Greek, he always made a case for the Vulgate rendering to be retained. In the case of Acts 4:27, it was possible to apply the 'Rule of Faith', since philologically the Greek *pais* could denote either 'servant' or 'son'. This was not, however, the case with Ephesians 5:32, since the Greek *mysterion* did not carry the sense of 'oath' implied by the Latin *sacramentum*, and in the New Testament *sacramentum* had not yet developed its later technical application to the church's sacraments. Although Erasmus may have claimed that the sacramental nature of marriage could be established on the basis of other passages of scripture,⁶⁶ the Ephesians text was in fact crucial since nowhere else is the term *sacramentum* ever used of marriage in the New Testament.

Stunica's main concerns were to defend the honour of the Vulgate as the work of Jerome and to safeguard the traditional beliefs and practices of the church.⁶⁷ Stunica went on in subsequent works to mount a more wide ranging attack entitled *The Blasphemies and Impieties of Erasmus*, in which he warned against the dangers he posed to the true faith of the church, and accused him of being 'the standard bearer and leader of the Lutherans'.⁶⁸ As Rummel has summarised it:

Erasmus, Stunica stressed, had no respect for authority. He attacked all men indiscriminately, reviling the translator of the Vulgate, the scholastic exegetes, even the Church Fathers, describing them variously as inept, careless or manipulative.⁶⁹

Erasmus in response maintained that he held to the church's doctrines, that he was writing before Luther had made his ideas known, and that criticism of abuses within the church did not mean criticism of the church itself. He also had a strong point when he claimed that doctrines needed to rest on wider basis than isolated biblical texts.

Initially, Erasmus accused those who rejected recourse to the Greek of the New Testament as in reality more concerned with their own position and reputation being weakened,⁷⁰ but it was a charge which could not be sustained once scholastic theologians like Lee and Stunica themselves took up biblical languages. There remained an issue, however, concerning scholastic theologians' belief that they had sole authority in matters of interpretation, and there was genuine concern on their part that any challenge to the church's teaching would weaken its unity and authority. Erasmus may not have intended, for instance, to deny the church's teaching on penance when he replaced the Vulgate's 'do penance' (*poenitentiam agite*) with 'repent' (*resipiscite*) on the basis that the Greek (*metanoiein*) meant a change of

66 So Rummel (1989) Vol. I, p. 160.

67 Jonge, ASD IX. 2, pp. 18–19, 34.

68 An abridged version *Erasmi Roterodami blasphemiae et impietates* (Rome, 1522) was rushed into print following the death of Leo X who had forbidden publication of the original and despite a ban by the cardinals who forbade its sale; Jonge ASD IX.2, p. 23.

69 Rummel (1989) Vol. I, p. 165.

70 Ep. 337; CWE3, p. 136.

attitude or direction in life rather than simply some external deed of penance,⁷¹ but it was a change that the reformers were not slow to exploit. By investing it with the authority of the 'true Greek' and by maintaining that authority of the Greek to outrank that of the Vulgate, Erasmus was at least providing support for theological positions adopted by the reformers.⁷²

The nature of authority in question

As well as being attacked for undermining the authority of the Vulgate and throwing doubt on the interpretation of texts traditionally used in support of vital doctrines, Erasmus' annotations were also criticized for their attitude to past authorities in general and to the authority of the New Testament in particular. This may be seen in a mutually respectful exchange of letters with Johann Maier von Eck, a respected professor of theology at Ingolstadt who had some sympathy with humanism.⁷³ In a letter to Erasmus of February 1518 Eck took issue with Erasmus' annotations on Matthew 2:6 and Acts 10.⁷⁴ On Matthew 2:6 Erasmus had commented that the quotation from Micah 5:2 accorded neither with the Hebrew text nor that of the Greek Septuagint. What concerned Eck was Erasmus' suggestion that the evangelists 'trusted as men will to memory and made a mistake'.⁷⁵ Eck argued, on the contrary, that they did not derive their knowledge from books, as Erasmus implied, but were directly taught the truth by the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ Similarly in relation to Erasmus' annotation on Acts 10 (note 33) to the effect that the apostles learnt their Greek 'from the conversation of ordinary men', Eck argued on the basis of Acts 2 that their knowledge of Greek was imparted by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.⁷⁷

Erasmus argued in response, however, that the nature of the apostles' inspiration must be understood in the light of the empirical evidence. The fact that Peter 'suffered a few lapses' after empowerment by the Holy Spirit did not result in a low opinion being held of the whole of his life, nor did it mean he lacked the Holy Spirit. Erasmus' belief was that the Holy Spirit inspired the disciples in matters essential 'to the business of the Gospel', but otherwise allowed them to be human.⁷⁸ Similarly, in response to Eck's comment on Acts 10, he argued that the apostles could previously have learnt some Greek and the gift of the Spirit need not have obliterated this. Christ allowed them to make mistakes even after the gift of the Spirit, 'but not to the extent of imperilling the faith'.⁷⁹

71 As in Matthew 3:2 in the 1519 edition. See Rummel (1989), Vol. I, pp. 140–41.

72 For the importance of the difference between 'repentance' and 'penance' to Luther, see Evans (1992), pp. 151–53.

73 On Eck, see Denis R. Janz in *Contemporaries*, Vol. 1, pp. 416–19.

74 Ep. 769; CWE5, pp. 287–93. See also Rummel (1989), Vol. I, pp. 47–48.

75 Ep. 769; CWE5, p. 289.

76 Ep. 769; CWE5, p. 290.

77 Ep. 769; CWE5, p. 290.

78 Ep. 844; CWE6, p. 28.

79 Ep. 844; CWE6, pp. 29–30.

Eck, on the other hand, feared that the authority of the New Testament itself would be weakened if the authority of the apostles and evangelists was called into question. 'If the authority of scripture at this point is shaky, can any other passage be free from suspicion of error?'⁸⁰ In raising this question Eck had in fact put his finger on a genuine difficulty. Erasmus maintained that the authority of scripture was not imperilled by the occasional error,⁸¹ provided that matters essential to salvation were not in question, but how could the reader be sure that they were not? The difficulty remains.

As promised in his letter to Eck, Erasmus made a long addition to the annotation on Matthew 2:6 in the second edition of his New Testament, in which he added further empirical evidence of disagreements between the apostles. Despite this the annotation was specifically censured by the Valladolid conference in 1527, to which Erasmus again responded that the inspiration of scripture only pertained to essential matters of faith.⁸² He also remained committed to the view that translation was a matter of linguistic scholarship and not of inspiration.

Eck's primary concern was the authority of the New Testament, but in order to defend it he considered it necessary also to defend the authority of the apostles and evangelists who produced it. Where traditionalists sought to assume the inerrancy of past figures whom they regarded as authorities, Erasmus was prepared to exercise critical judgement on their views on the basis of his understanding of the evidence. He thus called into question the nature of authority itself. He was not shy of invoking the authority of past scholars in defence of his own views, but modified this traditional approach to authority by accepting it in relation to the interpretation of the New Testament only when it accorded with the empirical evidence of the original Greek. The philological principle of taking the meaning of the Greek in its ancient context as determinative for interpretation subordinated the authority of past scholars as well as that of the Vulgate itself to historical and linguistic considerations.

Criticism and Defence: (2) Scholasticism and Authority

The philosophy of Christ and scholasticism

Erasmus' exposure to scholasticism as a student in Paris was not a happy experience. In a letter of 1499 he gave graphic expression to how he had found such theology stultifying both in its disdain of good Latin style and also in its preoccupation with logic and dialectical methodology,⁸³ and not many years later in the *Praise of Folly* he subjected it to biting satire for its preoccupation with abstract questions unrelated to the living out of the Christian life. In the meantime he had committed himself to work for the restoration of the 'old theology', which centred on scripture and gave a more prominent place to the early Christian writers. The philosophy of Christ to

80 Ep. 769; CWE5, pp. 289–90.

81 Ep. 844; CWE6, p. 28.

82 Rummel (1986), pp. 138–9; on the Valladolid Articles, see Rummel (1989) Vol. II, pp. 89–92, 96–7.

83 Ep. 64 to Thomas Grey in 1497; CWE1, pp. 135–8.

which he first gave expression in the *Enchiridion* in 1501 was a means to this end, and years later, in 1526, he could write of his New Testament, his *Paraphrases* and his editions of the early Christian writers as being produced 'to restore the theology of the schools to its origins, for it had been degenerating step by step into merely human sophistries'.⁸⁴

Erasmus' lifelong clashes with the theological establishment were in fact part of a wider tension between a scholasticism wedded to a systematic, philosophically based definition of doctrinal truth and renaissance humanism with its delight in classical literature and cultivation of elegance in Latin.⁸⁵ As Rummel has put it, the stereotypes were that:

all scholastic theologians were obscurantists who had never read classical authors, wrote atrocious Latin, and were interested only in esoteric quibbles, while all humanists were grammarians and wordspinners, interested in form rather than substance, pseudo-Christians whose brains had been addled by reading pagan literature.⁸⁶

Behind the stereotypes, however, lay serious questions concerning the nature of salvation and the authority of scripture in relation to it.

The correspondence with Maarten Dorp

Erasmus' particular concern in relation to scholasticism, as he made clear in reply to Maarten Dorp, was not simply that the theologians' abstract discussions were trivial and time-wasting, but that they left no time for study of the words of scripture. 'What can Christ have in common with Aristotle?', he asked, and 'What have these quibbling sophistries to do with the mysteries of eternal wisdom?'.⁸⁷ The 'mysteries of eternal wisdom', Erasmus believed, were revealed in scripture. According to his philosophy of Christ, true theologians were those who 'have drunk deeply of Christ's teaching from the true springs'.⁸⁸

Dorp had written to Erasmus in 1515 warning him that he had needlessly done himself harm in the eyes of the Louvain faculty of theology, by damaging their authority in the eyes of 'common folk'.⁸⁹ He countered Erasmus' renewed attack on scholasticism in his reply by warning that there was much in classical pagan literature that contained the 'wine of error' and 'poison of the soul',⁹⁰ and that humanists should not think that 'they know all subjects, because they understand the actual words and structures of the sentences'.⁹¹ He claimed that there were scholastic theologians who

84 Ep. 1672; CWE12, p. 63.

85 The debate between humanism and scholasticism is discussed at length by Rummel (1995).

86 Rummel (1995), p. 11.

87 Ep. 337; CWE3, p. 124. This was a reply to Dorp's letter on behalf of the Louvain theology faculty, Ep. 304; CWE3, pp. 18ff.

88 Ep. 337; CWE3, pp. 124–5.

89 Ep. 304; CWE3, p. 18.

90 Ep. 347; CWE3, p. 159.

91 Ep. 347; CWE3, p. 160.

were well versed in scripture, and that the application of dialectic could greatly help its understanding.⁹² Furthermore, he pointed out that scripture was not the entire content of theology, because there were other vital questions of importance for salvation which scripture could not solve, particularly questions ‘concerned with the sacraments, without which God’s holy catholic church maintains man’s salvation is in peril’.⁹³ The theology that Erasmus in a derogatory fashion called ‘new’ had in fact been practised in universities for many centuries, and its value recognised by the church in canonising some of its leading practitioners, not least St. Thomas Aquinas ‘for the divine quality of his teaching’.⁹⁴ It was such theologians who cared for the flock of God by ensuring his law was correctly understood: there were many issues more profitable for the flock than scripture.⁹⁵ For this reason it was important to maintain the authority of the church’s official theologians.⁹⁶ The points touched on by Dorp were later developed more fully by Jacques Masson in Louvain and Noël Bédard in Paris.

Jacques Masson (Jacobus Latomus, c. 1475–1544): the authority of scholastic methodology

In the *Methodus*, published as part of the *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516, Erasmus had set out a programme of education for the student of theology, which was grounded in the study of scripture and its interpretation on the basis of its original languages. The publication of a much expanded version of this in November 1518, the *Ratio verae theologiae*, sparked a backlash at Louvain where Erasmus was resident at the time.⁹⁷ It was led by the scholastic theologian, Jacques Masson.⁹⁸ In Book 2 of his tract *De trium linguarum et studii theologici ratione*, published in March 1519, Jacques Masson reaffirmed the value of scholastic methodology in giving systematic expression to doctrinal truths.⁹⁹ He also set out a curriculum for the study of theology

92 Ep. 347; CWE3, p. 163. Dorp cites the point, and a number of others that he makes from Augustine, here from *De doctrina*.

93 Ep. 347; CWE3, p. 165.

94 Ep. 347; CWE3, pp. 156–8.

95 Ep. 347; CWE3, p. 165.

96 Ep. 347; CWE3, p. 156.

97 Erasmus made Louvain his base from July 1517 to 1521. Ep. 539 (24 February 1517); CWE4, pp. 256–7 suggests an initially friendly atmosphere, but this seems to have changed when Erasmus became involved in the setting up of the Collegium Trilingue for the teaching of Latin, Greek and Hebrew; see Rummel (1989) Vol. I, pp. 65–6; Nauwelaerts (1969). On the Collegium Trilingue see de Vocht (1955).

98 On Masson, see Gilbert Tournoy (Jacobus Latomus) in *Contemporaries*, Vol. 2, pp. 304–306. The controversy is described by Rummel (1989), Vol. II, pp. 63–93. On Masson and the later Louvain Censures of Erasmus’ works, see also Crahay (1969).

99 It is widely agreed that Book I is directed primarily against Peter Mosellanus, who made the case for language studies in an oration at Leipzig: *Oratio de variarum linguarum cognitione paranda* (Leipzig: V. Schumann, 1518). A summary is provided by Rummel (1989), Vol. I, pp. 68ff. On Mosellanus, see also Michael Erbe, *Contemporaries*, Vol. 2, pp. 466–7.

on traditional lines,¹⁰⁰ which was opposed at almost every point to that proposed by Erasmus in his *Methodus* and *Ratio*.

For Masson, the authoritative guides to Christian truth were the scholastic theologians of the medieval period, and their teaching should first be mastered as a guard against error in reading the early Christian writers and in interpreting scripture. Denying the value of the study of pagan classical literature and of rhetoric, which Erasmus saw as a useful preparatory stage for the young scholar, Masson advocated instead a grounding in dialectic and philosophy.¹⁰¹ Whereas Erasmus put at the heart of his theological programme the study of scripture, Masson, though suggesting students become familiar with scripture by the daily reading and memorisation, allowed engagement in its interpretation only after the principles of scholastic theology had been thoroughly absorbed. Many committed blunders in interpretation, he claimed, because they 'neglected the established scholastic authorities'.¹⁰²

In his response, *Apologia contra Latomi dialogum*,¹⁰³ Erasmus did not deny the validity of theologians debating technical theological questions, nor did he claim that time spent on Aquinas or Scotus was wasted, even though he himself preferred more ancient authorities.¹⁰⁴ He did not, he wrote, criticize the use of Aristotle for the study of theology, but what he resented was setting his works at the heart of theology 'and giving almost as much, if not more weight to his authority than to that of the Gospels'.¹⁰⁵ Basically, he deplored the sort of theology that remained confined to the realm of abstract intellectual concerns, and resolutely advocated that this was not all that theology should be concerned with.¹⁰⁶ He was more concerned that theology should foster practical action, and that rather than endless wrangling about the nature of sin it should help people to avoid it.¹⁰⁷ In Masson's view, however, Erasmus was confusing two types of theology professional theology which was 'speculative', 'subtle' and 'spiritual', and popular theology; for Masson the application of theology to Christian living was a matter for the pulpit rather than the classroom.¹⁰⁸

Masson's work also laid bare a fundamental incompatibility between scholasticism and Erasmus' philosophy of Christ. For Erasmus the knowledge of God, which was the subject matter of theology, was revealed by Christ, whose living presence was encountered through the words of scripture. For Masson, on the other hand, truth was located primarily in concepts rather than words. The meaning of words was contingent on historical and cultural factors, whereas concepts were universally valid.¹⁰⁹ Since concepts are prior to words, for Masson scripture was subordinate

100 Para. 68; CWE71, pp. 66–7.

101 Para. 77; CWE71, p. 69.

102 Para. 82; CWE71, p. 72.

103 Set out in 122 numbered paragraphs and completed by 28 March 1519. English translation by Martin Lowry, CWE71, pp. 37–84.

104 Paras 1, 5, 6; CWE71, pp. 38–9.

105 Para. 96; CWE71, p. 77.

106 Paras 94–98; CWE71, pp. 76–8.

107 Para. 120; CWE71, p. 83.

108 Rummel (1989) Vol. I, pp. 81–2.

109 This was a distinction which he took from Augustine *De Doctrina*, 2.1.2, 2.24.37, and thereby sought to deprive the humanist appeal to his *De Doctrina* in defence of the

to theology in the same way that words are secondary to concepts grasped directly by the mind.¹¹⁰ The distinction held the key to the source of theology, which for Masson took as its starting point concepts that God, by the light of grace, directly implanted in the human mind. Such supernatural enlightenment comprised, in effect, ‘the gospel written on the tablets of the heart of the faithful’ and ‘received in words that belong to no language, in concepts which have natural significance (*in verbis nullius linguae, in conceptibus naturaliter significantibus*)’.¹¹¹

In his *Apology*, Erasmus argued that grace continued to allow place for human learning. Theological learning, he argued, should embrace the evidence of scripture rather than rely entirely on grace, since even such figures as Ambrose and Augustine who were helped by grace occasionally wandered from the gospel truth. Theology as defined by Masson may give sufficient knowledge of the gospel truth to ensure salvation, but it is quite another thing, Erasmus argues, ‘to take on discussion of the mystical texts with authority’.¹¹² That required human learning in the form of knowledge of languages.

These two fundamentally different epistemologies later came to the fore in the controversy between More and Tyndale. More, on the one hand, claimed truth embodied in the church’s teaching was written by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of Christians, whereas for Tyndale it was the truth of scripture by which the believer was supernaturally enlightened.

Noël Bédá (c. 1470–1537): the authority of scholastic interpretation

A second aspect of Erasmus’ philosophy of Christ which came under attack concerned his *Paraphrases* on the New Testament. The *Paraphrases* were part of Erasmus’ programme of disseminating the philosophy of Christ by making scripture more widely known; they were designed ‘to help the less energetic and encourage the hesitant reader with something easy and accessible’.¹¹³ Volumes covering every book of the New Testament except Revelation were published between 1517 and 1524.¹¹⁴ When approached by a Paris printer seeking approval for an edition of Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Luke* (1523), Noël Bédá, the syndic of the theology faculty,¹¹⁵ listed 50 passages as subject to censure. In 1526 he published *Annotations* which extended

necessity of knowledge of biblical languages of much of its force; Rummel (1989), Vol. I pp. 80–81.

110 Chantraine (1969), pp. 61–2.

111 Chantraine (1969), p. 61; translated from the French.

112 Para. 63; CWE71, p. 65.

113 Ep. 1672; CWE12, p. 63.

114 The Epistles were published between November 1517 and January 1521 by Dick Martens of Louvain, except for the volume which included 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon which was published in Antwerp; the Gospels and Acts were first published by Froben of Basel, Matthew in 1522, John and Luke in 1523, Mark and Acts early in 1524. See Pabel and Vessey (2002), p. xi.

115 Bédá had taught at the College of Montaigu in the 1490s when Erasmus was a student in Paris, and became its Principal from 1504 to 1513/4 after the death of Jan Standonck. On Bédá see James K. Farge, *Contemporaries*, Vol. 1, pp. 116–18.

his criticism to points excerpted from other New Testament *Paraphrases* and to other writings of Erasmus, including the *Enchiridion*.¹¹⁶ The pronouncements of the Paris faculty concerning orthodoxy or error carried great authority within the church, and Erasmus initiated a correspondence with Bédá. To seek to avoid censure he also published an *Apology* against him in August 1526; this was a composite work which included earlier documents written in his own defence to the faculty and to the French Parlement.

Bédá, unlike Masson, accepted the positive value of the study of ancient languages, claiming in his *Annotations* that he did not reject the study of languages and the humanities as such, but only the results yielded by such studies when they were contrary to the teaching of the church.¹¹⁷ He expressed strong reservations about those who entered the theological field when 'equipped only with a knowledge in the field of humanities and language', and rejected the claim to be theologians of those who devoted themselves to the study of scripture 'rather than to philosophical studies and the writings of scholastic theologians'.¹¹⁸ Theology was a matter solely for the trained scholastic professionals, not for those schooled only in humanities and languages, and even less for untrained laity, whom he feared would obtain access to the *Paraphrases* in vernacular translation. Like Masson, it was Bédá's unshakeable conviction that only theologians trained in scholastic methodology could interpret scripture correctly and that linguistic scholars and laity must defer to their authority. The doctorate Erasmus was granted at Turin did not qualify him for acceptance onto the theology faculty at Louvain;¹¹⁹ in the eyes of official theologians such as Bédá he was at best a 'theologising humanist',¹²⁰ and as such he was liable to error in his exegesis due to lack of theological training. As an example Rummel cites Bédá's criticism of the paraphrase on Luke 2:33, in which he accuses Erasmus of verging on blasphemy by suggesting that Simeon's blessing was meant for Jesus – something which, Bédá pointed out, Luke never said, but which rather represented Erasmus' own opinion.¹²¹ For Bédá, 'Such misrepresentations and misinterpretations ... made it clear that untrained persons must not be permitted to undertake biblical exegesis'.¹²²

With the *Paraphrases* Erasmus had less room for manoeuvre than in defending his New Testament annotations. Although in a few cases he could base his defence on the original Greek, in many of the passages singled out for censure there was no disparity between the Greek and the Vulgate. Nor could Erasmus claim that he

116 *Annotationum Natalis Bede ... in Jacobum Fabrum libri duo; et in D. Erasmus Roterodamum liber unus ... in Paraphrases Erasmi super eadem quatuor Evangelia et omnes apostolicas Epistolas* (Paris: Bade, 1526). Because Erasmus enjoyed the favour of the French king Francis I (1494–1547), a notable patron of arts and letters, it was not until the king was captured by the Spanish Charles V at Pavia in 1525 and imprisoned for a year in Madrid that Bédá could published his findings.

117 Bédá, *Annotationum libri duo*, translated by Rummel (2002), pp. 267–8.

118 *Ibid.*, p. 268 and n.13.

119 See Rummel (1995), pp. 89f.

120 Rummel (2002), p. 268.

121 Rummel (2002), pp. 268–9.

122 Bédá, *Annotationum libri duo*, translated by Rummel (2002), p. 269.

was setting out possible interpretations with which he did not necessarily agree, since it was in the nature of paraphrase that he had to commit himself to one. Thus, for example, in his annotation on Matthew 16:18 Erasmus' own preference for the interpretation of the 'rock' on which Christ would build his church seems to have been that Jesus meant Peter's 'solid profession of faith', but he also gives the opinion of Augustine that it could refer to Christ himself. He then goes on to note Cyprian's suggestion that Peter himself was meant, while rejecting its application to the pope, even though in catholic tradition this was a key proof text for the supremacy of the successor of Peter.¹²³ In the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, however, Erasmus was limited to one explanation of Jesus' words to Peter, which he gives as 'upon this stone of thy profession I build my church'.¹²⁴ In some instances Erasmus defended his interpretation by arguing that he was speaking with the voice of the New Testament writer, but since he was paraphrasing rather than translating he was vulnerable to Bédá's accusation that it was his own interpretation that was at fault when an explanatory expansion differed from the traditional teaching of the church.

In view of the weight of authority represented by the Paris faculty Erasmus made strenuous attempts to avoid its official censure. He emphatically denied the repeated allegation of Bédá that he was providing support for Lutheran ideas,¹²⁵ and affirmed his adherence to the teaching of the catholic church. He claimed in a letter to Bédá that he had always submitted his work to the judgement of the church,¹²⁶ and in a letter the same year (1525) to Alberto Pio, in which he defends himself against the accusation of being sympathetic to Luther, he wrote 'no one has yet been able to move me a finger's breadth from membership in the church of Rome'.¹²⁷ Despite such affirmations of loyalty to the church, as well as appeals to the French Parlement, to the king,¹²⁸ and to the faculty itself,¹²⁹ formal censures against passages from his works were issued by the faculty in December 1527, though not published until July 1531.¹³⁰

In the course of the controversy, one of the aspects of Bédá's criticism to which Erasmus took strong objection was his censure of excerpted passages without explanation. As Rummel has pointed out, this did not stem from arrogance, but from the authority inherent in his professional status as an accredited theologian; this in turn represented the traditional position of the catholic church, that religious matters

123 See Part II: Documents A.

124 See Part II: Documents A.

125 Rummel (2000), pp. 270ff.

126 Ep. 1581; CWE11, p. 157. See also p. 141.

127 Ep. 1634; CWE11, p. 331. Similar claims of loyalty to the catholic church are made in a letter to Conradus Pellicanus, Ep. 1637; CWE11, pp. 348, 349, 350, and in the following year (1526) in a letter to Simon Pistoris he wrote: 'I have never departed from the decrees of the church either willingly or unwillingly', Ep. 1744; CWE12, p. 329. For Erasmus' views on the church, see Augustijn (1969), Pabel (1995).

128 Ep. 1721 and 1722, respectively, CWE12, pp. 237–43 and pp. 243–7.

129 Eps. 1664, 1723; CWE12, pp. 25–30 and pp. 247–51.

130 For details of the course of the dispute, see Rummel (1989) Vol. II, Chapter 2, pp. 29–59.

were not to be discussed with non-theologians.¹³¹ There was here, as in Erasmus' approach to his New Testament annotations, a fundamental clash of methodology. Erasmus' preferred approach was that of scholarly discussion, and when in response to his requests Bédá did offer reasons for his criticism Erasmus was prepared, if he considered the reasons convincing, to make changes in the light of these.¹³² When the teaching of the church had been defined he emphasised, particularly in his 'Declaration against the censures' (1532), his total submission to the church's teaching authority.¹³³ In matters on which there had been no formal decision by the church, on the other hand, he maintained his own right as a scholar to suggest new ideas.¹³⁴

For Dorp, Masson and Bédá and the theological establishments which they represented, ultimate authority in the interpretation of scripture lay in the hands of fully qualified theologians with official accreditation. In maintaining the authority of scholastic theology its defenders were concerned to protect the church from errors like those Bédá claimed could be found in the work of Erasmus. Such errors, they believed, not only challenged the authoritative teaching of the church, but also imperilled the souls of believers. In the controversy with Masson, it is evident that for Erasmus scholastic theology could be as much a hindrance as a help in interpretation,¹³⁵ but neither in his defence against Masson nor in that against Bédá did he press the point. In his *Apology* against Masson he concentrated rather on pressing the case for languages, but in the eyes of Bédá and the Paris faculty the authority Erasmus could claim as a linguistic scholar did not in itself protect him from error in matters of interpretation.

Vernacular translation and authority

The best known expression of Erasmus' belief in the need for vernacular translation of scripture comes in his classic statement of his philosophy of Christ in the *Paraclesis*, but the often quoted 'ploughman' passage was in fact anticipated in his *Commentary on Psalm 1*, published the previous year, 1515.¹³⁶ Subsequently the case for vernacular translation was developed and defended in the preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, first published in 1522.

131 Rummel (2000), pp. 273–4.

132 See, for instance, Ep. 1571; CWE11, pp. 95–101.

133 Rummel (1989), Vol. II, pp. 53–4; see also pp. 40–41.

134 Ep. 1581; CWE11, pp. 130–162; Rummel (1989), Vol. II, p. 31.

135 Para. 82; CWE71, p. 72.

136 *Enarratio in Primum Psalmum*, 1515; English translation by Michael J. Heath in CWE63, pp. 5–63. For Erasmus views on vernacular translation, see also Holeczek (1975), pp. 186–202.

The Commentary on Psalm 1 Psalm 1 sets out as the model for the person blessed by God one who avoids the company of evildoers and whose life is founded in 'delight in the law of the Lord'. Erasmus in his *Commentary* interprets 'the law of the Lord' in a broad sense as referring to the whole of scripture. Commenting on verse 2, he writes:

... it is not the prerogative only of theologians to 'meditate on the law of the Lord,' unless we believe that they alone can be called 'blessed'. Everyone who wants to be 'blessed' must 'meditate on the law of the Lord'. Ordinary people too should read the Lord's law, in any language; even Scythians should read and 'meditate on it' to the best of their ability. Everybody should study it as far as their understanding will allow; they should talk about, discuss it ...

At the moment, however, some people believe that great care must be taken to prevent the common people from having direct contact with Holy Writ, translated into the vernacular, claiming that they will understand nothing and will fall into heresy. As if Christ's teaching were the kind that may only be understood by a few theologians! On the contrary, no one was ever more unpretentious than Christ, and similarly no teaching was ever more accessible than his. Let the ploughman read it and he will find food for thought; let the scholar read it and he will learn something. Essentially you need piety rather than ingenuity to understand the Scriptures; the Spirit explains them, not Aristotle; grace, not reason; the breath of God, not syllogisms.¹³⁷

It was fundamental to Erasmus' philosophy of Christ that the path to salvation or 'blessedness' lay through scripture, and that Scripture should accordingly be open to all to read. It was to be studied not so much for an intellectual grasp of its meaning, but for the transforming effect of the presence of Christ encountered in its pages on the lives of the faithful. Just as in human life the lover becomes like the thing he loves, 'If someone loves the Holy Scriptures, he is enraptured, changed, transfigured into God'.¹³⁸ Contrary to the scholastic contention that only trained theologians had the authority to interpret it and to ensure the avoidance of error, Erasmus believed that if sacred scripture was approached with piety then, with the help of God's grace, all could derive some benefit from reading it for themselves.

In advocating so forcefully that laity, whether educated or not, should have access to scripture for themselves Erasmus was flying in the face of centuries of tradition, which had maintained that the uneducated should depend for their knowledge of scripture on those who could interpret it for them in accordance with the teaching of the church. While vernacular translation as such was not formally proscribed, historically it was associated with outbreaks of heresy, notably of John Wycliffe and the 'Lollards' who followed him in England, and of the Waldensians in France. There had been tacit acceptance by church authorities of educated laity, especially the nobility, possessing vernacular translations, but in manuscript form private copies were costly and rare.¹³⁹ When Erasmus published his New Testament in 1516

137 CWE63, pp. 31–2.

138 CWE63, p. 25; see also p. 30.

139 For an extensive study of issues raised by vernacular translations, see Deanesley (1920).

the church had yet to come to terms with the mass production at an affordable cost made possible by the development of printing in the previous century, and with the appetite of an increasingly literate laity for publications in the vernacular – an appetite which the reformers were quick to exploit.¹⁴⁰

The Preface to the Paraphrase on Matthew In this *Preface* Erasmus developed the case for vernacular translation at greater length than in previous writings.¹⁴¹ Its foundation remained, as in the *Commentary on Psalm 1* and the *Paraclesis*, the promotion of the philosophy of Christ, but in anticipation of objections from the theological establishment he gave his arguments more backing, mostly derived from scripture itself.

The *Preface* opens with a strong statement of disagreement with those who maintained that only those trained in scholastic philosophy and theology should be allowed direct access to scripture:

I greatly differ from those who think that the illiterate and the laity as a whole are to be dissuaded from reading the sacred books, and that no one is to be admitted to these secret places except a few men who have for many years been worn down by Aristotelian philosophy and Scholastic theology.¹⁴²

Erasmus does not deny scholastics their capability for interpretation, and allows that the uneducated may be arrogant in their ignorance. He nevertheless again argues that all could gain something from scripture, provided that it was approached with piety, purity of heart and freedom from worldly desires. Otherwise learned and unlearned alike could fail to grasp Christ.¹⁴³

Erasmus founded his case for the widest possible access to scripture on historical precedent, on the precedent of Jerome, and above all on the authority of Christ himself. It was clear from the New Testament, he argued, that Jesus and the apostles taught the people in language which they understood. Jesus wanted his teaching to be heard by all classes of society, particularly the poor and uneducated:

Let us consider what listeners Christ himself had. Were they not a promiscuous multitude, among whom were the blind, the lame, beggars, publicans, centurions, artisans, women and children? Might he take it amiss to be read by those by whom he wished to be heard?¹⁴⁴

Likewise, Erasmus' belief was that 'Christ wants his philosophy to be propagated as widely as possible. He died for all men: he desires to be known by all men'. Either, then, princes should ensure that people are taught the three languages of scripture, or

140 On the consequences of printing for scripture, see Eisenstein (1979) Vol. 1, pp. 303–450.

141 The *Preface* is summarised (in German) by Holeczk (1975), pp. 194–201, and an extract translated by Patrick Preston appears in Part II, Documents B. It appears to have been an afterthought due the printer having a number of blank pages which needed to be filled.

142 Para. 1.

143 Paras. 2–6.

144 Para. 5.

scripture should be translated into all languages.¹⁴⁵ Erasmus believed that there was a principle of accommodation by which the Holy Spirit opened up the meaning of scripture in accordance with the capacity and needs of the individual concerned: 'in the Gospels divine wisdom bends to take even the infirm, so that no one could be so unlearned as not to be capable of grasping the Evangelical Philosophy'.¹⁴⁶ He spells this out expressively in terms of the capacity of the New Testament to meet a variety of pastoral and spiritual needs of the Christian believer.¹⁴⁷

Erasmus acknowledged that clergy had their proper place in making scripture known to their flock. He considered that the bishops had a particular responsibility to ensure that they did so:

For, according to Paul, it is the special duty, the first duty, of the bishops to teach the Christian people: to teach not Plato, or Aristotle, or the subtleties of scholastic disputation, but the doctrine of Christ ...¹⁴⁸

More generally he referred in the *Preface* to the duty of the pastors 'that this bread is broken by Christ and handed down to be distributed to the people'.¹⁴⁹ He also went a step further in suggesting, not unreasonably, that allowing the laity to read scripture for themselves would help prepare their minds for the teaching they were to receive from the pulpit.

Erasmus accepted that if the laity were allowed to consult scripture for themselves, they might not immediately understand everything they read, but he suggested remedies for that. They should prepare by prayer, seek the help of Christ, and consult others. They should also not be hasty in judgement of meaning, and if there was any danger of being misled, then:

the testimony of his own conscience is the most certain suffrage for each man. Next there is the agreement of Scripture and the life of Christ. Finally there are certain things that are too clear to require hesitation or demand an interpreter.¹⁵⁰

What is significantly absent from this list is the requirement to consult either theologians or clergy, though as a guide against misinterpretation he suggested that 'a summary of the Christian faith and doctrine in lucid brevity and learned simplicity' should be produced annually by 'learned men of integrity' and 'read to the multitude by the voice of the priest'.¹⁵¹

Erasmus went on, however, to argue that there were circumstances in which the laity were justified in consulting scripture for themselves. The most obvious of these was if the clergy were neglectful in making scripture known.¹⁵² Thus, in a

145 Para. 13.

146 Para. 5.

147 Para. 7.

148 CWE63, p. 43.

149 Para. 8.

150 Para. 9.

151 Para. 15.

152 See also CWE63, p. 33.

passage later echoed by Tyndale,¹⁵³ he asked, 'But what if the pastors were changed into Philistines and crammed the arteries of the living water with earth injected into them? What will the people do?'. In such circumstances then 'each man should help himself to the sacred bread by which he may satisfy his hungry soul'.¹⁵⁴

To this Erasmus added the argument that lay access to scripture was justified if the clergy were not truly interpreting it: 'if they teach those things that are plainly inconsistent with the Gospel ... each man should renew his soul by private reading'.¹⁵⁵ When set alongside Erasmus' claim that there were some passages of scripture which were so clear in their meaning that they needed no interpretation, a radical principle was in effect being put in place of the laity determining for themselves on the basis of their own reading of scripture whether the teaching they were being given by the church's official teachers was true or not. Unlike the reformers who pushed the principle to the extreme, however, Erasmus did not have in mind any criticism of the teaching of the church as such, and he specifically rejected scripture being made to serve doctrinal wrangles:

Abjure frivolous or impiously curious little questions, if by chance they arise in the soul ... the first thing to beware of is stretching scripture to your desires and twisting it to your decisions. Rather, temper your opinions and mode of life to its rule. Otherwise from origins of this kind is born stubbornness in assertion, contentions, disagreements and hatreds, heresies the poisons of Christian faith and concord at one and the same time.¹⁵⁶

Erasmus maintained in the *Preface* that he had not advocated universal access to scripture:

to take away their authority from the good doctors or add spirit to unlearned people of any kind so that they should claim for themselves knowledge of the mystical Scripture, rely on their own prudence, and reject the doctors of the Church.¹⁵⁷

Yet such a assertion did not sit easily with the claim that the gospels 'were revealed in such a way that they are more readily understood by the uneducated person who is pious and modest than by the arrogant philosopher',¹⁵⁸ nor with the cautionary comparison he made with the Jewish scribes and Pharisees who, for all their expertise in scripture, failed to perceive the truth of Christ.¹⁵⁹

However much he may have sought to avoid the conclusion, therefore, Erasmus' proposals for unmediated lay access to scripture represented a challenge to the established authorities of the church. The implication that lay people might judge for themselves what accorded with the teaching of the New Testament undermined the authority of clergy. The suggestion that preoccupation with abstract theological questions was less important than the application of scripture to life undermined

153 Tyndale, 'Prologue to the Prophet Jonas', *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 449.

154 Para. 8.

155 Para. 8.

156 Para. 11.

157 Para. 4.

158 Para. 2.

159 Para. 1.

the authority of scholastic interpreters in favour of those who gave priority to the philosophy of Christ. The challenge may have remained theoretical insofar as Erasmus never produced a vernacular translation, but in the hands of the reformers it was to present a grave threat to the authority of the catholic church.

Pierre Cousturier (Petrus Sutor 1475–1537): attack on vernacular translation

The objections which Erasmus had anticipated to allowing the laity direct access to scripture were given strong expression by the Paris trained theologian, Pierre Cousturier.¹⁶⁰ In 1524 Cousturier, with the support of the theology faculty of Paris, published *De tralatione Bibliae*.¹⁶¹ The bulk of the work was taken up with defending the Vulgate against alternative translations from the original languages, but towards the end of the treatise Cousturier turned to the matter of vernacular translation.¹⁶²

The heart of Cousturier's case was that to allow the uneducated laity unfettered access to scripture by means of vernacular translations carried too great a danger of their falling in error concerning the beliefs essential to salvation, thereby putting at risk both the authority of the church's interpretation and the salvation of the individual. As he put it, new translations were:

not only superfluous, but even dangerous, for it is through them that errors spring up, conflicts are incited, heresies arise, and the authority of Holy Writ is weakened and called into question.¹⁶³

Cousturier did not dwell greatly upon the technical difficulties of translation, nor of the suitability of vernacular languages as a medium for divine truth. He was concerned rather that even when the words of scripture are transparently clear there may be theological issues involved which can only be properly discussed and handled by trained theologians.¹⁶⁴ In typical scholastic manner, Cousturier saw the Bible almost exclusively as a source of dogma and moral precepts and made no allowance for scripture as seen in Erasmus' philosophy of Christ as providing the laity with a means of deepening their piety.¹⁶⁵ He focused rather on what he regarded as the intellectual and spiritual inability of the laity to understand the biblical text for themselves.¹⁶⁶ If they wished to grow in piety, then the laity should read other devotional writings approved by the church.¹⁶⁷

160 On Cousturier, see James K. Farge in *Contemporaries*, Vol. 1, pp. 352–3 and James Hogg, *BBKL*, Vol. XI (1996), cols 279–83. After taking his doctorate in 1510, Cousturier lived a relatively retired life as a Carthusian, until he emerged from the cloister to campaign actively against Erasmus.

161 *De tralatione Bibliae et novarum reprobatione interpretationum* (Paris, 1525).

162 Erasmus' controversy with Cousturier is described by Rummel (1989) Vol. II, pp. 61–73, and dealt with at greater length by Holeczek (1975), pp. 203–45.

163 *De vita Carthusiana* (Cologne, 1519), cited from Rummel (1989) Vol. II, p. 61.

164 For the detail of Sutor's arguments, see Holeczek (1975), pp. 204–19.

165 Holeczek (1975), pp. 204–5.

166 Holeczek (1975), p. 205.

167 Holeczek (1975), p. 206.

For Cousturier, the laity did not have the expertise necessary to judge between true and false interpretations, nor to move beyond the literal to the true spiritual sense. The assumption that the simple readers could of themselves understand passages which were the subject of scholarly debate and disagreement could lead to arrogance. The pressures of daily life upon the laity, especially women, could lead to the neglect of the Bible altogether. Its proper understanding depended upon piety, upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, and upon time for contemplation like that available to monks. All these were possible for those who devoted their time to the study of theology, but were unlikely to be so for lay people immersed in the affairs of the world. Moreover, the uneducated were likely to be lead astray by Old Testament passages describing the patriarchs sleeping with handmaids or harlots, and apparent contradictions in the gospels concerning the life and teaching of Jesus could lead to contempt. In this connection Cousturier cited as authority Matthew 7:6 'Give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine'.¹⁶⁸ This was a traditional text used to justify denying the laity access to scripture, with the pigs seen as living only for the satisfaction of their desires, and dogs as 'only becoming acquainted with truth in order to attack it'.¹⁶⁹ There was danger then, as Cousturier, saw it, to the authority of scripture itself if lay people were allowed direct access.

A further concern for Cousturier was that unmediated access could also give the laity knowledge of matters which were reserved for spiritual leaders or rulers. In this connection he cited Luke 4:20 'and he [Jesus] closed the book, and gave it again to the minister' as authority for scripture being entrusted to the clergy.¹⁷⁰ Established authority whether of the clergy or of the theologians who trained them in the church's interpretation of scripture was thus threatened by Erasmus' contention that the laity could, to a degree, understand scripture for themselves.

Echoing criticism made by Cousturier himself, Rummel considers Erasmus' *Apology against Sutor*,¹⁷¹ to be 'one of the least effective tracts in the corpus of his polemical writings because of its lack of structure and organization'.¹⁷² Despite it and his subsequent exchanges with Cousturier,¹⁷³ formal censures were issued against Erasmus' views concerning biblical translation by the Paris faculty on 17 December 1527.¹⁷⁴ Several of the censures related to his advocacy of vernacular translation in the Preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew*.

The Censures of the Paris Faculty, 1527

Against Erasmus' assertion in the *Preface*, cited as: 'I would desire that the sacred books should be translated into all languages', the censure allowed the principle of

168 Tyndale, 1526, with modernised spelling.

169 See Holeczek (1975), p. 209 for references to this by Chrysostom and others (n.72).

170 Holeczek (1975), p. 208.

171 *Apologia adversus debacchationes Petri Sutoris* (Basel: Froben, 1525).

172 Rummel (1989) Vol. II, pp. 67–8.

173 Summarised by Rummel (1989) Vol. II, pp. 69–73.

174 See Rummel (1989) Vol. II, pp. 46–55.

vernacular translation, since ‘the sacred books . . . are in their nature holy and good’, but drew attention to the dangers of ‘permitting the promiscuous reading of them, when translated without any explanation’. The main concern of the theologians seems to have been not so much that ‘the unlearned and simple should read the holy books translated into their own tongue’, but that they should do so without the church’s guidance. Thus against Erasmus’ assertion in the Preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew*: ‘With my good will, let the husbandman read the holy books: let the smith and the weaver read them’, the *Censure* was as follows:

Holy scripture bears witness that the simple are as children, to be fed, as S. Paul says, with milk ... Wherefore it is not a means suitable for these simple people, that they should read the sacred books promiscuously, translated into the vernacular: but the means which befits them is that which the Church has appointed, the hearing of the word of God, and attendance at sermons. Neither is the use of certain of the sacred books prohibited to them, if they are provided with suitable explanations, tending to edification, and if also such books are read by them piously and soberly, without pride and arrogance. Therefore this proposition, set down without any limitation, shews that its assessor is of unsound doctrine.¹⁷⁵

In response both to Cousturier and to the *Censures*, Erasmus claimed that he had never made it a ‘dogma’ that holy scripture should be translated into the vernacular, or that just anyone might translate it, nor had he ever attempted any such translation himself. He did not believe that scripture in the vernacular should be disseminated indiscriminately among the populace.¹⁷⁶ His position remained, as in the Preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, that the best means for making common people familiar with scripture was preaching, provided there was a sufficient supply of good teachers.

When Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Matthew* appeared in 1522, Luther’s German translation of the New Testament had yet to appear, but its publication, based on Erasmus’ Greek text, was used by Cousturier against Erasmus. Erasmus argued that he could not be held responsible for the use or misuse to which his work was put, but, as the conservative backlash to humanist ideas intensified in reaction to Luther’s ideas, it is hard to avoid the impression that Erasmus was qualifying his earlier advocacy of vernacular translation in order to avoid being tarred with the Lutheran brush.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Erasmus held to his conviction that scripture should not be withheld from the laity; it provided the food essential for spiritual health and all who approached the Bible with a devout attitude could derive some benefit from it. Where Cousturier argued on the basis of the gospel command not to throw pearls before swine (Matt 7:6) that the Bible had been entrusted to the clergy, Erasmus cited Gregory the Great’s saying that an elephant could drown in it and a gnat paddle.¹⁷⁸ He accepted the need for appropriate safeguards, but if the bishops and clergy failed in

175 The citations and translations are from Deanesly (1920), pp. 387–8.

176 Holeczek (1975), p. 225f.

177 Holeczek (1975), pp. 235ff.

178 Holeczek (1975), p. 234. PL LXXV, 613.

their responsibility of promoting knowledge of the Bible, he considered it justifiable for the laity to study the Bible for themselves in their own language. Accordingly, in his *Declarationes* published in response to the *Censures* in 1532,¹⁷⁹ he re-iterated that it was better for scripture to be taught verbally than read, but nonetheless maintained that it might be read if there were insufficient teachers, or as a preparation for a church service. The potential for this to damage the teaching and authority of the church was not lost on his critics. So fierce in fact was the resulting criticism that he withdrew the Preface from the second edition of the *Paraphrase on Matthew*.¹⁸⁰

It need not be doubted that the scholastic guardians of the faith represented by Cousturier were genuinely concerned with the spiritual well-being of the laity, which would be endangered if they fell into error in interpretation, as would the church itself. For Erasmus, on the other hand, the obstacles to opening up the Bible to the laity were not insurmountable; the potential gains outweighed the dangers, especially if the bishops and clergy took their responsibilities for instruction in gospel teaching and moral living seriously. In the hands of the reformers, however, vernacular translations became tools to undermine the authority of the church by challenging traditions and practices which were 'unscriptural'.

Conclusions

Erasmus' approach to scripture posed a challenge to traditional authority in a number of inter-related ways.

First, his adoption of Jerome's *ad fontes* approach of according primacy to the original languages of scripture called into question the authority of the Vulgate when its translation of the New Testament did not accord with the Greek. It also raised questions concerning the authority of the church insofar as certain of its doctrinal formulations depended upon the precise wording of the Vulgate.

Second, the philological principle of determining the interpretation of a text on the basis of its meaning in its original language as understood in its historical context challenged the traditional interpretation of a number of passages used in support of key doctrines. This again represented a challenge to the magisterium of the church, and while Erasmus accepted the catholic church's teaching, the reformers employed the principle against those doctrines and practices that they rejected.

Third, insistence on the primacy of the original languages of scripture initially put theologians who did not know those languages at a disadvantage, and implicitly meant that linguistic scholars could claim at least a controlling authority in interpretation. That ceased to be the case as scholastic theologians became competent in languages, but there remained those who rejected the primacy of the Greek and maintained the supreme authority of the Vulgate text, the position later adopted by the Council of Trent in 1546.

179 *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae sub nomine facultatis theologiae Parisiensis vulgatas*, published in 1532 both by De Keyser of Antwerp and Froben of Basel; see Rummel (1989) Vol. II, pp. 51ff.

180 Holeczek (1975), p. 194, n. 33.

Fourth, Erasmus challenged the nature and methodology of scholasticism by arguing that theology should accord greater authority to scripture as the primary locus of revelation and give it greater weight in the formulation of theology than Aristotelian philosophy. He also argued for a contextual and rhetorical approach to interpretation, rather than forcing scriptural texts into a predetermined doctrinal mould. Scholastic theologians, however, maintained that sole authority in interpretation must lie in their hands if error was to be avoided. Linguistic ability alone was, they argued, was no guarantee against it. By arguing that scripture rather than philosophy should provide the authoritative basis for theology, Erasmus to some extent prepared the ground for the reformers to take their stand on the authority of scripture alone.

Fifth, scholastic theologians saw scripture as an authoritative basis for doctrinal truth, assent to which was essential for salvation. For Erasmus salvation was more a matter of transformation into the likeness of Christ by means of the spiritual nourishment which scripture could provide in appropriate measure to all who had access to it. His advocacy of unmediated lay access to scripture was seen by the theological establishment as a particular threat to the authority of the church in interpretation. Erasmus himself counselled against scripture being read in order for the laity to judge for themselves whether the teaching they received from the church bore the authority of Christ as revealed in scripture, but the reformers had no such hesitation.

Finally, Erasmus' approach raised a fundamental question about the nature of authority itself. His method of working, which accorded decisive authority to the exercise of scholarly judgement on the basis of empirical evidence was contrary the prevailing tradition of unquestioning acceptance of past 'authorities'. It also represented a radical challenge to the practice of scholastic theologians of issuing authoritative pronouncements on the basis of their official status without giving reasons. For Erasmus even the Vulgate had to cede its authority to the empirical evidence of the original languages. In Erasmus' approach to the interpretation of scripture it is thus possible to see a chasm beginning to open up between two cultures of authority, between the spirit of dogmatic utterance of medieval theology and the humanist spirit of free enquiry and individual judgement. In this Erasmus was a representative figure of what has been described as in 'a paradigm shift towards freedom':

An emerging culture quite unlike that of the Middle Ages began to stress not only the need but also the right of all human beings to read and write. Every person was deemed capable of understanding, articulating, and communicating the truth. Everyone was thought to be able, upon proper education, to know, speak, and act for him/herself rather than to remain on the receiving end of dogmas passed down through the channels of an authoritarian system.¹⁸¹

181 Hoffmann (1994), p. 62. On concepts of authority at this time, see Evans (1992), especially Part I.

Chapter 4

The Debate between Thomas More and William Tyndale Concerning Translation

When Erasmus called for the scriptures to be made universally available in all languages he could hardly have imagined that his close friend and defender, Sir Thomas More, would become embroiled in a fierce battle to suppress the first ever translation of the New Testament into English from the Greek text, the New Testament of William Tyndale. It was not originally Tyndale's intention to publish a translation without the authorization of the church, but after failing to obtain the agreement of the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, he concluded that 'not only that there was no room in my Lord of London's palace to translate the New Testament, but also that there was no place to do it in all England'.¹ When copies of the Worms edition began to flood into London after its publication in 1526, it was Tunstall who ordered them to be seized and destroyed lest 'they contaminate and infect the flock committed unto us, with most deadly poison and heresy'.² Two years later, with the mass production made possible by printing threatening to overwhelm his agents, Tunstall commissioned his friend and fellow humanist Thomas More to take up his pen against Tyndale's New Testament and other writings seen as propagating Luther's ideas, including Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528) – and to do so in English, so as to 'reveal to the simple and uneducated the crafty malice of the heretics'.³ The first edition of what subsequently came to be known as *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*,⁴ appeared from the press of More's brother-in-law John Rastell in June 1529. In 1531 Tyndale published *An Answer*

1 Preface to Genesis, 1530; *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 396.

2 The full text (here cited with modernised spelling) is found in Pollard (1911), pp. 131–33 (Latin), pp. 133–5 (English). For Tunstall's response to 'heretical' literature, see Stewart (2002), pp. 79–83.

3 Tunstall's letter (7 March 1528) is printed in Rogers (1947), pp. 386–8 and by Sturge, (1934), Appendix 11, pp. 362ff. For the suggestion that More may have sought the commission, see Daniell (1994), p. 261.

4 *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Vol. 6* (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 1981) = CWM6 = *Dialogue*. The *Dialogue* will be cited in what follows from a modernised spelling version by Allan Jenkins based on the 1557 edition, with cross references to the Yale edition of the 1531 text. A facsimile of the 1557 edition and a text with modernised spelling was published by W.E. Campbell in 1927 with the title *The Dialogue Concerning Tyndale*. The *Dialogue* is available online at <http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/>. A summary is provided by Lakowski (1993).

unto Sir Thomas More's *Dialogue*,⁵ and More in turn responded in 1532 and 1533 with *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*.⁶ In the Yale edition of More's *Collected Works* this extends to some 1034 pages, much of it a repetitive interweaving of a few key themes, and it remains a work which because of its ordinate length and minute dissection of Tyndale's arguments is rarely studied. It is the debate in these three works concerning issues of authority in relation to the translation and interpretation of scripture with which the present chapter will be concerned.

William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536)

There is much about the life of William Tyndale (also known as Hytchyns, a family name variously spelt) that remains shadowy and eludes his biographers.⁷ It is inferred from his BA graduation at Oxford in 1512 that he was born about 1494. It is not known whether when he went on to Cambridge, probably to improve his Greek, Erasmus was still in residence there. That Erasmus was a potent influence on his life is however clear from the fact that while resident in the household of Sir John Walsh at Little Sodbury in his native Gloucestershire after leaving Cambridge, he made an English translation of Erasmus' *Enchiridion* (which had been re-issued with a new preface in 1518). By then a priest, he did so to counter the disapproval of local clergy and dignitaries of his religious opinions. He was also, according to Foxe, remembered as saying to a supporter of the pope, 'If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more scripture than thou dost'⁸ – words that echo those of Erasmus in the *Paraclesis*.

It is hardly surprising that in a book honouring Protestant martyrs Foxe's account of Tyndale's early years should depict him as drawn to scripture at an early age. As a young man at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, Foxe writes, he 'increased as well in the knowledge of tongues, and other liberal arts, as especially in the knowledge and truth of the scriptures, whereunto his mind was singularly addicted'. In the first words of his own to appear in print, Tyndale introduced himself to his readers as a translator. In the Prologue to his New Testament of 1525 he writes: 'I have here translated (brethren and sisters most dear and tenderly beloved in Christ) the New Testament for your spiritual edifying, consolation and solace ...'. He regarded the translation of scripture as the vocation to which God had called him and for which he had equipped him. He writes of how 'it had pleased God to put in my mind, and

5 *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (Parker Society edition, CUP, 1850) = *Answer*, from which quotations are taken. A critical edition edited by Anne More O'Donnell, S.N.D. and Jared Wicks, S.J. is now available as Volume 3 of *The Independent Works of William Tyndale* (Catholic University Press of America, 2000).

6 *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Vol. 8* (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 1973) = CWM8 = *Confutation*. Quotations are given with modernised spelling and cross referenced to the Yale edition. On the details of publication see Louis A. Schuster, 'Thomas More's Polemical Career, 1523–33', CWM8, Part III, pp. 1135ff.

7 For biographical details see most recently Daniell (1994) and in *OxfordDNB* (2004), and the earlier biographies of and Demaus (1886), Mozley (1937), and Williams (1969).

8 Foxe (1576), *Acts and Monuments*, Vol. 5.

also to give me grace to translate this fore-rehearsed New Testament into our English tongue', and of his belief that 'we have not received the gifts of God for ourselves only, or for to hide them; but for to bestow them unto the honouring of God and Christ, and edifying of the congregation, which is the body of Christ'.⁹

The first print run of his New Testament at Cologne in 1525 was disrupted by the authorities, and completed at Worms in 1526; a revised edition was published in Antwerp in 1534.¹⁰ Tyndale's translation of the Pentateuch from the Hebrew was completed in 1530, and his draft of Joshua to 2 Chronicles was published posthumously after he was burnt as a heretic at Vilvorde, near Brussels, in 1536. Tyndale took as the basis for his New Testament the 1522 edition of the Greek text of Erasmus, whose Latin version he also took into account. He also consulted the German edition of Luther, first published in 1522. To the extent that he based his translation of the New Testament on the Greek and of the Old Testament on Hebrew, Tyndale fully embraced the philological method and *ad fontes* principle of Erasmus. On the basis of a careful analysis of his use of earlier versions, Westcott concluded that he displayed both independence and originality; he often incorporated Luther's notes into his glosses, but 'he deals with the text as one who passed a scholar's judgement upon every fragment of the work, unbiased by any predecessor'.¹¹ Independent scholarly judgement did not always, however, as Erasmus also discovered, accord with the magisterium of the catholic church.

Tyndale's English version of scripture nevertheless proved a lasting achievement. It was the first since the banned Middle English Wycliffite versions of the late fourteenth century, the first English translation from the Greek of the New Testament and the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and the first to be printed. By wresting the Bible from the control of the clergy and making affordable copies of the New Testament available in the language of the common people Tyndale promoted the Reformation cause in England, but it was in his embrace of Luther's theology that he differed from Erasmus. The concern of the *Enchiridion* with inner piety rather than undue emphasis on ceremonial and the externals of religion is a theme which can readily be traced in Tyndale's writings, but whereas Erasmus' hope was for reform within the church and he was forced publicly to contest the teaching of Luther, Tyndale uncompromisingly rejected every tradition or pious custom for which there was no explicit scriptural authority, in the belief that scripture alone contained all that was necessary for salvation.

Ironically in 1536, the very year that Tyndale was executed, the English clergy were petitioning King Henry VIII for an English Bible, and it was in effect Tyndale's translation that formed the basis of successive English versions. It has been estimated that some 84 percent of his New Testament and around 76 percent of

9 Text from *A Pathway into Holy Scripture*, in *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 7ff.

10 For an overview of editions, see Daniell (2003), pp. 143–6, 151–52. An original spelling edition of the Worms edition was published by the British Library in 2000, and a modern spelling edition by David Daniell of the 1534 edition by Yale U.P. in 1989. Only a single copy of the 1525 edition is known, comprising Matthew Chapters 1 to 22 in the form of 31 quarto leaves, now in the British Library.

11 Westcott (1872), p. 142.

his Old Testament translations found their way into the King James Version of 1611 and gave to the English language many of its familiar expressions.¹²

Thomas More (1478–1535)

Although a family man and not a priest, and trained as a lawyer rather than a theologian, Thomas More was devout in the practice of the catholic faith and clear in his understanding of what the church taught as necessary for salvation. The year after Luther published his *Ninety-five Theses* in 1517 he entered the service of Henry VIII as Master of Requests and a Privy Councillor. He was knighted in 1521 and appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1525. He succeeded Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor of England in 1529, serving until his resignation in 1532, three years before he was beheaded for treason for refusing to swear allegiance to Henry VIII as Supreme Governor of the Church of England.¹³ He was canonized in 1935.

More is believed to have assisted Henry VIII with his defence of the sacraments against Luther, the *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* of 1521, (for which the Pope accorded Henry the title ‘Defender of the Faith’),¹⁴ and he also wrote his own *Responsio ad Lutheram* in Latin in 1523.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, therefore, Cuthbert Tunstall who was a close friend of More had confidence in his ability to defend catholic truth. In his letter of 1526 he described him as a Demosthenes both in English and Latin,¹⁶ and he would have known that More also had the necessary expertise in Greek to engage with Tyndale on his own ground. Tunstall recognised that Tyndale’s translation was fuelling a battle for hearts and minds on a much wider front than religious disputation hitherto conducted almost entirely in Latin. Thus, he asked More to defend catholic truth by writing in English and, following hard of the heels of Tyndale’s *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), the *Dialogue* was one of the first major works of the Reformation debate and the first of More himself, to have been written in the mother tongue of the English people. The main battleground in the war of words of the two Englishmen was that of scripture, its translation and interpretation.

The *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*

The *Dialogue* was a fierce attack on the ideas of Luther and Tyndale. It justified the burning of heretics in terms of the danger they posed to the church and to the

12 The figures are those of Nielsen and Skousen (1998). See also Daniell (2003), pp. 157–9 and for a more detailed analysis Hammond (1982), pp. 16–67.

13 Major biographies by Chambers (1935), Reynolds (1968), Marius (1985), Monti (1997), Ackroyd (1998), Guy (2000). See also House (2004), in *OxfordDNB*.

14 For More’s involvement, see Marius (1985), pp. 279–80, Daniell (2000), pp. 250ff.

15 CWM5; English translation by Sister Scholastica Mandeville. For a summary, see Daniell (1994), pp. 255–61.

16 Sturge (1934), p. 363.

salvation of its members. It specifically attacked Tyndale's New Testament, fiercely defended every element of catholic belief and practice rejected by the reformers, and challenged Tyndale's redefinition of the church and its membership.

As its name indicates, More cast his defence of the catholic church in the form of an imaginary dialogue between More himself and a 'secret' young 'Messenger' sent by a trusted friend to seek his guidance on various ideas that were provoking doubt concerning matters relating to the church's traditional beliefs and practices. (The 'More' of the *Dialogue* is thus a literary construct, since the real More wrote the whole thing.) The *Dialogue* is arranged in four books, and begins by setting out the 'Letter of Credence' commending the Messenger and More's letter to his unnamed friend in reply. It becomes clear that More's friend has some concern that his Messenger may be inclined to accept some of the views he has heard: 'he put me somewhat in doubt whether he were (as young scholars be sometime prone to new fantasies) fallen in Luther's sect.'¹⁷

Although the *Dialogue* is prompted in large part by the spread of Lutheran ideas, treatment of Luther himself is left to Book IV, which also seeks to justify the burning of heretics. The earlier books deal with two manifestations of false ideas in England, which, although he shows himself aware of the danger of damning every type of new teaching by labelling it 'Lutheran',¹⁸ More believed actually to stem from Luther's teaching. The debate centres around two people: Thomas Bilney who was tried for heresy in 1527 for preaching against saints, images and pilgrimages, and William Tyndale, whose English translation of the New Testament was banned. There is also coverage of the case of Richard Hunne, arrested for possessing illegal copies of the New Testament in English, and found hanged in prison under suspicious circumstances.¹⁹

The dialogue form helped ease More's dilemma of how to contest false teaching without at the same time making it more widely known, since the Messenger expressed the new ideas he wished to discuss at second hand, and in a number of places he pointed out that he does not necessarily hold them as his own. Even so, the dilemma was never fully resolved, nor, given the nature of the exercise, could it be. As Clebsch has observed:

All the while those whose faith More guarded might legitimately learn from his books what they were forbidden to read otherwise – the precise nature of the Protestant attack on the established religion.²⁰

In fact, the *Confutation* went a step further, by citing Tyndale's *Answer* word-for-word and in effect gave wider publicity to Tyndale's views, albeit in order to confute them.

What is significant, however, is that such an exercise was countenanced at all, and that it was no longer considered sufficient for the church to assert its authority

17 *Dialogue*, Book 1, Chap. 1; see CWM6, p. 34.

18 *Dialogue*, Book 1, Chap. 1; see CWM6, pp. 30-31.

19 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 15; see CWM6, pp. 316-30.

20 Clebsch (1964), p. 287. 'Established' is not here used in the technical sense in which it came to apply to the Church of England.

and forcibly suppress what it saw as heretical teaching. Forcible suppression there indeed was, but even the threat of burning was proving ineffective in suppressing the challenge of Reformation teaching to the church's authority. No longer were thinking people prepared to accept without question the teaching of the church as authoritative. With renaissance humanism had come a new questioning spirit, which would only accept as true what could be personally tested against historical investigation, empirical data, or the light of reason. More's reliance in the *Dialogue* on reasoned argument and his explicit defence of the place of reason in religion against the Messenger's rejection of it showed his humanist credentials, but for the most part he contests the reformers' claims on the common ground of scripture. At the same time the *Dialogue* is strongly marked by More's own unquestioning acceptance of catholic teaching in its entirety, even when it was contrary to reason,²¹ and despite an uneasy tension in the background with evident abuses in its practice.

For the purpose of this study it is not necessary to trace More's defence of reason, nor to evaluate the quality of the logic of the arguments of the two protagonists. The focus will be rather on investigating where they considered authority to lie in the translation and interpretation of scripture, and on analysing the basis on which they considered it to rest.

Translation: The Official Position in England

Whereas in Germany there had been some 18 German versions of the New Testament before Luther first produced his translation in 1522, and in Italy a translation by Niccolo Malermi had been published in 1471, all that previously existed in England was a late fourteenth-century translation in outdated Middle English, the 'Wycliffite' version. The translation, by followers of John Wycliffe (c. 1329–1384), including John Purvey and Nicholas of Hereford, had been made in furtherance of Wycliffe's conviction of the supreme authority of the Bible, and it was in response to this and other beliefs which challenged the power of the church and its authority in matters of faith that the official position in England concerning vernacular translation had been established. A posthumous condemnation of the Wycliffite translation resulted from the concern of Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury (1396–1414), at the strength of support for Wycliffe's teaching among the Lollards, as his followers came to be called, and whom Arundel sought with great vigour to suppress. Following Arundel's visitation, the Provincial Council of Oxford of 1407 enacted a Constitution which read a follows:²²

The Holy Scripture not to be translated into the vulgar tongue, nor a translation to be expounded, until it shall have been duly examined, under pain of excommunication and the stigma of heresy. Moreover it is a perilous thing, as the Blessed Jerome testifies, to translate the text of Holy Scripture from one idiom into another, inasmuch as in the translations themselves it is no easy matter to keep the same meaning in all cases, like as

21 *Dialogue*, Book 1, Chap. 27; see CWM6, p. 166; see also Fox (1982), pp. 155f.

22 Gairdner (1908), Vol. I, p. 61 gives the date November 1407, and that of publication as 1409 after confirmation by another council held at St Paul's Cathedral, London.

the Blessed Jerome, albeit inspired, confesses that he often went astray in this respect. We therefore enact and ordain that no one henceforth on his own authority translate any text of Holy Scripture into the English or other language, by way of a book, pamphlet, or tract, and that no book, pamphlet, or tract of this kind be read, either already recently composed in the time of the said John Wyclif, or since then, or that may in future be composed, in part or in whole, publicly or privily, under pain of the greater excommunication, until the translation itself shall have been approved by the diocesan of the place or if need be by a provincial council, Whoever shall do the contrary to be punished in like manner as a supporter of heresy and error.²³

The Constitution recognised that translation inevitably requires the translator to come to decisions about meaning, so that, to a degree, translation always involves interpretation. The church's desire to keep translation in its own power was correspondingly bound up with its determination to maintain its own authority in matters of interpretation. Accordingly the Constitution applied not just to the Wycliffite version, but to any translation. For the church to have allowed unauthorised translation at all would have been to undermine its own authority and open the door to heresy.

Nevertheless, despite the ban, Wycliffite Bibles continued to be secretly circulated in circles of Lollards who, despite efforts by bishops to suppress them remained active until the early sixteenth century, especially in London, south-east England and East Anglia.²⁴ When Thomas Bilney, one of the earliest supporters of the Reformation in England, was convicted of heresy in 1531, he was one of several hundred to be burnt at the stake in the Lollard's Pit in Norwich between 1390 and 1550. The Lollards continued to promote Wycliffe's belief in the sole authority of scripture in matters of religion and the right of every person to read the scriptures for themselves, as well as other aspects of his thought which anticipated key features of the theology of the sixteenth-century reformers.²⁵

The Lollards would have provided a ready market for Tyndale's New Testament, and Tyndale is known to have put several Lollard tracts into current English.²⁶ These included the early fifteenth century tract *A Compendious olde Treatise, shewing how that we ought to have the scripture in Englishe*, a fragment of which in what is believed to be Tyndale's own handwriting was discovered in the British Library in 1997.²⁷ It is usually assumed, however, on the basis of his claim in the *Epistle to the Reader* of the 1526 New Testament ('I had no man to counterfeit, neither was helped with English of any ... beforetime') that Tyndale did not make use of the Wycliffite translation itself.

In Book III of the *Dialogue* More addressed the popular misapprehension voiced by the Messenger that the English clergy had caused a total ban to be placed on

23 Pollard (1911), pp. 80–81.

24 Dickens (1966), p. 14.

25 See Dickens (1966), p. 15. For Lollard influence on Tyndale, see Smeeton, (1986), especially Chapter 4, pp. 89–113.

26 Mozley (1937), pp. 345–6.

27 Cooper (1998), who prints the text, with that of the full treatise reproduced from Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* as appendices.

translation (Chapters 11,13), pointing out that the actual position was that unofficial translations were prohibited by the Constitution of Oxford of 1408, but that pre-Wycliffe translations were not.²⁸ As a lawyer More was able to document this, and he cited the Constitution word-for-word from Lindwood, the authoritative compendium of church legislation. In More's view, Wycliffe was a 'great arch-heretic', and his translation made with the purpose of propagating heresy (Chapter 14).

Tyndale and More on Translation

Acceptance of the position that English translation was in principle not forbidden established a degree of common ground between More and Tyndale, both of whom were influenced by Erasmus. Tyndale's defence of English translation is set out in the preface to the reader of his *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), in which Tyndale claims the backing of Erasmus' *Paraclesis* and *Preface to the Paraphrase of Matthew*;²⁹ More's views are given in Book III, Chapter 16 of the *Dialogue*.

First, Tyndale recalls as a precedent how he had read as a child 'that king Adelstone caused the holy scripture to be translated into the tongue that was then in England, and how the prelates exhorted him thereto'.³⁰ More agrees that translations 'that were before Wycliffe's days remain lawful, and be in some folks' hands had and read'.³¹

Second, both More and Tyndale accept the testimony of scripture itself in favour of vernacular translation. Tyndale pointed out that 'God gave the children of Israel a law by the hand of Moses in their mother tongue; and all the prophets wrote in their mother tongue, and all the psalms were in the mother tongue',³² and that the sermons preached by the apostles in Acts were doubtless in the mother tongue. He asks why they may not therefore be read in the mother tongue.³³ The only cause Tyndale can see for denying the present generation the Old and New Testaments in the mother tongue is that it might allow them to see 'the work of antichrist and the juggling of hypocrites'.³⁴ More also made the point that the arguments against English translation, 'might in effect, for ought that I can see, as well be laid against the holy writers that wrote the scripture in the Hebrew tongue, and against the blessed evangelists that wrote the scripture in Greek'.³⁵

28 For the inhibiting effect of the Oxford Constitutions on the printing of religious literature in English in general and of scripture in particular well into the sixteenth century, see Kampen (1997), pp. 115ff.

29 *Obedience*, pp. 161–62. References are to the Parker Society edition. A more recent edition, edited by David Daniell was published by Penguin Books in 2000.

30 The historicity of this claim is uncertain, but Foxe also attests the belief that King Athelstan had commissioned a translation from Hebrew into English; cf. *Obedience*, p. 149, n. 3.

31 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 331.

32 *Obedience*, p. 144.

33 *Obedience*, p. 148.

34 *Obedience*, p. 145.

35 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 337.

Third, both make appeal to the authority of the early Christian writers. More, who cites the early Christian writers extensively in the *Confutation*, knows of no precedent against vernacular translation. Tyndale cleverly appeals to Jerome, the producer of the Vulgate, himself: ‘Saint Jerome also translated the bible into his mother tongue: why may not we also?’³⁶

Fourthly, both scholars were aware of the intrinsic difficulty of translating from one language to another pointed out by Jerome.³⁷ In the *Confutation*, for instance, More gives an example from John 1 of how translation might call for a difference in word order. Although, following the word order of the Greek, ‘God was the Word’, as Tyndale had done, was not wrong as a translation, to change the order in English to ‘the Word was God’ would, he argued, avoid any misunderstanding of God the Father also having been incarnate in Christ.³⁸ In the *Dialogue*, More admits the difficulty of translating without either diminishing the sense or losing the grace of the original,³⁹ but argues that the difficulty had already been faced by those who had first translated from the original Greek.

Fifth, both Tyndale and More reject the argument that by comparison with Latin English is ‘a tongue vulgar and barbarous’, and not suitable for holy scripture. A fantasy, responds More. Every language seems strange in relation to another, and if they say English is barren of words, it is plenteous enough to express people’s minds in everything else they would say to each other (as More’s own use of English amply demonstrates).⁴⁰ Tyndale even argues on linguistic grounds that English lends itself much better to translation from Greek and especially from Hebrew than does Latin.⁴¹

Finally, both Tyndale and More saw a pastoral value in allowing laity access to the scripture in their own language. Tyndale refutes what he sees as false claims by the clergy of pastoral concern in keeping scripture from the laity on the grounds that the laity are too busy with worldly matters to have the quietness of mind that scripture requires for its understanding. ‘If that be the cause’, he responds, ‘then it is a plain case that our prelates understand not the scriptures themselves: for no layman is so tangled with worldly business as they are’.⁴² More accepts that scripture is ‘a medicine for him that is sick, and food for him that is whole’, but more cautiously suggests that the bishop should, according to his assessment of pastoral need, loan appropriate parts of scripture to the laity in his care.⁴³

36 *Obedience*, p. 148.

37 In Epistle 57 to Pammachius ‘On the best method of translating’, Jerome discussed the difficulty inherent in translating from one language to another, but he did not draw the conclusion that a translation needed to have the approval of ecclesiastical authority, nor, except for the gospels, did he have it.

38 *Confutation*, Book III; CWM8, pp. 236ff. More does not impute any theological motive to Tyndale in maintaining the Greek word order.

39 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 337.

40 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 337.

41 *Obedience*, pp. 148–9.

42 *Obedience*, p. 146.

43 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 343.

On the principle of vernacular translation, therefore, there was much common ground between the two protagonists. There were differences, however, over the part played by the clergy in hindering access by the laity to English translations. Tyndale accused the clergy not only of withholding scripture from the laity lest it should expose their own faults and their twisting of its meaning for venal gain,⁴⁴ a view echoed by the Messenger.⁴⁵ More admitted that some clergy were of poor quality, but claimed that nevertheless many were faithful. If they were doubtful about making the Bible available in English, it was because it was the seditious who were most fervent for it. Despite this, he affirmed that the possibility of abuse is no argument against anything, and should not be allowed to override the benefits of right use. He concluded: 'I would not for my mind withhold the profit that one good devout unlearned lay man might take by the reading, not for the harm that an hundred heretics would fall in by their own wilful abusion'.⁴⁶

More had no problem with laity seeking to understand scripture 'not to dispute it, but to fulfil it',⁴⁷ in order, that is, to endeavour with God's grace to follow his commandments and to meditate upon Christ's Godhead and godly life.⁴⁸ What More regarded as improper, however, was the laity 'meddling' in 'the high secret mysteries of God' which could be beyond even the capacity of the learned, raising doubts concerning the teaching of the church, or handling scripture irreverently. Devout reading meant: '[ac]knowledging our own ignorance where we find a doubt, and therein leaning to the faith of the church'.⁴⁹ Matters 'that unlearned people can never by themselves attain' were to be left

to them whose whole study is beset thereupon, and to the preachers appointed thereunto, which may show them such things in time and place convenient with reverence and authority, the sermon so tempered, as may be meet and convenient always for the present audience.⁵⁰

Correspondingly, More could not agree with the Messenger that it was proper 'for men unlearned to be busy with the chamming [chewing] of holy scripture'; rather its strong meat should be 'chammed' for them by preachers that by 'long study are admitted to read and expound it'.⁵¹

Tyndale based his case for lay access to scripture on the authority of scripture itself. Referring to the command of Deuteronomy 6:6–7 that God's commands should be taught to children, he asks 'How can we whet God's word (that is, to put it into practice, use and exercise) upon our children and household when we are violently

44 *Obedience*, p. 147.

45 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 1; see CWM6, p. 29.

46 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 340.

47 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 334.

48 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 336.

49 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 336.

50 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, pp. 336–7.

51 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 337.

kept from it and know it not?'.⁵² His assumption is that the command applies directly to his own day, despite its originally being addressed to the people of ancient Israel. Later, alluding to John 5:39 he makes the point that: 'Christ commandeth to search the scriptures',⁵³ and not to put faith in his miracles or teaching 'without record of the scripture', and he continues, 'When Paul preached Acts xvii, the other searched the scriptures daily, whether they were as he alleged them'.⁵⁴

With these last two references Tyndale goes a step beyond the Bible's own commands for the study of scripture, and it is a crucial step. The passages concerned certainly reinforce the argument for the need of access to scripture, but they also embody the notion of the ultimate authority of the Bible over all else. What lies at the heart of Tyndale's promotion of vernacular translation is the claim that it is 'God's word, which only is true'.⁵⁵ It is by scripture, Tyndale asserts 'that I may know whether thine interpretation be the right sense, or whether though jugglest, and drawest the scripture violently unto thy carnal and fleshly purpose; or whether thou be about to teach me or deceive me'.⁵⁶

In his preface to Genesis which introduced his translation of the Pentateuch published in 1530 Tyndale writes of how in fact he was moved to translate the New Testament:

Because I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to establish the lay-people in any truth, except the scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother-tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text: for else, whatsoever truth is taught them, these enemies of all truth quench it again, partly ... with apparent reasons of sophistry, and traditions of their own making, founded without ground of scripture, and partly in juggling with the text, expounding it in such a sense as is impossible to gather of the text, if thou see the process, order, and meaning thereof.⁵⁷

That anyone with access to scripture should be enabled to exercise their own judgement upon the preaching and teaching of their priests, or upon the traditional teaching of the church was a prospect which, to say the least, would not be congenial to the guardians of the church's faith and practice, and was the very danger which More feared could imperil the souls of the common people. Thus by the time that More wrote the *Dialogue*, the synthesis between *humanitas* and *pietas* set out by Erasmus in the *Paraclesis* and *Methodus*, and to which More as a fellow humanist lent his support, had become overshadowed by the very 'chewing over' of the Bible to challenge the church and promote heresy which More had feared.

52 *Obedience*, p. 145.

53 *Obedience*, p. 146.

54 *Obedience*, p. 147; Acts 17:11.

55 *Obedience*, p. 153.

56 *Obedience*, p. 147.

57 *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 394.

‘Mark these Words’

Despite his support in principle for vernacular translation, More was highly critical of Tyndale’s New Testament which he saw as a deliberate attempt to undermine the authority of the catholic church’s teaching concerning the sacraments and other matters held to be essential for salvation. In the *Dialogue* (Book 3, Chapter 8) his criticism was concentrated on Tyndale’s rendering of the Greek words that More believed should be translated as ‘church’, ‘priest’ and ‘charity’:

For he hath mistranslated three words of great weight ... The one is quod I this word priests. The other the church. The third charity. For priests wheresoever he speaketh of the priests of Christ’s church he never calleth them priests but always seniors, the church he calleth alway the congregation, and charity he calleth love. Now do these names in our English tongue neither express the things that be meant by them, and also there appeareth (the circumstances well considered) that he had a mischievous mind in the change.⁵⁸

Other examples of Tyndale’s departure from traditional English renderings are given a bare mention, but are subsequently dealt with more fully in the *Confutation*:⁵⁹

For he changeth commonly the name of grace into this word favour, whereas every favour is not grace in English: for in some favour is there little grace. Confession he translateth into knowledging [acknowledging]. Penance into repentance. A contrite heart he changeth into a troubled heart. And many more things like and many texts untruly translated ...⁶⁰

The burden of More’s condemnation is that Tyndale had not made such changes purely on grounds of closer correspondence to the Greek text, as in some of the texts concerned Erasmus had also done, but that he had done so on theological grounds which denied the validity of the church’s traditional teaching and interpretation of scripture:

... to the intent that he would set forth Luther’s heresies and his own thereby. For first he would make the people believe that we should believe nothing but plain scripture, in which point he teacheth a plain pestilent heresy. And then would he with his false translation, make the people ween [think] further, that such articles of our faith as he laboureth to destroy, and which be well proved by holy scripture, were in holy scripture nothing spoken of, but that the preachers have all this fifteen hundred year misreported the gospel and Englished the scripture wrong, to lead the people purposely out of the right way.⁶¹

More’s attack in both the *Dialogue* and the *Confutation* is three-pronged: he engages with Tyndale on the ground of Greek philology, he criticises his choice of words in terms of English usage, and he questions his theological motives in choosing the words he does.

58 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, pp. 285–6

59 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, pp. 203–22.

60 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, p. 290.

61 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, p. 290.

Penance into repentance

In the *Dialogue* More gives no specific reason for his condemnation of Tyndale's preference for 'repentance' rather than 'penance' or 'do penance', but offers it simply as another example of a change made for theological reasons. Tyndale's defence in the *Answer* provides a good illustration of his methodology and motivation. His primary defence is founded on the philological principle of following the meaning of the original Greek:

The Greek hath *Metanoia*, and *Metanoite*, repentance and repent; or forethinking and forethink. As we say in English, 'It forethinketh me, or I forethink;' and 'I repent, or it repenteth me;' and 'I am sorry that I did it.' So now the scripture saith, 'Repent, or let it forethink you; and come and believe the gospel, or glad tidings, that is brought you in Christ, and so shall all be forgiven you.'⁶²

The point that the Greek meant a change of heart rather than an act of penance had already been established by Erasmus, who preferred *resipiscere* to the Vulgate *poenitentiam agere*,⁶³ and it may be for this reason that in the *Confutation* More does not take issue with Tyndale on philological grounds. The best he can do is to invoke consideration of context and argue that the gospel call to repentance as Tyndale understood it was originally addressed to those who were as yet unbaptised, and that after the forgiveness of sins effected by baptism a further means was needed of dealing with post-baptismal sin.

More's main argument rests on traditional English usage: 'Now as for the word penance whatsoever the Greek word be: it ever was and yet is lawful enough ... to call anything in English by whatsoever English men by common custom agree upon'.⁶⁴ Such a claim, however, is only valid in relation to translation if the meaning of the word agreed upon corresponds with the meaning of the original. Insofar as More understood penance to mean 'not a bare repenting or forthinking only, but also every part of the sacrament of penance, confession of the mouth, contrition of the heart, and satisfaction by good deeds',⁶⁵ Tyndale was undoubtedly right to maintain that this was not the sense of *metanoiete* in the New Testament.

More quite rightly perceives, however, that it was not just the word, but the matter which Tyndale rejected. It was possible, as Erasmus had done, to deny the validity of a particular translation without denying the validity of the sacrament of penance as it had developed in Christian tradition.⁶⁶ In defending his use of 'knowledge' (meaning 'acknowledge') instead of 'confession', Tyndale contests the identification of confession with 'shrift in the ear; whereof the scripture maketh no mention: no,

62 *Answer*, p. 23.

63 See his annotation on Matthew 3:2, Reeve (1986), p. 18; O'Donnell and Wicks (2000), pp. 254ff.

64 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 212. The Wycliffite translation had in fact used 'forthink' as well as 'do penance'; see *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 260, n. 2.

65 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 212.

66 For and overview of its development see O'Donnell and Wicks (2000), pp. 253ff.

it is clean against scripture'.⁶⁷ Similarly, in relation to penance Tyndale denied any New Testament basis for the practice of performing 'holy deeds ... which they must make satisfaction unto God-ward for their sins: when all the scripture preacheth that Christ hath made full satisfaction for our sins to God-ward'.⁶⁸

In rejecting the sacrament of penance Tyndale took his stand on the principle of *sola scriptura*: 'as for their penance, the scripture knoweth not of [it]'.⁶⁹ He also embraced a view of salvation, which he believed to be founded in scripture, namely, that the sacrifice of Christ himself was a sufficient sacrifice for sin, and that repentance and faith were all that were needed to appropriate its effects. For More, this was too easy a view of salvation. As he understood it, by means of repentance, confession and absolution God saves a person from 'perpetual banishment from the sight of his face and ... the eternal torment of hell', but nonetheless 'leaveth ordinarily some temporal pain to be sustained for the evil act passed' which may be 'suffered here by good works of penance doing' or remitted in purgatory by the good works of others.⁷⁰ More was well aware that penance is not enjoined in scripture, but argues that the church of Christ in 'appointing pain for the sin, and not a bare forethinking or repentance as Tyndale would have it, is therein taught by the Holy Spirit of God'.⁷¹ For More tradition was of equal authority with scripture, and in this case preserved what he believed, given human weakness, was a more adequate means of salvation.

If Tyndale could be accused of allowing his theology to govern his translation, so in this case could More. The weakness of More's argument should not however detract from the fact that he was motivated by a genuine concern that by denying the necessity and validity of the practice of penance Tyndale was putting the salvation of sinners at risk.

Elder and not priest

In the first edition of his New Testament, Tyndale translated the Greek word *presbuteros* (literally 'an older man') by 'senior'. Independently of More's criticism, he claimed, he came to recognize that 'senior' was not the best English word to use, and so changed it to 'elder' in his second edition.⁷² The word 'priest' he used only as a translation of the Greek *hierus* which was used exclusively in the New Testament of the Jewish priesthood. More contested Tyndale's understanding of the New Testament use, but in this case in terms of contextual meaning rather than philology.

67 *Answer*, p. 22. He does not actually give the Greek *exomologesis*. See also *Obedience*, pp. 261–5.

68 *Answer*, pp. 22–3.

69 *Answer*, p. 23. See also *Obedience*, pp. 260–61.

70 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 210.

71 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 215. 'Forethinking' was a contemporary expression for 'repentance' used both by Tyndale and More.

72 *Answer*, p. 16.

In the *Dialogue* More accepted that it was because ‘of old they used commonly to choose well elderly men to be priests’ that ‘in the Greek tongue priests were called *presbiteri*, as we might say elder men’. At the same time, he asserted that not all priests were chosen because they were old, and as a case in point he cited Paul’s words to Timothy, ‘Let no man contemn thy youth’.⁷³ Nor, he pointed out, was every older man a priest. More’s contention was that *presbuteros* indicated more than just age, and that in the New Testament church it signified an office. He was extremely disparaging about the novel term ‘senior’, which in English ‘signifieth nothing at all, but is a French word used in English more than half in mockage, when one will call another my Lord in scorn’. He added that if Tyndale was taking over the Latin word *senior* from the Vulgate, ‘that word in the Latin tongue never signified a priest but only an elder man’.⁷⁴ He accused Tyndale ‘that rather than he would call a priest by the name of a priest, he would seek a new word he neither wist nor cared what’.⁷⁵ Thus, as in the case of ‘penance’, More accused Tyndale of being theologically motivated in denying holy order:

Now as touching the cause why he changed the name of priest in to senior, ye must understand that Luther and his adherents hold this heresy, that all holy order is nothing. And that a priest is nothing else, but a man chosen among the people to preach, and that by that choice to that office, he is priest by and by without any more ado, and no priest again whensoever the people chose another in his place ... that priesthood and all holy orders among Christian people be but feigned inventions, and that priests be nothing but officers chosen to preach, and that all the consecration whereby they be consecrate is nothing worth.⁷⁶

Tyndale in the *Answer* took a diametrically opposed view to More of the significance of *presbuteros* in the New Testament, and justified not translating it ‘priest’ on the grounds that it indicated age and not office. He claimed support from a number of passages in which the Vulgate used *senior* (1 Peter 5:1, 2 John 1:1, 3 John 1:1), and especially from Acts 20:17 where he cites the Vulgate’s *majores natu ecclesiae*, ‘the elders in birth of the congregation or church’,⁷⁷ whom Paul enjoins to care for the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them ‘*episcopos ad regendum ecclesiam Dei*, bishops, or overseers, to govern the church of God’. He concludes that ‘they were called elders, because of their age, gravity and sadness, as thou mayest see by the text; and bishops, or overseers, by the reason of their offices’.⁷⁸ His response to More’s claim that the choice of the young Timothy meant that age was not determinative for office,⁷⁹ was that Timothy is never termed a *presbuteros*, that Paul’s careful instruction of him showed that the choice was exceptional, and

73 1 Timothy 4:12.

74 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, p. 286.

75 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, p. 286.

76 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, pp. 289–90.

77 *Answer*, p. 17.

78 *Answer*, pp. 16–17.

79 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, p. 286.

that Timothy was chosen only because there was no suitable person of an older age.⁸⁰ Where an office was concerned, a different term was used, for instance, *episkopos* as applied to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:2).⁸¹

In the *Confutation*⁸² (written after Tyndale had dropped ‘senior’ in favour of ‘elder’), More reiterated that the Greek *presbuteros* was the equivalent of the English ‘priest’, that in English a priest had never been called an elder, nor had ‘elder’ ever meant a priest. Tyndale, he claimed, translated as he did out of ‘cankered malice’ to promote his ‘deadly malicious heresy’ that holy order was no sacrament, and to make it seem that in the New Testament the apostles did not distinguish priests from laymen.⁸³ He argued the case concerning Timothy, and countered Tyndale’s rejection of the idea that priests were made by ‘shaving’ (the tonsure) and ‘oiling’ (anointing) by arguing that it was the laying on of hands that was the outward form of the sacrament. He invoked two references to Paul’s laying of hands on Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6), both of which, he argued, linked the action with the empowerment by God’s grace.⁸⁴ By this means he sought to counter Tyndale’s claim that there was no scriptural basis for the sacrament of holy order.

More also developed the case that *presbuteros* indicated more than just age, but rather signified an office, by rejecting Tyndale’s appeal to 1 Peter 5:1 in which the Vulgate rendered the Greek *presbuteros* as *senior* and *sumpresbuteros* as *consenior*. Tyndale had used this to support his contention that *presbuteros* meant age, by pointing to the Vulgate’s use here of *senior* when an office was clearly indicated by the context, which calls upon the *presbuteri* to ‘feed the flock of Christ’. More was forced to admit that ‘the old translation were in that point not so well as it might have been’. He cited Erasmus’ view that the Latin *senior* was not the best translation since it indicated only age, and that it would be better to keep *presbuteros*, since ‘it signifieth authority with the Greeks’. Similarly he claimed the support of Jerome who went so far as to join the Greek *presbuteros* with a Latin preposition to produce the hybrid term *compresbyter*. On Tyndale’s own admission in relation to 1 Peter 5:1, *presbuteros* referred to an office and not just age, and even if Tyndale wished to avoid ‘priest’, he should have used an English term which pertains to office, such as ‘rulers, governors, or officers’.⁸⁵

More admitted that he did not know why the apostles had not used *hierus*, or the Latin translators *sacerdos*, rather the term *presbuteros*, but argued that as in the case of *baptisma* and *ekklēsia* the general Greek senses of ‘washing’ and ‘assembly’ were given a specific Christian application to ‘baptism’ and ‘church’,⁸⁶ so too, he argued, was *presbuteros*, as all the early Christian writers attested.⁸⁷ Accordingly, More kept returning to the argument that as a translator Tyndale ought to use the English word

80 *Answer*, p. 17–18.

81 *Answer*, p. 17.

82 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, pp. 182–99.

83 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, p. 189.

84 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, p. 193.

85 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, p. 185.

86 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, pp. 188f.

87 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, pp. 185–6.

specific to the office designated by *presbuteros*, namely ‘priest’, rather than a word never before used of a Christian minister.⁸⁸

‘Priest’ or ‘elder’? The arguments assessed

In relation to the Greek, Tyndale was correct in pointing out that the various writers of the New Testament consistently used *presbuteros* in relation to ministers within the church and never *hierus* (‘priest’), which is used only in references to the Jewish priesthood. *Presbuteros* appears to be the comparative form of *presbu*, which had the basic meaning of ‘old’. The comparative sense of *presbuteros* is found in the parable of Luke 15, relating to the ‘elder’ brother (Luke 15:25), but the word is also used in an absolute sense in Luke 1:18 where Zechariah refers to himself as being so old and his wife Elizabeth too ‘stricken in years’ as to expect any longer to have children. In that sense there is some overlap with *gerōn* and related words, as in Luke 1:36 where Elizabeth is said to have ‘conceived a son in her old age (*gerasi*)’.⁸⁹ The predominant sense in the New Testament, however, is not so much that of physical age, but of the status it brought within society at that time, and particularly within the Jewish community, as shown by the references in the New Testament to the Jewish *presbuteri* in conjunction with the scribes and Pharisees. The use of *presbuteri* in the Septuagint of older men with senior status in the community was doubtless also a significant factor, since it was from these that those who exercised particular functions, such as membership of the Sanhedrin were selected. In terms of New Testament use, therefore, Tyndale’s ‘elder’ was a legitimate translation of the Greek *presbuteros*.

The translators of the Vulgate, however, had taken a different approach, and used a range of Latin terms for the same Greek word, including *senex* of Zechariah in Luke 1:18 and *majores natu* in Acts 20:17. In the majority of cases they used *senior*, but in a few cases they adopted the term *presbyter* from the Greek. While not entirely consistent, this was not indiscriminate variation, since the Vulgate’s use of *presbyter* seems to be restricted to passages which clearly suggest appointment to, or the exercise of, an office within the church. In Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5, for instance, there is mention of ordaining *presbyteri*; 1 Timothy 5:17 mentions *presbyteri* who rule; and in Acts 15:2 they are linked with the ‘apostles’ in Jerusalem, though in subsequent references *seniores* is used. It seems as though the Vulgate is interpreting certain New Testament passages in terms of the way that the church’s understanding of ordained ministry later developed, but even so it does not go as far as to use *sacerdos*.

It is not certain, given its banned status, whether or not Tyndale was aware that the Wycliffite version had sometimes used ‘priest’ where the Vulgate (from which it was translated) had *presbyter*. On the other hand, More’s claim that ‘elder’ was known in English only in the term ‘aldermen’ is invalidated by its frequent use (usually as ‘elder men’) in the Bible of the Lollards to render *presbuteros* in the New Testament and for Jewish ‘elders’ in the Old Testament.

88 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, pp. 182ff, 184, 186, 187, 188, 189.

89 The citations are from Tyndale, 1526; spelling modernised.

In the fifteenth century Lorenzo Valla took issue with rhetorical variation in translation and favoured as a general principle that the corresponding Latin word should always be used for the same Greek word. Recognising that what are now called the ‘semantic fields’ of words in different languages may not always be identical, he extended the principle so that if a Greek word had several discrete senses for which there were specific Latin terms, then the same Latin term should be used consistently for each occurrence of the Greek word in that particular sense. He criticised the variation in the Vulgate’s rendering of the Greek *presbuteros*, but nonetheless favoured a distinction being made in the Latin between its use in the sense of an older person and its use of a sacred office.⁹⁰ Erasmus also distinguished these uses, but extended the use of *presbuteros* to a number of texts where the Vulgate had *senior*. More’s plea was for a similar distinction in English between age and office, for which the different terms ‘elder’ and ‘priest’ existed. It is not clear whether he meant that ‘priest’ should be used for every occurrence in the Greek, or only in those cases identified by the Vulgate or Erasmus as indicating an office.

Following Valla’s principle, given new currency by Erasmus, More’s claim that where there is a specific term in the receptor language that renders the sense of the original it should be used is valid in principle, though in this case, whether priesthood as he understood it can be identified in the New Testament is doubtful. By opting to keep the same English word throughout for the Greek, Tyndale on the other hand was preserving a more formal equivalence and might have argued that he was simply doing in English what the New Testament writers, who also had a number of possible words at their disposal, had done in Greek.

More shared with Tyndale a common acceptance of the philological principle of determining meaning of the basis of the original language, and it is notable that neither More nor Tyndale refers to the Vulgate’s use of *presbyter*. In accepting the philological principle, however, in this instance More impaled himself upon it, because the evidence concerning the New Testament use of the Greek *presbuteros* was simply not strong enough to identify references to Christian *presbuteri* with Christian priesthood as it emerged in the post-apostolic period. Had More asserted that a clear understanding of the nature of ordained ministry emerged through tradition, which he believed to be of equal authority with scripture he would have been on firmer ground.

The disagreement between More and Tyndale concerning *presbyter* did not arise from different principles of philology, nor did it primarily stem from different methods of translation. It arose primarily from their different understandings of ministerial office within the church. Tyndale sought to cut away the scriptural basis for ordained priesthood as understood within the catholic church, and to claim it instead for those ‘ministers that were chosen to teach the people, and inform them in God’s word’.⁹¹ Or, as he put it in the Prologue to Matthew of his 1534 edition:

whether ye call them elders or priests, it is to me all one, so that ye understand that they be officers and servants of the word of God: unto the which all men, both high and low,

90 Holeczek (1975), pp. 85ff.

91 *Answer*, p. 17.

that will not rebel against Christ, must obey, as long they preach and rule truly, and no longer.⁹²

Tyndale's alternative conception of Christian ministry saw it as centring around, and as subject to, the pure word of God.

In denying the scriptural basis of sacramental priesthood as the church understood it the philological principle provided Tyndale with good support, and it can hardly be claimed that 'elder' was a mistranslation. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the New Testament accords any more support for his understanding of the function of a *presbuteros* than it does for that of More. Both scholars were seeking to invoke principles of philology and translation in defence of predetermined theological positions: both in this case were equally unsuccessful.

If Tyndale was not entirely correct that 'all that were called elders (or priests, if they so will) were called bishops also, though they have divided the names now',⁹³ differing interpretations of the relationship between *presbuteros* and *episcopos* resulted during the Reformation in different forms of church governance, which remain the subject of disagreement between churches today. The Preface to the Church of England Ordinal of 1549 opened with the words 'It is evident until all men, diligently reading Holy Scripture ... that from the apostle's time, there hath been three orders of Ministers in Christ's church, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons'. It may have been obvious to More, but it was not to Tyndale, and his judgement in this regard has been validated by modern scholarship. Although in his New Testament Tyndale in fact used 'bishop' for *episkopos* (1 Tim. 2:1–2), today the latest Roman Catholic translation, *The New Jerusalem Bible*, has 'presiding elder'.

Love rather than charity

In the case of Tyndale's rendering of the Greek *agapē* as 'love' rather than 'charity', More again both objected on grounds of English usage and also challenged Tyndale's motives in translating as he does. In the *Dialogue* More objected to Tyndale's use of 'love' on the grounds of its sexual connotations, whereas, according to More's definition, 'charity signifieth in Englishmen's ears, not every common love, but a good virtuous and well ordered love',⁹⁴ and he accused Tyndale of avoiding the word because its association with good works did not accord with Luther's theology:

For since Luther and his fellows among other their damnable heresies have one, that all our salvation standeth in faith alone, and toward our salvation nothing force of good works, therefore it seemeth that he laboureth of purpose to minish [diminish] the reverent mind that men bear to charity, and therefore he changeth that name of holy virtuous affection, into the bare name of love common to the virtuous love that man beareth to

92 *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 479.

93 *Answer*, p. 17.

94 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, p. 288.

God, and to the lewd love that is between flecke and his make [a worthless fellow and his paramour].⁹⁵

In his *Answer*, Tyndale defends himself on the basis of the Greek use of *agapē*, and the English use of ‘charity’: ‘Verily, *charity* is no known English, in that sense which *agapē* requires’. To use ‘charity’ for ‘holy’ and ‘godly’ love was not an appropriate translation, because ‘*agape* and *caritas* were words used among the heathen, ere Christ came; and signified therefore more than a *godly love*’. Besides this, ‘*agape* is common to all loves’, and so he used ‘this general term love’ despite some misgivings, leaving any more specific sense to be indicated by ‘the matter itself and the circumstances’. Finally, he points out that ‘love’ accords with the translation of the cognate verb (*agapaō*, though he does not give the Greek): ‘I say not, charity God, or charity your neighbour; but, love God, and love your neighbour’.⁹⁶

In the *Confutation*, More again presses the principle that in English translation it is normal English usage that must be determinative.⁹⁷ When *agapē* has the specific meaning of ‘charity’ in the sense that More has defined it of ‘godly love’, then ‘charity’ is the English word that should be used. What he objects to is that Tyndale never uses it at all. He is not arguing that Tyndale should always render *agapē* by ‘charity’, but that he ought to do so when it is clear that ‘godly love’ is meant, and he suggests that Tyndale should take his lead from the Vulgate for this. He counters the objection that in non-Christian use the Latin *caritas* could mean both good and bad love (though he can think of no example of the latter) by enunciating the principle that ‘Tyndale must in his English translation take his English words as they signify in English, rather than as the words signify in the tongue, out of which they were taken into the English’.⁹⁸ Otherwise he would have to translate the *personae* if the Trinity as ‘visors’.⁹⁹

‘Love’ or ‘charity’? The arguments assessed

Tyndale defends his choice of ‘love’ on the authority of the philological principle that translation must be true to the meaning of the original Greek. When he claims that *agapē* was ‘used among the heathen’ before Christ came and therefore was wider in scope than ‘godly love’, he was either being evasive or was unaware that the noun is hardly, if ever, found outside the Septuagint and the New Testament. There are a few instances in the Septuagint, as for example in 2 Sam. 13:15, where *agapē* is used of

95 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, pp. 288–9. More’s thinking may have been influenced by the fact that Latin had separate words for ‘love’ (*amor*) and ‘charity’ (*caritas*), and that in the church those who renounced *amor* and took a vow of celibacy were, in theory at least, living lives of greater holiness than those who married; see Long (2001), pp. 143–4. Germain P. Marc’hadour and Thomas L.C. Lawler, CW6ii, p. 515–6 also comments on ‘a long history of calculated ambiguity in the use of the word “love”’. See also Hooker (1997), pp. 132–3.

96 *Answer*, pp. 20–21.

97 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, pp. 199–203.

98 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 201.

99 The underlying Greek *hypostasis* could mean masks worn by actors playing a part.

sexual love, but in the New Testament it is used exclusively of love of God, God's love towards humans, and the love of believers to others which reflects this. On the other hand, Tyndale cannot have been unaware of other Greek words for love such as *philia* and *eros*. The latter does not occur at all in the New Testament, and *philia* is found only in James 4:4, and there Tyndale translates it by 'friendship' rather than by the generic term 'love'. The question therefore arises of why he does not use a specific English word for *agapē* when throughout the New Testament it was used with a particular connotation. 'Charity' had in fact been used from the medieval period to convey the New Testament sense of *agapē* as 'godly love',¹⁰⁰ but the reason Tyndale gives for not using it is that its meaning does not altogether correspond with that of the Greek.

In terms of exactness of translation, Tyndale maintained that 'charity' had a wider use in English than in Greek, in that it was used of giving alms, or as signifying patience or mercy.¹⁰¹ More continued to take his stand on the principle that when there is a specific English word available for what a Greek term came to mean in Christian use then it should be used, and believed that 'charity' adequately conveyed what the New Testament writers meant by *agapē*. Tyndale claimed otherwise and that, in the absence of a better word, he had no alternative but to use a more general term and leave the reader to discern its precise significance from the context. Given that *agapē* is very often qualified by such terms as 'of God' or 'of Christ', this was not an unreasonable approach for a translator to adopt, especially since it could not be avoided with the cognate verb. When, as frequently in his writings, Tyndale referred to the Christian 'law of love' it is difficult to imagine that anyone would be misled into associating this with sexual love as More feared.

In again translating using a single English word for the same Greek word Tyndale was departing from the practice of the Vulgate which used both *c(h)aritas* and *dilectio* to translate the Greek *agapē*, a practice that was followed by the Wycliffite version, which used 'charite' and 'loue' respectively. No changes were proposed by Valla, but Erasmus did in a number of cases change one for the other, apparently in an attempt to distinguish their different nuances more consistently.¹⁰²

In addition to the philological issues and translation principles involved, Tyndale was also anxious to exclude 'charity' on theological grounds. To use it would be to concede the authority of the New Testament for the giving of alms and the performance of other 'charitable' works, and thus undermine the principle of justification by faith alone. Correspondingly, More's complaint was not that Tyndale sometimes used 'love', but that he never used 'charity' even where it served better than 'love'. It could be argued, as More did, that Tyndale was allowing prior theological convictions to govern his interpretation, but in this case the paucity of English words for love gave him justifiable grounds in terms of philology and principles of translation to translate as he did. Whether 'charity' with its wide range of senses in English and its

100 See Germain P. Marc'hadour and Thomas L.C. Lawler, CWM6ii, p. 513ff.

101 *Answer*, pp. 20–21.

102 See Holeczek (1975), pp. 342ff.

association with giving alms was in fact an appropriate word to translate the Greek *agapē* is something on which subsequent translators continued to vary.¹⁰³

Grace and favour

With only a bare mention of this in the *Dialogue*, Tyndale's *Answer* on this point is brief, as, uncharacteristically, is More's response in the *Confutation*. More based his criticism on English usage in which 'grace' and 'favour' are not coterminous. Tyndale's response, adopting the same principle was that grace was not used exclusively of God: 'I can say also, "in some grace there is little goodness"; and when we say "he standeth well in my lady's grace", we understand no great godly favour'.¹⁰⁴ In the *Confutation* More again took his stand on the argument that 'the known holy names of virtues throughout scripture' should be used, and that the traditional word should be retained 'where the scripture speaketh not of the grace of My Lady but of the grace of our Lord'.¹⁰⁵ In fact, most occurrences of the Greek *kharis* were translated by Tyndale as 'grace', and the twenty times he used 'favour' were reduced to five in the second and subsequent editions.¹⁰⁶

'Congregation' rather than church

In his New Testament Tyndale consistently translated the Greek *ekklēsia* by 'congregation'. In the *Dialogue*, More questioned both the appropriateness of using this term rather than 'church' when the reference was to a Christian body, and also Tyndale's motive in rendering the Greek in a way that was contrary to traditional English usage:

For every man well seeth that though the church be indeed a congregation, yet is not every congregation the church: but a congregation of Christian people, which congregation of Christian people hath been in England alway called and known by the name of the church ...¹⁰⁷

The reason he does so, More suggests, is:

because that Luther utterly denieth the very catholic church in earth, and saith that the church of Christ is but an unknown congregation of some folk here two and there three no man wot [knows] where having the right faith, which he calleth only his own new forged faith ...

103 'Charity' prevailed for many, though not all, occurrences of *agapē* in the KJV of 1611 until the mid-twentieth century when new translations, almost without exception, reverted to 'love'.

104 *Answer*, p. 22.

105 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, pp. 203–4.

106 See the note in CWM8iii, pp. 1539–40.

107 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, p. 286.

and to persuade people that this is how the church is understood in the New Testament.¹⁰⁸

In his *Answer* Tyndale accepts More's point that 'congregation' is a more general term than 'church', but argues that this accords with the New Testament use of *ekklēsia*, which is also used, as in Acts 19, of non-Christian assemblies. The decisive argument against Tyndale for More was again not Greek usage, but English: the word 'church' was the proper word that should be used whenever the Greek *ekklēsia* referred to a Christian congregation.¹⁰⁹

The difficulty with More's argument was that 'church', derived from the Greek *kuriakos* ('of the Lord'), was a specifically Christian term, whereas in the New Testament *ekklēsia* was not. The difficulty for translation was compounded by the various senses in which *ekklēsia* was used in a Christian sense. As Holeczek has pointed out, this faces translators with the choice of seeking a single word corresponding to the Greek, or of using a variety of terms corresponding to the different senses of *ekklēsia* in the New Testament. The former was followed by the Vulgate which imported the term *ecclesia* into Latin, and by Tyndale with 'congregation'. Erasmus, however, followed Valla in distinguishing secular and sacral use, and adopted *concio* in Acts 19 where the Vulgate retained *ecclesia* for the assembly of the townspeople of Ephesus. Erasmus also went a step further in distinguishing between the various Christian uses of *ekklēsia* in the New Testament by using *congregatio* for house churches and restricting *ecclesia* to the church in a particular place and the church as a whole.¹¹⁰

Although he invoked the Greek, it was in fact English usage that figured most prominently in Tyndale's defence of his avoidance of the word 'church'. In the *Answer* he reviewed the various uses in English of the term 'church', noting, first, that it may be used of a place of worship; second, of the clergy; or, thirdly, of 'the whole multitude of all them that receive the name of Christ to believe in him, and not for the clergy only', which was the New Testament sense. His reason for using 'congregation' rather than 'church' was that in popular perception, whatever More may claim, the term 'church' had come to be synonymous with the clergy:

Wherefore, inasmuch as the clergy (as the nature of those hard and indurate adamant stones is, to draw all to them) had appropriate unto themselves the term that of right is common unto all the whole congregation of them that believe in Christ; and with their false and subtle wiles had beguiled and mocked the people, and brought them into the ignorance of the word; making them understand by this word *church* nothing but the shaven flock of them that shone the whole world; therefore in the translation of the new Testament, where I found this word *ecclesia*, I interpreted it by this word *congregation*. Even therefore did I it, and not of any mischievous mind or purpose to stablish heresy as Master More untruly reporteth of me in his dialogue ...¹¹¹

108 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 8; see CWM6, p. 289.

109 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, pp. 168ff. The English terms advocated by More were probably known to the laity through vernacular preaching; see Long (2001), p. 147.

110 Holeczek (1975), pp. 331–37.

111 *Answer*, pp. 13f.

More in turn disputed this, arguing that not even the clergy themselves understood the term in this way. He went on to make the counter-accusation that it was in fact Tyndale who was attempting to suppress the true significance of the word 'church'. To do this, More in the *Confutation* added to Tyndale's list what was for him the most significant use of the term. Taking Tyndale's third definition as 'a multitude gathered together in one, of all kinds, conditions and degrees of people', he qualifies it by adding 'but only of such people as be Christian people, and them not in one city only, but that whole number of every city, town and village throughout all the whole world'.¹¹² In his view, 'of a truth there is of the church no signification neither more great nor more common, than that by which it is meant and taken for the catholic church and universal'.¹¹³

This is certainly the sense which the Vulgate's *ecclesia* came to have in Christian usage, but to the extent that the term came to be identified with an institutional structure headed by the pope and dominated by the clergy there seems some justification for Tyndale's attempt to find an alternative term for the Greek *ekklēsia*. Modern scholars suggest that in the New Testament the term could designate both a local group of Christians and the totality of the 'Body of Christ' or 'people of God'.¹¹⁴ Whereas 'congregation' could serve for the former sense, it would not be a natural choice in current English for the wider sense: whether it was capable of such an understanding in sixteenth-century English More, at least, disputed.¹¹⁵

For More the reason that Tyndale avoided using 'church' to designate the universal church was found in the note which qualified Tyndale's third meaning of the word. There, in stating that 'church' was sometimes used for the whole body of Christians, Tyndale had added that 'And sometimes it is taken specially for the elect only; in whose hearts God hath written his law with his holy Spirit, and given them a feeling faith of the mercy that is in Christ Jesu our Lord'.¹¹⁶ Later in the *Answer*, when Tyndale gets to discussing whether the catholic church is the true church, it becomes clear that in his view it was not, and that it was those with 'feeling faith' that in fact constituted the true church. For More, the claim that the church was composed only of believing Christians was contrary to the New Testament understanding that the church on earth was a visible company that included all the baptised, whether good or bad. These differing concepts will be examined more closely in relation to interpretation, but they are mentioned here to show that, although both Tyndale and More could muster arguments from Greek usage, it was not philology but theology that lay at the core of the differences between them. Nor, for all the discussion of

112 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 147. He misrepresents Tyndale at this point by ignoring Tyndale's further specification of this meaning as applying to 'all them that receive the name of Christ to believe in him', and not simply to all the people of a town or city, whether Christian or not.

113 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 147.

114 So, for instance, Schmidt (1950), who argues that in the New Testament 'the Christian community in any particular place represents the whole body' (p. 66).

115 Hooker (1997) in upholding Tyndale's 'congregation' as indicating 'a company of people united in their common faith in Christ' (p. 132) overlooks More's question of which people constitute the company.

116 *Answer*, p. 13.

English usage did principles of translation of the sort raised by Valla come into the discussion. Tyndale may have claimed the support of Erasmus' *congregatio* for his use of 'congregation', but Erasmus used the word comparatively few times and in connection with a specific application of the Greek; he retained *ecclesia* for the church in its wider sense of all Christians.¹¹⁷

The key to the differences between More and Tyndale, as More rightly saw, was in radically different understandings of the nature of the church and its membership. This in turn was reflected in their respective understandings of 'church' as a place of worship to which people resort in their quest for salvation. Writing of a church as a place where Christians gathered, Tyndale sees it primarily as a centre for the preaching of scripture and for prayer:

... a place or house; whither christian people were wont in the old time to resort at times convenient, for to hear the word of doctrine, the law of God, and the faith of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and how and what to pray, and whence to ask power and strength to live godly. For the officer, thereto appointed, preached the pure word of God only, and prayed in a tongue that all men understood: and the people hearkened unto his prayers, and said thereto Amen; and prayed with him in their hearts ...¹¹⁸

For More, on the other hand, Christians were better moved to devotion and 'the taming of the flesh' by the sacraments and ceremonies of the catholic church, sanctioned though some of these were by tradition rather than scripture:

And for experience (let Tyndale say what it please him) good folk find this indeed, that when they be at the divine service in the church, the more devoutly that they see such godly ceremonies observed, and the more solemnity that they see therein, the more devotion feel they themselves therewith in their own souls, and their flesh the more tame and less rebellious, and far the better in temper, so that although they were at other times and places in right great rage, yet in the church at the voices of Christ's ministers in the quire, with organs and all together, and beholding the solemn godly sacraments, and ceremonies in their sight, they feel their passions appeased ...¹¹⁹

Conclusions concerning issues of translation

The dispute over Tyndale's translation of the New Testament turned on issues of philology, principles of translation and, above all, theological convictions concerning what was necessary for salvation.

It is a mark of the impact of renaissance humanism that although both More and Tyndale sometimes made reference to the Vulgate, they both accepted the principle of giving primacy to the original Greek. This was a principle which was explicitly

117 Holeczek (1975), pp. 333–5.

118 *Answer*, p. 11. More, *Confutation*, pp. 148ff claims that this is still what goes on in church.

119 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, pp. 160–61. More goes on to add that he doubted whether they would understand much more of the significance of such worship if it were to be in the English language; pp. 161f.

defended by More in his letter to Oxford,¹²⁰ and consciously put into practice by Tyndale in basing his translation on the Greek text of the New Testament. Although mention is sometimes made of the Vulgate, neither protagonist invoked its authority either for or against his opponent's arguments. Even more remarkably, More asserted that (at least in 1 Peter 5:1) the Vulgate version was not as good as it might have been.¹²¹

Of the two scholars, it was Tyndale who relied most heavily on philology to justify his translation. He reproduced the literal sense of key Greek terms based on their wider use and not just their use in the New Testament. Thus in the cases of *ekklēsia*, *presbuteros* and *agapē* he retained the generic terms which best indicated their wider use in the ancient world. In terms of philological method, however, this raises the question as to whether translation should be governed by the pre-Christian use of a word or should take account of specific Christian development of its meaning within the New Testament. To determine whether such a development had occurred depended in turn upon exegetical considerations, especially taking account of context in the way that Erasmus had advocated in the *Methodus*. At this point both Tyndale and More tended, when they differed, to let their theology guide their interpretation.

In terms of translation, where Tyndale took the view that it was justifiable to use a more general term and let the specific sense be inferred from the context, More argued that when there was an English term corresponding to a specific meaning of a Greek word, it should be used, as for instance in the case of 'church', which was a specifically Christian term. In this he could have claimed support from Valla and Erasmus who suggested that in the Vulgate *ecclesia* should be reserved for use when it had a Christian signification, and *concio* used for non-Christian assemblies, as for example, that of the townspeople of Ephesus in Acts 19:32, 39, 41.¹²² To the extent that the Vulgate was brought into the discussion, it supported differentiation between different sense of a Greek word, using for example both *caritas* and *dilectio* for the Greek *agapē*. In the case of the Greek *kharis* Tyndale in fact varied between 'grace' and 'favour', and it is difficult not to conclude that the 'one for one' principle suited his theological ends in denying a New Testament basis for More's understanding of penance, priest and church, whereas he had less reason to avoid 'grace'. Nevertheless, although their approaches were coloured by theological considerations, underlying this aspect of the differences between the two scholars there were as yet unresolved theoretical questions about principles and methods of translation at a time when English translation was in its infancy. The question of whether to adopt a 'one for one' approach or to use a variety of terms in the receptor language was still being debated almost a century later, as can be seen from the preface to the KJV, which excludes the former approach as a hindrance to good English style.

In terms of English usage, Tyndale's approach could mean using English words which were unfamiliar in the sense concerned, as for example, 'senior'. More argued, on the other hand, that translation should be governed by the principle of following

120 CWM15, pp. 130–149; Rogers (1961), pp. 94–103.

121 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, p. 185.

122 See Holeczek (1975), pp. 85ff, 332–3.

familiar English usage: 'I say that this common custom and usage of speech is the only thing, by which we know the right and proper signification of any word'.¹²³ This may be valid when the commonly used word corresponds in meaning with the New Testament term which it translates, but it cannot be justified when it does not. In the case of 'penance' and 'priest', for instance, Tyndale considered that as they were understood in English they related to developments that had arisen in the course of Christian tradition, and which had no basis in the New Testament. This may have suited his theological purposes, but can hardly be faulted on philological grounds. More, on the other hand, saw the subsequent developments of ordained priesthood and of the sacrament of penance as the work of the Holy Spirit in making clear the full implications of the New Testament references.

As More saw it, the reason that Tyndale deliberately set aside the traditional English rendering of key words was in order that his New Testament may serve 'for a principal instrument, toward the setting forth of all such heresies as he had learned of Luther, and intended to send over hither and spread abroad within this realm'.¹²⁴ Even though More had no objection in principle to vernacular translation, it was this that for him was the fundamental reason for arguing that Tyndale's translation was so flawed that it was best burnt. He could accept it 'if he changed the common known word into the better', he would suffer it 'if he changed it into as good', if sometimes he changed it into worse he might 'wink at it', but that Tyndale so consistently and so often changed 'the known and usual names of so great things into so far the worse' was for More a sure indication of his intent to spread heretical views. Another person 'being good and faithful' may have translated as Tyndale had done, but without any evil intent,¹²⁵ Thus when Tyndale invoked in his defence the fact that More's 'darling Erasmus' sometimes also used 'congregation' or 'elder' (or, more precisely, the equivalent Latin terms), More responded out that, unlike Tyndale, Erasmus had no intention of thereby changing the traditional understanding of what the terms represented,¹²⁶ whereas Tyndale's purpose as his other writings proved was 'to give his heresies in the ears of unlearned men, some colour of proof in the text of the New Testament'.¹²⁷ In other words, Tyndale's translation was governed by the need to claim the authority of scripture for teaching that was at variance with that of the catholic church.

Despite the radical nature of the differences between Tyndale and More, on both sides it was sincerely held conviction that lay at the heart of the matter: both Tyndale and More were prepared to die for their beliefs, and did. Their dispute was not over abstract or academic issues like those of the medieval schoolmen; rather both believed that the correct understanding of scripture had a direct bearing on

123 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 167.

124 *Confutation*, Book II; see CWM8, p. 143; the accusation was first made in *Dialogue*, III, 8; see p. 290.

125 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, pp. 144–5.

126 For More's defence of Erasmus' use of *congregatio* as a Latin equivalent for Greek *ekklesia*, see *Confutation*, pp. 177ff, where More argues that there is already a proper English equivalent in 'church'.

127 *Confutation*, Book II; CWM8, p. 145.

salvation and that false interpretation put Christians in danger of eternal damnation. The question of where authority lay in interpretation was therefore vital.

Chapter 5

The Debate between Thomas More and William Tyndale Concerning Interpretation

When Cuthbert Tunstall commissioned Thomas More to take up his pen in defence of the catholic church he had for some years been fighting a losing battle against Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament, which continued to flood in from the continent following its publication at Worms in 1526. By the late 1520s further publications in English were also becoming increasingly available, which supported Luther's teaching of justification by faith and of the sole authority of scripture. No longer were such ideas confined to small groups of academics meeting secretly in places like the White Horse Inn in Cambridge, but converts to Luther's ideas dared to criticize the church openly from the pulpit, in defiance of ecclesiastical authority and despite the threat of arrest and trial. Sincere and godly men, convinced in their hearts of God's free forgiveness, were reacting against what they saw as abuses within the catholic church, and challenging its authority on the basis of scripture. They preached against the sale of indulgences, prayers for the dead, and other age old traditions and practices held by the church to be necessary for salvation, but which had no explicit basis on scripture. As the 1520s progressed, the milder admonitions of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey gave way to the harsher policy of Thomas More who succeeded him as Lord Chancellor in October 1529. Increasingly not only books but preachers were publicly burnt, a policy which More defended at some length in Book 4 of his *Dialogue*.

As has been seen, More did not object in principle to vernacular translation but, as copies of Tyndale's New Testament became widely available, his fear that it would undermine the authority of the church as the sole bastion of truth if anyone 'cometh to the scripture of God to look and try therein whether the church believe aright or not'¹ was becoming a reality. The main direction of the attack on the catholic church's authority came in the claim reported by the Messenger that 'man ... hath no light but of holy scripture', that scripture 'was learning enough for a Christian man', and that its meaning anyone could 'perceive by himself', as 'every man was able enough to do with the help of God'.² On the one hand, private judgement based on an individual's reading of scripture was a potential threat to interpretation in accordance with the church's rule of faith. On the other hand, Tyndale was also promoting ways

1 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWM6, p. 152.

2 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 1; see CWM6, pp. 33–4.

of interpreting the New Testament that deprived the church of the scriptural basis of contested beliefs and the practice of good works.

More's concern was not simply for the weal of the catholic church, but also for the good order and stability of the realm, which he feared the spread of dissent would imperil. Above all, it was his devoutly held conviction that to undermine the teaching and practice of the catholic church as it had been accepted for 1500 years was to bring Christian souls into danger of eternal damnation. Given that the basis for the reformers' claim that the laity could understand scripture for themselves was founded on scripture (Matthew 7:7: 'if we seek we shall find'), as was the reformers' attack on 'idolatry', the question of where authority lay in the interpretation of scripture was crucial.

More saw the need to defend the authority of the church against the claim of the supremacy and sufficiency of scripture on two fronts: the inerrancy of the catholic church concerning beliefs and practices necessary for salvation, especially those deriving from tradition rather than scripture, and its inerrancy in the interpretation of scripture itself. In particular, he realised that he would need to defeat the reformers on their own ground, and by demonstrating that the interpretations of scripture by which they turned the Bible against the church were erroneous.

Much of Books I and II of the *Dialogue* are given up to defence of the traditional practices against which the reformers preached, namely, the use of images, the veneration of saints and the practice of pilgrimage. The relationship between the church and scripture comes more sharply into focus in Book I, Chapters 18, 20–31. More argues in these chapters that the church of Christ cannot err in any necessary article of faith, and that the church was inerrant in its interpretation of scripture, so that ultimate authority lay with the catholic church and not with scripture alone as the reformers claimed. Book II (Chapters 1–5) opens with a response to the claim of reformers that the catholic church was no longer the true church, but that the true church comprised those who took their stand on the word of God in scripture and rejected Rome's unwritten traditions and abuses of practice.

For Tyndale, like Luther, scripture was the sole and sufficient authority for Christian belief and practice. It was the standard by which the truth of doctrine and tradition was to be determined; indeed, it was a 'sword of the spirit' with which to fight against claims and demands of popes and prelates who sought to bend its interpretation to their own ends. It was this fundamental issue of the authority of scripture that lay at the heart of Tyndale's *Answer* to More's *Dialogue*. The *Answer* began, after a preface to the reader, with consideration of the basic question of the nature of the church. This marked the opening of what has been described as a 'foundational treatise' in which, after defending his rendering of *ekklēsia* and associated words in the New Testament, Tyndale addressed the central matters of principle upon which More's case for the inerrancy of the church rested: whether the church was before the gospel or the gospel before the church, whether the apostles left anything unwritten that was of necessity for salvation, and whether the church can err, which in turn led to the question of whether the catholic church was the true church. The remainder of the *Answer* is taken up with discussion of detailed points

which are dealt with book by book and chapter by chapter in the order in which they occur in the *Dialogue*.³

More's *Confutation* of Tyndale's *Answer* appeared in two parts (1532, 1533). In the first (Books 1–3) he addressed the issues of whether the church was before the gospel,⁴ unwritten tradition,⁵ and whether the church can err,⁶ and in the second (Books 4–9) whether the catholic church is the true church.⁷

William Tyndale's Approach to Scripture and its Interpretation

Scripture was for Tyndale integral to his inmost experience of faith and salvation. He believed it to have a transforming effect on the human heart and to embody all that was necessary for salvation, whether in terms of belief or of practice. His considered thought on its place in Christian life and how it is to be interpreted is to be found mainly in the prefaces to various translations: the prologue to the abortive 1522 Cologne edition, separately republished in 1534 as *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*;⁸ the appended 'Epistle to the Reader' of the 1526 Worms New Testament;⁹ the 1530 Preface to the Pentateuch;¹⁰ and the *Prologue to the Prophet Jonas* (c.1531),¹¹ in which Tyndale explicitly set out what he believed to be the correct way of interpreting scripture in general. In addition, the *Parable of Wicked Mammon* of 1528 provides an extended example of biblical interpretation,¹² showing how passages apparently commending good works could be interpreted in a way which accorded with salvation by faith alone, and in his *Exposition of Matthew V-VII* he dealt with the key relation between law and love.

The transforming experience made possible by the gospel remained a recurrent theme of all Tyndale's writings concerning scripture. The power of the gospel to enable a person to be 'born anew, created afresh, and enjoy the fruits of the blood of Christ', as it he put it in the 1526 edition,¹³ lay at the heart both of Tyndale's personal faith and of his theology. At the core of his understanding of scripture was its instrumentality in a process of justification by faith which involved the consent of faith to God's word on the one side, and the working of God's Holy Spirit to bring about inner spiritual transformation in the believer on the other. The first expression

3 For a discussion of whether these were written by Tyndale or Frith, see O'Donnell and Wicks (2000), pp. xxvff.

4 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWM8, pp. 225–53.

5 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWM8, pp. 254–383.

6 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWM8, pp. 387–574.

7 Books 5–7, with a recapitulation and summary in Book 9; CWM8ii, pp. 575–829, 993–1034. Book 8 deals with Robert Barnes and his treatise *What is holy chyrche, and who be thereof, and wherby men maye knowe her*.

8 *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 7–28.

9 *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 389–91; also in recent reprints of the edition.

10 *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 398–405

11 *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 449–66. Henceforth cited as *Jonas*.

12 *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 37–126. Henceforth cited as *Mammon*.

13 *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 389; see also *Mammon* for a later expression of the experience; *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 54–5.

of this transforming experience comes in the prologue of 1525, which includes word-for-word most of Luther's preface to his 1522 German New Testament.¹⁴ In a section without parallel in Luther's preface 'a soaring sentence of ten phrases ... tells the whole story of Christ's work with a believer'.¹⁵

In Christ God loved us, his elect and chosen, before the world began, and reserved us unto the knowledge of his Son and of his holy gospel; *and, when the gospel is preached to us, openeth our hearts, and giveth us grace to believe, and putteth the spirit of Christ in us; and we know him as our Father most merciful, and consent to the law, and love it inwardly in our heart, and desire to fulfil it, and sorrow because we cannot: which will (sin we of frailty never so much) is sufficient, till more strength be given us; the blood of Christ hath made satisfaction for the rest; the blood of Christ hath obtained all things for us of God ...*¹⁶

The individual believer appropriates the work of Christ by hearing the preaching of the gospel and responding with faith to the promise it holds out of the underserved and free forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood shed on the cross. Faith in the gospel is made possible by the grace of God, and accompanied by the inward gift of the Holy Spirit to enable the believer to live in accordance with the law of love.

Following Luther, Tyndale made a fundamental distinction between law and gospel.¹⁷ This was not to be equated with the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament indeed contained 'the law and commandments of God', but also 'many promises, which are nothing else but the Evangelion or gospel' of Christ. On the other hand, although the gospel 'is nothing but the promises of good things', yet:

All is not gospel that is written in the gospel-book: for if the law were away, thou couldest not know what the gospel meant; even as thou couldest not see pardon and grace, except the law rebuked thee, and declared unto thee thy sin, misdeed, and trespass.¹⁸

Although his purpose in translating the Bible was to enable ordinary Christians to read it for themselves, Tyndale's prefaces show that he believed that he nevertheless needed to give its readers firm guidance on how scripture was to be properly interpreted. He does this in terms of his understanding of law and gospel, and it is the relationship between them that forms the fundamental structure of his hermeneutics:

14 English translation by Charles M. Jacobs, revised by E. Theodore Bachmann (1960), pp. 357–62 in *Luther's Works, Vol. 35*, edited by E. Theodore Bachmann, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960.

15 Daniell (1994), pp. 126–7.

16 *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 14–15; italics added.

17 Where Luther tended to see the distinction between law and gospel as a radical antithesis, Tyndale came to see the relationship more in terms of complementarity. For Tyndale's initial dependence on Luther, see Clebsch (1964), Chapter 9, and for his independent development regarding the relationship of law and gospel, Chapters 10 and 11.

18 'Epistle to the Reader', 1526; *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 389.

On this manner to read the scripture is the right use thereof, and why the Holy Ghost caused it to be written: that is, that thou first seek out the law that God will have thee to do, interpreting it spiritually ... And on the other side, thou must search diligently for the promises of mercy which God hath promised thee again.¹⁹

These two points are the keys to the right understanding of scripture, namely:

... the law spiritually interpreted, how that all is damnable sin that is not unfeigned love out of the ground and bottom of the heart, after the ensample of Christ's love to us ...; and that the promises be given unto a repenting soul, that thirsteth and longeth after them, of the pure and fatherly mercy of God, through our faith only, without all deserving of our deeds or merits of our works ...: which two points, I say, if they be written in thine heart, are the keys which so open all the scripture unto thee, that no creature can lock thee out, and with which thou shall go in and out, and find pasture and food everywhere.²⁰

Alongside law and gospel Tyndale set a third category of scriptural material, namely, 'deeds': the deeds of those who fulfil or do not fulfil the laws of God in the Old Testament, and of those who believe or do not believe the promises of God in the New Testament. In the 1525 prologue this is taken directly from Luther (who uses the term 'history'), and it is developed at greater length in the *Prologue to Jonas*. He explains to his readers that stories of moral or religious failure serve not just as warnings against hardness of heart, but also as encouragement to 'put our hope and trust in God, when we see how merciful he hath been in times past unto our weak brethren that are gone before' – an emphasis which accords with his conviction of the human need for forgiveness.²¹

By dealing in this way with stories of reprehensible conduct, which for earlier exegetes like Origen seemed unworthy of scripture, Tyndale circumvented the need for allegorical interpretation, and he refuted its validity at some length in the *Obedience*.²²

When it came to the detailed interpretation of scripture, Tyndale recognised that there were in places some difficulties or obscurities, but he denied the need for allegorical interpretation or for proficiency in the philosophy of Aristotle and the schoolmen in order to deal with these. Those who thought thus, he wrote, 'rend and tear the scriptures with their distinctions, and expound them violently, contrary to the meaning of the text, and to the circumstances that go before and after, and to a thousand clear and evident texts'.²³ Where there was obscurity Tyndale, unlike More, allows no place for the traditional interpretation of the church. Instead, he counsels the reader, 'Mark the plain and manifest places of the scriptures, and in doubtful places see thou add no interpretations contrary to them'.²⁴ Above all, he argued 'all men's exposition and all men's doctrine' should be judged by 'the principles of the faith and by

19 Jonas, *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 463–4.

20 Jonas, *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 464.

21 Jonas, *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 452.

22 *Obedience*, *Doctrinal Treatises*, pp. 303–12. See Further Feldmeth (1998), pp. 236–7.

23 *Mammon*, *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 46.

24 1526 Prologue, *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 389.

plain scriptures and by the circumstances of the text'.²⁵ The 'principles of faith' as Tyndale understood them related to the inner experience of justification by faith, and the principle of *sola scriptura*. More was in accord when it came to the need to take account of the circumstances of the text; this was a principle both derived from Erasmus. When it came to the 'rule of faith' which should guide the interpretation of scripture, however, his starting point was very different.

Thomas More's Approach to Scripture and its Interpretation

Like Tyndale, More had a high view of scripture, describing it as 'the highest and the best learning that any man can have, if one take the right way in the learning'.²⁶ In common with Erasmus he believed the authority of scripture to lie in its power to animate and change the soul rather than as the raw material for the speculative theology of the scholastics.²⁷ He thus shared with Tyndale the belief that scripture was a means by which God through his Holy Spirit could work within the human heart to bring about inner transformation:

... when we hear the scripture or read it – if we be not rebellious but endeavour ourself to believe, and captive and subdue our understanding to serve and follow faith, praying for his gracious aid and help – he then worketh with us, and inwardly doth incline our heart into the assent of that we read, and, after a little spark of our faith, increaseth the credence in our incredulity!²⁸

More differed from Tyndale, however, in believing that scripture was not the sole channel of revelation, that unwritten tradition was of equal authority, and that the Holy Spirit also inclined the heart 'to give fast and firm credence to the faith that the church teacheth' that was not in scripture.²⁹ Nor was More as convinced as Tyndale that the meaning of scripture was in all respects plain and evident for all to see,³⁰ but held a more complex view of how it yielded up its meaning. His belief was that:

These books are tempered by the secret counsel of the Holy Ghost so plain and simple, that every man may find in them that he may perceive. And yet so high again and so hard, that no man is there so cunning, but he may find in them things far above his reach, far too profound to pierce unto³¹

25 *Obedience*, p. 156.

26 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWM6, p. 152.

27 See Fleisher (1973), pp. 110ff.

28 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 1; see CWM6, p. 254.

29 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 28; see CWM6, p. 254. On concepts of tradition in the late medieval period, see McGrath (2004), pp. 137–44 who distinguishes between tradition as coterminous with scripture, and tradition as an additional source of revelation. More uses it in the latter sense.

30 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWM6, p. 168.

31 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWM6, p. 144.

or as he more graphically put it (following Erasmus) ‘so marvellously tempered, that a mouse may wade therein, and an elephant be drowned therein’.³²

On the one hand, the simplest person could benefit from studying scripture, provided there was the right approach; this required prayerful reliance upon God and the humility to seek the guidance of earlier interpreters:

For there is no man so low, but if he will seek his way with the staff of his faith in his hand, and hold that fast and search the way therewith, and have the old holy fathers also for his guides, going on with a good purpose and a lowly heart, using reason and refusing no good learning, with calling of God for wisdom grace and help that he may well keep his way and follow his good guides, then shall he never fall in peril, but well and surely wade through, and come to such end of his journey as himself would well wish.³³

On the other hand, even if uneducated laity could read the Bible with profit, More considered scripture to be so profound that even the most learned may not easily penetrate its mysteries. The apostles, More believed, explained many of its mysteries by word of mouth, and he maintained that many of their interpretations were embodied in unwritten tradition handed down orally by the apostles to the church. Even so, he recognised that not everything in scripture was thus explained:

doubt I nothing, but that many things that now be very dark in holy scripture, were by the apostles (to whom our lord opened their wits, that they might understand scripture) so plainly declared, that they were by the people well and clearly understanden. I say not all the whole scripture, in which it may be that many a secret mystery lieth yet covered ...³⁴

Accordingly More accepted that there was scope for disagreement in interpretation until such time as God fully opened up the meaning to the church,³⁵ but on the necessary points of faith he claimed there was no doubt. Conversely, when maintaining the inerrancy of the church, he was always careful to limit this to matters necessary for salvation.

More was also aware that his opponents claimed that everything in scripture ‘is as plain as a pack staff’, and that there is no difficulty that could not be resolved by comparing one place with another.³⁶ Thus in the view put forward by the Messenger, if difficulty should arise, ‘the best and surest interpretation was to lay and confer one text with another’³⁷, and it was not necessary to consult the glosses of previous commentators. More disagreed and added reason and the beliefs of the church (the rule of faith) as ‘two good rules’ for arriving at the truth in interpretation:

... afore all thing were it necessary, to come well and surely instructed, in all such articles and points as the Church believeth. Which things once firmly had, and fastly for undoubted

32 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWM6, p. 152. Erasmus (*Apology against Sutor*) ascribes it to St Gregory; see CWM6ii, p. 649.

33 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWM6, p. 152.

34 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWM6, p. 146.

35 *Confutation*, Book 3, p. 248.

36 *Confutation*, Book 9, p. 997. The comparison is with a staff supporting a pedlar’s pack; CWM8iii, p. 1748.

37 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 1; see CWM6, p. 34.

truths presupposed, then shall reason and they be two good rules to examine and expound all doubtful texts by, since the reader shall be sure that no text is so to be understood, as it standeth against them both, or against any point of the catholic faith of Christ's church. And therefore if it seem to stand against any of them, either shall the light of natural reason, with the collation of other texts, help to find out the truth, or else (which is the surest way) he shall perceive the truth in the comments of the good holy doctors of old to whom God hath given the grace of understanding.³⁸

More made it clear that he did not think very highly of those who preached without studying what others before them have said, and who with 'obstinate pride' even made a virtue of this.³⁹ For self-aggrandisement they preached opinions which can be shown to be erroneous, sometimes even by 'plain authority of holy scripture'.⁴⁰ Even worse they 'cometh to the scripture of God to look and try therein whether the church believe aright or not'.⁴¹ When an interpretation was in conflict with the teaching of the church, then the interpreter must give way to the truth as the church holds it to be:

... finally if all that he can either find in other men's works, or invent by God's aid of his own study, cannot suffice to satisfy, but that any text yet seem unto him contrary to any point of the Church's faith and belief, let him then as Saint Augustine saith make himself very sure that there is some fault either in the translator, or in the writer, or now-a-days in the printer; or finally that for some one let or other he understandeth it not aright. And so let him reverently [ac]knowledge his ignorance, lean and cleave to the faith of the Church as to an undoubted truth, leaving that text to be better perceived when it shall please our Lord with his light to reveal and disclose it.⁴²

For More, the ultimate court of appeal was the teaching of the catholic church, the truth of which rested on the promise of Christ in the gospels, including that of Christ to Peter in John 21:17 'Feed my sheep'. In particular, he warned against the presumption of those who at first reading imperilled souls by 'bringing men into mad ways, sects and heresies; such as heretics have of old brought up, and the church hath condemned', and against those who 'interpret the text at their pleasure, and therewith fall themself and draw down other with them into seditious sects and heresies'.⁴³

For Tyndale, on the other hand, it was the authority of scripture that was supreme. Accordingly, as a matter of sound strategy More, although he did not lay aside the use of reason or abandon appeals to the authority of the early Christian writers,⁴⁴ engaged with Tyndale principally on the basis of scripture itself. He sought to discredit Tyndale by showing his interpretation of the texts he used against the

38 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 22; see CWM6, p. 127.

39 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 22; see CWM6, p. 124.

40 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 22; see CWM6, p. 125.

41 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWM6, p. 152.

42 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 22; see CWM6, pp. 127–8.

43 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 16; see CWM6, p. 335; see also p. 338.

44 In the *Confutation*, More because of the reformers' rejection of medieval theology distinguished between the previous 800 years during which the reformers claimed the church had been in error and the period of the early Christian writers, whose views still carried weight

catholic church to be unsound, and sought to establish his own view of the inerrancy of the church on scriptural foundations, though not exclusively so. The first of the two examples which follow will examine More's attack on the reformers' interpretation of the texts on which they based their rejection of 'idolatry' in the form of practices which stemmed from the church's unwritten tradition. The second will look at the way that More sought to establish his argument for the church's inerrancy on the foundation of Christ's promise to Peter.

Contested Interpretation: The Reformers' Rejection of Images

We may begin where More begins with an example of interpretation which he claimed was false and had led to heresy. First, however, More sets out his understanding of heresy, defining it as 'a sect and a side way (taken by any part of such as be baptized, and bear the name of Christian men) from the common faith and belief of the whole church beside'.⁴⁵ A specific example arose from the trial of one of the earliest of the Cambridge reformers, Thomas Bilney (c. 1495–1531), to which More devotes six chapters of the *Dialogue* (Book 3, Chapters 2–7). Bilney was formally tried in 1527 by a panel of bishops headed by Cuthbert Tunstall for preaching against 'idolatry' in the devotion shown to images, saints and relics, and against spurious claims of miracles to enhance financial gain at pilgrimage sites.⁴⁶ Bilney's preaching was condemned by More on the ground that it was contrary to the catholic faith, namely what had been held to be true by Christian people in all places and at all times. Bilney, and those like him who invoked the principle of *sola scriptura* against traditional practices of popular piety were heretical, because they were rejecting this common faith. For More universal common consent was the touchstone of truth, especially if it went back to the time of the apostles. As he put it:

For this am I very sure and perceive it well, not only by experience of mine own time, and the places where myself hath been, with common report of other honest men, from all other places of Christendom, but by books also and remembrances left of long time with writing of the old holy fathers, and now saints in heaven, that from the apostles' time hitherto, this manner hath been used, taught and allowed, and the contrary commonly condemned, through the whole flock of all good Christian people.⁴⁷

for the reformers. For Tyndale, however, scripture remained the ultimate authority, even over the early theologians.

45 Book I, Chap. 2; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, pp. 37–38.

46 It has been suggested by Rupp (1947), p. 28 that the Lollard origins of such criticism enabled Bilney to reconcile this with the verbal undertaking he had given to Wolsey two years earlier to cease preaching Lutheran teaching, but the basis of his criticism was the same principle of *sola scriptura* upon which Luther and his followers took their stand, and which lay at the heart of More's dispute with Tyndale. At his first trial, Bilney abjured, but four years later, he was tried a second time after relapsing. More himself, then Lord Chancellor, pressed the case against him, and Bilney was burned as a heretic in Norwich on 19 August 1531. See Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, Vol. 4; Clebsch (1964), pp. 278–280; P.R.N. Carter in *OxfordDNB* (2004).

47 Book I, Chap. 2; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, p. 38.

The rejection of the use of images was founded, according to More, on a set of biblical texts:

Non facies tibi sculptile, thou shalt carve thee none image.⁴⁸ And the Psalm. *In exitu Israel de Egypto*.⁴⁹ And *Soli deo honor et gloria*.⁵⁰ Only to God be honour and glory. And *Maledictus qui confidit in homine*.⁵¹ Accursed is he that putteth his trust in man.⁵²

These were apparently taken at face value by reformers and seen to apply directly to the church of their own day.

More pursued three lines of attack. His first response was to claim that the heresy was not new, but already contested by early Christian writers who understood the texts as well as the heretics did, and yet ‘inwardly taught’ by God’s Holy Spirit considered that their relevance was limited to the Jews.⁵³

More’s second and principal argument was exegetical. Like the early commentators he related the Old Testament texts to their historical and religious context in ancient Israel.⁵⁴ He repeats that they did not forbid any images at all, because there were figures of cherubim in the temple. He suggests, first, that the primary intention is to prohibit images of foreign gods, and he backs this up with the text ‘all the gods of the people be devils, but our Lord made the heavens’.⁵⁵ It would be absurd to think, however, that this could apply of images of Christ, Mary, or the saints. He goes on to concede that the prohibitions were intended to ensure that, even if the image is of the one true God, ‘that no man shall worship any image as God’, but interprets that as meaning that ‘the honour and service only pertaining to God’ should not be accorded to the image itself.

The third element of More’s attack was reason:

But I suppose neither scripture nor natural reason doth forbid that a man may do some reverence to an image, not fixing his final intent in the image, but referring it further to the honour of the person that the image representeth, since that in such reverence done unto

48 Exodus 20:4; wrongly cited in the marginal note as Apoc. 20.

49 ‘When Israel came out of Egypt’. Cited in the margin as Psalm 113, following the Vulgate numbering, but Psalm 114 in the Hebrew and the English versions which follow it. In the Vulgate this included what in the Hebrew is a separate psalm, Psalm 115, the relevant verses of which are vv.4–8.

50 ‘To God alone be honour and glory’; 1 Timothy 1:17.

51 Jeremiah 17:5.

52 Book I, Chap. 2; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, p. 38.

53 Book I, Chap. 2; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, p. 38. In claiming the authority of the early Christian writers he was exploiting Tyndale’s own readiness to accord them a degree of authority, as when Tyndale cited Augustine against More. For Tyndale’s attitude to the early Christian writers, see Smeeton (1986), pp. 111–12 and the references there.

54 He deals with the texts in the course of a lengthy interpolation introduced into the 1531 edition in response to the publication of *The Image of Love*.

55 Book I, Chap. 2; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, p. 45. CWM6ii (p. 610) identifies the psalm as Psalm 95:5 [96:5], but suggests that More thinks he is quoting Psalm 113 [114].

the image there is none honour withdrawn neither from God nor good man, but both the saint honoured in his image and God in his saint.⁵⁶

More illustrates the point by pointing out that the honour done to an ambassador is in effect done to the king he represents. He finds the ‘heretics’ treatment of the issue trifling, and considers that images should not simply be regarded ‘laymen’s books’ for the unlearned, but as helpful to people at all stages of spiritual development.⁵⁷

In seeking to demolish the reformers’ interpretation of the key texts which provided their sole authority for the rejection of images, More thus brings to bear a combination of contextual considerations and rational arguments. Interpretation in relation to context was advocated by Erasmus in the *Methodus*, and in theory also by Tyndale who, in the Preface to Genesis of 1530, claims to have translated in order that readers may see for themselves ‘the process, order, and meaning’ of the text.⁵⁸ Whereas, however, there was a tendency in the reformers’ reliance on scripture alone to assume that it applied directly in its literal sense to the present, without much need, if any, of interpretation, More’s approach was more nuanced. He distinguished between the significance of texts in relation to their Old Testament context and their validity in the light of the New Testament.

In the present instance More also brought reason to bear by suggesting a rationale for a Christian use of images which does not breach the principle of giving worship to God alone. Thus he preserved the underlying principle of the Old Testament revelation and reconciled it with the church’s practice. The reformers, on the other hand, were suspicious of reason in interpretation, because, as the Messenger was later to claim, of the danger of scripture being shaped to conform to contemporary ideas and practice, rather than being the standard on the basis of which they should be judged. In consequence the interpretation of More seems more balanced, while the reformers (at least as depicted by More) give the impression of extracting the texts from their context to give authority to a predetermined theological position in the manner of scholastic theologians. Such a use of scripture which set aside the wisdom of the early Christian writers and the continuity of tradition and used it to claim the authority to sit in judgement over the church was for More the hallmark of heresy. If the authority for the practices he was defending was not to be found in scripture, neither was the authority for their rejection.

56 Book I, Chap. 2; see CWM6, *Dialogue* pp. 45–46.

57 Contrary to the rejection of images in *The Image of Love*. The term comes from Gregory the Great, *Epistolarum libri XIV*.

58 *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 394.

Contested Interpretation: More's Scriptural Basis for the Church's Inerrancy

More appreciated the effectiveness of building his own case against the reformers on scriptural foundations, and this he does in arguing for the inerrancy of the church. The summary which heads Book I, Chapter 18 of the *Dialogue* states that 'by scripture he proveth that the church of Christ cannot err in any necessary article of Christ's faith'.⁵⁹ This claim was central to More's defence of the ultimate authority of the church, both in matters of faith and practice, and also in the interpretation of scripture. It was a claim to which he constantly returned and which was the driving force of his whole argument. At the same time, it is important to note that it was not a claim that the church had a monopoly of truth in every aspect of human life or over every detail of scripture, but that it was the repository of truth in matters necessary for salvation.

In order to found the claim to the church's inerrancy on scripture itself, More needed to establish that the promises of Christ in the New Testament were not restricted in scope to the apostles alone, but had continuing application to the church after their time. By reasoning step by step from the circumstances of Jesus' ministry he elicited the Messenger's agreement that, although some of the sayings of Jesus were limited in their application to his own time, others were meant for the apostles as his successors and through them for the whole church that came after them (he assumes without question that Jesus intended to found a church). The key passage that he used for this purpose was Luke 22:31–32:

Tell me then, I require you, when Christ said to Saint Peter, 'Satan hath desired to sift thee as men sift corn, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith shall not fail', said he this to him as a promise of the faith to be by God's help perpetually kept and preserved in Saint Peter only, or else in the whole church, that is to wit the whole congregation of Christian people professing his name and his faith, and abiding in the body of the same, not being precided⁶⁰ and cut off, meaning that his faith should never so utterly fail in his church but that it should whole and entire abide and remain therein?⁶¹

An attempt by the Messenger to suggest that like the invitation to walk on water (Matthew 14:29) the assurance may have been meant for Peter alone is countered by More pointing out that Peter's faith did in fact fail when he denied knowing Jesus after his arrest. Since, therefore, Peter failed, the promise could only have been intended for the church of which he was chosen by Christ to be head, and it meant that Christ should never fail in his church to ensure that the right faith was preserved:

But since that upon his first confession of the right faith that Christ was God's son, our Lord made him his universal vicar, and under him head of his church. And that for his

59 Book I, Chap. 18; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, p. 101.

60 Cut off from communion.

61 Book I, Chap. 18; see CWM6, *Dialogue* p. 107. Tyndale (1526; unchanged in 1534) translates: 'Simon, behold Satan hath desired you, to sift you, as it were wheat: But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted [Gk. *epistrepsas*; Vulgate *conversus*], strengthen thy brethren'; spelling modernised.

successor he should be the first upon whom and whose firm confessed faith he would build his church,⁶² and of any that was only man make him the first and chief head and ruler thereof, therefore he showed him that his faith, that is to wit the faith by him confessed, should never fail in his church, nor never did it, notwithstanding his denying.⁶³

He goes on to explain that the reason that the promise did not fail when Simon denied Jesus was ‘For yet stood still the light of faith in our Lady, of whom we read in the gospel continual assistance to her sweetest son without fleeing or flitting’.⁶⁴ Indeed, he suggested, the one candle that remained unextinguished during the Holy Week service of *Tenebrae* symbolised exactly this.⁶⁵ By the same token, the fact that Peter’s faith did fail could only mean that the promise was meant for him in his future capacity as head of the church. Thus when Christ added ‘And thou being one of these days converted, confirm and strengthen thy brethren’, he meant that the promised faith ‘should stand for ever’.⁶⁶

Luke 22:31–32 is a text with a long history of use in supporting the supremacy of the Roman pontiff,⁶⁷ and More’s interpretation of the New Testament reference to Christ’s statement that he would pray for Peter as a ‘promise of Christ’ and his tenuous reference to Mary’s faith of which there is no explicit New Testament reference probably stem from traditional use. Even allowing for this, however, there are evident weaknesses in his exegesis. It might be argued, for instance, that Christ’s prayer or promise was fulfilled after the resurrection or after Pentecost, when Peter was the first to preach publicly the truth to be found in Christ (Acts 2). Indeed, Tyndale in fact offered an alternative interpretation.

In the *Answer* Tyndale deals with the interpretation of Luke 22:32–33 in the context of showing ‘How a true member of Christ’s church sinneth not; and how he is yet a sinner’.⁶⁸ What he seemed to mean by this paradoxical position was that those whose hearts had been converted to God would ‘never sin of a purpose ... but of weakness and infirmity’,⁶⁹ and God for his part would always be ready with

62 Matthew 16:18.

63 Book I, Chap. 18; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, p. 108.

64 Book I, Chap. 18; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, p. 108.

65 This service traditionally ended in darkness, but there was no universal agreement about the meaning of the one candle that remained alight; see CWM6ii, p. 636. Nonetheless it illustrates More’s point that the light of faith remained burning between the arrest of Jesus on Maundy Thursday and his resurrection on Easter Day.

66 Book I, Chap. 18; see CWM6, *Dialogue*, p. 108; the quotation is the continuation of Luke 22:32.

67 See CWM6ii, pp. 636–7. It was used, for example, in Leo IX’s letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople which resulted in the schism with the eastern church in 1054, and it continued long after More’s time, as for example in Vatican I, as a basis for claiming the supreme authority and infallibility of the successor of Peter. Similarly More’s assumption that the catholic church had an unbroken succession of faith (*successio fidelium*) reflected a doctrine that went back to St Augustine’s *Enarratio in Psalmum CXXVIII*.

68 *Answer*, p. 32.

69 *Answer*, p. 33.

forgiveness so that they would not die in mortal sin and be damned.⁷⁰ Tyndale takes the failure of Peter's faith to be one example of this:

Yea, and Peter, as soon as he had denied Christ, came to himself immediately, and went out and wept bitterly for sorrow. And thus ye see that Peter's faith failed not, though it were oppressed for a time : so that we need to seek no glosses for the text that Christ said to Peter, how that his faith should not fail.⁷¹

By dealing with the passage in the context of a theological argument, Tyndale's interpretation, like that of More, is determined to a large extent by prior theological convictions. In purely exegetical terms both he and More seek to interpret Peter's failure of faith by denying Christ in relation to his consequent bitter weeping (Luke 22:55–62). Tyndale took this as evidence of an underlying faith which quickly overcame his temporary lapse. In the *Confutation*, on the other hand, More argues that the depth of Peter's sorrow indicated recognition of the seriousness of his sin,⁷² and goes a stage further by accusing Tyndale of falsifying the translation in order not to have to concede theological ground. Where More in Luke 22:32 had Christ referring to Peter being 'converted', Tyndale in the *Answer* had 'when thou art come unto thyself again'.⁷³ Noting that in his New Testament Tyndale had translated 'converted', which he explained as always in scripture meaning 'turning back' to God in repentance, he accuses Tyndale of deliberately substituting an expression which fitted in with his contention that Peter's faith had not in fact failed. Tyndale, he writes, 'to make the gospel seem to agree with his heresy, changeth in his exposition the very chief effectual word, whereupon the pith of all the matter hangeth'.⁷⁴

There was thus between Tyndale and More a clash of interpretations over a text which was crucial for More's defence of the authority of the catholic church. The conflict arose mainly from a clash of theological principles which governed their interpretations, but it also indicated genuine exegetical differences concerning the meaning in context. It is interesting, however, particularly in the light of Tyndale's denigration and rejection of the pope, that More does not use Luke 22:31–32 as John Fisher and other before him had done to defend papal authority. Rather, like Henry VIII in his *Assertio contra Luther*, he related the promise to the church rather than specifically to the pope.⁷⁵ Neither in the *Dialogue* nor in the *Confutation* does More rely on appealing to the authority of either of popes or of Councils.

Although More was engaging with the reformers on their own ground, it is important to note, that he was aware, as the Messenger discovered, that to claim the

70 *Answer*, p. 36.

71 *Answer*, p. 38.

72 *Confutation*, Book 4; CWM8, pp. 554–8.

73 *Answer*, p. 39.

74 *Confutation*, Book 4; see CWM8, p. 560.

75 CWM6ii, p. 635.

authority of scripture for the inerrancy of the church was in fact to concede ultimate authority to scripture.⁷⁶ He was careful therefore to rest his case for the inerrancy of the church not on scripture as such, but on the promise of Christ himself. The promise was attested by scripture, but was given before the New Testament came into written form. By using a text that was traditionally used to claim supreme authority for the catholic church, however, More was forced into a weak exegetical position. In the *Confutation* he makes repeated appeal to a few additional other texts which promise future guidance to the church, namely the pledge of Christ's continuing presence in his church in Matthew 28:20, and the promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in John 14:26 and 16:13.⁷⁷ With these he was on firmer ground.

More's additional grounds for the inerrancy of the church

More knew that despite common acceptance of the authority of scripture there could be radically opposing interpretations of the same texts, as the two examples so far considered have shown. Only an inerrant church could have the authority to adjudicate between true and false interpretation. For More that church was the visible catholic church, but in order to confute the claim that scripture alone had ultimate authority, he needed to establish grounds for its inerrancy in addition to scripture itself.

First, he argued that it was the church that had distinguished true scripture from false, and that accordingly it could be relied upon to distinguish true interpretation from false. Second, he relativised the authority of scripture by arguing the reformers that unwritten tradition was equally authoritative, and also that it provided a guide to interpretation (as in the case of texts concerning idolatry). Third, he argued that the catholic church was the true church because of its continuity with the teaching and practice with Christ and the apostles, which, when combined with the promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the positive and active consent of the faithful to its teaching through successive generations,⁷⁸ guaranteed the truth of its teaching concerning salvation. Correspondingly, he argued that when the teaching or scriptural interpretation of the reformers contradicted what had been universally agreed as true in the known catholic church it must be false, especially since amongst the reformers there was no lasting common agreement anywhere.

Conflicting Claims of Authority

In his *Answer* Tyndale singled out each of More's three arguments for the inerrancy of the church for detailed rebuttal.

⁷⁶ *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 1, pp. 247ff.

⁷⁷ These are mentioned briefly in the *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 18; CWE6, pp. 108–109.

⁷⁸ He put particular emphasis on the early Christian writers, especially Augustine, but since their authority, unlike that of medieval theologians, was also recognised by Luther and Tyndale, in what follows the focus will be principally on scripture.

'Whether the church were before the gospel, or the gospel before the church'

Fundamental to More's approach to scripture was his conviction that it was the church that held the keys to its right understanding, and that if it was correctly understood there could be no contradiction between scripture and the teaching of the church. Thus More tells the Messenger:

... the church biddeth you not believe the contrary of that the scripture saith. But he telleth you that in such places as ye would better believe the scripture than the church, there ye understand not the scripture ... the church hath so right understanding of scripture, that it well and truly perceiveth, that no text therein can be right understanden, against any article that the church believeth for thing to be believed of necessity.⁷⁹

One of the main arguments on which More based this claim for the church's inerrancy in its interpretation of scripture was that historically the church was in existence before the scriptures, and that it was the church that had determined which writings were to be included and which excluded from the New Testament canon. If the church had the discernment to distinguish God's word from the words of men, it could similarly determine the truth concerning the interpretation of scripture. As he put it in the *Confutation*:

I say to you, as the king's highness most prudently laid unto Luther, since God will not suffer his church to mistake a book of scripture for peril of damnable errors that might ensue thereon, and like peril may there ensue by the misconstruing of the sentence as by the mistaking of the book, it must needs follow that God will in things of our faith no more suffer them to take a false sentence for true, than to take a false book for scripture.⁸⁰

He concluded that the church's interpretation was infallible in matters necessary for salvation and thus had ultimate authority.

For Tyndale, on the other hand, the principle of the sole sufficiency of scripture (*sola scriptura*), which was the foundation of the reformers' theology, meant it was important to establish that the church was subject to the authority of scripture and not scripture to the authority of the church.⁸¹ The question of 'whether the church were before the gospel, or the gospel before the church' was accordingly the first point of principle with which he considered it necessary to deal in his *Answer*.⁸²

Tyndale began his response with the incontrovertible historical fact that Christ had first to be preached in order for the church to come into existence, and he concluded: 'therefore, inasmuch as the word is before the faith, and faith maketh the congregation, therefore is the word or gospel before the congregation'.⁸³ Tyndale's second point, which reinforced this claim, related to inner transforming effect of the word of God in dispelling darkness from the human soul:

79 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 30–31; see CWM6, pp. 182–4.

80 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 30; see CWM6, pp. 183–4. More takes the point from Henry VIII's *Assertio* against Luther.

81 On the medieval antecedents of *sola scriptura*, see McGrath (2004), pp. 144–7.

82 *Answer*, p. 24.

83 *Answer*, p. 24.

For the whole scripture, and all believing hearts, testify that we are begotten through the word. ... And again, as the air is dark of itself, and receiveth all her light of the sun; even so are all men's hearts of themselves dark with lies, and receive all their truth of God's word, in that they consent thereto. ... even so, the lying heart of man can give the word of God no truth; but, contrariwise, the truth of God's word is of herself, and lighteneth the hearts of the believers, and maketh them true, and cleanseth them from lies, as thou redest, John xv: "Ye be clean by reason of the word." Which is to be understood, in that the word had purged their hearts from lies, from false opinions, and from thinking evil good, and therefore from consenting to sin.⁸⁴

In other words, because all men's hearts are dark with lies, the word of God cannot depend upon human assessment of its truth, but is rather the source of truth which purges the hearts of believers from darkness and error.⁸⁵

It seems probable that Tyndale is here describing his own experience and that of other reformers of having their lives grasped and changed through the reading of scripture, and of a 'feeling faith' which for them validated the truth of scripture and gave them the inner illumination to discern what that truth was, however much it may differ from received interpretations.⁸⁶ Accordingly, in Tyndale's view, the church could claim no credit for recognising the truth of scripture; it was self-authenticating within the hearts of believers, and by implication so was its right interpretation.

So convinced was Tyndale that the authority of scripture had priority over the authority of the church, that his treatment extended to no more than two pages: More's rebuttal of Tyndale's position was much more extensive – some 27 pages in the Yale edition of the *Confutation*.⁸⁷ His initial response was that he had never suggested otherwise on either of Tyndale's counts. In dealing with the first point that the preaching of Christ predated the written record of the New Testament, he accused Tyndale of deliberately misrepresenting his position. He did not disagree that the church was indeed called into being by the preached word; his point was that it was only subsequently that the *written* record appeared.⁸⁸ Nor, second, had he ever suggested that God's truth depended upon human attestation. It needed none, not even that of being put in written form or even spoken by God.⁸⁹ What the church had done, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was to discern which writings embodied this truth and which did not.

Tyndale later reverted to what he termed the 'anchor' of the church's claim to inerrancy in the interpretation of scripture, namely that: 'They be the church and cannot err; their authority is greater than the scripture; and the scripture is not true, but because they say so ...'.⁹⁰ In direct contradiction of More's claim that it was the church that safeguarded scripture, he writes, 'No thanks unto the heads of the

84 *Answer*, pp. 24–5. The reference is to John 15:3.

85 *Answer*, pp. 24–6.

86 For a description by Bilney of such an experience after reading 1 Timothy 1:15, see Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, Vol. 4.

87 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 225–253.

88 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 225ff.

89 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 243–4.

90 *Answer*, pp. 46ff.

church, that the scripture was kept, but unto the mercy of God'.⁹¹ To this More again repeated that he was not claiming this, but that 'the church hath the very gift of God to *discern* which is the very scripture and which not'.⁹²

After this brief general response setting the record straight on his own position, More devoted the main part of his response to a detailed attack on the scriptural texts which Tyndale invoked in defence of his position. This was in accordance with his strategy throughout the *Confutation* both of exposing the logical weaknesses of Tyndale's arguments, and also of trying to undermine his dependence on the sole authority of scripture by challenging his interpretation of the texts he used to support his own views. In the present context, these were John 15:3, 17:17 and 5:34:

And (John xvii.) "Sanctify them, O Father, through thy truth: and thy word is truth". And thus thou seest that God's truth dependeth not of man. It is not true because man so saith, or admitteth it for true: but man is true, because he believeth it, testifieth and giveth witness in his heart that it is true. And Christ also saith himself, (John v.) "I receive no witness of man".⁹³

More concentrated particularly on John 5:34, which he accused Tyndale of maliciously mistranslating and misinterpreting in order to support his own position that the truth of scripture was in no way dependent upon human attestation, more especially that of the catholic church. He expatiates at some length on the general function of the definite article in English and in Greek and the effect of what he considers to be Tyndale's wilful omission of it in this verse. The correct translation, he argued, should be 'I take not record of man'.⁹⁴ This did not mean, as Tyndale proposed, that Christ 'would take of man no record at all',⁹⁵ because Christ himself mentioned the testimony of John the Baptist. It meant in this context that Christ did not receive his chief testimony from man, but that only God himself could testify to his relationship to him.⁹⁶

In dealing with John 17:17 More went a stage further and claimed that God's truth does not even depend on God's word: God's truth is absolute and true in its own right, even if never spoken or committed to writing.⁹⁷ He thus relativized the authority of scripture, the purpose of which, like that of unwritten tradition, he understood to be to make known the truth of God.

Next, More seeks to undermine Tyndale's advocacy of the sufficiency of scripture by introducing of the word 'alone' into the discussion of John 15:3. He cited the verse from Tyndale as 'Ye be clean by reason of the word',⁹⁸ but discussed it as if

91 *Answer*, p. 48.

92 *Confutation*, Book 9; see CWE8, p. 689. Italics added.

93 *Answer*, pp. 25–6.

94 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, p. 233.

95 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, p. 235.

96 See John 5:37 and the comments, for example, of Lindars (1972), p. 229.

97 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 243f.

98 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, p. 242. In his 1526 New Testament Tyndale renders as 'Now are ye clean, by that means of the words which I have spoken unto you' (spelling modernised).

Tyndale took its meaning to be ‘by the word alone’ and he thereby turned the verse into a vehicle for an attack on the principle of *sola scriptura* which lay at the heart of their differences.

In support of his understanding of the relationship between the church and scripture, More had history on his side. None could deny that that historically it had been the early church that had determined the canon of scripture and excluded books considered to contain false teaching. This also enabled More to argue that if scripture contained the truth, this was because the church knew it to be such, and that if the church were in error in any way, then the veracity of scripture was likewise called into question.

Tyndale’s defence of the view that the gospel is prior to the church is only valid if it is accepted that the written gospels embody the ‘gospel’ as initially delivered in oral form by the teaching of Jesus and the preaching of the apostles, and the prefaces to his translations show that Tyndale evidently did understand ‘gospel’ in this wider sense. It also assumes that until the word had been appropriated by the faith of the believer and purged the heart from ‘darkness, lies and false opinions’, truth could not be recognised. That historically the apostles came to faith before any New Testament book was written and on that basis were in a position to attest which writings truly represented the gospel and which did not, in fact accords better with More’s position in arguing for the prior authority of the apostolic tradition entrusted to the church. Such reasoned arguments which feature prominently in More’s defence of the church’s position, however, seem to have carried little weight for Tyndale. His position passed over the actual historical development of the New Testament and the fact that it was some years after the resurrection that the written gospels first appeared. He took his stand rather on ‘the whole scripture, and all believing hearts’ which ‘testify that we are begotten through the word’,⁹⁹ and he seems to have been projecting back into the early church the process by which he himself had come to accept the truth of the gospel.

For Tyndale, the issue was not one of ‘historical faith’ but of ‘feeling faith’. The experience of inner transformation brought about by God’s word when received by faith gave him a conviction of God’s truth in a way that his upbringing within the catholic church and his ordination as a priest had evidently failed to do. It is to such personal inner experience that he accorded ultimate authority. It was an experience that for Tyndale and other ‘believing hearts’ was bound up with a particular and personal understanding of salvation as unmerited forgiveness effected by the shedding of Christ’s blood. This, as Tyndale was well aware, was not the only possible understanding of New Testament teaching, but it was his personal experience of the effects of scripture on the life of those who understood the New Testament in this way that convinced him that he had found the true interpretative key to its meaning, or rather that provided him with a tool which he could use to exclude possible interpretations

which did not accord with his personal experience, as well as any possibility that anything of necessity for salvation should lie outside scripture. Authority in relation to scripture lay for Tyndale entirely within the closed hermeneutical circle of the inter-relationship between personal experience and assurance of salvation through the blood of Christ made known and working its effects through scripture when read with faith. In practice, because it was ultimately by means of personal experience that Tyndale reached his conviction of truth, his claims were beyond rational debate and could only be self-authenticating.¹⁰⁰

Behind the polemic with which both Tyndale and More presented the views of their opponents in stark, oversimplified and sometimes distorted ways, there was in fact a common acceptance that the ultimate source of truth was God. Their difference lay in the way that this truth came to be recognised and accepted. For Tyndale, this was by means of a ‘feeling faith’ based on personal experience mediated by scripture. More also believed that through the Holy Spirit God could implant truth directly into the minds of believers without the mediation either of preaching or of scripture, but in the context of the debate his position derived from what Tyndale termed an ‘historical faith’, which took on trust the traditional teaching of the church. For Tyndale, God revealed his truth to individual believers: for More, he revealed it primarily to the church. From these respective starting points they clashed over the interpretation of scriptural texts. Since logically it was not possible for More to adduce from scripture proof of the church’s authoritative role in determining the canon, the best he could do was to undermine Tyndale’s use of scripture to support the sole authority of the Bible. He also recognised that at the root of the disagreement between himself and Tyndale was not so much the authority of scripture, which both accepted, but the question of how the truth of conflicting interpretations could be established. If Tyndale wished to claim as true interpretations which for 1500 years had been deemed false, then the onus of proof was on him. Only if Tyndale produced miracles, More asserted, would he be believed.¹⁰¹ More, for his part, could claim the support of centuries of unwritten tradition. This was a major point of difference, to which Tyndale next gave specific attention.

‘Whether the apostles left aught unwritten, that is of necessity to be believed’

More fully accepted the authority of scripture and its necessity for salvation. The term (‘scripture’), he wrote, ‘signifieth such holy writing as God causeth to be written and bindeth folk to believe, upon the peril of their soul’s health’.¹⁰² In that, More stood on common ground with the reformers. Where he differed was in rejecting their claim for the sole sufficiency and authority of scripture. His position, representing that of the catholic church, was that ‘unwritten tradition’ had equal authority and also

100 See Egan (1960), p. 61 who comments that ‘recourse to a spiritual intuition or divine illumination which supersedes all external criteria for determining the content of revelation’, following Melancthon’s distinction between historical and feeling faith, ‘put all the Reformers beyond the field of rational debate’.

101 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 250–252.

102 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, p. 272.

embodied matters necessary for salvation, and he considered heretical the claim of Luther and his followers ‘that a man is not bound to believe anything but if it may be proved evidently by scripture’.¹⁰³

More first introduced the subject of unwritten tradition (‘unwritten’ in the sense of not being found in scripture) in defending his claim that the church could not err, the foundation for which was that Christ had promised his continuing presence within his church. In Book I, Chapter 20 of the *Dialogue* the Messenger raised the reformers’ claim that the perpetual presence of Christ in his church meant only his presence in scripture.¹⁰⁴ In his response More argued persuasively that Christ’s promise of his continuing presence in his church ‘to the world’s end’ (Matthew 28:20) was more likely to mean a living presence than a written book. Almost incidentally he introduced the idea that: ‘The Holy Ghost taught many things, I think unwritten, and whereof some part was never comprised in the scripture’,¹⁰⁵ and he subsequently took up the discussion more fully in Book I, Chapter 25.

It is clear that for More unwritten tradition included two elements. It was founded primarily on teaching handed down orally by Christ and the apostles and not embodied in the written record of the New Testament, but it also included doctrines and practices which had arisen since their time and become universally accepted throughout the church.¹⁰⁶ To establish that the authority and truth of tradition was equal to that of scripture was essential for More for two reasons.

First, because it was only on the basis of tradition that he could defend doctrines and practices that the reformers rejected as unscriptural. It was tradition that gave validity to the whole gamut of devotional practice involving pilgrimages, prayers to the saints, veneration of relics and indulgences, and to the rites and ceremonies of the church’s worship, to the defence of which is a great deal of the *Dialogue* is devoted. It included rituals used during the Mass, for example the mixing of water with the communion wine, which More claimed derived from unwritten tradition handed down orally by the apostles. It comprised matters of belief such as the bodily assumption of Mary, which together with other doctrines embodied in the creeds constituted the church’s rule of faith. More makes no attempt however to distinguish matters of greater or

103 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, pp. 148–9.

104 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 20; see CWE6, p. 113.

105 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 20; see CWE6, p. 115.

106 As an example of God’s ability to impart new revelation, More refers at the end of Book I, Chapter 20 of the *Dialogue* to Christ’s giving the apostles the words with which to respond to their future accusers:

Our Saviour also said unto his apostles, that when they should be accused and brought in judgement, they should not need to care for answer, it should even then be put in their minds. And that he meant not only the remembrance of holy scripture, which before the paynim judges were but a cold and bare alleging, but such new words given them by God inspired in their hearts so effectual, and confirmed with miracles, that their adversaries though they were angry thereat, yet should not be able to resist it. And thus with secret help and inspiration is Christ with his church, and will be to the world’s end present and assistant. Not only spoken of in writing. (See CWE6, p. 116).

lesser importance; for him whatever was embodied in tradition was as essential for salvation as what was written in scripture.

Second, More believed that it was the church's tradition that provided the key to the interpretation of scripture in matters necessary for salvation:

... the holy apostles, being taught by their great master Christ, did teach unto the Church as well the articles of faith, as the understanding of such texts of scripture, as was meet and convenient for the matter ... And as the apostles at that time taught the people, so did ever some of them that heard them teach forth, and leave their doctrine and traditions to other that came after. By reason whereof, not only came the rites and sacraments and the articles of our faith from hand to hand, from Christ and his apostles unto our days, but *also the great part of the right understanding of holy scripture* by good and godly writers of sundry times ...¹⁰⁷

As More pointed out, even if he were to accept the principle of *sola scriptura*, there would still be the issue of the interpretation of scripture. In the early church heretics like Arius¹⁰⁸ and Helvidius (who denied the perpetual virginity of Mary)¹⁰⁹ could claim scriptural support for their views. More refers frequently to the latter as an example of how, without the rule of faith controlling interpretation, scriptural references to the brothers and sisters of Jesus could be interpreted in a way which denied Mary's perpetual virginity, a conclusion that in More's view was heretical.¹¹⁰

It may be asked whether by allowing tradition to govern interpretation in this way More was in practice according greater authority to tradition than to scripture. His position, however, was that the authority of both derived from that of Christ himself whether during his time on earth or by means of his continuing presence in the life of the church:

to the intent we should well know that his own word and ordinance needeth none other authority but himself, but is to be believed and obeyed, be it written or not written, some things did he therefore bid to be done, and some things also to be believed, whereof we have in holy scripture no writing in the world.¹¹¹

Later, in the *Confutation*, More re-iterated that both scripture and tradition derived their authority from the truth of God, and the truth of God, he argued, stood in its own right whether or not it had ever been written or even put into words by God himself. Consequently the means of expression of that truth, whether written or oral, was less important than the substance of what was expressed.¹¹²

At the same time, More believed that tradition was a living process and that 'Christ and his Holy Spirit do still by secret inspirations, reveal and open to his

107 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 151–2. Italics added.

108 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 26; see CWE6, p. 159; *Confutation*, Book 4; CWE8, p. 389.

109 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 151.

110 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 151.

111 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 147–8.

112 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 243–4.

church, every necessary truth, that he will have the church further know and bounden to believe'.¹¹³ Correspondingly, it was absurd to think that God could be constrained by what had been committed to writing:

For who would be so mad to think that God knoweth not many things that we know not, and that he can if it please him reveal and show any of those, and command us to believe them ... And he may when it please him command us to do some other things that he hath not commanded yet, and then we should be bound to so them. And he may command to leave undone some things that he had before commanded to be done, and then we should be bound to leave them undone.¹¹⁴

This was something which Tyndale was not prepared to allow insofar as matters essential for salvation were concerned. Indeed, so extreme was his defence of *sola scriptura*, that in his *Answer* he went so far as to write that 'Christ and all the apostles, with all the angels of heaven, if they were here, could preach no more than is preached, of necessity unto our souls'.¹¹⁵ Even if there were unwritten traditions handed down within the church and coming from the apostles themselves, they were not essential to salvation, nor were they helpful. He dismisses the matter of mixing water with communion wine as unimportant,¹¹⁶ and while he does not deny the perpetual virginity of Mary, he describes it as 'story faith' and not a necessary article of belief.¹¹⁷ It was also of no benefit, Tyndale argued, for any Christian 'to believe that our lady's body is in heaven'; nor is he any better 'for the belief of purgatory', seeing that the picture of hell in the New Testament is more terrifying than purgatory's 'terrible fire, which thou mayest quench for almost three half-pence'.¹¹⁸

Tyndale conceded that Christ and the apostles preached many more sermons and did many more miracles than had been recorded.¹¹⁹ His conviction, however, was that 'the pith and substance in general of everything necessary unto our soul's health, both of what we ought to believe, and what we ought to do ... is written expressly, or drawn out of that which is written'.¹²⁰ Otherwise, if the salvation of his soul depended (as the church claimed) on unwritten traditions what help would scripture be? If the false teaching about which Christ warned his followers was to be shown as untrue, this could only be done by miracles to the contrary or by appeal to 'authentic scripture, of full authority already among the people'.¹²¹

113 *Confutation*, Book 9; see CWE8, p. 996.

114 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, p. 284; see also *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; CWE6, pp. 149ff; *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 365, 379.

115 *Answer*, pp. 27–28.

116 *Answer*, p. 97.

117 *Answer*, p. 96.

118 *Answer*, p. 28.

119 *Answer*, p. 26.

120 *Answer*, p. 26.

121 *Answer*, p. 26. In the *Confutation* More seized upon Tyndale's mention of miracles as a means of attesting true teaching in support of the catholic church which could claim a great number through the centuries, while the reformers are not in a position to produce a single one; *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 254–8.

Once again, both Tyndale and More sought to ground their respective claims in the authority of scripture itself. Firstly, More claimed the authority of the New Testament for the validity of unwritten tradition. Passages on which he drew included 2 Thessalonians 2:15 in which Paul commanded the church in Thessalonica ‘to keep the traditions that he took them, either by his writing or by his bare word’; 1 Corinthians 11:23f where he reminded the Corinthians of what he had taught them orally about communion;¹²² and John 21:25.¹²³

In relation to 2 Thessalonians 2:15, Tyndale in his *Answer* referred to the response he had already made to the Bishop of Rochester on this point in his *Obedience*, namely that Paul taught by word of mouth no more than he wrote, and what was essential for faith.¹²⁴ More in the *Confutation* asks how Tyndale can possibly know this or prove it from scripture, and re-iterates his counter-claim that many of the ceremonies of the mass ‘were taught by the spirit of God and delivered by his apostles’.¹²⁵ In the case of John 21:25, which states that ‘there are many other things which Jesus did: the which if they should be written every one, I suppose the world could not contain the books that should be written’,¹²⁶ Tyndale accused More of ‘juggling’ with scripture, claiming that John was referring to ‘the miracles which Jesus did, and not of the necessary points of the faith’.¹²⁷ More accepts that miracles are included, since John 20:30 says as much, but taking account of the context in relation to the gospel as a whole, which ‘was made not only of Christ’s miracles but of his doctrine and as well word and deed’,¹²⁸ he denied that ‘did’ is here restricted to miracles and argues that it includes his doctrine, deeds and words.

Secondly, as well as basing his own case on scripture, More challenged Tyndale to provide a scriptural basis for practices which the reformers accepted even though they had no direct attestation in scripture. He mentions, for example, the Christian observance of Sunday instead of the Jewish Sabbath, and reformers’ view that it was permissible for a woman to baptize.¹²⁹ In the *Confutation* the matter to which More returned time and again was what he insultingly describes as Luther’s ‘lechery’ in marrying a nun. It was a matter with which he had a seemingly obsessive revulsion, but the question of the scriptural sanction of such a practice nonetheless served as a critical test of the principle of *sola scriptura*.

When Tyndale did offer scriptural support for his views, the way that he interpreted the texts he used did not always stand up to More’s probing. Tyndale’s defence of a friar marrying a nun, for instance, was based on 1 Timothy 3:2 ‘a bishop must be unreprouable and the husband of one wife’. This, More responded, meant not that he must have a wife, but that if he does he should only have one. In dealing

122 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 148.

123 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 144.

124 *Answer*, p. 96.

125 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, pp. 324–5.

126 Referred to but not given verbatim by More in *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 144. The translation is that of Tyndale’s *New Testament* (1526), with modernised spelling.

127 *Answer*, p. 96.

128 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, p. 312.

129 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 149.

with related texts adduced by Tyndale, More makes the point that in Luther's case the offence was not marriage but the breaking of his vow as a friar.¹³⁰

To support his claim that everything necessary for salvation was to be found in scripture, Tyndale cited Christ's command 'Love thy neighbour', arguing that the evangelists and apostles would have been failing in charity if they had not written down everything necessary for salvation.¹³¹ More's response was to ask why then the apostles Andrew and Bartholomew wrote nothing, and how in the light of differences between the gospels, the evangelists could have known that they were including everything necessary?¹³²

Thirdly, More accused Tyndale, like Luther, of being selective in his use of scripture and ignoring or perverting its plain sense on matters that did not accord with his theology,¹³³ including the belief that there were seven sacraments, and the need for good works. He accused the reformers of rejecting the canonicity of Maccabees, which traditionally provided scriptural sanction for prayer to the saints and belief in purgatory.¹³⁴ Similarly, he claimed Luther's devaluing of the Epistle of James, was symptomatic of his refusal to accept any interpretation of scripture that did not accord with his own ideas.¹³⁵

Tyndale's attempt to exclude the possibility of tradition containing anything necessary for salvation on the basis of 'love thy neighbour' cannot be adjudged as anything other than tenuous. Similarly, in comparison with the way that More's exegesis takes full account of context, the alternative interpretations he offers for the texts used by More to establish the validity of tradition seem forced, and they do not stand up well to the logic and reason applied by More to discredit them. The accusation which More brings against Luther that 'no scripture can be evident to prove any thing that he list to deny. For he will not agree it for evident be it never so plain. And he will call evident for him that text, that is evident against him'¹³⁶ could equally be levelled against Tyndale.¹³⁷

130 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, pp. 261–2.

131 *Answer*, pp. 100–101.

132 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 334–6.

133 *Confutation*, Book 2, CWE8, pp. 156f; Book 3, CWE8 p. 254.

134 *Confutation*, Book 2, CWE8, pp. 156; Book 3, CWE8 p. 266.

135 *Confutation*, Book 2, CWE8, p. 156; Book 7, CWE8, p. 688.

136 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 149.

137 See the comments of Egan (1960), p. 31 that 'One is left with the impression that William Tyndale yearned for an utterly simple religion, and was so profoundly satisfied in Lutheranism, that rather than upset his peace of conscience by facing squarely the scriptural *inconvenientiae* of his beliefs, he shut our doubt by reaffirming more strenuously those parts of scripture which, in isolation, confirm his teaching', and that 'Tyndale's judgement leads him more than once to what seem deliberate equivocations resorted to in order to avoid an embarrassing text'.

The weakness of More's position, on the other hand, was that he was unable to explain why Christ and the apostles delivered some matters of essential belief only orally. The best he can suggest in the *Dialogue* is that they feared that putting it in writing should lead to 'casting pearls before swine' (Matthew 7:6), that is, subjecting it to the possibility of mockery by heathens.¹³⁸ Tyndale, however, had little difficulty in exposing this as untenable,¹³⁹ and ultimately More had to admit in the *Confutation* that he did not understand why some things were left unwritten while others were not, pleading that not everything that God did was accessible to human reason. He accepted the customary practice of the catholic church, believing that if God wanted things otherwise he would have revealed it to the church through his Holy Spirit in accordance with Christ's promise.¹⁴⁰

For More the authority of unwritten tradition was axiomatic, a basic datum of faith without which the whole seamless robe of the church's belief and practice would unravel. Were the advocates of *sola scriptura* to be given the least finger hold, and just a single element of faith or practice rejected as mistaken because it was unscriptural, the whole credibility of the church's teaching would be put in doubt, and Christians would be left unprotected from false teaching, to the peril of their souls.¹⁴¹ The difficulty was that axioms cannot be proved. The best More could do was to undermine his opponents' case by deploying reason to attack their logic and by turning their appeal to the authority of scripture against them.

Similarly, Tyndale's case also rested on a fundamental *a priori* assumption, namely that everything necessary for salvation was to be found in scripture. The claim could not logically be grounded in scripture itself, and Tyndale produced no positive argument for it. It was a claim that stemmed from a particular conviction of the nature of salvation, based on inner personal experience, which by its nature was impossible to controvert. The interpretations that Tyndale put forward provide further evidence of the subordination of scripture to predetermined theological positions in order to claim its authority for those positions.

More was again clear that the interpretation of scripture was a central issue between himself and Tyndale: 'concerning the word of God written, the question lieth between us, not upon God's word but upon the right understanding thereof'.¹⁴² He remained in no doubt that unwritten tradition was a key issue between the 'heretics' and himself, since 'upon this question hangeth all their whole hold, in the destruction of many holy things believed and observed in Christ's catholic church'.¹⁴³ In More's view the impasse of conflicting interpretations could only be resolved on the basis of the authoritative application of unwritten tradition both in its dimension of historical

138 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 144. Matthew 7:6 was a text used in the medieval period to justify not allowing from uneducated laity direct access to scripture in vernacular translation, lest they fall into error in its interpretation; see Deansley (1920), pp. 27, 83ff.

139 *Answer*, pp. 28–9.

140 *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 260–261.

141 This concern for the 'credence of Christ's catholic church' is re-iterated in the *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, pp. 254–5.

142 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, p. 250.

143 *Confutation*, Book 3; see CWE8, p. 254.

continuity with the Christ and the apostles, and in that of the discernment of Christ's continued guidance through the Holy Spirit. It was this that was the basis for his claim, the next to be challenged by Tyndale in his *Answer*, that the church could not err.

'Whether the pope and his sect be Christ's church or no'

Having attacked the twin pillars on which More established his case for the inerrancy of the church by disputing that the church had priority over scripture and by denying the authority of tradition, Tyndale then sought to deliver what he evidently considered the *coup de grace*. He directly confronted the claim that the church cannot err, but instead of rejecting it he argued that the 'pope and his sect' had forfeited their claim to be the true church. He argued this on the basis of a number of scriptural tests, which he claims the catholic church failed, for example, the pope's refusal to obey the command of Paul to 'obey the higher powers' (Romans 13:1) and the failure of the spirituality to repent when their faults were told them. Instead of amending their conduct, he writes, the clergy 'persecute both the scripture wherewith they be rebuked, and also them that warn them to amend, and make heretics of them and burn them'.¹⁴⁴ He then tackled 'the arguments wherewith the pope would prove himself the church', again seeking to demolish them on the basis of scripture.¹⁴⁵

This is the longest and most complex section of Tyndale's response to the claims made by More in the *Dialogue*. After a brief dismissive assertion that the answer to the question of whether 'the pope and his generation' could err was as obvious as that to the question of 'whether he which had both his eyes out be blind or no', Tyndale spells out at length his own understanding of the church. He then turns to three related issues: the question of whether 'the pope and his sect be Christ's church or no',¹⁴⁶ 'the arguments wherewith the pope would prove himself the church',¹⁴⁷ and More's claim that the authority and truth of scripture is dependent upon the church.¹⁴⁸ The basis of Tyndale's rejection of all three positions is scripture itself, which he accuses the catholic church of misinterpreting to suit their own ends. Tyndale finally reverts to the question of the nature and identity of the true church, arguing that 'this word church has a double interpretation'.¹⁴⁹ It was used by those who 'believe with master More's faith, the pope's faith, and the devil's faith' and of those with the right faith who 'repent ... and have the law of God written in their hearts' and constitute the true church.¹⁵⁰ The whole argument is placed within a framework which sets out Tyndale's own concept of the true church; it makes it quite clear why he had rejected the term in his translation and used 'congregation' instead. He also argues

144 *Answer*, p. 41.

145 *Answer*, pp. 42ff.

146 *Answer*, pp. 39ff.

147 *Answer*, pp. 42ff.

148 *Answer*, pp. 45ff.

149 *Answer*, pp. 54ff.

150 *Answer*, p. 54. In the remainder of the opening treatise Tyndale goes on to deal with true and false worship, images and pilgrimages.

in favour of the authenticity of his own ‘feeling faith’ and the inferior nature of what he considers to be the second-hand and unreliable ‘historical faith’ of the catholic church. Integral to his understanding of the nature of the true church is the way that God reveals his truth to the believer.

In the *Confutation* More begins his attack on Tyndale’s answer to whether the church can err in Part 2, Book 4, and he then devotes a whole book to each of the three issues singled out by Tyndale (Part 2, Books 5, 6, 7 respectively), in which he in turn seeks to show that Tyndale’s use of scripture is mistaken and does not support his case. He raises the crucial question of how differences in interpretation can be resolved, and argues that it is the known catholic church alone that can claim ultimate authority for its understanding of saving truth.

The arguments concerning the true church assessed

For More the true church was the catholic church as it had existed through history as a known, visible body of people who held the catholic faith: ‘it is the common known church of all Christian people, not gone out or cast out’.¹⁵¹ Tyndale, on the other hand, defined what he calls ‘Christ’s elect church’ as:

Christ’s elect church is the whole multitude of all repenting sinners that believe in Christ, and put all their trust and confidence in the mercy of God; feeling in their hearts that God for Christ’s sake loveth them, and will be, or rather is, merciful unto them, and forgiveth them their sins of which they repent And this faith they have without all respect of their own deservings, yea, and for none other cause than that the merciful truth of God the Father, which cannot lie, hath so promised and so sworn.¹⁵²

It was the faith of repenting sinners who trusted in God’s love and his undeserved forgiveness through the blood of Christ that was the determinative criterion for membership of the church. It was on the rock of the faith expressed by Peter (Matthew 16:16–18) that Christ built his church,¹⁵³ though it had not then been revealed that salvation would be ‘through the offering of his [Christ’s] body and blood’ as ‘a satisfaction for the sin of all that repent’.¹⁵⁴

Tyndale’s concept of a church of repenting sinners is closely related to the hermeneutic of law and gospel that he set out in the prefaces to his translations as a guide to the right understanding of the Bible. It has already been noted how Tyndale saw scripture as having a transforming effect on the lives of those who responded in faith to the promise of the gospel. What might be described as ‘the coming to faith

151 *Confutation*, Book 4; see CWE8, p. 398.

152 *Answer*, p. 30, reproduced by More, *Confutation*, p. 391. Tyndale goes on to introduce the seemingly paradoxical belief that members of the church thus defined could not sin but yet be sinners, and could not err but yet be mistaken (*Answer*, pp. 32–4), which More describes as a riddle of which ‘an old wife would be ashamed’ (*Confutation*, p. 394). For present purposes this is an aspect of Tyndale’s thought which may be left aside as far as his attitude to scripture is concerned.

153 On the interpretation of Matthew 16:16–18 see Part II: Documents A.

154 *Answer*, p. 31

experience' (Tyndale's 'feeling faith') not only provided a hermeneutical guide for the right understanding of scripture, but in the *Answer* it also becomes a pattern of salvation and the authoritative guide to truth. The basic elements of the experience were:

the preaching (or reading) of the word,
the individual's response of faith,
enabled by grace,
bringing the free forgiveness through Christ's blood promised by the gospel,
and accompanied by the Holy Spirit
who writes the law in the believer's heart
and enables the believer to live willingly in accordance with the law of love,
and to produce tangible demonstrations of this ('good works').

The faith bound up with this experience is *faith in*, or trust in, the gospel promise of undeserved forgiveness, and *faith that* or 'knowledge', that salvation comes through the saving death of Christ alone without the necessity of any good works on the part of the believer, least of all those commended by the church on the basis of unwritten traditions. As Tyndale puts it:

And this faith and *knowledge* is everlasting life; and by this we be born anew, and made the sons of God, and obtain forgiveness of sins, and are translated from death to life, and from the wrath of God unto his love and favour. And this faith is *the mother of all truth*, and bringeth with her *the Spirit of all truth; which Spirit purgeth us*, as from all sin, even so *from all lies and error*, noisome and hurtful. And this faith is the foundation laid of the apostles and prophets ...¹⁵⁵

The italics show how Tyndale has here embodied in a description of 'the coming to faith experience' an overlay which claims it as the basis for distinguishing truth from error. Truth was discerned by a 'feeling faith', integral to which was its writing on the heart by the Holy Spirit. To claim there was any other way to salvation was heretical:

And that this faith is the only way by which the church of Christ goeth unto God, and unto the inheritance of all his riches, testify all the apostles and prophets, and all the scripture, with signs and miracles; and all the blood of martyrs. And whosoever goeth unto God, and unto forgiveness of sins, or salvation, by any other way than this, the same is an heretic out of the right way and not of Christ's church.¹⁵⁶

More's response to this claim that the catholic church was not the true church was first of all to reaffirm the way of salvation that Tyndale denied: the value of the sacrament of penance, belief in purgatory, and the virtue of good works.¹⁵⁷ He then attacked Tyndale's use of the term 'elect' as differing from that of the New Testament. For Tyndale it meant, as More puts it, 'the final elect and predestinate to glory, being thereunto predestinate in the prescience and purpose of God before

155 *Answer*, pp. 30–31. Italics added.

156 *Answer*, p. 31.

157 *Confutation*, Book 4; CWE8, pp. 403–17.

the creation of the world'.¹⁵⁸ In the New Testament, however, More pointed out that the term does not refer to Christ's choice of a select few, but to *all* his followers and hence the church as a whole. In his understanding the church on earth contains both penitents and impenitents, good and bad, and he cites Christ's parable which taught this (Matthew 13:24–43).¹⁵⁹ In view of such differences, More again raised the question of how divergent interpretations of scripture can be resolved. He argued that it was only a known, visible church that can determine this and not an unknown and unseen company of repenting sinners.¹⁶⁰ In this, his emphasis in the *Confutation* falls on the consent of the faithful, and More does not directly invoke the primacy of authority of the pope.¹⁶¹ Finally, having tried to cut the scriptural ground from under Tyndale's feet, More denied the validity of Tyndale's distinction between 'historical faith' and 'feeling faith', and consequently the claim that only a person who comes to faith in the way that Tyndale considers normative can have an understanding of the truth concerning salvation.

Historical faith and feeling faith

For Tyndale 'historical faith' was not faith that arose from direct personal experience, but from the testimony of another person; it consequently depended upon 'the truth and honesty of the teller'.¹⁶² Such, Tyndale believed, was the faith of the catholic church, which was believed 'only by the authority of our elders',¹⁶³ and his view was, as he put it in a subheading, that 'faith that dependeth of another man's mouth is weak'.¹⁶⁴ 'Feeling faith', on the other hand, arose from direct experience, like that of someone who was present at a battle rather than hearing of it from someone else.¹⁶⁵ In accordance with the gospel promise 'they shall all be taught by God' (John 6:45), such faith is written by God in the heart with his Holy Spirit:

And this faith is none opinion; but a sure feeling, and therefore ever fruitful. Neither hangeth it of the honesty of the preacher, but of the power of God, and of the Spirit: and, therefore, if all the preachers of the world would go about to persuade the contrary, it would not prevail; no more than though they would make me believe the fire were cold, after that I had put my finger therein.¹⁶⁶

Tyndale rounded off his consideration of the question of whether the church can err, by re-iterating that the true church was constituted by repenting sinners with a

158 *Confutation*, Book 4; see CWE8, p. 392.

159 *Confutation*, Book 4; CWE8, pp. 391–92.

160 *Confutation*, Book 4; CWE8, pp. 394–400.

161 Monti (1997), p. 156 notes that a letter to Cromwell of 1534 shows that More had intended to include a passage defending papal primacy, and suggests that he omitted it because of the growing rift between Henry VIII and Rome; see Letter 109; Rogers (1947), p. 500. On More's view of Papal primacy, see Monti (1997), pp. 151ff.

162 *Answer*, p. 50.

163 *Answer*, p. 54.

164 *Answer*, p. 52.

165 *Answer*, pp. 50ff.

166 *Answer*, p. 51.

feeling faith written on their hearts by the Holy Spirit, and that it is this feeling faith rather than the authority of the pope that enables a believer to discern the truth:

the truth of God's word dependeth not of the truth of the congregation. And therefore, when thou art asked why thou believest that thou shalt be saved through Christ, and of such like principles of our faith; answer, Thou wottest and feelest that it is true. And when he asketh, How thou knowest that it is true; answer, Because it is written in thine heart. And if he ask who wrote it; answer, The Spirit of God.¹⁶⁷

Tyndale as usual backed up his claim for feeling faith as providing the key to truth by appealing to the New Testament. He points, for example, to the Samaritans who first believed in Jesus because of the testimony of the Samaritan woman but who, after meeting Jesus themselves, said to the woman, 'We believe not now because of thy saying, but because we have heard ourselves, and know that he is Christ, the Saviour of the world' (John 4:42).¹⁶⁸ Correspondingly in the *Confutation* More takes up in turn each of the New Testament passages cited by Tyndale in support of feeling faith (John 6:45, Romans 8:16, and John 4:42) and argues that in fact they have nothing to say about it.¹⁶⁹ In the case of John 4:42, he argued that the faith of the people of Samaria may well have increased quantitatively when they met Jesus for themselves, but asked 'must it needs follow that their faith was changed in kind, because it was augmented in degrees?'.¹⁷⁰ Tyndale cannot demonstrate that it changed qualitatively, and More could cite counter texts such as John 6:66 to show that there were those, including the scribes and Pharisees and Judas, to whom Christ preached with his own mouth, but who failed to believe.¹⁷¹ He also cited the words of Christ in John 20:29 'blessed be they that believe and have not seen',¹⁷² once again demonstrating that the New Testament could be interpreted in conflicting ways, and that scripture alone could not settle the fundamental theological differences between Tyndale and More.

More's response to Tyndale's claim was not just to undermine its scriptural foundations, but also to deny the validity of the distinction drawn by Tyndale between 'historical' and 'feeling faith'. The analogy drawn by Tyndale with empirical information was defective, he argued, since there can be no faith whatsoever without the inward working of the Holy Spirit. God may work through the outwards senses, but to enter the way of salvation by means of faith in the first place and to continue in it needed both the prevenient and the accompanying grace of God:¹⁷³

... in matters of faith, which faith is the first gate whereby we enter our journey the right way toward God, we can never come at it without the help of God, nor how ever probable

167 *Answer*, p. 55.

168 *Answer*, pp. 51–52.

169 *Answer*, p. 51. *Confutation*, pp. 752ff.

170 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, p. 759.

171 *Confutation*, Book 7; CWE8, pp. 761–2.

172 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, p. 748.

173 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, pp. 744ff.

a tale so ever be told us, never shall we believe it without his holy hand set on us, ... to prevent us and go forth with us ...¹⁷⁴

In other words, 'were every historical faith in matters in the faith a feeling faith also'.¹⁷⁵ In More's view, Tyndale's rejection of 'historical faith' as a basis for truth misrepresented the nature of the faith of members of the catholic church; they, too, and not just Tyndale's elect church of repenting sinners, were inwardly moved and guided by the Holy Spirit whom Christ had promised would lead his followers into all truth (John 16:13).¹⁷⁶ In support More cited Augustine, writing against the Manicheans:

... when we believe the church either in knowing which is the scripture or in the true sense and right understanding of the scripture, God both preventeth us in giving us the occasion and worketh with us and we with him in the perfecting of our consent and belief, as he doth toward the perfect accomplishment of everything whereby we walk to our salvation, towards which we can do nothing without him ...¹⁷⁷

More agreed with Tyndale that Augustine was inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit, but argued that it was this that enabled him to recognise the truth of the *church's* scriptures and teaching. Augustine took his stand against the error of the Manicheans quite deliberately on the authority of the church, More argued, because if he had claimed the unseen inward working of the Holy Spirit as the basis of the truth of his position, the Manicheans might have done the same for their views.¹⁷⁸

More thus argued that inward conviction was not sufficient to resolve disputes concerning truth, and he further exposed what he saw to be the weakness of Tyndale's position on this score by pointing out that Tyndale had no way of proving his 'feeling faith' or that any others felt the same as he did. Indeed, he pointed out that Luther did not take the same position as Tyndale concerning the rejection of 'historical faith'.¹⁷⁹ It suited Tyndale's purpose, More claimed, that no-one could refute heresies based on a feeling faith, because 'no man can look into his own breast but himself, and find what he feeleth written there'.¹⁸⁰ But by the same token, when Tyndale denies what the saints have believed for 1500 years (including that friars may not lawfully wed nuns):

there is no good man in all Christendom, but that he findeth and feeleth written by God's hand in his own heart, that Tyndale feeleth not that foul filthy heresy written in his heart by the hand of God. But if he feeleth indeed as he saith he doth, then he feeleth it scribbled and scraped in his heart by the crooked cloven claws of the devil.¹⁸¹

174 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, p. 746.

175 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, p. 748.

176 *Confutation*, Book 7; CWE8, p. 761.

177 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, p. 743.

178 *Confutation*, Book 7; CWE8, pp. 744–5.

179 *Confutation*, Book 7; CWE8, p. 751.

180 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, p. 816.

181 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, pp. 816–7.

More's arguments vary in strength, but the fatal point as far as Tyndale is concerned is that because of the inward and intensely personal nature of the faith and conviction he is claiming, no-one else can know for themselves whether it is true or not. Jews and Turks, More argues, could make similar claims for the truth of their faith on the grounds of inward conviction.¹⁸² Even if the validity of such claims is ruled out as excluded by Christian scripture, Tyndale is locked into the logical solipsism of relying on self-authenticating truth. Both Tyndale and More, then, could and did claim the authority of the guidance of the Holy Spirit for their own faith and for their interpretation of scripture. When their interpretations differed, as they frequently did, the problem posed itself, as More rightly pointed out, of how conflicting interpretations were to be resolved and truth established.

The Resolution of Conflicting Interpretations: The *Consensus Fidelium*

As a matter of considered strategy More chose to base his refutation of Tyndale's views mainly on the common ground of scripture, and there is hardly a single page of their writings which does not demonstrate crucial differences in their interpretations of the texts they used to support their opposing claims. This was much more, however, than an academic debate between two scholars. Because it was conducted in English it was more widely accessible than earlier disputes, like that between Henry VIII and Luther and More's *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523), which were conducted in Latin. It represented a debate which impacted on the lives of the laity in the form of Tyndale's controversial translation and by means of sermons by reformers like Thomas Bilney who risked their lives to propagate their conviction that scripture alone was sufficient for salvation. Nor was it a matter of theoretical issues: both sides believed that souls were at stake, and lives certainly were. The issue was particularly sharp when sermons were preached invoking the authority of the Bible against matters of belief and practice which for centuries the church had taught as essential for salvation. What if, More asks, like Tyndale:

any would percase [perchance] teach that confession is not necessary, and that penance needeth not, and that of the vii. sacraments v. serve of nought, and the sixth of almost as little, and that of the seventh all Christian nations be, and all this xv. hundred year have been in a very damnable error ...¹⁸³

Tyndale's criterion of testing conflicting claims 'by the truth of scripture',¹⁸⁴ More argued, was not sufficient, because interpretations differed. How, then, were the uneducated to know where the truth lay?

What if I be unlearned? What if I can read and have it in my language, and yet understand it but slenderly? What if I be well learned, and the false preacher as well learned as I though he were no better: yet he shall have text against text, and gloss against gloss, and

182 *Confutation*, Book 7; CWE8, p. 768.

183 *Confutation*, Book 4; see CWE8, p. 389.

184 *Confutation*, Book 4, see CWE8, p. 390; see also p. 397 'he shall judge them by the right rule of the word of God'.

when shall we then agree? Or if I give place to him or he to me, how shall yet the number of the unlearned hearers be satisfied with our doubtful disputations, if they were not sure by the common faith of the known catholic church, which of us lied ...¹⁸⁵

Tyndale believed that if scripture was available in the vernacular each person could decide its interpretation for themselves on the basis of the personal conviction engendered by their 'coming to faith experience'. From More's perspective this simply compounded the problem and, as has been seen, Tyndale himself considered it necessary to give firm guidance on how scripture should be read and interpreted in accordance with the principle of justification by faith alone. Even so, as More pointed out, there were significant disagreements between the reformers themselves.

For More, the key to truth was to be found in the faith of the catholic church or, more precisely in 'the common consent of the church'.¹⁸⁶ That faith, More believed, was fed not only by the single wellspring of scripture, but also by two other channels. The first of these was tradition, the truth of which was anchored in the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, and which embodied truths concerning the interpretation of scripture. The second was the direct infusion of truth into the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit. As an example of this he cited Peter's confession; the revelation to him that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, was 'not revealed by flesh and blood' (Matthew 16:16), 'was inwardly infused into Saint Peter his heart, by the secret inspiration of God, without either writing or any outward word'.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, he held, God could implant truth directly into the heart of any believer without the need for scripture or even of verbal testimony or teaching.¹⁸⁸

For it is not, as I say, the scripture that maketh us to believe the word of God written in the scripture (for a man might, as haply many doth, read it altogether and believe thereof never a wit) but it is the spirit of God that, with our own towardness and good endeavour, worketh in his church, and in every good member thereof, the credulity and belief whereby we believe as well the church concerning God's words taught us by the church, and by God graved in men's hearts, without scripture, as his holy words written in his holy scripture.¹⁸⁹

More accordingly had two additional tests to apply to determine the truth of conflicting interpretations of scripture: tradition and the consensus of the faithful.

For More, the first criterion for determining the truth of an interpretation was the line of tradition: whether it went back to Christ and the apostles, or whether it conformed with the teaching of the early doctors:

And whereby can we be sure that his teaching which is accused, is false and theirs true that correct him, but by that we be sure that the common faith of the catholic church is true, and that the catholic known church cannot err in that faith, which from hand to hand hath been taken and kept from Christ's days and his apostles hitherto? ... And that the faith of the known catholic church, that correcteth the false faith of the false preachers

185 *Confutation*, Book 4; see CWE8, p. 390; similarly pp. 397, Book 9, CWE8, p. 997.

186 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 28; see CWE6, p. 169.

187 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 143.

188 See, for instance, *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 28; see CWE6, pp. 143–4.

189 *Dialogue*, Book III, Chap. 1; see CWE6, p. 254.

and heretics, is the same faith which the holy doctors of Christ's church in every age have believed and taught: Saint Jerome, Saint Austin, Saint Ambrose, Saint Chrysostom, Saint Gregory, and Saint Cyprian do well and clearly testify by their books.¹⁹⁰

The appeal to tradition, however, was necessarily limited to teaching already formulated or disputes previously resolved. When disputes arose concerning the interpretation of scripture upon which tradition had not already pronounced, More believed that the church could rely on the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit:

"... But when he shall come that is the spirit of truth he shall lead you into all truth".¹⁹¹ Lo, our Lord said not that the Holy Ghost should write unto his church all truth, but that he should lead them by secret inspiration and inclination of their hearts into all truth – in which must needs be conceived both information and right belief of every necessary article, and of the right and true sense of holy scripture as far as shall be requisite to conserve the church from any damnable error.¹⁹²

When, however, the guidance of the Holy Spirit was claimed for conflicting views, and when the proponents of these views each claimed to represent the true church, some further test was necessary. Whereas Tyndale could claim only the certainty of subjective conviction, for More the decisive criterion was the consensus of the faithful.¹⁹³ There was, he claimed, a co-inherence between the guidance of the Holy Spirit given to the individual believer and their common consent as the church:

And from time to time as it liketh his majesty to have things known or done in his church, so is no doubt, but he tempereth his revelations, and in such wise doth insumate¹⁹⁴ and inspire them into the breasts of his Christian people, that by the secret instinct of the Holy Ghost they consent and agree together in one, except heretics that rebel and refuse to be obedient to God and his church.¹⁹⁵

The key expression 'consent and agree together in one' has been identified as deriving from 1 Corinthians 1:10, which was a fundamental text for More's ecclesiology.¹⁹⁶ It was the key to his understanding of how the church determined the truth of matters necessary for salvation. He later gives it in full in Latin and with his own English rendering in his defence of the veneration of saints and their relics. This was a practice for which there was no scriptural support, nor was tradition determinative when new claims for canonisation arose. When such claims came, however, by 'a common persuasion through the whole people of Christendom, that

190 *Confutation*, Book 4; see CWE8, pp. 389–90. More introduces also the attestation of the teaching of the early doctors by miracles. For present purposes this aspect of his thought will be left out of the discussion.

191 John 16:13

192 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 29; see CWE6, p. 178.

193 See Hitchcock (1975), p. 150.

194 Probably a mistake for 'insinuate'; CWM6ii, pp. 647–8.

195 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 25; see CWE6, p. 146.

196 CWM6ii, pp. 498ff. See *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 26, Book II, Chap. 9; see CWE6, pp. 163f, 223f.

the person is accepted and reputed for an undoubted saint',¹⁹⁷ then such unanimity meant that, 'we boldly may and well we ought in this case to trust that the grace and aid of God and his Holy Spirit assisting his church, hath governed the judgement of his ministers, and inclined the minds of his people to such consent'.¹⁹⁸

The possibilities of unreliable or false claims based on human testimony were manifold, even where the canon of scripture was involved, but in such cases the church had another means of determining the truth which could never deceive them 'and that is the assistance of God and the Holy Ghost'.¹⁹⁹ When this coincided with the consent of all believers, the inerrancy of the church was assured in matters necessary for salvation: 'that secret mean that inclineth their credulity *to consent in the believing all in one point* which is the secret instinct of God, *this is the sure mean that never can in any necessary point fail here in Christ's church*'.²⁰⁰ This claim to the way the church arrived at truth was, More believed, 'very sure and fastly confirmed' by Paul's call to the Corinthians to avoid discord when in 1 Corinthians 1:10 he:

... by common consent exhorteth them to agree all in one, meaning thereby, as methinketh, that if the church of Christ, intending well, *do all agree* upon any one thing concerning God's honour or man's soul, *it cannot be but that thing must needs be true*. For God's Holy Spirit that animateth his church and giveth it life, will never suffer it all [to] consent and agree together upon any damnable error.²⁰¹

There was, however, a practical difficulty in this procedure which was raised by the Messenger in the *Dialogue*. If there were diverse opinions within the church then, asked the Messenger, 'why should that one part more believe the other, than be believed of the other, since both the parts be of the church and make the church among them?'.²⁰² In response, More again brings in the criterion of unanimity, this time based on the nature of God as set out in Psalm 67:7 [Hebrew 68:6]. Those who deny the church's essential beliefs and practices, More argues, must be heretics and not of the church:

since the church is and must be all of one belief, and have all one faith. And as it was written in the Acts of the Apostles, *Erat multitudo credentium, anima una et cor unum*. The multitude of faithful believing men were all of one mind and of one heart.²⁰³ And in

197 *Dialogue*, Book II, Chap. 9; see CWE6, p. 220.

198 *Dialogue*, Book II, Chap. 9; see CWE6, pp. 220–21.

199 *Dialogue*, Book II, Chap. 9; see CWE6, p. 223.

200 *Dialogue*, Book II, Chap. 9; see CWE6, p. 223; italics added.

201 *Dialogue*, Book II, Chap. 9; see CWE6, p. 224; italics added.

202 *Dialogue*, Book I, Chap. 27; see CWE6, p. 162.

203 Acts 4:32

the church is the Holy Ghost, *qui facit unanimes in domo*, which maketh all of one mind in the house of God,²⁰⁴ that is in the church.²⁰⁵

More, throughout the *Dialogue* and the *Confutation*, puts great emphasis on the catholic church being a known and visible body, in contrast to the unidentifiable nature of a church consisting of an elect known only to God. When the Messenger objects that there are those who could in turn show him ‘a company and congregation, which they will say is the very church’, More points scornfully to the lack of agreement amongst those who follow the teaching of reformers:

For in Saxony first and among all the Lutherans there be as many heads as many wits. And all as wise as wild geese. And as late as they began, yet be there not only as many sects almost as men, but also the masters themselves change their minds and their opinions every day and wot never where to hold them ... in Prague itself one faith in one street, another in the next.²⁰⁶

The truth that Tyndale claims to be written in his heart by the hand of God likewise differs from that of others claiming the same feeling faith. Since God’s Spirit is ‘the inspirer of unity, concord and peace’, this can only mean, according to More, that his claims are not written in his heart by God, but rather by ‘the spirit of discord, debate and dissension, the devil’.²⁰⁷ On the other hand, where there is unanimity, as in the catholic church, truth is assured.

The consensus of the faithful acts as a golden thread which binds together every aspect of More’s case for the inerrancy of the catholic church. It was by common consent that the canon of scripture was agreed, it was by common consent that the ancient teaching of the doctors was affirmed and the subsequent decisions of councils agreed, it was by common consent that tradition developed, and it was by consensus that the truth of new teaching or interpretations of scripture were determined.²⁰⁸ Unlike its parallel thread, the promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church, the criterion of universal consensus enabled truth to be discerned and established when there were contradictory views both claiming the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

At first sight, More seems to have a strong case in arguing for the need of a known, visible body to determine the truth of disputed interpretations of scripture by means

204 Psalm 67:7 [EVV 68:6]; the psalm does not have the words ‘of God’. The text is given in the form used by the early Christian writers, which varies from the Vulgate; see CWM6ii, p. 653.

205 *Dialogue*, Book II, Chap. 1; see CWE6, p. 191; see also *Confutation*, Book 3; CWE8, p. 248.

206 *Dialogue*, Book II, Chap. 1; see CWE6, p. 192.

207 *Confutation*, Book 7; see CWE8, p. 817.

208 Hitchcock (1975), p. 150 has described it as ‘perhaps the most extreme statement of the position in the entire history of the Church’.

of consensus, but it may also be argued that in practice those who took their stand on the truth revealed by a feeling faith were sufficiently able to recognise and accept each other's integrity to formulate a common position. Indeed, Tyndale argued that God empowered his 'elect' to know him (John 1:10ff), had saved a 'seed' or remnant (Isaiah 1:9; Romans 9:29) and had gathered a 'flock' who recognised the word of Christ (John 10:4). To these, 'he hath given ears to hear what the hypocritical wolves cannot hear, and eyes to see that the blind leaders of the blind cannot see and a heart to understand that the generation of poisoned vipers can neither understand nor know'.²⁰⁹ Such a belief was no doubt reassuring for those who shared Tyndale's conviction and were prepared to die for it, but while it claimed to be based on the supreme authority of scripture, it left open no way to arbitrate between divergent interpretations. Although corrupt practices may have weakened the credibility of the church and its interpretation of scripture, there were catholic Christians like More himself who genuinely sought to live godly lives, within whom the Spirit of God was at work, yet who nonetheless remained unconvinced by interpretations adduced by the reformers, and not just because the pope said so. In fact, it may be argued that the logic of Tyndale's position was to accord supreme authority not to scripture, but to individual religious experience which claimed the authority of scripture for what in effect was self-validation.

More, on the other hand, was idealistic in seeming to assume that every member of the church would give informed consent to new teaching on the basis of a personal knowledge of truth implanted directly into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Although More does not himself see truth as being accepted solely on the authority of the Pope or of the theological establishment, it seems very likely that in practice, at least in matters of doctrine, many of the laity would accept what they were taught by those whose responsibility it was to deal with such matters. Nevertheless, More did offer a means of determining the truth of conflicting interpretations, but only at the cost of denying membership of the church to those who did not consent to its teaching. However sincerely dissenters held their views and however admirable their personal faith, More treated them as heretics to be burnt.

Conclusions

Both More and Tyndale followed Erasmus in wishing to see scripture restored to a central place in Christian theology, and both criticised its subjection to speculative reason by scholastic theologians. Tyndale in the *Obedience* was scathing about their dialectical methods, which separated scripture from the demands of Christian living, and his own writings on scripture accorded a primary place to its power to illuminate and transform the life of the believer. In his letters in defence of Erasmus More emphasised the greater effectiveness of rhetoric in bringing alive the witness of scripture to the life of Christ and in translating the authority it derived from him into 'power to arouse ardor or charity in the soul'.²¹⁰

209 *Answer*, p. 49.

210 Fleischer (1973), p. 111. Fleischer deals at some length with More's view of scholasticism and of the value of rhetoric as a tool of scriptural interpretation.

Both protagonists were well versed in Greek, and both fully embraced the *ad fontes* principle, propounded by Erasmus, of according ultimate authority to the Greek text of the New Testament rather than to the Vulgate. Both also took a positive view of the value of vernacular translation, as advocated by Erasmus, though More was reluctant to allow the laity uncontrolled access. Tyndale relied on philological grounds to justify his translation of key terms contested by More, while More criticised the interpretation Tyndale put on their specific use in the New Testament, accusing him of letting his translation be governed by prior theological convictions derived from Luther's 'heretical' teaching. More's repeated plea that preference should be given to traditional English renderings, especially in the case of 'church' rather than 'congregation' and 'charity' rather than 'love', raised as yet unresolved issues concerning principles of translation. In arguing for the translation 'do penance' rather than 'repent' and 'priest' rather than 'elder', however, More was also motivated by his own theological concern to establish continuity between later developments within the church and the New Testament.

The dispute over specific Greek words showed that that philological method could not itself resolve differences of interpretation. It might, as Erasmus's annotations had done, exclude those which depended entirely on the Latin of the Vulgate, but where there was a range of possible senses, it could not itself arbitrate between them. For both scholars context was determinative for interpretation, but More did not share Tyndale's conviction that the meaning of scripture was clear to all without the mediation of trained interpreters. Further, while More was prepared to allow place for the allegorical or spiritual sense considered so essential by Erasmus, Tyndale rejected the four-fold method and argued that the literal sense was in itself spiritual by virtue of its content. Where there was ambiguity or when diversity of meaning was possible, More advocated seeking guidance from the ancient Christian commentators and interpreting in accordance with the church's rule of faith. Tyndale, despite his defence of the perspicacity of scripture, also found it necessary to accompany his translations with guidance on interpreting the Bible in accordance with the reformers' belief in justification by faith alone.

In response to the reformers' claim of the sufficiency and ultimate authority of scripture, More argued that the church was inerrant in matters necessary to salvation. This inerrancy extended to the truth of its doctrines and practices, to its understanding of scripture, and to the unwritten traditions that had always existed alongside it. For him, the authority of the church came in unbroken tradition from Christ himself, and was guaranteed by his continued presence within it. It was the church that determined the canon of true scripture, and it was likewise able to detect any errors in interpretation. The church did not require anything to be believed, More argued, that was contrary to scripture, and when differences of interpretation arose, interpretation was to be guided by the rule of faith of the catholic church, a known body of saints and sinners, with its living tradition of interpretation under the guidance of Christ through the Holy Spirit. If it was a matter of some new interpretation then, by extension, the truth was to be determined, under the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit, by the consensus of the faithful into whose hearts it was directly implanted

by God.²¹¹ In distinguishing true from false interpretation of scripture, it was not the case that More subjected scripture to the authority of the church. Rather, he saw the authority of both scripture, tradition and the church as stemming from Christ himself, imparted to the apostles historically in his earthly ministry, and maintained by his continued presence within the church of their successors. It might be said therefore that he had an *ad fontes* view of authority, which reached beyond both scripture and tradition to Christ himself.

For Tyndale, on the other hand, the truth of interpretation was dependent upon the subjective experience of individual believers of a ‘feeling faith’, and the true church was confined to the elect company of those justified by the saving death of Christ without any merit of their own. Tyndale denied the authority of the institutional church in the interpretation of scripture but at the cost of remaining within a closed hermeneutical circle, which allowed for no other interpretation than his own or of those who shared his own understanding of the nature of faith and of salvation, integral to which was the conviction that there could be no other source of saving truth than scripture itself. For Tyndale the inerrancy of the church became the inerrancy of the individual Christian, and the universality and continuity which were for More essential marks of the catholicity of the church were rejected in favour of a ‘congregation’ of individual believers, for whom as a translator he opened up access to the Bible for themselves.

Although he made effective use of reason and logic, and in places put great emphasis on the testimony of miracles, More chose to contend with Tyndale on the common ground of scripture, even basing his defence of tradition on scriptural texts. He correspondingly sought to show that the interpretations proposed by Tyndale of the texts on which he based his theology were untenable. Apart from the rather strained interpretation of Christ’s promise that Peter’s faith would not fail that owed more to its traditional use than to More himself, More’s exegesis overall accords better with the scriptural context of the texts concerned than Tyndale’s. Tyndale was at the disadvantage of proposing radically new interpretations of texts which had been otherwise understood throughout the course of Christian history, and he had a tendency to assume that texts which supported his views had literal and direct application to his own time without the constraints of their original context, while ignoring texts which told against his theological certainties. Where More by virtue of the living relationship he understood to exist between Bible and church erred on the side of according greater authority to the church, Tyndale turned the Bible against the church and was in danger of subordinating the authority of both to that of personal experience of a sort that gave subjective certainty of salvation and of truth.

211 For the wider aspects of consensus and reception, see Evans (1992), Chapters 14 and 15.

Chapter 6

The Origin and Development of Catharinus's Polemic Against Cajetan

Introduction

The second part of this book focuses first on the criticisms that one Italian Dominican theologian made of the Bible commentaries of another, and then on that critic's further reflections on the problems of Biblical exegesis and translation.

In Italy, but not in England, discussion covered the full range of issues then current: the canon; the text; the interpretation of the text; and the translation of the text into the vernacular. The problem in Italy, as in England, was precipitated by humanists and reformers and was ultimately a problem of authority, but the way in which it developed in Italy was very strongly conditioned by its Dominican context.

The Dominican Order at the beginning of the sixteenth century laboured under problems that it had inherited from an earlier period. One was the power and the authority of the pope; another was the question of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. There were still those at the beginning of the sixteenth century who were prepared to challenge papal power. They might do so in a variety of ways, the most spectacular of which was Conciliarist. Though the heyday of Conciliarism was in the first half of the fifteenth century, it was still not dead: Savonarola had called for a council to support him in his struggle against Alexander VI; and a Conciliabulum actually met at Pisa in 1511. Thereafter, less dramatic challenges to the power and authority of the pope were probably more important, such as the contention of some Dominicans that the pope was not infallible in the canonisation of saints.¹ The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin was an equally divisive issue. It was not to be dogmatised until the nineteenth century, yet there was a growing current of sixteenth century opinion in its favour, particularly among the Franciscans. It was even discussed at Trent.² Most Dominicans however had always strongly opposed it, since Aquinas did not teach it. At the fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517), the papal

1 G. Bosco (1950), 'Intorno a un carteggio inedito di Ambrogio Catarino Politi', *Memorie domenicane*, 67, p. 157 shows how the Prior of San Marco in Florence advocated this view; and J. Schweizer (1910), *Ambrosius Catharinus Politus (1484–1553) ein Theologe des Reformationszeitalters*, Munster i. W., [Hereafter 'Schweizer'] p. 73 shows that the Master of the Sacred Palace, Tommaso Badia shared this view.

2 See *Concilium Tridentinum: diariorum, actorum, epistolarum, tractatum nova collection*, ed. Societas Goerresiana, Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 1961– [Hereafter 'CT'], Vol. I, p. 80, Vol. V, p. 236, and H. Jedin (1961), *History of the Council of Trent*, Vol. II, London, Nelson, [Hereafter 'Jedin'], pp. 155–162.

response to the Schismatic Council of Pisa–Milan, both these problems recurred. In fact, Cardinal Cajetan wrote two works to clarify the issues for the Council and the pope: *Apologia de comparata autoritate Papae et Concilii*, 1514;³ and *Tractatus de conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis ad Leonem X*, 1515.⁴

These issues were nevertheless to involve Cajetan in a posthumous controversy with another remarkable Dominican of the first half of the sixteenth century. The controversy was sparked off by the question of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, but ultimately centred on the power and authority of the pope.

The disputants were not of equal standing in the church or in the Order. In 1530, when the problem of the Immaculate Conception came to a head, Tommaso de Vio Cajetan, Cardinal of St Sixtus, a noted Thomist whose works were widely influential,⁵ was 61. He had been rapidly promoted in the Order, becoming the Dominican Vicar General in 1507⁶ and Master General in 1508, a post that he held until 1518. He was raised to the Cardinalate in 1517. In 1518 he was Legate to the Diet of Augsburg, and from 1523 onwards he was the trusted adviser of Clement VII, who described him as ‘the lamp of the church’.⁷

Ambrosius Catharinus (1484–1553)⁸ on the other hand never held high office in the Order. In the church however he became first, bishop (of Minori) in 1547, and then archbishop (of Conza) in 1551. He died November 8, 1553 at Naples while on his way to Rome to be made a cardinal.⁹ It is remarkable that he advanced as far in the church as he did. His sharp tongue and pugnacious temperament gained him many enemies; he was a late starter in his second career; and he never received the rigorous

3 Venice, 1514.

4 In *Opuscula Omnia*, Lyons, 1575, t. II, tract. I. 137–142.

5 J. Wicks (1978), *Cajetan Responds. A Reader in Reformation Controversy*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, [Hereafter, ‘Wicks (1978)’] pp. 3–42 give a handy biographical sketch.

6 Wicks (1978), pp. 99–104.

7 See entry in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* by John R. Volz (1908). (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03145c.htm>) [Hereafter ‘Volz’].

8 There is no full length modern study of Catharinus, but Schweizer is still useful, as is the substantial account of him in F. Lauchert (1912), *Die italienischen literarischen Gegner Luthers*, Freiburg im Breisgau. The following articles deal with aspects of Catharinus’s career: Diomede Scaramuzzi (1932), ‘Le idée scotiste di un grande teologo domenicano del ’500: Ambrogio Caterino’, in *Studi Francescani*, S.3. A.IV, 1932, pp. 296–319; G. Bosco, ‘Intorno a un carteggio inedito di Ambrogio Catarino Politi’, *Memorie domenicane*, 67, (1950); Salvatore Lo Re, ‘Ambrogio Catarino Politi e alcuni retroscena delle sue Controversie’, *Eretici, esuli e indemoniati, nell’età moderna*, ed. M. Rosa (1998), 13–60; P. Preston, ‘Ambrosius Catharinus’ Commentary on the General Epistle of St Jude’, *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, Volume 4, No. 2, December 2002, pp. 217–229; P. Preston, ‘Catharinus versus Luther, 1521’, *History*, Volume 88, Issue 3, Number 291, July 2003, pp. 364–78; P. Preston, ‘Ambrosius Catharinus and the Controversy over the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin in Italy, 1515–1551’, *Studies in Church History*, Volume 39, 2004, pp.181–190; P. Preston, ‘Carranza and Catharinus in the controversy over the bishops’ obligation of residence, 1546–52’, pp. 99–113 in ed. J. Edwards and R. Truman (2005), *Reforming Catholicism in the England of Mary Tudor*, Ashgate.

9 Bosco, pp. 165–6.

training in the Thomist system that was normal for a Dominican¹⁰. Whereas Cajetan had entered the Dominican Order at the earliest possible moment (in 1484, when he was 15), Catharinus spent the first part of his career as an academic lawyer teaching civil law first in the University of Siena and then at the Sapienza in Rome. In 1516, he became a papal consistorial advocate, but renounced the prospect of a lucrative and influential career among the elite¹¹ when, at the age of 33, he entered the cloister at San Marco in Florence in 1517. He first came to fame in 1520, when at the request of cardinals Giuliano de' Medici and Nicholas von Schönberg, he championed the church against Luther. His *Apologia*, which stated the church's case at this critical juncture, enjoyed a European reputation. It must have been about that time that Catharinus became an ardent devotee of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, his importunate advocacy of which, particularly at Siena 1527–1532, caused much resentment in the Order and led to his virtual exile in France between 1532 and 1538. One episode in the controversy over the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin at Siena was an appeal to Rome against the decisions of Catharinus's provincial superiors. The arbiter in the case was Cajetan, who found against him. No doubt Catharinus was disgruntled by this verdict. There is undoubtedly a connection between this case and the fact that almost immediately afterwards he began writing a critique of the commentaries on the Bible on which Cajetan had been engaged since 1524. These commentaries – they remained incomplete at his death – were published at intervals between 1527 and 1534.

10 I am very grateful to Professor Lorenzo Polizzotto for pointing out to me that although anyone professing in San Marco would have had to follow a determined curriculum of studies centred on Thomism, the fact that Catharinus's profession was authorised by Apostolic brief suggests that he underwent some sort of abbreviated training.

11 The career prospects of a papal consistorial lawyer can be suggested by examples. See for instance the careers of Giovanni Aldobrandini (1525–1573), and his brother, Pope Clement VIII, who both held such a post (See www.fiu.edu/~mirandas/bios1570.htm) and see also the case of Marcantonio Borghese, for whom see M. Firpo (1993), *Processo Morone*, Vol. I, p. 391, note 448:

The descendant of a rich patrician family, Marcantonio Borghese was born at Siena in 1504, where, in the Studio, he taught for some time after having taken his doctorate. After a short time, because of the political vicissitudes of his native city, he transferred to Rome where in 1545 he was enrolled in the college of consistorial advocates, of which he afterwards became dean and acquired for himself a prestigious professional reputation, which put him in the position of accumulating that conspicuous patrimony which was the foundation of the extraordinary fortunes of his family that culminated with the election of his son Camillo as Pope Paul V. He was the Roman advocate of Charles V, of Philip II and later of Cosimo de' Medici.

Cajetan's Bible Commentaries¹²

Cajetan's background and experience prior to 1527 inevitably shaped the way in which he responded to the task of writing explanatory commentaries on the Bible. As a Dominican, he was trained as a Thomist. In 1491 he was sent to Padua to complete his training and there came into contact with humanists well versed in Greek. The extent of his indebtedness to humanism is a moot point. The most that Jared Wicks¹³ is prepared to allow – it is a good deal – is firstly that his version of Thomism was strongly influenced by Renaissance Aristotelianism,¹⁴ and secondly, 'he was a Thomistic exponent of the Renaissance religious themes of the dignity of man, the power of human spiritual operation, and the tragic elements in the actual conditions of misery which men suffer'.¹⁵ These two influences do not suggest that he was closely acquainted with the work of Erasmus, though he was said to have been on friendly terms with him¹⁶.

Though Cajetan himself was apparently never distinguished for his knowledge of the ancient languages,¹⁷ he seems to have understood well enough their importance for biblical studies. No doubt it was in Padua and under humanist influence that he became aware of the shortcomings of the Vulgate translation. By 1524, he had produced his first work in the field of biblical studies, *Ientaculum novi testamenti*, an exposition of 64 problematical New Testament passages. The title indicates that the work is only a beginning and that Cajetan intended something further and more substantial in that field.¹⁸ It is doubtful whether he was adequately equipped for work of this kind, which demands linguistic, philological and historical expertise,¹⁹ which he, as a theologian and philosopher, did not possess. Perhaps he was drawn into unfamiliar territory by his personal involvement in the escalating Luther crisis.²⁰ This at any rate is the reason suggested by some historians for Cajetan's writing his Bible commentaries. They claim that he became convinced that the only argument that the Reformers would ever listen to was one based on the Bible interpreted literally, and give 1521 as the date by which this conviction had been formed.²¹

12 See R.C. Jenkins (1891), *Pre-Tridentine Doctrine. A Review of the Commentary on the Scriptures of Thomas de Vio, Cardinal of St. Xystus*, London, David Nutt.

13 Jared Wicks, 'Thomism between Renaissance and Reformation: the Case of Cajetan', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, Jahrgang 68, 1977, p. 9–32. [Hereafter 'Wicks (1977)']

14 Wicks (1977), p. 9.

15 Wicks (1977), p. 14.

16 See Volz.

17 See G. Bedouelle and B. Roussel (1987), *Le temps des Réformes et la Bible*, Paris: Beauchesne, p. 111. 'Ce théologien scolastique ... peut être rangé parmi les humanistes, même si sa connaissance personnelle des langues bibliques pouvait laisser à désirer ...'

18 Wicks (1978), p. 32. 'Ientaculum' means 'breakfast'.

19 Wicks (1978), p. 35 comments on Cajetan's limitations for the work of Biblical commentary.

20 Cajetan was the papal legate to the Diet of Augsburg 1518, before whom Luther had to appear in October.

21 Wicks (1978), p. 31. See also Volz.

His *Misuse of Scripture – Response to Charges against the Holy See*, March 22 1519,²² might even suggest that he was aware, albeit, perhaps, dimly of this key issue at least two years earlier. However in a recent article in a book on the Bible in the sixteenth century,²³ Michael O'Connor finds little evidence in the commentaries themselves for the view that Cajetan's Bible commentaries were intended as a tool for the refutation of the claims of the new heretics by deploying against them their favourite form of argument. If, however it is not certain that the Bible commentaries were intended as a contribution to the Reformation debate, the question of Cajetan's motives inevitably arises. O'Connor's belief is that Cajetan's commentaries 'are best understood as a "return to the sources", in search of truth for the mind and guidance for the conscience ...'.²⁴ As such of course, they might contribute in some sense to reform, whether of the church or of individual Christians, but without thereby becoming a polemic against clearly identified targets.

The title of the *Ientaculum novi testamenti*, 1524, is virtually a promissory note. Cajetan soon honoured it. Early modern scholars seem often to have written very quickly.²⁵ Given his method of working,²⁶ and his involvement at the highest level in the affairs of the church, Cajetan must have been unusually industrious. His intention was to produce commentaries on the whole of the Bible, except the Song of Solomon²⁷ and the Book of Revelation,²⁸ which he confessed were beyond his powers. He did not complete the task he had set himself, for when he died in 1534, he had only just begun on the Prophets.²⁹ His achievement was nevertheless remarkable.

22 Wicks (1978), pp. 99–104.

23 M. O'Connor (2001), A Neglected Facet of Cardinal Cajetan: Biblical Reform in High Renaissance Rome, in ed. R. Griffiths, *The Bible in the Renaissance, Essays on Biblical Translation in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

24 O'Connor (2001), p. 93.

25 For example, the case of Malerbi's translation of the Bible into Italian which took him about eight months. See E. Barbieri (1992), *Le Bibbie italiane del Quattrocento e del Cinquecento. Storia e bibliografia delle edizioni in lingua italiana dal 1471 al 1600*, Editrice Bibliografica, Milano, p. 45.

26 He adopted a chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse approach.

27 'Canticum Cantorum iuxta germanum sensum fateor me non intelligere' (*Commentary on Ecclesiastes*).

28 'Exponat cui Deus concesserit' (*Commentary on the Epistles of Paul and the other Apostles*). See also Cajetan's remarks in his dedication of his commentaries on the Epistles to Charles V: '...Et quoniam intentionis meae fuit sensum duntaxat germanum prosequi, ideo Apocalypsim Ioannis omisi: fateor enim ingenue me non penetrare illius mysteria iuxta sensum literalem'. See M.H Laurent, O.P., 'Quelques documents des Archives Vaticanes', *Revue Thomiste*, 1934–1935, [Hereafter 'Laurent'] p. 111, footnote 1.

29 He produced a commentary only on Isaiah 1–3.

The content and organisation of Cajetan's commentaries

The commentaries were originally published piecemeal. Later they were published in collected editions. The edition used in this study was published at Lyons in 1629.³⁰ It is in five volumes, as follows: Tomus I, The five Mosaic Books; Tomus II, The historical books of the Old Testament, and the Book of Job; Tomus III, The Book of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the first three chapters of Isaiah; Tomus IV, The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles; Tomus V, The Epistles, Twelve Ientacula, and Cajetan's reply to 16 censures published under the name of the Paris theologians. There are important prefaces to Tomus I (the Preface to the Five Mosaic Books), to the Book of Job in Tomus II, and to the Psalms in Tomus III. In Tomus IV, each of the Gospels is preceded by Jerome's life of the evangelist concerned as given in Jerome's *Liber de Scriptoribus Illustribus*. Each of the first three Gospels is also preceded by Jerome's preface to it. John's Gospel is however preceded by a preface attributed to Augustine. In addition, Cajetan remarks at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, '... however it is to be noticed that although Mark wrote the gospel in Italy, he wrote it in Greek, and on this account the text is to be corrected in accordance with Greek examples'.

*Cajetan's exegetical principles*³¹

The Preface to the Five Mosaic Books³² gives a very clear account of Cajetan's assumptions and intentions. Here this preface is taken as a declaration of intent that can be applied to all the commentaries. There is some difficulty in this because the commentaries on the Pentateuch did not appear until 1531, and they specifically refer to the work of Moses, but since the emphasis on literal interpretation³³ and the search for new meanings 'compatible with the text and not incompatible with the sacred scripture and the doctrine of the church' is in fact a pervasive feature of Cajetan's exegetical work, the general applicability of the principles outlined in the Preface to the Five Mosaic Books is not in doubt. These principles are very controversial, two of them especially so. One is the intention to expound the Hebrew text, not some translation of it. The other – Cajetan's declared readiness to prefer if necessary his

30 *Opera omnia quotquot in Sacrae Scripturae expositionem reperiuntur: cura atque industria insignis collegii S. Thomae Complutensis, ordinis praedicatorum*, Lugduni: Jacobi & Petri Prost, 1639. [Hereafter *Commentaries*.]

31 This topic has been addressed by T.A. Collins, O.P., in section II of 'Cardinal Cajetan's Fundamental Biblical Principles' (hereafter 'Cajetan's Principles'), in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Catholic Biblical Association of America, July 1955, pp. 363–378.

32 Part II provides a translation of this preface.

33 See for instance, his Preface to Job ('We now intend to explain the Book of Job in accordance with the literal sense of the Hebraic verity in the same way as we expounded the five Mosaic books and the remaining historical books of the Old Testament (from Joshua to Esther)'; and the following remarks at the beginning of the Commentary on Matthew. 'After with the assistance of divine grace, we have expounded the Psalter literally, acquiescing in the prayers of many, we also intend to expound the New Testament literally, beginning with Matthew.'

own judgement to that of the Holy Doctors of the church – is startling indeed. His argument for this is that God did not bind the exposition of the sacred scriptures to the senses of the early doctors. To behave as though he did would take away from us and from posterity the hope of expounding sacred scripture except, ‘as they say, by transferring it from one book into another’. He rejects in advance the charge of being motivated by the desire for novelty: he is old and truth is his only concern. Cajetan’s appeal to the impartiality of the reader suggests that he anticipated a hostile reaction from his first readers. But at the end he acknowledges his readiness to submit to the judgement of the catholic church, and this establishes that novelty for him is not the first step to heresy. He was nevertheless treading on some very sensitive corns, as the reaction of the theological faculty at Paris was to show.

Given Cajetan’s general indifference to the authority of the Fathers and Doctors of the church, his respect for the authority of Jerome, most obvious by the inclusion of Jerome’s Prefaces to the New Testament in the text of the commentaries, is *prima facie* somewhat surprising. He has no reservation about appealing to the authority of Jerome to settle questions of the canon, notably in the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as we see in his reply to the Paris theologians in article three in the Mainz list of the Sorbonne Censures of his work.³⁴ He sometimes uses Jerome’s authority in dealing with questions of the text also, as when in his reply to the fourteenth article of the Mainz list, he cites Jerome (and Augustine) in defence of his correcting the text in accordance with the Hebrew and the Greek verity. The reliance on the text in the original language, a bone of contention in the seventh article in the Mainz list, is discussed at length in Cajetan’s Preface to the Psalms:³⁵

When I began to expound the literal meaning of the Book of the Divine Psalms, I discovered that we have no such text as it originally is, that is to say in Hebrew. When I had taken up the translation according to the Hebraic verity that circulates in the name of St Jerome and collated with it the translation that circulates in the name of the Septuagint, and with four other modern translations, I consulted two men who know Hebrew (one of them a Jew, a master of that language; and the other a Christian) together with many vocabularies of that language; and in my presence, I had the translation said to be by Jerome brought back to agree word for word with the Hebrew text (I demanded the meanings of the Hebrew words in our Latin language or in the volgare, and I chose the meaning which seemed to suit the context best). And thus this our new translation of the Psalms has been conflated in word for word agreement with the Hebrew text ...

There is no reverence here for the Vulgate text, which is to be brought into strict conformity with the Hebrew version at the instance of private individuals. How to get agreement word for word is a complicated matter, given the differences between the Hebrew and the Latin languages, but it is done by three individuals two of whom (one Jewish expert and one Christian) provided equivalent meanings in Latin or Italian to a third, who made up his mind between them by considering the context. Once the text has been established, Cajetan interprets it literally. It is unfortunate

34 There is a discussion below of the Mainz list, which is to be found at the end of Tomus V in the 1639 Lyons edition of the *Commentaries*.

35 A translation of this Preface is given in Part II below.

that he does not give us an account of how he dealt with the Greek verity. Wicks suggests that he consulted the works of Lefèvre d'Étaples and Erasmus³⁶ (as the Sorbonne theologians had supposed). Catharinus too had detected the influence of Erasmus in Cajetan's *Commentaries*. Wicks further claims that Cajetan 'took special care in checking the original Greek of the Fourth Gospel and of Romans.³⁷ Cajetan's reliance on the Hebrew and Greek verity is reminiscent of the procedures of Valla and Erasmus, in returning *ad fontes*, but it did not extend to a critical comparison or evaluation of texts of the sort which they carried out. Nor has their meaning been established by considering the meaning that they would have had for the audiences that first read them. This is where indeed Cajetan's technical inadequacies for the exegetical tasks are exposed: he lacked the philological, linguistic and historical knowledge on which the method of Valla and Erasmus was based. What he had instead is the equipment of an accomplished Thomist scholar, and this dictated his approach to some texts.³⁸

The Context of Catharinus's Involvement in the Cajetan Controversy

Doubts about the orthodoxy of some of the opinions about the scriptures that Cajetan had advanced in his *Commentaries* began to be expressed soon after the first volumes appeared. Catharinus was certainly not alone in feeling as he did about them. His sentiments were replicated not only at the Sorbonne, but by at least two individuals with influence in the world of early Reformation politics and debate: on the one hand, there was the Italian diplomat and future cardinal, Girolamo Aleandro,³⁹ whose doubts had been shared with Cochlaeus,⁴⁰ and on the other, the German theologian John Eck,⁴¹ who had been alerted to the danger by Noël Bédá.⁴² But Catharinus's critique of Cajetan's *Commentaries* – his *Annotations* – is the most sustained and unrelenting⁴³ of all the adverse reactions to those works. The onslaught on Cajetan

36 Wicks (1978), p. 34.

37 Wicks (1978), p. 34.

38 This seems to be the case with his discussion of John 1.

39 Girolamo Aleandro (1480–1542), a famous Sorbonne theologian (he had been rector of the University of Paris, when he had to concern himself with its intrigues against Cajetan's *De comparatione auctoritatis Papae et concilii* [see Laurent, p. 118, footnote 27]), before becoming a papal diplomat and cardinal. In 1536 he was one of the nine members of the commission appointed by Paul III to consider the reform of the church. The article by G. Alberigo in *Dizionario Bibliografico degli Italiani* gives a very good summary of Aleandro's career.

40 Johann Cochlaeus (1479–1552), humanist and catholic controversialist, opponent of the Lutheran movement, friend of Aleandro, whom he met at Worms in 1521. See Laurent, pp. 117–119.

41 Johann Eck (1486–1553) catholic theologian and controversialist, who disputed with Luther at Leipzig in 1519. See pp. 63–4 above.

42 Noël Bédá (c. 1470–1537) influential Sorbonne theologian, opponent of Erasmus and Luther. See pp. 68ff above.

43 Even the last of his works to be published in his lifetime, the *Enarrationes* of 1551/2, contains an anti-Cajetan tract.

and on certain attitudes current in the Dominican Order that Catharinus believed Cajetan exemplified, marks the third great phase of his career after his polemic against Luther and his advocacy of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. Catharinus's critique of Cajetan's *Commentaries* is very abrasive. It is no doubt the case that Catharinus's mortification at his discomfiture at Cajetan's hands engendered resentment, as his fellow monks at Santo Spirito in Siena were inclined to believe, and that this resentment was the motivation for his polemic against Cajetan's *Commentaries*. But since Catharinus always claimed to act only in the interests of Christian truth and was able to provide some impressive arguments to substantiate his case, these arguments, and not some personal motive for making them, are the focus of attention here.⁴⁴ The arguments were first formulated in a manuscript of about 1532, which remains unpublished.

Catharinus's Manuscript of *circa* 1532

The manuscript, now in the Biblioteca Communale at Siena and dated about 1532, includes first the draft of a letter to Clement VII and then, in 25 sides 'The Disputation of a Useless Servant of Christ on behalf of the received truths about the Books of Holy Scripture'. These 25 sides deal with 12 topics, five of which are concerned with questions of canonicity and the authenticity of the text,⁴⁵ and the remainder with questions of interpretation.

Catharinus's Letter to Clement VII, circa 1532

It transpires from the letter to Clement VII included in the manuscript that Catharinus's direct approach to the pope was one of the later developments in an evolving situation. Despite his recent rebuff and his continuing unpopularity with the Dominican hierarchy, Catharinus has already spoken to the pope and the Master of the Sacred Palace (always a Dominican) about Cajetan and his Bible *Commentaries*. Predictably, he seems to have found that he was getting nowhere with the Master of

44 Note that in the letter to Fenario which is part of the prefatory material to the *Annotations* 1535, Catharinus is at pains to disclaim any personal motive, any malice, for his adverse remarks on Cajetan's *Commentaries*.

I have always retained towards him (Cajetan) a Christian mind, not only loving him as my neighbour, in accordance with the holy commandment, but also honouring him as my Father and Lord, and respecting him for the dignity and grandeur of his place. No cause of hatred against him has ever arisen in me, because he has never harmed me privately, nor I him, unless by chance, my taking up and safeguarding the cause of truth hurt him.

45 The questions of canonicity and the authenticity of the text deal with the Epistle to the Hebrews; the Epistle of St. James; the Epistle of St. Jude, the second and third epistles of St. John; and the last chapter of St. Mark's Gospel. The questions of interpretation deal with John 8:1ff; the Genealogy in Luke; Matthew 23:24; Mark 15:25; John 1:17; Matthew 11:14; Acts 12 [on Herod] (but this is crossed through).

the Sacred Palace, the papal theologian Tommaso Badia,⁴⁶ who was ‘spinning things out’ (‘in lungum rem ducit’): Badia was a friend of Cajetan, next to whom at his own request he was to be buried in the Dominican Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in 1547. After making the unlikely claim that Badia thinks as he does (‘he is persuaded of the truth’), Catharinus represents himself as one who has ‘toiled ... on behalf of the catholic truths and the authority of your apostolic see’, refers to this ‘disputation’ as a small work in which are assembled ‘those things which are most certain to all who are truly catholics’,⁴⁷ goes on virtually to condemn all deviation from what the church thinks, and asserts that ‘the decrees of your predecessors pronounce what we have learned from scripture’. All this fell on deaf ears, but Catharinus remained determined and persistent. In due course, he made his way to France, and contacted likeminded opponents of Cajetan at the Sorbonne, where his visit is recorded in the Sorbonne register in 1535.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, he was elaborating his critique of Cajetan’s *Bible Commentaries*.

The Wittenberg Version of the Sorbonne Censures⁴⁹

At their session of 8 June 1532, Noël Béda, the syndic of the Paris faculty of theology, told the masters of that faculty that he had received complaints about Cajetan’s commentaries on the Bible.⁵⁰ After discussion, five masters were charged with extracting erroneous propositions from Cajetan’s commentaries. Nothing however had been done by 10 December 1532, when the number of masters charged with the extraction was increased from five to 20. The list, which was not completed until 1 April 1533, was re-read on 15 May by Jean de Gaigny, Béda’s provisional successor, and then forwarded to Antoine du Prat, Archbishop of Sens and Grand Chancellor of France, for despatch to Rome along with letters addressed to Cajetan and Clement VII.⁵¹ Copies of the list and the accompanying letters have not been preserved in the records of the faculty of theology, but Laurent has shown that at some date before 4 May 1534, the Lutherans had published at Wittenberg a version of the list of propositions from Cajetan’s *Commentaries* that the Sorbonne theologians considered erroneous. According to this list, the Sorbonne had condemned 24

46 Tommaso Badia (1483–1547), created cardinal by Paul III 1542. T.M. Schwertner’s remarks on Badia in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02200a.htm>, are short but informative. He was actually an opponent of Catharinus’s, who had savagely annotated one of Catharinus’s contributions to the discussion that continued in the aftermath of the controversy over the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. See Schweizer, pp. 73–74.

47 Schweizer, pp. 248–9.

48 J.K. Farge (1985), *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France. The Faculty of Theology of Paris 1500–1543*, Leiden, p. 232, footnote 59.

49 The Sorbonne did not publish its censure of Cajetan’s scriptural writings until 1544. See Laurent, p. 113, footnote 11. For the Sorbonne censure, its antecedents and outcomes, see C.J. Hefele and H. Leclerq (1917), *Histoire des Conciles* [hereafter ‘Hefele and Leclerq’], Tome VIII, première partie, Paris, p. 319.

50 Laurent, p. 112.

51 Laurent, pp. 113–116.

propositions, which were taken from Cajetan's *Commentaries* on the Psalms and the New Testament. The first four propositions are on marriage as this question is treated in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and 1 Corinthians 7. There are five other propositions that bear more or less on the same subject, since they deal with adultery (though the problem here is also to do with the authenticity of the gospel text), divorce, the suggestion that Paul was married, and the marriage of priests (two propositions). Seven propositions deal with texts that may or may not be authentic, and therefore raise the question of canonicity. Six of the remaining propositions deal with auricular confession, extreme unction, the language in which the Gospel of St. Matthew was written, public prayer in the vernacular rather than in Latin, the Vulgate translation of the Bible, and the authorship of the writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite. The other two propositions concern the translation of the Psalms.

The letter that accompanied this published list of propositions allegedly favourable to Protestantism vented certain more general grievances. Not only had Cajetan used the Bible translations of Lefèvre d'Étaples, Erasmus and perhaps Luther also: he did not know Hebrew and his knowledge of Greek was inadequate. He had dared to write commentaries on the scriptures while abandoning the Vulgate, a text approved by long usage, and had based his work on translations the accuracy of which could not be guaranteed.⁵²

The Sorbonne propositions and the general grievances that Cajetan's method of procedure had aroused provide a useful benchmark for assessing the originality⁵³ and power of Catharinus's attack on him. To begin with the Sorbonne critique was the more detailed and damaging; but Catharinus was evidently not satisfied with the very modest statement of his case in the manuscript of circa 1532 and developed it further in two full length books which put the whole question on a different footing.

The Mainz Version of the Sorbonne Censures

There was great interest not only Wittenberg but also in Germany as a whole in the articles that the University of Paris was proposing to censure.⁵⁴ There were various versions of the Sorbonne list,⁵⁵ and Cajetan replied to one of them, when Master John Dietenberger,⁵⁶ Regent of the Dominican Studium at Mainz, brought it to his

52 Laurent, p. 117.

53 It is necessary to be very careful when talking about the originality of Catharinus's biblical and theological works, for he prided himself on his faithfulness to tradition and his hostility to innovation. His attack on Cajetan's biblical commentaries is original only in the sense that it went far beyond anything else that was done in this respect by other opponents of Cajetan, e.g. those at the Sorbonne. For a view of the Bible and its relationship to the church very similar to that of Catharinus, see the Regensburg Book of 1541, section ix (included in the Appendix).

54 Laurent, p. 120.

55 Laurent, p. 120.

56 Johann Dietenberger had published a version of the whole Bible in 1534. See G. Fragnito (1997), *La Bibbia al rogo. La censura ecclesiastica e i vogarizzamenti della Sacra Scrittura (1471–1605)*, Bologna, p. 79.

attention. This reply to 16 articles under the name of the Paris theologians was published on 30 December 1534, that is to say four months after Cajetan's death on 30 August 1534. The first two of the articles in question are about re-marriage in the case of the infidelity of a husband or a wife; the third, fourth and fourteenth are about the authenticity, correctness and canonicity of the last chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, of the second Epistle of St. John and of the Epistle to the Hebrews respectively; the fifth deals with auricular confession and the sixth with the necessity or otherwise of confession before the reception of the Eucharist. In the seventh and eighth the charges are of a linguistic nature: Cajetan has alleged first that the true text of the sacred scripture in Latin has to be a word-by-word translation from the original language, and secondly that prayers are better in the vernacular than in Latin. The ninth article is about a legal matter – the redemption of pensions charged on benefices with cure of souls, but ten to twelve are about different aspects of marriage. The thirteenth article is about Christ's descent into hell, and the fifteenth and sixteenth about family matters: was James the half-brother of the Lord, and was Paul married?

The first thing to notice in Cajetan's reply is that he shows no signs of having seen any list of condemnations previous to the one he received from Mainz, and this suggests that the Sorbonne decision to send to him a letter and a copy of the dossier had in some way miscarried. There is of course considerable similarity between the Mainz list and the Wittenberg list: they have twelve propositions in common. However, Cajetan's reply based on the former shorter list includes four articles that have no equivalent in the longer list,⁵⁷ while the Wittenberg list contains nine propositions that find no response in Cajetan's reply.⁵⁸ Cajetan's way of defending himself against the Sorbonne criticism makes it easy to comprehend both his standing with Clement VII, and the respect and admiration with which most members of the Dominican Order seem to have regarded him.⁵⁹ He begins his defence by arguing that the Sorbonne Masters have accused him of things that he never said. With this argument he exonerates himself from nine of the charges⁶⁰ made against him in the Mainz list.⁶¹ He exonerates himself from four more charges⁶² by arguments that depend on showing that he has not been properly quoted, and when the misquotation is corrected his position is orthodox, either because it is what Paul said (number eight) or Aquinas (number nine), or because it is in conformity either with reason (number ten) or with the Greek text (number fourteen). He admits that the Sorbonne correctly stated his position in the remaining three cases but in the case of number six, his doctrine is that of St Paul; in the case of number eleven, he argues that clerical marriage falls within the scope of papal dispensation; and in the case of number twelve – divorce on the grounds of irremediable discord or failure to

57 On Mark 16; 1 Corinthians 11:27–29; 1 Peter 3:19–20; and on the question of pensions on benefices that Cajetan had raised in the *Questiones quodlibetales*.

58 On the Epistle of St Jude; Mark 10:8; John 8:1–11; 1 Corinthians 7:15; James 5:14; Mark 1:1–8; Mark 8:34–38; Acts 17:34; and on the Vulgate edition.

59 For this respect and admiration, see Bosco, p.155.

60 Numbers 1–5, 7, 13, 15, and 16.

61 He may have had a more difficult time if he had had to defend himself against the longer Sorbonne list.

62 Numbers 8, 9, 10 and 14.

consummate – his justification is the authority of the apostolic see, as shown in the apostolic rescripts.

The difficulty with a defence of this kind is that it largely depends on exploiting the weaknesses in the way in which the contents of the Mainz list have been drafted. Such a list was probably never intended to stand up to the kind of scrutiny to which Cajetan subjected it. If the various propositions had been more carefully stated, it would no doubt have been more difficult for Cajetan to avoid the force of a set of arguments that are *prima facie* plausible. Cajetan does not entirely rely on rigorous logic, for he points out that the author or authors of the complaints against him are not identified, and takes their consequent anonymity, along with the misrepresentation of his claims, as indicative of malice and deception. He supposes that this is the work of only a small number of the many theologians in Paris, and that it is misleadingly offered as the opinion of the Sorbonne as a whole. But this is not the case as we see from the work of M-H. Laurent, who has clearly shown its origin in a meeting of the senior members of the faculty.⁶³ Nevertheless, Cajetan is able to score a point by magnanimously overlooking the alleged evil intent of his opponents and treating their work as ‘a book of good reputation’.

The *Annotations* 1535

Introduction

If Catharinus ever read Cajetan's reply to the Sorbonne theologians, he was in no way deterred by it. As an ex-lawyer who had in 1507 disputed the finer points of the law in the principal universities of North Italy,⁶⁴ he would no doubt have relished the opportunity of chopping logic with a clever opponent. In any case, we know that in 1534 he was already cultivating support within the Dominican Order⁶⁵ and that in 1535 he had been to Paris, a city that he described as ‘the mother and foster-son of all good letters’, to discuss his views with the Paris Masters Thomas Laurence and John Benedict, before the first version of his *Annotations* was presented to the Sorbonne for judgement, and thereafter scrutinised and approved by Master Stephen Paris of Orleans.

The first edition of Catharinus's *Annotations* was published in Paris in 1535, and the second modified and expanded version, in Lyons in 1542. Here, detailed

63 Laurent, pp. 112–121.

64 See Schweizer, pp. 10–11.

65 The evidence for this claim is to be found in the letter to Fenario and the Masters of the Dominican Order that is part of the material prefatory to the 1535 *Annotations*. It seems that even while he was still in Rome, he had spoken to Fenario about his misgivings. We also learn that Catharinus had concocted the *Annotations* ‘with very many men outstanding in intelligence and learning who urged him to publish them’. It is not known who these men who supported Catharinus were. They were probably French Dominicans, perhaps at Lyons, the city where Catharinus first betook himself after being posted to France. But one of them may have been Santi Pagnini, who had been there from 1528 onwards, whom Catharinus may have known at San Marco.

consideration will only be given to the 1542 version, but the introductory material to the 1535 edition is worth careful attention.

The Preface to the 1535 Annotations

The 1535 edition is addressed to the ‘Most Reverend Father and Master of the Order of Preachers, and the Other Fathers and Masters of the Same Order’, and there is every reason to suppose that this restricted audience was the one at which Catharinus was principally aiming, since it is silently assumed that the reader will know exactly what Cajetan had been saying: Catharinus refers to Cajetan’s argument but never formally states it, merely showing what in his opinion is wrong with it. The only audience in which a knowledge of Cajetan’s views could be taken for granted was the Dominican Order itself, in particular the élite, the Masters of the Order, who figure in the title. Part of the intention then must have been to destroy Cajetan’s standing in that Order, where he had many admirers.⁶⁶

Particularly to be noted in this Preface are the following points. Catharinus is objecting to new doctrine that is pernicious because it is contrary to the teaching of the Saints and ‘our Thomas’. This is a flat refusal of the argument that Cajetan carefully states in the Preface to the Pentateuch. More interesting is the objection to explanation of the scriptures ‘by the private desire of some man’, to which Catharinus contrasts declaration and interpretation by the sacrosanct church of what scripture commends and apostolic authority transmits and requires. In other words what counts as doctrine is an institutional and not an individual matter, and authority is vested in the institution concerned. Catharinus always, therefore, represents himself as the loyal son of the church, and here is particularly concerned to associate himself with the Sorbonne, for him the ‘mother and foster-son of all good letters’: first it transpires that Catharinus had already spoken to the Master General of the Order, Johannes de Fenario (Jean de Feyner) at Rome, to confirm with him that what Cajetan was saying was not Dominican doctrine; then, in Paris, he conferred with Thomas Laurence and John Benedict; thirdly the *Annotations* were successfully presented to the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne for endorsement; and finally their catholic truth was guaranteed after detailed reading by a group that included Stephen Paris, one of the Sorbonne masters. To emphasise further that what he is doing is an institutional and not a personal matter he makes an explicit disclaimer about the nature of his feeling

66 For confirmation of this claim, see the annotation on John 1:1 in the 1542 version of the *Annotations*, where, in referring to one of Cajetan’s distinctions, Catharinus refers to what he considers its patent ineptitude and commented that he pitied ‘not so much the man who babbled it as the wretched young students, who accept these things as oracles’. See also 1542 *Annotations*, page 23:

What was more intolerable was that a man, wholly ignorant of Hebrew, spoke thus about things Hebraic, put forward his opinion, and produced such reasons, which, may God be my witness, on account of their levity (the levity of the reasons) it disgusts me to bring them up and refute them. *O brothers, brothers, let the truth conquer; and let us not blind ourselves with base affection*, especially in matters of such great weight [Emphasis added].

for Cajetan: he is not motivated by hatred. No doubt some idea of the nature and content of the *Annotations* was already known in Dominican circles. It seems to have aroused resentment, and Catharinus is evidently anticipating a hostile response to the book on publication, for the rest of the Preface is devoted to a detailed defence of plain speaking and righteous indignation.

The Author to the Reader in the 1535 Annotations

This Preface is followed by what is really another preface, perhaps intended for well-informed readers from outside the Dominican Order, which is introduced only as 'The author to the reader'. It continues the theme of the ruin that can be brought by one 'who departs from the meaning of the Holy Doctors and the catholic church itself, inasmuch as he is the fond promoter of new things', but is chiefly concerned with stifling at their origin the complaints of those who read through the immediately following index and, noticing that the errors listed are something of a mixed bag, 'will contend' that some 'can be defended or excused; and some, even if they cannot be defended from falsity, bring with them no stain of heresy'. Catharinus's reply begins by claiming that:

there are certain things which at first sight seem true and pious, but which, more diligently considered are found to be not only false but also impious. There is no doctrine so bad that it cannot be painted and concealed with its own colours; and the inspection and distinguishing of the leprosy is scarcely easy.

In the second place, although he admits that some things that he has picked out for censure are not heretical, he insists that 'all error is evil, and if frequent is even worse; and if it is admitted in the Holy scriptures and the words of God, as is the case here, it is to be tolerated far less'. The final section of this second preface admits that its purpose is to destroy Cajetan's standing in the eyes of his admirers:

But I would show clearly to the reader who is strongly addicted to the doctrine of this man how unhappily – certainly to the point of amazement – he has openly gone wrong in small and rather light matters, so that that reader may thence learn that Cajetan could much more easily have gone wrong in the great and serious matters also.

There follows an Index of 204 errors in Cajetan's *Commentaries*, and of where they are put forward and where they are refuted. The main heading at the beginning of the 1535 *Annotations* reads, 'Concerning the scriptures and the small parts of the scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments that he thinks are not canonical and authentic, and first concerning the Epistle of St Paul to the Hebrews'. This correctly suggests that this was still the most serious issue. But the chapter headings – there are 54 of them – show not only how industrious Catharinus had been since writing the 1532 manuscript, but also the way in which he had vastly enlarged the scope of his attack.

The content of the 1535 Annotations

Schweizer describes the content of the 1535 *Annotations*⁶⁷ by producing a list of the topics discussed, e.g. Cajetan's denial of the Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews; the integrity and canonicity of the seven other canonical epistles; the authenticity of individual verses in the books of the New Testament; the status of the Old Testament books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, 1 and 2 Maccabees and of the additions to Esther and Daniel – considered dubious; the deviation from the Vulgate text; and the use of the vernacular in the Divine Service. In Cajetan's interpretations, Schweizer remarks, Catharinus detected two faults, namely the emphasis on the historical sense, and the disparagement of the mystical and spiritual meaning. Then the dogmatic part of the *Annotations* begins with remarks on the doctrine of the Trinity, the Mariological question, the Virginity of Mary, her age when she gave birth to the Lord, the special providence of God with regard to the Creation, the doctrine of the guardian angel, the substance of the angel, and the fiery heavens. The conclusion to this is a section on the Feasts of the Martyrs and the veneration of their relics in the early church, and on the veneration and canonisation of saints. There follows a series of sections devoted to the sacraments. Topics dealt with include the manner of receiving the Lord's body in the Holy Communion; the establishment of auricular confession; and marriage and celibacy. The list continues by dealing with aspects of monasticism. At this stage, Schweizer comments, the annotations fragment completely into a mass of individual points, for example the nature of hell-fire, the duration of Jesus' stay in Egypt, his age at the time of the Baptism in the Jordan, the original language of St Matthew's Gospel, and the authenticity of the texts that are known under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite.

It was this apparently unstructured work that Catharinus re-presented to the public in an improved version in 1542. The Preface to the 1542 *Annotations* explains his decision to produce the second edition of this work.

The *Annotations* 1542*Fugger's letter of consent to the 1542 Annotations*

A letter from F. Joannes Fugger, Inquisitor at Lyons,⁶⁸ with which the work begins, acknowledges that Catharinus's 'assiduous labour and continuous study against those who try with various strange meditations to overthrow the building of God omnipotent has long enough been esteemed by me and by all catholics without dissent'. Fugger therefore has no hesitation in acquiescing to Catharinus's request to republish the *Annotations* in a corrected and improved version with many additions. Clement VII had stipulated⁶⁹ that Catharinus should publish only after his *Annotations* had been

67 Schweizer, pp. 69–72.

68 No doubt the consent of the Inquisitor at Lyons was necessary because the second edition of the *Annotations* was published in that city.

69 Clement VII had imposed this restriction on Catharinus through the agency of Seraphin Bellandini, the Vicar general of the Dominicans: 'Unde et Lugdunum profectus

examined and approved, and here it is obvious that Catharinus is still scrupulously respecting the stipulation: his views are not therefore his personal opinion for they have the full and unreserved support of the church.

The Preface to the 1542 Annotations

Catharinus's Preface that follows the text of Fugger's letter shows that the 1535 version had caused some resentment against him in spite of the Inquisitor's assurance that his work had 'been esteemed by all catholics without dissent'. It is Catharinus's first concern to pacify his resentful readers. He has therefore 'redone all the things which could be omitted without harm to the defence of the truth'. Moreover he asks any critic who can find that he has argued badly or unfairly to admonish him fraternally. 'If some men were to do this, they would assuredly perceive (unless this love which I feel for the truth were to desert me) that I am not so prepared to attack the faults of others as to remove my own.' But this mildness is only the prelude to a vigorous re-assertion of the essential rightness of what he had done in 1535 and was proposing to do again in 1542, but better:

For, to myself, I seem to be of that mind (may God be well-disposed to this mind) that I cannot allow doctrines of any man which are opposed to the truth to go unpunished or permit them to evade the brand of my tongue or pen, whoever their author may be, even if by chance he or she were the father or mother who gave birth to me. Therefore, pious reader, you have in this new work many things in addition to those which formerly saw the light. But of all those things almost nothing has been withdrawn, many are unchanged but almost all are freer of fault like things that have been subjected to a more accurate filing. Many passages of the scriptures – the New Testament – have been added in their place according to the chapters of the Gospels. There is scarcely any chapter that has avoided annotation.

Nevertheless he has not annotated everything that he considers to be wrong. He has omitted the commentaries on the Pauline and the other canonical epistles, on the grounds that it would have been an immense labour to deal with everything in them that he considered erroneous. On the other hand he has introduced material that is to be found not in Cajetan's *Commentaries* on the scriptures, but in various small tracts of his, for instance on the Virgin Mary. Finally, he admits that there is much in Cajetan's *Commentaries* with which he cannot disagree. He did not think that:

this man's commentaries were to be wholly condemned or rejected, since much therein can be learnt that is actually thought out and explained in a catholic and learned fashion. But the ... reader was to be persuaded (on account of the admixture of many new doctrines, which he does not deny, that are contrary to his old teaching, when he followed, as he himself says, others, that is Thomas and the Holy Doctors of the church) to read all things

sum, ubi et aliud praeceptum vicarii ordinis habuit qui Romae tunc erat, nomine pontificis maximi Clementis VII, superstite adhuc et vivo Cajetano, sic justum et temperatum ut erat apostolica sede dignum; adjuncta enim fuit ex illius ore appendix haec: Nolumus quicquam ab illo edi contra virum illum non prius recognitum atque approbatum'. See Laurent, p. 113 and Schweizer, pp. 248–50.

with judgement and fearfulness ... But the reader should more observe what is Apostolic. Test all things, and hold what is true.

The content of the 1542 Annotations

The 1542 *Annotations*, the Preface tells us, include some new material. In his monograph of 1910, Schweizer tells us more specifically what it is: Catharinus now took into account Cajetan's opusculum on the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin,⁷⁰ the *Ientacula*, and the *Peccatorum Summula*,⁷¹ plus certain other writings by Cajetan on individual points of the doctrine of the sacraments. An Index of 84 errors suggests this revised content. There is no separate index for the admonitions directed at propositions contained in Cajetan's *Summula*, but there are in fact 67 of them. The question is, 'What do these 151 'errors' amount to? That question cannot be answered by listing them. The nearest that Schweizer gets to an answer is when at the end of his account of the content of the 1535 *Annotations*, he remarks that Catharinus's intended target is not clearly identified. Is it Luther, Erasmus, or Cajetan? The contention in this book is that this is the wrong way to pose the question. The short answer advocated here is that Catharinus is attacking a particular view of the scriptures that each of the three named, in different degrees no doubt, exemplifies. It is, as will be explained in detail later in this book, a view that centres on the notion of authority. Discerning it is made difficult by the way in which Catharinus presents his material. Firstly, he is speaking throughout to the initiated – the members of the Dominican Order who were familiar with the details of the works concerned. As a consequence, he rarely bothers to tell his readers what exactly Cajetan had said, nor does he make it easy for his more general readers to follow his train of thought. Moreover, the subject of the work is both less and more than Cajetan's *Bible Commentaries*, less in so far as it does not for the most part deal with Cajetan's *Commentaries* on the Old Testament, and more in so far as it deals with other works of his, for instance the opuscula on the Immaculate Conception⁷² and on the authority of the pope and a council.⁷³ Not even the whole of the New Testament is dealt with, for, as Catharinus tells us in the Preface, he has omitted the Epistles. Nevertheless he has not omitted them entirely, because they inevitably crop up in his discussion of the sacraments in Book V. Again, the treatment varies, appropriately enough, with what it is that is being treated. In Books II and III, which deal with the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, he follows the verse-by-verse and chapter-by-chapter approach that Cajetan had adopted. This approach is not feasible in Book I, where

70 This had been published at Lyons in 1541 in a new edition.

71 Thomæ de Vio Caietani, *Peccatorum summula : nouissime recognita, et supra omnes alia editiones nouis aucta summarijs, atque additionibus nonnullis illustrata ... Insuper præcipui conscientiae casus; quos idem author vel penitus omiferat, vel obiter tantum attigerat, plenius declarantur; adiecto etiam nouo rerum indice*, Venice, 1572.

72 Tommaso de Vio Gaetano, 'Tractatus de conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis ad Leonem X', in *Opuscula omnia*, Lyons, 1575, t. II, tract. I.137–142.

73 Tommaso de Vio Cajetan, *Auctoritas Papae et Concilii sive Ecclesie comparata*, 1511.

the topic is the canon; in Book IV, where the topics are the Trinity, the Angels and the saints of God, and the excellence and purity of the Blessed Virgin; and in Book VI, where the content is unhelpfully indicated as being 'on various commentaries of his, and "quodlibet"⁷⁴ (and) also various annotations'. It can be seen from the Index with which the whole work concludes that the contents of Cajetan's *Summula* are included in this survey.

The intention here is to restrict attention to Catharinus's critique of Cajetan's Biblical *Commentaries*. Where necessary material will be taken from Catharinus's later work, the *Commentaries* on the Epistles, as well as from the *Annotations* of 1542. A representative selection of these will shortly be examined.

Catharinus's Exegetical Principles in 1542

In a way, Catharinus was no better equipped than Cajetan for the task of Biblical exegesis: his career up to 1530 does not suggest that he had any particular aptitude in philology, languages, or history. It is true that he had been educated as a humanist, but since he was born in 1484 and graduated in law in 1501, his humanistic studies could not have lasted long;⁷⁵ and it is also true that San Marco in the era of Savonarola and Santi Pagnini, had a reputation as a school of advanced linguistic studies, but we do not know whether Catharinus learned Hebrew while he was there. On the other hand, we know that he was not a proficient Thomist, for that status was explicitly denied to him by the Master of the Dominican Order when the legates at Trent recommended him in 1545 for the post of Master of the Sacred Palace in succession to the ailing Bartolomeo Spina.⁷⁶ But these limitations are less of a handicap if the exegetical enterprise is conceived in terms of defending tradition, including the authority of the Vulgate text, and not in terms of a radical re-think of the canon, the text and the interpretation of the text.

Catharinus stated a set of exegetical principles in the *Claves Duae*, 1543⁷⁷, but these should be considered alongside the comments in the Preface to the 1535 *Annotations*, the charges that he made against Cajetan in the 1542 *Annotations*, and

74 'Quodlibet' = quodlibeta, a (scholastic?) disputation [see *Medieval Latin Word List*, OUP, 1934]. What Catharinus is referring to is 'Questiones quodlibetales reuerendissimi domini Thome de Vio Caietani, cardinalis : cu[m] aliquot assertionibus contra Lutheranos', 1530.

75 For the minimum time of preparation required for the degree at the University of Siena, see P.F. Grendler (2002), *Universities in the Italian Renaissance*, Baltimore, p.174.

76 See CT Tomus 10:

This commendation of Catharinus did not please everyone, nor indeed the Dominicans; indeed, the Vicar and Procurator of the Dominican Order himself wrote to the pope on 28 August 1545. "Here it is said that some of Your Lordships have proposed [as Master of the Sacred Palace] Fra Ambrosio Catherino da Siena and have strongly recommended him. Most Holy Father, I know the learned Father very well. He is certainly good and learned but he is not a scholastic and he is not suitable for theological disputes, since he is more a jurist..."

77 See below.

the views that he expressed on the canon in *On the Divinely Inspired and Canonical Scriptures*, 1551/2.

In the 1542 *Annotations*, exegetical principles are presupposed. No rationale is given for them. We are required to think with the church,⁷⁸ and accept its doctrines and practices. The emphasis on the institutional context is fundamental. Individual insights have no validity until the church, in which alone authority is vested, adopts them. The doctrine of the church has been built up in this way by the validated contributions of its saints and doctors. That is why we should concur in the opinion of the saints and ‘our Thomas’: ‘the life of the saints is the interpretation of the scriptures’. It is also why it is an excellent principle in exegetical polemic to invoke a ‘cloud of witnesses’.⁷⁹ The upshot of all this is that exegesis is inherently conservative.⁸⁰ Its prime function is to explain and defend the doctrines and the practices of the church.

The blatant pun in the title of the *Claves Duae*, 1543,⁸¹ correctly suggests the decisive role in exegesis that Catharinus assigns in that work to the pope and the church. The exegetical principles are derived from the two ‘keys’ that are offered as the means of deciphering the text. They are both uncontroversial, indeed banal, but their consequences are nevertheless significant. The first key is that scripture comes from God’s providence and is inspired by the Holy Spirit. There are three consequences of its divine origin. Firstly, it is to be preferred to all earthly wisdom, including that of the most famous doctors, poets, orators and philosophers; secondly, it cannot be in error except as a result of the shortcomings of human transcription or transmission;⁸² and thirdly it has to be interpreted not by purely human methods⁸³ – described as the

78 For a very succinct version of this requirement, see Catharinus’s tract ‘De divinis et canonicis scripturis’ (in *Enarrationes* 1551/2, column 315), where the infringement of the requirement is ascribed to ‘arrogance ... which does not suffer the intellect to be made captive in compliance to the faith’ (The requirement that the intellect be made captive is again stated in column 320 of this work). In a sense, Catharinus implies a set of rules for thinking with the church that is more systematic and more comprehensive than the ‘Rules for Thinking with the Church’ that Loyola annexed to the ‘Spiritual Exercises’. It is interesting to remember in this respect that Catharinus had known Loyola and his earliest disciples in Paris, and on 26 September 1538 gave evidence in their favour when their claim to be recognised as an Order was being investigated. See M. Del Piazzo and C. de Delmases, ‘Il Processo sull’ortodossia di San Ignazio e dei suoi Compagni’, *Archivum Histor. Soc. Iesu*, 38, 1969, pp. 443–4.

79 For a good example, see 1542 *Annotations*, p. 27.

80 Cajetan had noticed this conservative potential in exegesis. In the Preface to the Five Mosaic Books, he remarks, ‘If the exposition of the sacred scriptures were bound to the senses of the early doctors, exposition would be a matter of transferring the meaning from one book to another’.

81 For brief descriptions of this work, see Schweizer; also Lauchert.

82 Scribal faults are discussed in *Claves Duae*, pp. 163–8.

83 We are enjoined not to trust in the skills of secular learning: ‘Let no one trust in this study of the scriptures because he appears pre-eminent in great acuteness or skilled in different literatures so that he thinks he has no need of a teacher.’ *Claves Duae*, p. 60.

root of all heresies – but by the same spirit that produced it.⁸⁴ On account of this last stipulation, Catharinus produces a set of four ‘ways in which to encounter the spirit and open the sense of scripture’. One of them is careful preparation for the task. The other three require a particular disposition characterised by humility and the desire for knowledge, and formed ‘by imitating the life of Christ and obeying him’. It is easy, given this ‘key’ to dismiss the pretensions of the Ciceronians who fault the Bible on the grounds of style, and the linguistic scholars like Valla and Erasmus who interpret it by relying on the human science of philology.

The second ‘key’ is that Christ is the subject and purpose of scripture in its entirety.⁸⁵ This means at the very least that whatever the scriptures seem to be talking about, they are actually talking about Christ. The consequence is that when the text interpreted literally will not yield Christ, it must be interpreted metaphorically or mystically. Even what *prima facie* seems pointless or trivial must reveal Christ, even if at the moment we cannot see how. Those, like the Jews, who are blinded to Christ cannot interpret the scriptures. To rely upon the Rabbis, then, even for the interpretation of the Old Testament is an error.⁸⁶ The division between the literal meaning and metaphorical meaning required by the second key is associated with a further division between an outer ‘fleshly’ interpretation and an inner spiritual or mystical sense.⁸⁷ The point seems to be that even when literal interpretation does yield Christ, it may be legitimate to seek a further higher sense. But if this is what Catharinus does mean, he cannot claim it as the logical consequence of the second key. Catharinus therefore has moved some way towards Nicholas of Lyra’s fourfold method of biblical interpretation,⁸⁸ without providing a justification for so doing. But he recognises that meanings other than the literal ones have to be very cautiously elicited:

84 Because scripture came from the Spirit:

it also had to be interpreted in that same spirit and not by the sense characteristic of human beings. Hence ... all the heretics have deviated from the true sense of the scripture because they have not followed the spirit of God, but the worldly spirit in which error is always present.

For this reason, the language of the scriptures is in fact *sui generis*:

For the scriptures themselves, the scriptures in particular, have a certain way of speaking all of their own, which is not the case with other forms of literature ... the divine literature ... stands apart from the others in a very distinctive fashion so that the others have by far a greater affinity with each other than the divine literature has with them.

85 *Claves Duae*, p. 81.

86 Whence I wonder at some men of our religion and faith who have delighted (on the pretence of language) to consult those stone blind Rabbis who have followed only the letter and have abandoned the spirit and who cannot contemplate Christ. *Claves Duae*, p. 82.

87 These distinctions are made in *Claves Duae*, pp. 111–122.

88 Lyra distinguishes the following senses: the literal, the analogical, the anagogical and the tropological.

In the third place it is to be considered if the metaphorical meaning which is drawn out is in other respects probable and is not elsewhere condemned by the scriptures or by the authority of the Holy Doctors, or by the daily use and custom of the Holy Church, which is rightly the best interpreter of the divine words and the laws. Finally if it is not expressed by the evident determination of the said Church, it is censured.⁸⁹

Pace the Reformers, then, the authority of the church is above that of the scriptures. It has this superiority because it has a ‘judgement that is certain because the Spirit is in it in those questions that pertain to the faith and to the whole church ... scripture exists by the church’s grace’.⁹⁰ It acquired this superiority at the beginning of the world:

Therefore the moment the church was born directly from God and by his voice, it knew that it had this authority, for there was a church from the beginning in Adam and Eve. He was the head, and she who had been built from him was the body of the primitive church. He himself knew this. Taught by the Spirit, he taught it when he said, “This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” ... He accepted the covenant about not eating the fruit of the forbidden tree and recommended it to his wife ... She learned from the head man, who was, while he lived, not only the *pater familias*, but also the high priest and pontiff.⁹¹

This argument is followed by a historical excursus to show that there was a church and a covenant long before there were scriptures. The church was founded by God through Adam and Eve, but scriptures were first introduced by Moses. In effect, Catharinus offers us a continuous story of God’s covenants with his people, the growth of the church, and the development through that church of the biblical canon and the means of interpreting it.

Catharinus’s Views on Canonicity *circa* 1542⁹²

After discussing Catharinus’s views on exegesis, or the question of interpretation, it is appropriate to discuss his views on the canon, that is that group of texts in which alone the Gospel message is written, and which therefore it is absolutely essential to interpret correctly. Catharinus discusses the issue of canonicity in some detail in ‘De Divinis et Canonicis Scripturis’.⁹³ There are three general principles on which he has relied:

1. The revelation of the Holy Spirit makes scripture divine, but the judgement of the church when it declares it to be revealed and includes it in the Canon

89 *Claves Duae*, p. 179.

90 *Claves Duae*, p. 220.

91 *Claves Duae*, p. 221.

92 Though ‘De Divinis et Canonicis Scripturis’ was not published until 1551/2, it is likely that it was written at least ten years before. At any rate, he must have subscribed circa 1542 to something like the views expressed in the tract of 1551/2: his respect for the authority of the pope, which is a fundamental to his view of canonicity, was a feature of his thought at least as early as 1521.

93 Number XIX in *Enarrationes in quinque priora capita Geneseos*, 1551/2.

- makes it canonical. The church therefore must have criteria for distinguishing the divine scriptures in order to be able to make such a declaration.
2. Even with these rules, doubts and disputes about the status of texts occur in the church. For this reason there has to be the power of judgement in the church i.e. the power of declaring writings to be of divine origin, and therefore of declaring to be canonical writings hitherto not so considered.
 3. Since such decisions cannot admit error, for the faith is involved 'in which falsity cannot lurk', the power of declaring scripture to be divine and making it canonical must be located in the pope, whose infallibility is divinely guaranteed. The pope can pass judgement on scriptural questions either personally after consultation with learned men as the case requires, or through a General Council, if he thinks it expedient.

A question arises about the criteria mentioned in the first general principle. Catharinus begins negatively, that is by excluding as erroneous the principles that Cajetan has stated, i.e., firstly, that only those books are canonical and divine which were written or approved by apostles (because this would rule out many of the books of the Old and New Testaments, e.g. the gospels of Mark and Luke who were not numbered among the apostles); secondly that what St. Jerome said is decisive; thirdly that the canonical books of the Old Testament are to be decided by reference to the Hebrew canon: the judgement of the synagogue became irrelevant as soon as it became a synagogue of Satan. But since these rules are not valid, and rules are necessary, an alternative set is required. According to Catharinus they are these. Firstly, the Old Testament Books are those accepted before the reprobation of the Old Synagogue (proof of the divinity and the canonicity of these books is afforded by the fact that they are quoted in the New Testament) and the rest are those that the church has recognised as divine and made canonical thereafter. [Catharinus gives a list.] Doubt has been expressed about some books [The doubtful cases in the Old Testament are the books of Wisdom (said to be by Solomon) of Ecclesiasticus, Tobias, Judith, Baruch and Maccabees] but all doubt can be excluded by the application of the following principle: a book about which there is doubt is divine and therefore capable of being canonised if and only if one of the following conditions can be satisfied: a quotation from it is included in a canonical book; in the usage of churches, the book concerned is proposed for reading as divine when the cult is practised; no manifest error is detected in it; it teaches the things which are of God and which pertain to His will and the pact which He had with men; the eloquence seems chaste and unaffected, and 'it gives off I know not what divine odour'; the author of a book in the Old Testament has been expressly described as a prophet certainly established by God like Moses and Joshua, and others whom scripture commends; in the New Testament he was an Apostle, or at least an outstanding and apostolic man, such as Saints Mark and Luke; the ancient fathers and orthodox doctors agreed explicitly or implicitly in considering it a divine book.⁹⁴ No indication is given of either how these

94 The ancient fathers and orthodox doctors agree implicitly that a book is divine when they provide evidence from it as irrefragable, or when they use it against the heretics, or merely describe it as scripture.

criteria have been established, or how they are to be applied in assessing particular instances. The erection of the hopelessly subjective 'divine odour and chaste and unaffected eloquence' into a sufficient criterion of canonicity is preposterous. There is a similar subjectivity in the notion of being an 'outstanding and apostolic man', which is scarcely alleviated by citing the examples of Saints Mark and Luke.

Chapter 7

Reaction of the Dominicans to Cajetan's Biblical Commentaries

Initial Reaction of the Dominicans

In examining Catharinus's case against Cajetan's Commentaries more closely, it is appropriate to start with those parts of the Commentaries that first attracted condemnation in the Dominican Order. These must be the ones in which the Cardinal most flagrantly disregarded the orthodox exegetical tradition which it was the responsibility of his Order to defend. The details are given in the following table, which assumes that the best available approximation to the Sorbonne list of proposed censures is provided by conflating the Wittenberg (W) and Mainz (M) versions, and shows that despite the overlap between the views of Catharinus (AC) and the Sorbonne theologians there is a significant disparity between them. The proposed censures fall into two classes, one related to the canon, and the other to interpretation.

The question of the canon

Cajetan's commentary on:	AC 1532	W 1534	W No.	M 1534	M No.	AC 1542
Hebrews	Yes	Yes	10,11	Yes	3	Yes (pp. 13–29)
James	Yes	Yes	12	Yes	15	Yes (pp. 29–30)
Jude	Yes	Yes	13	No		Yes (pp. 30–31)
1 and 2 John	Yes	Yes	14,15	Yes	14	Yes (pp. 30–31)
Mark 16	Yes	No		Yes	4	Yes (pp. 32–33)

*The question of interpretation*a. The discussion of marriage and divorce.¹

Cajetan's commentary on:	AC 1532	W 1534	W No.	M 1534	M No.	AC 1542	AC 1551
Matthew 19:9	No	Yes	1	Yes	1	No	
Mark 10:8	No	Yes	4	No		No	
Mark 10:11–12	No	Yes	2	Yes	2	Yes (pp. 147–8)	
John 8:1–11	Yes	Yes	9	No		Yes (p. 199)	
1 Corinthians 7:15	No	Yes	3	No			Yes (pp. 163–4)

b. The discussion of sacraments other than marriage (Penance; Eucharist; Extreme Unction).

Cajetan's commentary on:	AC 1532	W 1534	W No.	M 1534	M No.	AC 1542	AC 1551
John 20:23	No	Yes	5	Yes	5	No	
1 Corinthians 11:27–29	No	No		Yes	6		Yes (pp. 184–5)
James 5:14	No	Yes	16	No			Yes (p. 540)

¹ It should be noted that, according to both the Wittenberg and the Mainz lists, the Sorbonne had censured three discussions of cognate topics in the *Quaestiones Quodlibeticæ*: priests who marry (Numbers 22 and 10 in the Wittenberg and Mainz lists respectively); dispensations for married clerics (Numbers 23 and 11 in the Wittenberg and Mainz lists respectively); and discord as a reason for dispensing (Numbers 24 and 12 in the Wittenberg and Mainz lists respectively).

c. The discussion of miscellaneous topics.

Cajetan's commentary on:	AC 1532	W 1534	W No.	M 1534	M No.	AC 1542	AC 1551
Matthew 11:14	Yes	No		No		Yes (pp. 99–100)	
Matthew 23:24	Yes	No		No		Yes (pp. 136–7)	
Mark 1:1–8	No	Yes	7	No		Yes (p. 142)	
Mark 8:34–38	No	Yes	8	No		No	
Mark 15:25	Yes	No		No		Yes (p. 151)	
Luke 3:23–38	Yes	No		No		Yes (p. 141)	
John 1:17	Yes	No		No		No	
Acts 17:34	No	Yes	21	No		Yes (pp. 258–60)	
1 Corinthians 14:14	No	Yes	6	Yes	8		No
Philippians 4:3	No	Yes	20	Yes	16		Yes (p. 342–3)
1 Peter 3:19–20	No	No		Yes	13		Yes (p. 555)

Three questions of principle

Cajetan's commentary on:	AC 1532	W 1534	W No.	M 1534	M No.	AC 1543 (Claves Duae)
The Vulgate edition	No	Yes	17	No		Yes (pp. 44–56)
Preface to the Psalms	No	Yes	18 and 19	Yes	7	No
Pensions on Benefices (<i>Quaestiones Quodlibeticæ</i>)	No	No		Yes	9	

Before discussing these censures and the general considerations on which they are based, two preliminary points need to be made: firstly, Cajetan's attitude to the Vulgate and to the translation of the Psalms will emerge in Part II, where extracts

from his Commentaries will be given;² secondly the censures of the propositions extracted from the *Quaestiones quodlibetales* will be ignored, since the emphasis in this book is on bible translation and interpretation, not on further developments that might arise from them.

Twenty-four passages from the Gospels and the Epistles remain. What exactly was wrong with them? The answer to this question that we would most like to have is not available to us: the appropriate Sorbonne records have not survived. In any case the Sorbonne masters may never have stated their case in detail: they may well have assumed that it was obvious. But it is not obvious to us. An indication however may be obtained from the works of Catharinus (1535, 1542, 1543, 1551), whose respect for the Sorbonne has been pointed out above. Since Catharinus's fullest and most carefully considered account of Cajetan's failings is to be found in the *Annotations* of 1542, the evidence will mostly be taken from this work. In each case a detailed indication of the nature of the argument first of Cajetan and then of Catharinus will be given, sometimes by the use of quotation. (But even with quotation, which here must necessarily be brief, much of Catharinus's polemical style is lost, with its characteristic mixture of asperity and aggression.)

As mentioned above, the censures of the Sorbonne masters readily divide into two groups, those where the topic is the canon, and those where the topic is unconventional interpretation: hence the structure of the account which follows.

Catharinus on the Propositions that First Attracted Adverse Public Attention 1532–1534

The question of the canon

The main issue in the discussion of the canon is the importance to be attached to the opinion of Jerome. Since Catharinus considers the Church as the ultimate arbiter of the content and meaning of the scriptures, he dismisses Cajetan's appeal to the authority of Jerome; but since he also admits the legitimacy of testimony – the production of a cloud of witnesses is one of his preferred ways of supporting his case – he would like to have Jerome on his side if he can. In the following discussion of the five issues concerning the canon that are itemised in the above list of the Sorbonne censures, we therefore see Catharinus from time to time attempting to show that Jerome does not always say what Cajetan says he says but something entirely different. Though all the five cases are of some importance, the most important is the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Epistle to the Hebrews

Cajetan raises two problems in his introductory remarks to this epistle. Was it written in Hebrew, and was Paul its author? Presumably the first question is important because the answer to it might have some bearing on the second. Cajetan's answer

2 See (1) Preface to the Five Mosaic Books; (2) Proemium to the Psalter.

to the first question is very quick. He refers to Hebrews 7:2, where it is said of Melchisedech that he was 'by interpretation King of Righteousness'. In Hebrew, 'Melchisedech' means 'king of righteousness', so that if the Epistle to the Hebrews had been written in Hebrew, Hebrews 7:2 would have read 'Melchisedech was by interpretation Melchisedech'. As this is an obvious nonsense, Cajetan concludes that this epistle was not written in Hebrew. As further proof he adds that there is no copy of the epistle in Hebrew, nor is there any certain translator of it from Hebrew into Greek.

With regard to the second question – the author of this epistle – Cajetan has arguments of two kinds: one is an argument from authority – that of Jerome; the other from the text. The opinion of Jerome is for Cajetan the generally applicable criterion of canonicity:

... we have chosen Jerome as the rule so as not err in distinguishing the canonical books (for we consider canonical the books that he hands down as canonical, and we consider to be outside the canon the ones that he separated from the canonical ones).

Jerome's opinion however is partly based upon the usage of his day. In Letter 53 to Paulinus, he writes, 'The apostle Paul writes to seven churches, (for the eighth epistle – that to the Hebrews – is not generally counted in with the others)'. Cajetan shows us what the remark 'generally' amounts to. In the Letter to Evagrius about Melchizedek, Jerome explains³ that 'all the Greeks accept it (i.e. the Epistle to the Hebrews) and some of the Latins'.⁴ He thus appears to be making universal acceptance his criterion for canonicity. Perhaps because this is a very stringent requirement, Jerome tried another tack: in *De viris illustribus*, he added an argument concerning the disparity between the style and language of this epistle and others of Paul, on the assumption that such disparity told against its Pauline authorship and provided the grounds on which others attributed it to a different author⁵. If this is to prove anything, a further premise to the effect that Paul would not have been guilty

3 There is no letter of Jerome to Evagrius, but there are two letters by him to Evangelus (LXXIII and CXLVI) who is sometimes also called Evagrius. In Letter LXXIII, Jerome does indeed make the remark that Cajetan attributes to him.

4 Cajetan quotes Jerome as casting doubt on the Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews in his remarks on Jeremiah 31; in *De viris illustribus* (Life 51, Gaius); and in his exposition of Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 8 (see 1639 edition of the *Commentaries*, the prefatory remarks to the Epistle to the Hebrews).

5 The reference is to *De viris illustribus*, chapter 5.

The epistle which is called the Epistle to the Hebrews is not considered his, on account of its difference from the others in style and language, but it is reckoned, either according to Tertullian to be the work of Barnabas, or according to others, to be by Luke the Evangelist or Clement afterwards bishop of the church at Rome, who, they say, arranged and adorned the ideas of Paul in his own language, though to be sure, since Paul was writing to Hebrews and was in disrepute among them he may have omitted his name from the salutation on this account. He being a Hebrew wrote Hebrew, that is his own tongue and most fluently while the things which were eloquently written in Hebrew were more eloquently turned into Greek, and this is the reason why it seems to differ from other epistles of Paul.

of such a disparity is required. The arguments so far considered, though perhaps suggestive, are not decisive.

Further arguments are provided by the text of Hebrews itself. Cajetan refers first to Hebrews 1:5, where we read, "To which of the angels did he ever say, "You are my son, this day have I begotten you?" and added, "I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me'", and claims that these remarks are intended to be a proof that Christ is superior to the angels. These words (i.e. 'I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me') are written literally in 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 7:14, where they are followed by 'If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men &c'; and in 1 Paralipomena (1 Chronicles) 28:6, where he says of David expressly, 'Solomon your son will build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be a father to him &c'. Cajetan's comment is that in so great a matter it did not befit the apostle to use such an argument, since the Jews could easily reply that these words are said by God to David through Nathan not of the Son of God, but of a pure man who could sin and as a matter of fact did sin thereafter. Because of this, Christ's superiority to the angels is not proved. The temptation in the circumstances is to rely on the mystical sense, but to do so, especially in the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, would weaken the proof: Cajetan's commentaries presuppose only the literal sense. Here again this argument proves nothing without the introduction of a further premise to the effect that Paul would not have used so feeble an argument. Given this further premise, it follows that the epistle is not by him.

Cajetan bases a similar argument on Hebrews 9:16–21, where the issue is the difference between a pact (which holds between the living) and a testament (which is without force before the death of the testator). Because a testament properly speaking requires the death of the testator, it is appropriate to mark it with blood. Hence Hebrews 9:18–19 reads:

Whence indeed the first (testament) was not dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every command of the law to the whole people, he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled the book and all the people, saying (Verse 20), "This is the blood of the testament that the Lord has sent to you".

But these words are taken from Exodus 24:6–8, where the topic is a pact not a testament. Consequently, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is guilty of a solecism: either he has confused a testament with a pact, or he is mistaken in thinking that in Exodus the topic is a testament. It is unbecoming in a great apostle to do either, especially in an epistle to the Hebrews, who knew the peculiarity of the words in the Hebrew text. The implication of all this is once again that the epistle cannot be by Paul, since Paul would not have made that kind of mistake. So far all the arguments from the text may suggest that Paul was not the author, but they do not prove this without the introduction of further premises to the effect that what is

unseemly, inappropriate etc. is not conceivable in a great apostle. This does not very much matter however, because finally Cajetan produces an argument that does seem to be decisive. In Hebrews 2:3, the author numbers himself among those in whom salvation was confirmed by those who heard it from Christ. But Paul proclaims that he learned it neither from man nor through man, but by a revelation from Jesus Christ, and that the apostles conferred nothing on him. *Ergo*, Paul could not have been the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Catharinus's reply to Cajetan⁶ is in eight parts. The first of these is directed against the most general argument that Cajetan uses to show that Paul was not the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is therefore of doubtful canonicity.⁷ Is the claim that Jerome is the rule for distinguishing the canonical books well founded? Catharinus aims to demolish it by the following clear and direct argument. The choice of the scriptures involves a question of the faith, for we are required to believe what is handed down in the canon. But a matter of faith must contain what is infallibly true. The judgement of a man is fallible. It obviously follows that it is manifestly absurd to make any matter of faith depend on the judgement and opinion of man. Jerome did not receive from God the gift of infallibility in decision-making.⁸ That was given to no one but Peter: 'I have asked on your behalf, that your faith should not fail'. *Prima facie*, this argument is decisive, but Catharinus makes an empirical addition to prepare the way for a further development of his case:

Why if Jerome were the rule have the most approved and noble authors not followed him in this matter? Rather with a great consensus they have approved and handed down this epistle as being without doubt canonical and by Paul as I shall soon show.

Catharinus's second argument against Cajetan is devoted to disputing crucial details in the use to which the Jerome principle is put. Even if Jerome were the criterion of canonicity, Cajetan's argument would fail, for, *pace* Cajetan, Jerome did not have doubts about the author of this epistle, for he openly disputed and gave explanations against the doubters in several places. In the letter to Dardanus, Jerome declared that if the Latin custom did not accept the Epistle to the Hebrews among the scriptures, and the Greek churches did not accept the Revelation of St John, he accepted both, because he did not follow the custom of the time but the authority of the old writers, who frequently used the testimonies of both, not as now and then they are accustomed to do with the apocrypha, but as canonical and ecclesiastical.⁹

6 For a discussion of these *Annotations*, see U. Horst, 'Die Streit um die heilige Schrift zwischen Kardinal Cajetan und Ambrosius Catharinus', in ed. M. Schmaus (1967), *Warheit und Verkündigung*, Munich, pp. 551–577.

7 To argue in this fashion is to imply that canonicity is logically connected with authenticity.

8 *Annotations*, p. 14.

9 *Annotations*, pp. 14–15. The reference is to Letter 129 to Dardanus of 414 A.D. In this letter, Jerome does not seem to say quite what Catharinus says he says:

Nec me fugit quod perfidia Judaeorum haec testimonia non suscipiat quae utique Veteris Testamenti auctoritate firmata sunt. Illud nostris dicendum est hanc epistolam quae

It is true that Jerome sometimes mentions doubts about the Epistle to the Hebrews, but, argues Catharinus, these are not significant, because he is merely reporting not his own doubts, but those of other people. Jerome has also provided the answer to the point about the language in which the Epistle to the Hebrews was written. Jerome claims that Paul wrote in Hebrew, as a Hebrew to Hebrews, that is to say, very fluently, ‘so that those things that had been eloquently written in Hebrew would be more elegantly translated into Greek. This is the reason why it is seen to differ from the other epistles of St Paul’.¹⁰

Catharinus’s third and fourth annotations both expose non-sequiturs. Firstly, from the fact that Jerome and others formerly had doubts about the author of this epistle, it cannot be deduced that we have to be in doubt about it, for otherwise many things that the church now firmly believes would be dubious and the faith would be imperilled; and, secondly, it does not follow that, if we cannot identify the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it thereby becomes uncanonical. Gregory, we are told, elegantly teaches this about the Book of Job: it is not required for the canonicity of one of the biblical books that it has a particular man as its author, for otherwise a substantial fragment of scripture would be imperilled.

Catharinus’s fifth annotation contains a set of miscellaneous points, the first of which, strictly speaking, ought not to be included here at all, for it addresses not what Cajetan had written in his preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews, but what he wrote on 1 Corinthians 12: that only what has been written by the apostles or approved by them has the authority of the sacred scripture.¹¹ This, in Catharinus’s opinion, is openly against the understanding of the doctors and the authority of the church, which has accepted as being canonical and of full authority certain scriptures, which, it is agreed, were not produced by the apostles or approved by them. Catharinus brushes aside a second argument to the effect that, since Paul’s name is not included in the title of the Epistle to the Hebrews, he is not the author of it, by pointing out that if that were a sound argument, it would follow that nobody is the author of it since nobody’s name is included in the title. In any case, Paul had good reason to suppress his name. His unpopularity with the Jews¹² – he was considered a destroyer of the law – would have deterred them from reading anything to which his name was affixed.

The sixth annotation is a much more coherent and effective performance. It is devoted to exposing the misunderstanding that Catharinus claims to detect in Cajetan’s argument based on Hebrews 1:5, that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has applied to Christ a scriptural extract that, literally, speaks of Solomon.

inscribitur ad Hebraeos non solum ab ecclesiis Orientis sed ab omnibus retro ecclesiasticis Graeci sermonis scriptoribus, quasi Pauli apostoli suscipi, licet plerique eam vel Barnabae vel Clementis arbitrentur, et nihil interesse cuius sit cum ecclesiastici viri sit, et quotidie ecclesiarum lectione celebretur.

Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 22, p. 1103.

10 Jerome does indeed say this, in *De Viris Illustribus*, Chapter 5, on Paul.

11 *Annotations* 1542, p.17. The reference to 1 Corinthians 12 is in the margin.

12 In Chapter 5 of *De viris illustribus*, Jerome says that since Paul ‘was in disrepute among them [the Jews] he may have omitted his name from the salvation on this account’.

Catharinus's point is that though what is said in 1 Paralipomena (1 Chronicles) 28:6 is in one sense about Solomon, it refers in the full sense to Christ in whom it is specially verified and fulfilled.¹³ There is however a further difficulty to be cleared up. To confirm his view that 1 Paralipomena (1 Chronicles) 28:6 cannot refer to Christ, Cajetan had pointed out that the same words occur in 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 7:14 where they are followed by 'if he has done anything wrong, I shall accuse him'. This too, according to Catharinus, is a mistake for it is the fashion of scripture to attribute to Christ things that really pertain to his members.¹⁴ Christ 'took our sins upon himself, so as to solicit on our behalf, and wash them in himself. For this reason, there is immediately added, 'I shall not take my mercy away from him'.

This is the chief of those principles that have to be accepted by those who wish to examine the scriptures: what the scriptures say of Christ as the head is understood specially from the members, as He exists in any member and in the whole body of the church.

To confirm that he is right, and not Cajetan, Catharinus points out that 2 Samuel 7:14 – 'I will be a father unto him, etc.' – is preceded by two verses which put forward certain things which cannot be applied to Solomon, but only to Christ viz.:

When your days have been fulfilled, you will sleep with your fathers, but I will raise your seed after you which comes forth from your loins, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build his house in my name, and I shall establish his throne forever.

The seventh annotation deals with Cajetan's argument based on Hebrews 9:16–21 where the issue is the difference between a pact and a testament, and the confusion between the two is taken as evidence either of the author's carelessness or his ignorance of Hebrew, both of which it would be inappropriate to ascribe to Paul. But, says Catharinus, in the Epistle to the Romans Paul expounded the same word – 'Berith' – as 'testament' and not 'pact'; and in the Epistle to the Galatians he called the promises made to Abraham 'testament' and 'inheritance'. If Cajetan were right, this would mean that neither the Epistle to the Romans, nor that to the Galatians is by Paul, because there also 'pactum' is changed into 'testamentum'. Moreover, Stephen (Acts 7:8) referred to the testament of the circumcision, and the Septuagint almost always translates the word 'Berith' as 'testament'. Likewise, Zacharias (Zechariah), the father of John, called it a 'testament' in his Canticum (Luke 1:72) and Zechariah the prophet calls the same word 'testament' in accordance with the proper understanding of 'testament', because it becomes efficacious on death (Zechariah 9:11). 'You also in the blood of your testament sent forth your fettered

13 In the *Claves Duae* Catharinus distinguishes between the literal and the metaphorical sense of a passage of Scripture and requires the literal sense wherever it does not eventuate in nonsense or triviality; but in distinguishing also between the carnal and the spiritual sense, he allows for the possibility that a passage of Scripture can indeed be read literally, but can also be read spiritually. See below. His answer to Cajetan on 1 Paralipomena (Chronicles) 28:6 presupposes this kind of literal-cum-spiritual sense.

14 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 18–19. It is a moot point whether (a) Cajetan would accept this; (b) Catharinus is reporting what had long been the catholic hermeneutical practice, or is merely making a convenient stipulation to protect catholic teaching.

ones from the lake wherein is no water'.¹⁵ Christ also says, (Luke 22:20) 'This is my testament in my blood'. Cajetan, as a man ignorant of the law, says Catharinus, did not think that 'pactum' was consistent with 'testamentum', so that these words mean the same thing, although inheritance could come into the covenant (pactum) as the laws teach. Moreover, both the old law and the covenant accepted what they called the 'testamentum' by means of tablet and book. But such considerations are really superfluous inasmuch as Christ's words in Luke 22:20¹⁶ are decisive.

Catharinus's eighth annotation is his reply to Cajetan's argument from Hebrews 2:3 to the effect that the author of the epistle puts himself among those in whom the evangelical salvation has been confirmed by those who heard it from the Lord, etc. and this is not an appropriate thing to say about Paul, who learnt the Gospel not from a man, nor by means of a man, but immediately from God ('a deo'). Catharinus tries to discredit Cajetan's very simple proof in eight ways. The first is that Hebrews 2:3 does not say that Paul received the doctrine from those who heard it from the Lord, but that salvation was confirmed in him through them, which was absolutely true in his case, for he received the sacraments from them: after being baptized by Ananias, he received his sight. This is a case then in which canonicity is made to depend on the interpretation of a short phrase, and to adjudicate between the judgments of the two Dominicans would require either the decision of the church or one of its great doctors, or the application of the method of Erasmus and Valla. The second argument against Cajetan's use of Hebrews 2:3 is an attempted refutation of what he says not in the Preface but in the Commentary itself where he points out a disparity between Hebrews 9:4 and 1 Kings 8:9. The point at issue is the contents of the Ark of the Covenant.¹⁷ Did the Ark contain a golden urn and Aaron's rod and the tablets of the Law, or only the two stone tablets? Relying on a principle that he states formally in the *Claves Duae*,¹⁸ he claims that there is no necessary contradiction between Hebrews 9:4 and 1 Kings 8:9, for what was true of the Ark at one time might not have been true of the Ark at a different time. The argument from possibility of course lacks force. Perhaps that is the reason why Catharinus tries to reinforce his reasoning by the introduction of a mystical argument that might have interested Cajetan if he ever saw it, but would certainly not have convinced him: the different states of the Ark create:

a mystery: it means that the priesthood of Aaron in the Promised Land, which is signified by the rod, was to cease, when the true Solomon, that is Christ, reigned. Likewise, the urn that contained the hidden manna, that is, the law, which has secretly conceived Christ, the true manna, had to pass away.¹⁹

The third argument rebuts the implication of Cajetan's argument that the author of Hebrews quotes the Old Testament from the Septuagint text and not from the Hebraic verity: that the author could not therefore be Paul. The rebuttal is by pointing

15 *Annotations*, p. 21.

16 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.'

17 *Annotations*, p. 22.

18 *Claves Duae*, 192.

19 *Annotations*, p. 23. Catharinus deals with this example in *Claves Duae*, p. 196.

out that the evangelists also quoted the Septuagint, as Paul himself did in Romans 10. The fourth argument is an indignant rejection of Cajetan's censure of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which must be canonical and sacrosanct because the church has accepted it and made it part of the liturgy; the fifth is an attempt to discredit Cajetan as a man who did not know Hebrew;²⁰ and the sixth is an attempted refutation of the argument from Hebrews 13:19 that Paul was not the author of this epistle because written in it is 'I shall see you more speedily'.²¹

The seventh argument is the production of 'an immense cloud of witnesses "sufficient to fill a fair-sized volume"'.²² This congregation of saints and doctors has accepted and taught that this epistle is by Paul, and have alleged opinions from it as irrefragable in argument against the heretics, just as Cajetan himself did in the *Ientacula*.²³ The cloud of witnesses includes Origen;²⁴ his master Clement; Cyril;²⁵ Jerome;²⁶ Theophylact;²⁷ Dionysius the Areopagite; Pope Clement; Peter;²⁸ Pope Anacletus; Bishop Irenaeus; Athanasius; Basil; Gregory of Nyssa; Gregory of Nazianzen; Ambrose; Gregory; the University of Paris;²⁹ the provincial synod of Sens; the Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, Laodicea, Carthage III, and Florence;³⁰

20 Here Catharinus points his remarks to fellow members of the Dominican Order, who, he believes, accept Cajetan's arguments because of their admiration of him: 'O brothers, brothers, let the truth conquer, and let us not blind ourselves with base affection, especially in matters of such great weight.'

21 Cajetan's point is that it would not be reasonable for Paul, who had recently appealed to Caesar in order to escape from the hands of the Jews, to promise to return to them again. Catharinus's reply is firstly that Paul was certainly not frightened by men, as his behaviour at Iconium showed, and secondly that not all the Jews were his enemies, and some indeed were his brothers.

22 *Annotations*, pp. 24–28.

23 A marginal note points out the 'inconstancy of doctrine'.

24 A marginal note refers to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

25 A marginal note states that in the Council of Ephesus, Cyril condemned Nestorius as a heretic on the testimony of this epistle and that the Council of Ephesus confirmed the condemnation.

26 According to Catharinus Jerome claimed that the allegation that the epistle was not by Paul was introduced by the heretics.

27 Catharinus notes that according to Theophylact, many heresies were confuted by the exordium of this epistle.

28 Peter:

who seems to cite this epistle specially (marginal note: 2 Peter ult. [= chapter 3, 15]), saying, "Just as the most beloved brother Paul wrote to you in accordance with the wisdom given to him, as he did in all his epistles", where you see a particular epistle hinted at where those things were written down which appear in this one in particular: for he specially warns the Hebrews about the forbearance which gives birth to salvation in this epistle, chapter ten, at the end, and in almost the whole of chapter 12.

29 In the condemnation of Erasmus.

30 Under Eugenius IV.

the decrees of Innocent I, Gelasius;³¹ Paschal II;³² and the use of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the liturgy.³³

The eighth and final argument against Cajetan's use of Hebrews 2:3 to show that Paul was not the author of the epistle concerned examines certain statements that are made in it and tries to show that these are true of Paul and most of them are only true of him. Catharinus claims that the author professes in the last chapter that he is by family a Jew,³⁴ and so by Cajetan's own admission, Clement and Luke are excluded, neither of whom was a Jew: one was a Roman, and the other a Syrian. This Jewish author sent Timothy, and Paul, his father and master, so to speak, was the only one who was in the habit of doing this, and no one else, Clement and Barnabas included, had the authority to do it. Thirdly the author recalls his bonds. But who was in bonds and wrote in bonds like Paul, who said, 'The word of God is not shackled'? Finally, he was in Italy when he wrote, doubtless at Rome, having Timothy with him, since in his last epistle, he admonished him (Timothy) to go to him there.³⁵

The conclusion is forthright: many things unite on behalf of the view that the author of this epistle was Paul: the great doctrine; the eloquence in his own language; the reason for suppressing the details of his own name; the fact that his family was Jewish; the sending of Timothy; the bonds and chains, and finally the sending of Timothy from Rome when he (Paul) was there in chains. Since all these things are true of Paul, and there is no evidence on behalf of anyone else, it is insane to doubt that the Epistle is by Paul.

Epistle of St. James

Catharinus was no doubt moved to this elaborate defence of the canonicity of Hebrews firstly because of the power of Cajetan's argument, and secondly because of the importance of the doctrine and the liturgy threatened. It could be argued that the Epistle of St. James had an importance in catholic doctrine at least equal to that of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But Cajetan's argument is nothing like as good. His brief remarks cast doubt on the author of this epistle, who, he thinks, was not James, the Lord's brother, although the epistle was published under his name. The salutation in James 1:1 increases the doubt about the author, for it is so unadorned that it is unlike any salutation of any other Apostolic epistle: the author invokes neither God, Jesus Christ, grace nor peace, but, in the profane way, says 'Greeting'. He does not call himself an apostle, but only the servant of Jesus Christ. His purpose was to instruct those members of the dispersed tribes who were now Christians, as is implied in the remark 'Do not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in the acceptance of persons'

31 Catharinus refers to a council with seventy bishops held at Rome.

32 Promulgated in the council held at the Lateran.

33 ... and what ought not to be considered last, the daily use of all the churches, which, in the cult of God, and in the sacred mysteries in the temples of the whole world which, receiving the reading of this epistle, have intoned it loud and clear under the title of St Paul to the Hebrews.

34 Catharinus says that in the last chapter of Hebrews the author tells us that he was a Jew. This seems to be untrue of Hebrews 13.

35 *Annotations*, pp. 28–29. The reference seems to be to 2 Timothy 4:21.

(James 2:1). But after disparaging the epistle in this way, Cajetan is really forced to concede the point at issue. Quoting Jerome in *De viris illustribus*, he admits that though it took some time for the epistle to gain authority, it is nevertheless now one of the seven 'canonical' epistles.³⁶

Here, as in his reply to Cajetan's remarks on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Catharinus challenges the accuracy of the remark that Cajetan attributes to Jerome: he claims that Jerome explicitly says that James, the Lord's brother wrote this work. Catharinus then deals with the point about the salutation. The abruptness of the beginning of the Epistle of St. James is not peculiar to it, for John has no greeting at all but bursts out immediately, 'What was from the beginning, etc.' (1 John 1:1.); it is untrue that the greeting makes no reference to Jesus Christ since it begins 'James the servant of Jesus Christ'; finally if the nakedness of his greeting condemns the Apostle James, the whole apostolic council must in justice be likewise condemned for we read in Acts 15:23³⁷ that they used a similar greeting in a letter: 'The apostles and the senior brothers, greeting to those brothers of the Gentiles who are of Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.'

Epistle of St. Jude

Cajetan bases his doubts about the canonicity of the General Epistle of St. Jude on *De viris illustribus*, where Jerome had pointed out that many people rejected this epistle because it accepted testimony from the apocryphal Book of Enoch.³⁸ Nevertheless Jerome also said that the epistle was one of the seven catholic epistles, and that it deserved to be so because of its antiquity and long use by the church. *Prima facie*, it seems strange that Catharinus should consider this epistle substantial enough to require fighting for, since no point of doctrine depends on it. To understand Catharinus's motivation we need to look not at his *Annotations* of 1542, but to his Commentaries on the Epistles of 1551,³⁹ where he reads St. Jude's remarks as a polemic against heretics, which can be applied prophetically to the heretics of the sixteenth century.⁴⁰ But it can only be so applied effectively if St. Jude is truly the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, and this cannot be assumed unless the epistle is canonical. In the *Annotations*,⁴¹ Catharinus makes his case negatively, that is to say by trying to show that Cajetan's argument is unsound. First he rightly points out that there is a contradiction between Cajetan's claim that the epistle is not of full authority

36 *De viris illustribus*, chapter 2, 'James the Just': 'James ... wrote a single epistle, which is reckoned among the seven catholic Epistles and even this is claimed by some to have been published by some one else under his name, and gradually, as time went on, to have gained authority.' It could be argued here that Jerome implies that the Epistle was not by James, and therefore gained authority wrongly by the mere passage of time.

37 Catharinus's marginal annotation erroneously refers this to Acts 18.

38 *De viris illustribus*, Book 4.

39 In *Commentaria in omnes divi Pauli et alias septem canonicas epistolas, Venetiis, in officina Erasmiana Vincenti Valgrisi*, 1551 (hereafter referred to as 'Commentary').

40 See P. Preston, 'Ambrosius Catharinus' Commentary on the General Epistle of St. Jude', in *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, Volume 4, No. 2, December, 2002.

41 *Annotations*, pp. 31–32.

and his admission that it is one of the seven canonical epistles; then he deals with the question of the testimony that Jude takes from Enoch. Cajetan supposes that the quotation from the Apocrypha derogates from the authority of the sacred scripture. But, Catharinus argues, because something was written in the Apocrypha it does not follow that what it asserts is *ipso facto* apocryphal. His claim is that Jude did not take testimony from the Apocrypha but rather proved that something contained in the Apocrypha was true. If he is correct in this assertion, his reading of the General Epistle of St Jude can only misfire if his identification of Jude's 'certain impious men, who were formerly ordained to this judgement', who 'have crept in and transformed the grace of our Lord into wantonness, and denied our Lord Jesus Christ'⁴² cannot be sustained.

Second and Third Epistles of St. John

De viris illustribus is also the source of Cajetan's doubts about the canonicity of the second and third Epistles of John.⁴³ Jerome invokes the authority of Papias to show that there was one John who was John the Evangelist, and another who was John the Elder, and it was the latter who wrote these two epistles. Both therefore are of lesser authority. The doctrine of the first of them was taken from the Epistle of St. John the Apostle. Cajetan's opinion was that this epistle did not need explanation, so much as correction, since in many places it differed from the Greek text: inspection showed that the Latin text had many things in the second person which the Greek has in the first.

Catharinus's reply to this reasoning is a terse refusal of Cajetan's argument. Where Cajetan relies on *De viris illustribus* against these epistles, Catharinus invokes the authority of Jerome in the letter to Evagrius⁴⁴ in support of them: Jerome's view is that the style and the words employed in them are peculiar to John.

Mark 16:9

Cajetan chose Mark 16:9 to draw attention to the fact that there are doubts about the chapter in which it occurs. As usual he begins with Jerome, who, in the letter to Hedebia on 12 questions, when solving the third question,⁴⁵ quoted the words, 'Jesus arising early on the Sabbath appeared to Mary Magdalene &c', and added:

42 Jude 4 and Commentary, p. 599.

43 *De viris illustribus*, Chapter 9.

44 See *Annotations* 1542, p. 30. Porro quod non solum Hieronymus iis attestatur epistolis ad Evagrium scribens, quod sint Ioannis evangelistae: verum etiam stilius ipse & verba Ioanni peculiaria quae ibi leguntur, idem confirmant.' There is no letter of St Jerome to Evagrius. There are however two letters to Evangelus, who is sometimes also called Evagrius. Letter 146 to Evangelus (para. 1) refers to 2 and 3 John as the work of 'that son of thunder, the disciple whom Jesus loved', that is, John the Apostle.

45 The reference is to Letter 120 to Hedebia. Question (3) reads, 'How are the discrepancies in the evangelical narratives to be accounted for? How can Matt. xxviii. I be reconciled with Mark xvi. I, 2?' Migne, PL 22, p. 987:

We do not accept the testimony of Mark, which is reported in few gospels: for almost all the Greek books do not have the end of this chapter, particularly since it seems to relate things different from and contrary to the other Evangelists.

Again, Cajetan says that in a second dialogue against the Pelagians, Jerome remarked that in certain codices of Mark's Gospel, particularly the Greek codices, there occurs at the end,⁴⁶ 'And they satisfied him when they said, "This world is the substance of iniquity and incredulity which does not allow the true virtue of God to be apprehended by unclean spirits. Consequently, now reveal your justice."' "

Since the codices on which this chapter is based give different readings, and because there are some things in it that are contained in no other Evangelist, there is a problem. It cannot be solved by asserting that the whole of this last chapter has been added, because it would follow that the Gospel of Mark finishes in the burial of Christ, and says absolutely nothing about the Resurrection. This, Cajetan thinks, would be foolish and faithless assertion, for the whole faith of the Gospel depends on the Resurrection. Cajetan believed that Mark 16 was considered suspect by many Greeks on account of the admixture, by some-one unknown, of those words that Jerome quotes in the dialogue, and also on account of the promise that is attached (Mark 16:17): 'These signs shall follow those that believe: they shall cast out demons in my name'. The upshot of these suspicions is that these parts are not, like everything else that Mark wrote, which is undoubted, of solid authority for establishing the faith.

Catharinus wastes little time in disposing of Cajetan's arguments about the last chapter of St Mark's Gospel. He first scores a point against Cajetan, by taking him to be saying that because some men have thought that the last chapter of Mark has been added, it is not of solid authority for establishing the faith like the other parts of Mark. In this crude form, Cajetan's argument is vulnerable. Does scripture lose authority because Tom, Dick and Harry have had their doubts? This is scarcely what Cajetan meant. Catharinus's real point is a reapplication of one of his general principles for deciding canonicity: the last chapter of Mark is part of the liturgy for Good Friday and Easter Sunday. And that, in his view, renders it invulnerable.

Hujus quaestionis duplex solutio est; aut enim non recipimus Marci testimonium (Marc. ult., 9 and 10) quod in raris fertur Evangeliiis, omnibus Graeciae libris pene hoc capitulum in fine non habentibus, praesertim cum diversa atque contraria Evangelistis caeteris narrare videatur.

46 [Cajetan's text actually reads:

Afterwards, when the eleven had reclined at table, Jesus appeared to them and reproached them with their incredulity and the hardness of their hearts, because they did not believe those who had seen him after his resurrection. *And they satisfied him when they said, 'This world is the substance of iniquity and incredulity which does not allow the true virtue of God to be apprehended by unclean spirits. Consequently, now reveal your justice.'*

This is a gloss on 16:14, now known from the fifth century Codex W – the 'Freer Gospels', but not found in the Vulgate (or KJV); see Parker (1997), p.128 who cites the relevant passage from Jerome.

It is not the purpose here to adjudicate between Cajetan and Catharinus on any issue on which they disagreed. It is not in any case clear on what general principles this could be done. In the particular case of Mark 16:9–20 it might however be done on the basis that Jerome could not find these verses in any Greek manuscripts. Virtually all scholars now agree that Mark 16:9–20 is an addition, perhaps in the belief that the original ending was lost. It is not found in the best manuscripts, including the Codex Vaticanus in Rome. Cajetan was also right to note the internal evidence of disparity of content with other gospels. Plainly, there are some weak arguments on both sides: Catharinus in particular seems to suppose that a good case is strengthened by the addition of such arguments. Central to the whole debate however is the importance to be attached to the views of Jerome. Catharinus supposes that for Cajetan Jerome is infallible. Since no human being except the pope has this status, a substantial part of Cajetan's argument can be rejected. But the case is otherwise if Jerome's views are not important because they are Jerome's, but because Jerome is reporting what the attitude of the early church was. In that case, such precious evidence should not be ignored.

The Question of Interpretation

Cajetan's use of Jerome as his criterion lends a kind of unity to the Dominican discussion of the canon. There is no such obvious point of reference to unify the range of cases in which Catharinus criticizes those textual explanations that the Sorbonne masters had stigmatised.

Three texts relating to marriage

Mark 10:11–12 Cajetan first asks us to notice that Mark does not repeat everything that Jesus said, because he has omitted the exception that Jesus stated about fornication, as can be seen in Matthew 19:9. On the other hand Mark included words that Matthew omitted. Matthew spoke without qualification: 'he commits adultery'; but Mark says, 'he commits adultery against her', that is the one who has been put away. This is important because the husband who commits fornication, commits adultery absolutely; but he who commits fornication to his wife's injury, that is, knowing another in her place, commits adultery against her. Cajetan has explained the plain sense of the letter exactly to show that the theologians are right in claiming that the law about one wife is not found in Canon law.⁴⁷ Furthermore Christ makes no exception for the wife, for husband and wife are unequal in this respect: the husband is allowed to send the wife away for the reason of fornication, but the wife is not permitted to send the husband away and to give the husband a bill of divorcement.

Catharinus thinks that Cajetan has failed to notice that a man can put away his wife, when she is willing, for the sake of a fuller fruit and the status of perfection

⁴⁷ The argument here is difficult. As Cajetan states it, it seems to involve a non-sequitur. It is almost as though there is a bit missing.

(presumably he is thinking of a woman who wishes to take the veil) – or even when she is unwilling – if the marriage has not been consummated.⁴⁸ Again Cajetan does not notice that a man who ‘amputates from himself the ability to have a wife’ (presumably he is thinking of a man who wishes to enter a monastic order) in effect dismisses her; and likewise with regard to children, for if he has any, he can dismiss them, but only if they do not particularly need his care.

John 8:1–11 Cajetan corrects the text, and points out its shortcomings in verses 3–5, 9, and 10. Mostly his commentary merely provides assistance for the reader of the text, as for instance in verse 4, when he explains that the scribes and Pharisees are implying that the crime committed is inexcusable, and in verse 6 when he points out that the Evangelist is explaining why they asked the question in verse 5. They would be able to accuse him either because he would be against the law, if, against the Law of Moses he were to say that the adulteress should not be stoned; or they could charge him for his lack of mercy if he were to say that she should. In the former case, they would accuse him judicially; but in the latter, at the tribunal of public opinion. But with regard to the second half of verse 6 ‘but Jesus bent down and with his finger wrote in the earth’, he offers an interpretation of the words that goes well beyond their actual meaning without involving allegorical or mystical senses:

What he was writing is not known. But – in accordance with the letter – I think he wrote to show that he was God, who formerly wrote His commandments in the tables of the law. He now writes not in stone but in the earth, and not with a pen but with his finger, to show by the very way of writing that the same God was pointing out by means of the difference between the earth and the stone that the status of the New Testament differed from that of the Old. For if he did not act to show this, it would appear useless.

In verse 7, he solves an obvious problem – ‘Why did they keep on asking him, when he had already given them a written answer?’ – with a conjecture: he did not write the words which he afterwards uttered so that the Scribes and Pharisees should read them – because if he had done, they would not have persevered in asking him. But the commentary on the remark about casting the first stone is both an explanation and a commendation: ‘A very prudent reply, neither contrary to the law nor alien from mercy, but the way to mercy without offending the law, plus the confutation of the malignant.’ Similarly his remark, in verse 9, on ‘they were accused by their conscience’ – ‘the Evangelist explains everything’ – is a laconic commendation. The commentary on the last part of verse 9 addresses another question that might easily arise in the mind of the reader. How could the woman be standing in the middle, when only she and Christ were present? The explanation is that she had not moved from the middle of the place in which the Scribes and Pharisees had placed her. Likewise, there might be a difficulty with the remark in verse 10 that Christ saw nobody but the woman, but, as Cajetan points out, everything becomes clear when Christ asks where the woman’s accusers are. In verse 11, Cajetan is at pains to point out Christ’s clemency. Christ’s answer ‘I do not condemn you’ is short for ‘I do not condemn you to this, that is, to be stoned’, which is an exercise of clemency without

48 *Annotations* 1542, p. 148.

injury to the law. The warning to sin no more, in which there is no asperity, is a refusal to exercise the office of a judge, because he did not come to judge the world but to exercise the office of a saviour.

Catharinus's annotation on Cajetan's commentary on John 8:3–11 is strange: it virtually ignores what Cajetan has said and considers an issue that he has not raised, that is to say the claim that, because some codices did not contain it, the story of the adulteress is not authentic and should therefore be removed from the Gospel.⁴⁹ In fact, in introducing this issue, Catharinus is reverting to the issue of canonicity. It may well be that this is how the Sorbonne masters understood the issue here. Catharinus also rejects an additional argument that he claims Cajetan had used in advocating the removal of the story of the adulteress from Gospel of St. John: that that story disrupted the continuity of the narrative. Catharinus's argument to prove that this is not so starts with John 7:23 where we are told that the people went home, but in John 8:1 Jesus goes first into the Mount of Olives and then in John 8:2 into the temple, where the malevolent brought to him the adulteress to impede his teaching, but in vain. Consequently John 8:21 – 'He therefore said again unto them⁵⁰ . . .' – follows well.

1 Corinthians 7:15 Cajetan is considering Paul's remarks on marriages between Christians and those who are not Christians, specifically the case where one party is an unbeliever and does not wish to persist in the marriage. He suggests the dissolution of the marriage: in an event of this kind, neither the Christian brother nor the Christian sister is subjected to the servitude of the marriage. The church commonly understands Paul's words as meaning that if a spouse who does not believe is separated, the Christian partner in such a marriage is free to contract marriage with another person. But Paul does not actually say this. He only denies subjection to servitude in cases of this kind, and this does not prove that the conjugal bond is thereby dissolved. Cajetan now considers 1 Corinthians 7:15 in a wider context. He first notes an oddity in the way in which the church has treated the question of divorce. When Christ clearly makes an exception in the case of fornication, the torrent of doctors does not admit that liberty to the married man, but when Paul does not speak clearly, the marriage is interpreted as being dissolved for a reason other than the one explained by Christ and alone made an exception of by him. Cajetan nevertheless conforms to the common understanding of this text established by the long-standing practice of the church. There is, however, a contrast between what the Lord says in the Gospel and what Paul says in the Epistle: the Lord does not hand down a common law of liberty to each spouse, as the text itself plainly shows; but Paul proclaims to each spouse a common law of liberty, by which alone can be separated what God has joined together. Thus different causes of freedom are assigned: to the husband, for his own case; and by Paul for the case of each spouse in common. The Lord judges the husband and the wife to be unequal with respect

49 *Annotations* 1542, p. 199. Perhaps the reason for Catharinus's interest in this question is not what Cajetan had said in the Commentaries, but in another of his works, e.g. the *Ientacula*.

50 I.e. the people.

to fornication, because the fornication of the wife causes doubt about the father of the offspring and arouses more natural horror than the fornication of the husband. But with regard to the infidelity that looks to the soul, Paul judges the right equal in each spouse.

Catharinus does not treat the epistles in the *Annotations*. However what Catharinus thought about Cajetan's commentaries on them can be gathered from his own Commentaries on the Epistles, which were published in 1551. His remarks on 1 Corinthians 7:15 should really be seen in the context of the immediately preceding 'Disputatio circa divortium'.⁵¹ Catharinus first defends the torrent of doctors who do not admit that liberty of the husband in the case of the fornication of the wife, on the grounds that the liberty of the husband does not follow from the Lord's exception of fornication.⁵² Secondly Cajetan said that Paul did not speak clearly, although he very expressly says, 'for the brother or the sister in cases of this kind is not subject to servitude'; but if he is not subjected to servitude, he is free.⁵³ Thirdly, Cajetan wonders in vain that the Apostle did not add another cause when it would be permissible for the marriage to be dissolved, since the Lord makes an exception of the cause of fornication only.⁵⁴ Catharinus is surprised that Cajetan did not see that the Lord gave a rule about very unusual marriages, that is, the marriages of those who do not believe, not of the marriages of those who do believe.⁵⁵ The saying 'those whom God has joined together ...' is not true of the marriages of unbelievers, for God does not attend their marriages. But the first spouses – Adam and Eve – were gracious in the presence of God, as St. Thomas teaches. They were Christians, since the mystery of Christ was revealed to Adam, and he received it with faith. The Holy Doctor did not deny this. Fourthly attention should be paid to Cajetan's doctrine that according to God's determination, the case of the woman was unequal in the matter of divorce, because what is allowed to the man on account of fornication is not allowed to her.⁵⁶ Catharinus made this point because the torrent of doctors was remarkably opposed to Cajetan, but did not pursue it since he had examined all the matter elsewhere in a special tract, to which he referred the reader.⁵⁷

Though Cajetan discusses three different aspects of the Christian institution of marriage, a kind of unity is lent to the discussion by the way in which Catharinus responds to them. In the first case, he is at pains to protect the existing practices of the church, which accepted the desire to enter a monastic order as a ground for the dissolution of marriage; in the second, he is defending the integrity of the Vulgate text against the argument that, because some codices did not contain it, the story of the adulteress is not authentic and should therefore be removed from the Gospel; and

51 *Commentaria*, pp. 163–164.

52 Catharinus should have explained why he thinks this.

53 In this case, it is not necessarily true that one not subjected to servitude is free, for though he may be free from cohabitation and the chores of marriage, he may not be free to re-marry.

54 Cajetan does not say this, but the opposite.

55 This too does not seem to be what Cajetan says.

56 The point here seems to be that man and woman are the same in this respect: according to the torrent of doctors neither man nor woman is allowed to re-marry.

57 This tract does not appear to have survived.

in the third, he is defending Paul against the charge of not speaking clearly, and the torrent of the doctors against the charge of being wrong. His defensive reaction is entirely predictable given his fundamental commitment to tradition and the authority of the church.

The other sacraments

1 Corinthians 11:27–29 Cajetan's topic is the reception of the elements of the sacrament, which can be received either worthily or unworthily. His argument is complicated. The theologians have here introduced a distinction between sacramental and spiritual eating and drinking: Paul describes sacramental eating and drinking as eating and drinking unworthily, but eating and drinking both sacramentally and spiritually is 'eating and drinking worthily'. In the former case, the communicant will be literally guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, for in receiving the sacrament he really does consume the body and blood of the Lord. This confutes the heretics who say that the elements of the sacrament are only the sign of the body and blood of the Lord. The difference between consuming worthily and unworthily is the difference between inner purity and impurity, and this is a matter of perceiving or not perceiving what is virtuous. This is a matter for each individual: his judgement of himself must be honest. The implication of this is that approval by a confessor is not a necessary condition for receiving the Eucharist not unworthily. On the other hand, examining oneself with complete honesty is not a sufficient condition for receiving the Eucharist worthily: justification by divine grace is required. Because Paul requires no more from a man than that he consumes not unworthily, he says (1 Corinthians 11:28), 'thus he may eat of that bread, and drink of that cup'. In 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 Paul explains the punishment for being guilty of the body and blood of the Lord by receiving the sacrament unworthily: either eternal damnation, or an affliction that lasts for a time only, which of the two depending on whether the sinner received knowing full well that he was in a state of mortal sin, or only in a state of venial sin (less reverence, devotion moderate only, and things of this kind). The reason for the judgment and the punishment inflicted is given by the phrase 'not discerning the Lord's body'. The failure to discern is the failure to understand how worthy the Lord's body is of the purity of the soul, of devotion and reverence – that body that is consumed unworthily. (This commentary must have infuriated its Dominican critics, for first Cajetan affirms the doctrine of the real presence against the Protestant sacramentarians, as Dominicans themselves affirmed, and then makes what looks like an attack on the practice of confession, which would encourage the Protestants.)

In his Commentaries of 1551, Catharinus takes exception to Cajetan's treatment of 'But a man should make himself acceptable, and thus eat of that bread and drink of that cup' in verse 28, and comments that here Cajetan accepted that a man is not held to confess his sins before receiving the Eucharist, even if he is conscious of being in a state of mortal sin. It was enough if a man made himself acceptable, as the Apostle requires; and he did this if he repented of his sins and was contrite. Many rightly rejected this dogma as new and obviously pernicious. Catharinus claimed

to have written more fully about this matter in the *Annotations*.⁵⁸ The fact is that to make oneself acceptable a man must judge himself and mediate between himself and God, and nobody in a state of mortal sin can do this.

There are also problems with Cajetan's distinction between receiving the elements sacramentally (or unworthily), and receiving them sacramentally and spiritually (or not unworthily). Catharinus reveals these problems by posing a dilemma about a man who eats not unworthily. If it is said that he eats sacramentally only, and therefore he eats unworthily (as Cajetan admitted) this is contrary to hypothesis; or if it is said that he eats spiritually, and therefore he eats worthily, this infringes the teaching that Cajetan shortly afterwards gives.⁵⁹ Catharinus's comment is, 'And this in truth happens to those who, in discoursing in a tortuous way, fall away from the right'.

James 5:14 This should be taken with James 5:13. After having corrected the Vulgate 'tristatur' to 'affligitur' so that the beginning of the verse reads, 'Is anyone among you afflicted? Let him pray', Cajetan comments that the remedy for affliction is recourse to God in prayer. With regard to 'Aequo animo et psallat', he says that the Latin is corrupted and mutilated. It should read, 'Is anyone among you in a state of equanimity? Let him sing psalms'. Cajetan comments that James told the afflicted to pray, and those in a state of equanimity to sing psalms and give thanks to God. On grounds of wording and of what happens when Extreme Unction is administered, he refuses to accept that verse 15 is about this sacrament. He thinks that it is about the unction that the Lord Jesus instituted in the Gospel to be exercised by the disciples on the sick. For the text does not say that someone is sick to death, but just that someone is sick. As to the effect, it is the raising up of the sick man. Nor is there any talk about the remission of sins save conditionally,⁶⁰ since Extreme Unction is not given except close to death, and tends directly (as its form shows) to the remission of sins. Furthermore, there is the fact that James stipulates that a number of priests be called to pray and to anoint the sick man, and this is alien to the rite of Extreme Unction.

Catharinus⁶¹ agrees that the text of 'Is anyone of you saddened &c?' is corrupt, since it is badly punctuated. It should read as follows: 'Is someone sad among you? Let him pray.' Here there is a full stop. Then follows 'Is someone of steady mind? Let him sing psalms'. Thus the sadness is driven away by prayer, but the equanimity with singing and psalms. But he does not accept the interpretation that Cajetan gives of 'Is there anyone among you who is sick?' According to Catharinus, the Holy Doctors rightly inferred from this place the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, which the Universal Church has always approved. Catharinus appeals to the following to establish this claim: Innocent III in chapter 1 of 'On Holy Unction'; the decree

58 Catharinus gives no reference to support this claim.

59 Catharinus should say here which doctrine of Cajetan's he supposes is infringed by one who accepts the second horn of the dilemma. He must mean the claim that examining oneself with complete honesty is not a sufficient condition for receiving the Eucharist worthily: justification by divine grace is required.

60 On condition that the man dies, that is.

61 *Commentaries* 1551, p. 540.

of Innocent I; the fact that the solemn prayers of the churches are put before this sacrament in the rite; the innumerable opinions of all the holy doctors on behalf of this truth; and the councils of the universal church. But Luther and his followers were against the truth of this sacrament that the church of God uses, and so was Cajetan, who approved as cogent and valid the reasons by which they were moved to urge that this text of St. James did not pertain to a sacrament. Catharinus feels however that the arguments used by Cajetan and the Lutherans are wholly frivolous.

With regard to verse 16 – *Confess therefore your faults &c.* – the Greek text is better. It does not contain ‘ergo’: this precept is not legitimately inferred from what had been said earlier. There is a problem however: the text says generally of ‘all men’ that they should confess their sins to each other. Cajetan and the heretics deny that St James was here speaking about sacramental confession because he says ‘confess to each other’, but sacramental confession is not to each other, because not all are priests. Therefore Cajetan claims that this Apostle is speaking here about the general confession. Catharinus however thinks that general confession is superfluous, firstly because keeping silent does not hide the sin, and secondly because sins that result in damage require satisfaction. But nothing prevents St James’s remark – one to another or in turn – from being understood about sacramental confession: it is common practice to adjust remarks to the context in which they are used. Catharinus’s comment here – virtually the rule of thinking with the church – should really figure in any list of his fundamental exegetical principles: Assuredly, remarks of that kind are too frivolous: they are certainly not to be tolerated in those who are required to assist the meaning that the church has adopted, not that of the adversaries of the church.

Here again, in these discussions of sacraments other than marriage, it is easy to see Catharinus’ objections as the local manifestation of a coherent and very conservative set of exegetical principles. He would have been pleased, in Cajetan’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 with the remark, ‘This confutes the heretics who say that the elements of the sacrament are only the sign of the body and blood of the Lord’, but infuriated by the later implication that approval by a confessor is not a necessary condition for receiving the Eucharist not unworthily. In the commentary on James 5:14, however, there was only cause for deep offence: Cajetan was removing scriptural support from the doctrine of Extreme Unction, which the Holy Doctors had rightly inferred from this text. Cajetan’s disastrous folly in this case led Catharinus to state a remarkable principle: one like Cajetan, a cardinal, should assist the meaning that the church has adopted, not that of the adversaries of the church.

Miscellaneous topics

Matthew 11:14 Cajetan begins by remarking that ‘John is Elias’ is the seventh commendation of John. With regard to this the Evangelist says three things. Firstly he allows his hearers to choose whether to accept this commendation or not by saying, ‘if you will receive it’. He does this because the meaning that John is Elias is not in accordance with the literal sense and Jesus the great master taught us not to compel hearers to mystical senses of Holy scripture, which are for the edification of those who freely hear and profess them. Cajetan explains ‘John is the Elijah who is to

come', by referring to God's promise to Malachi (Malachi 4:5) – 'Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the coming of the Lord'. Therefore the Jews expected Elias before the Messiah, but because they did not know how to distinguish between the first and second coming of the Messiah, they thought that Elias would precede the first coming of Messiah. But God only promised this with respect to the second coming as appears literally in Malachi, who speaks about the dreadful day of the Lord, which is the day of universal judgment. Jesus was preoccupied with the ignorance of the Jew in case it would prevent them from believing that he was the true Messiah. He said that John was Elias, not from the identity of mind or hypostasis, but by the proportional identity of the office, for with regard to the first coming of the Lord, John exercised the office that Elias would exercise with regard to the second coming of the Lord.

Catharinus begins with an accurate summary of Cajetan's remarks, and adds that if the cardinal is right, it follows that the Lord gave them the freedom to reject his interpretation, and thus to be able to believe that what he taught was not so. Catharinus finds this a horrible thought. 'If you wish to accept', he thinks, therefore tends, as Chrysostom explains, to signify that he did not wish to violate the freewill of anyone.⁶² This remark should therefore be understood in the same way as his remark, 'If you wish to enter (eternal) life, keep my commandments', where he did not put it into the liberty of anyone to keep or not to keep his commandments with impunity.

Matthew 23:24 Cajetan describes the 'blind leaders'. He calls the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees leaders of others, the former by their doctrine and the latter by their sanctimony. They are blind in what they do because of their manifest perversity.

'Straining out a gnat' is a metaphor based on drinking. To strain out a gnat is to strain wine in which there is a gnat through a linen cloth, so that the gnat with all its dirtiness remains in the cloth, leaving clean wine for drinking. Here the procedure for avoiding the least dirtiness in a drink is very carefully described, whereas usually, when we see a gnat in a drinking cup, we are content with simply extracting it.

With regard to 'swallowing a camel', a camel and an act of swallowing have nothing in common. The same must be said of the straining out of a gnat and the swallowing of a camel. On this account Cajetan tended to believe that both the Greek and the Latin text had been corrupted with regard to the proper name of the animal. The context of the metaphor required that some large animal be signified which could be swallowed in drinking. Otherwise the metaphor is not in order. These things express in a parable the fact that in drinking in this way, in order to avoid the very slight impurity of the gnat, you strain it out, but then you gulp down – obviously by drinking – a big dirty animal, for example a large fly, which is called in Italian a 'moscone' (bluebottle). If it were called a horsefly in Latin and a gadfly in Greek, we would have a clear sense although the horsefly is not attracted by water or wine but makes the ox restless. Cajetan felt that he could be more certain that what he had said was the literal sense because in that way and not otherwise all things were in

62 Cajetan of course says this, though not in quite the same words.

order, and the perversity of the Scribes and Pharisees in observing the small things and despising the greater ones was directly signified by their careful avoidance of the very small impurity in drinking a gnat, while so to speak swallowing down a horsefly, wasp or bluebottle.

Catharinus dismisses Cajetan's remarks with derision:

We have left an annotation above about the fact that, for 'camel', he gave 'gnat' or 'horsefly'. But there are certain other such things which provoke tears and laughter in me, for I do not understand what he explains about the ornaments of the sepulchres of the prophets, that in decorating them in that way, the Pharisees gave evidence against themselves.⁶³

Catharinus is referring here to Cajetan's commentary on Matthew 23: 31. (It should be noted that the Sorbonne masters did not include Cajetan's commentary on Matthew 23:24 in their censures.)

Mark 1:1–8 Cajetan tells us that although Mark wrote the Gospel in Italy he wrote it in Greek and so the text has been corrected from Greek exemplars. In Greek the title is, 'the Gospel according to Mark', and this should be understood in the same way as the similar title for the Matthew Gospel.

Catharinus points out that (in verse 2) Cajetan prefers to read 'in the Prophets' instead of the Vulgate 'in the Prophet Isaiah', and remarks that, although changes should be avoided wherever possible, especially when the Greek codices vary, Cajetan regularly makes them. Jerome makes no change in Mark 1:2.⁶⁴

*Mark 15:25*⁶⁵ 'It was the third hour and they crucified him'. Cajetan believes that by an error of the scribes, this verse in the Vulgate version is incorrect. According to St. John, Jesus was crucified at the sixth hour,⁶⁶ but in the Gospel of St. Mark, 'the sixth' was changed to 'the third' on account of the similarity of the characters that represent 'trinarium' and 'senarium'. Catharinus claims already to have made an annotation, but he does not say where, on the subject of the third hour, which Cajetan irrationally thinks to be a mistake.⁶⁷

Luke 3:23–38 The Sorbonne Masters did not include this passage in their censures of Cajetan's commentaries. Catharinus however dealt with it not only in the manuscript of 1532, but also twice in the *Annotations* of 1542, most importantly in Book I, that is to say along with his discussions of canonicity, not where he follows

63 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 136–137.

64 Erasmus' 1516 New Testament has 'in the prophets' in both the Greek and the Latin.

65 *Erat autem hora tertia & crucifixerunt eum. Credimus errore scriptorum mutatam sextam in tertiam propter characterum similitudinem designantium trinarium & senarium. Constat enim ex Evangelio Ioannis Iesum crucifixum hora sexta.*

66 John 19:14.

67 Erasmus (1516) keeps 'third' in the text, but states in his annotation that Jerome in his commentary on Ps.77 suggested possible confusion of letters serving as numerals.

Cajetan's verse-by-verse approach in Book III on Luke and John. In Book I, he says that he thought it was intolerable that Cajetan should have admitted the possibility that Luke had added a superfluous generation in the genealogy of Christ.⁶⁸ Cajetan had excused him for doing this because he had followed the Seventy, who were of great authority. Catharinus's response is given first in the form of a rhetorical question. 'Do the authors of the sacred scriptures follow translators?' and then with sarcasm: 'He should have excused the Holy Spirit for allowing his amanuensis to be led by the authority of men and so leave an error in the Gospel'. Did Luke have to follow the Seventy, because he did not know Hebrew? If he did not know Hebrew, the apostles who had seen and approved this Gospel could not have known it either. On the other hand, if the apostles did not approve Luke's Gospel it does not have the authority of scripture. At this point in the *Annotations* 1542, Book I, Catharinus loses his patience. 'This stuff is not worthy of being disputed by catholics.' In Book III Catharinus dryly remarks that he has already made an annotation to the effect that it is not lawful to admit that the genealogy is superfluous, in case we are compelled to admit that there is falsity in the scriptures, which the new masters do not shrink from.

Acts 17:34 Cajetan tells us that 'Areopagite' is the name of a judiciary office. The Areopagites were judges of great authority at Athens with regard to the most important cases, and this Dionysius was of their number. But whether this man was the Dionysius who wrote the books about the divine names, the heavens and the ecclesiastical hierarchy was not certain, both because Jerome (in *De viris illustribus*) does not mention him, and because Gregory in the thirty-third homily about the ten drachma only reports a rumour to the effect that he was the author of those books.

Catharinus records 'with pain' that Cajetan's views – adopted because Jerome failed to mention the Areopagite in *De viris illustribus* – coincide with the views of Erasmus and Luther. Catharinus's first retort is a *tu quoque*: Jerome's books are not mentioned in *De viris illustribus* and they are genuine enough so that criterion fails. Catharinus's next argument is also of a familiar kind: what Jerome says in *De viris illustribus* is offset by his evidence in favour of the Areopagite in *Ad Ruffinum*, written when he was better informed.⁶⁹ Moreover, Origen, on John 1, and after him the Venerable Bede, quote Dionysius the Areopagite and show that he was the author of those books. Further support is provided by the fact that the sixth Synod of Constantinople accepted his testimony from the book about the divine names, and John Damascene also honourably quoted him in an elegant sermon that he gave about those who die in the faith. On the other hand those who are doubtful about Dionysius the Areopagite include Valla, Luther and Erasmus, but the Sorbonne censured this.⁷⁰

68 The generation is the one associated in Luke 3:36 with the 'other' Cain.

69 I have not been able to check that Jerome made a remark to this effect in a letter 'ad Ruffinum'.

70 See the twenty-first censure in the Wittenberg version of the Sorbonne censures.

Philippians 4:3 The problem is the identity of the ‘true yokefellow’. Cajetan points out that in the learned language of the original, the expression can be either masculine or feminine, but that there are three reasons why the feminine reading should be adopted. The first is that two women are mentioned in the previous verse, and the use of the word ‘also’ in verse 3 therefore suggests that the ‘true yokefellow’ is also a woman; and the second is that the use of the personal pronoun picks out a certain person, but who it is not made clear by what follows if the pronoun is read as masculine. But if it is read as feminine, the identity of the person is clear: it is Paul’s wife, for the word used, ‘compar’ in the Latin, is very like ‘coniunx’, a wife, since it means ‘under the same yoke’, and the word that has been translated as ‘germane’ can mean ‘true’ or ‘proper’. The third reason is the injunction to the ‘true yokefellow’ to help the women: it is appropriate for women to be entrusted to a woman.

Paul says, ‘who struggled with me in the Gospel’, meaning women known to Paul’s own wife, who had helped Paul to spread the Gospel. Indeed he had begun at Philippi by converting women, as can be seen in Acts 16.⁷¹

Cajetan tells us that he considered it superfluous in this place to dispute whether Paul had a wife, since he had discovered nothing certain from the other parts of Paul’s epistles. Nevertheless, although it could not be proved, it seemed a reasonable inference from *Philippians 4:3* that Paul had a wife. Not only did many of the Greeks affirm it, but also the letters of Ignatius, if they were credible.

In his Commentaries of 1551,⁷² Catharinus notes that this is the place where some people believe that Paul gave an injunction to his wife, but others reject this and refuse to believe that Paul had a wife. His own opinion is that Paul never had a wife, if he did not have one before his conversion, for when he had the job which he had asked for of spreading the gospel through the whole world it would have been completely foolish to take a wife because it would have militated both against his own teaching and that of Christ if he had taken a wife: none of the apostles and disciples ever contracted marriage after their conversion but renounced the marriages that they had previously contracted. Though Jerome and some of the Latins denied that Paul ever had a wife, some of the early Greeks thought that he did. When such things come from ancient writings, histories and traditions, they should be accepted. Catharinus does not think that there is any written evidence for the view that Paul did not have a wife, even if this is claimed on the basis of 1 *Corinthians 7*. Indeed he thinks that the opposite is the case, provided we are not stubborn and too hard. The expression ‘true yokefellow’ in Greek plainly means ‘wife’; and the injunction to help those who laboured in the gospel with women’s duties is appropriate to a woman, not a man. Moreover there are some old traditions that declare that this is the case: the Epistle of St. Ignatius, and the Revelations of St. Brigit. It is remarkable that some people vigorously contend that this should not be conceded because it would favour the new heretics. In fact, it would not only not favour them but even rebut them, since it plainly appears from the Apostle’s own testimony in 1 *Corinthians 7* that even when his wife was alive he counted himself among the widowers. And chapter 9 shows that he did not take her around as his companion in the same way as

71 Acts 16:11–15.

72 Commentaries 1551, pp. 342–3.

some of the other apostles did. He called his wife his sister. It could easily be the case that he never touched her. It should only be said that there was no use for marriage in the Apostolate, but that both, as if each had been a widower, observed the Gospel as was right. He says that the women assisted the work, or rather strove in the gospel, or for the gospel.

1 Peter 3:19–20 Cajetan's understanding of this text is that that Christ descended in the spirit to the lower world, and preached to the souls of those who were incredulous in the days of Noah. They pleased God because they trusted in God's patience. The preaching was fruitful to them, but it is not said how.

Catharinus rejects this interpretation as a fabrication: those who did not believe Noah likewise did not believe God, who spoke through the mouth of the prophet, and was just. Nor would patience help them: penitence was required. Therefore St. Augustine, produced another interpretation to the effect that St. Peter meant the preaching that Christ had done through the mouthpiece of the prophets – Noah in particular – before his coming. Here, therefore, St. Peter wanted to show a special characteristic of God, that he never dismissed the world without the law and the news of the law, so that he could afterwards rightly judge the incredulous, and save those who believed. The problem is that in 1 Peter 3:19–20 it is said that Christ preached to the spirits and, if Peter were right, this would be virtually the only case in the whole of the scriptures where men still alive are called spirits. An alternative view is therefore that Christ preached to the lower regions when after his own death he was there visiting the faithful. Here it is said that he addressed those who were incredulous in the days of Noah, and so perished in the body, but repented of their perfidy and received faith and grace together. The Lord preached to them so that they might recognise the Saviour whom they had not known while they were alive. Catharinus thought that this explanation had much to recommend it. But the remark about longing for the patience of God seemed inappropriate. However, the Greek – 'When once the patience of God was longed for &c' – could be interpreted in another way so as to refer to Noah and his sons. Again, St. Augustine read the same text as referring to the patience of God: he was expecting or waiting for their conversion up to a time that had been fixed in advance. There is only one apparent objection to this interpretation: since this preaching is appropriate to many others who were found in the same case, e.g. those who perished by fire in Sodom, it seems remarkable that mention is only made of those who lived in the time of Noah. Now the acute reader should consider and reflect on another place in the following chapter where the same thing and the same difficulty seemed to be dealt with.⁷³

Not all the annotations in the 'Miscellaneous' section are of the same importance. In one of them – the annotation on Matthew 23:24 – Catharinus exposes no serious

73 The reference is to 1 Peter 4:6, where Catharinus in the 'Commentaries' makes the point.

contravention of the principles of traditional catholicism, but merely derides Cajetan's painstaking attempt to sort out the metaphor involved. In another – that on Philippians 4:3 – he seems largely to agree with Cajetan's views. In a third – 1 Peter 3:19–20 – he corrects, without any display of serious animus, an interpretation of a passage that Augustine himself had found obscure. Nevertheless, for the most part, he is still busily engaged in defending what he had defended in the letter to Clement VII in 1532: 'those things which are most certain to all who are truly catholics'. This leads him to make some sharp remarks about Cajetan's propensity to side with Valla, Erasmus and Luther in spite of the views of Origen and the Venerable Bede, for example (Acts 17:34); to fiddle about with small sections of the Vulgate text (Mark 1:1–8); to suggest that some part of the scripture is false (Luke 3:23–38); and to imply that the Lord's teaching could be false (Matthew 11:14).

Catharinus's Extension of the Case against Cajetan

It has been assumed that Catharinus's replies to Cajetan's commentaries on the disputed texts provide the closest approximation available to us of what in the early 1530s the Dominican critique of the Commentaries of the great cardinal amounted to. There is no reason to challenge this assumption, but it is obvious that Catharinus's views could not have fully coincided with those of the Sorbonne masters. The divergences occur with regard to interpretation and not the canon. With regard to interpretation, they are quite striking. For instance, Catharinus actually agrees with Cajetan on 1 Philippians 4:3; and there are six other passages picked out by the Sorbonne on which he offers no comment.⁷⁴ The only conclusion to be drawn from this evidence is that, in spite of his admiration for 'the mother and foster-son of all good letters', he was not wholly in agreement with her as far as Cajetan was concerned. Here a reminder of Catharinus's uneasy relationship with the Dominican Order as a whole is appropriate. Though he was prepared to appeal to one part of the Order in his disputes with another, there was a sense in which, after his novitiate, he tended to be critical of the Order as a whole.⁷⁵ Father Mortier, in his *Histoire des Maîtres-Généraux de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, records the famous bon-mot at Catharinus's expense: 'he had nothing of the Dominican save the habit he was dressed in'.⁷⁶ It is not just that Catharinus did not agree with the Sorbonne Masters even on what the most flagrant deviations from exegetical orthodoxy were. He went far beyond the Sorbonne critique in raising issues on which the Paris Masters, the reputed champions of orthodoxy, were to remain permanently silent. The following

74 Matthew 19:9; Mark 8:34–38; Mark 10:8; John 20:23; 1 Corinthians 14:4 and the Preface to the Psalms. In 1535 he had annotated at least the last of these [*Annotations* 1535, pp. 87–88].

75 It is astonishing how much of Catharinus's literary activity is devoted to attacking fellow members of the Dominican Order, e.g. Sibylla, Savonarola, Cajetan, Carranza, De Soto, and Spina.

76 D.A. Mortier (1911), *Histoire des Maîtres-Généraux de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, Vol. V., p. 451.

places are the ones in the extended critique to which, judging by the length of Catharinus's annotations, he attached most importance.

Matthew

2:1–10. *The star in the East.* Catharinus complains that Cajetan prefers his view (it was not a real star, but just looked like one, its purpose being to show where the infant Christ was. It did not come from the East) to that of the church (It did come from the East, and it did not only indicate where the infant Christ was: it showed that the prophecy of Balaam was now fulfilled). According to Catharinus, Cajetan contradicts himself, the deserved fate 'of those who depart so easily from the opinions of the Fathers and the church'.

4:18–22. *The calling of Peter and Andrew, James and John.* (cf. Luke 5:11) Cajetan argues that that the Evangelist did not say 'they left everything', but 'they left their nets'. Hence they did not give up the ownership of the property: they expressed the readiness of their obedience. Catharinus remarks that this:

is certainly very powerful doctrine, and contrary to all the catholic doctors, favouring the heretics to the destruction of religion; and finally contrary to the Gospel, because Luke says (Luke 5) "having left everything, they followed him".

Catharinus also notes the connection between this text and the monastic vow of poverty, and seems to object to Cajetan's view, because it threatens the biblical basis of this vow.

5:3–11. *The poor in spirit.* Cajetan's question is why Jesus calls the poor in spirit blessed, while he himself could not have been poor since, *inter alia*, he was able to give alms to the poor. Catharinus's point is that because these remarks detract from the state of the mendicants, they are to be treated in accordance with their merits as an injury against the doctrine of the saints and holy church.

5:17–20. *Christ has not come to destroy the law or the prophets.* Catharinus, taking Cajetan as suggesting that Christ did dissolve the law, though not during his lifetime on earth, denies that this is the case: the dissolution of the ceremonies and judgments of the law was not the dissolution of the law.

6:14. *Forgiving men their trespasses.* Cajetan produces a novel interpretation of this passage whereby God's forgiveness of a man who forgives another is indirect and prospective not retrospective. It is indirect because, by God's efficacy, the conversion of the merciful sinner intervenes to generate penitence, and forgiveness of the sins committed against God thereby ensues. Catharinus's ironical comment is that this introduces 'new and abominable dogma ... it is very remarkable that this revelation of the Lord's in the Gospel, so plain and at such a time, should have been hidden from the church'.

13:13. *Speaking in parables.* The parable of the sower is a verification of Psalm 78, verse 2.⁷⁷ The question is whether the parable should be interpreted as a metaphor or a simile. Is Christ metaphorically (that is, in Catharinus's parlance, mystically) the sower or is he only like the sower. Because Cajetan is committed to literal interpretation, he opts for the latter. Catharinus thereupon concludes by what seems to be a startling non-sequitur: that Cajetan must suppose that Asaph, the author of Psalm 78, is speaking about himself when he says in verse 1, 'Give ear O my people to my law', and this is absurd, for the people were never his.

15:2. *The disciples and the practice of washing of the hands.* The first point made against Cajetan is that he does not prove his claim that the problem as far as the Pharisees were concerned was not that the disciples did not wash their hands at all, but that they did not wash their hands more frequently before lunch. The gospel simply says that they did not wash their hands when they ate bread. The second point is much wider. It is concerned with the commands of men. Are these to be obeyed or not? Cajetan thinks that they are, for it is better to obey the commands of men as well as those of God, rather than to obey God's commands only. Catharinus's point is that some commands of some men should not be obeyed, but that the commands of men who are prelates certainly should. 'If they are good, the commands of the church are to be considered as being in the same rank as those of God himself to the extent that they likewise bind under the penalty of eternal damnation, as St. Thomas proves in many places.'

19:5. *Leaving father and mother and cleaving to one's wife.* Cajetan argues that God not only instituted marriage but also the categories of persons who could enter into that relationship, as we see in Matthew 19:5, where the mother is excluded as far as her son is concerned, and the father as far as his daughter is concerned. Catharinus takes this as a restrictive stipulation, so that all others except mother and father are possible marriage partners. He consequently describes this as bestial doctrine.

19:11. *'All men cannot receive this saying'.* Cajetan explains the Lord's remark by a remark of his own: 'to live in the flesh apart from the flesh is not common'. Nor is it possible by will power or effort. It comes only from God's compassion. Catharinus, presumably because he senses some threat to the monastic vow of chastity, though he does not say this, argues to the contrary, but on the rather weak grounds that Jerome and Cyprian thought otherwise.

19:21. *Being perfect and following Christ.* Cajetan first calls attention to the difference between wishing to enter (monastic) life and wishing to be perfect:

To the one wishing to enter the life, it is said, "Keep the commands to which divine law has obliged you." To the man wishing for perfection, it is said, "Sell all things &c", that is, "Keep the counsels of poverty, mercy and my follower". Next he emphasises that Jesus makes no mention of a vow for the man who wishes to pursue the life of perfection. The

77 'I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old.'

reason is that the pursuit of perfection consists in works, not in the bonds of vows. Then follows an acid criticism: 'Infinite is the number of those today who acquire the state of perfection by professing the vows of religion, but rare are those who wish to be perfect by imitating Jesus Christ in deeds of humility, patience, gentleness, charity &c.

Catharinus sees these remarks as sympathetic to the doctrine of Luther and Erasmus. He therefore condemns them. His argument is first that Augustine, Gregory and Thomas are against Cajetan; and secondly that Cajetan contradicts himself, for he had made what was tantamount to a different claim elsewhere.

Mark

6:8–9: *What to take on the journey.* Cajetan first notes two discrepancies between the accounts of Mark and Matthew of the same event. In Matthew 10:10, the disciples are told not to take a staff; in Mark 6:8, they are told to take only a staff; in Matthew 10:9, they are told not to take shoes, and in Mark 6:9, they are told to be 'furnished with sandals'. Cajetan resolves these discrepancies in the following way. The disciples are not to use a staff for defence, but they can use it for support while walking. Again, Christ did not make the disciples sell their shoes and buy sandals since care about the style of shoes, clothes, coverings of any kind is totally at odds with the Gospel teaching. Concern with things of this kind is indeed unworthy of so great a teacher. He never gave such a command. He never gave a command about the colour, quantity or the style of clothes; nothing about the beard or the hair; and nothing about any bodily things of this kind, which are things of no importance. The same goes for food and drink. In this way we know that he was God who made all things; all things serve him; nothing displeases him. He gave laws to all the nations in the world that suited everything and everybody. But Catharinus is not impressed by this poetic outburst. He first argues that there is scriptural warrant for concern about clothing, for instance in Paul and Isaiah,⁷⁸ though the instances that he gives, e.g. Isaiah on women's ornaments, might easily be used to support Cajetan's argument. He then tries the notion of decorum. But the whole of his long argument is unconvincing. What may well be its point is suggested by his reference to the 'new heretics', who 'wickedly and impiously mix these things up'. In other words, Catharinus's real anxiety is about monastic dress and tonsure on the one hand, and about vestments and ecclesiastical ornaments on the other.

Luke

1:48. *The doxology.* The first point is about the meaning of the Greek word that is translated into Latin as 'humilitas'. Cajetan thinks that it is not the virtue of mind that we call 'humility', but rather 'smallness' or 'lowness' so that the meaning is that the Lord deigned to look at her smallness, or baseness, or lowness. What happened was that the theologians usurped the word 'humilitas' to apply it to the virtue of mind. Here the virtue of humility is not exercised by the use of the voice: it is the inner

78 See Isaiah 3:18–24.

act of thinking or acknowledging that she is small, low &c. This is more consonant with her humility than to sing that her humility was seen by God, for it resounds to her own merit that God regarded her: this is not what humility is. Her humility was the humility of a humble heart exercised in action. She thinks of herself as of no merit and of no virtue. She does not pretend, for she considers herself as she is in herself, and not from the point of view of the gifts of God in her. Catharinus replies by claiming first that Cajetan is wrong about the meaning to be attached to the Greek words *tapeinōsis*; second that Cajetan is wrong in thinking that the Lord esteemed and rewarded Mary considered as she was without the gifts of God within her because in that state she was nothing and so unworthy of a reward; thirdly, that she was in fact rewarded for exercising the virtue of humility; and lastly that Mary was able humbly to proclaim that her virtues were respected by the Lord, since she did it in the spirit, out of charity, to the glory and praise of God, and for the stimulation and edification of others. Catharinus was perhaps induced to defend the Virgin by his well-known devotion to her.

10:8. *What to eat in the city.* Cajetan claims that, by the remark ‘Eat what is put in front of you’, Jesus prohibited no kind of food. Here again Catharinus reads this remark as favouring the heretics. He claims that in the scriptures, Christ only ate meat at the Passover, and then only to observe the old mystery. Otherwise, we read that they ate either fish, or the fruits of the earth. Christ indeed never says that meat is prohibited except at the Passover, but the life of the saints is the interpretation of the scriptures. In other words, ‘do as I do’, not ‘do as I say’. It is true that what enters the mouth does not pollute the soul. But what comes out of the mouth does. And what comes out of the mouth in this case – criticism of Mother Church, who has always warned us to abstain from certain foods – is wicked. This is a perverse argument and Catharinus must have been hard pressed to defend his position if he had to resort to such.

12:6–7, 22–30. *Divine providence.* It is difficult to understand why Catharinus wrote such a long annotation on Cajetan’s commentary on these verses. Cajetan points out that divine providence extends to single individuals. Christians should not doubt this although philosophers do not believe this. Catharinus’s point is that some philosophers do believe it and quotes Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book X to prove it. He implies that all philosophers ought to believe it. Why is this important? Not, probably, because Catharinus enjoys taking a point against one of the great philosophers of the early sixteenth century. From what Catharinus says – his argument is very ragged at this point – it seems that he is pointing out the social consequences (vice and crime) of two beliefs which the philosophers might encourage, firstly the belief that there is no divine providence; and secondly, the belief that the soul is mortal,⁷⁹ so that there is no life after death, and therefore no purgatory and no hell-fire.

⁷⁹ Catharinus says, ‘For how much harm do we think he did, and to how many when he taught that in Aristotle the soul is mortal?’ The immortality of the soul became an important

John

4:8. *The disciples go into the city to buy food.*⁸⁰ The problem here as far as Catharinus is concerned is the inferences that Cajetan draws from the fact that the disciples went into the city to buy food. First he infers that Christ was not a beggar; and then that he had property, but not personal property: his property was held in common with that of the disciples. Therefore possession of private property does not infringe the claim to lead the life of perfection. Catharinus makes short work of this view by pointing out that it is possible to beg the money and then use it to buy food, as Dominicans do.

11:1, 2, 15. *Martha and Mary.* Catharinus begins by mocking Cajetan's way of proving which of the two sisters was the elder. Then he takes issue with Cajetan's claim that the Mary mentioned here is the sinner who anointed Christ's feet in Luke 7:38, that is Mary Magdalen. Catharinus's argument is somewhat tangled. One of the main strands in it is that 'Jerome, Chrysostom and many others' have thought otherwise.

In verse 15, ('And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there ...') the question is whether Cajetan is right in supposing that the Lord could not mean that he wanted them to believe that he was not bodily there, because they already knew that. Catharinus's point is twofold: first that the Lord wanted them to know not that he was not there in the body, but that he was not there in his power and efficacy; second, the joy of the Lord was not principally because he had not been there, but because Lazarus was dead so that he could exercise the virtue of raising him, and thus they would believe that he was the resurrection and the life.

12:1–9. *Mary anoints Christ's feet, Judas rebukes her, but Christ restrains him.* Cajetan explains that Mary had acted as if the day concerned was the day of the Lord's burial, in other words in humanity and piety, not for any sensual gratification that the anointing might produce, as Judas supposed. But he leaves some doubt as to whether she had intended this to be her last service to the Lord. Catharinus gives a very long explanation of this incident, which is not at odds with that of Cajetan, but suggests that Mary had believed that Christ would be killed by the Jews, and anticipated the day of his burial by anointing him there and then, in case she could not perform the act on his dead body on account of the malice of his enemies.

15:13. '*Greater love than this hath no man ...*' The question is whether this text has any implication for the duties of a Christian man. We are required to love our enemies, do good to them, pray for them and so forth. Are we required to die for them? Cajetan thinks not. Although loving, your enemy, doing good to him, and praying for him can be referred to nature and the hope of blessedness, Christ does

topic of early sixteenth-century debate after Pomponazzi had argued in 1516 that it cannot be established by Aristotelian arguments. Cajetan became involved in this debate.

80 This annotation is actually short, but the place has importance on account of its connection with mendicancy.

not ask any man actually to die for his enemies as a requirement of love. Catharinus however claims that we are required to lay down our lives for our enemies, ‘just as Paul declares in Romans 5’ (presumably verse 7). Since Catharinus adds in a reference to those men who did die for their enemies – the saints and martyrs whom he thinks are like Christ (but of course under Christ) and calls gods and the sons of God – he may be thinking of the church’s treasury of merits, a doctrine which the Reformers, the ‘new heretics’, rejected.

18:21. *The chief priest asks Christ about his teaching, and Christ refers him to those who heard this teaching.* For Cajetan the point is first Christ’s puzzlement about why he is being asked when there are so many readily available witnesses of what he had said. When Christ knows why they are asking and what they are asking for, what he should answer would be clear to him. Cajetan’s second point is that Christ refers the chief priest to those who had heard what was said, because he did not wish to be a witness in the cause of his own teaching. Catharinus rejects this explanation and supposes rather that Christ refused to reply to malicious questions intended to trick him into saying something against the Law or against Caesar.

18:25–27. *Peter denies Christ again, and the cock crows.* How many times did Peter deny Christ? Cajetan says, ‘Seven’,⁸¹ but Christ says ‘Three’. Cajetan tries to resolve the discrepancy by arguing that one who denies seven times necessarily denies three times. Catharinus is incensed to see Cajetan contradicting Christ.

19:6–7. *Pilate finds no fault in Christ, whom he returns to the chief priests for crucifixion.* The problem is a problem about what Cajetan said in the *Ientacula*, not about what he said in the *Commentaries*. In the *Ientacula* Cajetan asked why the priests refused to judge and crucify Christ when Pilate referred the case to them. Cajetan answers by saying that the priests never refused to sentence Christ to death, but refused to sentence him to a lighter sentence than death. They did not have the power to sentence him to death, since the Romans had taken it away from them. They therefore said, ‘We are not allowed to kill anyone’. The implication is, ‘You kill him, because we cannot’. A further point concerns the law to which the priests refer in verse 7. Was this the law of Moses? Cajetan thinks not. The Jews were under two laws. One of them was the law of Moses, which had been limited by the Romans. The other was the law in accordance with the treaties that the Jews had with the Romans. Cajetan thinks that the Jews were referring to the latter. With regard to the question of the law, Catharinus argues that the law of the Jews was the law of Moses and not the treaty that they had with the Romans, for the treaty that they had with the Romans was not their law but the law of many peoples who were subject to the Romans. Properly speaking it was not a law but a treaty, pact or condition. With regard to the question of referring the case back to the Jews, Catharinus thinks that Cajetan is wrong here firstly because Pilate had no power to reject the case, and secondly the Jews had no power to accept it. The Jews therefore rejected the offer lest Caesar should rebuke them for having dared to act against the treaty. Pilate did

81 Cajetan probably derives this total from a conflation of the four gospel accounts.

not refer the case to them because he wanted to send them what was Caesar's, but so as to distance himself from those irksome men, and not himself be compelled to condemn an innocent man. Catharinus is presumably satisfied with what Cajetan says in the Commentaries, since he does not refer to it in the *Annotations*.

19:11. *Christ on Pilate's power*. What is implied by 'You have no power against me save what has been given to you from above'? Does the Lord in these words admit his own freedom from all sin, even original sin, as Cajetan claims, though not in the *Commentaries*? Cajetan's argument, as Catharinus gives it in the *Annotations*, where he describes it as a new doctrine, is as follows. There are two reasons why men have someone higher as a judge over them. Firstly, God ordered it so, in accordance with the dictum, 'All power is from God'. Secondly, man has a superior as judge over him as a result of sin, for sin made man punishable by man. (The argument here is apparently the familiar one to the effect that sin was the origin of the power of the state: fallen man was vicious and could only be kept under control by punishment or the threat of it.) Christ was not subjected to a superior judge for the second of the two reasons given, because he was not subject to sin. Therefore he was subject only to God's judgment. In summary then, when Christ says to Pilate, 'You could have no power against me at all if it were not given to you from above', is tantamount to saying that Christ had no sin, not even original sin, for otherwise Pilate would have had power over him. Cajetan's conclusion therefore seems to be valid. Even though Catharinus has described it as new doctrine, he has no objection to it. After all, all it shows is Christ affirming one aspect of his divine nature to which all Christians assent anyway. The affirmation is the only novel element.

How though do we deal with the next bit about the greater sin of 'the one who handed me over to you'? Catharinus here complains that on this subject, Cajetan offers words rather than anything of substance. The previous argument about Christ's freedom from all sin, including original sin, does not show that Pilate's sin is any less than that of the man who handed Christ over. In fact, Pilate's sin should be the heavier, because the fault of the man who has power and abuses it is greater than that of the private citizen, as Aristotle says in the *Ethics*. Cajetan deals with this problem by saying that those who handed Christ over to Pilate, were those who were foremost in instigating the crime. But even if we agreed with this point, Catharinus continues, it is not a point that can be inferred from the words in John 19:11: 'you would have no power over me unless it were given to you from above.' The holy doctors likewise have this problem when they give a better version of the point that Cajetan makes by adding that not only was Pilate not the instigator of the crime, he was against it. He tried to get Christ released, and told the Jews on many occasions that Christ was innocent. The chief instigators were Judas and the chief priests, who were moved by malice, cupidity and envy. Though this is better, it still does not follow from the words in John 19:11. Since there are however those who believe that it does, Catharinus examines what they say. They accept that the Jews were forbidden to kill, not only by natural law, but *a fortiori* by divine law. Moreover, not killing was mandatory for them in the case of Christ. They should have heard him, and not only not have killed him but rather have received him with honour and obedience, because he was not a gentile and he was not under the bond of the law. Pilate was

permitted to kill Christ, not only because the Lord did not resist his power, but also because he was under no special prohibition to prevent him from killing him. The Jewish people who handed him over were not permitted to kill Christ, both because of the law of Moses, and because of what Christ had said. Their sin was therefore the greater, because Pilate did have the power given by God. There is however a final variation to consider. There are some who say that 'He who handed me over to you has the greater sin', refers to Judas. Judas has the greater sin, because God allowed Pilate to abuse his power over Christ. If God had not given him this power, his sin would not have been less than that of Judas.

19:19. *'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'*. According to Cajetan, no Christian would believe that Christ was crucified for this reason if Pilate had not testified that this was so by displaying a public notice. Likewise no Christian would believe that Jesus had not used human ingenuity to secure the leadership unless Herod and Pilate had testified with their deeds of derision and mockery that what Jesus had done for his kingdom turned out on examination to be farcical, because it was in no way to be depended on. What Pilate did therefore showed that he thought that Jesus was a fool. Catharinus has 12 ways of showing that Cajetan must be wrong in supposing this. For instance, on examination this supposition is not consistent with the kind of explanation that Cajetan had given of John 19:11. In the first place, if Pilate thought that Christ was innocent and wanted to discharge him, how could he suppose that Christ had claimed for himself either a human or a divine kingdom? Secondly, Pilate calls Christ a just man; but this is not consistent with thinking that he was a fool, for folly and fatuity are not associated with justice, especially the fatuity that leads someone to seek a kingdom. Then Catharinus takes another tack and argues that Pilate really did think that Christ was the King of the Jews. How therefore does he think that a man who he openly admits is a king is a fool? Again, how can Pilate think that Jesus is a fool when on his account the Romans were terrified and his wife suffered greatly in a dream? Catharinus next turns to what Cajetan had said about the scourging of Christ:⁸² that Pilate thought that Christ was to be scourged so that he could be dismissed after he had been punished for the reason given, i.e. his fatuity (as Pilate believed) and the malice that the Jews objected against him. This, thinks Catharinus, is inconsistent with the Gospel according to St. Mark. Pilate had Christ scourged for no other reason than to satisfy the people and to glut their fury, but he could not glut it without Christ's death on the Cross. He testified several times that Christ was wholly innocent, and all the Holy Doctors that Catharinus had read – men whose opinions and words it is irksome to quote – had interpreted it thus. But Cajetan protests that he is using his freedom in this and does not want to be obliged to the comments of men. Finally, Pilate's letters to Tiberius Caesar, which are recorded in the ecclesiastical history and which testify to Christ's marvellous deeds and divinity show that Pilate did not consider Jesus a fool. But it is otherwise with regard to Herod, who expected signs to be given and wondered at Christ's unbroken silence in his presence. He scorned him and mocked him. But the Gospel does not say that he considered a fool a man about whom he had heard such things, but he

82 See Matthew 27:26.

scorned him because of his indignation. He felt indignant, because he felt scorned by Christ's silence, as though Christ were mocking him because he considered him to be unworthy of being in the presence of one who made signs. But if we say with Chrysostom, Augustine and the others that Pilate recognised the Lord's innocence, our account of Pilate is far truer and far more consistent with the literal interpretation of the Gospel.

Pilate wrote Christ's title and placed it above the Cross, first to make a response on behalf of Christ, so as to distinguish him from the thieves, and secondly to take revenge on the Jews by showing their malice in their rebellion against their Lord. He did not wish to change this title even when he was afterwards urged to do so by the Jews, because, as Chrysostom says, he did not change his mind. And a certain hidden voice within Pilate 'resounded so to speak, with a clamorous silence'. There was a prophecy to this effect in the Psalms: 'Do not corrupt the inscription of the title'.⁸³

Conclusion to the section on Catharinus's extension of the case against Cajetan

No more is needed to show the power and range of Catharinus's critique of Cajetan's Bible Commentaries both when he examines propositions to which the Sorbonne Masters had objected, and when he senses danger in propositions that they must have considered innocuous.⁸⁴ His survey of the dangers implicit in Cajetan's commentaries is presented in summary form in the following section, which shows, first the fundamental error in which, in Catharinus's opinion, they all originate, and secondly the means which Catharinus adopts to drive his message home.

Catharinus's Case against Cajetan: An Overview

Taken together, Catharinus's annotations constitute a *vade mecum* of the pitfalls that a Dominican – or anyone – intent on reading the work of the great Cardinal should beware of. There is nevertheless logic implicit in the mass of details with which Catharinus confronts the reader: his censures are not just a random collection of *ad hominem* accusations. It is possible to show that they all derive from one basic fault, the fault, that is, that Catharinus had emphasised in his 1532 letter to Clement VII, had emphasised again in the Preface to the 1535 *Annotations*, and is still harping on here in the 1542 version: 'believing other than the church believes'; departing 'from the meaning of the Holy Doctors and the catholic Church itself'; and explanation of the scriptures 'by the private desire of some man'. In other words Catharinus condemns the very search for new meanings independently discovered – 'novelty' – to which Cajetan dedicates himself in the Preface to the Five Mosaic Books. Because he, like Erasmus and Luther, maintains his own view against what other interpreters say, he explores 'the Ordinances of God most high' 'trusting in men and

83 Catharinus does not give the reference to the Psalm in question.

84 To admit the power and range of Catharinus's critique of Cajetan's Bible Commentaries is neither to state nor to suggest that Catharinus somehow refuted Cajetan, though he certainly produced a series of convincing objections to some of the things that he said.

in his own natural capacities'.⁸⁵ Self-reliance here is of course a form of pride, but it is also a form of stupidity, for the 'ordinances of God most high' are supernatural and divine. How can fallen men relying on their natural capacities aspire so high? The other interpreters whom Cajetan rejects are the spokesmen of the church, a divine institution, which authorises and guarantees what they say. Cajetan repeats his mistake when, for the wording and meaning of the Old Testament, he relied on rabbis and not on the church.⁸⁶ Four disastrous consequences follow directly from this independence and self-reliance, this search for novelty: he introduces new and unheard of doctrine, he contradicts himself, he perverts the Word of Christ, and he makes himself vulnerable to the influence of the heretics. The first of these stems from his fundamental commitment: what he looks for he finds.⁸⁷ Self-contradiction, however, is the deserved fate of those who depart from the opinions of the Fathers and the church. The accusation of self-contradiction is very common in the 1542 *Annotations*.⁸⁸ The expression 'Inconstantia doctrinae' occurs as a marginal note 54 times, and there are at least two other occasions in which the accusation is made in the text without a corresponding marginal note. What it amounts to is that Cajetan says one thing in the *Commentaries* and something entirely opposed to it either in another of his works or else at another place in the *Commentaries* themselves. The implication is that you do not know where you stand with this man. He is not only unreliable: he confuses his reader, who must be absolutely clear about his doctrinal commitments, particularly at a time when the influence of the heretics was at work even in the church itself and when the Roman Inquisition had been reconstituted to extirpate it. 1542, the year in which Catharinus, the foremost anti-Lutheran polemicist of his day, chose to republish his attack on Cajetan in an improved and expanded form, was the year of the apostasy and flight of Bernardino Ochino, General of the Capuchin Order, and of Peter Martyr Vermigli, prior of a house of Lateran canons in Lucca, both of whom were strongly influenced by the heretic Juan de Valdes, who, it was later thought, 'had corrupted all Italy'.⁸⁹ Catharinus seems to assume that there is no possibility that similar contradictions and potential confusions could be found in the doctrine of the church: that is why it is dangerous to step outside it. Because Cajetan wilfully steps outside the received teaching of the church, he himself is vulnerable to the influence of the heretics, in particular Erasmus and Luther. These 'new masters' do not hesitate to say that there is some untruth in the scriptures, a view that Catharinus totally rejects, as can be seen from the *Claves Duae* of 1543.⁹⁰ The scriptures are divinely inspired and are not therefore susceptible of error. Cajetan however changes the text, imposes his own meaning on it, in spite of the text itself and what other interpreters have said, he 'twists' the letter, and concerns himself

85 See *Claves Duae*, p. 63.

86 *Annotations* 1542, p. 152.

87 See e.g. *Annotations* 1542, pp. 77, 96, 98, 262.

88 Notice that although the *Annotations* on the *Commentaries* of Cajetan are restricted to the New Testament, Catharinus nevertheless shows an inconstancy in doctrine by referring to Cajetan's *Commentary* on Deuteronomy. *Annotations* 1542, p. 196.

89 See M. Firpo (1993), *Riforma. Protestante ed eresie nell'Italia del Cinquecento*, Roma-Bari, p. 129.

90 *Claves Duae*, p. 16.

too much with single words. Catharinus tersely dismisses this as futile. 'So you see everywhere this man's attempt to bring about what all hell, the world and human power cannot (bring about), because this is the word of Christ, which will endure forever'.⁹¹

'Going it alone', however, means cutting yourself off from institutional criticism and brotherly admonition. When others do not criticize him, he fails to criticize himself. Hence he lapses into error. Catharinus is his self-appointed critic. No doubt he enjoyed pointing out the factual mistakes,⁹² the bungled arguments,⁹³ the pedantic points that have no real significance,⁹⁴ the useless comments,⁹⁵ and the failure to remain with the literal sense where the literal sense is entirely appropriate.⁹⁶

But the effects of his commitment to novelty do not remain with Cajetan alone. He endangers the church by subverting first its doctrine⁹⁷ and then its liturgy.⁹⁸ He weakens the position of the papacy.⁹⁹ He undermines the faith by making philosophical claims,¹⁰⁰ encourages wrong and persistence in sin,¹⁰¹ and is an ineffective enemy of the heretics.¹⁰²

This ruthless exposé of the horrifying consequences of thinking for oneself rather than thinking with the church does not depend solely on reason for its impact on its audience. But reason is the main weapon: he shows why Cajetan's misinterpretations are indeed misinterpretations. Examples of his efficiency in this demolition work have already been given, though it has to be admitted that he is not always either clear or convincing in what he says. Nor are all his many very detailed objections about particular points equally significant. Perhaps this occasional lapse into pedantry is the consequence of his method: he subjects Cajetan's text to very close reading¹⁰³ to expose logical flaws – inconsistencies, contradictions, and non-sequiturs.¹⁰⁴ But he is also quite willing to take on Cajetan on his own ground. Sometimes he uses the

91 *Annotations* 1542, p. 79.

92 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 196–7, 205.

93 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 98, 99, 168–9, 170, 171–2, 172, 175–180, 202, 203, 218, 225.

94 *Annotations* 1542, p. 167 [on how to translate 'dung'].

95 *Annotations* 1542, p. 157, line 7.

96 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 99–100, 170. In the *Claves Duae*, 1543, Catharinus affirms as a methodological principle that the literal sense must be used wherever it does not result in nonsense, vacuity or triviality.

97 See e.g. *Annotations* 1542, pp 262ff on the Trinity.

98 *Annotations* 1542, p. 33 ['I have likewise annotated that the story of the adulteress in John, which St Ambrose testifies was always sung in the church and the whole has accepted it until now, is with injury called into doubt.'], 196 [with regard to Cajetan's case for external prayer].

99 *Annotations* 1542, p. 174.

100 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 162–7.

101 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 97, 164.

102 *Annotations* 1542, p. 202.

103 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 75–6.

104 For examples of non-sequiturs, see *Annotations* 1542, pp. 84, 99. For other failures of logic see pp. 105–6, 157, 159.

Greek text against Cajetan.¹⁰⁵ He even corrects Cajetan on what the Greek means,¹⁰⁶ which suggests, intriguingly, that Catharinus, the ex-humanist who could even show that his opponent was wrong by using a classical source to confute him,¹⁰⁷ was a better Greek scholar than the scholastic Cajetan. And at least once Catharinus uses the Hebraic verity against Cajetan,¹⁰⁸ though it is not known whether Catharinus was competent in Hebrew. But his approach is not merely negative and destructive. One way in which he sometimes works is by giving his own interpretation of a contested passage after he has exposed Cajetan's misinterpretations.¹⁰⁹ This method looks forward to the method of Biblical commentary and explanation that is demonstrated at length in the *Enarrationes in Quinque Priora Capita Geneseos*,¹¹⁰ 1551. Another way, entirely appropriate for one who proudly proclaims, 'I follow the judgment of the church'¹¹¹ and relies therefore on tradition and the Fathers, the ancient doctors and the saints,¹¹² is to support himself by the quotation of authorities, or as he sometimes says, 'a cloud of witnesses'.¹¹³ On one occasion he even ventured an intriguing principle of interpretation: 'the life of the saints is the interpretation of the scriptures,¹¹⁴ but unfortunately did not pursue it. But whichever method of confuting Cajetan he chose, his basic instinct is always to protect the doctrines and the practices of the church. Thus, for example, on the question of vows,¹¹⁵ it is plain that if Cajetan is correct – that the perfection of the Christian life does not consist in the bond of vows, but in works – the monastic life has lost its foundation, for as Catharinus says,¹¹⁶ 'it is clear that poverty, continence and obedience pertain to the perfection of the Christian life and so the state of religion requires that one is bound to these three things by a vow'. In pursuit of the same end, he defends the *Ecclesiastica hierarchia*¹¹⁷ a work that commends the state of the religious and the profession of the vow, as being by Dionysius the Areopagite. 'Consequently it is no wonder that the apostates deny that this book is by Dionysius the Areopagite,

105 *Annotations* 1542, p. 189, on Matthew 18:4, and p. 189 on John 1.

106 *Annotations* 1542, p. 199.

107 *Annotations* 1542, p. 158 [the reference is to Aeneas]

108 *Annotations* 1524 [see Matthew 18:20].

109 See e.g. *Annotations* 1542, pp. 174–87 [on Luke 22:35–36]; and pp. 207–218 [on John 12:3–9] in which it is also interesting that he seems to be providing a biblical foundation for that doctrine of works that says that one is justified if one does all that it is in one to do, as Mary did the best thing that she could do by anointing Christ's body, even though it was far short of what Christ deserved.]

110 'Enarratio' means 'a full explanation, description, interpretation'. In other words it is a method of thick description.

111 p. 118.

112 p. 226.

113 See e.g. *Annotations* 1542, pp. 27, 67, 71, 81–2 [on mendicancy], 166.

114 *Annotations* 1542, p. 160.

115 *Annotations* 1542, p. 120.

116 *Annotations* 1542, p. 120.

117 He refers to it as 'hierarch. ecclesi'.

by whom they are confounded. I greatly wonder that the Very Reverend has also followed them in this'.¹¹⁸

The reference to the 'Very Reverend' is a reminder that Catharinus relies not only on reason, counter-argument, and the appeal to authority to protect the church and its doctrines against the erosion with which Cajetan was threatening them. As often as possible he crushes the objections of potential defenders of Cajetan in advance: the ex-lawyer had evidently not forgotten the skills of forensic oratory, here applied in a different genre. But for the reluctant reader, rhetoric sugars the pill. So the reader is directly addressed, usually flatteringly, as for instance 'the pious reader', 'the man learned and acute';¹¹⁹ or he is subjected to a clever innuendo;¹²⁰ or he is flattered by a rhetorical question: 'Who believes such stupidity in so great a philosopher?' Catharinus's rhetoric is not always so transparent or innocent. There is, for instance, the sarcasm,¹²¹ the sneer involved in the frequent use, here surely pejorative, of 'the Very Reverend',¹²² and the forthright challenge to Cajetan's motives: in introducing 'novelty' he must have been motivated by ostentation.¹²³ There is surely enough here to justify the feeling that the vitriol in Catharinus's *Annotations* was not in fact just the by-product of his righteous indignation, as he claimed, but was in part directly attributable to his mortification at the outcome of the appeal to Rome in which Cajetan had decided against him. Nevertheless, there is still the fact that Catharinus produced an impressive array of arguments to back up his attack on Cajetan.

And, when tension and suspicion began to mount in the Italian church after 1520, and heresy threatened the purity of the faith, Cajetan was vulnerable. Perhaps without meaning to do so, he had, like Luther and Erasmus, challenged the authority of the pope and the traditional church. By promoting interpretations of the scriptures that on close analysis undermined orthodox doctrine, he had weakened the institution that, by virtue of his position, he was supposed to support. As Catharinus put it in his annotation on Cajetan's commentary on James 5:14: 'Assuredly, remarks of that kind are too frivolous: they are certainly not to be tolerated in those who are required to assist the meaning that the church has adopted, not that of the adversaries of the church.' In fact, Cajetan was in something of the same position as (later) the 'spirituali'. He was prepared to criticise or to go beyond the traditional teaching of the church, but, if required, he would conform. The problem surely was the damage that in the meantime he might have caused.

It is therefore puzzling that, if the publication record is anything to go by, Cajetan's commentaries survived Catharinus's attack unscathed. Although Catharinus kept up

118 *Annotations* 1542, p. 122.

119 e.g. *Annotations* 1542, pp. 164, 166 (three times) 174, 186, 196, 197.

120 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 263–4 [Cajetan is accused of departing from the position of Aquinas. In effect Catharinus is blaming him and his followers in the Dominican Order for not being orthodox good Dominicans. This, coming from a Dominican who was not himself orthodox – he was much influenced, particularly in his views about the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin by the Scotists – might be considered a bit rich].

121 *Annotations* 1542, pp. 180–181, 203, 222 [last two paragraphs].

122 *Annotations* 1542, e.g. pp. 119, 122 [twice], 123, 136, 149, 151, 173, 193, 203, 211, 226, 228.

123 *Annotations* 1542, p. 166.

this attack to the end of his life,¹²⁴ the *Commentaries* were never placed on the Index. They were even republished, as late as 1639, in a sumptuous edition. It may be of course that, in spite of the unfavourable reaction of the Sorbonne masters in 1534, the Dominican Order later protected Cajetan's works and reputation.¹²⁵ But if this is so, there is no direct evidence to prove it.

Translation into the Vernacular

Catharinus's tract, *Quaestio an expediat scripturas in maternas linguas transferri*, was printed in 1552 as Number XX of *Enarrationes, assertiones (sic) disputationes*, but it may have been drawn up in 1546 or before as a guide to the issues to be discussed at Trent in April that year.¹²⁶ The argument of the tract is very simple and straightforward. Two sets of argument are considered – one in favour of translating the scriptures into the vernacular and one against – and a verdict on the question is delivered in the light of these arguments.

There are four arguments in favour of translating. The first relies on the metaphor of spiritual feeding. The Bible is the food of the soul. Because in God there is no exception of persons, no person should be deprived of his spiritual food because he is not versed in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. The second argument is a matter of justice: God's testament, by which his children have been made his heirs, is contained in the scriptures, and it is therefore wrong for this testament to be concealed from them. In the third and fourth arguments, Catharinus takes a different tack: he argues from precedent. First in argument three, he considers the example of the apostles, whom everyone was able to understand because, by a miracle, they were able to speak in tongues. A translation is a form of human ingenuity, by which we should be able to do what was once done by a miracle. And in fact – argument four – translations already exist for Ethiopians, Indians, Armenians, and Arabs. Then again, Jerome translated the scriptures from Hebrew and Greek into his native language, as did Bishop Gothus.¹²⁷

These may seem to be convincing arguments, but they do not convince Catharinus, in the first place because almost all those who currently favour the first view are heretics, but all those who favour the opposite view are clearly catholic, e.g. Spiritus Roterus,¹²⁸ the Dominican Inquisitor of Toulouse, and the Franciscan Alfonso de Castro.¹²⁹ Moreover, there is very good reason for supposing that the consequences

124 See his last work *Enarrationes in quinque priora capita Geneseos*, 1551/2, tract VII, 'Pro eximia Praedestinatione Christi. Annotatio specialis in commentaria Domini Caietani'.

125 In an analogous case, the Dominican Order certainly defended the works and reputation of Savonarola when, in 1558, Paul IV, relying on Catharinus's 1548 attack on the San Marco prophet, instructed the Inquisition to enquire into his orthodoxy.

126 See H. Jedin, Vol II, page 68, footnote 1.

127 Catharinus refers to the Tripartite History as his basis for the claim about Bishop Gothus.

128 For some information about this Dominican Inquisitor of Toulouse (see D.A. Mortier 1911, Vol. 5, p. 418).

129 See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03415a.htm>.

of translating the scriptures into the vernacular will be disastrous – sixteenth-century Germany is a case in point – for though it is *prima facie* true that you can understand the Bible if it is translated into your native language, this argument needs to be treated with great scepticism, for your understanding of the Bible in many places is likely to be wrong, with great potential danger to the soul. The fact is that the difficulty of the scriptures does not derive from ignorance of languages: all the great heretics were men well versed in languages. The problem rather is that the literal sense of individual remarks is often misleading. The scriptures contain many tropes and figures of speech, some of them peculiar to sacred eloquence, which yield a meaning other than the primary sense of the words allows and do not survive translation into another language. Furthermore, there are tropes, metaphors, parables and enigmas for the understanding of which outstanding mental capacities refined by much reading, practice and acumen are required.

Again, the reconciliation of apparent contradictions [‘There is no dogma so bold and so insane with which the scriptures do not somewhere or other seem to agree’] presupposes the rare ability to make distinctions, while some passages seem trivial and incapable of contributing to edification. Actually mysteries are contained in these passages, but the common people would not grasp this.

This matter of fact style of reasoning is supplemented by an argument of a more ambitious kind based on the hierarchical and organic nature of the church. ‘Therefore there are many members of this body, certain being stronger and more honourable, and certain weaker and more ignoble, but arranged so that it is necessary for all members to assist each other.’ Some are prophets and some doctors, and these are to be overseers of the other functions. But if there are doctors, there are some who teach and others who listen and learn. Some men have to spend their life in business and the cares of the world, and so they cannot devote their energies to the understanding of the sacred literature. But suppose someone were to say that he wanted to listen to doctors but to be able to compare what they say with the scriptures? The answer to this depends on why they wish to compare what is said with the scriptures. If the answer is that they require biblical proof of what they hear, the demand is to be rejected. Piety and humility are required: the scriptures are meat too strong for weak stomachs. Why then did St Jerome teach women and induce them to read the Holy scriptures? The answer is firstly that they knew languages, and secondly they were quick to subject intellect to the faith. In any case, you can get what you need to know from catholic preachers. The fact that many preachers do not do a proper job is admitted, but for Catharinus the answer is not divine truth from vernacular translations, but divine truth from preachers who are proficient in their job. Another alleged counter-example receives short shrift. What about the homilies of Chrysostom? This example is just rejected by opposing to it a remark to the opposite effect by St. Paul.

The whole tendency of Catharinus’s argument is the condemnation of translation. Yet he reluctantly endorses it, for there are already many translations: almost every nation has one. Catharinus would not prohibit what has already been published except in the case of scandalous and heretical translations. Translation is tolerated from indulgence to hard hearts and not as a matter of principle. Furthermore it is necessary not to give the heretics the opportunity for charging catholics with the

desire to suppress evangelical truth. However, texts that the heretics rely on should be carefully explained in the catholic sense, and readers should be required to follow the traditions of the Fathers. New translations should carry the name of the author and evidence of the approval of catholic scholars.

Conclusion to Chapters 6 and 7

The evidence reviewed in Chapters 6 and 7 of this book suggests that there was indeed a crisis of authority in sixteenth-century Italy, which was caused by the coexistence of two views of the canon and of the way in which the Bible was to be interpreted. The first view in effect respected the viewpoint of the literate individual – lay or clerical, learned or ignorant – and admitted the relevance of human reason. The scriptures, therefore, became an essentially contested text:¹³⁰ there were many interpreters and many interpretations, and no way of deciding between them. The second view was frankly elitist and rejected the aspirations of the ignorant layperson. Thus the elitist Catharinus complained bitterly that everyone, of whatever condition, female as well as male, ignorant as well as learned wished to have an opinion about the deepest questions of theology and divine scripture.¹³¹ As far as Catharinus was concerned, the literacy of the lay ignoramus was irrelevant: he should get all that he needed to know of the faith from the pulpit.¹³² But there was more to this second view than the claim that the scriptures were an opaque and not a transparent text that would only yield its full meaning to the committed scholar after long study. Another aspect of it was the allocation of provisional status to the insights of even the most gifted and learned individuals until they had been scrutinised and accredited by the church¹³³. The human learning of scholars like Cardinal Cajetan could not in fact guarantee immunity from error,¹³⁴ for immunity from error was the divinely guaranteed prerogative of the church.¹³⁵ No such accreditation was possible where

130 The phrase ‘essentially contested’ was introduced by the philosopher W.B. Gallie to indicate a range of questions about which there was always dispute, perhaps because they were insoluble in principle.

131 See *Quaestio an expediat Scripturas in Maternas Linguas Transferri*, Tract XX *Enarrationes in Quinque Priora Capita Geneseos*, 1551/2 [hereafter ‘Quaestio’], columns 335–336. See also *Speculum Haeticorum*, Cracow 1540. This edition is not paginated, but if the page which contains Sporn’s dedication to Petrus de Gamratis is counted as 1 recto, then the reference would be 15 recto and verso.

132 *Quaestio*, column 337.

133 As Catharinus put it in the letter to Clement VII in 1532, ‘the decrees of your predecessors pronounce what we have learned from Scripture’.

134 ‘Let no one trust in this study of the scriptures because he appears pre-eminent in great acuteness or skilled in different literatures so that he thinks he has no need of a teacher.’ *Claves Duae*, p. 60.

135 In other words it was an institutional matter and not a matter for the individual. So great was Catharinus’s respect for the church that he considered the commands of the church to be of equal rank with those of God himself; *Annotations* 1542, p. 111.

human insight was at odds with existing doctrine, for the infallibility of the pope¹³⁶ made the doctrine that he had already announced invulnerable. Thinking with the church (concurring in the opinion of the saints and 'our Thomas') therefore required 'the intellect to be made captive in compliance with the faith'. Immediate inferences from this principle are firstly that, *pace* Luther, the scriptures cannot be used as a means of exposing error in doctrine; and secondly, the theologians are required to assist the meaning that the church has adopted, not that of its adversaries.¹³⁷ In short the authority of the church is above that of the scriptures as human reason might construe them, and if this is hard for human reason to come to terms with, then Catharinus is quite prepared to ease the way by claiming that from the beginning there was a church in Adam and Eve, through which, in the fullness of time, Moses produced the scriptures.

Not long after Catharinus produced the *Claves Duae* in 1543, the church at Trent resolved the crisis of authority that this research discusses. It did so first by exercising the authority that Catharinus had attributed to it, and then by enforcing the Trent decrees through the Index of Prohibited Books and the Inquisition tribunal if necessary. The main provisions of these decrees are as follows:

- The first decree declares that the Gospel is indeed the source of all saving truth and rules of conduct; and that these truths and rules are contained in the written books and the unwritten traditions. The canon is defined by listing the books of the Old and New Testaments. Anyone not accepting these stipulations is anathema.
- In the second decree,¹³⁸ the church declares the Vulgate Edition authentic; proclaims its own infallibility in Scriptural interpretation; and imposes censorship on the printers of ecclesiastical books.¹³⁹
- Particularly to be noticed in the context of this book is the following, which is almost exactly what Catharinus had been arguing for in his *Annotations* on the *Commentaries* of Cajetan:

... no one relying on his own judgment shall in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother church

136 Although papal infallibility was not dogmatised until the nineteenth century it was the basis of the second view of the canon and of how the Bible was to be interpreted.

137 In the Preface to the *Annotations* 1535, Catharinus draws attention to the ruin that can be brought by one 'who departs from the meaning of the Holy Doctors and the catholic church itself, inasmuch as he is the fond promoter of new things'; and with regard to Cajetan's interpretation of Luke 14:26–27, he complains in 1542 that what Cajetan says manifestly helps the doctrine of Erasmus and Luther and for that reason it must be rejected.

138 Schroeder, 18–19.

139 It should be noted that in settling the question of Scripture in this way, the Council had ipso facto demonstrated the authority of the church over the Scriptures, and not *vice versa* as the Lutherans had claimed.

to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation had held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers ...¹⁴⁰

A guide to the thinking of the Trent Fathers immediately prior to the Trent decrees on the scriptures of April 8 1546 is provided by 15 surviving contributions to the preceding debate,¹⁴¹ all by authors distinguished either by rank or learning.¹⁴² Four of these 15 papers are devoted to the canon, four to abuses, four to tradition, two to translating the Bible into the *volgare*, and one to the Vulgate edition. The contributions that discussed tradition are irrelevant here, because the question to which they are devoted is whether the doctrine of the church is or is not to be established on the basis of scriptures alone (as Luther had argued), for tradition¹⁴³ provided a second possible source of equivalent authority.

The relevance to the Trent Decrees of the preceding discussions is easy to see, but it is curious that the surviving documentation relating to these discussions makes no mention of the problem of interpretation. Another apparent oddity – the fact that the Trent decrees remain silent on the problem of translating the scriptures into the vernacular, though two of the Trent Fathers had vigorously urged it – is easily explicable, for it was such a bone of contention in the debate that the Legates, fearing a scandal, prudently omitted it in the decrees promulgated. The upshot was that vernacular translations continued to circulate unimpeded until they were banned in the 1559 Index of Prohibited Books. They remained banned until the second half of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁴ Despite, therefore, the facts that Catharinus did not contribute to the Trent debate on the scriptures, though he was present at it, and that what the Decrees said did not mirror his views exactly, we can say that they enacted the position that he had argued for,¹⁴⁵ even though there is no evidence for the view that the Trent Fathers were in any way influenced either by his *Annotations* or by the ‘*Claves Duae*’. There is little doubt however that the views he had championed became increasingly popular as the Counter-Reformation developed. Cajetan on the other hand was, strictly speaking, vulnerable. He had espoused all the positions that the Trent Fathers had condemned except the rejection of the authority of tradition, but got away with it with his reputation unscathed. There is clearly a problem here, but this is not the place to resolve it.

140 Schroeder, p. 19.

141 CT tome 12, pp. 473–538.

142 One cardinal, two bishops, three generals of religious orders, four observant Franciscans, one Jesuit and one scholar. (Catharinus, though present at the Council of Trent as a papal theologian made no contribution to these discussions of the Scriptures.)

143 Roughly ‘tradition’ refers to all those remarks of Christ that were never written down in the Scriptures, but were preserved in the church first by the disciples and afterwards by transmission to succeeding generations.

144 See Gigliola Fragnito (1997), *La Bibbia al Rogo. La censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della sacra Scrittura (1471–1605)*, Bologna [hereinafter ‘Fragnito (1997)’], pp. 197–8, 325.

145 His position however on the Vulgate is rather more subtle than the one suggested by the Trent Decree.

Vernacular Translation: An Overview

The translation of the Bible into the vernacular raises the question of authority in a special but very acute form. The topic was hotly discussed in the sixteenth century, especially at Trent in the early months of 1546. The intention here is to consider the principles that structured this debate, to illustrate them chiefly from the contributions made to it by English and Italian theologians and translators, and to outline the context in which the debate developed.

Translations of complex texts, e.g. works of literature and scholarship, tend to be problematic. There are at least two reasons for this. One concerns the nature of the original language. There is no guarantee that e.g. the words, tropes and idioms that figure in a text in the original language can be replicated even in part in the receptor language. Another concerns the methodology to be adopted. Does the translator proceed word for word or 'according to the sentence'? Either way he risks distorting or misrepresenting the meaning of the original.

When the original is the Bible, special difficulties arise. Firstly, the Bible is a very complicated and difficult text, so that it is by no means *prima facie* clear what even the literal meaning of the original is. Secondly, the church has a powerful vested interest in it: what the Bible means is obviously what it says, but in the catholic church, that is ultimately what the church says it says.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there were also certain additional considerations specific to the period. In the first half of the fifteenth century the 'humanist prejudice that serious literature should be written only in Latin'¹⁴⁶ must have inhibited vernacular translation of the Bible. But that prejudice had lost force by the later fifteenth century. In 1471, the Camaldolese monk, Nicolò Malerbi produced a vernacular translation of the whole Bible. There were 15 editions of this translation by 1520.¹⁴⁷ At the beginning of the sixteenth century, however, considerations more substantial than mere literary prejudice began to make themselves felt. If the Bible were to be translated into the vernacular, what should it be translated from? Malerbi had translated the Vulgate, but the Vulgate did not satisfy Christian Humanists like Erasmus. When they compared the Vulgate with the Hebrew and Greek verities they found it wanting. In 1516, Erasmus produced his Latin translation of the Greek text of the New Testament. In due course, there would also be a Latin translation of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.¹⁴⁸ But if it were legitimate to translate the Greek and the Hebrew into Latin, why not translate them into the vernacular, either directly, or via the Latin translations of e.g. Erasmus and Santi Pagnini? The faith, however, in so far as it was biblically based, had been based on the Vulgate. When Luther denied that there was any other base for the faith than the Scriptures, and then, ignoring the Vulgate, translated them into German, the church, as guardian of the faith, was seriously alarmed: vernacular translations that in effect implied a critique of orthodox doctrine were intolerable. They were objectionable for other reasons too. Even Malerbi had had his doubts about the cultural competence of the

146 C.G. Nauert (1995), p. 175.

147 Fragnito (1997), pp. 40–41.

148 By Fra Santi Pagnini, 1528.

literate but otherwise uneducated reader. He thought it prudent to include in his text a modicum of collateral information to explain the more obscure references.¹⁴⁹ No doubt the cultural competence of the reader of the vernacular text became an even more pressing issue when the vernacular text he was faced with was based not on the Vulgate, but on the Hebrew and Greek verities. Maybe in the circumstances it would be wiser to ban vernacular translations altogether: the motive for so doing would be to protect the naïve and innocent reader, intent on edification, from accidentally endangering his own soul. Suppose however that the literate but not Latinate reader were not naïve and innocent, but sought in the Scriptures the materials to support a critique of the church and its doctrines, or at least a means of checking whether what the church said was right or not. Such attitudes impugn the magisterium, the teaching authority of the church vested in the pope and the bishops, but primarily in the former. Doctrine declared by the pope is infallible, a claim that was in practice accepted long before 1870, when Vatican I dogmatised it. There was undoubtedly a serious threat to the magisterium: the doctrines of the reformers, e.g. the *sola scriptura* principle, created a demand for direct access to the Bible even in those who remained faithful to the Roman church.¹⁵⁰ Though Malerbi's translation was reprinted as late as 1567,¹⁵¹ this demand for vernacular translations was mostly met in Italy by Antonio Brucioli,¹⁵² who published in 1530 and 1532 respectively his versions of the New and Old Testaments. The Old Testament was based on the Latin version of the Hebrew verity by Santi Pagnini, and the New on Erasmus' Latin version of the Greek verity. Brucioli's translations were frequently reprinted, from 1540 together with a weighty commentary. Though Brucioli remained a catholic, his work was undoubtedly influenced by that of the Reformers so that the church had some justification for suspecting that vernacular translation was a means of propagating heresy. The suspicion was reinforced by the thought that all the vernacular translations had been done by heretics – or, more cautiously – that the heretics were the ones who most clamoured for vernacular translation.

These arguments against vernacular translation were at least plausible. *Prima facie*, however, the arguments for it were better. They were also simpler. One must have appeared self-explanatory: the Bible was 'food for the soul',¹⁵³ so why deprive the non-Latinate soul of it? Then there was the thought that we are all God's heirs, and heirs should not be deprived of the Testaments that explain the inheritance and the terms and conditions attached to it.¹⁵⁴ But the most powerful argument of all was the fact that in a number of places the Bible itself supported vernacular translation.¹⁵⁵

149 Barbieri (1992), *Le Bibbie italiane del Quattrocento e del Cinquecento. Storia e bibliografia delle edizioni in lingua italiana dal 1471 al 1600*, Milan, p. 53.

150 Fragnito (1997), p. 71.

151 Fragnito (1997), p. 61.

152 There were other Italian vernacular translations, e.g. those of Fra Zaccheria da Firenze (1536), Fra Santi Marmochino (1538), and L'Anonimo della Speranza (1545). Details of these can be found in Fragnito (1997).

153 See Barbieri (1992), p. 43.

154 *Quaestio*, cols. 329–330.

155 Antonio Brucioli, *Alla illustrissima Signora Renea di Francia, Duchessa di Ferrara [in 'I sacrosanti libri (sic) del Vecchio Testamento, tradotti dall'Ebraica verita in Lingua*

In these circumstances, it was easy to jump to the conclusion that opposition to vernacular translation was a blatant attempt to deprive the simple Christian of his birthright.¹⁵⁶ The final argument was of a different kind. It was a practical argument: 'the ever more extensive ignorance of Latin among the clergy and the laity, and the consequent incomprehensibility of the Scriptures'¹⁵⁷ made vernacular translation imperative.

The above account is schematic only. It is an attempt to expose the logic of the early modern debate on vernacular translation, without either giving the details or explaining the way in which the debate developed. Most of the arguments referred to can in fact be found in the works of the authors chiefly studied in this book – Erasmus, More, Tyndale, and Catharinus – sometimes with interesting variations.¹⁵⁸ They were, no doubt, the great commonplaces of Europe in the sixteenth century. There were, however, two other arguments of a more fundamental nature. One was to do with the nature of the relationship between the Bible and the church; the other, with the influence that theology might have on interpretation. The first of these was an issue with which Catharinus had wrestled at length.¹⁵⁹ It sharply divided More from Tyndale, for if, as Tyndale supposed, the Bible were logically prior to the church and so the ultimate authority, then it could be used as the criterion for appraising and if need be condemning the church. A layman armed with a vernacular translation could appeal to its authority against the church and thus challenge the magisterium, a prospect as uninviting to Catharinus as it was to Thomas More. Much would no doubt depend on the translation concerned and the way in which it dealt with key terms.

The influence of theology on translation is the second of the two more fundamental issues referred to above that were raised by sixteenth-century vernacular translation. The argument in the *Dialogue* and in the *Confutation* on the correct way of translating individual terms ('church' or 'congregation'; 'priest' or 'senior'; 'charity' or 'love'; 'grace' or 'favour'; 'penance' or 'acknowledging') in which More claimed that Tyndale's choices had been influenced not merely by linguistic considerations but also by Reformed theology has no parallel in sixteenth-century Italy. How is this to be accounted for? The fact is that none of the seven vernacular translations of the Bible or parts of the Bible that circulated in Italy in the sixteenth century ever received the

Italian et co breve & Catholico commento dichiariti, 7 vols. 1540–1547, [hereafter, 'Brucioli'] pp. 4–5.

156 Brucioli, p. 6.

157 Fragnito (1997), p. 27.

158 Consider, e.g., the case of Catharinus, who agreed (*Claves Duae* 44–56) with Erasmus that there were problems with the Vulgate. He also agreed (*Quaestio*, col. 334) with More, that the laity were wrong in claiming to understand the 'high secret mysteries of God', and in challenging the teaching authority of the church. Like More, he thought (*Quaestio an expediat*, col. 337) that instead the laity should be instructed by the clergy. For interesting variations, see Gentianus Helvetus Aureliensis. 'A discourse urging the translation of the sacred books into the vernacular' (CT, vol 12, pp. 531–536), p. 532, who e.g. argues in favour of vernacular translation, but claims that it is not sufficient for understanding: a teacher is also necessary. He thereby implicitly leaves the church's magisterium intact.

159 *Claves Duae*, pp. 211–230.

kind of close critical scrutiny to which More publicly subjected Tyndale's translation of the New Testament. The seven translations were those of Nicolò Malerbi, Antonio Brucioli, Fra Zaccheria da Firenze,¹⁶⁰ Fra Sante Marmochino,¹⁶¹ the 'Anonimo della Speranza',¹⁶² Massimo Teofilo,¹⁶³ and the 'Anonimo del Crespin'.¹⁶⁴ Of these all but the first were compromised to some extent by their dependence on Erasmus or Protestant doctrines, most obvious in their rejection of the Vulgate. To the extent that the translators had worked from Erasmus' Latin text, rather than directly from the Greek verity, they were likely to have replicated at least some of his more controversial readings and translations. Even in the first edition of Brucioli's New Testament there were ominous signs, of Lutheran influence.¹⁶⁵ The 1541, 1547 and 1551 editions of the Brucioli Bible went much further by including the 'Sum of all Sacred Scripture', 'a brief exposition of the contents of Scripture that Robert Estienne had put at the beginning of his 1532 edition of the Latin Bible. It was a text full of references to Protestant biblical and theological conceptions'.¹⁶⁶ The fact that Brucioli's passionate defence of vernacular translation is to be found in the dedication of his Italian Bible to the Calvinist Duchess of Ferrara, Renée de France, could only confirm the suspicion that Brucioli was a man of very doubtful orthodoxy. Since Fra Zaccheria virtually reproduced Brucioli's New Testament – he changed it only by introducing stylistic and formal variations¹⁶⁷ – he shared any blame attaching to it. The same can be said, and worse, of the translation by Fra Santi Marmochino. In addition to being indebted to Brucioli's translation, it introduced material from two known Protestant sources, one of which, the 'Table of Illustrious Men and Places', 'abounded in propositions derived from reformed doctrines'.¹⁶⁸ The 'Anonimo della Speranza' was also dependent on Brucioli, but introduced Erasmus' 'New Preface' to the New Testament, published at Basel in 1520.¹⁶⁹ As for the 'Anonimo del Crespin', his translation of the New Testament was the first one in Italian that is certainly on Reformed lines.¹⁷⁰ Significantly, it was published at Geneva.

Since, then, five of the translations that circulated in sixteenth-century Italy before 1559 were tarred with the Protestant brush, it is *prima facie* surprising none of them attracted the kind of attention to which More had subjected Tyndale. It is even more surprising in view of the fact that it was precisely Cajetan's alleged susceptibility to the teachings of Erasmus and the 'new heretics' that had brought Catharinus in full cry after him. Why did Catharinus not round on Brucioli and those whose Bible translations largely depended on his? The fact that both Fra Zaccheria and Fra Santi

160 New Testament 1536.

161 1538.

162 New Testament 1545.

163 New Testament 1551.

164 New Testament 1555 (published at Geneva).

165 For details see Fragnito (1997), p. 33.

166 Fragnito (1997), p. 36.

167 Fragnito (1997), p. 34.

168 Fragnito (1997), p. 35. The source was the Latin Bible of Johannes Rudelius, published at Cologne in 1527. See Fragnito (1997), p. 35.

169 Fragnito (1997), p. 35.

170 Fragnito (1997), p. 38.

Marmochino were San Marco Dominicans would have been no deterrent to him. Cajetan was also a Dominican and one-time General of the Order. Catharinus was certainly no respecter of persons. Brucioli was an obvious target for him, for he had clearly recognised the influence of the Reformers on the Florentine *poligrafo*.¹⁷¹ Catharinus's 1544 tract¹⁷² against the anonymous 'Beneficio di Cristo' contains the following:

Not long ago there came into my hands a vernacular translation of the New Testament with a commentary. In reading it, I recognised in some passages that this author had diligently read the Latin books of the German heresiarchs, in particular Bucer, for I recognized that he had translated word for word whole pages by that wicked heretic. I do not care to name this author. Suffice it to say BRUCIOLI. I am astonished that such books are allowed to be printed and sold, because this alone that I have quoted makes them worthy of the fire.

Though the reasons for his unusual inactivity in this case must, in the absence of documentation, remain a matter of speculation, it is possible that he thought that he had already adequately exposed Brucioli in his tract against the 'Beneficio di Cristo'. The *poligrafo* Brucioli, the argument might be, was merely a minor irritant, with whom the Inquisition would deal in due course.¹⁷³ He was certainly not – like Cajetan, the author of the 'Beneficio di Cristo', and Savonarola – worth a major effort. They were all powerful and influential figures whose unorthodox views were dangerous, even posthumously. Brucioli, he may have thought, was just a literary hack; but even if Catharinus had thought Brucioli worth taking seriously, it is unlikely that he would have produced the kind of detailed critique that More directed against Tyndale, with its understanding of the finer points in the use of the use of individual terms in the receptor language. Catharinus certainly wrote in Italian, but only when he had to, and he never had the sensitivity to language and usage of Tyndale or More. He would perhaps have been content to show the influence of the German heretics on Brucioli, without examining his Bible translation in detail.

The reason why the only work in which Catharinus considers vernacular translation – the *Quaestio an expediat* – has no individual reference is probably that it is not a polemical work: it is a balanced and judicious summary of the arguments on each side of the question with a plausible recommendation as to how the problem should be handled. Though it was not published until 1551/2, it may well have been written in 1546 either in preparation for the Trent debate on the Scriptures, or shortly afterwards as a summary and evaluation of the main arguments deployed. Neither of the two surviving contributions to this discussion – by Cristoforo Madruzzo and Gentianus Helvetus Aureliensis – descends to consider details and individual cases, for which a General Council of the church was hardly the appropriate forum.

In the event, Trent left the problem of vernacular translation unresolved. It was resolved by the Congregation of the Inquisition in 1559 and 1564.¹⁷⁴ There seems

171 Schweizer, p. 135.

172 Compendio, p. 20 verso.

173 It did so in 1554, 1558 and 1559.

174 The Tridentine Index of 1564 alleviated somewhat the penalties for infringing the ban in some circumstances.

little doubt that the decision was not based on a detailed investigation of vernacular translations, but firstly on the conviction that such translations were one of the causes, if not the principal cause, of the origin and propagation of heresy,¹⁷⁵ and secondly that they threatened the church's claim 'to mediate between Scripture and the faithful',¹⁷⁶ in other words the church's magisterium. Such a threat to the authority of the church was intolerable. Its consequence was the 'new heresy' that bedevilled Christendom in sixteenth-century Europe. Appropriately, what had originated in a challenge to authority was suppressed by an exercise of authority.

There was, however, some slight mitigation to the severity of the Roman ban on vernacular translation. On the one hand, there could be translations of the Scriptures, into the vernacular wherever there was a demand, and there was no power to enforce the ban, e.g. by bishop or Inquisition. It was in these circumstances that the Italian protestant bible by Giovanni Diodati was published at Geneva in 1607. On the other hand, such translations could be authorised by permission of the Roman church if it saw fit. It did indeed see fit in the English case with the Douay-Rheims Bible (1582–1609), intended to controvert the English Protestant versions, and therefore equipped with notes of a controversial character.¹⁷⁷ It was of course based on the Vulgate.

The More-Tyndale debate had no apparent influence on the eventual reception of Bibles in English in the sixteenth century. The reception, belated and hesitant under Henry VIII, was wholehearted during the reign of his Protestant successor. It is interesting to note however that when in the reign of Mary Tudor the question of vernacular translation was again aired in a catholic context, there were some very interesting differences. The title of the 1554 book by John Standish – 'A Discourse wherein is debated whether it be expedient that the Scriptures should be in English for all men to read that will' – seems to echo that of Catharinus, but there is no reason to suppose that Standish was in any way dependent for his argument on the earlier work. It merely confirms the position adopted in this book that the general arguments for and against vernacular translation had a European currency. In any case Standish's conclusion is not the balanced and moderate position of Catharinus, who does not like vernacular translation on account of its connection with heresy, but is prepared to tolerate it given the appropriate safeguards. Nor is it the position of Thomas More, who, as has already been shown, agreed with Tyndale that there was no English law against translation and that the Bible actually encouraged it, but parted company with him because Tyndale first allowed his theological opinions to influence his translation of key terms, and then made Scripture pre-eminent over the church. Standish was in fact more intransigent than either More or Catharinus. He claimed to provide 50 'proofs' that 'Scripture ought not to be in the vulgar tongue that all men without restraint may read it',¹⁷⁸ a position that coincided exactly with that of the Congregation of the Inquisition in Rome 1559. Had Queen Mary lived, therefore, and the pope remained Head of the church in England, the ban on

175 *Bibbia*, p. 76.

176 *Bibbia*, p. 76.

177 <http://www.bible-researcher.com/rheims2.html>.

178 Standish, 1554, p. 36 verso.

vernacular translation would no doubt have been enforced here as elsewhere in the catholic world, a prospect that evaporated with the reversion on Mary's death, not quite to the position of her father, who was 'Supreme Head on Earth of the church of England', but to something very similar.¹⁷⁹ As Supreme Head, or Supreme Governor, the English monarch, like the papal monarch, took responsibility for all questions to do with the Bible, including the language in which it should be publicly available, and dealt with them by an exercise of his authority. This was clearly recognized immediately after the Act of Supremacy, 1534, in Coverdale's dedication of his 1535 Bible to Henry VIII:

Again, considering your imperial majesty not only to be my natural sovereign liege lord, and chief head of the church of England, but also the true defender and maintainer of God's laws, I thought it my duty, and to belong to my allegiance, when I had translated this Bible, not only to dedicate this translation unto your highness, but wholly to commit it unto the same; to the intent that, if anything therein be translated amiss ... it may stand in your grace's hands to correct it, to amend it, to improve it, yea, and clean reject it, if your godly wisdom shall think it necessary.¹⁸⁰

The sixteenth-century crisis of authority with which this book has been concerned is therefore clearly revealed at the level of vernacular translation of the Bible, where humanists and reformers created the problem, but rulers found the solution, and declared it by an exercise of the authority that inhered in them by virtue of their office. They did not find the solution independently: there was always advice available from scholars and theologians, sometimes informally; but since theirs was the ultimate decision, theirs was the responsibility under God.¹⁸¹

179 Elizabeth was the 'supreme governor' of the Church of England.

180 G. Pearson (ed.) (1846), *Remains of Myles Coverdale*, Parker Society, Cambridge, pp. 10–11. It should be noticed how eager Coverdale is to assure Henry that he has not been guilty of the offence of allowing his translation to be influenced by his theological preconceptions, an offence of which More had accused Tyndale:

... so make I this protestation, having God to record in my conscience, that I have neither wrested nor altered so much as one word for the maintenance of any manner of sect, but have with a clear conscience purely and faithfully translated this out of five sundry interpreters, having only the manifest truth of the scripture before mine eyes ... (p. 11).

181 Various refinements might be made to these brief remarks, notably in the case of the catholic church. Catharinus for instance insisted on the importance of the church, but he also insisted on the infallibility of the Pope when he declared the church's view. Again, it might be supposed that had the Council of Trent not evaded the decision over vernacular translation in 1546, the decision and therefore the responsibility would have been the Council's. But no decision of the Council had binding force until it had been approved by the pope. The decisions of the Council of Trent were approved by Pius IV in 1564.

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Conclusions

The three sixteenth-century controversies that have been examined in this volume – the running conflict between Erasmus and scholastic theologians, the war in print between More and Tyndale, and the criticism by Catherinus of the commentaries of Cajetan – all concerned the authority of scripture in Christian teaching and practice, and in particular the authority of the Vulgate. The fundamental issue of whether a translation could in its own right be accorded the same or even greater authority than the original was not new, but was endemic to Christianity from the moment it took root in the Graeco-Roman world and adopted the Greek Septuagint as its scripture. The issue was unresolved by the early church, and it was brought to a head in the early sixteenth century by the claim of Christian humanists that not only the translation of the Bible but also its interpretation must be governed by the text in its original languages rather than by the wording of the Vulgate. The issue became bound up with the reformation debate concerning whether interpretation should be subject to the church's tradition and rule of faith or founded on the inner subjective conviction of individual believers. The resulting debates were fuelled by the proliferation of vernacular translations, which gave an increasingly literate laity direct access to the Bible and the means by which to judge for themselves whether the claims of catholics and reformers accorded with what they found on the printed page.

Authority in the Translation of Sacred Scripture

The question of how far scriptural authority could be vested in a translation rather than the original first arose in relation to the Septuagint, the earliest known example of the translation of sacred scripture. It was addressed by the *Letter of Aristeas*, in which two criteria stood out as important in establishing the authority of a translation.

The first was that of the scholarly skills of the translators in producing a version that was adjudged an accurate rendering of the original. On this basis, the authority of the translation was seen to derive from that of the original and to be dependent upon the accuracy of its rendering of the text in its original language. In the early church, Jerome's was practically a lone voice in claiming that translation was primarily a matter of linguistic scholarship, but when the principle was revived by Erasmus in the sixteenth century and given practical expression in his revision of the Vulgate on the basis of the Greek, it commanded the agreement of all who embraced the new learning. It was accepted by both Tyndale and More as the common ground of their dispute concerning Tyndale's English New Testament, and in Italy by Cajetan in his commentaries.

The majority view in the early church, on the other hand, was that that a translation could have authority in its own right by virtue of direct divine inspiration. This was a claim made by Origen in defence of the Septuagint and by Augustine who in effect

extended it to the Latin version. In the sixteenth century it was again invoked in defence of the Vulgate by conservative critics who maintained its superiority to the Greek on the basis of its divine inspiration. Similarly the divergent views of Jerome and Augustine regarding the canon of scripture also gave rise to differing positions in the sixteenth-century debates, with the catholic church affirming the wider canon and a number of reformers accepting only those books of the Old Testament found in the Hebrew Bible.

The second criterion for the authority of a translation given prominence in the *Letter of Aristeas* was the approval of the translation by the religious community. The approval of religious authority, however, was never a clear-cut issue in relation to Latin translations, either in the early church or in the sixteenth-century debates. Jerome could claim it only for the gospels. Erasmus could produce a supportive letter from the Pope only after publication of his revision of the Vulgate. Tyndale translated from the Greek, and in defiance of the requirement of ecclesiastical approval of vernacular translation. On the other hand, claims that the Vulgate was authorised by church councils did not stand up historically: it was at best the text relied upon by councils, and it derived its authority from long and widespread use rather than any conciliar decree. Its ascription to Jerome could also be demonstrated not to be entirely justified historically, though it nevertheless gained for the Vulgate the authority of a saintly Doctor of the Church.

It was never the intention of Erasmus, of More who wrote in support of his return to the Greek of the New Testament, or of Cajetan who based his commentaries on the original languages to dethrone the Vulgate. Nevertheless, the irrevocable consequence of their approach was to subordinate the authority of the church's version to that of the text in its original languages. In response, the Council of Trent in 1546 affirmed the Vulgate as the authoritative version of the Roman Church:

Moreover, the same holy council considering that not a little advantage will accrue to the Church of God if it be made known which of all the Latin editions of the sacred books now in circulation is to be regarded as authentic, ordains and declares that the old Latin Vulgate Edition, which, in use for so many hundred years, has been approved by the Church, be in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions held as authentic, and that no one dare or presume under any pretext whatsoever to reject it.¹

Within the newly formed churches of the Reformation, on the other hand, the Vulgate was rejected in favour of vernacular translations based on the original languages, and it was universally accepted that the authority of a translation was relative and dependent upon its faithfulness to the original. In England, following the break with Rome, the monarchy took control of the translation of scripture, with much of Tyndale's work feeding through into the King James Version of 1611, which continued in almost exclusive use in England until the mid-twentieth century.

1 Schroeder (1978), p. 18.

Authority in the Interpretation of Scripture

The revival in the early sixteenth century of the claim that it was the text in its original language that must govern interpretation also had serious repercussions for the interpretation of scripture. When allied to the philological principle that had arisen in consequence of the historical distance between renaissance scholarship and the early church, namely, that meaning must be determined on the basis of the use of the language in its original historical context, it gave rise to a number of challenges to established structures of authority.

The challenge to the church's reliance on the Vulgate

The principle that dictated that ultimate authority must be accorded to interpretations based on the text in its original languages had a twofold effect. First, it meant that when the church's teaching relied on texts of the Vulgate which did not accord with the original Greek, the authority of the theologians who promoted the teaching concerned was undermined. Second, it exposed the church to the risk of the validity of the doctrines or practices concerned being called into question, and thus undermining the authority of the church itself. The latter was never the intention of humanists like Erasmus and More, who were unswerving in their acceptance of the church's rule of faith, but it undoubtedly played into the hands of the reformers like Tyndale who used the lack of an explicit scriptural basis for a doctrine or practice as an argument that it was not necessary for salvation.

A further consequence of the principle that interpretation must be based on the original texts and on the use of words in their original language was that humanist scholars with the requisite linguistic skills could claim at least a controlling authority in interpretation. Initially, this put official theologians who did not know the biblical languages at a disadvantage, and called into question their claim to sole authority in the interpretation of scripture. Within a generation, however, sufficient theologians had learned the biblical languages to see off this challenge to the authority of the church's official interpreters by mere 'grammarians'.

Challenges to the methods and aims of the church's official interpreters

If questions concerning the interpretation of the Bible arose in consequence of the humanist approach of treating it linguistically like any other ancient document, a further set of issues arose in relation to its difference from other literature, namely its authoritative claims on the beliefs and lives of the adherents of the religion concerned long after it was first written. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, authority to determine the contemporary meaning and application of the Bible lay firmly in the hands of official theologians trained in scholasticism. The challenge of Christian humanism, particularly as developed in Erasmus' philosophy of Christ, was not to the authority of accredited theologians within the ecclesiastical establishment as such, but to the manner in which that authority was exercised in relation to the Bible.

Scholasticism was seen by humanists as subordinating the interpretation of scripture to the presuppositions of a philosophical system. Erasmus deplored its

preoccupation with precise definitions of doctrinal truth, which made it far removed from the daily demands of Christian living, and he was followed in that by More and Tyndale. He advocated instead a method of rhetorical appropriation, which related a text to its context and drew out its contemporary application. If Jerome was his model for linguistic scholarship, it was Origen who provided the impetus for the re-orientation of biblical interpretation towards spiritual growth and moral transformation. In seeking a return to the integration of scripture and life that he saw as epitomised in the early Christian writers, he in effect challenged the authority of accredited theologians who clung to medieval dialectic by calling into question both the method and the aims of their interpretation. He wished to restore authority more directly to scripture itself, and particularly to the New Testament as mediating a transforming encounter with Christ, the source of Christian life, and the ultimate authority for all truth.

The catholic church's claim of inerrant authority in interpretation

Before Luther promulgated his call for reform in 1517, humanist scholars who deployed the resources of the new learning and theologians wedded to scholasticism were at one in their acceptance of the church's rule of faith as establishing parameters for the interpretation of scripture. In this there was continuity with the early church; Origen in particular prefaced the rule as it then was to his treatise *On First Principles*, which embodied the first systematic statement of how scripture should be interpreted. The rule of faith belonged in the wider context of 'unwritten' tradition, that is to say matters of belief and practice not explicitly written in scripture, but handed down orally by Christ and the apostles, and which was considered within the catholic church to be equal in authority to scripture. Tradition also embodied insights into the correct interpretation of many texts which were either obscure or susceptible of more than one meaning, and it was Cajetan's departure from tradition in his biblical interpretation that gave Catharinus grounds for concern. As guardian of both of scripture and tradition the church was also held by More to be inerrant in its interpretation of scripture in matters essential for salvation. The traditional basis upon which he defended this conviction was twofold. First, since it was the church that had determined the writings accepted as canonical scripture, it could similarly be trusted in its discernment of which interpretations were true and which were not. Second, the church's inerrancy was guaranteed by the promise of Christ that his Holy Spirit would continue to guide the church into all truth. On both grounds, the authority of the church was supreme in matters of interpretation.

Sola scriptura: denial of the authority of the catholic church and its tradition

A radical challenge to the authority and inerrancy of the church in the interpretation of scripture, unprecedented in the early church, arose in the sixteenth century from the reformers' denial of the authority of tradition and their claim of the sole authority of scripture in matters necessary for salvation. More's vigorous and lengthy defence of the ultimate authority of the church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the interpretation of scripture was matched by Tyndale's equally passionate conviction

of the self-authenticating authority of subjective experience, which claimed the inward guidance of the Holy Spirit in coming to a realisation of the true meaning of holy writ. When conflicting interpretations arose, More's view was that they could be resolved only by a consensus of the faithful within a universal, visible, and known catholic church. For More it remained the catholic church that alone had the authority to resolve conflicting interpretations of scripture, but for Tyndale, as for other reformers, the 'pope's sect' no longer represented the true church.

After 1517, as Luther's ideas spread, conservative theologians were particularly concerned that any questioning on any grounds whatsoever of the church's traditional interpretation of scriptural texts would play into the hands of the reformers. Because of its questioning of traditional interpretations, the application of the new learning to the interpretation of the Bible got caught up in the backlash, with the work of both Erasmus and Cajetan incurring official censure by the Paris Faculty of Theology.

Vernacular translation

Another point at which the sixteenth-century debates differed from those of the early church concerned vernacular translation. Whereas in the early church, it was universally assumed that scripture should be available to all Christians in their own language, during the medieval period the western church developed reservations about 'casting pearls before swine' by allowing uneducated laity direct access to the Bible. The danger of wrong interpretation and the risk of heresy were considered too great, and Erasmus was censured for advocating the widest possible access in the vernacular. Although in principle vernacular translation was not forbidden, before the advent of printing copies were in limited supply. By the early sixteenth century a number of translations of the Vulgate had been produced in German and Italian, but in England the legacy of Wycliffe was such that vernacular translation was associated with heresy. In seeking to suppress unauthorised translations the church fought a losing battle with the printing press, and the fear that unmediated access would allow laity to sit in judgement over the teaching of the clergy was amply fulfilled by widespread access to Tyndale's translation. In the churches of the Reformation, on the other hand, the principle that all should have access to the Bible in their own language prevailed from the outset, with vernacular translations of the New Testament owing much to Erasmus' Greek text.

The nature of authority

The challenge to traditional interpretations of scripture on the basis of the original languages was also symptomatic of a paradigmatic change in the nature of authority itself. Matters long held to have been settled on the authority of revered figures of the past or by the weight of tradition came under new critical scrutiny, with the strong emphasis by Erasmus and Cajetan on the authority of scholarly judgement based on empirical evidence being seen by conservative scholars like Catharinus to be subversive of the authority of the church. The differences between advocates of the new learning and the scholastic establishment represented a clash between the authority of truth as handed down by established 'authorities' and truth as emerging

from scholarly sifting of evidence, between hierarchical authority and the freedom of scholars to follow where the evidence led.²

The common factor at the heart of the sixteenth-century debates studied in this volume was the principle that primacy of authority must be accorded to scripture in its original language rather than to a translation. The *ad fontes* approach, which for Jerome provided the simplest procedure or at best a principle to be followed in translation, became for Erasmus and fellow humanists a principle which extended also to interpretation. The challenges to the authority of the church and its theological establishment to which this gave rise stemmed ultimately from the fact that at a very early stage the Christian church became accustomed to using its scriptures in translation. That the teaching of Jesus and the other writings of the New Testament were propagated in the *lingua franca* of the Graeco-Roman world reinforced the acceptability of relying on a translation for reading and interpretation. The practice came to be supported by the claim that a translation could be inspired and thus authoritative in its own right, a claim that continued to be made for the Vulgate by sixteenth-century defenders of its over-riding authority. Had Jesus' teaching been preserved in its original language, it is unlikely that the question of according greater authority to a translation would ever have arisen, at least in relation to the New Testament. As it was, the defence of the Vulgate by the conservative theological establishment in the sixteenth century led the Roman Catholic church into a blind alley, from which it did not fully emerge until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

Today, it is widely agreed that the translation and interpretation of the Bible should be based on the original languages and governed by the meaning of words in their Old or New Testament contexts rather than by any subsequent development of their use within the church. At the same time, new translations that have been adopted for use in Christian worship have mostly been produced by teams of scholars appointed or approved by the churches involved – the model of the Septuagint and Complutensian Polyglot rather than of a solitary Jerome, Erasmus, Tyndale or Brucioli – and since the Second Vatican Council Roman Catholic scholars have joined those of other churches in producing new translations. The degree of unanimity that has developed on the basis of the philological principle is well illustrated by the way that Tyndale's contentious 'elder' has even been adopted by the New Jerusalem Bible produced by Roman Catholic scholars. In Acts 14:23, for example, where the Vulgate has *presbyteros* and More wanted 'priest', there is now agreement on 'elder'.

The sixteenth-century scholars who pioneered the return to the original languages as the basis for the translation and interpretation of scripture in the face of strenuous opposition and official censure have been decisively vindicated. Many of the issues engendered by the reformers' insistence, without precedent in the early church, on

2 For a discussion of this aspect of the problem of authority in the Reformation, see Bainton (1969).

according authority to scripture alone remain however unresolved. In particular, the authority of tradition, like that of the Pope, remains a point of difference between the Roman Catholic church and churches in the Reformation tradition. Authority in interpretation in relation to the original languages and historical context of scripture has largely passed from the church to the scholarly academy, but the question of where authority lies in the continuing application of scripture to contemporary life and belief, which lay at the heart of the sixteenth-century debates, continues to give rise to tensions between and within churches today.

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PART II
DOCUMENTS

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Documents A

The Interpretation of Matthew 16:16–19

Introduction

This passage was traditionally used in the western church to justify the primacy of the Pope as the successor of Peter in the See of Rome, and his supreme authority on earth to bind and loose, an interpretation reflected by Cajetan in his commentary. In the Greek there is a play on the name Peter (*Petros*) and the word ‘rock’ (*petra*) as the foundation of the church. As Erasmus points out in his annotation, there were three opinions in the early church as to how the metaphor of the ‘rock’ was to be understood. It was sometimes taken to refer to Peter, an interpretation which Erasmus and Tyndale rejected; by others, to the faith articulated by Peter but not confined to him, as in Origen’s interpretation, which Erasmus had evidently consulted; and by Augustine to Christ himself. For Tyndale, it was the faith of the individual believer that was all important, and in his translation he rejects the traditional rendering of the Greek *ekklesia* as ‘church’ in favour of ‘congregation’.

A second use made of this passage in the debates considered in this volume was as evidence that God was able to implant newly revealed truth directly into the mind of the believer, described by Origen as a ‘light from the Father in heaven shining in our heart’ and by Erasmus as ‘a secret inspiration’ from the heavenly Father. Catherinus, however, claimed that it was possible both for a truth to be outwardly taught (by the church’s magisterium) and also to be affirmed by inward revelation through God’s Spirit.

William Tyndale’s *New Testament*¹

Simon Peter answered, and said: Thou art Christ the son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said to him: happy art thou Simon the son of Jonas, for flesh and blood have not opened unto thee that, but my father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter. And upon this rock I will build my congregation [Greek: *ekklesia*]. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou bindest upon earth, it shall be bound in heaven. And whatsoever thou loosest on earth, it shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:16–19).

1 1526 Worms edition; spelling modernised.

Origen's Commentary on Matthew²*10. The Answer of Peter.*

And perhaps that which Simon Peter answered and said, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*”, if we say it as Peter, not by flesh and blood revealing it unto us, but by the light from the Father in heaven shining in our heart, we too become as Peter, being pronounced blessed as he was, because that the grounds on which he was pronounced blessed apply also to us, by reason of the fact that flesh and blood have not revealed to us with regard to Jesus that He is Christ, the Son of the living God, but the Father in heaven, from the very heavens, that our citizenship may be in heaven,³ revealing to us the revelation which carries up to heaven those who take away every veil from the heart, and receive “the spirit of the wisdom and revelation” of God.⁴ And if we too have said like Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”, not as if flesh and blood had revealed it unto us, but by light from the Father in heaven having shone in our heart, we become a Peter, and to us there might be said by the Word, “Thou art Peter”, etc. For a rock [or, a Peter] is every disciple of Christ of whom those drank who drank of the spiritual rock which followed them,⁵ and upon every such rock is built every word of the church, and the polity in accordance with it; for in each of the perfect, who have the combination of words and deeds and thoughts which fill up the blessedness, is the church built by God.

11. The Promise Given to Peter Not Restricted to Him, But Applicable to All Disciples Like Him.

But if you suppose that upon that one Peter only the whole church is built by God, what would you say about John the son of thunder or each one of the Apostles? Shall we otherwise dare to say, that against Peter in particular the gates of Hades shall not prevail, but that they shall prevail against the other Apostles and the perfect? Does not the saying previously made, “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”, hold in regard to all and in the case of each of them? And also the saying, “Upon this rock I will build My church”? Are the keys of the kingdom of heaven given by the Lord to Peter only, and will no other of the blessed receive them? But if this promise, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven”, be common to the others, how shall not all the things previously spoken of, and the things which are subjoined as having been addressed to Peter, be common to them? For in this place these words seem to be addressed as to Peter only, “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven”, etc; but in the Gospel of John the Saviour having given the Holy Spirit unto the disciples by breathing upon them said, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit”, etc.⁶ Many then will say to the Saviour, “Thou art the Christ, the Son

2 Source: *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 10, Book XII, pp. 455–9.

3 Philippians 3:20.

4 Ephesians 1:17.

5 1 Corinthians 10:4.

6 John 20:22.

of the living God”; but not all who say this will say it to Him, as not at all having learned it by the revelation of flesh and blood but by the Father in heaven Himself taking away the veil that lay upon their heart, in order that after this “with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord”⁷ they may speak through the Spirit of God saying concerning Him, “Lord Jesus”, and to Him, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”. And if any one says this to Him, not by flesh and blood revealing it unto Him but through the Father in heaven, he will obtain the things that were spoken according to the letter of the Gospel to that Peter, but, as the spirit of the Gospel teaches, to every one who becomes such as that Peter was. For all bear the surname of “rock” who are the imitators of Christ, that is, of the spiritual rock which followed those who are being saved,⁸ that they may drink from it the spiritual draught. But these bear the surname of the rock just as Christ does. But also as members of Christ deriving their surname from Him they are called Christians, and from the rock, Peters. And taking occasion from these things you will say that the righteous bear the surname of Christ who is Righteousness, and the wise of Christ who is Wisdom.⁹ And so in regard to all His other names, you will apply them by way of surname to the saints; and to all such the saying of the Saviour might be spoken, “Thou art Peter”, etc., down to the words, “prevail against it”. But what is the “it”? Is it the rock upon which Christ builds the church, or is it the church? For the phrase is ambiguous. Or is it as if the rock and the church were one and the same? This I think to be true; for neither against the rock on which Christ builds the church, nor against the church will the gates of Hades prevail ...

12. Every Sin – Every False Doctrine is a “Gate of Hades”

But when we have understood how each of the sins through which there is a way to Hades¹⁰ is a gate of Hades, we shall apprehend that the soul, which has “spot or wrinkle or any such thing”,¹¹ and because of wickedness is neither holy nor blameless, is neither a rock upon which Christ builds, nor a church, nor part of a church which Christ builds upon the rock ...

14. In What Sense the “Keys” Are Given to Peter, and Every Peter. Limitations of This Power

And after this let us see in what sense it is said to Peter, and to every Peter, “*I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven*”. And, in the first place, I think that the saying, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven”, is spoken in consistency with the words, “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”. For he is worthy to receive from the same Word the keys of the kingdom of heaven,

7 2 Corinthians 3:18.

8 1 Corinthians 10:4.

9 1 Corinthians 1:30.

10 Or, each of the sins on account of which Christ was about to go to Hades (Erasmus).

11 Ephesians 5:27.

who is fortified against the gates of Hades so that they do not prevail against him, receiving, as it were, for a prize, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, because the gates of Hades had no power against him, that he might open for himself the gates that were closed to those who had been conquered by the gates of Hades. And he enters in, as a temperate man, through an opened gate – the gate of temperance – by the key which opens temperance; and, as a righteous man, by another gate – the gate of righteousness – which is opened by the key of righteousness; and so with the rest of the virtues ...

But when those who maintain the function of the episcopate make use of this word as Peter, and, having received the keys of the kingdom of heaven from the Saviour, teach that things bound by them, that is to say, condemned, are also bound in heaven, and that those which have obtained remission by them are also loosed in heaven, we must say that they speak wholesomely if they have the way of life on account of which it was said that Peter, “Thou art Peter”; and if they are such that upon them the church is built by Christ, and to them with good reason this could be referred; and the gates of Hades ought not to prevail against him when he wishes to bind and loose. But if he is tightly bound with the cords of his sins,¹² to no purpose does he bind and loose ... and if any one who is not a Peter, and does not possess the things here spoken of, imagines as a Peter that he will so bind on earth that the things bound are bound in heaven, and will so loose on earth that the things loosed are loosed in heaven, he is puffed up, not understanding the meaning of the Scriptures, and, being puffed up, has fallen into the ruin of the devil.¹³

Erasmus’ *Annotations on the New Testament* (1516–35)¹⁴

You are Christ.) ὁ Χριστός, that is, you are the Christ. {and you are the son of God. The article is added in the Greek by the participle ζωντος [zōntos] and not irrelevantly, as Origen hints, adducing ‘I live, says the Lord’. The son, not of just any God, for the Gentiles had their own gods, but the son of the God, who alone has immortality, and who is the source and origin of all life.} <It is a small point that a little before

Jesus says to them.) Jesus is added, since it is absent in the Greeks and in the golden codex.>

Simon Barjonah.) It is strange that each translator preferred it to the other language, Greek or Latin, for it is translated otherwise {in John I: ‘You are Simon, the son of John; and again in John XXI:} ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ But perhaps he was alluding to the mystery of the revelation, for *bar* means ‘son’ and *jonah* means ‘dove’. With the added element *johanan* it means ‘John’. Furthermore, they translate ‘John’ as ‘grace of the Lord’. {Jerome thinks that ‘Bar Iohanna’ was corrupted into ‘Bariona’.

12 Proverbs 5:22.

13 1 Timothy 3:10.

14 Translated by Patrick Preston from Anne Reeve (ed.), *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament. I The Gospels*, Duckworth, 1986.

That you are.) ὅτι, [*hoti*] ‘That’ not ‘because’, that is, ‘I say that you are Peter.’ But in Greek, Petrus is *πέτρος*, [*petros*] which means ‘rock’, just as in the Syriac, not the Hebrew, form, ‘Cephas’, it means solidity {as Jerome tells us}. Jesus calls him ‘the rock’, because he is firm in his confession of the faith, and does not vacillate hither and thither in the levity of common opinions. On that rock, that is on that solid profession of the faith, I shall build my church. If it stands firm on this foundation, hell will not be able to do anything against it {much less men}. (Theophylact and Chrysostom, whom the golden chain quotes, are of this opinion,) although Augustine in the homilies accommodates the words of this verse about the rock to Christ, not to Peter: ‘You are’, he says, ‘Peter, and on this rock, that you have confessed, and on this rock that you have acknowledged, when you said, “You are Christ, the son of the living God”, I will build my Church’, that is, on myself, the son of the living God, I will build my church. I will build you on me, not I will build myself on you. For men wishing to be built on men said, ‘I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas. He himself is Peter. But others who did not wish to be built on Peter, but on a rock, said, ‘I am of Christ’. (Again, in chapter 21 of the first book of retractions, he surveys each opinion, but is more inclined to this one, that Peter, professing that Christ is the Son of the living God, is the type of the Church, to whom the keys are given. Otherwise, he gives the reader free choice.) Therefore I am astonished that there are those who twist this verse to the pope {in whom, no doubt, they seek the founder of the Christian faith in the first place. But not on this one man, but on all Christians, which Origen elegantly points out in this first homily of those which we have.} But there are those to whom nothing is enough save what is out of all proportion. Thus, they extolled Francis with praise even to the point of arousing envy, though it was more becoming to imitate him than to exalt him to the heavens. Only to the virgin and to Christ perhaps, could too much not be ascribed. {Cyprian, in the third epistle of the first book, seems to accept that the Church is founded on Peter, for Cyprian said, Peter, on whom the Lord founded the Church. But perhaps Cyprian is to be excused because he here takes Peter not for the man, but for the type, as what follows more or less indicate. ‘One speaking for all and replying with the voice of the Church says, ‘O Lord, where shall we go?’ (The places in which Jerome seems to say that the church of Christ was founded on Peter could perhaps be similarly excused.) And so Peter the rock represents the solid faith of the church.} For the rest, our interpretation, which we have introduced because it seems more cogent than his, differs only in words from that of Augustine, to which however he preferred to turn aside than to run into the other rock, that is to say, that he placed the foundation of the church on man.

{They will not prevail against it.} Origen noted the ambiguity of this expression, in that the pronoun could refer either to Peter or to the church, but it is a thought of little importance.} Furthermore, he put ‘inferi’ for ‘inferno’, though it is not even satisfactory Latin. For the Greeks, it is Ἅδου [*Hades*], the infernal regions, or the lower world. Lactantius in a poem used it thus:

The infernal regions insatiably opening their hollow throats.

It will be bound & in heaven.) The conjunction is redundant. It was not added by the Greeks and is not found in the old copies. In the same way, ‘loosed in heaven’ is/ to be read/instead of ‘and loosed in heaven’.

Note: Additions in editions after 1516 are indicated by brackets: {1519} <1522> (1527)/1535/

Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Matthew* (1522)¹⁵

... Jesus hearing these, to the intent that he would get out some more certain and higher profession, saith: ye (cp he) which should know me better, who say ye that I am. Here Simon Peter as he loved Jesus best, as the chief of the Apostolical order, answered for them all: Thou art very Christ the son of God alive, not speaking of suspicion, but professing certainly and undoubtedly that he was Messias promised of the Prophets, and the son of God after a certain singular manner. Jesus delighting with this cheerful and substantial profession, said: blessed art thou Simon the son of John. The affection of man taught thee not this word, but the heavenly father put it in thy mind by a secret inspiration. For no man hath a worthy opinion of the son, but by the inspiration of the father, which only knoweth the son. And I again, lest thou should adorn me thankless with such a noble testimony, assure thee of this, that thou art very Peter that is to say a sound and sure stone, not wavering hither and thither with sundry opinions of the vulgar sort: and upon this stone of thy profession I build my church, that is to say, my house and my palace: which being set on a sure foundation, I will so fortify, that no power or strength of the kingdom of hell shall beat it down.

Satan will come upon you with many engines: he will raise a company of wicked spirits against you, but through my defence my building shall stand impregnable, only let this sure and sound profession abide. The kingdom of heaven is the church, the kingdom of the devil is the world. Of this no man need to be afear’d, so that he be Peter, that is to say, like unto thee. And the keys of this heavenly kingdom I will deliver unto thee. For it is meet that he be first in authority which is first in the profession of the faith, and in charity. And truly this kingdom of heaven is in earth, but it hath to do with heaven, whereof it doth depend. Wherefore he that is entangled with sins, doth belong to the kingdom of hell nor cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Sir Thomas More’s *Dialogue concerning Heresies*, 1536¹⁶

But since that upon his first confession of the right faith that Christ was God’s son, our Lord made him his universal vicar, and under him head of his church. And that

15 An extract with modernized spelling from *The First Tome or Volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus upon the Newe Testamente*, 1548, translated under the patronage of Catherine Parr and edited by Nicholas Udall (c. 1505–1556).

16 *Dialogue* Book I, Chapter 18; see CWM6, p. 108.

for his successor he should be the first upon whom and whose firm confessed faith he would build his church,¹⁷ and of any that was only man make him the first and chief head and ruler thereof, therefore he showed him that his faith, that is to wit the faith by him confessed, should never fail in his church, nor never did it, notwithstanding his denying.

William Tyndale, *An Answer unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, 1536¹⁸

Whether the church can err.

There is another question, whether the church may err. Which if ye understand of the pope and his generation, it is verily as hard a question as to ask whether he which had both his eyes out be blind or no; or whether it be possible for him that hath one leg shorter than another to halt. But I said that Christ's elect church is the whole multitude of all repenting sinners that believe in Christ, and put all their trust and confidence in the mercy of God; feeling in their hearts that God for Christ's sake loveth them, and will be, or rather is, merciful unto them, and forgiveth them their sins of which they repent; and that he forgiveth them also all the motions unto sin, of which they fear lest they should thereby be drawn into sin again. And this faith they have without all respect of their own deservings, yea, and for none other cause than that the merciful truth of God the Father, which cannot lie, hath so promised and so sworn ...

And this faith is the rock, whereon Christ built his congregation. Christ asked the apostles (Matt. xvi.) whom they took him for. And Peter answered for them all, saying, "I say that thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, that art come into this world". That is, We believe that thou art he that was promised unto Abraham, that should come, bless us, and deliver us. Howbeit, Peter yet wist not, by what means. But now it is opened throughout all the world, that, through the offering of his body and blood, that offering is a satisfaction for the sin of all that repent, and a purchasing of whatsoever they can ask, to keep them in favour; and that they sin no more. And Christ answered, "Upon this rock I will build my congregation": that is, upon this faith. And against the rock of this faith can no sin, no hell, no devil, no lies, nor error prevail.

For whatsoever any man hath committed, if he repent and come to this rock, he is safe. And that this faith is the only way by which the church of Christ goeth unto God, and unto the inheritance of all his riches, testify all the apostles and prophets, and all the scripture, with signs and miracles; and all the blood of martyrs. And whosoever goeth unto God, and unto forgiveness of sins, or salvation, by any other way than this, the same is an heretic out of the right way and not of Christ's church.¹⁹

17 Matthew 16:18.

18 William Tyndale, *An Answer unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, 1536. Edited for the Parker Society by the Rev. Henry Walter, Cambridge University Press, 1850.

19 *Answer*, pp. 30–31.

... And again, how doth St Jerome, Augustine, Bede, and many other old doctors, that were before the pope was crope up into the consciences of men, and had sent forth his damnable sects, to preach him under the name of Christ, as Christ prophesied it should be, expound this text, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church”; and this text, “Peter, feed my sheep”; and, “All power is given me in heaven and in earth”; and innumerable such texts clean contrary unto all those new old holy doctors, that have made the pope a god? They knew of no power that man should have in the kingdom of Christ, but to preach Christ truly. They knew of no power that the pope should have, to send to purgatory or to deliver thence; neither of any pardons, nor of any such confession as they preach and teach; neither were many that are articles with you, articles of their faith. They all preached forgiveness of sins through repentance toward the law, and faith in our Saviour Christ: as all the scripture plainly doth, and can no otherwise be taken, and as all the hearts of as many as love the law of God, do feel, as surely as the finger feeleth the fire hot.²⁰

Cajetan’s Commentary on Matthew (1532)²¹

Verse 16. *In reply Simon Peter said.* Jesus asked all of them but they do not all reply. Peter did not discuss his reply with the others, but as the Lord afterwards confirms, on being touched with an internal revelation, he replies immediately. *You are the Christ.* He confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, a true man and a king anointed by God. *The son of the living God.* (Cajetan corrects a discrepancy with the Greek verity.) It was not sufficient to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah, but he explicitly says that he is God, by acknowledging that he is the natural son of God. Therefore he did not say ‘the son of God omnipotent or blessed’, and he is not talking about adoptive filiation made by omnipotence or by the benediction of God. He said ‘son of the living God’, to say that he is the natural son of God inasmuch as proceeding from the living God, since it is a most natural work for all living things, inasmuch as they are living to generate other things like themselves, as the philosophers tell us. Peter did not say, ‘You are the Christ, you are the son of God in the way in which Nathaniel said it, who did not know the mystery of the Trinity, by accumulating the excellences of the Messiah. But, by continuous use of language, he acknowledges the natural generation of the son, developing the reason of giving birth in the name of the living (God).

Verse 17. *In reply Jesus said to him, blessed art thou.* Truly blessed, because he was elevated to the knowledge of the divine revelation by the whole faculty of his nature. *Simon Bar Iona.* ‘Bar Iona’ is not one word, but two, that is to say ‘Bar’ and ‘Iona’. ‘Bar’ means ‘son’. ‘Iona’ is the name of Peter’s natural father. He gave him a personal name and surnamed him ‘son of Iona’ so that we should understand that he directed his words not to an Apostle, not to all the disciples, but to that single man named Simon, born of Iona. These details distinguish him from the others, and so

20 *Answer*, p. 132.

21 Translated by Patrick Preston from the edition of 1629.

they are named. Then so that we should understand Peter's acknowledgment, that is to say 'son of the living God' is to be understood of a filiation that was not adoptive, not a matter of his superiority, but natural, as if he had openly said, 'I am the son of God, just as you are the son of Iona, so that Peter might understand more clearly in the example of his own filiation the meaning of revealed divine filiation. *Because flesh and blood have not revealed it.* If John or some other relative of Jesus had spoken or taught this profession, it would have been attributed to flesh and blood. But since Peter was joined to Christ by no necessity of flesh and blood, he burst out with this profession without any connection with Jesus' relatives, and so rightly hears that he did not get it from flesh and blood. *To you.* The singular (*tibi*) is used, not the plural (*vobis*), for only to Peter is it indicated that this revelation has been made. *But my father who is in heaven.* He does not say, 'I taught you' for he had not yet taught them the mystery of the Trinity, but he shows that he has taught it to Peter by an internal revelation by describing the Father's revelation, for the Father is a spirit and is aptly said to work in the mind of man by a spiritual operation.

Verse 18. *And I.* Anticipated by a revelation by my father, you said to me, 'You are &c' and I continuing what my father had begun likewise *Say to you* (singular not plural) *That you* (singular not plural) *are* not only called *Peter* the rock. *And on this rock.* See why you are called Peter, why you are the rock: obviously, to serve as a foundation, for the pronoun 'this' picks out the rock which is the subject of the discussion. There is no other rock of which this is said, nor about which statements are made except about Peter. According to the plain context of the letter, Peter himself therefore is indicated by the demonstrative adjective 'this', as if he had more openly said, '*You are the rock, and on this I will build my church.*' And I will make you who are now the rock the foundation in building my church on you. He promises that he will give to Peter the kind of primacy in the Church that the foundation obtains in building. Jesus promises that he will make Peter the foundation of the Church, because he predestined the Church to be supported on the steadfastness of the See of Peter. To avoid repetition, see the mystery of this reading which I have more fully discussed in the short work in 'Christ's institution of the Papacy'.²²

And the gates of hell will not prevail. In order for us to understand that the building of the Church cannot be shaken and thus stands firm not with human but with divine strength, he declares vain the attempt of all things contrary to it to destroy it. He does not say 'heresies, tyrants, loss of morals', but 'the gates of hell', to point out not only human forces in themselves, but human forces, so to speak, as the gates of hell, for the devils use human inclinations and powers as if they were the gates of hell, through which, of course, there is access to the lower regions, and through which, therefore hell lies open to all. Consequently, not only human powers, but also diabolical powers are excluded through this stipulation: all things indeed succumb to the Church. However much they strive to eradicate the Church, they will never prevail. *Against it.* He does not say, 'against its luxury, riches, temporal dominions',

²² *De institutione pontificatus a Iesu Christ.* The full reference is *De divina institutione pontificatus Romani pontificis super tota ecclesiam a Christo in Petro*, 1521.

but ‘against it’, for it exists in the congregation of the faithful in one faith, hope and charity. On the contrary, the more they prevail against the temporalities of the Church, the more the Church is increased in number and merit, as appears in the Acts of the Apostles, the deeds of the martyrs, and in the comparison of the Church to riches for a man who was formerly poor. Go through the individual states of the Church.

Verse 19: *And to you* – Singular not plural. *I will give*. He only promises. He gave after the resurrection, in the last chapter of John, ‘feed my sheep’. Keys. Jesus describes the pre-eminence of Peter in many metaphors. First he described it by comparison with the foundation stone in a building. Now he describes it by its likeness with the keys. Custom bears witness that when princes first come to their kingdom or acquire a kingdom, the keys are offered to them as a sign of their supreme dominion over that kingdom, city or citadel. In accordance with this custom, he promises that he will give the keys to Peter, to signify that he will give him supreme power in the Church. But he says ‘keys’ in the plural, because supreme power consists of two things. One is the authority of discerning, judging and defining those things that are of the kingdom of heaven, either for or against. This key is called the key of knowledge. The other is the authority of doing or carrying out the things that have been defined, and this key is called the key of power. *The kingdom of heaven*. He does not say ‘the kingdom of the earth’. Just as Jesus abstained and abstains from perceptible rule over the kingdom of the world, because so far he has not received possession of it, although he will receive the power of ruling it, but sits at the right hand of God until the time comes for the Last Judgement, so he did not promise to Peter the keys of the kingdom of the world, but of the kingdom of heaven. The whole power of Peter is referred to the kingdom of heaven, to the government of the world for the purpose of the kingdom of heaven, the salvation of souls, for those things in which the kingdom of heaven is preserved and increased in men, which, it is agreed, are spiritual things. Thus it is that temporal things are not included in the power of Peter, unless they are related to spiritual things.

And whatsoever. If he had meant to explain the peculiar function of the keys, he would have said, ‘you will open and close’. But where he goes on to binding and loosing, he adds the functions of the power promised in the analogy of the keys to the implied power, so that, by saying ‘to absolve’, to loose is not only to free from the bonds of sin, punishment, commands, oaths and vows, but from the emerging tangles of difficulties with regard to those things that are of the faith. Likewise, ‘to bind’ is not only to fix with commands to the things that are of the kingdom of heaven, but to protect by defining errors and heresies, to prevent belief in what has been condemned. *Whatsoever you bind*. Not one thing yes and something else no. He does not say that you will think or say that you are binding, but you will bind according to the truth of the thing.

On earth. Hence Peter’s power is limited to binding or loosing the things that are on earth, in distinction from those things that are under the earth, such as hell or purgatory, for they are exempt from Peter’s cognisance (for Peter cannot know their

causes) and so they are exempt from his jurisdiction: they pass over from the court of the Church Militant to the court of Jesus Christ reigning in Heaven. *And will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven* ‘And’ is redundant. It is an efficacy to be marvelled at, since Peter’s act of binding on earth penetrates the heavens, but it is said that what Peter must loose, (will be loosed) with the same stupendous efficacy as Peter’s terrible binding. Indeed it can be and ought to be gathered from this that he does not bind on earth arbitrarily, but only when the bond is ratified in heaven, for otherwise Peter’s loosing and binding would be arbitrary, or rather bad, and the court of Heaven would be compelled to approve it, and this is not only foolish, but blasphemous. Through things like this Jesus explained the efficacy of what he had first referred to, that is the keys to the kingdom of heaven, for through this he explained to Peter that the actions of binding and loosing extended to the heavens.

Catharinus, 1542 *Annotation*²³

He ineffectively gathers that the Father makes the revelation to Peter alone among the disciples, for although Peter alone replies on account of the fervour of his faith, he does not reply for himself alone, but also for the others, just as at another time in John 6. Nor is what he says likely – that the Lord had so far not explained the mystery of the Trinity to his disciples in words, because the Father had revealed it to him, for while the Son was explaining by the sound of the words and so revealing in his own way, nothing prevented the Father also from having persuaded and so revealed it internally through the Spirit. Internal revelation does not prevent but rather presupposes an external magisterium, which is a kind of plantation receiving increment from above. I do not think that he has properly explained this text, for there are certain things here that I do not think that he has rightly explained, but I will not dispute about this, for I will do it more extensively elsewhere.

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Documents B

Documents relating to Chapters 2 and 3

Erasmus' *Methodus*¹

1. Some reader may perhaps say to me: why do you urge on, so to speak, someone who has been running for a long time. Rather, show the way and the method by which someone may arrive as if by a short cut at this philosophy which has been so greatly praised, since knowing the way of arriving at the work is not the smallest part of that work. Although, to be sure, I know, in the first place, that is not a task for a single book, and in the second place that is not even a job for me, however, when those who have sailed unsuccessfully are nevertheless accustomed rightly to advise others when they set sail about dangers that have been noticed, I shall certainly imitate these men, or those statues of Mercury which, placed at cross-roads, sometimes by their pointing assist the wayfarer to the place which they themselves will never reach. To quote a bit from the poets, I shall act in the fashion of a whetstone which can sharpen iron, though it does not itself cut.

2. Although the divine Aurelius Augustus [St. Augustine] has accurately and copiously discussed this matter in four books to which he gave the title *De Doctrina Christiana*, this is all the more reason for us to do the same not only as briefly as possible but also more thickly and, as they say, with a fatter Minerva [that is, simply and artlessly] because we prepare these things for men who are not outstanding and strive to help by our industry, ordinary people with minds of the inferior kind. And so, what in the first place was immediately to be grasped, that as they say, can very easily be said by number. But as far as effort goes, it is the first and greatest by far of all things. Understanding is the least part of business, but carrying it out is the greatest.

3. Truly – to bring the mind worthy of it to this philosophy, which is neither Stoic nor Aristotelian, but wholly divine – it is not only free from all filths of the vices, but is peaceful and restful from all the tumult of desires. Hence the image of that eternal truth may shine more distinctly in us as in a placid stream or a very highly polished mirror. For if Hippocrates demands from his followers morals that are holy and unimpaired; if Julius Firmicius in the art of superstition does not admit a mind corrupted by zeal for profit or glory, how much the more is it right for us to approach the school or temple of this divine wisdom with minds more truly purged. Let the highest fervour for learning be present. For it is not worthy that this incomparable

¹ Translated by Patrick Preston from the Latin text published by Delègue and Gillet (1990).

pearl is loved in a common way or esteemed along with other things. It requires a thirsty soul which thirsts for nothing else. Now that you are about to cross this sacred threshold, away with all arrogance, away with that most harmful plague of the truth, the hunger for glory, away with stubbornness, the parent of brawls, and even more away with blind rashness. When you come up to places that are to be venerated in religion, you kiss all things, adore all things, and, as if some divinity is never absent, there is nothing which you do not revere. And you will remember that you must act even more religiously when you are about to enter sanctuaries of the divine spirit. What is given you to see, kiss it prostrate, what is not given but hidden, whatever it is, adore it and venerate it from afar. Away with all impious curiosity. Certain mysteries you will deserve to see on account of this very thing, that you reverently would look away from looking at them. Let this be your first and only aim. Make this one vow to be changed, to be seized, to be inspired, to be transformed in those things which you are learning. It is the food of the soul and useful, not when it falls into the memory as if into the stomach, but when it is cast into the passions and the inmost parts of the mind. You will seem to have set out, not if you dispute more bitterly, but only when you feel yourself to have become another person, less lofty, less choleric, less avid for life and some part of your vices abates each day while some element of piety accrues.

4. Now, as to what pertains to those letters by the support of which we reach this end more easily, the first concern must be the thorough learning of the three languages, Latin, Greek and Hebrew, because it is agreed that all the mystery of scripture is made known by them. Dear reader, do not here shy away from me because of the difficulty of the business as if you had been repelled with a club. If you lack neither a teacher nor the spirit, these three languages may be learned with almost less trouble than the pitiful stammering of half a language, undoubtedly on account of the culpable ignorance of the teachers. Nor do we demand that you are taken forwards by the miracle of eloquence: it is enough if you progress towards a certain neatness and discrimination, a mean, which suffices for making judgements. For, to disregard all other disciplines, understanding what is written is impossible if we do not know the language in which it is written. For I do not think that these men deserve attention who, while they rot in sophisticated trifles until senility are accustomed to say, 'Jerome's translation is enough for me'.

5. For this is the most frequent response of those who do not even take the trouble to know Latin, so that, for them, Jerome too has translated in vain. Moreover, not in the meantime to speak of the importance in many ways of going back to the original sources – or any sources whatever – what about linguistic peculiarities that cannot be expressed in a different language so as to retain the same light, their native grace and equal emphasis? What about certain things that are too minute for completely accurate translation (a matter that Jerome constantly proclaims and complains about)? What about the very many things which, restored by Jerome have been lost by the injury of time, like the Gospels amended in accordance with the Greek truth? What about the books corrupted in the past and being corrupted now by the mistakes or rashness of the scribes? Finally, what about the fact that those things to which

Jerome made the appropriate emendations are not sufficiently understood if you just do not know the languages on evidence from which he relies? Because, if Jerome's translation once sufficed, what is the purpose of warning in the Papal decrees that the truth of the Old Testament is sought in Hebrew books, but the faith of the New Testament from Greek sources? Certainly, at that time Jerome had already made his translation.

6. If Jerome's translation were sufficient, why is it that subsequently theologians of the foremost repute have fallen into so many manifest and shameful errors – a matter too open and too obvious to be either denied or dissimulated. Among them is Thomas Aquinas, the most conscientious of all the moderns, whom I would not wish to be well disposed towards me if I lie or say these things for the sake of abuse. I shall say nothing of the others since, in my opinion they are not in any way to be compared with him.

7. If someone is now too old for this work, he should – it is a mark of a prudent man – take his fate in good part, and, as far as he can, be supported by the work of others, and not cry out against the young men for whom these things are specifically written, although I would assuredly not even be an author of despair to old men, seeing that I could name four, well known to me, who are famous for the books they have already published, one of whom first attacked the elements of Greek at 48 and others have testified by their works how far they have advanced. But if the example of Cato moves us but little, the divine Augustine, when a bishop and an old man returned to Greek, which he had sampled as a boy but been disgusted by. Rudolph Agricola, the one light and ornament of Germany, when past 40, did not blush as a man so great in literature to learn Hebrew, nor did he despair, advanced in years as he was. For he had imbibed Greek in his youth. I myself now 49 return when I can to Hebrew which I formerly sampled in some fashion: there is nothing which the human mind cannot do if there is the will and the desire. And for this business, as I said, a kind of moderate standard is enough, provided that it is free from that boldness which, the less exact its discriminations, the more presumptuous are its declarations. In this connection, youth has the better prospects, but age should not despair.

8. Jerome himself in his epistles has sufficiently refuted the opinion of Hilary and Augustine, who think that in the Old Testament nothing but the Septuagint is required; and if he had not refuted it, Hilary's outstanding lapse in the 'Hosanna' would have adequately done it. Ambrose also dashed against the same stone.

9. If a certain rare felicity of intelligence, and a clear, as is usually said, disposition will seem to promise a remarkable theologian, I am not displeased, because Augustine was not displeased, when the more refined disciplines have been tasted, if the theologian is furnished and prepared in dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, astrology, but, in the first place with the knowledge of natural things – living beings, trees, precious stones – and in addition of places, especially those which the scriptures call to mind, it happens that when we know the location, we follow the story in thought and are carried around in that location so that we seem to see the thing, not read about it, and

at the same time the things which we thus read stick more strongly. Now if we have learned from historical literature not only the situation but also the origin, customs, laws, religion and character of the peoples about whom the action is narrated or to which the apostles write, it is marvellous to relate how much light, as I might say, of life will be forthcoming to the reading, which is fitting for things which, being dead are yawn provoking; and how many times not only these things but almost the words for all these things are not known, so that sometimes either impudently guessing or consulting very poor dictionaries, they interpret ‘arbor’ (tree) as a quadruped and ‘gemma’ (precious stone) as a fish. It seems very learned if they merely add, ‘It is the name of a precious stone, or a species of tree, or the genus of a living thing’. But yet it is not unusual that the knowledge of a mystery depends on the property of a thing.

10. Nor do I think that it will have been useless if the young man destined for theology is diligently trained in the forms and figures of speech of the grammarians and rhetoricians, and practises on fables which are to be explained as allegories, and on apologia, comparisons, and in particular those parts of rhetoric which deal with states, propositions, proofs, amplifications, and passions, because these for the most part form the power of judgement, which counts for a great deal in every kind of studies. And since the theological profession consists more in feelings than in subtleties, which even the pagans laugh at in their philosophers and Paul loathes in a Christian – we see this in more than one place – it is right to be trained in youth in this skill, with which one can later turn more skilfully to dealing with common places and theological allegories. That, if I am not mistaken, Augustine had seen when he ordered his Licentius to return to his muses, whom he was preparing to desert, because, studies of that kind render the mind more vigorous and full of juice for other forms of literature.

11. Or, if some one is filled only with those infantile, troubled and meagre little precepts of dialect, or, as we now say, sophistry which they daily render with new difficulties now one thing, now another, he turns out invincible in argument, but in dealing with divine literature, how fallen, frozen and lifeless do we see that literature. If someone seeks a quick argument for this, let him compare Origen, Basil and Jerome with these more recent theologians. He will see there a golden river flowing but here a meagre rivulet; there they are not only clear, but sparkle at the source, and you will be abundantly satisfied with gardens copiously bearing fruit, but here you will be torn to pieces and tortured among the thorns; there all things are filled with grandeur, but here there is nothing so splendid but much that is mean and scarcely worthy of the dignity of theology.

12. If we ought not to dwell longer in profane literature, at all events I would prefer to linger in those parts of profane literature which are more specifically connected with the arcane books. But I know how arrogantly certain men scorn poetry as if it were a thing that is more than childish, and rhetoric and all ‘good’ (as they really are) letters. But poetry, rhetoric and good letters gave us outstanding theologians, whom now it is easier to neglect than to understand. For Christ clothed nearly everything in

parables – a practice peculiar to poets. Augustine shows the figures of speech in the prophets and the Pauline epistles. Paul himself used the testimony of the poets.

13. But wherever in Augustine and Paul, does the author refer in this respect to Aristotle and Averroes? Where is there any mention of first and second intentions, enlargement and restriction, formality or quiddity or even haecceitas, with which everything is now stuffed. In other professions it is now very nice if everyone refers to his founder and creator. Virgil quotes Homer, Avicennas Galen, and Aristotle various authors according to the nature of his argument. Why have we alone dared to cut ourselves off by every means from the foremost men of our philosophy. Augustine congratulates himself for coming frequently upon Plato, for no other reason than that Plato's doctrines are approximations to Christ's teachings and the transition is easy from a neighbouring country. But I would not condemn those studies which now we see established in public if they were properly dealt with, and were not the only studies available. Let them be embraced by those few whom Jupiter the Just loved, to use Virgil's words, but we are educating a theologian of the people. To say simply what I feel, it seems to me not safe, for a man destined for theology to grow old in profane studies, especially ones that are strange to us. Those who have a palate and tongue corrupted by absinthe taste absinthe whatever they eat and drink, and those who have dwelt long in the sun are offered whatever they see in the colour which they themselves provide in eyes that are damaged by cataract. And so those who have invested a good part of their life in Bartolus, Averroes, Aristotle and the Sophistical cavillings do not savour the divine letters as they really are but only as they think they are. In fact it is perhaps refined in dealing with divine literature to sprinkle here and there something of these so to speak exotic treasures; so it seems very absurd why you deal with something which is very different by far from all worldly wisdom, and chatter nothing but Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Averroes and authors more profane than these, and become benumbed before their opinions as though they were oracles. Isn't this not to preserve the philosophy of Christ, but to give us a different philosophy? But if someone cries out that without these there is no theologian, I am indeed consoled by so many examples of distinguished men – Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Clement, nay rather Peter and Paul who not only were not versed in those things but also condemned them several times.

14. It will be more pertinent for our young beginner, if Christ's dogmata are handed down reduced into a summary of first the gospels and then the apostolic epistles, so that everywhere he has aims that are certain, with which to compare other things like those. I give a few as examples: that Christ has established on earth a new people which entirely depends on heaven and, having distrusted all earthly safeguards, attains another form of wealth, wisdom, mobility, power and happiness, and, by scorning things, the happiness of things; a people which certainly to the simple eye, does not envy, desire; a eunuch people which, by its own will does not feel human shame and which, the greater it is, the more it is submissive to everything; which is, so to speak, reborn to the simplicity and purity of little children; which like the birds of the air lives from day to day; for which life is of small value and death preferable; and which, relying on Christ alone, fears neither tyrant, nor death, nor Satan; which

knows neither provocation, anger nor profanity; which is zealous to do good to those that do ill; among whom is the highest harmony nor different from that between the members of one body, among whom mutual charity makes all things common; which so lives that it is the light and salt of the earth, and so acts that at the last day it is always so to speak, armed and prepared.

15. It should be briefly pointed out that Christ left out nothing against which His doctrines did not protect His followers. He taught in the Sermon on the Mount in what things happiness is to be placed. He taught in the parable of the judgement under the metaphor of the sheep and the goats by what deeds immortality is to be prepared. How they are to behave towards brothers by whom they have been offended; how towards the weak, heathens, enemies, persecutors, bad or impious rulers.

16. Next the young man destined for theology should be admonished diligently to observe that whole circle and world of Christ, how He was born, educated, grew up, His behaviour towards parents and family and how He entered into His task of evangelisation. How varied His miracles and response were. How He pitied the common people, how He cried out against the scribes and Pharisees, how violent He was in whipping the buyers and sellers. How He everywhere despised ceremonies and always demanded only faith. Certain things He so to speak ignored, like Caesar's image. He went to certain men of his own accord, but to others unwillingly; of His own accord He made some His disciples, but He did not admit others who wished to follow Him; and to Herod He answered not at all, to Pilate only a little, just as to Caiaphas and Annas. It is supremely important to observe how He prepared Himself for the last battle, how he conducted Himself in death, how He was buried and rose again. For there is nothing in these things which is not a wonderful lesson for piety, if one looks more carefully, and philosophy consists in searching these things out thoroughly.

17. It is not now sufficient to examine how the eternal truth shines forth in different ways in different things in accordance with the historical, tropological, allegorical and anagogical sense. We must also examine in each of these what the degrees of significance are, what the specific differences, and what the method of dealing with them. In how many ways does Origen treat God's temptation of Abraham? In reflecting upon the story, which topics of thought does he come upon? I pass over the fact that the same image accepts, so to speak, a different significance in response to the variety of things to which it is accommodated and the differences of times involved, for example, the husks that the swine did eat can be applied to wealth, pleasure, honour and worldly learning. And yet you are still reflecting in the tropological fashion. Yet the whole parable can be applied to the Jews and the Gentiles. There are parables which apply specifically to the disciples and those times; there are certain which are universal; others are devoted to the passions of those times; and some cause a smile by their irony. But if someone were to try to explain these parables by giving examples, one volume would not be enough.

18. The young man destined for theology should be advised to learn how to quote the evidence of the Holy Scriptures appropriately not out of paltry *summae*, or trifling sermons or collections six hundred times mixed up one with another and poured back by I know not whom, but from the sources themselves. And let him not imitate certain men who are not ashamed to twist the oracles of divine wisdom to strange meanings, sometimes completely opposite. There are some men who carry around decrees and force the sacred scripture into subservience to these, when the decrees of the soul are to be sought from scripture. There are men who forcibly apply scripture to public dispositions and practices, and when what should be done is to be taken from scripture, they protect what is generally done by reference to scriptural authority.

19. But there is a kind of distortion which is more covert and consequently more dangerous, when, abusing the words of the divine scriptures, we interpret ‘ecclesia’ as the priests and ‘mundum’ as Christian laymen. Meanwhile we apply what is said about Christians to monks, and about swords to sovereignty of either of the two kinds [temporal and spiritual] while we bend what is said about divine worship to ceremonies *tout court* and reduce what is said about the office of a priest to little prayers said no matter how.

20. In order to do this more surely, it is not sufficient to be able to select four or five words. He must examine where what is said originated; to whom it is said; when; on what occasion; in which words; what went before it; and what came after. For, assembling and pondering these things one may grasp the exact meaning of what is said. If, from the start, you take the trouble to do this, you will afterwards be able to do it easily. The peculiarity of theological discourse should be observed. For the divine spirit has a language of its own, and when the sacred authors write Greek they replicate much of the peculiarity of the Hebrew tongue. And here, for many, is the occasion for error.

21. I do not know whether what I am going to say will prove specially useful if someone carries it out skilfully. It is like this: either prepare for yourself a number of theological topics, or take a number handed down by someone else in to which you may digest everything you read as if into pigeon holes so that you are readier, where it appears appropriate, to take out what you wish, for example, a thing known about faith, fasting, evils that one has to put up with, sick people who require support, ceremonies, piety and other things of that kind. For two or three hundred can be imagined. When these have been arranged in order by reference to principles of similarity and difference, as I formerly indicated in my *Copia*, whatever is always significant in all the books of the Old Testament, in the Gospels, in the Apostolic Epistles will need to be included in this system and subjected to the same ordering principles of similarity and difference. If this seems appropriate, one can bring here from the ancient interpreters and, in the last resort, from pagan books what one thinks useful. I think it appropriate to point out from his writings that this was more or less St. Jerome’s practice. If a case has to be argued, one has a tool ready for the hand; if a point has to be explained, the assembling of the topics (material) will be

easy. Indeed, for both Origen and Augustine this was the best method of interpreting scriptures when we render an obscure topic clear by collating it with other topics and expound mystic scripture by mystic scripture.

22. Thus equipped, the young man destined for theology should dwell in continuous meditation on the divine literature; dwell on it day and night; have it always in his hands and in his heart; something from it should always be sounding in his ears, or striking his sight, or coming into his mind. It would not be inadvisable to commit the divine books completely to memory, especially those of the New Testament, which today act on our profession so much more powerfully that they can suffice on their own; and next those books of the Old Testament, like Isaiah, which are in close accord with the New Testament. If, having ordered the topics as I have said, one compares Paul with the Gospels, and Isaiah and the remaining passages of the Old Testament with both, one finds that the Old Testament themes automatically stick fixedly in the memory. If this work deters some people, I ask the man who agrees that the future theologian should learn by heart the trivial precepts of sophistry, a commentary on Aristotle of whatever kind, and the conclusions and arguments of Scotus, to think whether he should feel incommoded in devoting the same effort to the divine books, from the fountains of which the entire theology – the only real theology – gushes forth. How much more satisfying is it to devour this work – I did not say irksomeness – than by never-ending labours, to flee for refuge to dictionaries, small summaries and indices every time something needs to be dealt with or quoted, just like these people who, having no equipment at home, every time there is a need ask their neighbour for the necessary dish or cup. Make your breast Christ's library, and draw from it as from a storeroom either New or Old Testament material in whatever way the thing requires. The things which come forth from your breast as if alive penetrate far more vividly into the minds of listeners than the things which are picked up from the hodgepodge of others.

23. Let someone ask, How do you judge divine scripture so easy that it can be understood without commentaries? Why not, if the dogmas are known, and this collection of texts which I have spoken of has been applied? What have those followed in any case who first produced commentaries on this, among whom Origen is distinguished. What prevents others arriving at the same point if they take the same route? Not that I wish it to be done. No, rather the work of the ancients relieves us of part of the work. Let us avail ourselves of their commentaries, while in the first place choosing only the best of these e.g. Origen, who is the foremost and with whom none can be compared; Basil; Gregory of Nazianzen; Athanasius; Cyril; Chrysostom; Jerome; Ambrose; Hilary; and Augustine. Next, let the young theologian read them with judgement and discrimination. For they were men who did not know certain things, and in some respects their minds wandered. In some places they were dozy; and they devoted certain things to the task of subduing by any means possible the heretics with whose arguments everything was then seething. Moreover, there is hardly one of these under whose usurped name very many works are not circulating and, what is worse, in whose books much material has been included that does not belong there, a fact which, in the case of Jerome we publicly proved, and which in

the other writers is not difficult to see. If the reader has not in this way been made aware of this fact there is a danger of his embracing the dream of an impostor or a humbug instead of the utterance of Jerome or Ambrose. Moreover, seeing that it is an endless task to read all authors, the young theologians should read the best of those who have been tested and found good. Where does it get you to spend good time badly on these moderns who are compilers rather than interpreters, and in whom in the first place there are so many things which later cause one much trouble to unlearn. In the next place, if they do contain something that is correct, one will find that it is derived from the ancients, but defective and shortened, because they were compelled by ignorance of words and facts to pass by many things, perhaps the best, because they did not understand them. Furthermore, a good part of the material that is correct is not even culled from the ancients but from summaries which have been frequently summarised and transformed, as if filched from the tenth lake and so savours scarcely at all of its source. And finally, in order to be able to teach the same things, how frigid are all things among them, and how mean all things are on account of the childish obscurity of the writers. But Jerome so seasons and enriches everything with delight that when he wanders from the truth or digresses from the point he still teaches more good matter than the moderns do when they rightly pass on a point. I pass over the fact that we ourselves are made completely just like the authors with whom we continually engaged. The quality of food does not pass so directly into the character of the body as reading does into the mind and morals. If we are continually engaged with things meagre, frigid, meretricious, thorny or squabbling, this is what, appropriately, we become. But if we are engaged with those things which really breathe out Christ, which burn, which live, which teach and exhibit true piety, we shall reproduce these in part at least.

24. You will say to me that if I get nothing more (than this) I shall be insufficiently equipped for the scholastic wrestling school. But we are not preparing a fighter, but a theologian – a theologian who prefers to express what he professes in life rather than in syllogisms. Nor would you be much displeased with yourself, if you seem to the moderns to be not much of a theologian, because even Jerome himself would have nothing to reply to them, nor Paul too, perhaps. Theology itself was not born like this and is not to be blamed. The proceedings of certain men are to be blamed. These men have dragged theology down into the subtleties of dialectic and Aristotelian philosophy, so that there is a good deal more philosophy than theology. It could happen that some rhetorician, arithmetician, or musician would so deal with theology that no one would understand it without mastery of the entire resources of those disciplines.

25. But is it necessary for theology to give certain answers to all the minute questions of all men? There is no limit to the number of such questions, no measure while, in the manner of the hydra, for each one cut back, six hundred sprout forth. The investigation of some questions smacks of impiety; some can be ignored without prejudice to salvation; there are some where equivocation and the academic suspension of judgement is a more learned response than decision. If someone possesses such mental power that he can embrace both kinds of study, let him go

with fortunate foot where his genius calls him. But I think the starting point is the theology that I have extolled, and to this the greater part of life is to be devoted. If one of the two studies is to be abandoned, I must confess the truth: I would prefer to turn in this direction. It is better to be a little less the sophist, than to be less well-informed about the gospels and the Pauline epistles. It is more satisfactory not to know some of the Aristotelian dogma than not to know Christ's commandments. Finally, I would prefer to be a pious theologian with Jerome than to be an unconquered theologian with Scotus. It cannot be denied that Christ's teaching was illuminated and defended by those ancients, whom I would allow at length to be made obsolete if it were established that by the nicest minutiae and the subtlest subtleties of the moderns one pagan had been converted to faith in Christ, or one heretic had been reconquered and transformed. If we want to confess that it is true that there are today fewer heresies, we owe this more to the little books than to syllogisms. For what knot could ever be tied with dialectical subtlety which the same subtlety could not untie, if it is open to each side to assume what they wish. But the simple epistles of the ancients could renew the people of the whole world within a few years. But let us end with the comparison of these disciplines. Let every man find his own thing beautiful. To use the words of St. Paul, let each man abound in his own sense.²

26. He whom the scholastic contests please should follow what is accepted in the schools. But if someone more desires to be instructed in piety than in disputation he should first and foremost be very well versed in the sources, and well-versed in these writers who most closely drank from these sources. What has been lost in syllogisms prayer will counterbalance. And *qua* theologian you will be sufficiently immune from refutation if you advance to that point where you succumb to no vice, and lapse into no desires, even if you depart from a disputation where you had the worst of it. He who teaches Christ without spot is unquestionably a great teacher.

Erasmus' Preface to his *Paraphrase of Matthew*³

Desiderius of Rotterdam to the pious reader

1. I remember, excellent reader, that somewhere with regard to other things it was made known that I greatly differ from those who think that the illiterate and the laity as a whole are to be dissuaded from reading the sacred books, and that no one is to be admitted to these secret places except a few men who have for many years been worn down by Aristotelian philosophy and Scholastic theology. I shall not indeed on the present occasion contend with those who think that such men are especially suitable for reading and declaring the arcane books because they bring (to them) a mind exercised in the human disciplines. Let it be so, by all means, on condition that

2 Romans 14:5. (KJV 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind', which represents the Greek 'fully convinced'.)

3 Source: J. Leclerc (ed.), *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia*, Leiden, 1703–1706. Translated by Patrick Preston.

they have come to them (the human disciplines) soberly and modestly in the course of time; have not grown senile in them; do not attribute to them more than they deserve; are devoid of haughtiness and the blind love of self; that the eye by which God is seen in the arcane Scriptures be pure and simple; and that the mind is not vitiated by the mundane desires from which the heavenly Spirit recoils. The Scribes and Pharisees comprehended the Sacred Writings otherwise, and when they were questioned by Christ they offered testimony without delay from the Prophets: asked about the principal command of the Law, they responded appropriately. Caiaphas too declared the prophecy about the redemption of the world by the death of Christ. 'But seeing, they did not see', because they had eyes with malice that were vitiated by hatred; and 'hearing they did not hear', because they had ears stuffed up with the vileness of evil desires; and 'understanding they did not understand',⁴ because they had minds made blind by the darkness of ambition and avarice. Nor did any men more stubbornly obstruct Christ than those who in particular defended those books in which he had been promised and shadowed forth. But an exact knowledge of the Sacred Letters is not to be condemned because certain men by the vice that is in them turn their exact knowledge to mischief, for it is by its own nature good and beneficial.

2. So that, therefore, the first place in teaching may be given to them, I do not see why the uneducated are to be turned away from the Gospels, as the profane from the sacred, for these Gospels were revealed to the learned and the unlearned, 'to the Greeks and the Scythians',⁵ to the bond and the free, to women and to men, to ordinary people and to kings. What they teach pertains to all in the same way, and what they promise likewise pertains to all men. And they were revealed in such a way that they are more readily understood by the uneducated person who is pious and modest than by the arrogant philosopher. It is a characteristic of the Jews, who were preoccupied with shadows, to veil their mysteries from the people. The light of the Gospel cannot be suppressed. Formerly only one priest entered the Holy of Holies. But when the veil of the Temple was rent on the death of the Lord, all were given access to Christ himself who is truly the Holy of Holies and the sanctifier of all. And when he was raised from the earth, he drew all things to himself, who desires to save all men. They cry out that it is unworthy if a woman or a tanner speaks of the Sacred Scriptures. But I prefer to hear certain girls speaking of Christ than certain men who, in the opinion of the common people, are the greatest Rabbis.⁶ Why are we more severe than the Jews? They took the infant Jesus into the midst of the doctors where he asked questions and replied to them when as yet they had no inkling of the divine that was in him. He rebuked his disciples who prevented the children from coming to them. 'Such', he said, 'is the kingdom of Heaven'.⁷ Let us not therefore discourage the little ones from reading the Gospel. Perhaps Jesus will

4 See Matthew 13:13. Erasmus 1522 has *videntes non vident, & audientes non audiunt, nec intelligunt*.

5 See Colossians 3:11.

6 See Matthew 23:7.

7 Matthew 19:14.

deign to embrace them and touch them with his sacred hands and bless them. This is the age. When the Pharisees were belittling the Lord, it sang a pleasing Hosanna.⁸

3. From this kind he chose the disciples of the Evangelical philosophy – not only fishermen and the illiterate, but also those who were by their nature rather stupid, which is clear from many instances in the Gospel story. He thanked the Father on behalf of these humble people. ‘I praise you, God of Heaven and Earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to the humble’,⁹ that is, to the foolish, according to the judgment of the world. Very often those who are most despised in the world are of the highest value to Christ; and those whom the world holds most dear are unlearned people to Christ. Paul speaks about these in Romans. ‘They have vanished in their own thoughts and their foolish heart has been darkened, and those who say that they are wise have been made foolish.’¹⁰

4. Let me not have said these things to take away their authority from the good doctors or add spirit to unlearned people of any kind so that they should claim for themselves knowledge of the mystical Scripture, rely on their own prudence, and reject the doctors of the Church. Human wisdom has its own arrogance but the ignorance of the unlearned is no less arrogant. Paul does not suffer the woman to speak in a church assembly, not even for the sake of learning. And he rebukes the little women laden with sins who are always learning but never arrive at the knowledge of the truth. On the other hand St. Jerome urges the virgins, the widows and the married women to read the sacred books but complains that the profession of this knowledge is in every direction arrogated by the unworthy. ‘The garrulous old woman’, he says, ‘the silly old man, the wordy sophist all presume to do this and mangle it. They teach before they learn’. But far be it from me that I should commend in the layman the arrogant profession of the divine Scripture so that it does not seem tolerable to me in the erudite. For what is more arrogant than that a man should profess that he is a teacher of the divine things? But as the profession is not adopted modestly enough by the erudite, so, I think, a sober and pious searching is permitted especially of those things that make life better.

5. Furthermore, since various kinds of pleasures are born in those gardens, each man may pluck what is advantageous to him. Let us consider what listeners Christ himself had. Were they not a promiscuous multitude, among whom were the blind, the lame, beggars, publicans, centurions, artisans, women and children? Might he take it amiss to be read by those by whom he wished to be heard? Let the farmer, the smith, the convict, let the prostitutes and pimps, and finally the Turks read me, the author. If Christ did not ban them from his voice, I will not ban them from his books. How do you know whether to these too, will come what happened to the Eunuch? Among the books of the Old Testament there are some perhaps from which there is a reason for

8 The reference is probably to the contrast between the praise of Jesus by children and the indignation of the religious leaders at this in Matthew 21:15.

9 Matthew 11:25.

10 Romans 1:21–22.

keeping away the unlearned, such as Ezekiel and the Song of the Bride, and almost all the Books of the Old Testament, because in them frequently a story of an absurd kind or the obscurity of the enigmas gives offence, but I would not forbid the reading of them to anyone desirous of the Christian Philosophy. From this they will certainly have taken fruit, for they will come to church sermons more prepared and instructed; they will listen more readily to things in which they recognise something, and they will more easily understand the things for which they have now conceived some taste. But in the Gospels divine wisdom bends to take even the infirm, so that no one could be so unlearned as not to be capable of grasping the Evangelical Philosophy. Only let the soul assist, however uncultivated, provided that it is simple and pure and free from those cares and desires that render even the most learned incapable of grasping Christ.

6. Before the unlearned man takes the New Testament in his hand, he should prepare himself for reading by a small request. He should pray that that supremely good Jesus who died for most despicable men should deign to impart his Spirit, who does not find rest unless on the man who is humble and merciful and who trembles at his words. This is confirmed by the advice of James: ‘He who needs wisdom, let him ask it from God who gives affluently to all and does not reproach’;¹¹ let him say with the Psalmist ‘Uncover my eyes, and I will consider your wonderful law’,¹² and again, ‘I am your servant, give me understanding O Lord’.¹³ Then he hunts nothing else in this forest-glade than to turn out better in himself.

7. If he is afflicted by ignorance let him see if light is shining somewhere. If he is twisted by hatred or malice, or held by desire, avarice, ambition or some other disease of the mind, let him seek a remedy here and he will find one. If someone grieves, let him here seek the soothing of his pain, and depart more cheerful. If someone is perplexed and at a loss, nowhere will advice be better available. If someone is tempted and put to the test, let him seek assistance from the Gospel. If someone thirsts for justice, here he will find the purest spring; if a man drinks from it, a fountain will be made in him of water that ascends into eternal life and he will no longer thirst for the waters that come forth from cisterns that have been pounded and troubled by the hooves of all the beasts of the earth. If someone hungers for the food of life, here is bread descending from heaven; he who eats it becomes vigorous and strong in Christ until at length he encounters the perfect man in the measure of the plenitude of Christ. This spring is the spring of Paradise from which come forth the four rivers watering the entire face of the earth. This is the bread of the divine discourse from which Jesus today makes new the promiscuous crowd that flows to him and sticks to him in the desert places.

8. I know that there are duties of the pastors, that this bread is broken by Christ and handed down to be distributed to the people. But what if the pastors stopped being

11 James 1:5.

12 Psalm 119:18.

13 See Psalm 119:125.

pastors and instead were changed into wolves? It is typical of them to pollute the wells and to offer to the people the liquid of the heavenly doctrine that has been drawn from them so that they do not perish from thirst in the desert. But what if the pastors were changed into Philistines and crammed the arteries of the living water with earth injected into them? What will the people do? Certainly they will implore the help of Jesus, the prince of shepherds. He still lives and has not abandoned the care of his flock. Disturbed by the public prayers of his people, he will do what is promised in Ezekiel: ‘Behold, I myself will search for my sheep, and will visit them, just as a shepherd goes to see his flock on the day on which he will be in the middle of his scattered sheep.’¹⁴ And the other things that follow in this remark in the same Prophet. The sheep are ignorant but rational, and shepherds are made from those sheep. Sometimes it is the case that the sheep knows more than the shepherd himself. Hence, as it is not fitting for the layman seditiously to rebel against his elders, lest order be confounded, which Paul requires in the body of Christ, so it is not fitting for the priests to be tyrannical to the flock. Otherwise the sedition will be imputed to them. Therefore, as long as the priests perform their office, they must be reverently heard like the angels of God, through whom Christ speaks to us. If they teach without sincerity, it is to be omitted (ignored) if some good is found in it. But if they stop altogether, or if they teach those things that are plainly inconsistent with the Gospel, or if there is no teacher available for the occasion each man should renew his soul by private reading. Each man should take from the fountains of the Saviour what he can. And each man should help himself to the sacred bread by which he may satisfy his hungry soul. The Spirit of Jesus, who promised that he would be there whenever two met together in his name, will not be lacking to one who thinks thus. Six thousand will come together in vain, if they do not come together in the name of Jesus. But they come together in his name who look to nothing but the glory of their prince and eternal salvation.

9. Someone may say to me: ‘It is difficult to distinguish spirits and the Angel of Satan sometimes transfigures himself into the Angel of light.’ I admit this; and for that reason I would not wish judgment to be hasty. But the testimony of his own conscience is the most certain suffrage for each man. Next there is the agreement of Scripture and the life of Christ. Finally there are certain things that are too clear to require hesitation or demand an interpreter. And yet those who dedicate themselves wholly to the world are offended by these things only because they obstruct their undertakings and promises. For what other reason was Christ so serious with the Scribes and Pharisees. Nothing was more just than his teaching, more innocent than his life, and more beneficent than his power. Certainly the Scribes and Pharisees had a kind of kingdom: they were honoured as learned, adored as holy. They were abundantly rich, and they wanted that state to be perpetual, although it was very wicked. And so they did not tolerate the light of the Gospel truth through which they saw that their pretence was open to question. If things of this kind are publicly

14 See Ezekiel 34:11–12.

deplored, Christ sufficiently shows how much is to be attributed to them. ‘Suffer them’, he says, ‘they are blind men who are leaders of the blind’.¹⁵

10. Certainly Christ, who once imparted the prophetic spirit to shepherds, closes the store of his Scriptures to no one who is pious, even if he were a swineherd. All those who have pursued the Christian Philosophy may be occupied with his books. If he succeeds, thanks be to God. If he does not entirely succeed do not forthwith cast off the intention: seek, ask, knock. It may happen that one who seeks finds, the one who asks is given, the one who knocks has the door opened for him by the one who has the key which opens in such a way that no one may close it and closes so that no one may open. Consult your neighbour if you have achieved nothing. Perhaps the secret spirit, who is not accustomed to insert himself into the minds of men in one way only, will speak to you through him.

11. Let a certain pious curiosity and curious piety be present, but away with temerity and the headlong and stubborn persuasion of knowledge. What you read and understand, embrace with the highest with the greatest faith. Abjure frivolous or impiously curious little questions, if by chance they arise in the soul. Say, ‘The things that are above us are nothing to us’. Do not discuss how the body of Christ came out of the closed tomb. It is enough for you that he actually did come out. Do not investigate how the body of Christ is on the altar where the bread is placed. For you it is enough to believe that the body of the Lord is there. Do not examine how the Son is different from the Father, when they are of the same nature. For you it is enough to believe that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three Persons but one God. But the first thing to beware of is stretching Scripture to your desires and twisting it to your decisions. Rather, temper your opinions and mode of life to its rule. Otherwise from origins of this kind is born stubbornness in assertion, contentions, disagreements and hatreds, heresies, the poisons of Christian faith and concord at one and the same time. But the ignorant are not forthwith to be barred from the Scriptures if someone has arisen, who, by reason of this opportunity, has fallen into error, for that is not the fault of reading, but of the man.

12. Formerly it was not forbidden for the Gospel to be recited in the temples just because the early heretics drew the seeds of their errors from this source. The bees are not forbidden access to the flowers because sometimes the spider sucks poison from them. Therefore let all men read but he who wishes to read fruitfully should read soberly, not carelessly like some human story which is of no consequence to him, but avidly, attentively and assiduously. Like a pious disciple of Jesus, he should follow him by following all his tracks, should observe what he does and what he says; scent him, follow in his track, make careful examination of individual things and discover in those very simple things in unpolished Scripture the ineffable counsel of heavenly things. He will see in that foolishness of God, if it is permitted to speak thus, at first appearance lowly and despicable, something that is far superior to all human prudence however sublime and admirable it may be. Nothing is there said that does

15 Matthew 15:14.

not pertain to every one of us. Nothing is done there that is not done daily in our life, more hidden indeed, but more true. Christ is born in us, and the Herods who tried to kill him when he was still young and at the breast, are not lacking. He grows and makes progress with the steps of the ages. He heals every kind of sickness if only one implores his aid with faith. He does not reject the lepers, and those inhabited by demons, nor those impure with the flow of blood, not the blind, nor the lame. There is no one so foul with the vices of the mind, so incurable by the doctors that he does not elevate if we say to him and mean it, 'Jesus son of David, have mercy on us'.¹⁶ And, 'O Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean'. Verily, he brings the dead to life. He teaches, alarms us, threatens, coaxes, and consoles. He has now his Jews, who do not suffer his Moses to be obscured by his light. He has Scribes and Pharisees who may plot against him. Would that he did not have more than the two, Annas and Caiaphas. He has his Iscariots to sell his harmless blood for money. Nor is Pilate missing and his retinue by whom he is scourged, spat upon and crucified. Meanwhile he has his pitiful flock which depends on him. He has those who say, 'O Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life'.¹⁷ It is useful for all to be occupied in a philosophy of this kind however unlearned and illiterate. Nor will there be lacking for those who are occupied soberly an unction which teaches them about all the things that pertain to everlasting salvation, in accordance with the prophecy of Joel. 'I shall pour out from my spirit on all flesh,¹⁸ and they will all be θεοδιδακτοι [*theodidaktoi*],¹⁹ that is 'taught by divine influence'. Paul does not wish the spirit to be restrained but chooses that all should prophesy. And Moses, when asked to restrain Heldad and Medad from prophecy said, 'Who may confer the power on all the people to prophesy that the Lord would give them his Spirit?'.²⁰

13. Some men think it a crime if the sacred books are translated into French or English. But the Evangelists were not afraid to write in Greek what Christ spoke in Syriac. Nor have the Latins been afraid to translate the discourse of the Apostles into the Roman tongue, that is to make it known to the promiscuous multitude. Jerome had no scruple of conscience in translating the Scriptures into Dalmatian. Indeed I wish it to be translated into all languages. Christ wants his philosophy to be propagated as widely as possible. He died for all men: he desires to be known by all men. It is conducive to that if, either his books are translated into all the languages of all the nations, or it is made the task of the princes that the three languages in which the divine philosophy is especially believed are learned by all peoples. If the industry of the Roman Princes could bring it about in a few years that the French, Germans, Spanish, Africans, Egyptians, Asians, Cilicians and Palestinians spoke in Latin and Greek as well as the vernacular, for no other reason than that by the commerce of languages an empire that would not last for long would be propagated more easily, how much more suitable a task would it be for us to extend through all the regions of

16 Matthew 9:27.

17 John 6:68.

18 Acts 2:17, citing Joel 2:28.

19 1 Thessalonians 4:9.

20 Numbers 11:29.

the world the empire of Christ, which will last for ever but is now contracted into a corner, I know not for what reason except that, as I suspect, there are men who prefer to hold a worldly kingdom under the pretext of Christ in a confined corner than that Christ himself should reign in the whole world. But on this subject perhaps there will be something to be said at another more suitable time. Now I shall continue what I have urged.

14. Why does it seem inappropriate if someone recounts the Gospel in the language into which he was born and which he understands: the Frenchman in French, the Englishman in English, the German in German and the Indian in Indian. To me it seems more inappropriate or rather ridiculous that the ignorant and the little women, by the example of the parrot, murmur the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer in Latin, since they do not understand the things that they say. But I feel the same way as St. Jerome and would more speedily be glad of the glory of the cross and account it a magnificent and triumphal thing if it were celebrated in all languages by every kind of men, if the ploughman holding the plough handle repeated something in his own tongue from the mystic Psalms; if the weaver sitting near the web mitigated the work by reciting something from the Gospel, and from this, the shipmaster fixed to the tiller should sing something; and finally if to the woman sitting at the colander her companion or relative should recite something. What more alien from the mysteries of the prophets than the Eunuch of Queen Candaces, brought up in the royal palace, addicted to womanly obedience, and finally an Ethiopian, perhaps the most effeminate of peoples. Nevertheless, while he was carried like an effeminate in the chariot, he read Isaiah prophesying about Christ. The profane and uneducated man did not understand the meaning of the Scripture, but since he read with pious application, Philip was sent to him immediately as an interpreter. The Eunuch is changed into a man, he is bathed in water and the coal-black Ethiopian is dressed in the snowy fleece of the immaculate lamb. The servant of Jesus Christ is forthwith made out of the slave of the profane queen.

15. Now I think that the fact that we have so many Christians so unpolished that they do not know much more of the Christian wisdom than those who are most alien to the Christian profession is to be imputed in great part to the priests. To myself, I seem to see the way by which it can be brought about that we shall have people a little less unsuitable for sacred reading, that is to say if a summary of the Christian faith and doctrine in lucid brevity and learned simplicity were put forward year by year to the Christian people. And so that nothing should be depraved by the vice of the producers I would like a small book to be put together by learned men of integrity, which should be read to the multitude by the voice of the priest. I would like it to be produced not from human pools, but from the evangelical springs, from the Apostolic letters, from the Creed, which, whether it was produce by the apostles I do not know. Certainly it carries the apostolic majesty and purity before it. This, I think, would not be done untimely at the Easter festival.

Basel, 14 January, 1522.

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Documents C

Documents relating to Chapters 6 and 7

CAJETAN: Proemium to the Psalter (1527)¹

Preface to the Book of Psalms translated literally from the Hebrew by Thomas de Vio, Cardinal of San Xystus.

§I

When I began to expound the literal meaning of the Book of the Divine Psalms, I discovered that we have no such text as it originally is, that is to say in Hebrew. When I had taken up the translation according to the Hebraic verity which circulates in the name of St. Jerome, and collated with it the translation that goes around in the name of the Seventy and with four other modern translations, I consulted two men who know Hebrew (one of them a Jew, a master of that language; and the other a Christian) together with many vocabularies of that language; and in my presence, I had the translation said to be by Jerome brought back to agree word for word with the Hebrew text (I demanded the meanings of the Hebrew words in our Latin language or in the volgare, and I chose the meaning which the more seemed to suit the context. And thus this new translation of the Psalms has been conflated in word for word agreement with the Hebrew text, and I have taken pains to expound it only in accordance with the literal sense. But there was need for a great deal of work, because unless the text is such as it was, that text is not expounded save by divination, but the text is expounded as understood by that translator.

I bear witness that it was said to me by the translators: the Hebrew word means such and such, but that meaning does not appear unless the other text is changed to this text. When I had heard all the meanings, I replied, Do not let it worry you if the meaning does not appear, because it is not your job to expound but to translate. Translate it for me just as it is, and relinquish and leave to the expounders the care of understanding it: translate the text as it is in Hebrew, and leave to us and the Jews the common care of understanding this obscure text. If I do not understand, someone else may. So I have taken trouble to have a text of the Psalter word for word such as the Hebrews have it. Would that I have accomplished it.

Understand however the phrase ‘word for word’ soberly, because a noun is to be given for a noun, but not a genus for a genus or case for case, because it is impossible to do this and preserve congruity. Grammar is even more impossible since the Jews do not have the neuter genus.

1 Source: *Commentaries* 1639.

But because the use of the dative case is very frequent in this Psalter, I have taken the trouble [to see] that there is an annotation in the margin for an utterance in the dative case that has been changed into another case in the text in order to preserve the construction of the verb. But number has been given for number, save that when the true God has been signified in the plural number (that is 'Dii' or 'Domini') it is translated in the singular number: and in the margin we have made an annotation on the plural number, so that the mystery is not hidden and an opportunity for error has not been given in the Latin language.

But when the four letter name of God is given in the text, it is translated in the text as 'Deus' or 'Dominus'; but it is designated either in the margin by the word tetragrammaton, or in an interlineary note of the number '4', so that the mystery is visible. Although the Hebrews lack the comparative and the superlative and use circumlocutions for them, because we have them, when there is a comparative and a superlative in this text, we believe that it is word for word more clear to us since no change in the construction intervenes.

In verbs also word is given for word and number for number and person for person and time for time, except in gerunds ending in 'o' when they have a subject and predicate, that is the agent and the patient, because the Latin language lacks such a construction. On this account a change has been deliberately made in the present participle in the ablative case, for example 'In convertendo Dominus captivitatem Sion' ['The Lord, in converting the captivity of Sion'] is translated 'Convertente Domine captivitatem Sion' for in this way the same signification of the same time is retained by the present participle, and the congruity of the construction.

And because among the Hebrews, there are only three moods of the verbs – indicative, imperative and infinitive, no verbs are found in this Psalter in the optative or subjunctive mood. And because also among the Hebrews there is no preterite time except the perfect preterite of the indicative mood, no verb of the preterite time is included here save of the preterite perfect indicative. And because among the Hebrews there is no present time except in the imperative mood (and this in the second person only) the infinitive, and in the place of the present indicative the participle of the present tense, so no verb in the present tense is found here, except an imperative in the second person, and of the infinitive mood.

And whenever you find a substantive verb of the present tense (sum, es, est, sumus, estis, sunt), know that it is not placed by the translators as present but as completions of the preterite perfect, for instance 'persecutus est', 'consolatus sum' and so forth with the others, and whenever against my will I do not know what adverb in the third person present is meant, 'est'. And because they lack supines and future participles, none of those are found here. And whenever you come across the passive in a future participle (for example, 'timendus') know that that does not correspond to a participle, but to the Hebrew verbal noun.

If, prudent reader, you consider all these things, you will know that, with the exception of the adverbs, every word meaning time, with the exception of these six (perfect preterite of the indicative, the future of the indicative, the present of the imperative in the second person, the present of the infinitive and the participle of both the present and the preterite time) are from the workshop of the translators.

You will know in the second place that with other translators, there is a confusion about what is contained in the Hebrew text in the preterite and what in the future, what is said indicatively and what otherwise, while many things have been changed by the decision of the translators; and the translations do not show which have been changed from which, and which have been left unchanged.

In the third place you will cease marvelling at this maimed translation and you will attribute it to the poverty of the Hebrew tongue. Then you will desire with me to have the translation of the whole Old Testament thus maimed; and would that such had been had by the early Fathers; since now we should have the very text of Sacred Scripture expounded, and not a text fabricated by the decision of the translators.

But plant your foot here, and know from this diligence with the whole universe that two things remain, which cannot be supplied by any one interpretation. One is the equivocation of the words, for almost all Hebrew words are equivocal. Thus it is that the Hebrew text retains its equivocation. Any translation that you like is restricted to one meaning. But an equivocation that is true is to be believed: it is more rational to translate such various meanings, because it is not really an equivocation, but a result of the extension in the Hebrew tongue, just as in the Latin tongue we see that, when the nouns have been extended, the words are frequently transferred to other things that have to be signified.

The other is the frequent failure to articulate the cases since indeed among the Hebrews, all the nouns are indeclinable. And although it is customary to prefix the articles, designating of which case the nouns there are, in not a few places they use the nouns without any article. From this it happens that among the Jews the nouns remain free; but in any translation whatsoever, the nouns are determined to a certain case.

For these two reasons we have the very great, but irreprehensible variety of translations, because in the truth of the matter a Hebraic word is capable of one and the other meaning, and is indeterminate with regard to this and that construction. I am prone to believe that the poverty of the Hebrew language occurred in its antiquity. But since it is common to all arts to have imperfect beginnings, it is likely that, in the beginning, speech was imperfect.

I, who have no part in Hebrew letters [he means that he does not know Hebrew] said these things about the Hebrew language, so that everybody should know how much, in the writings of the Old Testament, we lack a pure Hebrew text, and that work needs to be done to produce one. So much for the letter.

§II

But about the literal sense, it is necessary to preserve two things (both in harmony with reason, one about the thing, the other about the way).

About the thing: any psalm whatever has a unique material, and does not dance from kind (genus) to kind, although it uses many places for one and the same thing, as a result of causes, effects, contraries, events, concomitants, circumstances, and others of that kind. The very nature (ratio) of song demands unity of the subject matter; the common practice of those who write commends (it), and divine wisdom

requires (it), disposing all things sweetly, and for this reason moving the prophet to write, just as it is fitting for one man to write one song. This is to preserve the unity of the material in one and the same song.

With regard to the way, it is fitting to remember that just as a tractable man does not demand the same certainty in all things (in Mathematics certainty is demonstrated; in Natural Sciences certainty arises from the frequency of the works of Nature; in Morals, from the congruency of right reason), so no tractable man here demands clear certainty in the very form, but admits certainty arising from the coherence of the parts.

When these things have been preserved, the matter of the Psalms is to be inquired into in four ways: first with regard to the title of the psalm, when the title signifies the material of the psalm, and this way would suffice if all the psalms had such titles; secondly, from the authority of the Sacred Scripture in the New Testament, e.g., the Lord in Matthew 22 saying to the Pharisees that David calls Messiah Dominum, 'The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand'. He showed that that Psalm speaks literally about Christ, and therefore the matter of that psalm is clear from that. Likewise in the case of other things like that. Thirdly from the Apostolic rule, which the princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, used. For Peter in Acts 2, invoking the words of Psalm 16 and proving that David did not say those things about himself but about Messiah, uses this reason, namely that those words are not verified about David himself and hence (on the supposition that he was a prophet and that the Messiah had been promised to him) he infers that those words speak literally of Christ. And again in the same place invoking Psalm 110, 'The Lord said unto my Lord', by the same reasoning (that is to say that these words were not verified about David) he infers that they were said about Christ. Paul too in Acts 13 proves that David spoke the words of Psalm 16 about Messiah for the same reason, that is to say that they were not verified with regard to David himself. Therefore we shall learn the rule from the practice of these Apostles: that any psalm of David speaking those things about himself which are not verified in him but in Christ, is to be understood as being literally about Messiah. For a place of an opposite kind (*per locum ab opposito*), whatever Psalm of David in the first person, speaking those things about himself which are verified in himself are to be understood as being literally about David. Fourthly by relying on the context of the Psalm. Consequently I have investigated the literal sense through these ways, and I have explained in what way I have done it. Let others, I ask, supply my defect.

I have decided to add between the lines not a gloss, but a little note of continuation, so that the readers are not offered a pure text mutilated in this way.

§ III

In pursuing this intention, it must first of all be said that the psalms have been dispersed and put together again without order. Indeed this is clearly proven by the small note added to Psalm 72 (God give your judgment to the king), which says, 'The orations of David son of Jesse are finished. From the fact that many Psalms of

David are found after that it clearly appears that they have been put together without order.

And if there is meaning in the word ‘orations’, the same appears no less. For Psalm 86 is found after that Psalm, and on it is written ‘Oration of David’, and so that little note preserves a sufficient witness of the lack of order in the collection.

Next it is necessary to say that there is no title of this work. The Lord (Luke 24) called them ‘psalms’, saying, ‘Everything that is written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms is about me’. Peter the Apostle (Acts 1) called it the Book of Psalms, saying, ‘It is written in the Book of Psalms’.

There being no title, no author of the Book of Psalms can appear here. On this account the doctors contend about whether David was the author of the Book of Psalms, and so far, the dispute is *sub iudice*. But the small note added to Psalm 72 ‘written for Solomon’ shows that David was the author of the Book of Psalms. For by saying ‘the orations of David the son of Jesse, it shows first of all that all the psalms were by David, and the last of them was ‘God give your judgment to the king’. Secondly it shows that that Psalm, although written for Solomon was by David. Thirdly it shows that that psalm was the last of the psalms, for if it had been the last not of all the psalms but of some of the psalms that David wrote, this small note would have been added to some psalm with the inscription ‘of David’ and not written for someone else. Thus, from the fact that the inscription is for another man, that is to say Solomon, the inference is that that Psalm was the last of the psalms.

And this is confirmed by the fact that if the meaning were ‘the end of some psalms only’, by parity of argument there ought to have been added to some one of the psalms inscribed ‘Asaph’, ‘the psalms of Asaph are ended’. Since however no note of an end is found other than that of David, it is shown that that Psalm was the last of the psalms, and that David was the author of the Book of Psalms.

As yet, this is confirmed, because if on some psalm written to another person, there had been found prefixed an inscription of the kind, ‘the orations of David, the son of Jesse, begin’, we would all assert that David was the author of the Book of Psalms. Therefore by parity of reasoning the same seems to be asserted by what is found at the foot, for the authority of a title at the beginning is not greater than at the end. Moreover, from this small note, the title of the book can be settled, that is to say, ‘The orations of David the son of Jesse begin’. Where the name of the oration is not such that it could be distinguished as psalm or canticle, that Psalm where this small note is added testifies that it is to be taken as common to orations properly so called and to canticles, since it is established that a canticle is just like other psalms and is not written with the name of an oration or has the style of a narration more than other psalms.

It happens, moreover, that many psalms without titles are proved to be by David, as we see about Psalm 2 (Acts 4) and about Psalm 95 (Hebrews 4).

The reply to the opposed argument from other things named in the titles to the psalms appears from what has already been said. From the fact that the often referred to small note ‘psalm written for Solomon’ (who is counted as one of the ten authors of the psalms) shows that it was by David, it clearly appears by the same reasoning that psalms written for others were by David, for if they do not save Solomon the author, how can they save others?

However there remains the great argument from 2 Paralip. 29, where clearly two authors of the psalms are spoken of: David and Asaph [the reference is to 2 Chronicles 29:30]. Hezekiah and the princes commanded the Levites to praise the Lord in the words of David and of Asaph the seer.

But it can be reconciled with the aforesaid conclusion by distinguishing between the matter of the psalm and the psalm itself; and by understanding that Asaph and the sons of Corah, and other prophets furnished the matter of many psalms to David, but David put that matter into the form of a canticle. For he was an outstanding player on the cithara skilled in this art, who formed not only what was revealed to him, but also what was revealed to others, into psalms. And on account of those to whom the revelation had been made, they were inscribed with their names. In this way the Scriptures which attribute (the psalms) to David and Asaph are in harmony.

But there is good reason for this reconciliation, because in the same chapter 29 it is written of Hezekiah: 'And he set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries and with harps according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet, for so it was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets.' Here we learn that the disposition of the order in the solemnity of divine worship decreed by King David was revealed to the prophets, so that the prophets suggested it to the king and the king decreed it. In the same way, we have to understand many of the psalms, that they suggested the matter to him and David composed the psalms. And just as the disposition of the solemnity of the worship is attributed to David the King as author, so the Book of Psalms is also attributed to him.

But it is consistent with all these things that this book contains some psalm that was not produced by David, such as, perhaps, Psalm 90 (Domine refugium) which is said to be by Moses. This does not mean to say that David is not the author of the Book of Psalms for a very small thing is considered to be nothing.

§ IV

This is the order to be preserved in every psalm. First will be the title with the matter of the psalm; next the summary of the psalm; and after that, the persons who speak; and finally each psalm is divided into two parts (the matter proposed; and the execution of it). Indeed it is to be noticed that it was customary for the author of the Psalms to put forward the matter of the psalm at the beginning of it as if it were the argument of the whole psalm.

CAJETAN: Preface to the Five Mosaic Books, 1531²

As I am about to write on the five Mosaic books according to the literal sense and sometimes, subject to the censure of Holy Mother Church and the Apostolic See, bring forth a new meaning of Scripture, I ask all readers not to denounce anything in haste but to read everything mindful of Holy Scripture, the truth of the Catholic faith,

2 Source: *Commentaries* 1639.

and the lessons and practices of the Catholic Church; and if a new meaning presents itself which is consistent with the text and not inconsistent with Holy Scripture and the teaching of the Church, although different from the torrent of holy Doctors, to show that they are impartial judges. They should remember to give each man what is just. Augustine says that only to the authors of the Sacred Scriptures is the authority given that we believe that something is the case because they say so; but I read the other authors in such a way that however much they excel in sanctity and learning, I do not believe that things are so because they say so. No one therefore should denounce a new meaning of Holy Scripture because it differs from (the meaning) of the early Doctors, but he should look more carefully at the text and the context of Scripture, and if he finds that (the new meaning) squares (with these), he should praise God, who has not bound the exposition of the Scriptures to the meanings of the early Doctors, but, subject to the censure of the Church, to the meaning of the whole Scripture. Otherwise all hope would be taken from us and from posterity of expounding the Sacred Scripture, except by transferring as they say from one book into another.³ I am now an old man, and I am not enticed by love of novelty, but only by love of truth alone. I begin this work as an offering to Almighty God for kindling the minds of others towards the Holy Scriptures. May the Lord Jesus Christ grant that I achieve my intention: I aim to expound the text in accordance with the Hebraic verity, where there are differences between the Vulgate edition and the Hebraic text, for the text of Moses himself, not his translators, should be expounded: it is the authority of the Hebrew text itself, not that of a Greek or Latin translator that we are required to embrace and all faithful men do embrace.

CAJETAN: Reply to the Paris Theologians⁴

The Reply of Thomas De Vio Cajetan, Cardinal of St Sixtus to the Censures of 16 Articles Published under the Name of the Paris Theologians [Sent to Master John, Regent of the Studium at Mainz], 1534⁵

Included in your letters, you sent to me a small leaf of paper capable of causing offence to our brothers, and asking me to make provision against the offence by declaring the truth. Wishing to satisfy your request I am sending you the reply to the small leaf of paper that I have received from you which contains the 16 articles, the title of which is:

Some articles excerpted as erroneous by the theologians of Paris from the books of Cajetan. In the first place the title is false since many of the articles written below are not in my books. Next that title shows that the author is uncertain. From the fact that it is said to be by the Parisian theologians, we do not know who those theologians are, for there are innumerable theologians in Paris. Two suffice for the correct use of the plural number. Consequently many people suspect that this title

3 'Quinternum' = the name given in medieval Latin to a book of a particular size.

4 *Annotations* 1639.

5 Source: *Commentaries* 1639.

is the work of a deceptive mind, so that he who has put this title has said one thing and means another, for he said ‘by the Parisian theologians’ but he meant those who read and listen at random to be deceived by understanding the whole school of theologians at Paris. Nor is this suspicion without justification, since whoever he was, he imposed on me many things which I did not write, and that imposition is a sign of an evil mind. Therefore you should be cautious so that you are not deceived by the title. May God Almighty have mercy on him whoever he may have been. I shall reply as if to a book of good repute.

- The first article. It is lawful for a man with a fornicating wife, to marry another one.
- The second article. The wife does not have the same freedom.

Those articles are not mine, for neither of them is found to be asserted in my books, as appears in the commentaries on Matthew 19 where I discussed this matter, and I left it to be defined by the Church.

- The third article. The epistle of Paul to the Hebrews is not authentic. That article is not mine, for in the commentaries on that epistle I did not deny that the epistle is authentic, but I said that in Jerome there was doubt about the author of this epistle, and this doubt makes the epistle doubtful, for if it is not by Paul, it is not clear that it is canonical. Here you see that where the author of the epistle is in doubt, I deny that its authenticity is perspicuous, but I do not deny that it is authentic. That an epistle is canonical is one thing, and that it is perspicuous that it is canonical is another. Perspicuity is a matter of our knowledge, but to be canonical is to do with the epistle itself as it is. If the doubt were taken away it would be perspicuous, but not on that account would it newly become canonical, but what was canonical in itself would be shown to be canonical. But it is certain that while there is doubt, it is not of such authority as to suffice on its own for the things that are of the faith. I therefore did not speak about the epistle itself, as my words clearly show, but the article (i.e. the Parisian article), speaks about the epistle itself.
- The fourth article. The last part of the last chapter of Mark, which has only recently become established, is not authentic. This article is not mine as can be seen from the commentaries on Mark. But on the basis of Jerome’s words I said that the writings of Mark which Jerome considers dubious are not of solid authority for confirming the faith in the same way as Mark’s other writings are. It is certain that those things which are considered doubtful are not of such authority as those that are not doubtful. Doubt is related to our knowledge, and not to the thing itself. But with regard to this article, the preceding one and others like it, it is to be noted that I have rejected no part of the Bible except those which St Jerome rejected, and I have doubted no part except those that

Jerome doubted. I have followed Jerome and I have deduced from his words things that agree with what he says. Jerome is the light of the whole Church for discriminating the parts and particles of Holy Scripture from those which are not parts and particles of it, and for discriminating the parts and particles of it that are certain from those that are not. Why therefore am I accused when I follow St Jerome? In accusing me in these matters, they are accusing Jerome, who is the principal author of these doubts.

- The fifth article. Auricular confession was not instituted by Christ in so far as it is both auricular and secret. This article is not mine: but John wrote [John 20] that Christ instituted voluntary confession of sin, but left to the usage of the Church the way of confessing and likewise of absolving (whether to the ear or publicly) in accordance with the secret or hidden quality of the sin. This is not to make the negative remark that auricular confession was not instituted by Christ, but to say that the confession instituted by Christ is not restricted to this way of confessing because it extends also to public confession. He who after he has publicly sinned confesses in public, is absolved in public and makes satisfaction in public, satisfies Christ's commandment.
- The sixth article. It is not necessary that a man who has mortally sinned and who has a confessor available should confess before he receives the Eucharist. This article is mine and it is founded on the doctrine of the Apostle Paul, who says about a man who is in mortal sin that he would eat and drink the Eucharist unworthily unless he is first approved. But, he says, a man may approve himself and so eat the bread and drink from the chalice. 'He who eats and drinks unworthily etc.' [1 Cor. 11:27ff] To approve oneself is a matter of contrition. But confession is a matter not only of approval by oneself, but also by someone else, the confessor. It follows from this that Paul says that it suffices for avoiding unworthiness to approve oneself: he says that contrition suffices for taking the Eucharist. If approval of oneself were not sufficient he would not have added 'and thus he may eat of that bread', for this clearly signifies that the man who is thus approved by himself may eat of that bread and drink of that cup. Therefore the article that Paul taught is not erroneous.
- The seventh article. We do not have the true text of Sacred Scripture in the Latin language unless it is made word for word from the language from which it is taken and is made wholly such as it is in its origin. I never wrote this article, as the proemium to the Psalter in which alone I dealt with this matter shows.
- The eighth article. It is better that prayers [*orationes*] are spoken in the vulgar tongue than in Latin. This article is not fully recited, since I did not write 'prayers' but 'public prayers' which are given with the people listening. I have based this on the teaching of Paul (1 Corinthians 14).
- The ninth article. Pensions on benefices with cure of souls can be redeemed in money. That article says more than I wrote, because I did not write about

benefices with cure of souls in particular but about ecclesiastical benefices in general. I based what I said on the teaching of St. Thomas. And the usage of the Church testifies in various places that these things are true, for even devout men make redemptions of this kind daily. And the amount of a pension to be redeemed by paying money is usually in fivefold proportion, for it is commonly thought that a price of this kind is just.

- The tenth article. Neither by reason nor by authority can it be proved that absolutely speaking a priest who contracts marriage sins, but rather that reason leads in the opposite direction. It can be proved that that article is not mine with regard to that particle, since as the text of the question shows I wrote that neither by reason nor by authority is it proved that a priest sins by contracting marriage etc, if the laws of the positive oath and vows are left out of consideration. I provided a reason against which those who are opposed must proceed by reasons and not by a slanderous little book.
- The eleventh article. The pope, saving his conscience, can dispense with a priest of the Western Church who contracts marriage even if there is no reason of public utility. That article is mine and is shown to be free from all error in that question, for no laws restrict the reason for dispensation to the public utility alone. If there is another reasonable cause, the pope can use his power as is plainly revealed.
- The twelfth article. When discord has arisen between married persons of this kind without hope of remedy, and there is a reasonable cause of dispensation so that each may contract with the other, can the marriage be dispensed? I believed so, provided that there is the consent of the married couple. This article about a marriage not consummated is mine. It is so moderate as to be totally irreprehensible, both because I only asserted belief, and because it depends on the authority of the apostolic see which considers a cause of this kind reasonable, as the apostolic rescripts show.
- The thirteenth article. He asserts that Christ descending into hell preached to the demons and to the damned. This article is not mine, for I never asserted it. But in the commentaries on 1 Peter 3 I plainly said that Christ did not speak of the preaching by which Peter showed to the nether regions that he was the Messiah and convinced both the demons and all the unbelievers of this kind, for the preaching was common to all in hell. Here it clearly appears that I spoke not about preaching absolutely speaking but about preaching of this kind (that is confuting and convincing demons and all the incredulous). But those men impose on me preaching without any qualification.
- The fourteenth article. The second epistle of John does not so much demand explanation as correction. The article is not fully recited, for in the commentaries on the epistle I wrote that it does not so much demand exposition as correction since in many things it differs from the Greek text. Here it clearly appears that I spoke about the correction of words differing from the Greek text. If

this is an error, why did Jerome labour for so long a time to correct the books of Sacred Scripture in accordance with the Hebraic verity? And why did Augustine refer readers to the Hebrew text for the correction of the books of the Old Testament, and to the Greek text for the correction of the books of the New Testament?

- The fifteenth article. James Alphaei is called the brother of the Lord, inasmuch as he was the son of Joseph by another wife. That article is not mine, for I never knew and never asserted that Joseph had another wife, although the opinion of those who say this did not displease me, and I therefore wrote in the commentaries on the Epistle to the Galatians that perhaps no greater reason seemed to be suitable than that he was the son of Joseph by another wife. I wrote nothing as certain.
- The sixteenth article. To argue whether Paul had a wife is superfluous, because we have nothing certain from his Epistles, although by some it may be shown by a very reasonable meaning that he had a wife. That article is not mine for in the commentaries on the epistle to the Philippians chapter 4, I wrote that I considered it superfluous to dispute whether Paul had a wife, since from other parts of the epistles of Paul I get nothing certain. And this place may seem to constrain (us to believe) not by a demonstrative reason, but by a reasonable meaning, that Paul had a wife. From this reason and from many others previously recited it can easily be seen that these articles are unworthy of theologians and unworthy of reply. They have either been imposed or they are free from the charge of error, for no error is incurred by thinking that Paul had a wife or did not have a wife. It is no error to think that Joseph had or did not have another wife than the Blessed Virgin. It is no error to think that the epistle of John is correct or incorrect according to the Greek text. Nor is it an error to doubt about those things about which Jerome doubted. Many things of this kind are contained in the articles of that small leaf of paper. So, honourable master, I have written these things to console you and the brothers so that you may consider that these slanderous little books are ridiculous among those who read and understand our books. Let those who desire to attack what we have written, fight with reasons and with the authorities of Holy Scripture, not with slanderous little books, and not with the arrogance of a name. Farewell.

Rome, 30 December, 1534.

The Regensburg Book, 1541 [Article XI]⁶

27 April 1541: The Book put forward by the Emperor with regard to the principle of concord that should be adopted in religious controversies.

6 Source: J. Le Plat, *Monumentorum ad historiam Concilii Tridentini potissimum illustrandam spectantium amplissima collectio*, 7 vol., Lovanio, 1781–1787, Vol. 3, *Acta Colloquii Ratisponensis*.

Art. IX: On the authority of the Church in distinguishing and interpreting the Scriptures.

1. Authority should therefore be known and sought in the Church. In order for this authority to be perceived, it must be known that God, in order to prepare this Church for himself, in the beginning wanted the practice to be by the ministry of the spoken, not the written word, which is handed down and communicated by the hands, so to speak. In this way, Christ ordered his apostles 'to go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature'. But God used this external and vocal word just like an instrument for showing the internal voice, by which alone hearts are opened.
2. Scripture was added afterwards by the benefit of God, both to assist human feebleness, which is prone to forgetfulness and error, and on account of the deceits of the devil, who always strives to drive out the word.
3. But because, as has been said, God knew that the devil, having made ready all his cunning against it, would do enough to corrupt that living word, and would suborn against it men who, transfiguring themselves into angels of light, would, under the names of the apostles themselves, both publish forged scriptures, by which they would arrogate apostolic authority, deprave the apostolic scriptures to their own perdition, and break the bond of love which was in them by injurious separations, he (God) consequently wanted to establish his same authority in the Church in a double way.
4. Firstly, in the Church he wanted there to be the authority of judging between the scriptures and distinguishing the canonical from the non-canonical. This authority in its time was held by the synagogue and afterwards confirmed in the Church by Christ. By it that most healthful ecclesiastical canon was established, which laid it down that canonical holy scripture was contained in certain terms and in certain books of the prophets and apostles both of the Old and of the New Testament, and took away that eminent canon of sacred letters from other books, which (the canon) was sublimely established as it were in a certain seat by the succession of bishops and the propagation of churches. Every faithful and pious intellect is subject to the canon, so that it is wholly inappropriate to doubt the rightness and truth of whatever this Scripture contains. Augustine's remark looks to this authority in the Church: *I would not believe in the Gospel unless the authority of the Catholic Church moved me to it.*
5. But this authority is placed only in discerning the true scriptures from the false ones. For it is agreed that all scripture which has been received into the ecclesiastical canon as true and divine is clearly immovable and greater by a long chalk than all human authority. Christ said of it that it could not be dissolved; hence, it is vain and irreligious to dispute about whether the authority of the Church is preferred to that of the Scriptures; whether the Church could abolish or change the things that are handed down in the word of God; and whether it could establish something against the word of God. But since, as the Apostle Peter teaches, no prophecy of Scripture is made by his interpretation, because it never arose from human will, for men spoke thus

- when they were inspired by the Holy Spirit, God also wanted the authority of interpreting the Holy Scriptures to be located in the Church, which is ruled by his Spirit, so that the same Spirit which is the author of Scripture is also the interpreter of it. Hence we read in the last chapter of Luke that the Lord opened his mind to his disciples, so that they should understand the Scriptures.
6. But this authority is not to be sought in any private individual. On the contrary, we should have recourse to the whole Church and the common consensus of all pious men, which is the universal testimony of the Holy Spirit, the support of truth. In this spirit, the Apostle said (1 Timothy 3), *The Church is the pillar and support of truth*. The highest authority of interpreting the Scriptures, which cannot be contradicted, resides not in individual members, but in the whole Church, which not only distinguished the genuine books of Holy Scripture from the supposed books, but also handed down the genuine interpretation of Scripture in necessary things, such as our confession that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are of the same nature and essence, and are three persons; and that there are two natures and one person in the Lord Christ. These and most other things the whole Catholic Church receives more by the explicit interpretation of the Scriptures than they are expressed by the words of those Scriptures, but they are implicit in those words of Scripture.
 7. This is what Athanasius says: *It is always the custom of ecclesiastical teaching against the insolent novelties of the disputes when some new doctrine of the heretics arises, to change the words and to express the natures of things more significantly, while the things remain immutable, while agreeing with the virtues of existing causes, which more show fully that the same things existed in ancient times and do not measure the novelty of the origin*. Irenaeus said, *If there is doubt about any question, it is appropriate to resort to the most ancient churches which the apostles frequented, and, with regard to the question that has been put forward to take up what is certain from them*. But if, as he suggests, not even the apostles left anything to us, was it not appropriate to follow the order of tradition which those men to whom they committed the churches handed down to us? Even the barbarians, without anything written in ink, assented to this, because they had salvation in their hands by the agency of the spirit.
 8. It is generally agreed that the synods and the writers of the Church, who are not of suspect faith, are suitable witnesses of this authority which the Church obtains with regard to the interpretation of Scripture in that common, perpetual and universal consent established in the earliest days, when they unanimously hand down and teach that some doctrine which is in accordance with the Scriptures was continuously in force in the church from the time of the apostles up to our time and was always accepted.
 9. Further, we should conform to this true and perpetual consensus, to which the synods and Fathers bear unanimous testimony, just as the Church has decreed that we should conform to it. For the things that have been handed down in common differ. For certain of them are dogmas that are plainly necessary, but some are not, which, obviously established on account of the time [i.e. they are established to meet some merely temporary need] can be changed.

Consequently we ought to accept that common consensus in accordance with the reason by which it speaks to us, and for the purpose to which it has regard, and we should not fasten on scriptures nor on dogmas which Basil in 'De spirito sancto' calls 'unwritten', and confound them with the necessary dogmas of the faith. For the reason for the prohibition against eating of suffocated blood ought not to be considered equal to the (reason) for prohibiting fornication, even if it was decreed and accepted by the common consent of all for a long time in the Church by the same authority as the latter and confirmed as much by the canons of the synods, for the former was judged necessary for the time. On this account it fell into disuse without prejudice to religion, but what has been expressed by divine law is perpetual: neither fornicators nor adulterers will possess the kingdom of God. Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 6.

10. In other respects, where the writers vary, the reader or hearer has free judgment about what to approve or disprove, but in case someone rashly trusts in himself he should in doubtful matters desire more to be taught than to teach, and where it seems necessary should transfer his judgment about ambiguous things to the Church, in accordance with the Apostle's saying, 'Let others decide', 1 Cor. 14. For there is a spirit throughout the Church of proving and determining that it is not permitted to individuals to interpret forthwith the scriptures, for in them, by their nature, there are many things that are difficult for the intellect, II Peter, ult. [the reference is to II Peter, 3:16]. But the universal church is eternal. The consensus of the orthodox general councils, to which long since all churches have lent assent and authority, is expressly to be distinguished from the authority of particular churches and synods. By this, that universal consensus and admirable unanimity in one and the same doctrine has a nature all of its own, so that we must stand by its interpretation, because the Church, I say, and the agreement with the Scriptures, is supported by the most infallible signs, which are promises of divine truth from the Spirit, with regard to the future concord of doctrine. Both of these are the sign of the Spirit, which is called the Spirit of unity, not of discord, because it is the dictator and author of all true interpretation and salutary arrangement. These things are deliberately proved by the sanctity of the churches and the sanctity of the pious, by miracles and by the blood of martyrs.
11. On the other hand, particular churches indeed have the authority of comparing, examining and even interpreting the Scriptures, John 5, Acts 17, but only so that they are not inconsistent with that perpetual consensus. And while opinions vary, lesser individual churches should look to the greater and the many, and finally the many, when necessary, to the universal Church, and this ought to be done by means of assemblies, which come together in synods, of which some are episcopal, some provincial, some national, and some universal. May what has been said so far have been said about the means of recognition of the word.

CATHARINUS: Letter to Clement VII, c. 1532⁷

Complaint about the behaviour of the Order and the Master of the Sacred Palace in view of his polemic against Cardinal Cajetan's Commentaries on the Holy Scriptures.

Eternal glory to the Most Holy Lord, Pope Clement VII.⁸

Would that a useless servant of Christ should find grace in the face of your clemency, so that Your Clemency should deign to read this letter of ours with a quiet mind removed as far as possible from other tumults. I have faithfully toiled over this letter on behalf of the Catholic truths and the authority of your apostolic see. From this study and labour of mine, I neither seek nor desire any reward for myself on earth, except that I should purely serve Christ, that his health-bearing virtue should live, and that the falsehoods that are hostile to our religion should be cast down by the spirit of your mouth. I have dealt with many things that are to be reprehended in that Very Reverend, concerning whom I have talked with you, and I have dealt with a few things as much as he can with the Master of your Sacred Palace, whom, I do not doubt (although he defends the Very Reverend for the sake of the Order and his dignity), I do not doubt I say that he is persuaded of the truth but he is spinning things out. Consequently, being about to go away from here⁹, I have decided to assemble in this small work and in these few words, those things which are most certain to all who are truly Catholics so that your Holiness should see what will rightly seem good and profitable to the Christian republic which is in your hands. But, with regard to what pertains to me, where it is agreeable to watch over what I preach, I totally promise that I consider nothing more excellent nor more magnificent than to honour the truth above all things, especially Christian truth, which no Christian can with equanimity bear any man to violate. But, Holy Father, I know that he refuses this mere dispute because in the glory and dignity of knowledge I am not his equal. This is the characteristic of the glorious soldiers of this world, but it is not the characteristic of the unseemly and the base who live among Christian men of more ample standing, from whom in the first place the Divine Scripture demands that they should give as promptly as possible to each man desiring it the reason for those things that the Scriptures contain, just as our forefathers, who were really pre-eminent in doctrine, sanctity and the glory of honours, always did. I do not strive to do battle with him for the sake of glory, I shall not cast any shadows over his glorious name, and I do not make myself equal to him in any kind of knowledge; but what he believes other than the Church believes, I neither approve nor accept, but I reject it and think that it is wholly to be rejected, because the Church believes thus, and because I see that otherwise great damage is done to the doctrine of faith. Nor should the prudence of your Holiness wonder if I pronounce a little more confidently against so great a

7 Siena, Biblioteca Comunale K. VIII. 36 nr 4 S. 75rf. Autograph (Rough draft).

8 The Letter has been published by Schweizer, J., *Ambrosius Catharinus ... Appendix of Selected Documents*, pp. 249–250, Document 5.

9 Catharinus is presumably referring to his impending journey to France.

man, for the nature of the cause demands this, since in matters of the faith, the Lord granted all men to be equal, because the decrees of your predecessors pronounce what we have learned from Scripture. If this had not been the case, Paul would certainly not have presumptuously trusted in himself to rebuke his Pastor Peter, the head of all the Apostles, with such great spirit, and in a certain way even boast about it afterwards when he wrote: ‘I resisted him to his face in the presence of everybody, because he was reprehensible, not rightly walking with the truth of the Gospel’.¹⁰ For this reason, when some error is likewise detected in superiors, those who expound the Sacred Scriptures observe the example given to inferiors of hearing the same spoken against them. Let not then the Very Reverend despise me, who, although he can rightly despise me about everything else, cannot do so with regard to the teaching and learning of the faith. Let him consider that his Lord Jesus, Eternal Wisdom, did not look down on the young Samaritan woman laden with her sins, but taught her good water, which she did not thirst for. Let him behold the same Jesus in the midst of the doctors talking with such gentleness, asking question and replying to them, or rather let him notice that he did not disdain, when the Devil tempted him with the Scriptures, to rebut and confute him with the Scriptures likewise. Let him no less consider that I am not the only one whom his writings have not pleased, for there are many learned men, or rather whole universities and synods who censure these new dogmas of his, and condemn and explode them as erroneous, schismatic and heretical. Let him not despise them, but rather himself. Let him remember the proverb, ‘Cursed be the man who neglects his own reputation, and does not gratify himself’; he to whose face scarcely any man can object these things should hear Jerome, who says, ‘No one dares to accuse a greater man, because the saints and the blessed and those who walk in the commandments increase the sins for the sinners’. It is difficult to accuse a bishop, for even if he has sinned, it will not be believed, and if he is convicted he is not punished. What wonder therefore, if those whose job it is in particular to warn, act remissly and with gentleness, since what Paul says is especially to be wondered at: ‘All seek their own interest, not that of Jesus Christ.’¹¹ It is rather to be wondered that we can find someone who is so obviously foolish, who, speaking the truth on all sides has dared to excite hatred against himself. I have spoken freely, trusting in the approbation of your clemency. Nevertheless, whatever I have said, I very promptly, sincerely and with all my heart submit and subject to your judgment and apostolic censure, not as many do with feigned mind. Would that I, a gentle little sheep, might hear the voice of my Shepherd Clement, as I desire and pray, both in this life and in eternity.

CATHARINUS: The Vulgate Edition¹²

How much is to be granted to the Vulgate Edition?

Although as has been said it is surely right to accept the scriptures as wholly blameless, since their authors, who spoke as prophets by the inspiration of the

10 Galatians 2:11f.

11 Philippians 2:21.

12 Source: *Claves Duae* 1543, pp. 44–56

Holy Spirit, received not only what they wrote but also how they wrote it from the Holy Spirit likewise, as Augustine rightly shows, I do not want it to be thought that I also approve of those who translated the scriptures into another language: we do not have to suppose that anyone's edition is uncorrupted, having no part of error ... I am not of those who suppose that no distinction can be made between an interpreter and a prophet – which Jerome elegantly rebukes. For one man, he says, is a prophet and another an interpreter. In the first case, the spirit prophesies the things that are to come; in the second, learning and a rich vocabulary transfer the things that he understands. Nor do I agree with those who champion whatever any man has thought who is holy or is of great name in the Church, as they fear to concede in their unreasonable religion that Jerome in his edition failed to notice something that some much smaller man than Jerome perhaps discovered – something which I would have admitted as a thing not difficult or greatly to be wondered at. For it is a very different matter for me to be more perceptive than someone in a single instance than to be more perceptive than him in everything. For who sees everything? However, there is frequently someone who sees something which has escaped the notice of another person who is even more perceptive. Would that Jerome were here to judge of this matter, and that they knew through him that much more was bestowed on him than he in shame would recognize or judge to be right. But I do not know how they established that this edition which at least we generally use is by Jerome, because he admits that his edition does not differ from the Hebraic verity, and summons as his witnesses in this matter those Jews who were more skilled in that language. Yet not only the Jews but almost all those of us who are versed in this language testify that the Vulgate differs (from the Hebrew verity). And certain things are definitely so clear that they cannot be denied unless I am mistaken, except by a stubborn man. In addition to these, the majority that stand out in this edition are those which Jerome himself openly condemns and censures as least to be tolerated both in the New and in the Old Testament, which it is not the present business to show. And what seems to shut the mouth of those who disagree is the fact that Jerome himself tells us somewhere or other that he corrected certain things in his edition which however remain in ours, and added certain things which they do not have thus as he himself adds. And he himself calls our edition the Latin Vulgate. He never corrected his own edition, as inspection reveals. I know that certain men have recently descended into argument concerning this edition, but I am not convinced by the arguments of those who say that the translation is not Jerome's. If I considered it worthwhile, I believe that I could prove this to a reasonable man, but I consider it more useful not to pursue the question of whether the text is by Jerome or by someone else. Nevertheless, I think it more useful not to insist on whether it is by Jerome or someone else, but whoever is the author, whether it is true and whether the light of truth shines deep within it. For some believe that faith is imperilled if one or the other error is observed in an edition of this kind, either because Jerome wrote it or because it was accepted by the Church and is approved by long use. But they do not prove this. But none of these things if they consider them wisely and in accordance with Jerome himself and other masters strong in doctrine is capable of derogating from the faith. For let him be what he may, does our faith, I ask depend on Jerome's learning, so that if he is proved to have erred our faith on this account staggers? Perish the thought, for

the faith rests on a better foundation – a rock, not Jerome – than to be capable of staggering by reason of an error however great and of whatever kind perpetrated by any holy man. Suppose that the Church has approved this edition. Did it not approve others before Jerome, especially the Septuagint, which the whole company of the early saints so commended that nothing more could be added. Jerome's version never had that. The Septuagint received its authority from Christ, the Apostles and the Evangelists, who, by often quoting from it, testified on its behalf. Yet Jerome, who knew it very well, did not shrink in some respects from censuring and amending and changing the translation of the Seventy for the better, for he thought that the Seventy had been occasionally deceived by the likeness of the rudiments, although this seems elementary.

Suppose someone were to say to me, 'Therefore the Church and the Apostles, who approved and accepted such editions were wrong'. Perish the thought. The Church approves and commends in different ways, in the same way as things of different kinds are put forward for approval. Some writings are put forward for the Church to approve as holy. If approval is forthcoming, it is approval as truly holy. Consequently, the text concerned is forthwith completely free from error. It was put forward for approval of this kind, and has been so approved. Again, a translation of Scripture is put forward, which is likewise offered for the approval of the Church. But even if it is approved, it is not approved in the same way in which Holy Scripture is approved, for Scripture is approved as having been produced by God, but a translation is approved as having been produced by man. It is approved to be accepted not as free from all error, but as that in which dangerous error does not appear. And it could be changed. It is not therefore of the same status in the faith as the former example. Consequently, we do not often see translations of the kind in which many things remain properly in accordance with the original verity: although some of them are not correct, a good part contains no falsehood, but announces a different verity, although the first author did not see it there. Finally, if they do contain some error, it is not pernicious and it is mostly unimportant. Even if some error were to be important, the Church presupposes that it could be changed and that it ought to be changed by reference to the version in the original language from which the translation was made. However, not all error is to be attributed to translation, since many errors have slipped in from the vice of the scribes. This, I think, is enough, lest someone should offer me Damasus as an objection. Damasus had handed over to Jerome the responsibility for amending the translation that he had approved. As I have said, he did not approve it as true in all respects and in accordance with the purity of the original language which the authors themselves had used. He was not bound by the way in which he had approved an edition of this kind – whether extra-judicially, or solemnly by taking cognisance of the matter. The pope commends nothing whatever at first sight: it is believed that it is approved. In matters of this kind it is fitting to have a meeting with those who are skilled not only in languages, but in all disciplines, especially the sacred ones, so that no deception can arise either from words or things. Some men think that the Holy Spirit always inspires the popes in these matters. I praise their faith, but it is sometimes excessive, for the spirit indeed inspires, but when appraisal is required, human diligence also. God does not wish to perform blatant miracles, nor is it reasonable for him to be at hand with his

personal viewpoint, unless man is also at hand to do what he can, so that his work is completed where human industry can do no more. God does not wish to do everything himself but (to work) alongside man so that he supplies no defect of man save the human defect. But let those things be said in honour of, and with all the reverence that is owed to, the sanctity and authority of Jerome, the pope and both together, and especially on account of the new editions of others, particularly Erasmus, who defends his edition with the pretext that it was approved by Leo X, although he himself did not approve the approbation of that pope, for after he had published that first edition that the pope approved, he published four more, and in all of them he amended many mistakes which he recognized in the earlier ones. If I were to give my judgment about these matters, I would say that the Latin edition that we use – I speak of the New Testament – is undoubtedly superior to all others, although I do not approve of it in all respects. It has deserved this (eminence) not only because of its great age and its long reception, but also because it is purer and sounder as the divine mysteries themselves require, and more venerable in a certain simplicity and gravity of eloquence. Not all the mistakes have been removed. Many of these, it is reasonable to say, have arisen from the vice of the scribes not of the translator. They could easily be corrected by reference to the Greek verity, to which it is far closer. Here I would like the prudent to think that not everything that seems to be wrong in the Vulgate edition or is different from the Greek or the Hebrew is wrong and requires correction, in case we are ipso facto compelled to blame the apostles and the evangelists who seem often to quote the Old Testament differently from the Hebrew. If Valla and Erasmus had considered this correctly they would not have attacked the Latin translator so much, whoever he was, for they blame him in many things undeservedly. Here I would like the reader to consider many things, firstly, that the same meaning is often extracted from various words meaning various things. For example, Matthew quotes from Micah 5: ‘And you Bethlehem are by no means the smallest land of the princes of Judah etc.’ But another reading is, ‘And you Bethlehem Effrata are small in the thousands of Judah’. Here, you see how much difference there is, if you attend to the words alone, for in one place there is ‘Effrata’, and in the other ‘the land of Judah’; in one, ‘You are small’ and in the other, ‘You are by no means small’; here, ‘In the thousands of Judah’, and there, ‘In the princes of Judah’. But all these differences preserve the meaning unharmed as far as the letter and the truth of the narrative is concerned, while the meaning of the spirit emerges more completely. Effrata is in the land of Judah, and so nothing of the story is lost, and the Jews cannot complain that the meaning has been violated. The spiritual sense is however imparted more richly. Effrata was fruitful, and Judah was the land of confession, so that it is made plain why Effrata is fruitful, that is, by reason of that confession which the wretched Jews did not know. The land prepares from the fruit of our heart what the Lord confesses is good. And all these things are prepared especially by the Virgin, who only confesses and brought forth the fruit of her lips that confessed in the name of the Lord. This is the host of praise, as St Paul declared. No one knows what those words are worth: ‘Behold, the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me, according to your word.’ But it can be known from the outcome and the fruit, since they drew the word of salvation from the sky, and produced salvation for us. What is written in one text – (‘you are small’) – is not written in the other (‘you are in no way small’) and

this wonderfully succeeds in expressing the prophetic meaning, for she was small in her own eyes because of her lowliness and abject as far as she was concerned on account of the good tidings that she had received, which produced humility. Hence was fulfilled 'In as far as you are greater, humble yourself in all things' (Ecclesiastes 3). The prophet expressed this when he said, 'You are small'. But because she was very small to herself, the Lord here regards her and exalts her, because it was written, 'He regards the humble things and considers the great from a distance'. Thus the Evangelist, expressing the merit of that humility said, 'You are in no way small'. He does not deny what the prophet says, but declares what the spirit says in it, just as she said in the same spirit, 'My spirit exulted in God my saviour because he regarded the humility of his handmaiden, for lo henceforth all generations shall call me blessed, for he who is powerful did great things for me, and holy is his name'. In case you think that the prophet did not sufficiently express the excellence of the merit of this divine land, see what follows. 'You who are the ruler of Israel will come out from yourself to me'. For, O Bethlehem, this is undoubtedly the cause of your greatness, for thus the Evangelist adduced it, saying, 'From you will arise the leader to rule my people Israel', as if he had plainly said, 'Therefore you are not at all small or the least in the presence of God'. See therefore how wonderful and incredible is the consonance in each saying, where nevertheless so much diversity arises from the words themselves. So no one ought to be moved rashly, as many smatterers are, who, from a certain erudition and knowledge of languages, basely call out where they see a departure from the words, 'there is a mistake', not seeing that they themselves have gone astray.

There are many places of this kind. See, in Paul, we read, 'Every man who believes will not be confounded'. This is taken from Isaiah, who says however, 'They who believe should not hurry'. These remarks really seem different, and yet they look to one meaning, for the prophet warned the man who has accepted Jesus by faith not to hurry, that is, he should not think that he has done everything that is required for the possession of the kingdom, because obviously a great road remains before him, and it is appropriate for him to be worthy by his good works. Therefore he should wait as one in hope. Paul says absolutely the same thing, except that he expresses the reason for the prophetic exhortation, as if he had said, 'I also say that he should not hurry, but wait in hope, sowing and labouring, because he will not be confounded'. It is not this hope of Christians that might confound us, that might be frustrated, just as he had said above. Hope does not confound. Therefore you see here that Paul does not stray from the prophetic sense, but brings it to life in his remark and declares it more fully. Why therefore do you not understand that what Isaiah said – Unless you believe, you will not persevere – was well explained by the Seventy, who said about this place that what is said is, 'You will not persist', for he who does not understand will not persist. I could quote a number of examples of this kind, but this is enough to make the point. It is useful to know that from time to time, a number of places are joined together into a proof. Thus Paul in Romans 3 creates a proof, teaching us that all those texts tend to the same point. Thus Matthew got 'Say, O daughters of Sion, your Saviour comes' partly from Isaiah, where we read, 'Say to the daughter of Sion, behold your Saviour comes', and partly from Zechariah, where the remainder is to be found. John said, 'Do not be afraid, O daughter of Sion', from

Zechariah, who said, 'Rejoice, shout, O daughter of Sion'. Hence he said to him, 'Do not be afraid'. These are things to be received with reverence and wonder. There are from time to time certain things that are not found in the old writers. Certain of these are quotations, but certain are not. Jeremiah is quoted about the price of blood: all the examples are in agreement. But this is to be found nowhere in Jeremiah, nor anything like it. What then are we to think? Are all the examples entirely corrupt? I do not think so. What wonder would it have been if Jeremiah had said this and it was then read and written down, as some people say, in certain apocrypha that contained it. Jerome said that he had read it, and Origen too. The book was not classified as apocryphal for this reason (i.e. because it contained the remark attributed to Jeremiah) for there might be some truth in it. Thus Jude, the Apostle, quoted prophecy from Enoch. There is nothing in the Scriptures to confirm this, though there might be from the apocrypha. Paul quotes the Lord's remark, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive', which is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures. Again, with regard to Iannis and Mambris, who made restitution to Moses. Is that perhaps contained in the Apocrypha? Luke puts one generation into the genealogy of the saints from Christ to God the Father: Cain. This generation is not to be found in the old writings as it should have been. It was omitted. Because it was required in Luke's genealogy, on account of the sacred significance of numbers, or some other reason perhaps, Luke added it. But perish the thought that it should be thought superfluous. Lest, however, we wander too long in these matters, the point here is to make it clear that in interpretation no opinion should be offered easily or rashly. As it is the first intention of a translator to express the sense, his task is not always to stick to the words and translate word for word, since the sense is sometimes obscured or lost, as the learned know. Certain more recent scholars have departed on many occasions from the Vulgate edition by not noticing this. They have introduced some mere Hebraism from which greater obscurity arises because of the exotic language and tropes. They have gone so far in this direction that they even arrogantly criticize the Evangelists, or rather the Holy Spirit in them, for error. They now suffer for it. Another consideration is that what has crept in on account of the vice of the scribes should not be attributed to the translator. There are certain places that are corrupt as a result of scribal carelessness. Another thing worth taking a lot of trouble over is that although as a rule, as Jerome says, the Greek texts are better than the Latin, and the Hebrew than our own, we should not think that this is always so. I have sometimes discovered that it is plainly otherwise. This is undoubtedly true with regard to the Greeks. No sane man could think that the writers of that language are by a miracle preserved from the possibility of error. Likewise there is evidence from the Latins that the heretics sometimes obliterated or corrupted the texts by which they were nailed. To show this by a number of examples, take the remark to the devil in Luke in Greek: 'Get thee behind me, Satan'. Jerome and Origen testify that the Lord said this to Peter alone. To the devil, he said, 'Go Satan'. This is very likely. Therefore, the Latin exemplars are here better. Again, the Lord said, in our version, 'He who is angry with his brother'. In the Greek codices we read, 'He who is angry with his brother without a cause'. But this 'without a cause', as Jerome notes, is without a cause, and was rashly added by those who thought that it was appropriate for it to be like this. Frequently, what was in the glosses or scholia was incorporated in the text.

Sometimes something was added from another part of the Scriptures, although not with evil intention. But where you see the whole is inverted, and where a whole story or opinion or whatever is contained in our codices that is not in the Greek, beware of thinking that it came from the translator: it came from a copy or copies in Greek and the translator took it from there. When there is a disagreement about the Greek codices, the question has to be raised, ‘Which Greek texts are to be considered the more probable ones: the ones that the translator used, or those that are now offered to us?’ For example, the story of the adulteress is contained in John, but not in some of the Greeks. If it were to be said that it was invented by the translator and added by him, he would be very rash, since it is agreed that the story is found in many copies and is mentioned in the most ancient of them. Therefore, it would be appropriate to consider whether the story was added in those manuscripts in which it was found or rather subtracted from those in which it is not. The latter is to be supposed for many reasons. Much the same is to be thought about the last chapter of Mark; about the angel who appeared to Christ to comfort him; about what we read in the canonical epistle of John (there are three who give witness in heaven); about the fragment of the story of Daniel; about what again is in John (every spirit which dissolves Christ). These are not contained in certain Greek codices, but on the evidence of the Latins, they were removed by the heretics (see the Tripartite History). It is probable that the Arians corrupted many things that are connected with the Trinity. I wanted to introduce these things for prudent, considered and judicious examination, so that we should not immediately denounce the translator when there is some discrepancy between the Greek version and ours, as Erasmus did in many cases. Consequently Erasmus himself was compelled to change the version that he had produced together with the annotations on the literal sense and to recognise his manifest errors, as we well know from the event. He who delighted in railing against all men was too much of a lightweight and too complaisant in claiming for himself a reputation for wisdom among both learned and common but not in truth among the wise.

CATHARINUS: Errors Concerning the Scriptures¹³

FIRST indeed there is the error of the philosophers who utterly neglect it and condemn it contemptuously, as is commonly said of Aristotle (although I do not believe it), who is said to have looked down on Moses because he did not prove what he had proposed. Averroes and his followers thought the same, as if indeed what we cannot prove we may immediately show to be non-existent, or as if the things which are put forward to be received by faith should be demonstrable. But by their loftiness, these things exceed reason or, if you wish, are to be handed down appropriately in some other way, e.g. by revelation or can be taken up e.g. by faith. But such philosophers as Averroes do not know the weight of the sentence by which they were warned: ‘Give a wise man wisdom and he will be yet wiser’. Certainly, if they had been worthy of hearing Moses and the prophets they would have known incomparably more. And what they knew they would have perceived much more

13 Source: *Claves Duae* 1543.

clearly and strongly, since they (Moses and the Prophets) declared many things that are above the capacity of our senses. Finally they would have been freed from many errors and doubts about many things, because they are now clearly exposed.

THE SECOND ERROR is the error of those who not only condemn these scriptures and disparage them, but even with impious fury have tried to attack them in books which they have produced, like Celsus, Porphyry and the famous apostate, who do not hesitate to charge our prophets and evangelists with ignorance, lies and contradictions. But by this their perverse and impious enterprise in which their foolishness and ignorance are exposed, their lies and unjust spirit of contradiction is likewise exposed. However, we know that some things in the Scriptures offend at first sight which can appear to the unlearned and to those who are unaccustomed in these matters either trivial or tasteless or false or even mutually inconsistent. But if from the beginning we go into them as is fitting in faith and piety, so that we always think the Holy Spirit is there, as many arguments about this maintain, the Holy Spirit himself will deign to show that nothing there is trivial or unsuitable, nothing false or inconstant, but that the whole is most serious, congruent, true and marvellous in concordant unanimity, and mutual confirmation.

THE THIRD ERROR in like manner, is that of the Jews who only accept the Old Testament, where there is the inheritance of the good thing of the earth, and they reject the new Testament where we are described as the heirs of the heavens, but this error has its own deserved and suitable punishment, for they are deprived of the inheritance of both Testaments: to the injury of the testator they preferred what had now waned, and rejected what was waxing, or rather was eternal.

THE FOURTH ERROR is that of the Manicheans, who, on the contrary denying the Old Testament, and perverting and corrupting the New, divided God himself, the sole author, into two. Whence, since they, neither recognised the testator (as was fitting), nor accepted the law and the prophets who were joined in agreement with the testator they were deservedly deprived of the whole inheritance. For they did not understand that the Master himself had said that it was the responsibility of the learned writer to produce both the new and the old from his treasury.

THE FIFTH ERROR is the error of those who although they fully acknowledge the contents of each testament nevertheless mutilate some parts, which they deny to be holy and canonical, and what is most perverse of all dare to accuse them of error, and that against the judgment and sense of the Holy Church. I have elsewhere argued and disputed against these men in separate book, on account of men who have recently become masters by listening to it.

THE SIXTH ERROR is the error of those who most perversely dare to change something in the Scriptures, as if they had discovered a fault, neither led on by any probable reason for the fault nor equipped with any more correct codex from which to confirm the fault which they imagined, but with the highest impudence daring to do it by the judgment of their own brain, as the Manicheans did, not fearing for

themselves on account of God's threat: 'If anyone shall add to this, may God inflict plagues upon him' (Revelation 22:18). For although some errors may have crept into the sacred books either by the unskilfulness of the scribes or by their carelessness when they were copying from another text; or by the inexperience or dozingness of the translators when they were turning one language into another, it is not credible, as Augustine says, that all the books in whatever language should be deeply corrupt, because divine providence would not have permitted this. On this account I now believe it is opportune to annex a catalogue of the Scriptures which the Catholic Church has long observed and ordained, just as we were instructed by the decisions and decrees by the Holy Fathers and the popes.

Catalogue of the Divine and Canonical Writings

First therefore the Old Testament is composed of these books. For the Pentateuch precedes all the Scriptures, that is to say the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These are followed by one book of Joshua, one of Judges, one of Ruth, and four of Kings (although the Jews call the firsts two of these 'Samuel'). There are two books of Chronicles, then the two first books of Ezra (the Church never recognized the last two, although indeed one or two ecclesiastics quote opinions from them, not, as I think, in approval of the book, but in the manner of collecting something good or true just as authors have borrowed from the Apocrypha and annexed the borrowing to their own works, because everything that is true comes from the Holy Spirit. Next comes one book of Tobias, one book of Judith, one book of Job, one of Psalms, one of the Proverbs of Solomon, one of Ecclesiastes, one of the Song of Songs, one of Wisdom, and one of Ecclesiasticus. Many of the ancients said that these last five books were by Solomon either because Solomon wrote them as is established in the case of certain of them, namely Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, or they were faithfully assembled from his sayings and writings by others, as is reasonable to believe concerning the remainder, although the author of the Book of Wisdom calls himself Solomon. Four Books of the major prophets follow: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. To Jeremiah are annexed the Lamentations, the Oration, and the prophet Baruch. After these come the 12 minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Two books of Maccabees have the last place. The Old Testament concludes with these.

The New Testament has first of all the four Evangelists – Matthew, Mark Luke and John. Then Luke's Acts of the Apostles. Then the 14 epistles of Paul: one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon, and lastly one to the Hebrews. But this order is not in accordance with the times in which he wrote, but is accepted following the spirit who thus catalogued the mysteries with reason. The seven canonical epistles follow: one of James, two of Peter, three of John, one of Jude. These likewise received their order from the Holy Spirit, not according to the worth of the apostles. And I do not doubt that in that number (the number seven) there is prophetic mystery. The

Apocalypse of the beloved John has the last place. And this testament was written in Greek, except for the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle to the Hebrews, as many ancient authors have testified. And this would not have been the case without a hidden meaning, i.e., a mystery. Therefore all the books written above are holy, divine and canonical. Nor do I think that the divine law is for anyone to doubt since the age-old custom of all churches, and the public decrees of the popes, and the Holy Fathers and the old doctors who have deserved praise in the Church have confirmed (them) with marvellous agreement: although from time to time certain things will be doubted in the Church, they will not be doubted by the pre-eminent authors whom I have preferred to follow, but by this or that nobody or some piddling fellows from whom the new heretics seize the opportunity of saying otherwise, not knowing that by the process of time, as Jerome says, they are proven and confirmed, and the Scriptures grow more powerful, especially when they are determined by the Roman faith as holy and canonical. This is clearly apparent in the things said above, and I have shown it more fully in a separate disputation, from which the reader who wants more on this topic will have been able to get it.

THE SEVENTH ERROR (a marginal note reads, 'The error of Erasmus, who does not think it absurd that the authors of the Scriptures were wrong') is the error of those who have got as far in that direction as not to think it absurd and impossible that there should be some error in those scriptures by reason of some thoughtlessness or a lapse of memory of those who first handed them down, that is the Prophets, Apostles or Evangelists. They do not think that they are detracting from the dignity of the faith but are rather helping it, and they do not think that those who feel like this are heretics (marginal note reads, 'Erasmus in the Annotations on Matthew'). But may such impious thought against the Holy Spirit be far from the pious heart. For if the Scriptures in any part admitted a tiny error or untruth of this kind, as Augustine has most prudently taught, our faith in the whole would waver and be endangered. For just as in foundations there cannot be anything unsound, so there cannot be in the Holy Scriptures, which the Holy spirit gave us as a foundation. Consequently, one of the men with a bad reputation in the church speaks very impiously (marginal note reads, 'Erasmus is signified'). He says, 'With reference to what the Apostle has written in 1 Corinthians 7, for instance, on divorce, in my opinion we hold them sufficiently tightly, let me not say more than sufficiently tightly'. Another man (a marginal note reads, 'Cajetan') has dared to say that Paul did not express an opinion about excommunication that was in accordance with Christ's way of thinking. And thus you see men of this kind made judges of scripture and the apostles on their own initiative, and on account of this, being blind in the very gates.

THE EIGHTH ERROR is the error of certain men who desire in scripture I know not what eloquence in which they delight and glory more than greatly, not knowing the counsel and virtue of God, which does not consist in vain and fallacious pomp and noise, but in the content and the simple truth; so far is this secular eloquence from being fit to be furnished to the writers of the divine mysteries, that it had to be avoided deliberately and as much as possible lest the simplicity and virtue of the Cross were overshadowed. Wherefore Paul, protesting that he knew nothing but

Jesus Christ crucified said, 'My speech and my preaching are not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in the showing of spirit and virtue, so that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the virtue of God'. Consider O prudent reader, and ask reverently for divine advice. What is more abject, what is more weak, and more foolish than the Cross? Nevertheless in it are placed our glory, knowledge and strength. Again, what is weaker, what is more ignoble and foolish in the eyes of the world than those ancient preachers of the Cross. Yet those who confessed it conquered the world, saying, 'We are foolish for Christ's sake' and again, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels'. Although therefore what they preached was abject in the eyes of men as were those who preached it, was it not likewise right that the very speech of the preaching should also be lowly, so that thus the secret virtue of Christ should appear in a higher degree, lest what was the spirit and virtue of God, namely the triumph and the marvellous increase in faith and the taking of the princes of this age should be unworthily attributed to human eloquence. Nevertheless I should not wish anyone to think that the language of scripture lacked eloquence and the science of speaking, since a little later the same Apostle admits that he is announcing the things which are given to us by God not in the learned words of human wisdom, but in the learned words of the spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things, as if more clearly by this means he were to say: There is human wisdom which the wise of the world try to express, which has its learned words, which are adapted to the world; which teaches those very things devised by human art, decorated with colours and ordered with care. But there is also the wisdom of the spirit which is opposed to the wisdom of men, which, since it also has to be made manifest by speech has also to have learned words that are in proportion to it – provided not by human art, but by the spirit. That is, that spirit is pure, simple, sober and thus the words that it teaches are chaste, untainted, simple and not impaired, as it was written: The eloquence of the Lord is a chaste eloquence, silver tried by the fire and proved free from earth seven times. And therefore Paul said 'matching spiritual things with spiritual things', that is, matching them to the spiritual knowledge that we must proclaim, that is matching spiritual language to spiritual content, not secular language, which human wisdom requires. No one then ought rightly to marvel if that spiritual kind of eloquence which comes from the wisdom of the spirit, serves that spirit, and prefers rather to show the spirit itself and to fill the breasts of the learned rather than their ears, is disregarded – indeed condemned – by those who give first place to word and speech. On account of this, Augustine, that excellent doctor, when he asked himself the question whether our authors who handed down the books of scripture by divine inspiration, should merely be called wise or truly eloquent as well, very truly and elegantly produced this verdict. I and those who share my opinion, he says, very easily solve this question. For where I understand them, nothing can be seen which is more wise and eloquent. And I dare to say that all those who understand rightly what they say, ipso fact understand that they ought not to have been said otherwise. For just as there is a certain eloquence which is more fitting for youth, there is an eloquence which is more fitting for old age, and it is not now to be called eloquence if it does not correspond to the person of the speaker. Thus there is a certain eloquence which becomes men in the highest authority, who are most worthy and wholly divine. These men have spoken in this

style. No other form of eloquence becomes them. The humbler it seems to others, the more highly does it transcend not by its beauty, but by its solidity. Where indeed, I do not understand them, their eloquence indeed seems less to me, but I do not doubt that it is such as where I do understand it. I could indeed if there were time show in the sacred books of those men that are to be taught to us to transfer us from this base age into the age of blessedness that divine providence repudiates all the virtues and ornaments of eloquence about which those are puffed up, who prefer their language to the language of our authors not for its greatness but for its elevation. But those things that are common to those men and the orators or the poets of the Gentiles do not delight me more than can be said in that eloquence. I wonder at that and am astounded by it, because they have used this eloquence of ours with a view to a certain different kind of eloquence of theirs, so that they neither lack it, nor excel in it, blame it nor boast of it: if they avoided the one, the other was conceivable. Perhaps in some places the learned recognise it. Such things are said that the words in which they are said are not used by the speaker but seem spontaneously joined to the things themselves. And if by chance, in these places it is recognised by the learned, such things are said that the words in which they are said are not used by the speaker but are seen in the things themselves, as if added spontaneously, as if one is to understand wisdom that proceeds from its home, that is, the heart of the man of sense, and follows eloquence as an inseparable maidservant follows even if not called. For this is man when made spiritual and can judge all spiritual things by the spirit. For before he was such, he thought differently as he himself admits, who differently did not value this holy scripture so much that he thought it was comparable with the dignity of Cicero, as in another place he admits, and condemns it (i.e. scripture) because he did not of course see the thing with the spiritual eye, nor advance his judgment from spiritual taste but with the taste of men, just like those, who whatever they read are accustomed only to approve at the forge of Cicero or Demosthenes the eloquence of a very few. Would that some of these who so superstitiously dedicate themselves to certain select words without which all speech is sullied and makes them sick (they call these words eloquence) be a little more unjust to their authors. Moreover, they reject the word 'humility' in the sense in which it is generally used in the scriptures and by churchmen, and prefer, instead of humility, to say either 'lowliness' or 'modesty', or some such thing. They also avoid the word 'faith', when they wish to refer to what now everyone calls by that word, and put in its place, 'persuasion' or 'religion', but not thus suitably expressing what they mean. They think to call Jesus 'the very pious man', and his most pious mother 'the reconciler'. They do not dare to call him 'Saviour', but rather 'deliverer'. They substitute 'legation' for 'apostolate' for the sake of this elegance. They reject much else of this kind in which they undoubtedly show perverse, not to say impious, superstition. But it is undoubtedly true that if they had the true virtue of humility which at length makes us sublime they would not reject that word as humble and abject for the reason that, used like that, it is not Ciceronian. Again, if they were illuminated by the light of faith they would not hesitate to accept that word in the sense in which innumerable very eloquent churchmen have frequently used it; and they would think that adopting the language of the scriptures for eloquence is far wiser than adopting the language of Cicero. For who among the faithful dares to deny that the Holy Spirit has spoken through his

Evangelists and Apostles about the divine much more fittingly than any tongue whatever of the wise of the world has the power to express. Nor is it true that what we say lacks the testimony of their own authors since one of them of proven judgment (marginal note: Horace) has spoken as a prophet: 'It always was and always will be allowed, to signify new things with new words'. His prophecy was well-founded:

Many honourable words now fallen, and now falling, will be reborn if use requires, for use, which is in the power of the hearer, is the force and the norm of speaking.

The philosopher also thinks that for the sake of teaching it is occasionally convenient to form wholly new words. He himself does this and sometimes on his own authority. But, I ask, what art does not have certain words of its own which it uses? In the law you will find many words of the 12 tables that you never read in other authors. Could not Cicero himself, if I remember rightly, have taught them this in his discussion of the Platonic philosophy (*de Academi. quaest.*)? But we accept what Pope Gregory says under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 'It is unbecoming to shackle the words of the heavenly oracle to the laws of Donatus. Nor is it fitting to plant a sacred wood in the temple of God'. For he plants a sacred wood in the temple of God, who overshadows the Church and Christ Himself, the true temple of God, with the shadows and the empty talk of words as if with leaves and foliage and the dark and fruitless branches of woodland trees. They (the humanists) teach that what gives light least or what prevents light is called 'lucus' although at first hearing the noun seems to be derived from 'lucendo', i.e., 'shining'. So, very agreeably, for expressing what we say, the Holy Spirit accepts what, in the sound of the word, suggests light, although there is no light in the thing that it signifies. Such I believe are those who think that by their elegance and ordered words they give light to the gospel truths; but they do not see that they thus rather darken them; and so truly plant a sacred grove in the temple of God next to the altar of the Lord, which is Christ, and thus you see that this is done by divine providence so that not one of those who have tried in books to illuminate divine matter with secular eloquence has accomplished anything. For somewhere their author, Marcus Tullius, wisely warns us that the decorations and the ornate refinement of an oration should be omitted and a certain careful carelessness should be applied instead, since the truth itself is to be instilled, and judgment is to be more firmly established in the mind, lest the refinement – or rather clatter of words in the ear – divert the heart of the listener from the consideration of the matter. Consequently, for the most part:

Decoration of the exterior does not permit the teaching of the content.

Whence Cyprian says that in the exertion of judgment on the rostrum, the rich eloquence is disturbed by voluble ambition, but when the talk is about Christ and God, the pure sincerity of the voice supports itself, for proofs of faith, with facts, not with the strength of eloquence. Consequently, Jerome wrote to Damasus. It is much better he says for the truth to be adduced in a countrified manner than for falsehood to be adduced distinctly. And against Jovinianus, he wrote, 'The sense is always more majestic in the simple words of the Scriptures. They were very illustrious men who said this. But the others [the followers of Cicero?] are so fastidious that they

pervert the order of nature by this superstition and do not allow the words to serve the things, but compel the things to serve the words, and although they can be rich (as we have said) by the tongue by binding themselves to those certain select words which they greatly approve, they reveal that they are speechless paupers, so that what it is right to express they absolutely cannot. What however is more hateful, more violent, more unsuitable and more imprudent than to hang the common tongue of many people on two or three authors and what exceeds every superstition to have ears so enchanted as to say that all other voices apart from the ones approved, are to them an intolerable row, which they call vulgarly conceived pollutions. Indeed so wretchedly and basely are they affected in their ears that the name of Jupiter Tarpeius and Capitolinus sounds sweeter in their ears than that of Jesus Christ, and how marvellously do they think themselves to have spoken when they have stuck onto their speech an oath – ‘by Heaven’, or ‘by Hercules’, or ‘by Castor’ – as if dealing with the most sought after little flower concerning the Christian King. Erasmus, responding in a certain place to the faculty of Paris, said, ‘By Hercules’. The Apostate also swore thus solemnly but also firmly maintained that it was not an oath. And what a pleasing thing they think it is when Jupiter, Juno, Diana, Pallas, Minerva, Bellona, Venus, Apollo, Phoebus, Mercury, Mars and the profane names of other false and infamous gods, that is, devils, illuminate as they suppose, their own eloquence, but as we more correctly believe, actually darken it. And likewise when they commemorate the Caesars, Camillos, Furios, Scipiones, Fabrios, Tuberones, Bestias [the last two are Roman family names] and all the other Gentiles, they seem to themselves to sound very big, but on the contrary they seem coldly to receive the names of Jesus Christ, Mary, John, Peter, James and so forth, nay they almost seem to stink like dirty things taken up out of the dregs. If they rightly reckon with themselves, they will easily notice that they come to rave like this neither by judgment nor by effort nor for any reason, but rather by the force of custom and the persuasion of the imagination, although the incitement and confirmation of the Devil (as I do not doubt) enters into these things since he has lost his lordship over this world which he exercises under these names of false gods, and at least tries to raise himself up again by this means as he lives in the memories of men through these poems and speeches of theirs. How far this is from piety, those who are spiritual men can easily judge. I have become thoroughly acquainted with the confession of those demons, although I do not adduce as evidence those whom I know are liars and so not worthy to be called as witnesses, but because they are contrary to themselves and their likes, God sometimes compels them to speak out. But enough of this essentially foolish matter. I here hold my peace with the conclusion that the Scriptures do not lack their own kind of elegance, an elegance far more agreeable to and efficacious for the pious heart. I am not moved because Paul once (2 Corinthians 11) admitted that he was unskilled in speech for I accept the saying as a profession of the truth, not as certain people think of humility, which is not consonant with the truth. But he was thinking of that skill in speech which proceeds from the wisdom of the world. For he proposed this wisdom to us, which he despised in its very nature, as his example of what was despicable. Elsewhere, (when it was objected against him that his epistles were serious and powerful but their bodily presence was feeble and their language was contemptible) he was to reply, ‘Let someone like that think so, because

throughout the Epistles we are as absent in the word as we are present in the deed'. I know that Jerome produced different opinions about Paul's eloquence as certain scholars have noted. But I agree with what Jerome says in the Epistle to Paulinus. 'As often as I read his writings, I seem to hear not words, but thunder.' If the critics continue, as they usually do, that he did not write in the Ciceronian style, do not take it seriously, for Paul speaks not to Latins and Ciceronians, but to Christians and churchmen; not to the wise only, but to the simple also; and if in Christ there is not barbarian and Scythian, not Jew or Greek, there is not Ciceronian or Terentian, or whatever advocate of another language either, but only whoever was reborn by water and the Holy Spirit. If Paul professes (Romans 1) that he is a debtor in Christ to Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and foolish, and boasts that he is all things to all men so that he should gain all men, in what way is this not more true of Christ, who also suffered for all men? Whence his speech had to be accommodated to all men, and to be extended like a net for catching all men. Nor should it be thought unsuitable for language to be humbled in eloquence and to be accommodated to all men and even children, for the purpose of intelligibility. Who could endure the true word of God? Further what that is more useful and more honourable could come to us from speech than knowledge and wisdom for eternal life? If divine discourse is superior to the discourse of the world, even if it is inelegant (as they would have it, though I cannot agree) what further does man want? For this is what Paul meant, when, after the provocations to which he had been submitted, he admitted that he lacked skill in speech, he added, 'But not knowledge', as if he had more openly said, 'O inane man, why in vain do you seek speech when I show you knowledge, on account of which speech exists'. If the virtue of the thing is ascertained from its effect, the lover of truth should consider what that uncouth and contemptible speech of God and fishermen was worth. Let him compare it with the eloquence of Demosthenes and Cicero. For Demosthenes compressed almost all his fame into the fact that by the vehemence of his speech he got one man driven out of his homeland. And Cicero is raised to the sky because either by the force or by the dissimulation of his oratory he preserved certain men from capital punishment. True, with much ado, he also ejected two men from the city although he did this, if truth were told, more by the mouth of the sword than by the sword of the mouth. But our men, by the very force of a speech that was unskilful but sincere and powerful and expressed the truth captured the whole world for Christ. But on withdrawing from the debate, we conclude that anyone who has the fantastic or diabolical idea that the holy men of God by whom the Holy Scriptures were written ought to have spoken otherwise than they did speak and does not quickly get rid of it is not really suited for learning the Scriptures, for he clearly shows that he does not understand the divine.

The NINTH error is the error of those who, descending to particulars about the way in which Scripture is expressed, demonstrate as they think manifest faults. And first they reproach a certain obscurity which suggests that what is written is what nobody understands. One of these critics of the world, well known to the world for many reasons (a marginal refers to Erasmus), especially in connection with Paul's Epistle to the Romans, says, 'The difficulty of this epistle equals and almost overcomes its utility'. He ascribes the difficulty to the language on account of the confused order,

the hyperbata, and the frequent *ωνδαποδατα*,¹⁴ as a result of which the content of what is said proceeds in a split up fashion and is incomplete. Others offend by superfluity as in the very laborious and frequent description of genealogies and other things of this kind, as in the enumeration of names of leaders and soldiers, and in certain repetitions and trifles, as when the same words and expressions are repeated, as when someone adduces an example from the Book of Daniel, where that old song about the sound of the tuba, pipe, lyre, stringed instrument, psaltery, symphony and the whole genus of musical (instruments) is repeated ad nauseam. The often unfinished and defective use of language on the other hand offends others, who are accustomed to contend even violently about goat's wool, a topic about which they are informed in several places. But we shall respond to these later on in a more suitable place. Meanwhile the key that we have accepted requires us to hold firmly to the following principle: there is absolutely no error in the Scriptures, there is nothing there that is inconvenient or in vain or improperly said, and the Holy Spirit is their author. Everybody should accept this.

The TENTH error is the error of those who desire more from the Scriptures than is there contained, as if they do not contain perfectly all the things that constitute the tradition of the Church, although Christ promised to his bride the spirit of truth who would teach the whole truth, and it is now supposed, as Paul says, that the Scriptures are good for teaching, for proving, for holding, and for educating in justice, so that the man of God is completely prepared for all good work. Why therefore do those wretches (marginal note: Erasmus) want more? For hear the desires of the critic of heaven and earth, who writes thus: 'Would that Paul's remarks on the ceremonies of the Church in the Epistle to the Corinthians had been more detailed.' The feeble man uncircumcised in his lips scandalously adds, 'How concisely the Apostle thinks about the Eucharist as if afraid to say more about so great a mystery than is fitting'. And further. 'Would that Paul had at least revealed by whom, at what time and with what worship, ceremony and words it was usual to consecrate the bread and wine.' And again, 'Would that Paul had shed more light for us on how souls exist apart from the body; where they exist; do they enjoy the glory of immortality; are the souls of the impious now being tortured; do our prayers help them; are they suddenly freed from punishment by other good deeds or the indulgence of the Pope?' Thus Erasmus. But do these things seem to you to be the desires of piety? Only if piety can be associated with perfidy, for if those who speak thus believed the scriptures, they would also believe the Church, which Scripture itself commends, and commands that it is to be believed in this fashion, and which it calls the pillar and support of truth. But if they believed the Church, these desires to learn from the Scriptures would perish or rather never arise, for the Church teaches these things fluently and clearly, since in such matters, the authority of the Church is the authority of the Scriptures. It was not from the authority of new Scripture that he taught those who were no longer boys, but he induced learned men to institute the rites of the

14 The meaning of the Greek word is uncertain. A similar point is made by Jerome in his Letter 57 *On Translation*, who writes of 'the windings of hyperbata, differences in the use of cases, divergencies of metaphor ...'; see above p. 23.

Church, which could easily be obtained and kept more decently from the tradition and continuous custom of the Church. But the dissimulator feigns that he does not entertain these desires for himself but on account of the heretics, who do not hear the voice of the Church, but would hear the Scriptures if they spoke openly to them – as if the heretics admitted any reason of Scripture, which they confess with their lips, but whose virtue they openly deny. If they truly believed Scripture, as I have said, they would have faith in the Church, which that Scripture manifestly declared is to be believed (marginal note; Luke 16). To some people perhaps might seem just the request to Abraham of the former guest at the feast that he should send Lazarus to tell his brothers to beware of that place of torments. But he wisely replied that they had Moses and the Prophets. Let them hear them. When the guest at the feast resumed, ‘Not him then, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead should go to them they will do penance’. Then Abraham very suitably replied, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets they would not believe it even if one of the dead were to rise up.’ And what else can we say except that if they do not hear the Church, they would not hear the Scriptures even if they were to speak, because in denying the Church, they really deny the Scriptures also. Although this is so, nevertheless I do not wish anyone to think that there is nothing whatsoever in the Scriptures that is not properly expressed as far as some stupid people are concerned, for the heretics put this forward as an excuse. Who would say that the resurrection of the dead is contained in those words of Scripture where we read: ‘The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob’, yet nevertheless the Lord subtly elicited it from them, and through this censured the ignorance of the Scriptures in those who denied the resurrection saying: you are in error because you do not know the Scriptures. Do you not read what God said, when he said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, etc.’ That for which there is evidence in the Scriptures, and which is deduced from them by subtle reasoning is the case. Confession, purgatory, the status of souls after death, the fact that the prayers of the Church and the gifts of indulgences do good even to the dead, are all deduced in a similar way; and those who move forward a little way do not doubt that many other things which the heretics deny are clearly enough based on the Scriptures. I pass over the fact that purgatory is explicitly understood from the books of Maccabees. These miserable fellows, unless they hear these things explicitly – i.e. unless they hear those very words, and purgatory and indulgences from the popes are mentioned, are not deterred. Let them wax strong then, and let them be heretics according to their desires.

The ELEVENTH error is the error of those who find a cause of offence in the many things in the Scriptures that seem either excessively miraculous or excessively feeble and trivial. Such things are encountered in the Scriptures on all sides. Consequently these men think that they are all fabricated tales, the reason for which they do not know; and they do not think it worthy either humbly not to know them; or rather, knowing themselves and measuring their condition, to seek the knowledge of them from God, as far as it is allowable. What is more foolish than to want to embrace the whole of divine art and power by the capacity of one’s own small brain; and dare to lacerate with your teeth what you cannot receive in your own mind. I see that nothing is more efficacious than this impious presumption for obscuring, nay rather

for befouling, the eyes of the heart, so that they cannot see a salutary thing in the Scriptures.

However, the TWELTH error, on which, in a reflective study of this kind, it is useful to fix one's mind firmly, so that it can be exceedingly watchful, is the error of those who even if they praise the Scriptures in words and acknowledge that they are sacrosanct and cannot be gainsaid, do not interpret them in that spirit in which they ought, but in the peculiarly human, animal and even diabolical spirit, since they are all heretics. For Scripture, it has been established, has come forth from the spirit of God, and is to be interpreted not by human wish, but by the same spirit by which it is made. Our Key-Bearer himself wonderfully taught this (2 Peter 1: 20–21), in these words, saying, 'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture,' that is, exposition and declaration of the Scripture (this is what 'prophecy' frequently means in the Holy Scriptures) 'is of any private interpretation', that is, it is not produced by an interpretation which comes from a human mode of thinking. Peter gives the reason by adding 'for prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. He said, so to speak, that human will cannot attain what comes from the spirit of God, since the thoughts of human prudence are foolish. Thus the ways of God are raised above our ways, and the thoughts of God are raised above our thoughts, as heaven is raised above earth. And so he who wishes to penetrate Scripture where the mysteries of God are contained far from the grasp of man should not in his judgment support himself on man, but share in that same spirit with which were inspired those who transmitted the Scripture to us.

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