

When God Spoke Greek: The Place of the Greek Bible in Evangelical Scholarship

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The Septuagint was the OT of the Christian church for centuries because it was the Scripture of Israel in its Greek form that was used extensively by the NT writers and the early Church fathers. From the time of the Reformation, the Hebrew Masoretic Text has eclipsed the place of the Septuagint in Protestant scholarship. This article, originally delivered as a plenary lecture at the IBR meeting in 2004, argues for a place for the Septuagint in evangelical scholarship that moves beyond textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible and the discussion of canon. New Testament exegesis that refers to the Hebrew text where the NT authors were in fact using the Greek OT is methodologically flawed, as is biblical theology that fails to give the Septuagint its historical due as a literary and theological background of the NT. Moreover, much fresh opportunity for scholarship awaits those who study the ancient Greek versions of the OT in their own right.

Key Words: Septuagint, Greek OT, LXX, canon, Jerome, Augustine, Luther, Bible translation, Old Greek, OT in NT, textual transmission, NT exegesis, syntax criticism

Augustine's famous statement, "I believe that I might understand," is often quoted in discussions of the relationship between Christian faith and intellectual endeavor. This thought actually comes from the Bible—the Bible of Augustine, that is, who was referring to an Old Latin rendering of Isa 7:9 translated from the Septuagint.¹ That rendering is not found in the Latin Vulgate or in the English version, both having been translated from the Hebrew text, which lacks the thought. This famous phrase from the Old Latin Bible continued to be quoted by Anselm, Abelard, and many

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1. Isaiah 7:9 LXX: καὶ ἐὰν μὴ πιστεύητε, οὐδὲ μὴ συνῆτε; *fides quaerens intellectum*; "If you do not believe, neither shall you understand," in *On the Trinity*, cited by Jaroslav Pelikan in *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)*, vol. 3: *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 258–59.

others as a justification for the Christian life of the mind. This is but one small example of the influence of the Septuagint in Christian heritage.

The very word *Septuagint* is a Christian term, first attested in the 2nd century by Christian authors and scribes who referred to 'the Seventy' (οἱ ἑβδομήκοντα) as a shortened form of the title *Interpretatio septuaginta virorum* ('the translation of the seventy men').² This title was used to refer to the entire Greek OT, even though the 70 (or 72 translators) of Alexandria apparently produced a translation of only the first five books.³ And ever since, the referent of the term *Septuagint* has always been a bit ambiguous. In its most general sense, it may refer to any or all Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible, just as one might now refer in general to the "English Bible," with no particular translation in mind. However, in more precise and specialized terminology, *Septuagint* technically refers *only* to the oldest Greek version of the Pentateuch, though it became customary to extend the term to the oldest Greek version of the rest of the OT canon as well, to distinguish it from the later versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.

The Septuagint is significant because it was the first written translation made of the Hebrew Scriptures. To whatever extent translation is interpretation, the Septuagint is to that extent the earliest surviving witness of how Hellenistic Judaism understood Scripture; and therefore, it is a foundational text for studying the Judaism from which early Christianity arose. As Robert Hanhart notes, "the Septuagint cannot be bypassed if we want to conjure the Judaism from which Christianity grew."⁴

Furthermore, the Greek OT was the Scripture used extensively by the NT writers. Adolf Deissmann once commented that Greek Judaism had with the Septuagint ploughed the furrows for the gospel seed in the Western world. F. F. Bruce adds that it was the Christian preacher quoting the Septuagint who sowed that seed of the gospel.⁵ Bruce notes several places "in which the Septuagint translators used a form of words which (without their being able to foresee it, naturally) lent itself to the purposes of the NT writers better than the Hebrew text would have done" (for example, Matt 1:23 quoting Isa 7:14, and Acts 15:15–18 quoting Amos 9:11ff.).⁶ Martin Hengel remarks, "The use of the LXX as Holy Scripture is practically as old as the church itself. For NT writings, beginning with Paul, it is the rule."⁷

2. Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 32; Mogens Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (JSOTSup 206; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 68.

3. The *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* explains that 72 translators produced the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, but later Jewish writings specify 70 translators.

4. Cited in Müller, *First Bible*, 117.

5. Cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 50.

6. *Ibid.*, 53.

7. Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 22. See also Johan Lust, *Messianism and the Septuagint: Collected Essays by J. Lust* (ed. Katrin Hauspie; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 153;

Although the Septuagint is quoted extensively in the NT, the number of quotations is notoriously difficult to count. Swete made a rough estimate that the NT quotes the OT in about 160 places;⁸ Archer and Chirichigno counted about 420 OT quotations;⁹ Silva counts about 100 in Paul's letters alone.¹⁰ When Turpie studied 275 quotations of the Old in the New, he concluded that the NT, the LXX, and the Hebrew text all agree in only about 20% (or about 55) of the quotations.¹¹ Of the 80% where some disagreement occurs, about one-third of the quotations agree with the LXX against the Hebrew. Because of the extensive use of the Greek OT in the NT, it forms a historical bridge that mediates literary and theological concepts between the Hebrew Bible and the Greek NT.

Moreover, it was the *Greek OT*, not the Hebrew, together with the Greek NT that was the Bible for much of the Christian church for fifteen hundred years—either directly in its Greek form or in one of the nine early translations made from the Greek into other languages, such as the Old Latin read by Augustine.¹² In those first crucial four centuries of the church, it was primarily the Greek OT, not the Hebrew, over which the councils deliberated the great doctrines on which our Christian faith rests today. According to Pelikan, Origen was probably the first and perhaps the only ante-Nicene father to study Hebrew, and then only to verify and correct the Greek text used by the church. Pelikan writes,

it seems safe to propose the generalization that, except for converts from Judaism, it was not until the biblical humanists and the Reformers of the sixteenth century that a knowledge of Hebrew became standard equipment for Christian expositors of the Old Testament. Most of Christian doctrine developed in a church *uninformed by any knowledge of the original text of the Hebrew Bible* [emphasis mine].¹³

In fact, in the Christological debates of the fourth century, the debate was not between the differences between the Hebrew text and the Greek but between various Greek versions. For instance, the Arians appealed to the Old Greek version of Prov 8 in defense of their Christology, while those

Sidney Jellicoe, "Septuagint Studies in the Current Century," *JBL* 88 (1969): 191–99; Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 322; Müller, *First Bible*.

8. Henry B. Swete, *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914; repr. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), 386.

9. Gleason Archer and G. C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1983).

10. Moisés Silva, "Old Testament in Paul," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993).

11. D. M. Turpie, *The Old Testament in the New* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1868), 267–69.

12. John Wevers, "An Apologia for Septuagint Studies," *BIOCS* 18 (1985): 38; Fernández Marcos, *Septuagint in Context*, 361.

13. Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 19–21.

whose views became the orthodox Christian position preferred the reading found in Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.¹⁴

According to Mogens Müller, the debate about the place of the OT in the early Christian church went through four phases, each of which was anchored solidly in the use of the Septuagint. He writes,

First, the Christians argued with the Jews about the correct interpretation of their common Bible. Then there was a clash with Marcion and the gnostics over the "Christian relevance" of the Old Testament. Later, it was disputed whether the Apocrypha should be incorporated into the Bible. . . . Finally, the question was raised whether it was the original Hebrew text or the Greek translation that represented the Old Testament of the Church.¹⁵

Many of these underlying issues are still with us today, though perhaps expressed in other forms.

Clearly we cannot understand the Church Fathers or, fully, the history of the Christian church before the Reformation without understanding the place of the Septuagint in our heritage.¹⁶ And Sidney Jellicoe's claim is not an overstatement when he wrote very much to the point, "He who would read the NT must know *Koiné*; but he who would understand the NT must know the LXX" (emphasis original).¹⁷ Consequently, to do justice to the historical place of the Septuagint as a foundational text for Christianity and to avoid using flawed methodology in NT exegesis, a sound knowledge of the Septuagint is essential for evangelical biblical scholarship.

But let me make clear that I mean to promote the use of the Septuagint only in our scholarship, not in the Church. I do not endorse the opinion of those who, like Mogens Müller and Robert Funk argue, to quote Funk, that

[t]he Christian movement purloined a set of scriptures not its own, in a secondary language, and then created a "canon" of proof texts within that "canon" to support its own claims. In view of the history of this process, and in view of Christian-Jewish relations over the centuries, I think it is time we return the Hebrew Bible to the Jews whose Bible it is and confine ourselves to scriptures that were historically employed by the first Christians. If we need a collection of ancient documents that function as "background" to the rise of Christianity, we should readopt the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) and translate it into English as our "First Testament."¹⁸

14. Johann Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs: Jewish and/or Hellenistic Proverbs? Concerning the Hellenistic Colouring of LXX Proverbs* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 218–19; Jobes and Silva, *Invitation*, 230, 248 n. 18; Swete, *Old Testament in Greek*, 471.

15. Müller, *First Bible*, 79; cf. Paul Lamarche, "The Septuagint: Bible of the Earliest Christians," in *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity* (ed. P. Blowers; Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1997), 15–33.

16. Wevers, "An Apologia," 28.

17. Jellicoe, *Septuagint Studies*, 199.

18. Müller, *First Bible*, 121, 144; Robert W. Funk, "The Once and Future New Testament," in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 542.

I do not think an English translation of the Septuagint should function as Scripture in our churches today. The Greek OT was Scripture for the Christian church at a different moment of history in a different place; it is *not* our Scripture. But to be historically and methodologically faithful to interpreting Scripture in our own time, we must face the questions raised by this historical happenstance.

Almost fifty years ago, Septuagint scholar Peter Katz complained, "Never was the LXX more used and less studied!"¹⁹ Katz pointed out that at that time studies in both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek NT were "branching out widely, without much regard for the LXX, though the LXX is by its nature a connecting link between them both."²⁰

In more recent times, the importance of the Greek OT for understanding the NT has been recognized in a significant number of studies.²¹ On the other hand, it is startling to discover that even some of the best NT commentators show no awareness in their work of the best critical edition of the Septuagint now available and look no further than Rahlfs' edition—if they consider the Greek OT in their exegetical work at all.²² Others appear to assume the Septuagint reading means what the Hebrew means, without showing an understanding of the complexities involved in explaining the differences between the Greek and Hebrew renderings. Tim McLay's recent book was motivated by his observation that "the LXX has not received the attention that it should in New Testament studies."²³

The resurgence of Septuagint studies in the last twenty years or so will no doubt have a positive effect on NT scholarship. But the dearth of courses on Septuagint studies (beyond advanced Greek language courses) indicates that future scholars are still being trained without deliberate attention to the importance and complexities of this corpus for biblical studies.

19. Peter Katz, "Septuagintal Studies in Mid-Century: Their Links with the Past and Their Present Tendencies," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: In Honour of Charles Harold Dodd* (ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); repr. in *Studies in the Septuagint: Origins, Recensions, and Interpretations* (ed. S. Jellicoe; New York: Ktav, 1974), 198.

20. *Ibid.*, 176.

21. For instance, see: G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *A Commentary on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming); Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel: With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (NovTSup 18; Leiden; Brill, 1967); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Walter Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985); Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); B. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Gert J. Steyn, *Septuagint Quotations in the Context of the Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acta Apostolorum* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995).

22. For those books of the OT for which it is available, scholars should be using *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939–).

23. Timothy R. McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 37.

The Septuagint has been used in evangelical scholarship primarily in two areas: First, the Septuagint provides a valuable resource for textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible and also has been central to discussions of the development of the biblical canon. As important as these two tasks are, they do not exhaust the opportunities for scholarship presented by the Septuagint. The Septuagint represents, for instance, a crucial chapter in the history of Judaism, but as Natalio Fernández Marcos notes, "The theology of the LXX as a stage of the religious history of Israel, and in relation to the religion of Hellenism, is a chapter that has not yet been examined in a systematic way."²⁴

Perhaps it is the use of the Septuagint primarily for textual criticism of the Hebrew text and for studies in canon that has made some evangelicals seemingly shy to engage it in its own right. McLay raises an important question: why do so many scholars explain away readings in the Septuagint that differ from the Masoretic Text? He answers, "It seems to me that this view may be rooted in an uncritical assumption that the Hebrew text is inherently more trustworthy than a translation or just plain bias towards the MT."²⁵ Does Protestant reverence for the MT necessarily imply that the Septuagint should be dismissed? This is the first of two questions that deserve the attention of evangelical scholars.

The second question concerns the use of the Septuagint in studies of the development of canon. Have evangelicals dismissed the Septuagint based upon the belief that it necessarily implies an acceptance of a broader canon than that received by Protestants since the time of the Reformation? Martin Hengel's recent book, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, is a fine work about the influence of the *Letter of Aristeas* in the early church that focuses almost exclusively on the issue of canon. Although canon remains an important issue in our day—and all the more so with books like Elaine Pagels's *Beyond Belief* reaching the *New York Times* Best Seller list²⁶—there are other interesting historical and theological issues raised by the fact that the Bible of the NT apostles was, in all their extant writings, by and large a *translation* of the OT. God apparently did not feel constrained to speak in Hebrew only; God spoke in Greek when he gave his word to the Christian church.

And so to foster a greater place for Septuagint studies among evangelicals, these two questions of the hegemony of the MT and the implications of the LXX for canon are essential to consider.

THE HEGEMONY OF THE MASORETIC TEXT

The MT, being the only complete text of the Hebrew Scriptures, has since the time of the Reformation been the basis of the canonical text of the OT

24. Fernández Marcos, *Septuagint in Context*, 305.

25. *Ibid.*, 109.

26. Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random, 2003).

for Protestants. Furthermore, its consonantal text has been shown by the discoveries at Qumran to be a very ancient text. Moreover, the Greek OT has a correspondingly important place in Eastern Orthodoxy and a lesser but still significant place in Roman Catholicism. This situation has made it easy for Protestant scholars, and particularly evangelical scholars, either to dismiss the Septuagint completely or to consider it an inferior version that has little or no exegetical and theological value.

On the other hand, the history of the Christian church does not start with the Reformation. The Christian church made virtually exclusive use of the Greek Bible and the translations derived from it in the first four centuries after Christ. It is therefore reasonable that some might ask why the *Masoretic* text—a Hebrew text form that through Christian history has not been the Bible directly used by the worshiping church²⁷—should be more relevant to Christian studies than the Greek OT used almost exclusively by the earliest Christians, including the writers of the NT itself (for example, Hübner and Müller).²⁸ Perhaps the most basic answer is that, regardless of whether the Septuagint was widely used or not in first-century Palestine (and the jury is still out on that), the Hebrew Bible apparently was the received Scripture of our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:25–27, 44–49).²⁹ That should count for something. Moreover, the original writings of the OT Scriptures were in Hebrew with a bit of Aramaic, and for evangelicals who link divine authority with the autographs, the *Hebrew* OT stands closest to those autographs. But even so, these apparently were not sufficient reasons for the NT authors to write the gospel in Hebrew³⁰ or for the apostles to insist that Christian converts learn to read the OT in Hebrew.³¹ So while it may be justified to defend the 1st-century Hebrew text as Christian Scripture, why should the much later Masoretic Text be passionately defended, being a text form that was finalized centuries after the advent of Christ and after the formation of the church itself? Why should Christians receive as Scripture a text form that developed within a Jewish tradition that rejected Jesus as the fulfillment of the very covenant on which that text was based?³² Though this question highlights an interesting historical irony, the place of the MT as Christian Scripture is justified. For the important thing for establishing the textual base of Christian Scripture is the

27. With perhaps the exception of the very first Christians in Judea and contemporary Jewish-Christian groups in Israel today.

28. Hans Hübner, *Biblische Theologies des Neuen Testaments, I: Prolegomena* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 59; Müller, *First Bible*, 119.

29. See also Craig A. Evans, “The Scriptures of Jesus and His Earliest Followers,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 185–95.

30. Though see Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3rd ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998).

31. As devout Muslims today must learn Arabic to read the Koran.

32. Emanuel Tov, “The Status of the Masoretic Text in Modern Text Editions of the Hebrew Bible: The Relevance of Canon,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 240 (citing Müller and Childs); also Eugence Ulrich, “Our Sharper Focus on the Bible and Theology Thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 16.

reliable preservation of the text, regardless of who did it. And as the Qumran discoveries have indicated, the Masoretic tradition did quite reliably preserve for several centuries a Hebrew text extant at the time of Christ.

The authority of God's redemptive deeds and God's word come together in the persons of the prophets and the apostles, and therefore the locus of revelation and inspiration is in the text of the original languages. And the Masoretic Text, though it may not represent a homogenous text form, preserves the oldest complete Hebrew text that also circulated in 1st-century Palestine, albeit along with others. However, it seems that if one's true interest is in a Hebrew text much older than the MT, then one must be vitally interested in determining the original readings of the earliest Greek translation of each OT book as an attestation of that Hebrew text that circulated in the three centuries before Christ and from which the Greek version was translated. Therefore, a high regard for the MT dictates the importance of textual criticism of the Septuagint before the Septuagint can be used for textual criticism of the MT. There remains much scholarship to be done both in establishing the original Greek translation of the OT and in writing the textual history of the subsequent Greek versions.³³

Although many of the differences between the LXX and the MT probably do not reflect a Vorlage that was different from the MT but were instead the result of the interpretation and contextual work of the translator, it is a historical fact that the LXX *does* reflect a Hebrew text form much older than the MT simply because it was made from Hebrew texts that predate the time of Christ by anywhere from one to three centuries. The question is, How different was that older Hebrew text form from what has been preserved in the MT? Consider the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), which has about 6,000 variant readings in comparison with the MT. Of those 6,000 variant readings, almost one-third (about 1,900) agree with the LXX *against* the MT, indicating the common dependence of the Samaritan text and the LXX on an earlier text that was known outside Samaritan circles.³⁴ The destruction of the Samaritan temple by John Hyrcanus in 120 B.C. completed the religious breach between Samaritans and Jews, so where the LXX and SP agree, it attests to a text common to both and may identify differences that were introduced into the MT in reaction to the breach.³⁵

In the history of the church, two great Christian Bible translators have defended the use of the Hebrew text as the translation base in their own times: Martin Luther in the 16th century and Jerome in the 5th. The translation of the Bible into German was arguably Martin Luther's greatest work, without which the Reformation probably would not have succeeded. Luther believed that knowledge of the languages alone is insuffi-

33. See Albert Pietersma, "Septuagint Research: A Plea for a Return to the Basic Issues," *VT* 35 (1984): 296-311.

34. Bruce K. Waltke, "Samaritan Pentateuch," *ABD* 5:934.

35. Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 131.

cient for the work of Christian Bible translation and that an understanding of Christ's gospel by the translators is the essential qualification. Because of this, he considered the Septuagint to be irrelevant for the Christian church because it had been made by Jewish translators who did their work prior to any possible knowledge of the Christian gospel.³⁶

While Luther considered the Septuagint irrelevant for the Christian church—a view that has influenced Protestant scholarship ever since—Augustine before him argued that it was the *Hebrew Bible* that was irrelevant for the Christian church. Augustine argued that the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT made by the Seventy was inspired by God in special anticipation of the advent of Jesus Christ and that therefore the Hebrew Bible is of secondary relevance to the Christian faith at best.³⁷ According to Augustine the Old Greek translation made by the Seventy enjoyed a special status not shared by its later revisions or by the translations made from it into other languages and should therefore be the translation base of the church's OT.³⁸ Augustine argued with Jerome while he was producing the Vulgate that the Latin text should be corrected to the Old Greek and not translated from the Hebrew.³⁹ Where the Greek translation was known to deviate from the Hebrew text of that time, he understood that the Holy Spirit had either restored the true meaning of the Hebrew that had become corrupted through the ages or that the Spirit was providing a more congenial interpretation of the OT text in anticipation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

Augustine's hermeneutic of the fourfold sense of Scripture was adept at accommodating the differences between the Hebrew text and the LXX as a work of the Holy Spirit. For instance, according to the Hebrew text, Jonah proclaimed to Nineveh 40 days until the overthrow, where the Septuagint has 3 days. Augustine believed that the prophet Jonah had actually said 40 days, but that the Greek translators inspired by the Spirit of God changed it to 3 days, which had become a symbolic number representing the time of deliverance in Jewish tradition. Augustine suggested, "the sensitive reader will recognize an allusion to Christ's resurrection on the third day."⁴¹ And since the NT writers drew their quotations from both the Hebrew and LXX alike, Augustine believed, "both sources should be employed as authoritative, since both are one, and both are inspired by God."⁴² Even though Augustine revered the Old Greek version, he rejected the later versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. He considered

36. Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Old Testament," *Luther's Works*, vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament* (trans. C. Jacobs; rev. E. T. Bachman; ed. E. T. Bachman; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 249.

37. Müller, *First Bible*, 74; Hengel, *Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, 38–39.

38. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.15 (NPNF¹ 2:542–43).

39. Idem, *The Letters* 71.6 (NPNF¹ 2:327–28).

40. Idem, *City of God* 18.44 (NPNF¹ 2:387).

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

the versions of the Three to be Jewish works made after the advent of Christ and contaminated with pernicious Jewish errors.⁴³

The fact that the NT writers quote the Septuagint as authoritative even where it disagrees with the Hebrew text is an interesting circumstance but should not lead to the conclusion that the Greek translation was inspired. Evangelical scholars need not accept the idea, as Augustine did, that God inspired all the differences between the Hebrew and its Greek translation. But instead, like the Reformers understood, divine inspiration applies only to the semantic contribution specifically made by the Septuagint quotations by virtue of becoming part of the inspired NT text as used in their specific NT context. The use of the Septuagint by the NT writers does not extend inspiration to the Greek version as a whole.⁴⁴

Unlike Augustine, Jerome did not believe the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions to be a new work of the Spirit. He believed that the Greek versions and the Old Latin translated from it teemed with errors that made those versions unsuitable for use in the church.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Jerome rightly rejected the divine inspiration of the translators. He writes, "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."⁴⁶

Jerome defended his return to the Hebrew text as the translation base of the Vulgate because he claimed that the NT referred to passages quoted as "Scripture" that were in the Hebrew text but not found in the Septuagint. He reasoned that in their translation, the Seventy had suppressed the Hebrew Scripture's mysteries (*mystica*) out of fear of King Ptolemy, particularly those passages promising the coming of Messiah.⁴⁷ Like Luther much later, Jerome rejected the translation of the Seventy because "they translated before the Advent of Christ, and expressed in ambiguous terms that which they knew not. . . . The better we understand a subject the better we describe it."⁴⁸ Like Augustine, Jerome also rejected the later versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion because he believed the Three to be "judaising heretics" whose work deliberately concealed the mysteries of salvation.⁴⁹

Both Martin Luther and Jerome believed that the Septuagint should be rejected as the textual basis for the translation of the Bible in the church because it was inappropriate that a translation made by Jewish translators should form the basis of the Christian Scriptures. Probably many evangel-

43. Idem, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.15 (NPNF¹ 2:542–43); *City of God* 18.43 (NPNF¹ 2:387).

44. Jaroslav Pelikan states this position well in *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)* (vol. 4. of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984]), 345.

45. Jerome, *Preface to the Book of Hebrew Questions in Letters and Select Works* (NPNF¹ 6:486).

46. Idem, *Apologia adversus libros Rufini* 2.25 (NPNF² 3:516).

47. Idem, *Preface to the Book of Hebrew Questions in Letters and Select Works* (NPNF¹ 6:486).

48. Idem, *Apologia adversus libros Rufini* 2.25 (NPNF² 3:516).

49. Idem, *Preface to Job* (NPNF¹ 6:491).

icals today, if not most, would agree that it would be inappropriate for the Christian church to use as its OT the English *Tanakh* produced by the Jewish Publication Society. Of course, if the JPS English *Tanakh* were the *only* English translation of the Hebrew Bible available, then the English-speaking church would have little choice but to use it as our OT. And such was the situation in the Greek-speaking world of the 1st century in which the apostles wrote.

Evangelicals deeply respect the Masoretic Text, and rightly so, but that need not exclude an appreciation for the place of the Greek OT in the earliest era of Christian history or, perhaps more importantly, a recognition of its methodological significance in biblical theology and NT exegesis. As Eugene Ulrich comments in light of a pluriform textual history, “we can now recognize that Scripture is even more complex than we have known and presents problems that we may be happier without. Though not all would see this as a gain, I would nonetheless argue that, if Scripture is indeed more complex, it is better to know that than not to know it.”⁵⁰

THE SCOPE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The discussion of canon is the second topic for which the Septuagint has been used in ways that perhaps make evangelicals wary of it. It might be assumed that by engaging the LXX in its own right, evangelical scholars must or should accept a broader OT canon than the Protestant doctrine of Scripture allows, namely the inclusion of the apocryphal books. It is true that at least since the time of Thackeray in 1921, it was argued that the Septuagint represented the Jewish canon outside Palestine, specifically an Alexandrian canon that included the apocryphal books.⁵¹ And Peter Katz later argued that the Septuagint preserves the Jewish canon of *both* Palestine and Alexandria before Jamnia.⁵² But Albert Sundberg and others, such as Roger Beckwith, have soundly refuted that argument.⁵³ In more recent scholarship it is more common to use the Septuagint to call into question whether there was any formalized Jewish canon in the first century at all. But neither the evidence offered by the Septuagint nor its use in the NT deserves the weight some scholars have put on it in their decisions about the development of canon, whether Jewish canon or Christian.

For instance, McLay argues, “the use of the Greek Jewish Scriptures by the NT writers is itself a lethal argument against the view that there

50. Ulrich, “Our Sharper Focus,” 13–14.

51. H. St. J. Thackeray, *The Septuagint and Jewish Worship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921).

52. Peter Katz, “The Old Testament Canon in Palestine and Alexandria,” *ZNW* 47 (1956): 191–217.

53. Beckwith, *Old Testament Canon*, 385–86; Albert C. Sundberg, *The Old Testament of the Early Church* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964; repr. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), 79.

was any type of fixed 'canon' of Jewish Scriptures in the first century CE."⁵⁴ This statement can be challenged on several levels, one of which is apparent confusion between the various Greek text forms of an OT book—which the NT does attest—and the canonical status of the quoted book. The fact that the NT writers quote different Greek versions of an OT book—or produce their own translation—indicates that they did not consider any one *form* of the text as sacrosanct (much as there are several different English versions of the Bible in use as the authoritative word of God today). So regardless of how the NT writers viewed the Hebrew Scripture, that did not keep them from freely quoting its Greek translation as the authoritative word—even where the Greek disagrees with the Hebrew now extant. The use of various text forms, however, says nothing at all about the canonical status of the book being quoted.

Martin Hengel is probably more on target when he writes, "If we consider the use of the OT Scriptures by the earliest Christian authors in the NT itself, it becomes evident how remote they are from any question about the canon and its limits."⁵⁵ But that is just to say that our questions at this moment of history are not the same as the concerns of the NT writers. No surprise there. However, that does not prove that the NT writers had *no* sense of an OT canon or that they thought the matter unimportant.

Peter Stuhlmacher is among those who have concluded that recognition of the Septuagint as the OT of the early church implies the acceptance of the apocryphal books as Scripture today. He writes, "In the course of early Christian mission history, the Septuagint then became the real OT of early Christianity. The so-called Septuagintal Apocrypha thus belongs inseparably to the Holy Scripture of early Christianity."⁵⁶ Is his case compelling?

The Septuagint enters the discussion of the development of canon at two points: first, it is often noted that the NT quotes from books not found in the Hebrew canon that are attributed to the Septuagint; and second, the contents of early Greek codices containing the Septuagint are construed as evidence for a canon list.

To the first point, Stuhlmacher offers several examples where quotations not found in the Hebrew canon are introduced with some reference to its authoritative status. He writes, "from the synoptics and letters of Paul to Jude and 2 Peter, some of the so-called Septuagintal Apocrypha, and also pseudepigraphical tradition, are freely quoted *as Scripture*, and knowledge of them is presupposed" (emphasis mine).⁵⁷ We need not lin-

54. McLay, *Use of the Septuagint*, 144.

55. Hengel, *Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, 105.

56. Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Significance of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha for the Understanding of Jesus and Christology," in *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective* (trans. P. Ellingworth; ed. S. Meurer; UBS Monograph Series 6; New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 12.

57. *Ibid.*, 2. The quotation continues: "The most important evidence is as follows: in Mk 10.19, Sir 4.1 is quoted alongside Ex 20.12–16 and Dt 5.16–20; in 2 Tim 2.19, Sir 17.26 is quoted

ger over the fact that the NT writers do not confer canonical status on a work simply by quoting it. The most famous example of this would be Paul's quotation from the Greek poet Aratus in Acts 17:28. Pseudepigraphal books should be considered in this category as well. Furthermore, even if the NT quoted the pseudepigrapha (not to be confused with the apocrypha), that would have nothing to do with the Septuagint since there are no extant manuscripts of the Greek Bible that include the pseudepigraphal books. Whether the pseudepigrapha is in fact quoted and quoted as Scripture is a different matter.

The three instances Stuhlmacher cites as "the most important evidence" supporting his claim are, upon close examination, rather weak. Stuhlmacher's claim that material from the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha is cited *as Scripture* certainly is not uncontested when the passages are examined. In two of the three instances,⁵⁸ the alleged quotation of the apocryphal book is three words or less (a verb or a verb and prepositional phrase), calling into question whether it should even be considered a quotation. In one of Stuhlmacher's examples, Mark 10:19 allegedly quoting Sir 4:1, the source is just as likely to be a reference to Mal 3:8 as it is rendered not in the Old Greek but in the revised editions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. Stuhlmacher's third example of 1 Cor 2:9 allegedly quoting the *Ascension of Isaiah* or the *Elijah Apocalypse* just as likely derives from a Greek version of Isa 64:3, as Clement of Rome implies.⁵⁹ In any case, there are so many theories about the source of this text that it is far from conclusive evidence for Stuhlmacher's point. If Stuhlmacher is presenting the strongest evidence for NT quotations of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha as Scripture, then it is not strong enough to overturn Beckwith's claim that "the NT, by contrast with the early Fathers, and by contrast with its own practice in relation to the books of the Hebrew Bible, never actually quotes from, or ascribes authority to, any of the Apocrypha."⁶⁰

The use of NT citations as evidence for the extent of the 1st-century OT canon is perhaps a necessary consideration, but is quite insufficient as evidence. As Hengel points out, on the basis of NT use of the OT, it seems likely that the scope of the Christian OT would have been quite smaller than the Hebrew Bible, since most of the NT quotations are from so few of the OT books.⁶¹ He estimates that 60% of all direct quotations come from just three books: Psalms, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy.⁶² Swete had previously concluded that nearly half of the OT passages expressly cited in the NT

alongside Num 16.5. Paul offers in 1 Cor 2.9 a quotation from "Scripture," either from the Ascension of Isaiah 11.34, or (according to Origen) from a lost Elijah Apocalypse derived from Isa 64.3."

58. Mark 10:19 allegedly quoting Sir 4:1; 2 Tim 2:19 allegedly quoting Sir 17:26.

59. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 250–51.

60. Beckwith, *Old Testament Canon*, 387.

61. Hengel, *Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, 112–13.

62. *Ibid.*, 107.

come from either the Psalms or Isaiah.⁶³ According to Craig Evans, Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels quotes or alludes to 23 books of the Hebrew canon.⁶⁴ Now this is very telling for evidence about the extent of the Jewish canon in the earliest centuries of the church. For why would the Christian church have adopted all 39 books of the *entire* Hebrew canon—even those books *not* quoted in the NT—if the Hebrew canon was so unformed even while early Christianity was developing? Given the later alienated relations between Church and synagogue, would the much-later church have cared about adopting a Jewish canon that had only recently been formalized well after the time of Jesus and the apostles and that included books not referred to by their sacred writers? Moreover, the very fact that the Diaspora Jews translated into Greek *all* of the books now recognized in the Hebrew canon attests to the standing of those books well before Christianity came on the scene. Swete notes that there are 160 quotations of the Septuagint in the NT; of these, 51 are from the Pentateuch, 61 from the Prophets, and 46 from the poetic books.⁶⁵ In other words, 1st-century NT writers included a substantial number of quotations from each part of the tripart Hebrew canon. The existence of the tripart Hebrew canon in or before the 1st century would explain why Christians adopted as canonical Scripture even those OT books that are not quoted in the NT.

Discussions of the development of canon also take as evidence the contents of the manuscripts containing both the Greek OT and NT. McLay writes, “The external evidence of our Greek codices, which contain the apocryphal/deutero-canonical writings, is a simple testimony to the authority that the Greek Scriptures exercised in the life of the Early Church.”⁶⁶ True enough that the Greek Scriptures exercised authority in the early church. But this does not necessarily imply that the apocryphal books were widely accepted as canonical or as Scripture, even granting McLay’s helpful distinction between “Scripture” and “canon.”

It is probably a mistake to use the table of contents of codices as if they were a canon list. Too much weight has been given to the contents of the codices in the discussion of canon. Pick up any English Bible today, and the table of contents will include items other than the canonical books—items such as prefaces, introductions, general articles, and reference materials. More to the point, the selection of material in a particular codex may have been motivated by the purpose of the volume in consideration of the expense of producing it. In other words, a codex that contained only the Gospels is clearly not a statement that other NT books were not considered canonical but only an economy of production for a purpose that was concerned with readings from the life of Jesus. Furthermore, one codex (MS Gr. 242) has the NT and the Psalms but also includes hymns and much

63. Swete, *Old Testament in Greek*, 386.

64. Evans, “Scriptures of Jesus,” 185.

65. *Ibid.*

66. McLay, *Use of the Septuagint*, 144.

liturgical material in what presumably was a service book.⁶⁷ And there are five Greek codices (35, 69, 506, 680, 1424) that include the NT plus various treatises similar to articles bound in modern Bibles today.⁶⁸

The point is, as Earle Ellis has observed, “No two Septuagint codices contain the same apocrypha, and no uniform Septuagint ‘Bible’ was ever the subject of discussion in the patristic church. In view of these facts the Septuagint codices appear to have been originally intended more as service books than as a defined and normative canon of scripture.”⁶⁹ Roger Beckwith had earlier concluded similarly that the Septuagint manuscripts have little to offer as evidence of the extent of the Jewish canon in the 1st-century: “any idea that the Septuagint manuscripts, though not actually as early as some of the lists, reflect an earlier and more Jewish view of canon and the order of its books, would be quite mistaken. On the contrary, the Septuagint manuscripts appear simply to reflect the reading habits of the early church, whereas the [canon] lists are often more critical.”⁷⁰ On this topic David deSilva more recently concludes:

The “Septuagint” codices . . . cannot be used as evidence for an Alexandrian Jewish canon that included the Apocrypha. These manuscripts are fourth- and fifth-century Christian works, fail to agree on the extent of the extra books, and seem to have been compiled more with convenience of reference in mind than as the standards of canonical versus noncanonical books. . . . As “church books,” they may have sought to contain what was useful rather than what was strictly canonical.⁷¹

Even acknowledging that the apocryphal books were used by various Christian communities, and possibly with high esteem within those communities, does not wed them forever to Holy Scripture, as Stuhlmacher’s remark quoted above implies. Even at the time when the Greek OT was read widely in the church as the Bible, the fathers noted the difference between translations of books of the Hebrew canon and the apocryphal books. For instance, Cyril, who was bishop of Jerusalem (ca. A.D. 350), advised in his Catechetical lectures: “you are to read the OT books of the Septuagint that have been translated by the Seventy-two. . . . Stay away from the Apocrypha.”⁷²

Therefore, to appreciate the Septuagint’s rightful place in our Christian heritage does not imply that we must necessarily accept a broader canon than that allowed by Protestant tradition.

67. Daryl D. Schmidt, “The Greek New Testament as a Codex,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 478.

68. *Ibid.*

69. E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991), 34–35.

70. Beckwith, *Old Testament Canon*, 195.

71. David A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 29–30.

72. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.33, 35 (NPNF¹ 7:26).

* * *

I have addressed what I believe to be the two major sticking points that I suspect have deterred evangelicals from fully allowing the Septuagint its rightful place in our scholarship: first, the assumption that to appreciate the place of the Septuagint in biblical studies somehow demeans the value of the Masoretic Text as the textual basis of the Protestant OT; and second, that to recognize the value of the Septuagint for our work implies an acceptance of, or at least a tolerance for, a broader canon than our Protestant heritage allows. If this discussion has at least somewhat cleared the way of obstacles for an evangelical attitude toward the Septuagint, I would like to conclude with a few ideas of how the study of the Septuagint in its own right might enrich evangelical scholarship in our times.

One area of interest is the history of transmission of the biblical manuscripts. For instance, did the NT quotations of the Greek OT more often motivate variant readings in the transmission of the LXX manuscripts or vice versa? In my work on 1 Peter I discovered that 1 Peter had virtually no influence on the manuscripts of the OT books it quotes but that the Greek Isaiah did influence the manuscripts of 1 Peter.⁷³ It would be interesting to know if other NT books (for instance, Romans or Hebrews) had more influence on the transmission of the source texts of their quotations. The study of these kinds of questions would be greatly assisted if there were a list of manuscripts containing both Greek OT and NT texts with the Rahlfs manuscript numbers cross-referenced to corresponding Nestle-Aland numbers.⁷⁴

A second area in which I believe fruitful work remains to be done is biblical theology. It is methodologically flawed to use the *Hebrew* OT alone for biblical-theological concerns developed in the NT if, in fact, the NT writers used the *Greek* OT. One important example of this is the development of sophia- or wisdom-Christology without regard for the Greek translation of Proverbs, which is the book of the OT most relevant to the concept of God's wisdom. Since Prov 8:22 is the exegetical crux in the case for sophia-Christology, surely it is the Greek translation of Prov 8 that is the place to begin when seeking to understand how the Jewish concept of wisdom was later related to Hellenistic thought. Elizabeth Johnson, whose work is foundational in feminist theology, lists her sources for the study of wisdom in Jewish literature as "the Hebrew Bible, the deuterocanonical books, intertestamental apocalyptic, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Hellenistic Jewish philosophers, rabbinic Judaism, and Gnostic sects."⁷⁵ The Septuagint of

73. Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

74. According to a source at the Münster Institute, a comprehensive list of manuscripts containing both Greek OT and NT writings has not yet been produced (Klaus Wachtel, personal correspondence, May 15, 2002).

75. Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology," *ETL* 61 (1985): 261–94. Similarly, "Wisdom Was Made Flesh and Pitched

Proverbs that was produced and used in the Hellenistic era is conspicuously absent. But bringing the Greek Proverbs into play changes the picture considerably. As Johann Cook has demonstrated, the Greek translator of Proverbs comfortably uses Greek style and rhetoric but, unlike Wisdom of Solomon, does *not* accommodate the message of Proverbs to Greek ideas about wisdom upon which sophia-Christology so heavily leans.⁷⁶ The Septuagint Proverbs actually resists the very direction in which Johnson and others have developed sophia-Christology.⁷⁷

Third, NT exegesis would be enriched if interpreters paid closer attention to the context within the Greek OT of a verse quoted from it in the NT. It is especially easy to overlook the Greek OT when the quotation in the NT happens to agree with the Masoretic Text, and the NT exegete continues merrily to assume the context of the Hebrew of the immediately surrounding OT quotation for exegesis. But beware! The immediate context of the quotation in the Septuagint might be very different from the context of the verse in the Hebrew, even though the individual verse quoted closely agrees with the Hebrew. For instance, 1 Pet 2:6 quotes Isa 28:16, "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (TNIV). The LXX translation of Isa 28:16 differs from the Hebrew in the tense of the verb and in the addition of a brief prepositional phrase. Such close agreement might lead a NT exegete to look no further. However, the very next verse, Isa 28:17 LXX, provides a somewhat different context for understanding v. 16 than does the Hebrew by emphasizing hope instead of judgment ("I will turn judgment into hope"). The introduction of hope found in the LXX context contributes more congenially to Peter's message of encouragement than does the thought of MT Isa 28:17. This example suggests that exegesis is methodologically flawed if the context of the Hebrew is assumed but in fact it was the Greek OT that was in the NT author's mind. Moreover, the Septuagint may provide the answer to some of the charges that the NT writers use their quotations out of context, if exegetes are looking to the context of the Hebrew text when in fact the NT writer was assuming the context of the Greek OT.

Fourth, the Greek OT provides a large corpus of linguistic data that can enlighten the relationship between the Greek and Hebrew languages, which in turn can be brought to bear on wider-ranging issues. For instance, using syntactic analysis and the linguistic principle of bilingual interference, I have argued that the author of 1 Peter was probably a native

Her Tent among Us," in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol* (ed. M. Stevens; New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 98–102; also *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 87–94.

76. Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*.

77. Karen H. Jobes, "Sophia Christology: The Way of Wisdom?" in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke* (ed. J. I. Packer and S. K. Soderlund; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 226–50.

Semitic speaker for whom Greek was a second language.⁷⁸ Much work remains in developing syntax criticism as a methodology that can enlighten critical issues on the origin and relationship of books in the Greek Bible.

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The eminent German biblical scholar Ferdinand Hitzig is said to have begun his class in Septuagint with the remark, "Gentlemen, have you a Septuagint? If not, sell all you have, and buy a Septuagint."⁷⁹ Recognizing the treasure that God has preserved in the Septuagint can only enrich evangelical scholarship devoted to the true pearl of great price—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

78. Idem, "The Syntax of 1 Peter: Just How Good Is the Greek?" *BBR* 13 (2003): 159–73.

79. Quoted in Frederick W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (3rd ed.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 63.