

# The Great Code: Greek Bible And the Humanities<sup>1</sup>



PETER J. GENTRY  
*Professor of Old Testament  
Interpretation Southern Baptist  
Theological Seminary  
Louisville, KY  
pgentry@sbts.edu*

## INTRODUCTION

Northrop Frye was a Professor in the Department of English at Victoria College in the University of Toronto from 1948 until his death in 1991. One of his most influential and significant books was entitled *The Great Code*.<sup>2</sup> In this work he argued that the Bible is foundational to much of the literature in the western world. In particular, in terms of *language, myth, metaphor, and typology*, the Bible functions as a code providing a system for imagination and metaphor necessary to the correct interpretation of texts. Prior to Frye, for example, the poetry of William Blake was poorly understood because readers did not grasp the system of metaphor derived from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Bible upon which Blake's writings were based. Today, my hope is to extend the thesis of Frye to show how the Bible, and in particular the Greek Translation of the Jewish Scriptures, is at the foundation of many disciplines in the humanities.

---

<sup>1</sup> This lecture was first given as one of the Sizemore Lectures in Biblical Studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary November 29, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

Let me begin by describing the Greek Bible in the Jewish and Christian traditions. The translation into Greek of the Jewish Sacred Writings and the Christian First Testament is normally referred to as the Septuagint.

### Definition

What is meant by the term Septuagint? A lack of precision is common in both popular and scholarly use of the word. Mainly responsible for this lack of precision are uncertainties about the history of the process of translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. There is general agreement that the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy known as the Pentateuch or Torah, were translated in Egypt early during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285/2-246 B.C.E.), possibly around 280 if we can rely on the testimony of the Church Fathers.<sup>3</sup> The books in the “Prophets” and “Writings” sections of the Jewish Canon were translated later, most of them by 130 B.C.E. as is clearly indicated by the Prologue to the Greek Translation of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus). Questions have been raised about the date of translation of each of the books in the collection known as Megilloth (Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther). Some of these may have been first translated after 100 B.C.E. Thus the term Septuagint is applicable in a technical sense only to the Greek Pentateuch, although it is commonly employed in a loose manner of speaking for the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures as a whole. To further complicate matters, long before all the books had been translated, revisions were already being made of existing translations. The process of making systematic, thoroughgoing revisions (called *recensions*) continued from possibly 150 B.C.E. through 200 C.E. The precise line of demarcation between original translations and revisions in this body of texts has, in fact, not yet been clearly established. Scholars are still working to prepare scientific editions of these translations based upon careful study of all available evidence in Greek manuscripts, citations in Church

---

<sup>3</sup> N. L. Collins, “281 BCE: the Year of the Translation of the Pentateuch in Greek under Ptolemy II,” in *Septuagint, Scrolls, and Cognate Writings* (eds. George J. Brooke and Barnabas Lindars; SCS 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 403-503. A recent re-analysis of the *Letter of Aristeas* and the origins of the Septuagint is Sylvie Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the Letter of Aristeas* (London: Routledge, 2003). Her conclusions do not challenge a date in the early third century B.C. as the proposed time of translation.

Fathers, and early daughter translations. Moreover it should be noted that the Greek Bible originated in Africa.

### *Purpose*

What motivated the task of translation continues to be debated to the present time. Five major hypotheses have been advanced: (1) a generation of Greek-speaking Jews in the Hellenistic period begun by the conquest of Alexander the Great (333-323 B.C.E.) required Greek scriptures for their liturgy, or (2) for the education of their young; (3) the translation was required as a legal document or (4) as cultural heritage for the royal library being assembled in Alexandria; (5) Aristarchus' new edition of Homer around 150 B.C.E. employed textual criticism to produce an authoritative text and served as a model to produce an authoritative text of the Bible for Alexandrian Jews (hence early revisions and *The Letter of Aristeas*).

### *Origin*

A document known as (*The Letter of Aristeas*) purports to relate the story of the origin of the Greek Pentateuch. This document is a piece of propaganda written 150-100 B.C.E. to authenticate the Greek version in the face of criticisms circulating at that time—criticisms to the effect that the Greek translation did not adequately reflect the current Hebrew text in Palestine.

The name Septuagint comes from *septuaginta*, the Latin word for seventy. According to *Aristeas*, there were seventy-two translators. The number seventy is an adaptation of seventy-two based on models like the Seventy Elders at Sinai, the Seventy Judges who assisted Moses, the Seventy Elders of the Sanhedrin, etc. (seventy in *Sefer Torah* i.8 and seventy-two in *Sôferim* i.8). Likely there were just five translators for the Pentateuch as the rabbinic versions of the story indicate (*Aboth of Rabbi Nathan* 37, *Sôferim* i.7). While church fathers like Justin Martyr (c. 135 C.E.) refer to the seventy translators, the earliest use of the term Septuagint as a reference to the translation itself is found in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (c. 303 C.E.).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.16.1.

## Character

In both ancient and modern times different approaches to the task of translation have been adopted. Each language employs a code to 'cut up' and represent the 'pie' of reality. The code of one language may overlap with that of another in multiple ways or perhaps not at all in some aspects. Translations may be characterised in a continuum on a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum the translator seeks to follow as closely as possible the code of the source language where that of the target language will permit. Formal correspondence between the code of source and target languages may be at the clause level, phrase level, word level, or word-component morpheme level.<sup>5</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, the translator seeks to follow the code of the target language where that of the source language will allow in order to communicate effectively to the readers. Thus the notion of fidelity to the Word of God motivates both ends of the spectrum. When the codes of source and target languages overlap in multiple ways, certainly more than one correct translation is possible. The books in the Greek Pentateuch as well as those in the Prophets and Writings vary widely within this spectrum. Some are literal and represent formal equivalence in the extreme; others are freer and represent many gradations of functional equivalence.

Genesis and Exodus are fairly dynamic translations while Leviticus through Deuteronomy are quite literal. The translator of the book of Job abbreviated many of the long, windy speeches for his Hellenistic readership so that the book is one-sixth shorter in Greek. The translator of Proverbs re-arranged the material to enhance the figure of Solomon. Other books have additions to them such as Esther and Daniel. The Greek Jeremiah differs significantly from the Hebrew Text in both arrangement and text. Most of the books, however, reflect the same Hebrew parent text as that later preserved in the Masoretic Text.

In general, the differences between the Septuagint and the later standard text (Masoretic Text) are due to a number of factors. In some cases, the translators were using a Hebrew parent text which differs somewhat from the Masoretic Text. In other cases, differences are due simply to a different way of reading the same text or understanding the grammar and meanings of words.

---

<sup>5</sup> Harry Sysling, "Translation Techniques in the Ancient Bible Translations: Septuagint and Targum," in *A History of Bible Translation* edited by Philip A. Noss (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007), 285-86.

The Septuagint quickly became popular among the Jews of the Diaspora for whom Greek was the familiar spoken language. When the Christian church began to spread beyond Jewish borders, it adopted the Septuagint as its Bible with minor modifications. For example, the book of Daniel in the Septuagint was considered so deficient by the Christian church that it was rejected and a later Greek translation attributed to Theodotion was used instead. Many of the quotations of the Old Testament in the New are from the Septuagint, or even early revisions of it, and as a result may differ from the Masoretic Text. The differences range from superficial to significant. The existence of differences in the text and different Greek translations does not appear problematic for the strong claim made by Jesus and the Apostles concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures.

## INFLUENCE OF THE GREEK BIBLE IN GENERAL

Two approaches will be used to demonstrate the main thesis, i.e. that the Greek Bible is the Great Code for the Humanities. First, a syllogism can establish the point in broad and sweeping terms by showing the debt owed by our civilization in the West to the Bible in general, and by demonstrating that the Greek version of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures was the chief instrument and source for this impact on the humanities. This might be displayed as follows:

### *Syllogism*

1. Humanities in Western civilisation are indebted to the Bible.
2. During the largest part of the past two thousand years, the dominant form of the Bible is the Greek Version.
3. Humanities in Western civilisation are indebted to the Greek Bible.

Recently a brief publication from *Kairos Journal* entitled "Legatees of a Great Inheritance: How the Judeo-Christian Tradition Has Shaped the West" provided a summary of facts illustrating the first point in areas such as the arts:<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> What follows is adapted from "Legatees of a Great Inheritance: How the Judeo-Christian Tradition Has Shaped the West," *Kairos Journal Booklet* (2008),

## The Arts

The canon of Western civilization includes such incomparable literary figures and practitioners of the arts as Rembrandt, Shakespeare, Mendelssohn, and Tolstoy. It is a tradition rich in media and genres. Often Judeo-Christian convictions were the inspiration for achievement. Furthermore, people of faith provided the freedom for non-believers to work their craft. These two factors together have been the seedbed for a flowering of artistic culture such as the world has never seen.

## Painting and Sculpture

Painting and sculpture have been mainstays in worship centers—from illuminated manuscripts (Book of Kells) to Byzantine icons; from Giotto's murals in the Arena Chapel in Padova to the Vatican Bernini colonnade; from the stained glass of Notre Dame and Sainte-Chapelle to the Marc Chagall windows in the Hadassah-Hebrew University synagogue. Then, beyond the walls of churches and synagogues, the visual arts have flourished in many forms. The European Renaissance gave the world Botticelli and Raphael in the South, Breughel and Dürer in the North. And who can count the various artistic "isms," such as Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Impressionism, and Cubism, emerging in subsequent centuries.

## Architecture

The West is home to Gothic, Romanesque, Baroque, Neo-classical, Italianate, Spanish mission, Colonial, Prairie, Federal, Art Deco, Bauhaus, PostModern, and Expressionist architecture. It has given the world the Hagia Sophia, the Spanish Steps, the Ponte Vecchio, the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, and the Royal Albert Hall.

## Music

Christianity alone has contributed the oratorio, cantata, hymn, gospel song, requiem mass, Negro spiritual, and Gregorian chant. It has

birthed Bach's "St. Matthew Passion," Handel's "Messiah," and Luther's "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

Western orchestras abound, with music scored for a wealth of finely engineered instruments, from violin to trumpet to oboe. National arts commissions and private patrons underwrite the performance of symphonies, operas, and folk song festivals. Popular music of every sort issues from Western recording studios. Some of it is original, some of it internationally eclectic. But inceptive or hybrid, the production is Western and the audience is worldwide.

## Fiction

From the early days of Cervantes (*Don Quixote*) and Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*), through the days of Dumas (*The Three Musketeers*), Dickens (*Oliver Twist*), and Austen (*Pride and Prejudice*), to the modern work of Orwell (1984) and Hemingway (*The Old Man and the Sea*), the novel has been a mainstay of Western civilization.

## Theatre

The theatre has enjoyed unparalleled vitality in the West, with its West End, repertory, summer stock, and touring companies. The names of venues (the Globe in London; the Abbey in Dublin), playwrights (England's Shakespeare; Norway's Ibsen; Russia's Chekov), and dramas (*Tartuffe*; *The Cherry Orchard*) are legendary.

## Film

Western films are the gold standard, dominating theaters from Jakarta to Nairobi. Notable is the contribution of Eastern European Jews and their progeny, who founded America's great companies (MGM, Fox, Paramount, Columbia, etc.) and of Italians of Catholic tradition (Fellini, Bertolucci, Zeffirelli, etc.). Europe is dotted with historic studios (Shepperton and Ealing in England, Cinecittà in Italy, Pathé in France) and influential film festivals (Venice, Cannes, Berlin).

## Comedy

Comedy rates special notice because it flourishes in free societies of the West. Indeed, the work of satirists, comedians, cartoonists, parodists, caricaturists, clowns, and jesters is a vital check on absurdity, hypocrisy, pomposity, and tyranny. Judaism has been particularly

fruitful in this connection, providing the West with many of its comedic luminaries.

### Creativity and Diversity

This is not to gainsay the wonderful contributions of Islamic art. As Sir Ernst Gombrich puts it in his classic *The Story of Art*, Muslim artisans “created the most subtle lacework ornamentation known as arabesques,” and he observed, “It is an unforgettable experience to walk through the courtyards and halls of the Alhambra and to admire the inexhaustible variety of these decorative patterns.” But Muslim theology, whether through disdain for sacred music, figurative depictions, (aniconism), or dissenting expression, has limited creativity and diversity, hallmarks of Western civilisation.

These are illustrations of areas in the Arts that have been deeply shaped by the Judeo-Christian heritage. Only a few considerations are necessary to demonstrate Part Two of the Syllogism, i.e. that the form of the Bible that was the means and source of shaping our heritage was the Greek Version.

It is now widely accepted that Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek were all used in Palestine in the First Century C.E. The question as to whether a particular individual or region or town was bilingual or even trilingual is debated.<sup>7</sup> Outside of Palestine, the Jews of the Diaspora, for the most part, spoke Greek and used the Greek Version of their Sacred Writings. An excellent example of this is Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E. – 40 C.E.). Additional evidence can be found in the use of the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament. The Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15 is a case in point—appeal to the Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures settled the matter. We must remember that the Christian Church began as a sect within Judaism.

---

<sup>7</sup> See esp. G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, Vol. 5 (Macquarie University: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1989), 19-26.



## TEXTS AND VERSIONS USED BY THE EARLY CHURCH

In 1983 Archer and Chirichigno produced an overview of the citations of the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> Although this work is dated, it does give a helpful picture of the biblical texts used by the Early Church. The authors used categories to describe quotations as follows:

(1) Quotations in the New Testament from the Septuagint when it closely follows our present Hebrew Masoretic Text – 268.

(2) Quotations in the New Testament following the wording of the Septuagint even when it deviates somewhat from our present Masoretic Text – 294.

(3) Quotations in the New Testament closer to MT than to the LXX – 33.

(4) Quotations in the New Testament adhering closely to the LXX against our present Masoretic Text – 22.

(5) Quotations in the New Testament where the New Testament writer appears to have taken liberties in quoting the Old Testament – 13.

It is not hard to see from this short survey that the LXX played an important and significant role in terms of the use of the Old Testament in the New.<sup>9</sup>

### *Influence of the Septuagint in Jewish Communities*

The influence of the Septuagint among Jewish communities continued well into the Middle Ages. Since the Christian Church adopted the Septuagint as Scripture and attempted to demonstrate the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah in Christian-Jewish dialogue based upon this version, several Jewish revisions of the Septuagint were produced in the first two centuries C.E. in an attempt to bring this version into closer alignment with the Hebrew Text and current rabbinic teaching. The main Jewish revisions of the Septuagint are attributed to Theodotion, Aquila, and Symmachus. For the most

---

<sup>8</sup> Gleason L. Archer and G. C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> See further Karen H. Jobes, "When God Spoke Greek: The Place of the Greek Bible in Evangelical Scholarship," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 16.2 (2006): 221.

part, these versions were revisions of the original Greek Translation and not brand new translations. Abraham Wasserstein and his son, David J. Wasserstein, in a recent work, *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* trace the influence of the Septuagint, whether directly or indirectly via the Jewish Revisors, among Jewish communities well into the Middle Ages.

At a Conference on the Greek Bible in Byzantine Judaism held in July, 2007 at Cambridge University, I presented an analysis of a fragment of Ecclesiastes from the Genizah in the Old Jewish Synagogue in Cairo, Egypt.<sup>10</sup> This document contains a Greek version of Ecclesiastes written in Hebrew Script. The text is derived from the Septuagint, but updated to reflect the grammar and lexicon of Byzantine Greek and dates to about 1000 C.E. It provides a clear witness to the abiding influence of the Septuagint among Jews in the medieval period.

### *Influence of the Septuagint in Christian Communities*

We have already noted that the Christian Church adopted almost immediately the Greek Version of the Christian Old Testament. Breakdown in relations between Christians and Jews early on meant that the Christian Church was separated from the Semitic sources of its Scriptures as well as from the Jewish background against which they are properly understood. The only important leaders in the Christian Church who could in any measure read the Hebrew Text up to the time of the Renaissance and Reformation were Origen and Jerome.

Not only did the Apostles of the New Testament cite the Hebrew Scriptures from the Greek Version, but the Septuagint exercised a great influence on their grammar and vocabulary just as the King James Version influenced the jargon of Christians in the Twentieth Century. Sidney Jellicoe, a leading scholar of the Septuagint in the third quarter of the last century did not overstate when he claimed: "He who would read the NT must know *Koiné*; but he who would understand the NT must know the LXX" (emphasis original).<sup>11</sup> This can especially be seen in the writings of Luke, who in terms of text contributed more to the New Testament than Paul. For example, in the so-called "Parable of the Good Samaritan" (Luke 10) Jesus asks who was a neighbour to the man who

---

<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Gentry, "The Greek Genizah Fragment of Ecclesiastes and its Relation to Earlier Greek Versions." In *Festschrift for John Lee*, edited by James K. Aitken and Trevor Evans. Forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> Sidney Jellicoe, "Septuagint Studies in the Current Century," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 199.

fell among thieves. An expert in the Torah answers: “the one who did ‘mercy’ with him.” The expression is as strange in Greek as it is in English, but derives via the Septuagint from a Hebrew expression “do *hesed*” for performing acts which fulfill obligations of loyalty and love in a covenant relationship.

Concerning the use of the Septuagint in the Christian Church, Karen Jobes rightly states:

...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. 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.<sup>12</sup>

And Jaroslav 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].<sup>13</sup>

John Sawyer concludes similarly:

Despite the efforts of a few Hebrew scholars down the ages and their claims to be concerned, like St Jerome, with the original Hebrew, it was the Greek Bible that has been most influential in

---

<sup>12</sup> Karen H. Jobes, “When God Spoke Greek: The Place of the Greek Bible in Evangelical Scholarship,” 221.

<sup>13</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 1: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 21.

the history of Christianity and indirectly in the history of western culture.<sup>14</sup>

The Greek Bible continued as the central text in the Eastern Roman Empire and Byzantium until the Fifteenth Century. Moreover, the Bible of the Orthodox Church in Russia is derived from the Septuagint and the Orthodox Church maintained closer ties with Greece than Western Europe. Increasingly, in the West, the dominant language was Latin. Although Jerome produced a translation of the Bible in Latin directly from the Hebrew during the years 390-406, the Old Latin Translation made from the Septuagint continued to be used for a long time and was not quickly replaced by the Vulgate. Augustine mentioned in a letter to Jerome in 403 that a bishop in Oea (Tripoli) had caused a disturbance when he used Jerome's new version instead of the Old Latin.<sup>15</sup> The word *cucurbita* for gourd in Hebrew (*qiqqayon*) had been replaced by *hedera* (ivy). When the lector read the text, the congregation shouted out that the correct word was *cucurbita*.

Augustine's intellectual influence in the West has been immense. Crucial to his epistemology in the area of philosophy is the statement "I believe that I might understand." This is derived from the Old Latin of Isaiah 7:9 where the translation is based on the Septuagint and this meaning cannot be derived from the Hebrew Text. This famous phrase from the Old Latin Bible continued to be quoted by Anselm, Abelard, and many others as the foundation of epistemology, an area of philosophy that is the foundation of many disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

The Old Latin persisted the longest in monasteries in Ireland. The influence of Irish Monks in the intellectual tradition in Europe is enormous, particularly through centres of learning like Lindisfarne in England, a daughter monastery of Iona established by Columba, and St. Gallen in Switzerland, founded by the Irish monk Gallus in the missionary movement beyond Ireland and England led by Columbanus.<sup>16</sup> The humanities in the West, then, before 1500 owe much to the Greek Bible.

---

<sup>14</sup> John F. A. Sawyer, *Sacred Languages and Sacred Texts* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), 94.

<sup>15</sup> *Epist. Hieronymi* 104,5 and 112,22; *C.S.E.L.* 55 (ed. I. Hillberg), 241, 392, *PL* 22, 833 § 5, 903 § 22; *Comm. In Jonam Prophetam* 4,6; *PL* 25 1202C – 1204B.

<sup>16</sup> See Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity. Vol. 1: From the Beginnings to the Threshold of the Reformation* (trans. James L. Schaaf; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 238-242.

*Influence of the Greek Bible in Particular*

The second approach to demonstrate the main thesis, i.e. that the Greek Bible is the Great Code for the Humanities, is to consider individual disciplines in the humanities and illustrate in particular the bearing that the Greek Bible has on that discipline.

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND THE HISTORY OF THE TEXT OF JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

The Septuagint is one of the earliest and most significant witnesses to the text of the Hebrew Bible. The oldest **complete** manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible date to c. 1000 C.E. The Greek Pentateuch was translated early in the Third Century B.C.E. To the extent that the translation can be used to determine the parent text from which it was translated, we have a much older testimony to the text of the Hebrew Bible. The parent text of the Septuagint would also pre-date the Dead Sea Scrolls and contains more important variants than the Dead Sea Scrolls as a textual witness.

When considering large-scale differences between various witnesses to the text, Emanuel Tov affirms:

The list of biblical Qumran texts attesting to early redactional stages different from MT LXX S T V is thus rather limited... Consequently, according to this understanding, in addition to MT, the LXX remains the major source for recognizing different literary stages (early and late) of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>17</sup>

Three examples are sufficient to show that sometimes the Masoretic Text is superior, and at other times, the parent text of the Greek Bible is superior.

---

<sup>17</sup> Emanuel Tov, "The Nature of the Large-Scale Differences Between the LXX and MT S T V, Compared with Similar Evidence in Other Sources," in *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered*, ed. Adrian Schenker (SCS 52; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2003), 137.

ZECH 1:21[2:4]

MT 1:21

וַיִּבְאוּ אֵלָהּ לְהַחֲרִיד אֹתָם

... לַיְדוֹת אֲתֵּי־קִרְנוֹת הַגּוֹיִם ...

LXX 2:4<sup>18</sup>καὶ εἰσῆλθον οὗτοι τοῦ ὄξϋναι  
αὐτὰεἰς χεῖρας αὐτῶν τὰ τέσσαρα  
κέρατα

And these came to terrify them  
by casting down the horns of  
the nations...

And these came to sharpen  
them—the four horns—into  
their hands.

The rendering in the LXX is based upon reading  $\text{לְהַחֲרִיד}$  from  $\text{דַּד}$  ‘be sharp’ and is due to the confusion easily made between *dalet* and *resh*. He also vocalised  $\text{יָדַי}$  ‘hands’ and supplied a possessive pronoun rather than the Piel Bound Infinitive of  $\text{יָדָה}$  that we find in MT. The number four is supplied from the context. The text offered by the LXX is obviously inferior and can be easily shown to be a secondary development from the text in MT by common errors in textual transmission. At the same time, it is clear that in reality it witnesses to the same text transmitted in MT and is not a witness to a different textual tradition.

Two examples are drawn from Isaiah, where Barthélemy and the Committee of the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project sponsored by the United Bible Societies propose that the parent text represented by the LXX is superior and the text of MT secondary. The first example is Isaiah 19:10. Verses 9 and 10 in MT and v. 10a in LXX provide the context, followed by the analysis of the committee designated by CTAT (*Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*). The sources for the relevant witnesses are cited last.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Duodecim Prophetiae* (Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1943, 1967).

ISA 19:10

MT

LXX<sup>19</sup>

[9] וּבִשּׁוּ עֲבָדַי פְּשִׁתִּים שְׂרִיקוֹת

וְאֲרָגִים חוֹרֵי:

[10] וְהָיוּ שְׂתֵתֶיהָ מְדַכְּאִים

καὶ ἔσονται οἱ διαζόμενοι  
αὐτὰ ἐν ὀδύνη

כָּל-עֹשֵׂי שְׂכָר אֲגַמִּי-נֶפֶשׁ:

Those who work with combed  
flax will despair,  
as well as those who weave  
white fabric;

And her foundations will be  
dejected;

all her wage-earners are people  
who are like murky pools.

And those weaving (set the  
warp in the loom) them will be  
in pain

CTAT: 19,10 cor שְׂתֵתֶיהָ [C] 1Q<sup>a</sup> 4Q<sup>b</sup> G T // assim Ps 11,3: M שְׂתֵתֶיהָ /  
exeg: Th Aq(?) V / deform-int: g t / constr: S

MT

שְׂתֵתֶיהָ

1Q<sup>a</sup>

שׁוֹתֵתִיהָ

1Q<sup>b</sup>

שׁתֵתִיהָ

4Q<sup>b</sup>

שׁוֹתֵתִיהָ

LXX

οἱ διαζόμενοι αὐτὰ

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Isaias* (Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939, 1967).

Targ      בֵּית־שְׂתֵי מְחָא (ms Urbinates 1; 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible)

The excellent analysis and discussion of Barthélemy in *Critique Textuelle de l'Ancien Testament* and de Waard's *Handbook on Isaiah* need only be summarised here.<sup>20</sup> The rendering in the Septuagint is based upon a Hebrew Text in which the consonants are identical to our later Masoretic Text, but a different vocalisation is used: MT read *šātōtehā* (her foundations) while the Septuagint Translator read *šōt<sup>t</sup>tehā* (those weaving it).

While the vocalisation of 1Q<sup>b</sup> is unknown, the plene spelling of 1Q<sup>a</sup> and 4Q<sup>b</sup> clearly support the rendering in the LXX and Targum.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, LXX and Targum have preserved the original text at this point. The rarer verb שָׂתָה, 'to weave' is also the harder reading. The vocalisation behind the Dead Sea Scrolls, LXX and Targum was lost early. The renderings in the Syriac, Latin Vulgate, and Jewish Revisors are based on construing the form from the more commonly known root שָׂתָה, 'to drink'. The MT seems to have correlated the text with Ps 11:3, the only other occurrence of the noun שֵׁתָּה, 'foundation':

צַדִּיק מֵה־פָּעַל      כִּי הִשְׁתֹּחַת יֵהְרֹסוּן

For the foundations are being demolished  
What did/(will?) the righteous do?

Another example, taken from Isa 53:8, concerns the consonantal text and not just a difference in vocalisation. The relevant sources are cited followed by the summary analysis of CTAT:

ISA 53:8

MT      מִפֶּשַׁע עַמִּי נִגַּע לְמוֹ

<sup>20</sup> Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*, 2, Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations. Rapport final du Comité pour l'analyse textuelle de l'Ancien Testament hébreu institué par l'Alliance Biblique Universelle, établi en coopération avec Alexander R. Hulst, Norbert Lohfink, William D. McHardy, H. Peter Rüger, coéditeur, James A. Sanders, coéditeur (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 50/2. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 139-141, and Jan de Waard, *A Handbook on Isaiah* (Textual Criticism and the Translator 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 85-86.



1Q <sup>a(c)</sup>	מפּשע עמו נוגג למ'
1Q <sup>b</sup>	מפּשע עמו נגג למ'
4Q <sup>d</sup>	מפּשע עמו נוגג למ'
LXX	ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνομιῶν τοῦ λαοῦ μου ἤχθη εἰς θάνατον <sup>21</sup>
Aq	ἀπὸ ἀθεσίας λαοῦ μου ἤψατο αὐτῶν
Sym	διὰ τὴν ἀδικίαν τοῦ λαοῦ μου πληγὴ αὐτοῖς
Theod	ἀπὸ ἀθεσίας τοῦ λαοῦ μου ἤψατο αὐτῶν
MT	because of the transgression of my people, the blow was <u>his/theirs</u>
LXX	because of the sins of my people he was led <u>to death</u>

CTAT: 53,8B cor תּוֹמַלְ נַגַּג [C] G // err-graph: 1Q<sup>a</sup>(corr) מ' נוגג למ' →  
 harm-int: M 1Q<sup>b</sup> 4Q<sup>d</sup> Sym; מ' נַגַּג, ThAq V S T: clav מ' נַגַּג / lacun:  
 1Q<sup>a\*</sup>

למות	lammāwet	to death
לם	lāmô	to them / to him?

The best handling of the problem is by Barthélemy in *Critique Textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*.<sup>22</sup> It seems that the parent text of the

<sup>21</sup> The text of the LXX as well as those of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion are all cited from Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Isaias* (Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum, 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939, 1967).

<sup>22</sup> Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*, 2, Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations. Rapport final du Comité pour l'analyse textuelle de l'Ancien Testament hébreu institué par l'Alliance Biblique Universelle, établi en coopération avec Alexander R. Hulst, Norbert Lohfink, William D. McHardy, H. Peter Rüger, coéditeur, James A. Sanders, coéditeur (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 50/2. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 397-399, and Jan de Waard, *A Handbook on Isaiah* (Textual Criticism and the Translator 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 194-195.

Septuagint Translator had לָמוֹת, i.e. “to death.” The *taw* was lost by accidental mutilation at the end of the line. The translator also read a passive form of the verb as is also attested by the corrector of 1Q<sup>a</sup>. Once the *taw* was lost, the remaining letters were read in the Masoretic Text as *lāmô* and the consonants for the verb vocalised as a noun: “the blow was to them.” This text is problematic since evidence is slim to show that the suffix can mean “to him” as many modern scholars interpret the text. Thus, while not all critics are persuaded,<sup>23</sup> the difference in LXX is probably due to a different Hebrew parent text which preserves the original reading.

Differences, therefore, between the LXX and other witnesses to the text which are genuine textual variants should be evaluated on a case by case basis and one should not prefer *a priori* either the LXX or the MT.

## HEBREW AND SEMITIC LANGUAGES

The Septuagint plays an important role in investigation of the history of Hebrew in all aspects of the language: accent system, phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicology.

### *History of Accents in Hebrew*

The Masoretic Text of the Jewish/Hebrew Scriptures records not only consonants and vowels but also an accent system. The accents mark stressed syllables and show how the text was chanted in the synagogue. They can also show a syntactic understanding of the text when different options are possible. A number of biblical texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls use spaces between words that correspond to the later division of the text into verses and in some instances, also division of verses into smaller sense units as marked by the accent system. Most manuscripts from the Dead Sea Scrolls use spaces only for word division. Some of the earliest manuscripts of the Septuagint, however,

---

<sup>23</sup> Ekblad acknowledges the possibility that the parent text of the LXX had לָמוֹת, but argues that since neither ἡχθη nor any form of ἄγω matches עג anywhere in the LXX, the Greek translator may have mistaken עג as the perfect of נה. This is not probable either as an error of hearing or sight and overlooks the fact that the rendering in v. 9 is inspired by that in v. 7. See Eugene Robert Ekblad, Jr., *Isaiah's Servant Poems According to the Septuagint: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 235-36 and nn. 278-279.

have spaces between words which correspond not only to the division into verses, but also into smaller units as specified by the accent system.<sup>24</sup> I mention Papyrus Fouad inv. 266 from Egypt and dating to 50 B.C.E. This manuscript of Deuteronomy employs spaces in the Greek Text that correspond to the so-called closed and open sections and paragraphs marked by the Masoretes. Even more significant is John Rylands Papyrus 458 in Manchester, England dating to the Second Century B.C.E. This papyrus contains fragments of Deuteronomy 23-28. It employs spaces that correspond precisely to the phrase division within verses indicated by the accent system in Hebrew. It is, therefore, manuscripts of the Septuagint that provide the oldest evidence for the accent system in Hebrew.

### *Historical Phonology and Polyphony*

From the Tenth Century B.C.E. to the Fifth Century B.C.E. Hebrew was written using the Canaanite or Phoenician script. From around the Fifth Century B.C.E. onwards, the Assyrian or Aramaic Square script was used. These scripts attempt to represent the spoken form of the language using approximately 22 symbols. A question in the history of phonology is this: did any cases exist where a symbol represented more than one sound? The best evidence for this question lies in the Greek Pentateuch, the Septuagint in the narrowest sense of the term. When the Torah or Pentateuch was translated into Greek, names as a general rule were transliterated rather than translated, that is, they were represented letter for letter by using letters of the Greek Alphabet for letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. A consistent approach to transliteration used by the translators allows us to gain insight into the sounds represented by the writing system. The cases of *heth* and *'ayin* are instructive.<sup>25</sup>

When Classical Hebrew is taught today, normally the symbol *heth* is described to represent a voiceless uvular fricative or spirant—a consonant produced by restricting the back of the mouth before the uvula to a hole so small that friction results as the air passes through.

---

<sup>24</sup> See E. J. Revell, "The Oldest Evidence for the Hebrew Accent System," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 54 (1971): 214-222.

<sup>25</sup> J. Blau, *On Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew* (Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Proceedings Vol. 6, No. 2; Jerusalem: Ahva Press, 1982) and J. W. Wevers, "Heth in Classical Hebrew," in *Essays on the Ancient Semitic World* edited by J. W. Wevers and D. B. Redford (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 101-112.

The sound is comparable to the 'ch' in the German word *Bach*. Nonetheless, names normally spelled with the letter *heth* in the later Masoretic Text are spelled either by Greek  $\chi$  or by zero:

חֶשְׁבֹן > Εσεβων

*hešbôn* > *Esebôn*

חָרָן > Χαρραν

*haran* > *Charran*

Although debated at first, scholars appear satisfied that this shows that two different sounds inherited by Hebrew from Proto-Semitic were consistently being represented by the one symbol. One was a voiceless uvular fricative and the other was a voiceless pharyngeal fricative.

Another example is the symbol 'ayin normally described in grammars of Hebrew as representing a voiced pharyngeal. Again consistent patterns in the transliteration of names in the Greek Pentateuch show this symbol sometimes spelled with a Greek  $\gamma$  or with a vowel or zero:

בַּלְעָם > Βαλααμ

*bil'am* > *Balaam*

עַמֹּרָה > Γομορρας

*'amorâ* > *gomorras*

Once more, scholars have concluded that in one case the symbol represented a voiced pharyngeal and at other times a voiced uvular. The latter sound is represented by a separate symbol in Arabic and Ugaritic called a *gayin*. The one symbol represented two separate sounds which were preserved in speech at the time of the translation of the Greek Pentateuch. What is interesting is that these distinctions in the transliteration of names in the Greek Pentateuch are not maintained in

the transliteration of names in the books of the Former Prophets and Writings made no doubt about a hundred years later. This demonstrates that the distinctions between voiced uvular and pharyngeal and between voiceless uvular and pharyngeal were lost among native speakers around this time. Thus for questions of historical phonology, the Greek Bible is actually an important source for issues that cannot be resolved from the evidence of the Hebrew Bible since the Masoretic Text is later.

### *Historical Morphology*

Also relevant to the history of the Hebrew language is Origen's Hexapla. Sometime around 240 a church father named Origen prepared an edition of the Christian Old Testament in six columns. Although debated, scholars generally believe the First Column contained the Hebrew Text and the Second Column a transliteration in Greek of the Hebrew Text. The Second Column would have aided the reading of the First Column since vocalisation of the text was not yet recorded as in the later Masoretic Tradition. Column Five contained the Septuagint, the earliest Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, and columns Three, Four and Six offered Jewish revisions of the original Greek Translation attributed to Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. This project stretched the nascent development of the codex and may have required as many as forty codices of 400 folios each.<sup>26</sup>

Origen's massive work did not survive except in copies of which only fragments are extant today. The remains of the Second Column are of particular interest for the history of the Hebrew language. As an illustration we may consider the development of a type of noun called Segholate Nouns. These are nouns of two syllables, always accented on the first syllable, and both syllables usually a short 'e' as in bed. Grammarians diagram the development of such nouns as follows when the main vowel is originally 'a':

CaCCu >	CaCC >	CáCeC >	CéCeC
---------	--------	---------	-------

In the earliest stage, the nouns had the structure consonant, vowel, consonant, consonant, 'u'. Later, a change occurred in patterns of stress in the language and final short vowels were lost leading to a syllable

<sup>26</sup> See Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 105.

ending in two consonants. This problem was later alleviated by introducing an anaptyctic or helping vowel, a seghol or short 'e'. Finally, the first vowel was assimilated to the helping vowel. The last stage is what we find in the Masoretic Text. The second stage is what we find in the fragments of Origen's Hexapla:<sup>27</sup>

Spelling in Masoretic Text	Spelling in Second Column
'éres      (אָרֶס)	ars      αρς
géber      (גָּבֵר)	gabr      γαβρ

Thus the textual tradition of the Septuagint is critical for determining the history of morphology in Classical Hebrew.

## SEMANTIC HISTORY

The Greek Bible also contains data relevant for the history of the meaning of certain words in Hebrew. Sometimes the equivalents for Hebrew words are not based on their meaning in Standard Biblical Hebrew but rather their meaning in Post-biblical Hebrew or Aramaic.

### *Interpretation Based on Meaning in Post-Biblical Hebrew or Aramaic*

#### EXOD 12:22

MT

וּלְקַחְתֶּם אֶגְדַּת אֲזִיב

וּטְבַלְתֶּם בְּדָם אֶשֶׁר־בַּסֶּף

LXX<sup>28</sup>

λήμψεσθε δὲ δεσμὴν ὑσσώπου

καὶ βάψαντες ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ  
παρὰ τὴν θύραν

<sup>27</sup> E. Brønno, *Studien Über Hebräische Morphologie und Vokalismus* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1943), 125.

<sup>28</sup> John Wm. Wevers, ed., *Exodus* (Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum, 2.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991).

וְהִגַּדְתָּם אֶל-הַמַּשְׁקוּוֹת

καὶ θίξετε τῆς φλιᾶς

וְאֶל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת מִן-הַדֶּלֶת

καὶ ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρων τῶν σταθμῶν  
ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος, ὃ ἐστὶν παρὰ τὴν  
θύραν·

וְאֶשְׁרָבָה

And you shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip [it] in the blood in <u>the basin</u> and touch [it] to the lintel and to the two door-posts from the blood in the basin.	And you shall take a bundle of hyssop and dipping from the blood <u>beside the door</u> and you shall touch the lintel and on both door-posts from the blood which is beside the door.
---	--

Hebrew has homonymous nouns וָבַיִת = 'basin' and וָבַיִת = 'sill, threshold'.<sup>29</sup> Akkadian has both nouns, too, but not in homonymous form.<sup>30</sup> Aramaic, however, only has וָבַיִת = 'sill, threshold', while Phoenician only has וָבַיִת = 'basin'.<sup>31</sup> Only the Aramaic noun was known to the Exodus Translator, and guided by the context, he made the best sense he could with that meaning. Nonetheless, the point is that the Greek testifies to the same parent text as in MT.

Jan Joosten's excellent work on Aramaising renderings in the LXX reveals that several issues may be involved at the same time. Consider the following examples:<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 5 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994-2000), s.v. I וָבַיִת and II וָבַיִת.

<sup>30</sup> In Akkadian *s/šappu(m)* is 'basin' and *sippu(m)* is 'doorpost', see W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1965-1985), 1027, 1049, 1175.

<sup>31</sup> See J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the Northwest Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 796-797 and Charles R. Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 347.

<sup>32</sup> Drawn from Jan Joosten, "On Aramaising Renderings in the Septuagint," in *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor*

JER 31[38]:13

MT - Jer 31:13

LXX - Jer 38:13<sup>33</sup>

אָז תִּשְׂמַח בְּתוֹלָהּ בְּמַחֲוֹל

τότε χαρήσονται  
παρθένοι ἐν συναγωγῇ  
νεανίσκων,

וּבְחָרִים וּזְקֵנִים יִהְיוּ

καὶ πρεσβῦται  
χαρήσονται.

Then maidens will rejoice with  
dancing,  
and young and old men together.

The virgins will rejoice  
in the gathering of  
young men,  
and old men will  
rejoice.

Joosten notes that the Greek translation reflects a 3 m. pl. of the Aramaic verb חדה “to rejoice” instead of the adverb יְהִי ‘together’ in MT.<sup>34</sup> Exegetes debate whether the rendering in the Septuagint reflects the intended meaning of the Hebrew text or diverges from it. Joosten points out that the idiomatic use of the adverb ‘together’ fits usage elsewhere in Jeremiah.<sup>35</sup> We do not need, however, to resolve the debate to see that the Greek translator had the same consonantal text as is preserved in MT. The issue of different vocalisation will be taken up shortly.

---

T. Muraoka on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday, eds. M. F. J. Baasten and W. Th. Van Peursen (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 587-600.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Ieremias, Baruch, Threni, Epistula Ieremiae* (Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum 15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957, 1976).

<sup>34</sup> Jan Joosten, “On Aramaising Renderings in the Septuagint,” 589.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Jer 13:14 and cf. 6:12, 21; 31:8; 48:7(Q); 49:3. See Jan Joosten, “On Aramaising Renderings in the Septuagint,” 589-590 and n. 11.



PS 60[59]:10

MT - Ps 60:10

מוֹאֵב סִיר רְחֵצִי

LXX - Ps 59:10<sup>36</sup>

Μωαβ λέβης τῆς ἐλπίδος μου

Moab is my washbasinMoab is the cauldron of my hope

The Hebrew root רָחַץ 'to wash' is correctly rendered by *νίπτομαι* in Ps 26[25]:6, 58[57]:11 and 73[72]:13. Here in Ps 60 the rendering by *ἐλπίς* 'hope' is based on the Aramaic meaning of this root.<sup>37</sup> In 1912 M. Flashar argued that the Greek translation was based on theological considerations since the translator hesitated to speak of God as having a washbasin.<sup>38</sup> Thus the Greek is based on the same Hebrew text that we have in MT, but the apparent divergence is based both on Aramaic influence as well as exegetical issues.<sup>39</sup>

### Translation Reflecting Interpretive Traditions

The rendering in Psalm 60 is explained not only by factors in the lexical and semantic history of the Hebrew Language but also by exegetical issues. Since all translation involves interpretation, the Greek Bible is, in effect, the earliest commentary on the Hebrew Text. What kind of interpretive tradition or traditions are reflected in the Greek Translation?

### Translation Reflecting Early Rabbinic Interpretation

This question leads to the next point. Since the Septuagint was produced during the time of Second Temple Judaism, it represents a

<sup>36</sup> Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Psalmi cum Odis* (Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931, 1967).

<sup>37</sup> See M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 2nd ed. (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), s.v. רָחַץ. The observation was also noted in Franz Wutz, *Die Transkriptionen von der Septuaginta bis zu Hieronymus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933), 151.

<sup>38</sup> M. Flashar, "Exegetische Studien zum Septuagintapsalter," *ZAW* 32 (1912): 241-268, esp. 251.

<sup>39</sup> See also Jan Joosten, "The Septuagint as a Source of Information on Egyptian Aramaic in the Hellenistic Period," in *Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistic Setting* edited by Holger Gzella and Margaretha L. Folmer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 93-105.

key witness to the thought and worldview of Second Temple Judaism. A major problem in using sources like the Aramaic Targums or Jewish sources like the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Midrashim to determine the character and nature of early Judaism is that one cannot frequently distinguish materials that represent the situation before the Fall of Jerusalem when Judaism was variegated from those after the Fall of Jerusalem when one sect within Judaism dominated and formed the origins of rabbinic Judaism. Yet it is possible at times to connect interpretive renderings in the Greek Bible with later rabbinic tradition and show earlier stages of this rabbinic tradition.

### MIC 5:[6]7

MT - Mic 5:7

בִּטְלַ מֵאֵת יְהוָה

בְּרִבְיָיִם עֲלֵי־עֵשֶׂב

As dew from the Lord,  
as showers upon the grass

LXX – Mic 5:6

ὡς δρόσος παρὰ κυρίου πίπτουσα

καὶ ὡς ἄρνες ἐπὶ ἄγρωστί

As dew falling from the Lord  
and as lambs upon the field grass

Although at first glance the rendering of רִבְיָיִם by ἄρνες seems to indicate a possible divergence between the parent text of LXX and MT, again, in certain dialects of Palestine at a later time רִבִּיב had the meaning 'lamb'.<sup>40</sup> We are certain, then, that the parent text of LXX is the same as that represented by MT. Yet what motivated this translation? The language of Mic 5:6 immediately recalls that of Deut 32:2:

יְעַרְף כַּמָּטָר לְקַחֵי תֵל בִּטְלַ אִמְרָתִי: MT:

בְּשִׁעִירִים עֲלֵי־דָשָׁא וּכְרִבְיָיִם עֲלֵי־עֵשֶׂב

May my teaching drop like the rain;

may my speech drip like the dew,

<sup>40</sup> See F. Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum* (Berlin, 1903), 188.

Like drizzle upon the vegetation,

like showers upon the grass.

As Jan Joosten has shown,<sup>41</sup> an early interpretation of Deut 32:2 preserved in *Sifre Deuteronomy* (Pisqa 306)<sup>42</sup> and also the Samaritan Targum construes רביבים as lambs. By way of illustration, the Samaritan Targum reads:

כצפירים עלוי יאר וכטלין עלוי עסב<sup>43</sup>

like goats upon the verdure and like lambs upon the grass<sup>44</sup>

Thus the rendering of LXX in Micah 5:6 is an Aramaising rendering, but one that is based upon an intertextual link or what might be called the midrashic principle of *Gezerah shawah*.<sup>45</sup> Many apparent divergences between the LXX and MT are, in fact, interpretive renderings based on

<sup>41</sup> Jan Joosten, "L'Ondée et les Moutons: La Septante de Michée 5,6 et l'Exégèse Juive Traditionnelle, *Revue des études juives* 162 (2003): 357-363.

<sup>42</sup> Joosten cites *Sifre on Deuteronomy* as follows:

כשעירים עלי דשא — כשאדם הולך ללמוד תורה תחילה אינו יודע מה לעשות

והיא קשה עליו כשעיר עד ששונה שני ספרים או שני סדרים ואחר כך נמשכת

ועב (Jan Joosten, "L'Ondée et les

Moutons," 362). It should be noted that the words עליו כשעיר are relegated to the apparatus in the edition of Finkelstein, see L. Finkelstein, *Sifre on Deuteronomy* (Berlin, 1939; reprint, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2001), 339. On this text, R. Hammer notes, "This homily is best read as a continuation of the one above. It refers to both parts of the verse and interprets *śā'ir* as a demon, and *rabīḇ* as a pet animal: when you begin to study, Torah is so difficult that it attacks you like a demon; after you learn a little, it becomes as tame as a pet ewe that follows after you" (Reuven Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven: Yale, 1986), 492, n. 41). ā. ś.

<sup>43</sup> Cited according to A. Tal, *The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch*, Part II (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1981). The reading וכטלין is based upon MS E for which MS J has וכטביים and MS V' has וכרביבין. English translation is mine.

<sup>44</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>45</sup> On *Gezerah shawah* see David Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis Before 70 CE* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 30; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 17-18.

intertextual links and do not provide support for a different Hebrew parent text.

### *Linguistics: Bilingualism and Translation Theory*

Within the field of linguistics, areas impacted by the Greek Bible in particular are bilingualism and translation theory. The Septuagint is probably the earliest known large-scale translation. A recent exploration is a monograph by Alexis Léonas, *L'Aube des Traducteurs*.<sup>46</sup> An area of linguistics has been pioneered especially by Gideon Toury called Descriptive Translation Studies. This is briefly summarised by A. Pietersma as follows:

According to Toury, all translations are facts of their respective recipient cultures and as such can best be studied by a target-oriented approach. That is to say, not only are they called into being by a felt need in a specific cultural environment, but, as such, they are intrinsically endowed with three inter-dependent aspects designed to meet the cultural need that evoked them. Translators can thus be said to be working in the interest of the target culture regardless of what kind of product they produce. The (logically) first of the three inter-dependent aspects or foci that Toury identifies he labels “function,” by which he has in mind not so much the actual use to which a translation is put, but rather the systemic slot it is designed to fill within the recipient culture or subculture. That is to say: what sort of text is it, and to what extent does it cater to the norms of the target system and is thus “acceptable” to its host culture? Is it “acceptable,” for example, as a literary or a non-literary production? Is it seen to be a philosophical text or a non-philosophical text, a text in prose or in poetry, romance or history, designed to function bilingually or monolingually? In short, “function” (or “position”) signifies a translation’s cultural slot and the prospective use for which it has been designed...

The second aspect Toury calls “product,” by which he means the textual linguistic makeup of the translated text, that is to say, the network of relationships introduced by the translator; in other words, what is studied in discourse analysis.

---

<sup>46</sup> Alexis Léonas, *L'Aube des Traducteurs. De l'hébreu au grec: traducteurs et lecteurs de la Bible des Septante (III<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C. – IV<sup>e</sup> s. apr. J.-C.)* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007).

Concretely, one may think here of the target text as a cultural entity.

The third aspect Toury terms “process,” that is to say, the strategies by which a translation is derived from its source text. Consequently, it includes the relationships that hold the target text and the source text together. Here Septuagintalists might think of “translation technique” since its focus, as noted above, is precisely that of target-source equation and hence the process by which the target text is derived from its source.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from *The Letter of Aristeas* almost no propaganda has survived about the translations. We must develop and utilise approaches like Descriptive Translation Studies to determine the function of the translations, the intended meaning of the translators, and assess the reception history of the translations. Such studies on the body of translations known as the Septuagint reveal and uncover a debate amongst different groups in Second Temple Judaism. Results affect not only linguistics and translation theory but also as sociological analysis of competing cultural heritages. This is highly instructive for our society. During the last fifty years, various groups in North America have had heated debates over modern translations of the Bible and are engaged in culture wars. One calls to mind the famous line from George Santayana: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Most of these debates over approaches to translation as well as the associated culture wars repeat much of what occurred in the Second and First Centuries B.C.E. with no knowledge of the role of the Greek Bible.

One case in the culture war between faithfulness to the Jewish Heritage and the advance of Hellenistic Culture that is ironic is 2 Maccabees. In terms of the history of the Greek Language, this is one of the finest examples of Atticistic Reaction to the Koiné, yet the author would want to side with those faithful to the Jewish Tradition unsullied by advocates of Hellenism.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Albert Pietersma, “LXX and DTS: A New Archimedean Point for Septuagint Studies?” *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 39 (2006): 9.

<sup>48</sup> Geoffrey Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), 51.

## Classics

Classical Studies may also benefit from the Greek Bible. The texts included in the Septuagint and the New Testament form a huge portion of the extant literature in Greek from the Hellenistic Period. Although some work has been done on grammar and lexicography for the Septuagint, an accurate assessment must await the completion of critical and reliable editions. Nonetheless, this body of texts is critical for description of developments in phonology, morphology, syntax and discourse grammar from the end of the Classical Period to the beginning of the Byzantine Period. In order to describe where the trajectory of developments in Classical Greek are going one must be able to see clearly where they went. Only then can one spot a *Tendenz* in the early process of change towards the end of the Classical Period. As one example, the diminutive is on the rise in the Hellenistic Period. This may affect how one assesses its semantic value in the late Classical Period.

## History

Historians might argue that events in a minor province in the Roman Empire or Hellenistic World such as Palestine had little significance for the larger world. Nonetheless, the events there from 250 B.C.E. — 150 C.E. shaped both Jews and Christians and through them the disciplines of the humanities were given their foundations and direction. The major source for this historically, and in philosophic and religious terms is the Greek Bible, and in particular, the Septuagint.<sup>49</sup>

## Literature

Ben Edwin Perry, in his important work on *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of Their Origins*, describes the importance of the novel in literature and the forerunners to it in the Greek and Roman world as follows:

---

<sup>49</sup> A standard work is Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (New York: Atheneum, 1975). Strangely, François Chamoux, *Hellenistic Civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1981, 2003), only refers once to the Septuagint.

Today the novel is well recognized as a literary form and so familiar as such, in spite of its many varieties and the many uses to which it is put, that no one is likely to confuse it with other genres. It has become the principal medium of literary expression, enlisting in its service as practitioners authors from the lowest to the highest. It has come to include every kind of entertainment or interpretation of society and human experience, ranging from what is profoundly philosophic or sublimely poetic to what is inane, vulgar, or merely sensational, thereby embracing what, in earlier and more disciplined ages, would normally have been cast into such various literary forms as tragedy, comedy, and mime, history, biography, epic, essay, satire, dialogue, elegy, etc., or circulated orally for amusement with no pretense to being art and therefore never written down. But this epic-like universality of the novel is something relatively new in the Western world—in a strict sense, no older than Balzac. In Graeco-Roman antiquity, on the other hand, as also in the time of Shakespeare, what we call novels or romances were far more restricted in the range of their substance, quality and pretension than they are today.<sup>50</sup>

Perry was breaking ground to analyse the ancient novellae and romances and discuss these as precursors to the modern novel. From the deuterocanonical works, Judith and Tobit are fine examples of this genre. They were popular reading among both Jews and Christians and have had some influence on the development of the novel.

## CONCLUSION

We have considered both in general terms and in a few of the particulars how the Greek Bible has a bearing on the humanities studied in the university today. Much more is involved than just the study of the Bible or the study of Greek. The Greek Bible has a bearing on the foundations of many disciplines and may justify the title of the "Great Code" as study of the Greek Bible is necessary to understand and advance other areas of study.

---

<sup>50</sup> Ben Edwin Perry, *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of Their Origins* (Sather Classical Lectures 37; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 4.

truth of the gospel is not only announced from without but also confirmed from within. In the theology presented here both revelation and salvation have to be understood as objective-subjective rather than fundamentally objective (as in evangelical rationalism) or predominantly subjective (as in existentialism and mysticism)."<sup>1</sup>

Here Bloesch is staking out his basic methodological commitment and declaring how it will play itself out especially in the way theology walks into the knowledge of God. But notice that he does so by defining the character of soteriology: it is "*salvation*" which must "be understood as objective-subjective." Salvation, in other words, has to be described in a way that rejects false dichotomies, and does so even at the cost of resorting to the language of paradox: it is simultaneously objective and subjective, or, as Bloesch often prefers, one single complex hyphenated reality: objective-subjective.

Bloesch's writing is full of paradox: his standard mode of operating is to survey a situation, identify the crippling and unnecessary dichotomies that bedevil the topic, and then to demand that those extremes be reconciled by being held together. If necessary, these extremes can be held together by sheer fiat and force of will, but more often he pushes through to achieve a conceptual demonstration of the underlying unity that in fact holds them together. As we stroll through Bloesch's *Foundations*, we see this apparent paradox motif in almost every part of the landscape. I think, however, that we are not seeing merely a formal similarity that is traceable to a habit of thought: a tendency to identify and overcome dichotomies everywhere, and identify erroneous positions to the left and the right. Instead, I believe that throughout his project, Bloesch is tracking down the one central paradox of Christian soteriology, the single reality which we encounter in a polarity as objective-subjective salvation, salvation by Word and Spirit. This soteriological paradox is fruitful, and brings forth the other paradoxes.

In the opening pages of his *Christology* volume, Bloesch recapitulates the methodological commitments of his project, using identical terminology and then applying it more directly to the Christian life:

---

<sup>1</sup> Donald Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 14-15.



The aim of my *Christian Foundations* series is to set forth a theology of Word and Spirit, which seeks to do justice to both the objective and subjective poles of revelation and salvation. A theology of Word and Spirit will be at the same time a theology of the Christian life, since the truth revealed in the Bible must be appropriated through the power of the Spirit in a life of obedience and piety. While I affirm the pivotal role of the Christian life I am calling not for a new form of the imitation of Christ but instead for a deepening recognition that the risen Christ lives within us, empowering us to realize our divinely given vocation under the cross. The Christian life is not simply the fruit and consequence of a past salvation accomplished in the cross and resurrection of Christ but the arena in which Christ's salvation is carried forward to fulfillment by his Spirit. The Pauline and Reformation doctrine of salvation by free grace must be united with the call to holiness and discipleship, a theme found in Catholic mysticism and Protestant Pietism."<sup>2</sup>

Salvation is a complex unified reality that pulls in two directions at once: the theologian wants to say that it is a finished work then and there, but also that it is a present reality here and now. Salvation "then and there" means objectively for us in Christ; but salvation "here and now" means subjectively in us by the Spirit. Both must be true, and true in a way that doesn't allow one to surreptitiously conjure away the reality of the other. From that position, Bloesch is able to affirm the way that various traditions have given especially clear witness to one side or another of the polarity: Reformation teaching on justification by free grace brings out the then and there accomplishment of salvation, but mystic and Pietist emphasis on holiness and discipleship keep the here and now of salvation before our eyes.

The question of what is held "before our eyes," or kept at the center of our theological attention, may be the key to understanding soteriology in Bloesch's project. Bloesch is committed to theology as disciplined reflection on a given, a datum, a concrete complex reality which God has set before us, has set us down in the middle of, and fidelity to which is the sole determinant of whether we have a chance of saying the right thing as theologians. Abstracting away from that reality may be a necessary exercise for conceptual clarification in particular thought projects, but the theologian must always return from

---

<sup>2</sup> Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 11.

these carefully delimited exercises in abstraction to the thing itself in its situation in actuality. Keeping the actual thing before the eyes of our contemplation is the main thing. This commitment shows up repeatedly in the topics that make up soteriology. For example, in the doctrine of sin, or “the plight of humanity,” Bloesch avoids describing or defining humanity’s plight in advance, instead demanding that “the knowledge of sin is included in the knowledge of faith. We do not have any reliable knowledge of our sin apart from God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Bloesch is aware that many, especially many Lutherans, disagree, but he sees his theological task as starting from the actual knowledge of sin, which comes to us bundled together with knowledge of grace, and only by an act of abstraction can be considered in itself.

Similarly, Bloesch weighs the merits and challenges of Christological approaches from above and from below, and opts for what he calls tellingly “Christology from the center.”<sup>4</sup> The whole problem of the other approaches is that it makes no sense to start with the human Jesus and work your way up, or to start with the divine person and work your way down. Bloesch has a high Christology, affirms Chalcedon, and defends the pre-existence of Christ, but he does not consider this as giving him a license to start his reflection with the unincarnate Word and then consider its enfleshment as a problem to be solved. He counsels that christology is not reflection on the “abstract concept of God or Christ removed from history nor ... the historical man Jesus. Instead my point of departure is the paradox of God himself entering world history at a particular place and time, in a particular historical figure – Jesus of Nazareth. I wish to begin with the Word made flesh rather than with the preexistent Logos or with the historical Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

Again, turning from the doctrine of the person of Christ to the work of Christ, Bloesch wants to keep the actual atonement, the one Christians have experienced their salvation through, in its objective-subjective polarity, at the center of theological reflection. That the atonement is objective is obvious and uncontroversial for anybody operating with a remotely traditional theology of the atonement: the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross is obviously a “then and there” event in the history of Jesus Christ. Using a variety of formulations, Bloesch tries to indicate how the atonement itself also has a subjective side: it echoes in the experience of the faithful. In Bloesch’s words: “The

---

<sup>3</sup> Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

atonement is an objective sacrifice that reverberates throughout history in the lives of those who trust in this sacrifice for their redemption. It includes both God's atoning work for us in the life history of Jesus Christ and the faith of the human subject in this work."<sup>6</sup> However, this is not simply the traditional Reformed approach of "redemption accomplished and applied." It is not atonement then and there, reception of it here and now. Rather, Bloesch expands the parameters marked out by the term "atonement" so that it includes both the objective sacrifice and its reverberation in later lives: the two together are atonement. This must be the case, for what good would be an atonement that saved nobody? And the historical objective sacrifice divorced from its later reverberations would not be salvation for anyone you have ever met, not even the theologian attempting to render an account of salvation.

As Bloesch circles around this reality of atonement, he tries to describe its nature as something that is in itself both accomplished and experienced, and the tension of doing justice to its then-and-there character and simultaneously its here-and-now character becomes heightened. Finally he has to posit that there are two subjective poles of the atonement: Jesus Christ and the Christian life. He distinguishes the senses, however:

In one sense Jesus Christ himself is the subjective side. Jesus as our representative appropriates the salvation of God on our behalf. Yet salvation remains incomplete until we ourselves participate in Christ's appropriation. The experience of faith constitutes the subjective side of salvation. The Christian life can also be said to comprise the subjective pole of the atonement. Jesus' life and obedience are the ground of our salvation, but our lives and obedience are the fruit and culmination of Christ's work of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the objective sacrifice on the cross becomes ours in two ways: first of all, it is always already ours in the sense that it was for us and our salvation that Christ as our representative went to the cross. "Jesus...appropriates salvation of God on our behalf." Second, it becomes ours when we participate, not in the sacrifice, but in Christ's appropriation of that sacrifice for us. In this formulation, we do not make the death and resurrection of Christ our own; Jesus the

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>7</sup> Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 163.

representative makes them our own and we participate in the own-making.

Ever alert to the danger of a misplaced emphasis, Bloesch is self-critical and worries later that he has himself run the risk of a false emphasis:

The Christian life is not simply a byproduct but a concrete sign and witness of Christ's passion and victory in his struggle against the powers of darkness. But it is more than that: it is the arena in which the implications of our salvation are unfolded as we strive to appropriate the fruits of Christ's cross and resurrection victory. In my early writings I sometimes gave the impression that the Christian life is a contributory agent in the effecting of our salvation. I would now contend that our works of obedience mirror and proclaim Christ's work of obedience unto death, but they do not render his death and resurrection efficacious.<sup>8</sup>

Expanding the very definition of atonement to include also its effects is a dangerous move. The chief danger is that the effects of the atonement, my salvation and Christian life, might now count toward constituting the work of salvation. This conclusion Bloesch denies, understandably: this whole objective-subjective whirligig is a long way to travel if the goal you arrive at turns out to be just salvation by works of righteousness. Bloesch insists on an order, a structured sequence within the manifold reality. The atonement and its effects must be held together, but the effects (salvation and the Christian life) are downstream from the objective event: they answer, or echo, or reflect, or witness to, or proclaim the cross and resurrection.

It seems that Bloesch would be comfortable with the traditional "redemption accomplished and redemption applied" schema of Reformed theology, and he repeatedly uses similar terminology. He often quotes and has clearly reflected deeply on Calvin's classic transition to the third book of the *Institutes*:

First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains

---

<sup>8</sup>"Donald Bloesch Responds," in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch* (ed. Elmer M. Colyer; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 200.

useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us.<sup>9</sup>

The objective-subjective soteriology of *Christian Foundations* is a variation on this theme. The fact that Bloesch is concerned about the specter of an atonement that has no effect also puts him in the lineage of the Reformed tradition, the tradition that asks and answers difficult questions about the scope of the atonement. If the atonement is intrinsically effective and necessarily saves all for whom it is intended, then we must affirm either a limited atonement or universalism. Bloesch asks and answers this question as well, which marks him as comfortable in the Reformed tradition, though his answer is not calculated to make his Westminster cousins happy at the family reunion. Because of his commitment to keeping the unabstracted reality of experienced salvation at the center of his reflection, he continually fiddles with the accomplished-applied schema, finding objective-subjective polarities within each side of the accomplishment and application of atonement.

It may not always be clear to the reader which element Bloesch intends to emphasize, because often his whole point is to secure the complex reality of objective-subjective accomplished-applied salvation by Word and Spirit without emphasis or distortion. But when confronted by a tendency toward imbalance, Bloesch immediately goes to the armory and brings out weapons. He sees pietistic subjectivism as a major threat, and "it is dangerously misguided," he warns,

to contend that the real salvation is only what happens in us. The real salvation happened in Jesus Christ for us and happens in us through faith. Our salvation is effected not only through the death of Christ on the cross but also through the application of the benefits of his death by the Spirit of the risen Christ. The descent of God to humanity and humanity's ascent to God through faith and the life of obedience must be hold together in paradoxical tension.<sup>10</sup>

Bloesch sees the subjectivist temptation as taking several forms: mystical-pietist subjectivism, existentialist subjectivism, and ethical-humanist subjectivism, all of which give total priority to Christ in me

---

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 163.

over Christ for me. The objectivist temptation, on the other hand, appears in the forms of sacramentalist objectivism and predestinarian objectivism. It also appears in a kind of Barthian christological objectivism, which has always been Bloesch's major complaint against Barth's soteriology. In 1976, when the standard evangelical misunderstanding of Barth was that his doctrine of the word left him mired in existentialist subjectivism,<sup>11</sup> Bloesch published a book arguing that Barth, at least in soteriology, was too objectivistic to do justice to biblical salvation.<sup>12</sup> In Bloesch's judgment, "Where Barth's soteriology stands in most obvious tension with that of historical evangelical orthodoxy is in its objectivism,"<sup>13</sup> and "The paradox of salvation is ever again sundered in his emphasis on the objective to the detriment of the subjective."<sup>14</sup> Barth's "objectivistic slant" made him sound to Bloesch like the famous reformed Pastor Kohlbrügge, who testified that his own conversion took place at Golgotha. While deploring Barth's objectivist distortion, Bloesch admitted that

Barth's stress on the finished work of salvation is perhaps a needed corrective to the view rampant in American folk religion that salvation is primarily and essentially an experience of the power of God in the here and now. Such a notion robs the historical atonement of its significance and efficacy, since the work of Christ on the cross is reduced to a mere preparation for the real salvific event, which takes place in man's present religious experience. An unbiblical subjectivism is very much in evidence in current revivalism... It is my contention that biblical faith is neither objectivistic nor subjectivistic but

---

<sup>11</sup> The clearest instance of an author who shares Bloesch's concern about Barth but views it from the opposite side is found in Robert Reymond's booklet, *Barth's Soteriology* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1967), 3: "Of course, it is true that Barth's *Römerbrief* (1919) had refused to ground Christian faith in objective history and objective knowledge, this refusal rendering his dialectic theology wholly compatible with existential emphases and in broad early agreement with Bultmann..." "But there are sound reasons for feeling that this much-discussed 'development' has been greatly exaggerated and that Barth is still controlled today in his methodology by the presuppositions which bound his thinking in the second edition (1921) of his *Römerbrief*."

<sup>12</sup> Bloesch: *Jesus is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon 1976).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

paradoxical in that the divine Word and human subject must be seen together in paradoxical or dialectical tension.<sup>15</sup>

When Bloesch sounds those warnings against the equal and opposite errors of objectivism and subjectivism, and struggles to define the place of integrity that falls into neither error, I believe he is working on the issue which is his greatest contribution to contemporary theology, and especially to evangelical theology. We have already said that every fully-elaborated Christian theology finds its coherence and the key to its articulation in a vision of salvation. That vision of salvation is the secret center to which the theologian recurs and refers in locus after locus of the entire range of doctrine.

The personality of a theological character shows through most clearly in his soteriology. Every topic he takes up will be colored by the basic tone of the experience of salvation, and one of the best ways to sort theologians is according to their soteriologies, because that's where family resemblances—sometimes embarrassing family resemblances—are most undeniable. The family resemblance that becomes undeniable in Bloesch's soteriological method is his position in the theological tradition of Protestant Pietism. Pietism resonates with evangelicalism in countless ways, and since its classic expression in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it has exerted a positive pressure on Christian theology and life: it curbs rationalistic tendencies, insists on application to life, and it centralizes and integrates the otherwise disparate set of truths that make up a theology, connecting them all in a vital way with the experience of communion with God. Take as one example of early Pietism the Puritan William Ames, who in his *Marrow of Theology* defined theology as "the doctrine or teaching of living to God."<sup>16</sup> He explained what he meant by "living to God:" People "live to God when they live in accord with the will of God, to the glory of God, and with God working in them."<sup>17</sup> According to Ames, *theologia* really ought to be called *theozoia*, living to God.<sup>18</sup> Thus Ames derived the science of theology from an analysis of "the spiritual life, which is the proper concern of theology."<sup>19</sup> This is a noble tradition, and one in which Bloesch partially—though only partially—views himself as working.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>16</sup> *The Marrow of Theology*, translated and with an introduction by Eusden, I.i.1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, I.i.6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I.i.13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, I.ii.2.

Between us and the classic Pietists, however, stands the Enlightenment, and in particular that first titanic modern theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher had a Pietist upbringing (among the Herrnhut brethren), and his theological project can be considered a modern twist on the Pietist project. In Schleiermacher's hands, the Pietist impulse entered modern theology as *Bewußtseinstheologie*, the theology of consciousness. If Christian salvation is something we definitely experience, we can then reflect on that experience, and set forth a coherent, systematic, scientific Christian theology as reflection on the distinctively Christian consciousness. The primal content of that Christian consciousness is *Gefühl*, feeling, which operates in the moment prior to the divergence of what we would normally call thought and emotion, prior even to the epistemic distinction between subject and object, in a moment so fleeting and primal that "you always experience and yet never experience" it. It is the pre-conscious pious awareness that you are a portion of the whole world, that you are acted on by God through the universe, that "you lie directly on the bosom of the infinite world."<sup>20</sup> By defining the essence of religion as *Gefühl*, Schleiermacher was securing for it an independent region alongside metaphysics and ethics, a maneuver made necessary by the Enlightenment tendency to reduce religion to either a way of thinking (metaphysics) or a way of behaving (ethics). Schleiermacher was manifestly Kantian in that he did not believe that metaphysics was able to deal adequately with the things of religion, but he was decidedly anti-Kantian in the sense that he would not tolerate the reduction of God to "a postulate of practical reason." *Gefühl* could not be reduced to either pure or practical reason; it demanded recognition as an independent realm of experience, or as Schleiermacher said, "Piety cannot be an instinct craving for a mess of metaphysical and ethical crumbs."<sup>21</sup> Schleiermacher had to assert the absolute independence of piety over against ethics as well as metaphysics, and he made this connection explicit at the point of *Gefühl*, in the Christian consciousness and its experienced knowledge of the reality of salvation. Schleiermacher's argument came from deep convictions rooted in his Pietist faith, but his strategy was largely apologetic. He was recommending Christianity to its cultured despisers, and winning a place for theology in the modern University.

---

<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches To Its Cultured Despisers* (trans. John Oman; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), 43.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



The way of *Bewusstseinstheologie* is the way of 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theology.

The full title of Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* is *The Christian Faith Systematically Presented According to the Basic Tenets of the Evangelical Church*. In his lectures on the theology of Schleiermacher, Karl Barth analyzed this title according to its three main components: Faith, System, and Tenets. The Christian Faith, Barth points out, means for Schleiermacher "the faith of Christians," or the pious consciousness as expressed in the church. "Systematically presented" means that every element of the presentation is explicitly related to *Gefühl*, to the God-consciousness of believers. Finally, "according to the basic tenets of the evangelical church" introduces the idea of an external, even confessional, source for the form and content of the dogmas. Barth is right to indicate that the combination of these three elements in one theological work indicates a tension at the heart of the undertaking: the universal God-consciousness present in *Gefühl* can be seen struggling to express itself through the historically-conditioned forms of a particular church's confession. The awkwardness of this situation is apparent when Schleiermacher discusses the different kinds of dogmatics, and at the borderline between a "Scientific Dogmatic" and a "Symbolical Dogmatic" refers to the requirement that the principal points of the system should be "none other than the fundamental facts of the religious self-consciousness *conceived in a Protestant spirit*." If the theologian is attending to pious consciousness, what inherent connection can that have to a set of doctrines enshrined in confessional statements? Perhaps the theologian's own pious consciousness has been schooled in the confession? But if that is the case, how is reflecting on the Christian consciousness better than simply reflecting on the confessional documents which teach it the things it knows? Are we reading a book or a mind? Or if both, how are they related, and what if they aren't? Schleiermacher seems to have left this tension unresolved.

I have taken a few moments to sketch Pietism's heritage before and after the enlightenment, because I believe this is the nut Bloesch is trying to crack. He is essentially operating within the Pietist paradigm, but with an insistence that there is such a thing as an objective word from God which finds us from outside, communicates to us in a way that produces concepts, knowledge, content, knowable truth. Bloesch is not merely trying to repristinate Pietism or get back to the way it was before Schleiermacher turned it into that modern beast, the theology of consciousness. He is well aware that the dangers which bore fruit in Schleiermacher's romantic faith-subjectivism were latent in the Pietist

approach from the beginning; in fact, this is the main reason he will not associate himself unreservedly with Pietism. In a dialogue with Clark Pinnock, Bloesch observes:

Pinnock rightly perceives my roots in evangelical Pietism, but he needs also to take into account my reticence to define my position as pietistic. While learning from Pietism I also recognize with Karl Barth how easily Pietism slides into liberalism and modernism. When the source of theological authority is reduced to the experience of faith, it opens the possibility of allowing reason to interpret this experience. The University of Halle founded by Pietists in the eighteenth century became within two generations a bastion of rationalism.<sup>22</sup>

Notice that in Bloesch's estimation, the slide into liberalism is bad, but the real final danger of pietism is that it can suddenly convert into rationalism, by taking experience as the subject matter of theology and therefore making theology directly available for rational analysis. Fear of rationalism is a pretty pietistic reason to reject Pietism. But it is telling, and entirely consistent that Bloesch would identify the main danger as a reduction of the subject matter of theology to something directly available for human mastery, rational analysis, and personal manipulation.

As he takes a stand between the experience of salvation and the revealed word of God, Bloesch warns that taking Schleiermacher's approach

tend[s] to make religious experience rather than the gospel itself the source and norm of theology. The right order is not from experience to reflection but from divine revelation to human appropriation in experience, life and thought. Experience is not the regulatory norm or enduring basis of theology, but it is a vital and necessary element in theology. The transcendent source of a biblical, evangelical theology is the living Word of God who breaks into our experience from the

---

<sup>22</sup> "Donald Bloesch Responds," in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch* (ed. Elmer M. Colyer; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 197.

beyond and remolds and transforms our experience and understanding.<sup>23</sup>

Theologians must experience salvation, hear God's word, and reflect on it: "Unless it has a perduring experiential ingredient, theoretical theology becomes unnervingly abstract and speculative...the theological task can be carried out only by believers and that the only right theology is a theology done by regenerate persons (*theologia regentorum*)"<sup>24</sup> But it is not their own experience or their Christian consciousness that they reflect on. Adamantly, Bloesch insists that it is the transcendent word of God, above our experience and producing our experience, which is the subject of theology.

In 1968 Bloesch published a set of essays called *The Crisis of Piety*. The book was republished 20 years later, and in the "Author's Note" to this 1988 republication of the 1968 original, Bloesch reflected:

If there has been a shift in my perspective, I believe more strongly than before that a theology of Christian commitment must be united with a theology of the Word of God if it is not to lapse into subjectivism and anthropocentrism. The focus on personal piety must never supplant the more basic focus on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The bane of classical Pietism was that it sought to cultivate the Christian life without a corresponding emphasis on the decision of God for humanity in Jesus Christ. Morality and Christian character became more important than the incarnation and substitutionary atonement of Christ in biblical history. Pietism invariably fades into latitudinarianism and liberalism unless it is informed by the wisdom of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, becomes barren and deadening unless it is nurtured by an abiding seriousness concerning personal salvation and the life of discipleship. What is called for is a live orthodoxy, which is none other than a biblically grounded and theologically robust Pietism.<sup>25</sup>

A "biblically grounded and theologically robust Pietism" is not the same thing as Schleiermacher's "fundamental facts of the religious

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Bloesch, *The Crisis of Piety: Essays Toward a Theology of the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1988), xi-xii.

self-consciousness *conceived in a Protestant spirit,*” and need not suffer from the pitfalls of that project. This is what I take to be Bloesch’s great contribution to evangelical theology: he has tried to combine the subjective, lived reality of experienced salvation with the objective, revealed, mind-informing, concept-generating self-revelation of God. He has been at work on a project that bedeviled the Pietists, Schleiermacher the archetypal modern liberal theologian, and Barth. His recommended way forward is to focus our attention on the gospel itself rather than on our experience of salvation, to start with the almighty living Word of God rather than the collection of texts that bear witness to him.

Can the articulation of an entire theology be deducible from a vision of salvation? I believe it both can and should be. But there are right ways and wrong ways to proceed here. Bloesch is an advocate for the right way, taking up a basically Pietist concern to center our knowledge about God on that knowledge of God which is our salvation. There is a very ancient tradition of framing theological arguments according to soteriological vision: even classical conciliar Christology was hammered out with the tools of soteriology. Athanasius knew that Christians had been saved with a salvation only God could have accomplished, and concluded that the savior Jesus Christ must therefore be of one essence with the Father who sent him. This soteriological insight led the Nicene theologians through the Scriptures and gave them advance notice of what testimony to expect from the Scriptures. A generation later, Gregory of Nazianzus argued that however God might have considered saving us, what he actually did was to assume human nature into hypostatic union with the Son of God, healing what he took on. Therefore what is not assumed is not healed, therefore everything essential to human nature was assumed, therefore Jesus Christ is fully human. This must be true, or it would follow that God has not saved us, and he has. These classic theological arguments are soteriological visions which generate theological conclusions, and examples could be multiplied. Schleiermacher represents a paradigmatic modern misuse of the classic method. Bloesch, for his part, intends to stand not in that modern line but in the classic one. The difference between classic soteriological theologizing and the kind of faith-subjectivism generated by 19<sup>th</sup> century *Bewusstseins-theologie* is the extent to which a vision of salvation is normed and formed by the actual content of God’s work in Christ. The difference between a bad Pietist and a good Pietist is that good Pietists take their religion to heart, recognizing that salvation is something deeper and greater than new ideas, new codes of conduct, or new feelings. Bad Pietists are locked up inside their own consciousness

and cannot hear a word from the Lord. Bloesch has staked his system on the paradox of Christian salvation, of evangelical Protestantism's proclamation of free grace that puts us on the highway to holiness. And he has done so with a keen eye on the danger of lapsing into subjectivism, non-cognitive approaches to truth, or denigration of the Scriptures into a dead letter. Under the banner of salvation by Word and Spirit, Bloesch has been fighting all these years to expound the experience of the Gospel, rather than the gospel of experience, which is not good news at all.