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The Reformation Canon and the Development of Biblical Scholarship

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Marijke H. de Lang
Global Translation Advisor, United Bible Societies

Abstract
This paper argues that the well-intended attention of humanist and Reformation scholars to the original languages of the Bible also had its downside, especially for study of the New Testament. Although the revival of Greek and Hebrew studies in itself was a positive development, together with the promotion of a Hebrew canon and the notion of *sola scriptura*, the hermeneutical horizon of the New Testament was limited to a Hebrew canon and a Semitic context. The New Testament was separated from its original Hellenistic-Jewish Greek environment, and was explained from a background to which it never really belonged.

Keywords
Reformation, biblical canon, sola scriptura, Erasmus

Introduction

During the early Reformation, the canon was not yet an issue between the opposing parties.[1] The reason was that the outlines of the canon and the order of the books had not yet been fixed. And so, issues such as the exact number of New Testament books and their order were widely debated *in general*, and not yet as part of the Reformation controversy. If we want to discuss the canon in the Reformation, it is perhaps best to do so against the wider background of the development of biblical scholarship

[1] I would like to thank my colleagues Dr. Daud Soesilo, Dr. Stephen Pattemore, and Dr. Simon Wong for their suggestions and improvements.

Corresponding author:
Marijke H. de Lang, Jan Pesijnshof 11, Leiden, 2311SM, The Netherlands.
Email: mhdelang@solcon.nl

in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in general. As we know, during the sixteenth century biblical studies in Western Europe developed significantly with the introduction of the study of the original languages, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. From then on, the study of the biblical books in their original languages was seen by many as imperative for a better understanding of Scripture and the study of Hebrew and Greek rapidly developed as an academic enterprise. Moreover, in Protestant circles this new development was vital for Bible translation, since new translations were from that time on based on the Hebrew and Greek source texts. At the same time, the Reformed churches began to exclude the so-called Apocrypha, thus limiting their Bibles to the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

The question I would like to ask here is, What was the impact of the Reformers' view of canon, in combination with the humanist principle *ad fontes* and the Reformation adage *sola scriptura*, on biblical studies in later ages and on our work nowadays? My thesis is that the Reformed canon, which had its roots in a truly scholarly motivated study of the Bible, also inadvertently led to a number of serious limitations of that same scholarly enterprise. The territory is wide and varied, but I hope to come to at least one or two observations which may contribute to a better understanding of some of our current habits, ideas, and trends in biblical exegesis and Bible translation. With regard to biblical exegesis, I will focus on the *historical* approach to the biblical writings and will leave aside all the other possible ways of interpreting the Bible.

Canon

In the centuries before the Reformation, the educated classes active in law and legislation, jurisdiction, church, and university had adopted Latin as their language of communication. Initially, the Latin churches had taken the Vetus Latina as their authoritative text, of which the Old Testament was based on the Septuagint (LXX). The Vetus Latina, however, was a collection of translations which in the process of transmission had gradually deteriorated through the conflation of textual traditions and the addition of glosses.

At the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries, Jerome gave an important new impulse to the development of the Bible in the Western church with his new translation of the Old Testament and the Gospels, which was intended as a replacement of the corrupted texts of the Vetus Latina. Contrary to what had been done before him in the Latin-speaking world, Jerome (ca. 347–420) took the Hebrew canon as his source for the

Old Testament.[2] He regarded the books lacking in this canon but present in the LXX as less authoritative, but maintained their value as part of the teaching of the church. At the same time, Jerome expressed doubts about the authorship of several New Testament books (James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude), and regarded these books as less authoritative than other New Testament books.

However, in the centuries to come, the contents of the canon continued to vary from one period to another and from place to place. And so, even though Jerome had explicitly stated his preference for the Hebrew canon over the Greek, soon translations of the deuterocanonical books were added to his project. The canon of the Vetus Latina, which reflected the canon of the LXX, was still regarded as authoritative. The church's uncertainty about the question of whether to keep the Vetus Latina or accept the Vulgate was reflected by the fact that soon three types of Bibles began to circulate in medieval Western Europe: the Vetus Latina, Jerome's translation based on the Hebrew canon, and Jerome's translation supplemented with the Apocrypha (Westcott 1870, 190). In any case, in Western Europe the Bible continued to be perceived as a Latin book.

Then for several centuries the issue of the size of the canon was submerged and only resurfaced in the Reformation, instigated by the rediscovery of the original languages. The questions of the Reformation were more or less the same as in Jerome's days: Should the Hebrew or Greek canon be followed? What was the status of the Old Testament Apocrypha? What was the status of New Testament books such as Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation? The difference was, however, that these questions were now raised in a time when the church in the West was in serious crisis.

Contrary to what one would perhaps expect, the Catholic Church was divided over the issue of the canon. Some defended the canon of the Vulgate. Others remained indifferent. Erasmus (1466/69–1536), for example, admitted that the Old Testament apocryphal books did perhaps not have the same authority as the books of the Hebrew Bible, but he did nothing to contest

[2] See Kerber, "The Canon in the Vulgate Translation of the Bible," in this issue for a full overview of the Vulgate canon. Kamesar argues that an important reason for Jerome's interest in the Hebrew text was the Roman bilingual culture in which he lived, whereas Greek culture had always been monolingual: "The Romans had developed one of the most sophisticated bilingual cultures in the history of man. Jerome was heir to that culture, and in fact, as is clear from the researches of P. Courcelle, was perhaps its most significant representative in his own epoch. The Greeks, on the other hand, did not possess such a level of sophistication when it came to the study of foreign languages. Their culture had always been monolingual. Indeed, this seems to be what Jerome has in mind when he notes that Origen undertook the study of Hebrew 'contra gentis suae naturam' [contrary to the character of his people]" (1993, 43).

their place in the canon and accepted them for ecclesiastical use. Cardinal Cajetan (1469–1534), on the other hand, was far more outspoken in his view. Following Jerome, Cajetan strongly favored a Hebrew canon and stated that the Old Testament Apocrypha did not have the same status as the books of the Hebrew canon in establishing points of faith and should at least be put in a separate section. And, again in line with Jerome, Cajetan considered James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude as less authoritative than other New Testament writings and dismissed Revelation as basically useless for ecclesiastical purposes (Westcott 1870, 253ff.; Bruce 1988, 242–43). For the Catholic Church this uncertainty changed after the Council of Trent (1546–1563). Then it was decided that only the Latin Vulgate *with* the deuterocanonical books was to be accepted as the church's sacred text. And for the very first time in Western church history, the canon was made into an article of faith and confirmed by an *anathema* for those who dissented (Westcott 1870, 256–57).[3] However, discussions during the Council had shown opinions were divided and many had voiced their preference for the Hebrew canon.

In the same period, Martin Luther had his own views on the canon (Bruce 1988, 243–45). Although the books that Luther put under scrutiny were the same as those discussed by Jerome, Augustine, Cajetan, and many others, the reason for rejecting them was different. Luther's choices were dictated not so much by tradition or ecclesiastical authority, but quite the opposite, by a new theological agenda. His criterion for biblical exegesis and theology was the slogan "was Christum treibet" (what promotes/bears Christ). His christocentric view of theology and the Bible led him to dismiss books which he personally considered in contradiction with it. He preferred the deuterocanonical books to be separated from the books of the Hebrew canon; in this he did not differ from Cajetan. But he made a clear distinction between writings which, according to him, reflected the very heart of the gospel (the Gospel of John, the letters of Paul, and 1 Peter) and writings that did less to "promote Christ" (James, Jude, and Revelation). The letter of James, for example, lacked any reference to the passion and resurrection and "had no character of the Gospel in it"; therefore, books such as these

[3] See also Denzinger 2010, 1503: "Si quis autem libros ipsos integros cum omnibus suis partibus, prout in Ecclesia catholica legi consueverunt et in veteri vulgata Latina editione habentur, pro sacris et canonicis non susceperit, et traditiones praedictas sciens et prudens contempserit: anathema sit." (But if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema. —Translation by Waterworth 1848, 19.)

were not suitable for laying the foundation of faith.[4] Luther put them at the very end of his New Testament. However, tradition proved stronger, and from the seventeenth century onwards the disputed New Testament books were put back at their original place. In the period after Luther, disputes about the canon in other Reformation churches in, for example, Switzerland, England, and the Low Countries, went through similar stages with controversies about the authority of the Old Testament Apocrypha and some of the New Testament books (Hebrews, James, Jude, Revelation).

Over time, the squabbling about the New Testament books stopped, but the deuterocanonical books remained the subject of vehement disputes, resulting in their complete expulsion from the Bible in the Calvinist tradition. This was a gradual process. The early editions of the Authorized Version of 1611, for instance, still contained the deuterocanonical books, albeit in a separate section. The apocryphal books were still admitted as part of the teaching of the church for their moral and historical value, even though they were not recognized as having doctrinal authority. But in 1644 the Long Parliament forbade the reading of the Apocrypha in the church, and shortly afterwards the Authorized Version was printed without it. Something similar happened to the Dutch States Translation of 1637. Although there was some disagreement, the apocryphal books were added, albeit in a separate section and with a special warning ("Waerschouwinge") to the readers. However, in later editions they disappeared, never to return again.[5] Initially, their disappearance from the States Translation was caused by competition among publishers rather than by a dogmatic or theological decision: Bibles without the Apocrypha were cheaper and easier to sell. But the special warning with which the apocryphal books had originally been introduced had its effect as well (Jaakke and Tuinstra 1990, 45). The final blow came in 1814, when the newly founded Netherlands Bible Society, in line with what the British and Foreign Bible Society had done, made it their official policy to publish Bibles without the Apocrypha (Broeyer 1994, 25–26). From the nineteenth century onwards, this policy was implemented by most Bible Societies.

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[4] Translation by Westcott (1870, 263–64); German text: "St. Johannis Evangelium und seine erste Epistel, St. Pauli Episteln, sonderlich die zu den Römern, Galatern, Ephesern, und St. Peters erste Epistel, das sind die Bücher, die dir Christum zeigen und alles lehren das dir zu wissen noth und selig ist, ob du schon kein ander Buch noch Lehre nimmer sehest noch hörest. Darum ist St. Jakobs Epistel eine recht stroherne Epistel gegen sie, denn sie doch keine evangelische Art an sich hat" (Luther 1929, 10).

[5] The 1561 *Confessio Belgica* (the Belgic Confession) of the Lowlands had stated that the Apocrypha did not have the same authority as the canonical books, but could be used for pedagogical purposes. See Westcott 1870, 276.

Ad fontes!

In the sixteenth century, however, the issue of the canon was part of a larger debate. The early Reformation period was also the age of humanism with its revived interest in original sources—hence the rallying cry "ad fontes!" (to the sources!). After the death of Jerome in 420 C.E., the study of the Greek and Hebrew sources of the Bible had rapidly disappeared. There were some exceptions, most importantly the two medieval renaissances in Western Europe. The first was the Carolingian renaissance in the eighth century with Alcuin of York. The second was the twelfth-century renaissance with its growing contacts with Byzantium and Islam through the Crusades, and with Spain as a center of Jewish studies. In France, Nicholas of Lyra (ca. 1270–1349), greatly admired by Martin Luther, was a student of Rashi and other rabbinic literature.[6] In England Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1175–1253) and his pupil Roger Bacon (ca. 1214–1294) revived interest in Greek and Hebrew.[7] The Crusades even led to the decision at the Council of Vienne (1311) that Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Arabic should be taught at the universities of Oxford, Paris, Avignon, Bologna, and Salamanca. However, this was not so much for the sake of biblical studies, but for the conversion of Muslims and the training of missionaries to the Holy Land (Bainton 1969, 65; Burnett 1996, 103). In general, Hebrew and Greek philology remained a somewhat forgotten territory at the medieval universities.

This situation began to change more profoundly during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The birth of humanism with its keen interest in classical Latin and Greek authors began in Italy and gradually moved to Spain and northern Europe. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1453 and the subsequent exodus of Greek scholars to the West was an extra impetus to this development. The humanists not only rediscovered the beauty of Ciceronian Latin, but also recognized the importance of the Hebrew and Greek sources for a better understanding of Scripture. Well-known Italian humanists include such scholars as Lorenzo Valla (1405/7–1457), Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). Less known but equally interesting are the early humanists Wessel Gansfort (1419–1489) and Rudolph Agricola (144/45–1484),[8] who worked in the northern Low Countries. Both men were well versed in Greek and Hebrew. The important difference between the age of humanism and

[6] The influence of Nicholas of Lyra on the Reformation became proverbial: "Si Lyra non lyrasset, Lutherus non saltasset" (If Lyra had never played his harp, Luther would never have danced). See Reventlow 1994, 259ff.; Smith 2008, 50ff.

[7] See Reventlow 1994, 263; Vanderjagt 2008, 155–56.

[8] About Gansfort and Agricola, see Vanderjagt 2008, 161–67.

the Middle Ages was that now the ancient languages were studied for a better understanding of the sources and not just for the sake of the languages themselves or for missionary purposes.

The two names usually associated with the humanist revival of Greek and Hebrew biblical studies in northern Europe are those of Desiderius Erasmus for the New Testament and Johannes Reuchlin for the Old Testament.

Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/69–1536) was educated in schools of the Modern Devotion, a movement in the Low Countries and Germany which advocated the *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ), a life in simple piety, obedience, and humility. Although by the time Erasmus entered their school system the movement had lost its original freshness and vigor (in later life he remembered his schoolteachers as stuffy and parochial), in some way he was influenced by the movement's theological notion of the *imitatio Christi*. In line with this, he criticized the Catholic Church at large for its corruption, nepotism, and superstition, and its loss of simple obedience to the gospel message. He also fulminated against academic education in northern Europe which was governed by the petty nit-picking of scholastic theology. In his *Praise of Folly* Erasmus ridicules the lamentable state of academia and mocks the would-be scholars of his day who occupied themselves with trivialities such as, "Is it a possible proposition that God the Father could hate his Son? Could God have taken on the form of a woman, a devil, a donkey, a gourd, or a stone? If so, how could a gourd have preached sermons, performed miracles, and been nailed to the cross?"[9] Moreover, he ridiculed the Latin in which these discussions were held for its barbarism, lack of clarity, and appalling neologisms.

Even the source of the church's spiritual life, the holy Scriptures themselves, did not escape his critique: the text of the Vulgate was, after centuries of careless transmission, in a deplorable state. In 1504 Erasmus discovered a manuscript with Valla's notes on the New Testament in which Valla compared the text of the Vulgate with Greek manuscripts. It had a huge impact on Erasmus and he published it the following year.[10] Valla was right, according to Erasmus: one had to study the original Greek texts in order to understand where the Latin of the Vulgate needed improvement. Erasmus's own *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516 was therefore first and

[9] Translation by Betty Radice in Levi 1986, 127. Latin text: "Num possibilis propositio: Pater deus odit filium? Num deus potuerit suppositare mulierem, num diabolum, num asinum, num cucurbitam, num silicem? Tum quemadmodum cucurbita fuerit concionatura, editura miracula, figenda cruci?" (Miller 1979, 146–48).

[10] Valla worked from 1453 until his death in 1457 on his notes, which remained unpublished. Erasmus published them in 1505 under the title *In Latinam Novi Testamenti Interpretationem Annotationes*.

foremost intended as a revision of the Vulgate. The Greek text, for which the *Novum Instrumentum* became especially known in later ages, was added at the very last stages of his project and only at the request of his publisher. For Erasmus, the great advocate of the study of the original languages of the Bible, the Bible was still very much a Latin book.[11]

The story of Erasmus's New Testament is known.[12] The Greek text took on a life of its own and together with the Greek texts of the Complutensian Polyglot and Stephanus it became the "received text" (*textus receptus*) and the standard for a host of vernacular translations. The Latin translation (or rather "revision") is less known now, but became the center of fierce controversies between scholars all around Europe until Erasmus's death. He was scolded for daring to criticize Jerome and for changing the holy Scriptures with his new Latin wording, or for his text-critical choices, such as leaving out the *Comma Johanneum*. Some wanted Erasmus excommunicated. At the same time Erasmus's defenders resented the narrow-mindedness of his opponents and were furious about the attacks against their hero. The arguments could get very nasty at times. For example, Edward Lee, whose scholarly ambitions were greater than his scholarly qualities, suffered all sorts of insults because he had tried to reprimand Erasmus about details in his *Novum Instrumentum*. Defenders of Erasmus wrote satires about Lee in which he was described as a "pale, skinny fellow with a sardonic grin," the grin being explained by the fact that Lee had played the jester too long, or in which he was said to have died of thinking too hard. One wrote a letter to Lee saying, "I should like to wish you good health if I did not see that you are so insane that there is no hope of good health," and ended the same letter with the advice, "Go hang yourself" (Rummel 1989, 122ff.).[13]

Just as Erasmus advocated the study of the Greek New Testament, Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) played a key role in the promotion of Hebrew studies (Kessler Mesguich 2008, 264–67). He propagated the *Hebraica veritas* (an expression coined by Jerome)[14] with his voluminous dictionary and grammar *De rudimentis hebraicis* (1506).[15] Just as Erasmus had encountered fierce criticism for his use of Greek sources, so Reuchlin

[11] See de Jonge 1983, 5–6, and de Jonge 1984.
[12] See April 2016 issue of *TBT*.
[13] The letter was written by the German humanist Johann Sapidus (1490–1561).
[14] In his commentary to Eccl 8.13, Jerome uses the phrase "veritas Hebraici sensus" (truth of the Hebrew meaning) and in the preface to this commentary he speaks about the Hebrew text as "fons veritatis" (source of truth). In *Epist*. 20.2 Jerome wrote that "ex Hebraeis codicibus veritas exprimenda est" (the true meaning should be taken from the Hebrew manuscripts). For these quotations, see Kamesar 1993, 42.
[15] See, e.g., Schwarz 1955, 61ff.; Reventlow 1994, 33–39; Kessler Mesguich 2008, 256–64; van der Heide 2008, 46–49 and 60–61.

was criticized for his use of the Hebrew Bible. The Dominican Johann Pfefferkorn (1469–1523), a converted Jew, accused Reuchlin of "Judaism" and even advocated the complete destruction of Hebrew books (Rummel 1993, 1–2; 2008, 220). Reuchlin, however, was more interested in the Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism than he was in the Hebrew Old Testament.

It was Conrad Pellican (1478–1556) who studied the Hebrew language for a better understanding of the Old Testament. He became the leader of a group of Rhineland humanists who worked in Strasbourg, Basel, and Zürich.[16] In the first half of the sixteenth century, the group produced Hebrew grammars and translations of and commentaries on the Old Testament. From the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, the study of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac rapidly developed as serious scholarly disciplines at the universities. The academic training was perhaps best organized at the Protestant universities in Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and England, and in the Protestant academies of Saumur and Sedan in France. "Christian Hebraists" such as Josephus Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), Johannes Drusius (1550–1616), Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614),[17] Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629), and Louis Cappel (1585–1658) developed Jewish studies into a serious academic enterprise.[18] Basel and Leiden were the most important Hebrew presses in those days.

The promotion of the Hebrew text in Reformed circles was also encouraged on dogmatic grounds by the decision of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) to accept only the Latin text of Jerome as authoritative (Lebram 1975, 35). Not all seventeenth-century scholars followed this trend. Daniel Heinsius (1580–1655), for example, cherished the opinion that the LXX was the source of the "lingua Hellenistica" in which the New Testament was written, and that the Hebrew and Aramaic were to be used as helps for a better understanding of the Greek (Lebram 1975, 37). But in general, Reformed Protestants showed a preference for the Hebrew canon, which they also used for their translations of the Old Testament. The first to use the Hebrew and Greek texts for a translation of a full Bible into a vernacular

[16] Scholars belonging to this circle were, amongst others, Wolfgang Capito (1478–1541) and Sebastian Münster (1488–1552). Münster was the first to write on biblical and rabbinic Aramaic; see Kessler Mesguich 2008, 269–70.

[17] Casaubon was perhaps the most erudite of all these scholars and combined his scholarship with deep piety and humility. In his notes, sentences such as "We cannot command religion," "Because no one is forced to believe against his will," or "Since divinity allows so many religions to exist, we do not dare to impose a single one of them" show Casaubon's awareness of the need for religious tolerance in an age of religious war. See Grafton and Weinberg 2011, 22.

[18] See Burnett 1996 and 2012.

was Pierre Robert Olivétan (1506–1538).[19] In the same period Luther and William Tyndale (1494–1536) worked on their translations of the Old Testament from the Hebrew. Soon other translations followed: the Geneva Bible (1560), the Polish "Brest" Bible (1563), the Czech "Bible of Cralice" (1579–1593), and countless others.

Sola scriptura

Luther and the other early Reformers had advocated the importance of Scripture over church tradition. For Luther the idea of *sola scriptura* was an expression of the authority of Scripture, not just as a formal principle, stating the authority of all individual Bible verses, but as a theological one: it focused on Christ as the center of Scripture and as the Lord of the church and its authorities and traditions (Joest 1993, 174–75). The adage *sola scriptura* did not mean that church tradition was no longer accepted, but that the balance between Scripture and tradition was reevaluated. However, the rejection of papal authority as the guideline for the understanding of Scripture led to a plurality in biblical interpretation among the Reformers (Goertz 2008, 576–77), despite the fact that Scripture was supposed to explain itself.

The Catholic Church in its turn responded to the Reformation's emphasis on the sole importance of Scripture at the Council of Trent. As mentioned above, the Council declared that anyone who did not accept the Latin Vulgate edition would incur an *anathema*. Moreover, a phrase in the original draft of the decree stated that the truth of the gospel had its foundations partly in Scripture, partly in tradition (*partim-partim*; Dantine 1988, 426).[20] The use of the word *partim* gave the Reformers the impression that the Catholic Church admitted the insufficiency of Scripture.

The decisions of Trent intensified the antagonism between the Catholic Church and Protestantism. In their response to Trent, the Reformed theologians underlined more strongly the sufficiency and perfection of Scripture (*perfectio scripturae*). Quite rapidly, this emphasis grew into precise and even rigid doctrines about the character and the contents of the Bible, with

[19] Olivétan's translation was the first Protestant full Bible in French, published in 1535 in Neuchâtel under the title *La Bible Qui est toute la Saincte scripture*. The work became known as either "Bible d'Olivétan" or "Bible des Martyrs," the last name pointing to the persecutions of the French Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

[20] The original phrase was "hanc veritatem partim contineri in libris scriptis, partim sine scripto traditionibus" (this truth is preserved partly in the holy books, partly in the oral traditions). Later, in the official decree the *partim-partim* was changed into a simple *et* (and): "hanc veritatem et disciplinam contineri in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus" (this truth is preserved both in the holy books and in the oral traditions); see Denzinger 2010, 1501.

extremes in the Lutheran and Calvinist orthodoxies of the seventeenth century and later (Hornig 1988; Oftestad 2008). This more dogmatic notion of *sola scriptura* resulted in the hermeneutical principle of *scriptura scripturae interpres*: Scripture had to be explained by Scripture itself.[21] Church tradition was no longer taken seriously, something that would never have occurred to Luther or Calvin. The more radical interpretation of *sola scriptura* of the later Lutheran and Calvinist churches resulted in a situation in which Scripture had to be explained from a canon that consisted of a Hebrew Old Testament and a Greek New Testament. The important materials bridging the gap between these two, the materials from Greek-speaking Jewish communities, were lacking. This undoubtedly had a major impact on the way the New Testament was interpreted.

Some consequences

So far I have tried to highlight some of the main ideas revolving around the canon of the Reformation. First, we have seen that the biblical books put under discussion by the church Reformers had already been problematic for a long time; no really new issues were raised in the Reformation. Second, we have seen that the humanists played a key role in the revival of Greek and Hebrew studies and the promotion of a Hebrew canon. Third, it was noted that with turning the notion *sola scriptura* into a hermeneutical principle, the Reformers limited the hermeneutical horizon of Scripture to Scripture itself. What I want to argue now is that the combination of the latter two of these three developments had a serious, not entirely favourable, impact on biblical exegesis and Bible translation.

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[21] Originally, the adage *sola scriptura* referred to Scripture as the only measure for the content of faith; see the Epitome of the Formula Concordiae (1577): "et *sacras litteras solas* unicam et certissimam illam regulam esse credimus, ad quam omnia dogmata exigere et secundum quam de omnibus tum doctrinis tum doctoribus iudicare oporteat" (Lietzmann 1967, 834; italics mine). The original German text is shorter than the Latin; the English translation of the full sentence runs as follows: "First [then, we receive and embrace with our whole heart] the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged." Hornig comments, "Als Reaktion auf diese Position suchte die altprotestantische Orthodoxie ihrerseits das reformatorische Schriftprinzip (sola scriptura) durch die Behauptung der inhaltlichen Suffizienz und Vollkommenheit der Heilige Schrift abzusichern und zu verteidigen" (In response [to the Council of Trent's view on Holy Scripture], early Protestant orthodoxy on their part sought to reinforce and defend the Reformed doctrine of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) by claiming Scripture's sufficiency and perfection; Hornig 1988, 78). And Steiger: "In the course of the academic theoretical consolidation of theology, the principle of *Sola Scriptura* upheld by the Reformers was further refined to the effect that Scripture was spoken of as the absolutely irreplaceable canon" (2008, 703).

By the first century B.C.E., most Jews in and outside Palestine were influenced by the Graeco-Roman culture of which they were a part. Even though the Jesus movement had its roots in a Jewish, Aramaic-speaking environment, all its *literary* sources we read and translate were written in Greek in a Graeco-Roman context. Already quite early the movement spread rapidly to mainly Greek-speaking areas, where both Jews and Christians used the Greek translations of the Old Testament as their holy Scriptures—or, to be more precise, where Jews, whether or not they belonged to the Jesus movement, and non-Jewish adherents of the Jesus movement, used these Greek translations.

Unlike synagogue meetings, where only the five books of Moses were taught and explained, the first Christian meetings focused on prophetic literature to understand Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.[22] It was the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was the background of and breeding ground for the Christian understanding of Jesus. We can see this most clearly in the earliest letters of the New Testament, the letters of Paul. Even though collections of Jesus' words must already have been put together during Paul's days, Paul rarely refers to words of Jesus,[23] but mainly uses the writings of the Greek Old Testament to support and underpin his teachings.

By the time Christians began to produce their own literature, collections of Greek Old Testament writings were the Bible for all of them. For the correct understanding of the New Testament, therefore, what we need in the first place is what we now refer to as the LXX and not the Hebrew Bible.[24] But with the shift to the Hebrew canon in the sixteenth century, the New

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[22] See Rouwhorst 2002, Alikin 2010, and de Jonge 2013. Among others, Philo, Josephus, and the book of Acts testify to the reading of the Law as the primary function of the synagogue gatherings (Alikin 2010, 150ff.; de Jonge 2013, 391). Alikin and de Jonge argue that the readings during the earliest Christian meetings started with the apostolic letters (e.g., 1 Thess 5.27; Acts 15.31; Col 4.16), the Gospels, and the Prophets (Justin Martyr, *Apologia i* 67.3–4), and were different from the readings in the synagogue.

[23] The only times Paul refers to a word of Jesus are in 1 Cor 7.10; 1 Thess 4.15; and 1 Cor 11.24–25, where he quotes Jesus' words at the Last Supper.

[24] Of course, "the" Septuagint does not exist. Strictly speaking, the LXX is only the Greek translation of the Pentateuch; all other books should be referred to as Old Greek (OG). And there is no evidence of a full Greek Old Testament before the second century C.E.; see Jobes and Silva 2000, 30–32. The first collections of Greek Old Testament writings are Christian and consist of texts reflecting various origins, and if we speak about "the Septuagint" we speak about a construct. But we could say similar things about "the New Testament." My point is, however, that principally any collection of *Greek* Old Testament texts provides a better context for the New Testament than does a Hebrew text—even more so when this Hebrew text is in the commonly used Masoretic form, reflecting a tradition that is even younger than the Christian collections of Greek Old Testament sources.

Testament was no longer studied in the context of the *Greek* Old Testament *with* the deuterocanonical books and of Graeco-Roman culture in general, but came to be explained from a more limited, narrow *Hebrew* canon. In other words, the New Testament was now explained from a literary world to which it never really belonged. As a result, exegetes have tried to go behind the Greek sources of the New Testament in order to explain the New Testament, directly or indirectly, from a Semitic tradition.[25] Joachim Jeremias,[26] David Hill,[27] or William David Davies[28] are good examples of New Testament scholars who have done this. The scholarly study of the biblical writings in their original languages as promoted by humanism and the Reformation, together with the constricted canon, led to tunnel vision in biblical exegesis: the New Testament was explained as the immediate continuation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

This raises two questions for work in Bible translation. The first regards New Testament exegesis in general. Although in the last three decades exegetes have been emphasizing the Graeco-Roman background of the New Testament (for example, Gerd Theissen, Wayne Meeks, Kingsley Barrett, Everett Ferguson, Moyer Hubbard, to name a few),[29] we must ask ourselves whether this development is sufficiently reflected in the way we train Bible translators. Do we work in ways that keep this tunnel vision alive or do we indeed give the deuterocanonical books (and other Jewish-Hellenistic sources) the weight they deserve for the explanation of the New Testament?

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[25] The *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neues Testament* is a good example of research that takes the Hebrew Old Testament as the starting point for the explanation of the New Testament and often understands non-biblical Greek as reflecting another meaning.

[26] Jeremias coined the notion of *passivum divinum* (or "theological passive") in Greek, basing it on the prohibition of pronouncing the tetragrammaton in Hebrew, and argues that several New Testament passages can be understood better with the help of Hebrew sound and rhythm patterns. He also speaks favourably of the retroversions of the New Testament into Aramaic by G. Dalman and C. F. Burney; see Jeremias 1973, 20–21, 30ff. The idea of *passivum divinum* was spread in New Testament Greek grammars and Bible translation manuals, e.g., Beekman and Callow 1974, 214–15.

[27] Hill argues that "the language of the New Testament is a special kind of Jewish biblical Greek (both in syntax and in the thought-forms it expresses) and the LXX translation plays a very important role in locating the area of Hebrew meaning which has contributed to the meaning of New Testament words" (1967, 19–20). Hill ignores the fact that both the LXX and the Greek New Testament were not written in isolation from the culture around them.

[28] Davies states, "Paul constantly drew upon concepts derived from Rabbinic Judaism; it was these that formed the warp and woof if not the material of his thought" (1970, 323).

[29] Compare also Smith: "Early Christian thought and language, for all their specificity in certain theological respects, were exposed to and part of the Hellenistic culture of the Mediterranean in its entirety, comprising both Jewish and pagan traditions" (1990, 81 and 140–41 n. 41).

Some of the most important ideas of New Testament biblical theology, such as resurrection and ideas about the afterlife, can only be understood correctly with the help of a Greek Old Testament and other Hellenistic-Jewish literature. Adolf Deissmann stated this point emphatically: "A single hour lovingly devoted to the text of the Septuagint will further our exegetical knowledge of the Pauline Epistles more than a whole day spent over a commentary."[30] But interestingly enough, computer software like ParaTExt, used so widely in Bible translation, clearly operates within the parameters of the old paradigm: the tools for research for the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament are much more developed than those for the LXX.

The second question regards our view on the notion of "source text." As we have seen above with Jerome and others, the humanists of the sixteenth century were certainly not the first to advocate a return to the original sources. But the approach to biblical exegesis based on the original sources did become programmatic only from the sixteenth century onwards and has led us to work in a paradigm in which we regard the Hebrew for the Old Testament and the Greek for the New Testament as *the* original sources. As noted above, ParaTExt, with its developed tools for the study of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament but with underdeveloped LXX tools, is still built on this paradigm.

But is this paradigm the only valid one? In recent times, translation studies in general, and Bible translation in particular, have been occupied with the variety of choices and ranges of target texts. *Skopos* theory has at least widened the previously rather limited view on translation as a simple distinction between "literal" and "free" (or whatever terms are used to describe this dichotomy). But perhaps it is also time to question the sources we translate. Not so much because the sources are "unknown" or "uncertain" to us in a postmodern sense. They are not. Scholarly research has done (and is still doing) enough work to give us a fairly reliable idea of our ancient sources, whether they are Hebrew or Greek, and the unknowns we encounter are normal for our field of research and quite similar to the ones met in, for instance, classical and medieval studies.

But the question is whether or not the field of biblical exegesis and to a greater extent perhaps that of Bible translation are perhaps still determined by a humanistic Reformed view of Scripture. The emphasis on the importance of translating the Old Testament from Hebrew diverted attention from the fact that the Bible of the authors and earliest readers of the New Testament writings was a Greek Bible, not a Hebrew one, and that for a

[30] Quoted by Jobes and Silva (2000, 23).

better understanding of the New Testament, a translation of the Old Testament from the LXX would perhaps make more sense.[31] Using a Greek source for the Old Testament would at least put the New Testament in its proper cultural context. True, the United Bible Societies do mention the LXX as a possible source next to the Masoretic text, but they do so only for confessional translation and not for interconfessional translation or translation for general audiences.[32] This shows that the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament are regarded as the scholarly norm, and that all other source texts are seen as exceptions, accepted only for the status they have in their respective church traditions. One wonders if it is not time for a revision of the UBS guidelines which puts the combination of a Hebrew Old Testament with a Greek New Testament in a correct perspective, and which explains that this combination leads to a hybrid Bible and one that only really became accepted in church tradition from the Reformation onwards.

Conclusion

The decision to move away from a combination of the Greek Old Testament and Greek New Testament, and instead to combine a Hebrew Old Testament with a Greek New Testament, is a choice once made by Reformed scholars in Reformed churches. Their choice has had significant consequences for how the Bible is perceived. It has influenced biblical exegesis by making the Hebrew Old Testament the immediate background of the Greek New Testament (though this has changed for the better in the last decades). The promotion of the combination of a Hebrew Old Testament and a Greek New Testament also has dominated the discipline of Bible translation: it has been the background of the UBS guidelines and has influenced the development

[31] As we have seen, some translations (Vulgate and later) have an Old Testament translated from the Hebrew, combined with the deuterocanonical books translated from Greek, Latin, and/or Hebrew. They at least offer the reader some of the context needed for a good understanding of the New Testament.

[32] About Old Testament translation, the UBS Background Paper on "Scripture Translation and the Churches" (2004) states both under the section for "General Audiences" and under the one for "Interconfessional Scripture Translation," "In conformity with UBS policy, the best and most reliable original language base texts should be used. These should be scientific editions that meet the highest standards of scholarship. The base text for the Old Testament should be the Masoretic Text (MT) published by the German Bible Society as *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) or the forthcoming *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ)" (UBS 2004, 7). Only under the section for "Confessional Translation" do the guidelines state that "the UBS recommends that the Masoretic text or the Septuagint should be used as base text," suggesting that only certain churches will opt for a translation from the LXX. For the full text of the guidelines, see http://intranet2.biblesocieties.org/intranet/publish/files/translations/UBS%20Translation%20Guidelines.pdf.

of electronic Bible programs such as ParaTExt. It is perhaps time to understand that this ideal was a choice made at a particular moment in history, and has some serious limitations.

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