

50. Eusebius: Church History

In the second book of his *Church History*, Eusebius of Caesarea describes the life and works of the apostles and companions of Jesus. As a digression, he describes which New Testament books are “recognized” as truly attributed to the apostles and their companions. On the basis of historically determined criteria of authorship, he also categorizes popularly read books as “disputed” (among which number many books others included in their canon), “spurious,” and even “beyond the pale.” Eusebius’s view of the canon as a function of historical reliability also explains his concern to harmonize the various gospel accounts so that they will produce a single, seamless historical narrative of Jesus’ life. Following Eusebius, authorship remained an important component of canon formation through Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Texts securely ascribed to their authors could be taken as divinely sanctioned, while those falsely attributed to apostles or disciples were, conversely, the devious product of heretics seeking to fool the Christian faithful.

THE ORDER OF THE GOSPELS

(24) Now let me indicate the unquestioned writings of this apostle (John). Obviously, his gospel, recognized as it is by all the churches in the world, must first be acknowledged. That the early fathers had good reason to assign it the fourth place after the other three can easily be seen. Those inspired and wonderful men, Christ’s apostles, had completely purified their lives and cultivated every spiritual virtue, but their speech was that of every day. The divine wonder-working power bestowed on them by the Savior filled them with confidence, and having neither the ability nor the desire to present the teachings of the Master with rhetorical subtlety or literary skill, they relied only on demonstrating the divine Spirit working with them and on the miraculous power of Christ fully operative in them (cf. 1 Cor 2:4). Thus they proclaimed the knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven through the whole world, giving very little thought to the business of writing books. The reason for this practice was the ever-present help of a greater, superhuman ministry. We may instance Paul,

who, though he surpassed all others in the marshaling of his arguments and in the abundance of his ideas, committed to writing nothing but his very short epistles; and yet he had countless unutterable things to say, for he had reached the vision of the third heaven, he had been caught up to the divine paradise itself, and had been privileged to hear there unspeakable words (2 Cor 12:2–4).

Similar experiences were enjoyed by the rest of our Savior’s pupils—the twelve apostles, the seventy disciples, and countless others besides. Yet of them all, Matthew and John alone have left us memoirs of the Lord’s doings, and there is a firm tradition that they took to writing of necessity. Matthew had begun by preaching to Hebrews, and when he made up his mind to go to others, too, he committed his own gospel to writing in his native tongue, so that for those with whom he was no longer present the gap left by his departure was filled by what he wrote. And when Mark and Luke had now published their gospels, John, we are told, who hitherto had relied entirely on the spoken word, finally took to writing for the following reason. The three gospels already

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written were in general circulation, and copies had come into John's hands. He welcomed them, we are told, and confirmed their accuracy, but remarked that the narrative only lacked the story of what Christ had done first of all at the beginning of his mission.

This tradition is undoubtedly true. Anyone can see that the three evangelists have recorded the doings of the Savior for only one year, following the consignment of John the Baptist to prison, and that they indicated this very fact at the beginning of their narrative. After the forty days' fast and the temptation that followed, Matthew shows clearly the period covered by his narrative when he says: "Hearing that John had been arrested, he withdrew from Judaea into Galilee" (Matt 4:12). In the same way, Mark says: "After the arrest of John, Jesus went into Galilee" (Mark 1:14). Luke, too, before beginning the acts of Jesus, makes a similar observation, saying that Herod added one more to his other crimes by shutting up John in jail (Luke 3:19-20).

We are told, then, that for this reason the apostle John was urged to record in his gospel the period that the earlier evangelists had passed over in silence and the things done during that period by the Savior, i.e., all that happened before the Baptist's imprisonment; that this is indicated, first by his words "Thus did Jesus begin his miracles" (John 2:11), and later by his mentioning the Baptist in the middle of his account of Jesus' doings, as then still baptizing at Aenon near Salim; and that he makes this plainer when he adds "for John had not yet been thrown into jail" (John 3:23-24).

Thus John in his gospel narrative records what Christ did when the Baptist had not yet been thrown into jail, while the other three evangelists describe what happened after the Baptist's consignment to prison. Once this is grasped, there no longer appears to be a discrepancy between the gospels because John deals with the early stages of Christ's career, and the others cover the last period of his story, and it seems natural that as the genealogy of our Savior as a man had already been set out by Matthew and Luke, John should pass it over in silence and begin with the proclamation of his divinity, since the Holy Spirit had reserved this for him, as the greatest of the four.

This is all that I propose to say about the composition of John's gospel: the origin of Mark's has already been explained. Luke's work begins with a preface in which the author himself explains the reason for its composition. Many others had somewhat hastily undertaken to compile an account of things of which he himself was fully assured (Luke 1:1), so, feeling it his duty to free us from doubts as to our attitude to the others, he furnished in his own gospel an authentic account of the events of which, thanks to his association and intercourse with Paul and his conversations with the other apostles, he had learned the undoubted truth (Luke 1:3-4). This is how I see the matter: at a more appropriate moment I shall endeavor to show, by quoting early writers, what others have said about it. Of John's writings, besides the gospel, the first of the epistles had been accepted as unquestionably his by scholars both of the present and of a much earlier period; the other two are disputed. As to the Revelation, the views of most people to this day are evenly divided. At the appropriate moment, the evidence of early writers shall clear up this matter, too.

WRITINGS ACCEPTED AS SACRED AND THOSE NOT ACCEPTED

(25) It will be well, at this point, to classify the New Testament writings already referred to. We must, of course, put first the holy quartet of the gospels, followed by the Acts of the Apostles. The next place in the list goes to Paul's epistles, and after them we must recognize the epistle called 1 John; likewise 1 Peter. To these may be added, if it is thought proper, the Revelation of John, the arguments about which I shall set out when the time comes. These are classed as recognized books. Those that are disputed, yet familiar to most, include the epistles known as James, Jude, and 2 Peter and those called 2 and 3 John, the work either of the evangelist or of someone else with the same name.

Among spurious books must be placed the "Acts" of Paul, the "Shepherd," and the "Revelation of Peter," also the alleged "Epistle of Barnabas" and the

“Teachings of the Apostles,” together with the Revelation of John, if this seems the right place for it; as I said before, some reject it, others include it among the recognized books. Moreover, some have found a place in the list for the “Gospel of Hebrews,” a book that has a special appeal for those Hebrews who have accepted Christ. These would all be classed with the disputed books, but I have been obliged to list the latter separately, distinguishing those writings that, according to the tradition of the Church, are true, genuine, and recognized from those in a different category, not canonical but disputed, yet familiar to most churchmen; for we must not confuse these with

the writings published by heretics under the name of the apostles, as containing either Gospels of Peter, Thomas, Matthias, and several others besides these or Acts of Andrew, John, and other apostles. To none of these has any churchman of any generation ever seen fit to refer in his writings. Again, nothing could be further from apostolic usage than the type of phraseology employed, while the ideas and implications of their contents are so irreconcilable with true orthodoxy that they stand revealed as the forgeries of heretics. It follows that so far from being classed even among spurious books, they must be thrown out as impious and beyond the pale.

51. Athanasius: Easter Letter 39

Athanasius (see the introduction to Text 26) took the occasion of his annual letter to the churches of Egypt in which he set the official date for Easter to explore the question of canon and apocrypha. This letter, dating from 367, is notable as our earliest surviving list of New Testament books that contains the same twenty-seven books as the current canon (although not in the same order). This list of Old Testament books agrees with the canon of the Hebrew Bible. In addition, Athanasius lists several books that the Catholic and Orthodox churches would later recognize as deuterocanonical (the Protestant Apocrypha), as well as popular Christian texts, such as the *Shepherd* of Hermas and the *Didache* (the Teaching of the Apostles). He distinguishes these latter books, which may be usefully read by Christians, from those that he says are in the official canon. For Athanasius, every book read as Scripture beyond these two lists is apocrypha, the devious and deliberate “invention of heretics” (he singles out the schismatic Melitian group for condemnation). For him, the concept of canon is driven by his understanding of the disparate scriptural books as a single, coherent Bible, the Word of God that conveys Christian teaching in a perfect, complete form. To seek beyond that coherent perfection must therefore signal heretical disagreement with God’s Word.

[*The beginning of the text is lost.*] . . . although alive, he came to those who are dead, and although God, he came to human beings. In this way those who sought him found him, and he was made manifest to those who did not question him. So, too, he became a light for the blind when he opened their eyes, and he became a staff for the lame when he healed

them and they walked. Once and for all he became a teacher for everyone in everything.

For the teaching of the worship of God is not from human beings; rather, it is the Lord who reveals his Father to those whom he wishes, since it is he who knows him (Matt 11:27). And first he did this to the Apostles; one of them, Paul, writes to the Galatians:

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"I am informing you, brothers and sisters, about the gospel that was proclaimed through me, that it is not of human origin, nor did I receive it from any human being, nor was I taught it; rather, it is according to a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11–12). Moreover, writing to those in Ephesus, he said, "If you have heard about the working of the grace of God that has been given to me for you, how in a revelation I was informed about the mystery, just as I wrote to you earlier in a little bit as you are able, you desire to understand my teaching in the mystery of Christ, which was not revealed to the generations of the children of humanity as it has now been revealed to his prophets and holy apostles" (Eph 3:2–5).

Not they alone, brothers and sisters, are the ones to whom the Lord has become a teacher by revealing the mystery to them; rather, he is a teacher to us all. [For] Paul rejoices with his disciples that they have been taught about the gospel in this way. He prays in behalf of those in Ephesus that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in his knowledge" (Eph 1:17). The Apostle knows that we all share in this prayer that he made for them (the Ephesians) and not only at that former time. When the Lord reveals knowledge to human beings, it is he who commands forever, he who teaches humanity about knowledge, according to the word of the Psalmist (cf. Ps 18:35; 94:10). It is he whom his disciples asked to teach them how to pray, and he who taught daily in the temple, as Luke said (Luke 11:1, 19:47). It is he whom his disciples asked, "Teacher, when will these things happen, and what is the sign that all these things are going to be fulfilled?" (Matt 24:3). When his disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to prepare to eat the Passover?" he answered, saying to them, "Behold, when you enter this city, a man will meet you carrying a jar. Follow him into the house that he enters and say to the master of the house, 'It is the Teacher who says to you, Where is my guest room where I will eat the Passover with my disciples?'" (Luke 22:9–11).

Well, indeed, he spoke like this, for the name of Wisdom is fitting for him because it is he alone who is the true Teacher. For who is to be trusted to teach

human beings about the Father, except he who exists always in his bosom? (John 1:18). Thus, who can convince those whom he teaches about "things that eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have arisen upon the human heart" (1 Cor 2:9), except he who alone is acquainted with the Father and has established for us the way to enter the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, he charged his disciples, just as Matthew said, "Let none of you be called 'Rabbi,' for your Teacher is one and you are all brothers and sisters. And do not call for yourselves 'Father' on earth, for your Father in heaven is one. And do not be called 'Teacher,' for your Teacher, Christ, is one. And the great one among you will be your servant" (Matt 23:8–11).

It is not fitting, brothers and sisters, that we should listen to the holy words carelessly. Therefore, why does the Apostle in one place call himself "teacher of the gentiles in faith and truth" (1 Tim 2:7), and in other places say about the Lord, "It is he who has made some apostles, others prophets, and some preachers, others pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11)? And James commands, saying, "Let not many be teachers, my brothers and sister; you know that we will receive a more severe judgment than you all" (Jas 3:1). He did not say this as if there were no teachers, but as if there were some, although it was not necessary that there be teachers. While these people are speaking like this, it is written in the gospel that the Lord commanded that we not be called "Rabbi" and that no one be called "Teacher" except the Lord alone.

While I was examining these (passages), a thought occurred to me that requires your scrutiny. What I thought is this: The task of the teacher is to teach, and that of the disciple to learn. But even if these people teach, they are still called "disciples," for it is not they who are the originators of what they proclaim; rather, they are at the service of the words of the true Teacher. For our Lord and God Jesus Christ, wanting to inform us of this, said (to) his disciples, "What I say to you in the darkness, receive in the light, and what you hear with your ears, proclaim upon the rooftops" (Matt 10:27). For the words that the disciples proclaim do not belong to them; rather, they heard them from the Savior. Therefore, even if it

is Paul who is teaching, it is nevertheless Christ who is speaking in him. And even if he says that the Lord has appointed teachers in the churches (1 Cor 12:28), he (the Lord) nevertheless first teaches them and then sends them out.

For the nature of everyone who is of the created order is to be taught, but our Lord and Craftsman (demiurge) is by nature a teacher. For he was not taught by another person how to be a teacher, but all human beings, even if they are called "Teacher," were nevertheless disciples first. Moreover, every (human being) is instructed because the Savior supplies them with the knowledge of the Spirit, so that they might be students of God. But our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, being the Word of the Father, was not instructed by anyone.

Rightly he alone is the Teacher, as I have said, so that the Jews were astonished when they heard him and said, "How does he know the Scriptures without being taught?" (John 7:15). Therefore, when he was teaching in the synagogue and healing the sick, the Jews persecuted him. Therefore, "from their feet to their head they do not lack wounds or bruises" (Isa 1:6); rather, such punishment came upon them as a great madness. For "they have not understood," as it is written, "nor have they learned wisdom; rather, they walk in darkness" (Ps 82:5). And, following them, those from the heresies who have caught up to them, namely the wretched Melitians, by denying him, have walked in waterless places and have abandoned the spring of life (cf. Luke 11:24). Therefore, even if they talk about the Passover hypocritically for the sake of the glory of human beings, their gathering is a bread of mourning, for they take counsel evilly against the truth, so that whoever sees such a gathering speaks the word that is written as suited to them: "Why have the nations become arrogant, and why have the peoples worried about vain things?" (Ps 2:1). For the Jews gather together like Pontius Pilate, and the Arians and the Melitians like Herod, not to celebrate the feast, but to blaspheme the Lord, saying, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) And also: "Take him away! Crucify him! Release to us Barabbas!" (Luke 23:18). For it is just like the request for Barabbas to say that the Son of God is a creature and that there was a time when he was not.

As for them, it is no surprise that they have remained dead in their unbelief by being bound by their evil thoughts, just as the Egyptians were bound by their own axes (Exod 14:25).

But for our part, let us now keep the feast according to the tradition of our ancestors, since we have the Holy Scriptures, which are sufficient to instruct us perfectly. When we read them carefully with a good conscience, we will be "like the tree that grows upon places of flowing water, which brings forth its fruit in its season and whose leaves do not wither" (Ps 1:3). But inasmuch as we have mentioned that the heretics are dead but we have the divine Scriptures for salvation, and we are afraid that, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:3), a few of the simple folk might be led astray from sincerity and purity through human deceit and might then begin to read other books, the so-called apocrypha, deceived by their having the same names as the genuine books, I exhort you to bear with me if, to remind you, I write about things that you already know, on account of the Church's need and advantage.

As I begin to mention these things, in order to commend my undertaking, I will employ the example of Luke the evangelist and say myself: "Inasmuch as certain people have attempted" (Luke 1:1) to set in order for themselves the so-called apocryphal books and to mix these with the divinely inspired Scripture, about which we are convinced it is just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and assistants of the Word handed down to our ancestors, it seemed good to me, since I have been urged by genuine brothers and sisters and instructed from the beginning, to set forth in order the canonized and transmitted writings, those believed to be divine books, so that those who have been deceived might condemn the persons who led them astray, and those who have remained pure might rejoice to be reminded (of these things).

There are, then, belonging to the Old Testament in number a total of twenty-two, for, as I have heard, it has been handed down that this is the number of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet. In order and by name they are as follows: first Genesis; then Exodus; then Leviticus; and after this, Numbers; and finally,

Deuteronomy. After these is Joshua, the son of Nun; and Judges; and after this, Ruth; and again, next four books of Kings, the first and second of these being reckoned as one book, and the third and fourth likewise being one.¹ After these are First and Second Chronicles, likewise reckoned as one book; then First and Second Esdras, likewise as one.² After these is the Book of Psalms; and then Proverbs; then Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. After these is Job; and finally the Prophets, the twelve being reckoned as one book; then Isaiah, Jeremiah and with it, Baruch; Lamentations and the Letter; and after it, Ezekiel and Daniel. To this point are the books of the Old Testament.

Again, one should not hesitate to name the books of the New Testament. For these are the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; then after these, Acts of the Apostles and seven letters, called catholic, by the apostles, namely: one by James; two by Peter; then three by John; and after these, one by Jude. After these there are fourteen letters by Paul, written in this order: first to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; and after these, to the Galatians; and next to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians and to the Colossians; and after these, two to the Thessalonians; and that to the Hebrews; and in addition, two to Timothy, one to Titus, and finally that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.

These are the springs of salvation, so that someone who thirsts may be satisfied by the words they contain. In these books alone the teaching of piety is proclaimed. Let no one add to or subtract from them (cf. Deut 12:32). Concerning them the Lord put the Sadducees to shame when he said, "You err because you do not know the Scriptures or their meaning" (Matt 22:29), and he reproved the Jews, "Search the Scriptures, for it is they that testify to me" (John 5:39).

But for the sake of greater accuracy, I add this, writing from necessity. There are other books, in addition to these, which have not been canonized, but have been appointed by the ancestors to be read to

those who newly join us and want to be instructed in the word of piety: the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith, Tobit, the book called Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd.

Nevertheless, the former books are canonized, the latter are (only) read, and there is no mention of the apocryphal books. Rather (the category of apocrypha) is an invention of heretics, who write these books whenever they want and then grant and bestow on them dates, so that, by publishing them as if they were ancient, they might have a pretext for deceiving the simple folk. Great is the hard-heartedness of those who do this and do not fear the word that is written: "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it" (Deut 12:32). Who has made the simple folk believe that those books belong to Enoch even though no Scriptures existed before Moses? On what basis will they say there is an apocryphal book of Isaiah? He preaches openly on the high mountain and says, "These words are not hidden or in a dark land" (Isa 45:19). How could Moses have an apocryphal book? He is the one who published Deuteronomy with heaven and earth as witnesses (Deut 4:26, 30:19). No, this can be nothing except "itchy ears" (2 Tim 4:3), trading in piety, and the pleasing of women. Paul spoke about such people beforehand when he wrote to his disciple: "A time will come when they will not keep to the salvific teaching, but according to their own desire they will produce teachers for themselves, when their ear will itch, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and go after myths" (2 Tim 4:3-4). For truly the apocryphal books are filled with myths, and it is a vain thing to pay attention to them because their voices are empty and polluted. For they are the beginning of discord, and strife is the goal of people who do not seek what is beneficial for the Church, but who desire to receive compliments from those whom they lead astray, so that, by publishing new discourses, they will be considered great people.

Therefore, it is fitting for us to decline such books. For even if a useful word is found in them, it is still not good to trust them. For this is a work of the wickedness of those who have conceived of mixing one or two inspired texts so that, through such de-

¹ In modern Bibles, these four books are divided into 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings.

² In modern Bibles, Ezra and Nehemiah.

ception, they might somehow cover up the the evil teachings that they have clearly created. Therefore, it is even more fitting for us to reject such books, and let us command ourselves not to proclaim anything in them or to speak anything in them with those who want to be instructed, even if there is a good word in them, as I have said. For what do the spiritual Scriptures lack that we should seek after these empty voices of unknown people? It is appropriate for us to cite the text that is written about them: "Is there no balm in Gilead or physician there?" (Jer 8:22) and again "Of what profit to you is the road to Egypt so that you drink the troubled water from Gehon?" and again "Of what profit to you is the way to Assyria that you drink the water from their rivers?" (Jer 2:18).

Therefore, if we seek the faith, it is possible for us to discover it through them (the Scriptures), that is, we believe in Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Or on the subject of his humanity, John cried out, "The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). And on the subject of the resurrection, the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, saying, "Have you not read what is said to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt 22:31–32). On the subject of the coming judgment, it is written, "We shall all stand . . ." (Rom 14:10) [*The text is missing here.*] . . . among human beings? Who among those who have no hope could at all think that the Word would become flesh (cf. Eph 2:12; 1 Thess 4:13; John 1:14)? Have the things in God's heart arisen upon the heart of human beings (1 Cor 2:19)? When has anyone known his heart (Rom 11:34; 1 Cor 2:16)?

[. . .] and "these are the things that he proclaimed" or "as he said" or "Isaiah charges and says" and "as David says" and also "Moses says beforehand" and again "the Scripture says that Elijah was." Even if it says "as it is written," it does not make clear where the text is written or who proclaimed it. Rather, we are the ones who read and learn where it is written in the (Hebrew) Scriptures. And this text, "What eye has not seen . . ." (1 Cor 2:9), we do not find written in the Scripture as it is. But if it is extant in the apocryphal books as the heretics says,

then those who invented these books have secretly stolen from the words of Paul and written it at a later time.

Therefore, inasmuch as it is clear that the testimony from the apocryphal books is superfluous because it is unfounded—for the Scripture is perfect in every way—let the teacher teach from the words of the Scripture, and let him place before those who desire to learn those things that are appropriate to their age. In the case of those who begin to study as catechumens, it is not right to proclaim the obscure texts in the Scripture, since they are mysteries, but instead to place before them the teaching that they need: what will teach them how to hate sin and to abandon idol worship as an abomination. The wisdom . . . [*The text is missing here.*] . . . in the Scriptures. I am satisfied that this will remind you, so that, when you take for yourselves the saints as patterns and administer well the words of the Holy Scriptures, you will hear sometime, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Since you are trustworthy in small things, I will place you over great things" (Matt 25:21, 23).

For I have not written these things as if I were teaching, for I have not attained such a rank. Rather, because I heard that the heretics, particularly the wretched Melitians, were boasting about the books that they call "apocryphal," I thus have informed you of everything that I heard from my father (Bishop Alexander of Alexandria), as if I were with you and you with me in a single house, i.e., the Church of the living God, the pillar and strength of truth. When we gather in a single place, let us purify it (the Church) of every defilement, of double-heartedness, of fighting and childish arrogance. Let us be satisfied with only the Scripture inspired by God to instruct us. Its books we have set forth in the words above: which they are and how many their number. For in this way we now celebrate the feast as is fitting, not with old leaven or with evil or wicked leaven, but with pure and true leaven (1 Cor 5:8).

We will begin the holy Lent on the 25th of the month of Mechir (19 February), and the great week of the saving Passover on the last of the month of Phamenoth (26 March). And we will finish the holy

fast on the 5th of the month of Pharmuthi (31 March). And next we will celebrate the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost, remembering the poor and sharing with one another and with the needy, in accordance with the word of Esdra (Neh 8:10). Once and for all we do everything, glorifying God, in accordance with the command of Paul in Christ Jesus our Lord,

through whom be glory and power with the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the brothers and sister with me greet you.

I inform you of this as well: that when the blessed Lampon, bishop of Darnei, fell asleep, [. . .] was appointed . . . [*The remainder of the text is lost.*]

52. Priscillian: On Faith and Apocrypha

Priscillian (d. ca. 386) was a popular preacher and ascetic leader in Spain, who, shortly after being ordained bishop of Avila, was accused of heresy by his fellow bishops and executed on charges of sorcery by the imperial court. His name was associated with Manicheism and Gnosticism by writers, such as Jerome (see Text 27). During his brief and turbulent ecclesiastical career, Priscillian wrote a series of theological and exegetical treatises that were discovered in the nineteenth century and that have shed new light on a universally condemned "heretic" of the late fourth century. Among these treatises was a text *On Faith and Apocrypha*, in which Priscillian defended his ecclesiastical use of noncanonical texts as sources of Christian teaching and faith.

The portrait of a self-consciously orthodox Christian who acknowledged the authority of the church and confessed a theologically correct creed defending the use of apocryphal writings significantly challenges the view of Eusebius and Athanasius that apocrypha were produced by heretics to pervert scriptural truth. Priscillian's defense of his reading of apocrypha is, by turns, serious and mocking and is ultimately grounded in a strong sense of theological, ascetical, and intellectual elitism.

THE ACCUSATION

" . . . would be condemned, since novelty of intellect is the mother of contention, erudition is the author of scandal, the fuel of schism, nourishment of heresy, form of mortal sin. Indeed, everything that seems to have been said or done, by God or by the apostles such that it might be approved, concerning this it has been written: 'Yes is yes, no is no' (Matt 5:37). Moreover, that which has been newly discovered by intellects and trickeries is here exposed by the witness of divine virtue, which says: 'That which surpasses this is from the Evil one' (Matt 5:37)."

THE CANON POINTS TO APOCRYPHA

Let us see, therefore, if the apostles of Jesus Christ, master of our conduct and life, did not read from outside the canon. Judas the apostle, himself the Lord's twin—he who believed more in Christ God after the remarkable passion, when it is recounted that he was tested; he who both saw and touched the vestigial marks of the chains and the glories of the divine cross—he proclaimed: "Concerning these things Enoch prophesied in the seventh [generation] from Adam, saying, 'Behold the Lord is coming with thousands of saints to make judgment and to convince

everyone . . . also concerning all of the harsh things that sinners have said against him" (Jude 14–15). Who is this Enoch whom the apostle Jude enlists in the witness of prophecy? And who would prophesy concerning God, with nothing but this prophecy to refer to, rather than (if these things are said truly) condemn himself according to the canonical ordering? Or perhaps Enoch was not considered to be the prophet whom Paul in his letter written to the Hebrews testified that he had "borne witness before his translation" (Heb 11:5) or that one in the beginning of Genesis (when still the form of the world and the nature of the crude age, retaining the sin of the deceived human, did not believe in the conversion toward God after sin) whom God preferred to translate among his own rather than let him die? If it is not disputed, but is believed among the apostles, that he is a prophet, then why is it called a matter of consideration rather than commotion, counsel rather than temerity, faith rather than falsehood that, when an opinion is offered to avenge grudges and a prophet who preaches God is condemned?

Are we dealing in trivial matters? Are we casting bones and dice?¹ Do we trot out trifling plays on a stage so that, while we follow humans of this age, we condemn the words of the apostles? By what peaceful compromise is there grace for people who wish to believe, yet do not hold to apostolic words?

Now perhaps someone follows these lines of reasoning: although indeed a single testimony might suffice to confirm the faith of saints in God, nevertheless he may say that it is not to be believed of one, but that "two and three witnesses secure more completely the reason of the word" (Deut 19:15; Matt 18:16). Let our inquisitor turn to anything at all of this sort, seeking diligently, poring over the Scriptures to see whether or not we speak truly.

This is Tobit's testimony, the saint of the life to come, laying out rules for his son, pronouncing what things he should guard: "We are the sons of prophets: Noah was a prophet, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all of our ancestors who prophesied from

the beginning of the age" (Tob 4:12). When do we read from the book of the prophet Noah in the canon? Who reads the Book of Abraham among the prophets of the established canon? Who ever taught that Isaac prophesied? Who has heard the prophecy of Jacob set in the canon? If he reads of them in Tobit and values the witness of canonical prophecy, then is it given to him as a testimony of valuable virtue, or is it assigned to others as an opportunity for just condemnation? In these matters let each one have a little patience if we prefer to be condemned with the prophets of God, rather than condemn those things that are religious along with those who make imprudent assumptions.

Who, indeed, would not fear the accuser of Noah, dispenser of divine judgment? Concerning him the apostle says: "Righteous Noah did he preserve, that herald of justice, when he brought down the destruction of the world upon the impious" (2 Pet 2:5). Who would not seek the "bosom of" the prophet "Abraham" (cf. Luke 16:22, 23) as a testimony of serenity? Who would not wish to be considered the seed of Isaac (cf. Gal 4)? Who would not love Jacob, called by God "a God to Pharaoh"?² And who would not tremble at rejecting the memory of the saints, since it is written: "Truly I say to you that whoever placed a stumbling block before the smallest of those who has believed in my name, it is better for that one to be tied to a millstone and cast into the depths of the sea" (Matt 18:6)? If this is said concerning the littlest ones, I would like to know what is pronounced concerning those who are first in faith!

Moreover, in all these books there is no fear—if some things have been inserted by miserable heretics—in deleting and in agreeing to reject that which is not found in the prophets and Gospels. Indeed, for that saint of God himself, a lie is not embraced by the truth, nor are sacrilegious and hateful things set before saints; it is better to "lift out the tares from the harvests" (cf. Matt 13:29), rather than have the hope of a good harvest destroyed on account of

¹ "Bones and dice" may be a reference to Cicero's condemnation of such practices in *On Divination*.

² Priscillian seems to be referring to Exod 7:1, although here the subject is Moses, not Jacob.

tares. This is why the devil inserted his own words into the holy words, in order that (without a careful harvester) the harvest should perish with the tares and the good be made to fall with the worse. The same judgment binds the one who has joined the worst to the good as the one who has destroyed the good with the bad.

So in the Gospel according to Luke, God testified: "Let them investigate the blood of all the prophets, which has been shed since the creation of the world, from the blood of Abel until the blood of Zechariah who was cut down between the altar and the temple" (Luke 11:50–51), and Elijah says in Kings: "They have thrown down your altars and killed your prophets, and I alone am remaining and they seek after my life" (1 Kings 19:10). Who is this prophet Abel, from whom the prophets' blood first flowed, whose beginning ended in Zechariah? Who are these intermediary prophets who appear to have been killed? If indeed everything that is said is sought in the books of the canon, and to read beyond that is to sin, we read of no one killed among those who are established as prophets in the canon. If nothing is to be assumed or maintained beyond the authority of the canon, we cannot simply believe in stories and, by agreement, retain an account of events not in the text. Maybe someone will jump up and say that Isaiah was dismembered;³ if he is among those who condemn my practice, let him shut his mouth or, offering forth the story of how this happened, let him say that he also believes in painters and poets! For already they casually allow the fancies of philosophers to be mentioned, doubtless so that they might find a witness of this matter of the blood of the prophets slaughtered since the creation of the world. If the evangelist saying these things correctly came forward to testify, saying, "Search the Scriptures" (John 5:39), indeed he drew me forward to read what he read.

Moreover, I cannot say that which I am compelled to speak, that my following the apostle was not the learnedness of faith but, rather, the trap of one de-

³ According to the popular *Martyrdom of Isaiah* to which Priscillian refers, Isaiah was sawn in half by Manasseh, son of Hezekiah of Judah.

ceived. For once again, the text is brought forth from the Gospel according to Matthew: "Rising then Joseph received the boy and his mother by night, and he went into Egypt and was there until the death of Herod, so that which was said by the Lord through the prophet was accomplished: 'out of Egypt I called my son'" (Matt 2:14–15). Who is *this* prophet, whom we do not read in the canon, whose faithful prophecy the Lord fulfilled like the guarantor of a promised obligation? Certainly, no tremendous amount of toil is required to believe that God would prepare the future road of the divine path with the witnesses of prophecy, from which God would not then wish to deviate, so that we might admit that he did, in fact, speak through the one who prophesied.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CREED

Certainly a book cannot be condemned whose witness fulfills the faith of canonical speech. Nor is it possible to pick and choose, as if selecting among delicacies at a banquet! Nor is it a question of clever reasoning, whereby someone has assumed that which follows: while they claim to see the dialectical work of intellects, they have made sects through persuasion. The Scripture of God is a solid matter, a true matter not to be chosen by a person but transmitted to that person by God, of whom if "the first fruits are holy, so also is the whole matter holy" (Rom 11:16). Here is the source of heresies: when each individual serves his own intellect, rather than God, and is not disposed to follow the creed but, rather, to argue over the creed, even though, if they knew faith, they would hold to nothing outside the creed. The creed is the seal of the true matter, and to pick apart the creed is to prefer to argue over the creed, rather than to believe in it.

The creed is the work of the Lord, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, faith in one God, from whom Christ God is the Son of God, savior born in the flesh, suffering, who rose up on account of love of humanity, who, handing over the creed to his apostles, taught what he was and would be, showing in himself and in his creed that the Son is the name of

the Father and the Father is that of the Son, lest the error of the Binionites should prevail.⁴ For he showed to the apostles who inquired that he was everything that has a name (cf. Eph 1:21); he wished to be believed in as One and indivisible, as the prophet says: "This is our God, no other is to be compared to him who showed the way of discipline and gave it to Jacob his son and to Israel his beloved; afterward he appeared on the earth and associated with humans, the Lord God is his name" (Bar 3:35–37, Amos 5:8).

"A CLOUD OF WITNESSES"

But now lest we be said to be drawn by love of faith to have acted otherwise than we have suggested (certainly from an overwhelming refutation against diverse heresies, one passage may lie vulnerable), so on this account we especially wish this work to be accepted, that we might triumph over that faithless lie by a cloud of witnesses (cf. Heb 12:1). So now let us return to the matter: whether we are to be found credible in the matter of which we are accused; indeed, we may rightly be seen to be arguing about leftovers.

So even Paul says that God said: "More blessed is it to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), and we do not read of God speaking thus in the canon. Also Daniel testifies that God has spoken, saying, "Since wickedness came forth from Babylon from elders who were supposed to rule the people" (Sus 5). Even though we should believe that these things were said and written, in the words of an evangelist and in the declamation of apostles and divine speech, yet look! The time has come: while the debate over superfluous matters is being carried out, stupidity is introduced among the faithful! We cannot say that God has not said what the apostle said he has said or that the prophet made no prophecy about which the Scripture testifies. Since we correctly believe these things on faith, we do not see these texts in the canon, and, therefore,

⁴ "Binionites" seems to be a coinage of Priscillian, perhaps referring to creeds that draw too much of a distinction between the Father and the Son. Priscillian's particular phrase "Christ God," by contrast, emphasizes their unity.

if everything outside the canon is to be condemned, either the testimony of the condemned is received or else there is no authority in these things written in the Scriptures.

So, too, the prophet Ezekiel says: "Thus says the Lord to Gog: 'You are the one of whom I spoke in the ancient days through the hands of my servants the prophets'" (Ezek 38:14, 17). I believe he said that (and I am not playing false), so I must either affirm that the prophet has invented what God had said or that God lied: for who might that prophet *be* through whom God said this? I do not see him in the canon; although we have faith in these words, we haven't found the author of this text in the canon.

So also in Chronicles we do not find Nathan, the prophet; Ahijah, the Selonite; the visions of Iddo; the words of Jehu, son of Hanani, for the faith but, rather, the authority of what they recount, when Scripture says: "and the rest of the deeds of Jehosaphat from the first to the most recent, behold, are written in the Deeds of Jehu, son of Hanani, who recorded them in the Book of the Kings of Israel" (2 Chr 20:34), and we do not read these texts in the canonical books, but we show them to be held apart from the canon. So also it says there: "and the rest of the deeds of Solomon from the first to the most recent, behold, they are written in the words of Nathan, the Prophet, and the words of Ahijah, the Selonite, and in the visions of Iddo, which he saw concerning Jereboam, son of Nebat" (2 Chr 9:29); and again there: "and the remaining deeds of Rehoboam from first to most recent, are they not written in the words of Shemaiah, the prophet, and Iddo, the Seer, and all his deeds?" (2 Chr 12:15); and again there: "and the remaining deeds of Abijah and his acts and words are written in the book of the prophet Iddo" (2 Chr 13:22); and again there: "and the remaining deeds of Amaziah from first to most recent, are they not written in the Book of the Days of the Kings of Judah and Israel?" (2 Chr 25:26); again there: "are these things not written in the Book of the Days of the Kings of Judah?" (2 Chr 26:26); again there: "and the remaining deeds of Manasseh and his prayer, which he prayed to the Lord in the name of the God of Israel, behold, they are written in the acts of his speeches, in the deeds of the seers" (2 Chr 33:18–19). Who there-

fore would patiently receive such a torrent? Here, on the one hand, as unlearnedness urges insanity and rage drives ignorance to say nothing unless it be Catholic, are you not saying: "damned what I do not know, damned what I do not read, damned what I do not seek through the zeal of my sluggish leisure!" When, on the other hand, divinity urges eloquence, it says "Search out the Scriptures" (John 5:39), particularly showing this: though their blood is sought as a testimony of revenge, their words will not be denied.

Necessarily set amid these matters, we want you to be confident that we spoke before out of certainty. I have the witness of God, I have that of the apostles, I have that of the prophets; if I seek out that which characterizes the Christian person, if (I seek) that which characterizes the ecclesiastical disposition, if (I seek) that which characterizes God Christ, I find those who preach God. I find those who prophesy. It is not fear, it is faith, because we have cherished that which is better and have rejected that which is worse. Diligence has kept certain books outside the body of the canon, preserving them for the labor of reading and for the confirmation of those texts that we read inside the canon. Indeed, it is through these certain books that the greater part of heretical senses has waged war against the Catholic, thereby showing that they prefer to falsify, rather than to hold true. Yet it is by preserving one or other of such books that we might uphold that justly apostolic opinion that "every spirit that denies Jesus is not from God, and every spirit who confesses Jesus Christ from God" (cf. 1 John 4:3, 2); so is it written: "no one indeed says in the Holy Spirit 'Jesus is cursed,' and no one says unless they are in the Holy Spirit 'Jesus is Lord'" (1 Cor 12:3).

Citing once more from the ancient monuments of books: When the devil was jealous of the witness (*testimonium*) of the Scriptures, it was not enough that Jerusalem was captured, that the altar of the Lord polluted, and that the Temple had been destroyed, but since it was easy for humans to reconstruct with their hands that which had been originally built by their hands, the Ark of the Covenant (*arca testimonii*) was burned, since the devil knew that human nature plagued by the world might easily lose faith if it did not have the testimonies of the Scriptures for the

preaching of the divine name. But the nature of the divine mystery shines brighter than that of the devil; because of this, in order that God might be able to demonstrate this fact to humanity, he desired that Ezra be preserved, who rewrote those items that had been burned (4 Ezra 14). Now if we truly believe that these were burned, so, too, we believe they were rewritten. Although it may be read in the canon that the covenant was burned, it is not read in the canon that it was rewritten by Ezra; nevertheless, since after the covenant was burned, it could not have been restored unless it was written down, we correctly give faith to that book that claims Ezra as its author: even if it is not established in the canon, it should be retained as a record of the restored divine covenant with veneration appropriate to such matters. There also we read it written that the Holy Spirit penetrated the heart of the elect person from the beginning of the age, guiding the actions of humans and their affairs; so, because the form of the text was hardly retained by human memory, it reconstructed all those acts that we read about and that seem to have been rewritten from human memory, recapitulated in an orderly form while he wrote, "speaking by day and not silent by night" (4 Ezra 14:43). At this it seems right to say: Yes! That's it!

THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECT SEEKS GOD EVERYWHERE

So then, I ask, are we guilty for having read a few bits of this material? We would be more criminal if we did not read all the things that were prophesied concerning God! I have no doubt what will be said by one of those who cherish malicious subterfuge more than faith: "Seek nothing more! It suffices for you to read what is written in the canon!" Against the words of that one, whose natural human intellect easily seeks leisure, rather than toil, I would stand up, if the witness of the evangelist Luke were not pressing down upon me in the Acts of the Apostles, saying: "Equally inquisitive, they consulted the Scriptures to see if it were so" (cf. Acts 17:11), about what Paul had said to them. Their understanding is what I de-

sire: I recognize that the witness of prophecy has been transmitted in the canon. Although it would indeed be a crime not to have believed the apostolic speeches, nevertheless it is no damnable guilt to shore up support for the affirmation of the faith of Scriptures, and there is no reproof of the devil in this that might render us unfit. Divine speech could not (since everything it had said belonged to it) speak a text about another when speaking about itself, but only report about itself; saying therefore that "it is written" necessarily offers a responsible basis for our reading. Nor did it set aside its own prophesied glory, nor its grace that was prophesied as the due of future generations. Concerning both these things "I am under obligation" (Rom 1:14): so I may read about the one who prophesied for divine commemoration, and I may believe in God.

Who indeed would not take delight in the fact that Christ was prophesied before the ages, not just by a few, but by all? And who would appraise divine greatness so cheaply—both that God was born by such an incredible miracle, having a virginal mother in the service of the divine word for conception and birth, and that he suffered in the dwelling place of a body—that he would think that the mysteries of the divine sense did not cry out in every land and in all people, as it is written: "every tongue will confess that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11)?

And so whoever would deny these things, I know for certain that he will receive the wage of that Pharisee, who, at the coming of the Lord, when the whole crowd cried out with the apostles joining in: "Hosanna, Hosanna in the heavens, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," said they ought to be stopped (Luke 19:37–79). Even though doubtless they could not be silent at the coming glory of the Lord. But let the one of that stripe see what the Lord said: "Even if they keep silent, the stones will shout out" (Luke 19:40). So let him understand that if the hardness of naturally dead stones is animated into the use of human speech to give witness to God, how is the tongue of the saints closed off, which is pressed to confession both by its very nature and by divine grace? If indeed the gentile souls, hindered by the

forms of idols and divine mummeries, speak of the flying movement of birds and the paths of feathers driven by winds as omens for the foreknowledge of future events, as well as the veins of entrails throbbing with the life force of earthly spirits, while they give faith to demons, (and) they affirm that the innards of animals that are about to die at any moment foretell the future, and they beseech the dead about life, saying to the stone "rise up" and to the tree "keep watch" (Hab 2:19), thus zeal is called sacrilege from this, wisdom is named ignorance for those who do not know that by these actions, they "sacrifice not to God but to a demon" (1 Cor 10:20). If in such actions there is any glory for that one, how can we reject the divine prophecies of the saints and, when we are obedient to our own wills, how can we look askance at those who have prophesied God and still retain the apostolic precepts that say: "do not extinguish the spirit, do not reject the prophecies" (1 Thess 5:19, 20)?

PRISCILLIAN'S FAITH ACTS AS HIS GUIDE

And thus, since "where there is freedom there is Christ" (2 Cor 3:17), allow me to proclaim alone before all that "I, too, have the spirit of the Lord" (1 Cor 7:40); let the devil's jealousy cease! The Lord was proclaimed by all, Christ was prophesied by all, by Adam, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and by all the others "who have prophesied from the beginning of the world" (Tob 4:13). And I dare to say that the devil is jealous: every human knew that God was coming in the flesh, and I shall not even speak of those whom, in the disposition of his generation, God established in the gospel that they would surpass the faith of divine nature and the collection of the canon. For just as the penalty is greater for those who know and deny, so, too, complete glory means not only to believe in one's heart, but also not to deny glory "in the confession of the mouth" (Rom 10:10), as David says: "I believed and because of this I spoke" (Ps 116:10). On this point also the apostle Peter⁵ (aware of the reason for the lim-

⁵ Priscillian means, of course, Paul, not Peter.

ited number of the books in the canon and still relaxing the freedom to read those things written concerning Christ), when he sent a letter to the Colossians, said: "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; also you should read that which was sent to the Laodiceans" (Col 4:16). Now is it a fact that the apostle was condemned among you, he who allowed his followers to read a letter that was not in the canon? Do you care more about yourselves than about Christ, and so you bend your wills to extend even an unjust judgment in the matters decided before you?

Indeed, for all of us who believe in Christ God, the fullness of faith is the day of the Lord, and the law of the apostolic life is the form of the command (since if "faith comes from hearing, hearing moreover is established through faith" [Rom 10:17]), but is the hope of future things established for us if the things that used to be taught as written or said about Christ and preserved in memory, not ever rejected by the apostles but read [by them], are now not only rejected by us but condemned as sacrilege, although it is written in the Gospel: "whosoever has done a miracle in my name, he cannot speak ill of me" (Mark 9:39)?

On that count, furthermore, I do not refuse, nor do I reject those things that should not be communicated to ignorant ears, lest—since many things have been

falsified by heretics—as they seek a divine work under the famous names of prophets, in the words of the saints, they rush into the pit of heretical falsehood, for they do not maintain the discipline of apostolic speech to its fullest. But not on account of the villainy of the worst men should the prophecy of saints be condemned. For all heresies have persuasively made the perverse bases of their miserable sects through the interpretation of all the Scriptures, and all of them affirm that they believe that Christ is God and that they are Christians. So divine Scripture is not to be condemned, or the faith of Christ repudiated, or the name of Christian refused, just because they wish to push their own sacrileges, and so they dare to usurp the fellowship of the Catholic name. If indeed we wish to condemn everything they read, we would also have to condemn those books that are set in the canon! So it is better to condemn deadly interpretation and sacrilegious behavior, rather than divine Scripture, since it is written: "to you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; to others, however, I shall speak in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not hear" (Mark 4:11–12). To me, certainly, a servant of the Lord contemplating these matters, remains this one idea, that "who does not love Christ, let him be anathema. *Maranatha*" (1 Cor 16:22).

53. Augustine: On Christian Doctrine

As a young man, Augustine had been disappointed with the literary quality of the Bible, deeming it vulgar and crude in comparison with the Latin classics he studied and taught. As a bishop, preaching the word of God from the Scriptures, Augustine endeavored to demonstrate how the Bible could function as the foundation of a Christian culture, a system of signs and meanings that gave the world a definitively Christian shape. The result of this quest was his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*, which he began as a newly ordained bishop in 396 but did not complete until 426, a few years before his death.

On Christian Doctrine raises theoretical and practical questions of reading, centered on biblical interpretation. In this excerpt from the second book, Augustine emphasizes the im-

From *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part I, Volume 11: *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1996. Used with permission.

portance of the text itself. Augustine provides a list of Old and New Testament books that matches the later, medieval canon. His stance on apocrypha is mild (he was less sanguine in other, antiheretical writings): apocrypha are dangerous only in proportion to the mental fragility of their readers. As a Latin-speaking Christian of the fourth and fifth centuries (Augustine complained notoriously in his *Confessions* about his inability to learn Greek), Augustine faced the additional problem of textual transmission and translation, of choosing from among myriad Latin versions. He was uncomfortable with the solution proposed by his elder contemporary, Jerome, who attempted to produce an entirely new translation from the original Hebrew and Greek. Instead, Augustine constructs a notion of textual tradition, guided by past experts, the hand of God, and the watchful eye of the learned interpreter.

(8) But let us turn our attention back to that third stage,¹ about which we had undertaken to set out and discuss whatever the Lord might suggest. So then, the really accomplished investigators of the divine Scriptures will be those who have begun by reading them all and becoming familiar with them at least by reading, if not yet by understanding them all—just those, that is, that are called canonical because the others are best left to be read by people who are well instructed in the truths of faith, or else they may so enthrall the feebler spirits that they delude them with dangerous falsehoods and fancies to the prejudice of sound understanding. But for the canonical Scriptures, they should follow the authority of the majority of the Catholic churches, among which, of course, are those that have the privilege of being apostolic sees and have received letters from the apostles.

They will hold, therefore, to this standard with the canonical Scriptures, that they will put those accepted by all the Catholic churches before those that some do not accept; among these that are not accepted by all, they will prefer those accepted by most of them, and by the greater ones among them, to those that fewer churches and ones of lesser authority regard as canonical. Should they, however, discover that different ones are held to be canonical by the majority of churches from those so regarded by the greater churches—though this would be very un-

likely—I consider that both should be regarded as having equal authority.

But the whole canon of the Scriptures, which we are saying is to be the subject of our consideration, consists of the following books: The five of Moses, that is, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and one book of Joshua, son of Nun, one of Judges, one little book that is called Ruth, which seems rather to belong to the beginning of the Kings; then the four of Kings and the two of the Chronicles, which do not follow on, but run parallel beside them. This is all history, which contains the sequence of times and the order of events. There are other historical books, which are not connected to each other or to this order and sequence, such as Job and Tobit and Esther and Judith, and the two books of the Maccabees, and the two of Ezra, which do seem more to follow the order of that history which ended with Kings or Chronicles.

Next the prophets, among whom are David's one book of psalms and three books of Solomon: Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. The fact is, those two books, one of which is entitled Wisdom and the other Ecclesiasticus, are said to be Solomon's only from a certain resemblance to the others because it is the constant tradition that Jesus son of Sirach wrote them, but since they have been thought worthy of being accorded canonical authority, they are to be counted among the prophetic books. The rest are the books of those who are properly called prophets, each single book of the twelve prophets, which joined together, since they have never been separated, are treated as one book; the

¹ Augustine has just enumerated six stages by which a Christian comes to scriptural meaning: fear, piety, knowledge, courage, counsel, and understanding.

names of the prophets being these: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; next, the four prophets, each with his greater volume, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel. To these forty-four books is confined the authority of the Old Testament.

But in the New Testament, there are the four books of the gospel, according to Matthew, according to Mark, according to Luke, according to John; the fourteen letters of the apostle Paul, to the Romans, to the Corinthians two, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Thessalonians two, to the Colossians, to Timothy two, to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two letters of Peter, three of John, one of Jude, and one of James; the one book of the Acts of the Apostles, and the one book of the Apocalypse of John.

(9) What those who fear God and have a docile piety are looking for in all these books is the will of God. The first step in this laborious search, as I have said, is to know these books, and even if not yet so as to understand them, all the same by reading them to commit them to memory or, at least, not to be totally unfamiliar with them. Next, those things that are put clearly in them, whether precepts about how to live or rules about what to believe, are to be studied with the utmost care and diligence; the greater your intellectual capacity, the more of these you will find. The fact is, after all, that in the passages that are put plainly in Scripture is to be found everything that touches upon faith and good morals, that is to say hope and charity, which we dealt with in the previous book.

Only then, however, after acquiring some familiarity with the actual style of the divine Scriptures, should one proceed to try to open up and unravel their obscurities, in such a way that instances from the plainer passages are used to cast light on the more obscure utterances, and the testimony of some undoubted judgments is used to remove uncertainties from those that are more doubtful. In this matter, what is of the greatest value is a good memory; if this is wanting, these instructions cannot be of any great assistance.

(10) Now there are two reasons why texts are not understood: if they are veiled in signs that are either

unknown or ambiguous. Signs, for their part, can be either proper or metaphorical. They are said to be proper when they are introduced to signify the things they were originally intended for, as when we say "ox" to signify the animal that everyone who shares the Latin language with us calls by this name. They are metaphorical when the very things that we signify with their proper words are made use of to signify something else, as when we say "ox," and by this syllable understand the animal that is usually so called, but again by that animal understand the evangelist, whom Scripture itself signified, according to the apostle's interpretation of *You shall not muzzle the ox that threshes the corn* (1 Cor 9:9; Deut 25:4).

(11) The best remedy for ignorance of proper signs is the knowledge of languages, and in addition to the Latin language, the people whom I have now undertaken to advise have need of the two other languages of the divine Scriptures, namely, Hebrew and Greek, so that they can have recourse to the earlier versions whenever doubt about the meaning of a text is raised by the infinite variety of Latin translations. Although we also often find Hebrew words untranslated in the books of the Bible, like Amen and Alleluia and Raca (cf. Matt 5:22) and Hosanna, and any others there may be. Of these some, though they could have been translated, have been traditionally kept as they are because of their more sacred associations, like Amen and Alleluia; while of others it is said that they could not be translated, like the other two I mentioned. There are some words, after all, in particular languages that defy translation into any other language. And this is above all the case with exclamations, which are words indicating some emotion of the spirit, rather than any part of a connected sentence. These two, in fact, are generally considered to be such words; they tell us that Raca is a word expressing ill-natured contempt, while Hosanna expresses joy.

But it is not because of these few words, which can be very easily noted and asked about, that knowledge of these languages is necessary, but because of the variety of the translations, as has been said. Those who translated the Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek can be counted; this is certainly not true of

Latin translators. The fact is that whenever in the early days of the faith a Greek codex came into anybody's hands, and he felt that he had the slightest familiarity with each language, he rushed in with a translation.

(12) In fact, this state of affairs has been more of a help than a hindrance to the understanding of the Scriptures, provided only that readers are not casual and careless. The examination of several versions has often been able to throw light on obscurer passages, as with that text of the prophet Isaiah (58:7), where one translation has, *And do not despise the household of your seed*, and another has, *And do not despise your own flesh*. Each corroborates the other; that is, each can be explained by the other, because, on the one hand, flesh could be taken in the proper sense, so that the reader could suppose he was being warned not to despise his own body, while on the other, the household of one's seed could be understood metaphorically as Christians, born spiritually from the same seed of the word as ourselves.

But now, putting the minds of the translators together, we hit upon the more probable meaning that we are being commanded, according to the literal sense, not to despise our blood relations, because when you connect the household of your seed with your flesh, it is your blood relations that immediately occur to you. I am sure that that is what the apostle meant when he said, *If I may by any means provoke my own flesh to jealousy, in order to save some of them* (Rom 11:14); that is, that by being jealous of those who had believed, they themselves might come to believe as well. By his flesh, clearly, he meant the Jews, because of their blood relationship.

Again, there is that text of the same prophet Isaiah, *Unless you believe, you shall not understand*, which another translator rendered, *Unless you believe, you shall not endure* (Isa 7:9). Which of these two, though, followed the original words one cannot tell, unless one reads copies of the original language. But all the same, for those who are shrewd readers, something important is being suggested by each version. It is difficult, after all, for translators to differ so much from each other, that they do not come close to some extent. So then, understanding refers to ever-

lasting sight, while faith in temporal things as in a kind of cradle is, so to say, nourishing little ones on milk, now, however, *we are walking by faith and not by sight* (2 Cor 5:7), but unless we walk by faith, we shall never be able to reach the sight that does not pass away but endures, when with our understanding purified we cleave to Truth. And that is why one translator says, *Unless you believe, you shall not endure*, while the other has, *Unless you believe, you shall not understand*.

And translators are often misled by ambiguities in the original language, when they are insufficiently familiar with the context, and translate the meaning of a word that is clearly far from the author's mind. Thus some versions have, *Their feet are sharp to shed blood*; *oxys*, you see, in Greek can mean both "sharp" and "swift." So the one who got the author's meaning was the one who translated, *Their feet are swift to shed blood* (Rom 3:15), while the other went wrong by following in the wrong direction a sign that points two ways. And in such cases we have to do, not with obscurity, but with falsehood; so here another condition has to be met, the requirement being to correct, rather than simply to understand, copies of such versions. Here, too, is another instance: because the Greek *moschos* means "calf," some translators failed to understand that *moscheumata* means "seedlings," and so they translated it as "calfings." This mistake has indeed infected so many copies that you can scarcely find one with the other reading. And yet the meaning is as plain as can be because the next words make it quite clear; after all, *Bastard seedlings will not strike deep roots* (Wis 4:3) makes better sense than *calfings*, which walk on the ground with four feet and do not strike roots. The rest of the context in this place also confirms this translation.

(13) But the proper meaning of a passage, which several translators attempt to express, each according to his capacity and judgment, can be definitely ascertained only from an examination of it in the language they are translating from, and translators frequently deviate from the author's meaning if they are not particularly learned. So one should either aim at a knowledge of those languages from which the Scriptures have come to their Latin versions or else get

hold of translations that have been the most strictly literal, word for word, renderings of the original, not because they are sufficient in themselves, but because they can help one to control the freedom, or even the mistakes, of those translators who have preferred to follow the meanings, rather than the words, of the authors. It is often the case, after all, that not only single words but also whole phrases are transposed that simply cannot go into correct Latin usage if one wishes to stick to the standards of the old classical authors who spoke the languages. Sometimes this in no way prevents one from understanding a passage, but still it does offend those who find greater pleasure in the substance of the things said, if a certain propriety is preserved in the signs by which they are conveyed.

What are called solecisms, after all, are simply cases where words are put together without observing the rules followed by our predecessors, whose manner of writing and speaking was not without authority. I mean, whether you say in Latin *inter homines* or *inter hominibus*, or *between you and me* or *between you and I*,² makes no difference to our ability to get the meaning. Again, what else is a barbarism but the spelling or pronunciation of a word in a way that was not accepted by received authors of the past? I mean, whether you pronounce *ignoscere* with a long or short e in the third syllable or *forgive* to rhyme with "hive" or "sieve,"² is of little concern to those who are begging God to forgive their sins, however they may manage to pronounce that word. What else, then, is correctness of speech but the observation of a manner that is foreign to one, which has been established by the authority of past speakers?

But for all that, people are the more readily offended by such instances the less sense they have, and they show less sense the more they wish to be thought learned or well educated, not by knowledge of things that build up, but by knowledge of signs, which it is very hard to avoid being puffed up by.

² These English examples were inserted by the translator for clarity and are roughly parallel to Augustine's examples of solecism and barbarism.

since even knowledge of the substance of things can give us swollen heads and stiff necks, unless we submit them to the Lord's yoke. After all, is one in the least prevented from understanding this passage because it is written as follows: *What is the land in which these people reside upon it, whether it is good or bad, and what are the cities in which they dwell in them* (Num 13:19)? I consider this is just a form of expression derived from a foreign language, rather than any hint of some deeper meaning. There is also that mistake we cannot now remove from the mouths of our psalm-singing congregations, *But on him my sanctification floriēt (shall flourish)* (Ps 132:18), which in no way detracts from the sense; still, the better educated listener would prefer it to be corrected, and *florebit* substituted for *floriēt*, and the only thing that stops such a correction being made is the habit the singers have got into. So these things can even be easily shrugged aside if you are not fussy about avoiding little errors that do not get in the way of a proper understanding.

But as for this that the apostle says, *The folly of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men* (1 Cor 1:25), if someone had wished to preserve the Greek idiom, and instead of saying, *Quod stultum est Dei sapientius est hominibus, et quod infirmum est Dei fortius est hominibus*, had said *Quod stultum est Dei sapientius est hominum, et quod infirmum est Dei fortius est hominum*, a sharp-eyed reader might have got the right sense, but the less quick-witted might either not have understood at all or else have even got a back-to-front meaning out of it because such an expression is not only bad Latin, it is also ambiguous, so that it could be taken to mean that the folly of men and the weakness of men seems to be wiser or stronger than the folly or weakness of God, though even the correct *sapientius hominibus* is not without the possibilities of ambiguity because only the whole sentence can tell us whether *hominibus* is in the dative or the ablative case; so it would be better to say, *Sapientius est quam homines* and *fortius est quam homines*.

(14) But we shall talk about ambiguous signs later on; for the time being, we are dealing with unknown ones, of which there are two sorts, as far as words are

concerned, because it is either an unknown word or an unknown expression that causes a reader to get stuck. If these come from foreign languages, their meaning can either be sought from people who speak those languages, or the languages can be learned, if you have the leisure or the knack, or several translations can be compared. But if it is some words or expressions of our own language that we are ignorant of, we can get to know them through the habit of reading or listening. None, certainly, are to be more carefully committed to memory than those words and expressions that we do not know; so that when we meet someone more learned whom we can ask about them, or when what goes before or what follows in such a reading can show what their force is, and what is signified by what we do not know, then with the aid of memory we can easily notice and learn.

Though such, as a matter of fact, is the power of habit even for learning, that people who have been as it were reared and brought up on the Scriptures are more surprised at other nonscriptural forms of expression and think they are less proper Latin than the ones they have learned in the scriptures, which are not found in authors of classical Latin. Here, too, the examination and discussion of a variety of versions that can be compared are of the greatest help—provided only that they are not full of mistakes. The first thing, in fact, to which those who wish to know the divine Scriptures should devote their careful attention and their skill is the correction of their copies, so that the uncorrected ones give way to the corrected ones, when they derive, that is, from one and the same type of translation.

(15) Among the versions themselves, however, the *Itala* is to be preferred to the rest because it sticks more closely to the actual words, while at the same time has a clear perception of the meaning. And for correcting any Latin versions at all, Greek ones should be employed, among which, as regards the Old Testament, that of the Seventy Translators has the greatest authority. These are said, throughout all the more learned churches, to have been so directed

by the Holy Spirit in their translations that while being so many, they had but a single mouth. If, as the story goes, and many by no means unreliable authors declare, they were all kept apart from each other in separate rooms, and when they had finished their translations nothing was to be found in any of their copies that was not there in exactly the same words and the same order as in all the others, who could possibly put any other version on a level with such an authority, let alone prefer one to it? If, on the other hand, they collaborated in order to speak with one voice by the common consideration and judgment of them all, even in that case no single individual, however well qualified, may decently aspire to correct what was agreed to among so many venerable and learned scholars.

For this reason, even if things are found in Hebrew codices that differ from what the Seventy have put, in my judgment they should give way to what divine providence has achieved through these men, and that is that the books which the Jewish people were unwilling to share with others, whether out of a religious sense or out of envy, were made available by the Lord, using the royal authority of Ptolemy, to the nations that were going to believe. And so it can well be the case that these translated the Hebrew in such a way as the Holy Spirit, who was guiding them and gave them all one mouth, judged would be most suitable for the gentiles. But still, as I said above, comparing their text with that of translators who stuck more closely to the words of the original is often useful for explaining the meaning.

So then, Latin volumes of the Old Testament, as I had started to say, should be corrected where necessary according to the authority of the Greek ones, and particularly of the Seventy who are held to have translated in unanimous agreement. But as for the books of the New Testament, if there are any hesitations about the text because of the variety of Latin translations, nobody doubts that one should bow to the authority of the Greek texts, and of those especially that are to be found in the more learned and careful churches.