Louis G. Kelly

To Pammachius:
On the Best Method of Translating
(St. Jerome, Letter 57)

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
Louis G. Kelly
University of Ottawa

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PREFACE

The canonization of Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus, (348?-420?) and his subsequent acceptance by the eighth-century Christians as a Doctor of the Church would have brought ironical smiles from his contemporaries, and perhaps a grin of satisfaction from Pope Damasus (fl.366-384), who was, at times, one of his few friends in high places. Like many who have been recognized as turning points in the intellectual and spiritual development of Christianity, St Jerome vas a most controversial figure in his own time. He combined outstanding scholarship and enthusiastic asceticism with a notable lack of tact, and his command of invective and satire, an important element in his teaching techniques, was turned towards the defence of orthodoxy, and at times of himself.

Though the canon of his works includes commentaries on Scripture, and a large number of letters on Church discipline and dogma, his reputation was assured by his translation of the Scriptures into Latin, the *Vulgata*. This is only partially an original translation: a large part of it is a revision of the *Vetus Latina*, a corpus of Latin versions of the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament dating from the second century A.D. The canon of his works also includes translations of Origen (185?-254?), and certain Greek theologians of varying importance.

It was from his attempts to combat the influence of Origen in the North African Church that this letter to Pammachius arose. In his early days as a monk Jerome had become friendly with Rufinus (340?-410?). They shared an interest in the works of Origen, and translated many of them into Latin. When Rufinus came under the influence of Origen's heretical tendencies, Jerome and Rufinus parted company, and there ensued a long running battle in which Jerome, by his wit, superior command of language, and lack of attention to his enemies' feelings, scored the most wounding points. The pretext of Letter 57 was a letter written in about 394 to John, Bishop of Jerusalem, by Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis. This was an accusation of heresy, and a call to repentance. At the request of a unilingual friend, Jerome translated this letter into Latin: his text appears as Letter 57 in Jerome's correspondence. A copy was obtained fraudulently by a sympathizer of Rufinus, conveyed to him, and ruthlessly analysed in public. Owing to his fairly free style of translation, Jerome was accused of falsification: Rufinus and his circle had the grace to leave to the public the inference as to whether St Jerome was incompetent or malicious. In 395-396 St Jerome defended himself in this letter to his friend Pammachius, confident that it would be circulated as a counterblast.

Jerome sees two issues in translation: the absolute necessity of transferring the content into the target language; and the attainment of a style in the target language that reproduces the atmosphere

of the original text. In discussing the first issue, Jerome refers to the content of the original text as *veritas* (truth). The choice of this word may have been governed by his constant preoccupation with divine truth as revealed in Scripture: indeed all the occurences I have seen have referred to the original texts of the Scriptures. It is obvious that St Jerome shares St Augustine's view of the translator as a teacher: a view which puts into perspective his concern with textual criticism, and with comparing the Septuagint (which he calls "the standard translation") with the Hebrew. However, conscious as he was that many of his colleagues had made serious mistakes in translation, he does not follow his friend St Augustine in postulating divine inspiration for the translator: an ironical note, considering the claims that were made on his own behalf later.

To understand his attitude to the stylistic issue, we must go back to the classical age, and more particularly to Cicero (106-43 B.C.) and Quintillian (30-100?), whose theories and practice Jerome knew intimately. The classical attitude to translation is well summed up by Quintillian:

> "I do not want a translation to be merely a paraphrase but a contest and rivalry over the same sense." (*Institutes of Oratory* X.v.4)

The essential point here is the creative aspect of translation. In Roman literary tradition there was no clear separation between translation and other types of literary creation. The first major figure who tried to separate the two seems to have been Cicero, but the old practice of using translation as a tool of literary creativity can be traced through Vergil and Horace to at least Milton, and probably a good deal further.

The preclassical dramatists who are so indignantly cited in this letter (see #5) used translation as the central technique. This was not accurate translation in the modern sense of the term, but translation which, though in the main textually accurate, was put into a new perspective by juxtaposition vith new material and, at times, internal rearrangement. Obviously, this technique would not work unless the rhetorical norms of Latin were observed in a way that would reproduce the stylistic level of the original Greek. These dramatists had to tread between two dangers: plagiarism, which was utterly detested by Roman critics, and imitation, which was egually detested by creative writers. Terence (190-159? B.C.) was accused of both at different times: in the prologue to the *Andria*, he defends himself against a charge of over-free translation, and in the prologue to the *Eunuchus*, he refutes charges against plagiarism and imitative translation. The same concerns are found in the poet Horace (65-8 B.C.), whom Jerome quotes in his blast against literal translation (#5).

But, though Jerome was willing to use these authorities as subsidiary evidence, he based his case on the more solid foundation of Cicero, who saw translation as an independent genre but one subject to the rules of rhetoric. True, in a theatrical recitation of a famous nightmare (Letter 24) Jerome had renounced Cicero as a pagan master unfitting for a Christian; but he was to congenial an influence to lay aside entirely. There was a strong fellow-feeling in Jerome's admiration: he shared Cicero's biting humour and intense enjoyment of language; and in his present situation, he saw enough parallels to close his attack on Rufinus by comparing it to the Philippics, Cicero's senatorial attack on Anthony in the days before the Civil war.

But, more to our purpose, Jerome shared with Cicero the classical belief that subject-matter dictated style. Early Christanity had been rather scornful of the rhetorical niceties of the classical world: there are touches of this in #12 of this letter, and it can be traced back through writers like St John Chrysostom (Homily 3 on I Corinthians 1) and Origen himself (see footnote 21). For the Christian rhetor then, style was determined by audience characteristics; so that in a writer like Jerome we have a whole range of styles, from the fairly polished style of his letters to aristocrates to the relatively popular style of the Vulgate, which was meant for the wide consumption by all types of Christians, educated and uneducated.

Jerome's old-fashioned approach to translation was, thus, iconoclastic; and we can see in him one of the last movements of the classical impulse in translation before the humanist movement of the fifteenth century. his main principle is set out very clearly in Letter 106 to Sunnia and Fretella on the translation of the Psalms:

> "For the same rule that we have often laid down, is to be followed in translation: where there is no damage to the sense, the euphony and the properties of the language into which we are translating are to be observed."

We should balance this against his preface to the Pentateuch where he speaks of translating "with the same spirit". This is, as far as is known, the first use of this extremely troublesome critical concept in translation. Jerome was conscious that style coloured the message, so that faulty transference of style could mean distortion of both the connotative and denotative elements of the message. What is remarkable in this letter is the casuistry he brings to bear to prove that this sort of freedom is part of the Christian tradition as well. Ancient authors tended to quote from memory:

verification of a reference was a difficult business, given the nature of ancient books. The evangelists were no exception. And Jerome argues from this to show that free translation was not forbidden by Christian precedent. Likewise, he makes capital of the confusion among the various manuscript versions of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, and moreover, does pick up several places where there is considerable variation between Greek, Hebrew and Latin.

Hence we find Cicero and Horace as uneasy bed-fellows of the evangelists; and a case for a certain type of translation based on an attempt to reread classical norms with Christian eyes. Owing to the needs of the moment he argues only half his case: his classical sensitivity to paraphrase comes through in a wry comment he makes in his preface to the Books of Samuel:

> "And when you have understood what you did not understand before, think of me as a translator, if you are well-disposed; if you are ill-disposed, I am then a paraphraser. In any case, I am not at all aware of having changed anything from the authentic Hebrew text."

Little of this aspect of translation appears in Letter 57: there he is more concerned with showing that literal translation is, to a certain extent, falsification of the text. At the time in which he was writing paraphrase was not the enemy, as it had been during the classical period. The whole tenor of Letter 57 shows that he was fighting a rearguard action against literal translation. In his comment on Ephesians I.i.4 he has a provocative statement on why literal translation is not possible:

> "Hence,because of the poverty of our language and the strangeness of the matter, and, as certain people say, the features which make Greek a more graceful and comprehensive language, we shall try, not to translate word for word, which is impossible, but to explain the force of each word by some circumlocution." (*PL* XXVI. 466B)

If we ignore, for the moment, the traditional Roman awe for the achievement of the Greeks, we can link this statement with the concern expressed by St Augustine in the *De doctrina christiana* and *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, for problems of matching the semantic and metalinguistic resources of lanquages. Though the term is nowhere mentioned in Letter 57**,** nor, indeed in any of Jerome's writings, Quintillian's concept of *aemulatio* (rivalery) was never far below the surface: we can infer

it from the preface to Eusebius (#5), Evagrius's preface (#6), and the extraordinary abuse heaped on Ruffinus in #12 with its copious allusions to classical authority.

There is little in Jerome that would allow us to draw a conclusion about his actual perception of method. In the preface to Ezekiel there is a tantalizing sentence:

> "Read this, and compare it to my translation. It was written in rhetorical units [per cola scriptus et commata], and carries the sense clearly over to the reader."

We may be witnessing here the birth of the theory of the unit of translation; but what is important to our present purpose is that this quotation underlines the classical roots of Jerome's practice. Examination of his translations do indicate that he translated by spans of words, treating phrases and sentences as units from which he derived units in Latin with differing internal structure

Classicist as he was, Jerome had to be conscious of the problems set for him by the Christian tradition in translating. In #5 he claims that, except in Scripture, he translates sense for sense; and in the Preface to the Book of Esther he says, "....verbum e verbo pressius transtuli [I translated exactly word for word]." Examination of the Scripture text shows that his claim is not quite founded: true, he does translate more closely in Scripture than in other writings, but there are considerable allowances for structural differences between Greek and Latin, and some attempt to get a flowing style in Scripture. What is clear is that he does not allow himself the full range of liberties that he takes in other texts. Yet there is little contradiction between his practice in Scripture and his method in other works. It had been a classical tenet that the style of the original set the style in the translation. The Greek and Hebrew Bible used a popular style, so that an equivalent style was mandatory by classical precedent in the Latin translation. Thus, Jerome could salve his Ciceronian conscience, while at the same time conforming to popular prejudice, by explaining away the unpolished style of his translation as being due to religious scruple, and also as conforming to the style of the Greek. This is corroborated by his adoption of the traditional arguments justifying the unrhetorical style of the Greek Bible (see #12). Yet, most of his references to translating sense for sense come from his Biblical prefaces. One can see in this question the conflict between classical and Christian standards that is so forcibly expressed in the account of his abnegation of classical studies.

Despite his many enemies, Jerome's reputation remained, and actually improved, after his death. By 555, his reputation was such that, in founding the *Vivarium*, a centre for Patristic studies

in Calabria, the Roman Senator Cassiodorus, could propose him as a model to his monks. Though Jerome was honoured during the Middle Ages, his principles of translation were not consistently followed. The balance was redressed by Erasmus, who looked to him for inspiration, and the Erasmian approach to Biblical exegesis and translation was closely patterned on St Jerome. It would, however, be saying too much to claim that Jerome's principles were consistently practised during the Renaissance. Many of the translations of the time would have been too racy for even his taste. But we can see his ideas in Luther, especially in the *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen* (1530). It is during the nineteenth century that Jerome's ideas were again widely promulgated after the rather astounding excesses that were committed in the name of translation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The movement seems to have begun, however, in a sort of protest movement in the mid-seventeenth century: scholars like Daniel Huet (1661) protested against the prevailing exaltation of the target language over the sense and manner of the original, and we can trace a line of dissent culminating in George Campbell's *Four Gospels*, published in Aberdeen in 1789. This chastened approach was fostered right through the nineteenth century by scholar-translators like Conington and Burnouf. Interest in St Jerome himself is shown by a number of theses emerging from German universities at the end of the nineteenth century.

Much of the modern approach to translation follows Jerome's aims and ideals, without, however, the classical background detailed here. In a sense, modern theory *has* gone in two directions, amplifying Jerome's position. On the literary side, there is a clearer intellectual understanding of the ramifications of Jerome's position on the linkage between style and content; and one is becoming more aware of the inherent creativity in translation: one need only think of the work of Hilaire Belloc, Ronald Knox and Arrowsmith. On the linguistic side there is a multiplicity of currents; American linguists typified by Eugene Nida have investigated the mechanisms of equivalence working from the structural linguistics of the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties; other linguists have developed the ideas of Charles Bally, one of the editors of Saussure's "Cours de linguistigue générale", into a discipline known as comparative stylistics. The key book here is Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, "Stylistigue comparée du français et de l'anglais" (1958). Yet a third current, represented by J.C. Catford's "*A Linguistic Theory of Translation*" (1965), works from the postulates of the Firthian school, based in Great Britain. The effort here has been aimed at seeking a scientific explanation for the linguistic means a translator uses to transfer his content.

As for the present translation, the text used is that of Isidore Hilberg, published in the *Corpus ecclesiasticorum latinorum*. I have taken some liberties with Hilberg's punctuation, and

compared him against the other editions cited. The quotations from Scripture have been checked against the Greek text, and against Jerome's Vulgate. The spelling of Scriptural names is that of the New English Bible. To avoid an indigestible nunber of footnotes, I have identified refferences to classical literature and the Bible in text. I have footnoted only where an explanation of classical references or of contemporary allusions seems necessary, or where I have considered that a close rendering of the Latin would lead to obscurity. I have tried to follow St Jerome's example, and translate with the freedom he allowed himself. If this attracts the attention of a modern Rufinus, I have only myself to blame

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To Pammachius:

On the Best Method of Translating

TEXT

1. When Paul the apostle was arraigned before King Agrippa on charges which he knew his hearer could assess at their true worth, from the first he was sure of winning his case. He began his defence by referring to his good fortune: "I count myself lucky, your Majesty, to be defending myself today before you against the charges brought by the Jews, as you have an expert knowledge of Jewish law and of the points at issue" [Acts XXVI. 2-3]. He had read in the prophets, "Blessed is he who speaks to ears that know how to listen" [Ecclesiasticus XXV.9][1]; and he knew that the effect of an orator's words are proportionate to the learning of the judge. And so, I too believe that I am fortunate, as far as the present matter is concerned, because it is to learned ears that I am to present my case against the claims of an incompetent who reproaches me with either ignorance or lack of professional honesty. It would seem that either I did not know to translate documents in another language accurately, or I refused to: the first alternative represents error, the second wrongdoing. And to preclude the unlucky chance that my accuser should vilify me in your eyes as he has already calumniated Archbishop Epiphanius – with the facile speech he applies to everything, and with the impunity he thinks is due to him in all matters – I am writing this letter to clarify the rights of the case to you and to others who see fit to respect me.

2. Almost two years ago Archbishop Epiphanius sent to John, the Bishop of Jerusalem, a letter in which he pointed out several errors in his teaching, and magnanimously invited repentance. The Palestinians eagerly acquired copies of this letter, attracted by both the reputation of the author and the elegance of his style. In my little community there was a man of some distinction, Eusebius of Cremona, who was completely ignorant of Greek. As this letter was widely discussed, and both learned and unlearned admired it for its teaching and the purity of its style, he badgered me to translate it into Latin for him, and to annotate it for easier understanding. I did as he asked. I called in a secretary, and dictated at considerable speed, noting in the margin the contents of each section. As I had done this expressly for his benefit, I asked him in return to keep his copy at home, and not to lightly make it public. This is how matters stood for eighteen months, until, by a strange conjuring

trick, the translation wandered from his desk into Jerusalem. Some imitation of a monk had played Judas, and had rifled his papers and private effects. This fellow had either been bribed, as is the common rumour, or he had done it through gratuitous malice, as the source of the bribe vainly tried to have it understood. He gave my enemies the chance to bay after me, and to pillory me among the unlearned as a fraud: I had not translated word for word; for "honourable" I had put "dearest"; and by slanted translation – a monstrous accusation – I had refused ta translate "aidesimôtaton" (most venerable). It is of trifles of this sort that my crimes consist.

3. First, before I answer charges about the translation, I want to question those who call competence malice. Where did you get your copy of the letter? Who gave it to you? By what impudence do you publish what you bought by crime? What will remain safe among men if neither desks nor walls can hide our secrets? If I were to take you to court on this charge, I would bring to bear the full rigour of the law. For, even against informers whose activities enrich the Emperor's privy purse, punishments are laid down, and while information is acted on, the informer is punished[2]. They evidently like the money and dislike the intention. Some time ago, Hesychius, a man of consular rank, for whom the Patriarch Gamaliel had the deepest enmity, was condemned to death by the Emperor Theodosius, because he had suborned Gamaliel's private secretary, and had gained access to his private papers. We read in the old histories the story of the schoolmaster who had betrayed the boys of Falerii[3]. He was bound, handed over to the boys, and sent back to those he had betrayed. The Romans would not accept a victory gained by criminal means. Fabricius was shocked to the core at the suggestion that Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, while in camp being treated for a wound, should be killed by the treachery of bis doctor. So he sent the doctor back to his master bound, to avoid sanctioning a crime, even against an enemy[4]. What the laws protect, and enemies keep sacred, what is sacrosanct in the midst of war and battle, this has been openly flouted by monks and priests of Christ to discredit me. And you know who brazenly raises his eyebrows, snaps bis fingers[5], and breezily declares: "What if he did buy it? What if he did get it by bribery? He did it for his own advantage." A fine defense for a crime! As if bandits, robbers and pirates did not do what was to their own advantage! Certainly, when Annas ard Caiaphas suborned the unhappy Judas, they did what seemed useful to them.

4. I want to write in my papers any foolish trifles I care to, comment the Scriptures, snap back at my detractors, give went to my irritation, improve my composition techniques[6], and, as it were, lay up sharpened arrows for the fight – as long as I do not make my thoughts public; and abuse, that

is, abuse that does not come to public knowledge, is not a crime. You, you would corrupt slaves, suborn your followers, and, as we read in legends, enter Dana's room in a shawer of gold[7]; and then, having concealed what you have done, you can call me a fraud, when by your very accusations you confess to a worse crime than the one you are trying to pin on me. One person calls you a heretic, another accuses you of false teachings. You are silent, you dare not answer him, you tear the translator concerned to shreds, you spread calumny about syllables. You think your whole defence lies in discrediting a silent man. Now just suppose that in the translation I had either made a slip, or missed something out – this is the main point of your case, this is your defence – are you not a heretic by the same reasoning that makes me a bad translator? And I do not say this because I know you are a heretic – let him who has accused you know, let him who has written it be sure – but because it is the height of stupidity for a person accused by somebody else to calumniate a third party, and, when his own body is riddled with wounds, to seek consolation by stabbing a sleeping man.

5. So far, I have spoken as if I had changed something in the letter, and a mere translation could contain error but not wrong-doing. Now, since the letter itself shows that nothing has been changed in the sense, no fresh matter has been added, no doctrine dreamed up, "by their understanding, do they not show that they understand nothing?" [Terence *Andria* Prol. 17][8]. While they intend to demonstrate another's ineptitude, they incontestably prove their own. Not only do I admit, but I proclaim at the top of my voice, that in translating from Greek, except from Sacred Scripture, where even the order of the words is of God's doing, I have not translated word by word, but sense for sense. In this matter my teacher is Cicero, who translaced Plato's *Protagorus*, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and two magnificent orations by Aeschines and Demasthenes, each answering the other. How much he left out, how much he added, how much he changed so that the qualities of the original language would be explained by those of his own, it is not the time to say. For me the authority itself of the translator is enough. He writes in the preface to these speeches:

> "I thought I should take up a task useful to the interested scholar, but not necessary for myself. From the Attic Greek of two most eloquent orators, Aeschines and Demosthenes, I translated two excellent orations, each answering the other. I translated, not like a hack, but in the manner of an orator, with the same point to their sentences, and the same form and shape in words congruent with our customs. In my

> view, it was not necessary to render word for word, but I kept the character and force of all the words. I did not think I was bound to count out the words for the reader, but, as it were, to pay out their value" [Cicero *De optimo genere oratorum* V. 13-14]

And then, at the end of this preface:

> "If I have translated their orations in a way that, I hope, reproduces their full vigour, that is, reasoning, style and disposition of matter, and follows the words to an extent not discordant with our customs, it is only because, even if I did not translate everything from the Greek, I nevertheless worked out a similar style of expression" [Cicero *De opt. gen.* VII.23].

Horace too, a perceptive and cultured man, enjoins, the same duty on the learned translator in his *Ars poetica* [vv. 133 et seq.]: "And you will not play the faithful translator by rendering word for word..."[9] Terence translated Menander, Plautus and Caecilius translated the ancient dramatists; did they stick fast to words, and not prefer to reproduce the authors' elegance and dignity in their translations? What you call faithful translation educated men term mindless aping.

Twenty years ago I learnt from such authorities and was then drawn into similar "errors". I certainly did not know you were going to throw it up at me when I wrote in the preface to my translation of Eusebius's *Chronicles*:

> In dealing with a foreign text, it is tempting to make extensive cuts, and difficult to recreate in the translation the impact of felicitous expressions in the foreign tongue. Something is signified by the properties of a particular word, and I do not dispose of an equivalent to bring it over[10]. And in seeking to do justice to the sense by a long periphrasis, I have difficulty in covering a distance which is quite short. I am beset by the dislocations of hyperbaton[11], differences in case usage, variety in figures of speech, and, so to speak, the genius

> of the language. If I translate according to the letter, it reads absurdly; which if necessity compels me to change something in the sentence structure or style, I will appear to have abdicated the obligations of a translator" [Eusebius *Chronicles* preface]

And after writing much more which it would be useless to quote here, I added this:

> "Now if a person who does not perceive that the grace of a language is changed in translation, let him translate Homer word for word into Latin – I will go further - let him translate Homer's poetry into prose. He will see a ridiculous progression of words, and a most eloquent poet reduced to babbling" [Eusebius *Chronicles* Preface].

6. But it may be that my own statements have little authority – though I merely wish to prove that from my youth I have always translated content, not words. Let me then quote a relevant passage from the short preface of a life of Anthony:

> "Word for word translation into another language clouds the sense, and, like uncontrolled weeds, smothers the crop. For, while the original case usages and figures of speech dominate the text, what it could have stated in pithy sentences is hardly made clear by a long periphrasis. At your request, I have translated St Anthony in such a way that this trap is avoided, and, even if some words are missing, nothing is missing from the sense. Leave it to others to smell out words and syllables, you must look for the sense [*Prologue* of Evagrius[12]].

Time will fail me if I am to detail all the evidence from those who have translated according to the sense. In the present instance, it is enough to cite St Hilary[13] who translated several homilies of Job and commentaries on the Psalms from Greek into Latin. He did not fuss over each flaccid letter, nor contort himself with the vile translation techniques of the bumbling yokel, but, as is the duty of a victor, led the sense of the text like a captive into his own language.

7. There is nothing extraordinary about this procedure in secular or ecclesiastical writers, when the translators of the Septuagint, the evangelists and the apostles, did the same thing in the sacred books. In St Mark, we read that the Lord said: “Talitha cumi.” This is commented in the text: “Which is translated: ‘My girl, I say to you, get up’” [Mark V.41]. Dare you accuse the evangelist of lying because he adds “I say to you”, when all we have in the Hebrew is, “My girl, get up?” But to make it more emphatic and to translate the nuance of urgent command he added, “I say to you.”

Let us pass to St Matthew. In the passage where the traitor, Judas, gives back the thirty pieces of silver, and it has been used to buy the potter’s field, we find: “Then what was written in Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘and they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value that had been placed on him by the sons of Israel, and bought a potter’s field with them, as the Lord has told me’” [Matthew XXVII.9-10]. This is nowhere found in Jeremiah, but in Zechariah, where different words are used in a different order. In fact, in the standard version we find:

> “And I shall say to them: ‘If you think fit, give me my wages, or hold them back.’ And they weighed out my wages as thirty pieces of silver. The Lord then said to me: ‘Put them in a melting-pot, and consider, if the assay is good, how I have been assayed by them.’ And I took the thirty pieces of silver and put them in a rnelting-pot, and sent them into the Lord’s house” [Zechariah XI. 12-13].

It is clear how this Septuagint text differs from that of the evangelist. But in the Hebrew, though the sense is the same, the words are in inverse order, and rather different:

> “And I said to them: ‘If it is good in your eyes, give me my wages; if not, say no more.’ And they weighed out my wages as thirty pieces of silver. An the Lord said to me: ‘Throw it to the statue-maker: it is a fitting value they have placed on me.’ And I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the statue-maker in the house of the Lord.”

They could accuse the apostle of falsification because he agrees with neither the Septuagint nor the Hebrew; and, what is worse, he mistakes the name for – Zechariah he puts Jeremiah. But one must not say this of a disciple of Christ, whose intention was not to hunt out words and syllables, but to make statements on doctrine.

Let us come to another text from Zechariah, which John the evangelist took direct from the Hebrew: “They shall look on the man they wounded” [John XIX.37]. In the Septuagint we read: “kai epiblepsontai pros me anth’ hôn enerchêsanto”. [Zechariah XII.10]. In the Latin versions it reads: “And they shall look at me just as at those they have derided” or “reviled”[14]. The evangelist, the Septuagint, and the current Latin translation all differ, but the variety of speech harmonises vith the unity of the spirit.

In St Matthew as well, we find the Lord predicting his desertion by the apostles, and confirming his words by citing Zechariah: “It is written, ‘I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered’” [Matthew XXVI.31]. But in the Septuagint and the Hebrew, the passage is quite different: it is not God in person who speaks, but the prophet speaking to God the Father: “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” [Zechariah XIII.71]. In this place, I know, according to the judgment of certain people, the evangelist is guilty of sacrilege, as he has dared to ascribe the prophet’s words to the person of God.

The same evangelist writes of the angel’s warning to Joseph, to take the child and his mother, and go to Egypt, where he was to remain until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord said through the prophet: “I have called my son from Egypt” [Matthew 11.15]. This does not appear in our manuscripts, but in the Hebrew text of Hosea: “Since Israel was a child, I loved him, and called called his sons out of Egypt” [Hosea XI.1]. For this passage, we have in the Septuagint: “Because Israel is a little child, I loved him and called his sons out of Egypt.” Are we to utterly repudiate those who in another fashion translate this passage which has the utmost pertinence to the revelation concerning Christ, or are we to show men some understanding according to the teaching of St James: “We all sin repeatedly. And if anybody does not sin in speech, he is a perfect man, able to control his whole body” [James III.2]?

The following passage is also found in St Matthew: “And he came and lived in the city of Nazareth, to fulfil what was said by the prophet, that he would be called a Nazarene” [Matthew 11.23]. Let the pedants and critics who disdain all scholars answer where they read this. Let them learn what Isaiah says. For in the place where we read and translate: “And a shoot will grow from the root of Jesse, and a flower will bloom from the root” [Isaiah XI.1], in the Hebrew, according to the idiom of that language, we read: “A shoot will grow from the root of Jesse, and a Nazarene will rise from his root.” Why did the Septuagint omit this? If it is not permitted to substitute one word for another, it is sacrilege to conceal or to be ignorant of a mystery af faith.

8. Let us pass to other things – the space at our disposal does not allow more extended discussion of individual points. St Matthew says: “This was all done so that the Lord would fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: ‘See, the virgin will be with child, and will bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel” [Matthew 1.22-23]. The Septuagint reads: “See, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son, and you will call him Emmanuel.” [Isaiah VII.14]. If you are going to quibble about words, *be with child* and *conceive* are certainly not the same, neither are *they will call* and *you will call*. Furthermore, we read in the Hebrew: “See, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son, and *she* will call him Emmanuel.” According to this, not Achaz, who was proved unfaithful, nor the Jews, who were to deny the Lord, but the virgin herself who was to conceive and bear the son, would call him Emmanuel.

In the same evangelist we read that Herod was worried by the visit of the wise men. He called together the scribes and priests and questioned them closely on the birthplace of the Christ. They answered: “In Bethlehem in Judea. For it is written in the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, the land of Juda, are by no means the least among the princes of Juda. From you will come a leader who is to rule my people, Israel’” [Matthew 11.5-6]. In the standard translation this passage reads: “And you, Bethlehem, the house of Ephrathah, are too insignificant to be counted among the hosts of Juda. At my call will come from you a ruler for Israel” [Micah V.2] You would wonder more at the discrepancies between the words and sentence-structure of Matthew and the Septuagint if you could see what was written in the Hebrew: “And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are tiny amidst the hosts of Juda. At my call, will come from you a ruler for Israel.” Consider phrase by phrase the passage from the evangelist, “And you, Bethlehem, the land of Juda”: for “the land of Juda”, the Hebrew reads “Ephrathah”, the Septuagint “the house of Ephrathah”. “You are by no means the least among the

princes of Juda": the Septuagint reads "you are too insignificant to be counted among the hosts of Juda"; the Hebrew "you are tiny amidst the hosts of Juda". The Hebrew and the Septuagint agree, but their sense is contrary to the Gospel text. For the evangelist says that he is not insignificant among the chiefs of Juda, but, on the contrary: "You are indeed small and unimportant. However, from you, small and unimportant as you are, will come, at my call, a leader for Israel, according to the text of the apostle: 'God chooses the weak to confound the strong'" [I Corinthians 1.27]. And then, what follows: "who is to rule (or "who is to feed") my people Israel", is clearly expressed otherwise in the prophet.

9. I have gone over all this – not to accuse the evangelists of falsehood - this is impiety typical of Celsus, Porphyry and Julian[15] – but to show up the incompetence of my detractors, and to demand from them the grace to grant me in a mere letter the latitude they concede, whether they like it or not, to the apostles in Scripture. St Mark, the disciple of St Peter, begins his gospel thus:

> "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. As it is written in the prophet Isajah: "See, I am sending before you my angel who will prepare your way. There is a voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths'" [Mark I. 1-3].

This passage is a conflation of two prophets, Malachi and Isaiah. The first part of the passage: "See, I am sending before you my angel who will prepare your way" is found at the end of Malachi [Malachi III.1]. What follows: "There is a voice of one crying in the wilderness etc." is in Isaiah [Isaiah XL.3]. And how has St Mark placed this passage: "As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'I am sending my angel...'", at the very beginning of his gospel, when it is not in Isaiah, but in Malachi, the most recent of the twelve prophets? Let presumtuous incompetence solve this minor point, and I shall beg pardon for error.

Likewise, St Mark depicts our saviour talking to the Pharisees:

> "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his men were hungry? He went into the house of God under Abiathar

> the High Priest, and ate the consecrated bread which only the priests were allowed to eat" [Mark II.25-26, cf 1 Samuel XXI.1-6]

If we read Samuel – or as they are commonly called the Books of the Kingdoms – there we will find that the reading is not "Abiathar", but "Ahimelech", the High Priest, who was afterwards struck down by Doeg with the other priests at the order of Saul. [I Samuel XXII.18]

Let us pass to the apostle Paul. He writes to the Corinthians:

> "If they had only known, they would never have crucified the Lord of majesty. But, as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard nor human heart imagined what God has prepared for those who love him'" [I Corinthians II.8-9].

There are some who try to see in this passage the ravings of the apocryphal scriptures, and say this passage is taken from the *Apocalypse of Helias*[16]. However, we read in the Hebrew text of Isaiah:

> "From the beginning they have not heard, nor perceived with their ears. Eye has not seen, my God, without you what you have prepared for those who wait for you" [Isaiah LXIV.4].

The Septuagint has a very different version:

> "From the beginning we have not heard, nor have we seen God without you, and your works are true, and you have mercy on those waiting for you."

We know on what authority the apostle depended; however, the apostle did not translate word for word, but by a paraphrase expressed the same sense with other words. In the Epistle to the Romans the same saintly apostle took a text from Isaiah: "See, I shall place in Sion a stumbling-block, a stone to catch men's feet "[Romans IX.33]. This agrees with the Hebrew text, but not with the old translation. In fact, in the Septuagint, the sense is the opposite: "You will not run into a stumbling-

block, nor a stone which will make you fall" [lsaiah VIII.14]. The apostle Peter agrees with both Paul and the Hebrew when he puts it this way: "for the unbelieving, a stumbling-block and a stone to trip men's feet [I Peter II]. From all of these examples it is clear that, in their translation of the ancient scriptures, the apostles sought the sense, not words, and did not slave over the construction and the words, as long as the sense was dear.

10. St Luke, evangelist and companion of the apostles, writes that Stephen, the first martyr for Christ, said in his defence before the Jews:

> "With seventy-five souls, Jacob went down into Egypt. There he and our fathers died, and their bodies were taken to Shechem. And they were placed in the tomb which Abraham bought from the sons of Hamor, the son of Shechem, for a sum of money" [Acts VII. 14-16].

This passage is quite different in Genesis: Abraham, of course, bought a double cave and the land surrounding it near the Hebron from Ephron the Hittite, the son of Zohar, for four hundred silver pieces, and buried his wife, Sarah, in it [Genesis XXIII]. And in the same book we read later that Jacob returned from Mesopotamia with his wives and children [Genesis XXXIII.18-20]. He built an encampment in front of Salem, the city of the Shechemites, in the land of Canaan, and lived there. He bought the land on which bis tents were pitched from Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred sheep, built an altar on it, and sacrificed to the God of Israel. Abraham did not buy land from Hamor, the father of Shechem, but from Ephron, the son of Zohar. Nor was he buried at Hebron, which is incorrectly called Arboc. The twelve patriarchs were not buried in Arboc, but at Shechem; the field was not bought by Abraham, but by Jacob. I defer the solution to this point, to encourage my detractors to do some solid research, and to understand that words are not to be considered in Scripture, but sense.

The opening words of the Hebrew text of Psalm XXI are the very words Christ spoke on the cross: "Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani." This means: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me" [Ps. XXI. 2; cf. Matthew XXVII. 46] Let them state the reason why the Septuagint intercalates "look at me", for it reads: "My God, my God, look at me, why have you abandoned me?" They will reply that there is no distortion in the sense if two or three words are added. Let them also realise that the stability of the Church is not threatened if, in the heat of dictation, I leave out a few words.

11. It is a long job to detail how much the Septuagint adds, how much it leaves out. In the editions used in church these are indicated by daggers and asterisks. When the Jews hear what we read in Isaiah XXXI.9: “Blessed is he that has seed in Sion, and family in Jerusalem”, they are inclined to laugh, as they do at Amos VI.5 where, after the description of debauchery, appears: “They thought these things were permanent, not fleeting.” This is, indeed, a rhetorician’s sentence, a flourish from Cicero. But what shall we do in the face of the authentic texts, in which we do not find these additions and other similar passages? If we tried to detail all this, we would need an infinity of books. Besides, as I have said, critical marks are the witnesses to the extent of their omissions, or even our translation if a diligent reader compares it with the old version. Howewer, it is not for nothing that the Septuagint has become the official church text: it was adopted either because it was the first and was produced before the coming of Christ, or because it was used by the apostles, at least where it did not differ from the Hebrew.

Aquila, a convert to Judaism and a contentious translator, strove to translate not only words, but also their derivations[17]**.** It is on good grounds that we reject him. For *grain*, *wine* and *oil*, who could accept “cheuma”, “opôrismon”, and “stilpnotêta”? We can translate these by *pouring*, *gathering of fruit*, and *splendour*. Or, because Hebrew has not only articles, but also pre-articles, and he translates both letters and syllables with the zeal of a pedant, can we accept the rendering “sun ton ouranon kai sun tên gên [with the heaven and with the earth]”, which is totally unacceptable in both Greek and Latin? We can take similar examples from our own language; how many felicitous expressions there are in Greek, which, in a literal translation, have no grace in Latin. On the other side of the coin, expressions pleasing to us, when translated according to the order of the words, will be displeasing to the Greeks.

12. But, to pass over an infinity of considerations, and to show you, most christian of noble men, most noble of Christians, what sort of falsification they cavil at in my translation of the letter, I shall place before you the opening of the letter itself with its Greek original, so that, in judging one accusation, you can evaluate the others: “edei hêmas, agapête, mê têi oiêsei tôn klêrôn pheresthai”, which, as I remember, I translated: “We must not, dearly beloved, abuse the honour of the clerical state by arrogance” [Letter LI-i]. “See,” they say, “the number of inaccuracies in one short line! First, ‘agapêtos’ is *beloved*, not *dearly beloved*. Then, ‘oiêsis’ is *reputation*, not *arrogance* – the author

said ‘oiêseo’, not ‘oimati’, the first means *opinion*, the second *vanity* – and everything that follows: ‘abuse the honour of the clerical state by arrogance’ is really ‘is yours.’” What do you say, you pinnacle of literary achievement, you Aristarchus of our time[18], you who pass judgment on all our writers? I see: it is for nothing that I have spent such a long time in study, and “often held out my hand for the cane” [Juvenal, Satire I.15]. In coming out of port, I have immediately run aground. Herce, seeing that it is human to err, and confession of error shows the humility of the scholar, I beg you, whoever you are, my critic, I beseech you, my learned professor, to correct me and translate word for word: “You should have written,” he says, “‘We should, beloved, not be led away by the worth of clerics’.” A sentence worthy of Plautus! What Attic charm! How felicitously, as they say, comparable to the language of the Muses! The words of that well-known popular proverb are fulfilled in me: “He who sends his ox to the gymnasium, loses his time and money.” This fault is not imputable to him who assumes the mask of another to play a tragedy, but to his teachers[19] who, at great expense, taught him to know nothing. I do not take it on myself to blame the ordinany Christian for lack of linguistic skill – and would that we had the quality described by Socrates, “I am well aware of what I do not know”, and adopt another sage’s adage, “Know yourself” – for I have always held in the deepest respect holy simplicity, and scorned verbose abuse of language. Whoever claims to imitate the language of the apostes, must first imitate their lives. In them, simplicity of speech is to be “excused” by their great sanctity[20], and the syllogisms of Aristotle and twisted subtleties of Chrysippus are refuted by the Risen Christ. It is ridiculous if any person among us, living among the riches of Croesus and the pleasures of Sardanapalis, boasts of his simple life, as if all the bandits and assorted criminals passed for learned men and hid their bloodstained swords behind the tomes of the philosophers rather than behind tree trunks.

13. I have gone beyond the length of a letter, but not beyond the measure of my anger. I have been called a fraud, and cackling women tear me to pieces between the shuttle and the loom. But I am content to counter the accusation, rather than to turn it against others. Thus, I leave everything to your judgment. Read the letter itself, in both Greek and Latin, and from it you will quickly judge the sort of cant indulged in by my accusers and the true value of their complaints. For my part, it is enough to have set things right with a very dear friend, and to avait the day of judgement hiding in my cell. If possible, despite the raging of my enemies, I would rather comment the Scriptures, than write Philippics in the style of Demosthenes and Cicero.

Notes

1. The reference here is to Ecclesiasticus XXV.12 in the Vulgate and the Septuagint. The best manuscripts read “Isaia” here, which does not make sense, as Ecclesiasticus was translated from the Hebrew of Sirach by his grandson, Jesus son of Eleazar. Some inferior manuscripts read “Iesu” for “Isaia”.

2. See the Theodosian Code X.x.10. The informer (*delatores*) first made their appearance under Marius, who encouraged denunciation of his enemies after the defeat of his rival, Sulla, in 83 B.C. They were consistently used by the early emperors, who awarded a proportion of the estate of a defendant found guilty of treason to the person who denouced him. On January 18, 313, the emperor Constantine decreed the death penalty for informers (Theodosian Code X.x.1); and in further provisions this edict is defined to cover only malicious accusation. In X.x.10 et seqq. of the code, promulgated between 365 and 380, the details of legal proceedings against malicious accusation are set out, and the death penalty is reaffirmed. See Theodore Mommsen, *Theodosiani libri XVI*, 3rd edn., (Berlin: Weidmann, 1962) I. 1, 540-544.

3. This legend is found in Livy V.27. Falerii was conquered in 294 B.C. during the first Roman thrust into Campania. The general concerned was Camillus, who, to Livy, typified all the old Roman virtues in contrast to the decadence of his own times. Hence the force mentioning this incidence in a passage where Jerome is pointing out the lack of both Christian and Roman virtues in his adversaries.

4. Fabricius was another hero endowed with all the old Roman virtues. His adversary, Pyrrhus, had been invited into Southern Italy by the Greek communities to help contain Roman expansion into the area which began about 285 B.C. Pyrrhus’s own activities, which included some hard-won defeats of the Romans, lasted from 262-275 B.C. There is a mention of this incident in Livy XXXIX.51. The actual book in which it occurs is lost, but it is related in Livy *Periocha* XIII, a summary of the book compiled later for school use.

5. For those in the know, a clear reference to Rufinus, whose habit of snapping his fingers and whose bushy eyebrows were very well known. The conventions of Roman satire precluded the mention of the victim’s name, but demanded enough information so that he could be identified. See David S. Wiesen, *op. cit.*, 226-230.

6. The original Latin is *in locis me exercere communibus* (drill myself with model passages). The “locus communis” was a passage chosen from an author for its stylistic or moral excellence. In school, pupils were encouraged to take copies of such passages and base imitation exercises or. them. This technique lasted in composition teaching until well into the eighteenth century, being used by teachers like Erasmus, Comenius, Roger Ascham and Latomus. John Milton’s Commonplace Book is still extant. For a brief discussion, sec L. G. Kelly, *Twenty-five Centuries of Language Teaching* (Rowley: Nevbury House, 1969), 156-158.

7. Dana was the daughter of Acrisius, King of Argos. He was told by an oracle that his grandson would kill him. So he shut Dana in a bronze tower. Zeus entered it in a shower of gold. When her son, Perseus, was born, Acrisius put them both in a wooden box and threw it into the sea. The box drifted to the island of Seriphus, where Dana and Perseus were put under the protection of Polydectes, the king. On his eventual return to Argos to see his grandfather, Perseus accidentally hit him with a discus and killed him.

8. The prologue to the *Andria* was written to answer accusations that Terence had been unfaithful to his authorities in combining elements from two Greek plays in his compositions, so that this passage is not to be taken as more than an opposite quote. Terence was defending here his method of composition, not his method of translation: it is not until after the Cicero quotation that immediately follows this that Jerome appeals to the authority of the pre-classical dramatists on translation. For an excellent discussion of their techniqes of both translation and composition see Gardon Wiliiams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 289-294. For a further discussion or. the distinction between this and translation, see L. G. Kelly. "*Contaminatio* in *Lycidas* an Example of Vergilian Poetics", *Revue de l'Univ. d'Ottawa*, 38 (1968), 588-598.

9. The full text of the Horace passage is*:* "Public material will become private property if you refuse to follow the pathway trod by everybody else, and will not play the faithful translator by translating word for word, nor jump into the confines of imitation." The Latin *fidus*, translated by "faithful" here, is ironical, and can be taken as meaning *slavish*. There are reminiscences of this passage in later translators like Joannes Scotus Erigena (9th century), see *PL* CXX.1032C., where for "infidi interpreti (unfaithful translator)" read in the text, there is a variant reading "fidi interpreti (faithful translator)". Gordon Williams, *op. cit.*, 353-357, traces the development of the Horace position from the relevant passages in Aristotles *Poetics* through interpretations of the doctrine by later peripatetic philosophers.

10. There is a reminiscence of the preface of Ecclesiasticus here: "Hebrew words lose their force when they are translated into another language; ..." Ronald A. Knox (trans.), *The Old Testament* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1949), II, 1001.

11. Hyperbaton is an alteration of the natural order of words, a very common figure in Latin and Greek, given the possibilities opened by flexion. For a good example see Horace *Odes* I.V.1-3.

12. This is a translation of St Athanasius's life of St Anthony the Hermit, by Evagrius, an old mentor of Jerome's. The text is in Migne, *Patrologia graeca* XXVI, 834 et seq.

13. Hilary of Poitiers (ob. 367?) was one of the chief opponents of the Arian heresy, and his writings are credited with having a formative influence on Christian Latin. St Jerome's respect for him was tempered by a critical spirit. In Letter XXXIV.3, he praises his interpretation of Psalm CXXXVI.2.

14. In the modern texts of the Septuagint the reading is “enôrchêsan” which gives the sense Jerome cites from the *Vetus Latina*. St Jerome’s own translation in this letter uses the word “compungere” (to *prick* or *stab*). From Tertullian on, this word developed metaphorical uses, to *goad, sting* or *tease*. Hence, St Jerome’s claim that all the translations cited in this passage are believable in the light of the Greek. In the Greek text of St John, the word used is “exekentêsan”, which excludes all metaphorical meaning. St Jerome translates this as “transfixerunt” in the Vulgate.

15.Celsus (fl. 178) was a neo-platonist who accused the Christians of building a religion from misunderstanding and corruption of tradition. According to him the apostles misunderstood Greek philosophy and built their writings by fabrications deriving from this misunderstanding; and also, the true doctrine of polytheism was corrupted by the monotheism of the Christians.

Porphyry (234-305) was a follower of Plotinus. He took the same line as Celsus in his book “Kata Christianôn”, which was burnt in 448.

Julian is the emperor Julian the Apostate (331-363) who reversed Constantine’s legislative ban on paganism, and openly rejected Christianity in 36l.

16. The *Apocalypse of Helias* is an apocryphal writing from the first or second century. In his commentary on Matthew XXVII.9, Origen claimed that it was the source of I Corinthians II.9. This passage is another barely concealed jab at Rufinus and the Origenist party.

17. Aquila was a Greek convert to Judaism, who lived during the second century. He tried to supplant the Septuagint by a more literal and, in his eyes, scholarly version, but with little success. Jerome’s attitude to him was mixed: we should compare with this passage Jerome’s comment in the *Commentary* on Hosea I.3, where he describes Aquila as “diligens et curiosus interpres”.

18. Aristarchus (217-145 B.C.) is mentioned by Cicero (*Ad Atticum* 1.14.3) and Horace (*Ars poetica* 450) as the very model of the literary critic. He was head of the library of Alexandria and an excellent grammarian and literary critic. He founded a school at Alexandria which kept its reputation until the first century A.D. Famous grammarians like Apollodorus and Dionysius Thrax were products of the school.

19. A reminiscence of Cicero II *Philippic* 43. Certain major manuscripts add the names, Rufinus and Melanius, here. The norms of satire would indicate that the additions are spurious, revealing as they are of the tradition of the letter. See David S. Wiesen, *op. cit.*, 226-230.

20. This is an extremely unkind passage in which Jerome uses Origen to make a point against Ruffinus. In his refutation of Celsus, Origen makes the point that the sanctity of the apostles and their reliance on divine inspiration makes the linguistic issue irrelevant (*Contra* Celsum I.62; II:39). Rufinus comes into the picture through bis edition of Origen’s commentary on the Gospel of St John in which (as St John’s Greek leaves a lot to be desired from a rhetonical standpoint) the same point is made:

"A reader who carefully distinguishes language, meaning, and things on which the meaning is based will not stumble over solecisms, if, on examination, he finds that the things are none the worse for the language in which they were clothed; particularly as the holy writers confess that their speech was not in the persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of Power." (*Commentary on St John*, cited *Philocalia* Ch. IV)