

FROM *THE JERUSALEM BIBLE*  
TO *THE BIBLE IN ITS TRADITIONS*



## EDITING THE BIBLE AT THE ÉCOLE BIBLIQUE ET ARCHÉOLOGIQUE FRANÇAISE IN JERUSALEM

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The project of *The Bible in its Traditions* belongs to a rich experience of editing the Scriptures at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem. The École Biblique became known to a wide readership because of the quality of the Bible it edited in 1956, 1973 and 1998. To this day, the *Jerusalem Bible*, as it is called, has never stopped being edited, translated and adapted anew.

### I. A SHORT HISTORY OF *THE JERUSALEM BIBLE*

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This history begins on May 15, 1943, a few months before the promulgation of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, the encyclical of Pius XII, which in the middle of the war, gave due place to historical criticism in Catholic biblical studies. Father Chiffot (1908-1964)<sup>1</sup> had enough hope to organize the work to be done after the war and in particular to envisage the edition of a Bible that could replace that of Canon Crampon<sup>2</sup> by enriching it with all the discoveries made during the years of the “biblical movement”.<sup>3</sup> At the time when he began the project, Father Chiffot was the vice-director of the Éditions du Cerf, owned by the Friars Preachers (Dominicans) of the province of France. Towards the end of World War II, he had persuaded Fr. Roland de Vaux, then the director of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem, to work with him on this long-term project, which would be the publication in French of a reference edition of the Bible.

At that time, there was no such Bible. Aside from the admirable 17<sup>th</sup> century translation by Lemaître de Sacy (1669-1696), only the Bibles of Segond (1873-1910) and of Canon Crampon (1894-1904) were available.<sup>4</sup> From the point of view of academic rigor as well as from that of historical awareness, both of these tended to make the text uniform, whereas the biblical books are in reality very diverse in style and as literature. The Protestants were on the verge of completing the publication of the Centenary Bible (1917-1948) – excellent from a critical point of view,

but, for the same reason, it lacked funds: the Protestant Bible Societies refused to finance a final edition in one volume. Thus there was room for a new translation of the Bible, which would combine literary quality with the concern for historical criticism.

By bringing together the best specialists for the various biblical books at a time when their small number enabled them all to know one another, the Dominican scholars of the École Biblique succeeded in completing the project a first time after some ten years. The various books were published in installments as fast as the work progressed. The first appeared in 1948, only two years after the project’s official launching, and the complete Bible came out in 1956.

With the distance given by the passing of time, it is worth comparing the edition of the Bible that the pioneers of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem dreamed of and *The Jerusalem Bible* that is available today. For that comparison was the origin of the project to edit *The Bible in its Traditions*. Thus, let us plunge for a few pages into the archives of *The Jerusalem Bible*, which are still nearly entirely unpublished.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Roland de Vaux, “Le P. Thomas-Georges Chiffot 1908-1964”, *La Vie Spirituelle* 46 (1964) 517-525.

<sup>2</sup> François Refoulé, “La Bible de Jérusalem” in the coll., *Jérusalem de la pierre à l’esprit* (Jérusalem: École biblique, 1990) 173-181, p. 174. Refoulé does not give any reference, but he is probably quoting a document that was found in Chiffot’s papers.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Joseph Trinquet, “Le Mouvement biblique”, in C. Savart and J.-N. Aletti (eds.), *Le monde contemporain et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985) 299-318, pp. 306-8.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent insight into the history of the Bible in French, see Philippe Sellier, “Préface”, *La Bible, traduction de Lemaître de Sacy* (Bouquins; Paris: Laffont, 1990) XI-LIV.

<sup>5</sup> We rediscovered them both at the Éditions du Cerf in Paris and at the École Biblique in Jerusalem on the occasion of rendering homage to Dom Henry Wansbrough, the translator of *The Jerusalem Bible* into English. For more details on these archives, see: O.-Th. Venard, “The Cultural Backgrounds and Challenges of *La Bible de Jérusalem*”, in Ph. McCosker (ed.),

## 1. A scientific, literary and religious project

From its conception, the project took into account the diversity and significance of the issues at stake. Starting already in the 1940s, the *Bulletin dominicain des éditions du Cerf* presented it as an undertaking that was at the same time religious, scholarly and cultural.<sup>6</sup>

### *A religious project*

The goal of the Dominicans who initiated the project was clearly religious, as the original title of the Bible suggests: *La sainte Bible, traduite en français sous la direction de l'École biblique de Jérusalem* [The Holy Bible, translated into French under the direction of the École Biblique in Jerusalem]. Even more, the publishers, Le Cerf, made a great effort to promote “the Bible to the Church”, publishing a large-format *Jerusalem Bible* in 1959 that was printed artistically and leather bound. They went so far as to organize a parish contest: who could find the most beautiful way to enhance the holy book in its usefulness to the faithful?<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, by returning to the Hebrew and Greek sources over and beyond the Vulgate, the new Bible represented a model for modern biblical editing and in fact constituted a kind of “vulgate”.<sup>8</sup> “*The Jerusalem Bible* was born of a desire for communion. If some, as heirs to a long tradition, dedicated their life to the study of the Holy Scriptures, the fruit of their labor must be given to all, to those who are less learned, to those who are not at all learned. What they have acquired with all the strength of their knowledge, with all the patience of their work, must also help us hear the Word of God in the effort of intelligence and finally in the silence of prayer. [This Bible] represents a concrete attempt to establish communication, an exchange between us, and better, fraternal service in the communion of saints.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, those promoting the project did not forget that they belonged to the Order of Preachers; it was an integral part of their mission, both within and outside of the Church.

### *A scientific project*

With outside readers in mind, great care would be taken to establish the text: “The *translation* would be based on the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek text, which would be established critically by taking

into account the variants and ancient versions. It would attempt to render the text as faithfully as possible, not only as to its meaning but in its rhythm and color as well, in each case giving attention to its poetic elevation or its simplicity, even its prosaic platitude, in a language employing all the resources of the French tongue.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, everyone could see that the Christian faith does not prevent believers from respecting the autonomy of the areas in which they work – that it does not set up any division in the community between all who honestly seek the truth. Believers themselves would see that they were endowed with a historical culture which henceforth seemed necessary for a true understanding of Sacred Scripture.

The introductions were meant to “place each book of the Bible in its historical and cultural setting. They would analyze its form and content, setting forth its essential doctrine. Filled with an informed criticism, they would assist the modern reader in the difficult task of understanding ancient writers, where the methods of literary composition and the demands of historical precision were very different from ours.”<sup>11</sup>

The idea was also to provide notes to oppose every form of fundamentalism, inviting people to read each text in the light of the Bible as a whole so as to grasp all of its meaning.

*What is it that the Scripture Says? Essays in Biblical Interpretation, Translation and Reception in Honour of Henry Wansbrough OSB* (Library of New Testament Studies 316; London: T&T Clark, 2006) 111-134.

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous text without a title [Chifflet? 1948?], *Bulletin dominicain des éditions du Cerf*, 7, pp. 9-13, here p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> In Chifflet's files, a treatise with the title “La Bible à l'église” shows photographs of the Bible in various French churches, recalling that Le Cerf went so far as to organize a contest in the places of worship for the best presentation of the Bible for the faithful to read.

<sup>8</sup> A. Paul, *Le Fait Biblique: Israël éclaté: De Bible à Bible* (Paris: Cerf, 1979) 172-173, and P. Grelot, review of *The Jerusalem Bible* and of the *Osty Bible*, *Revue Biblique* 81 (1974) 103-116, use expressions like “new Vulgate”.

<sup>9</sup> Th. Chifflet, “L'École biblique de Jérusalem et la Bible de Jérusalem”, archive document, no date (1960?), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> P. Benoit, “Jerusalem Bible”, *Review and Expositor* 76 (1979) 341-349, p. 341. Cited henceforth as Benoit, “Jerusalem Bible”.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

### *A literary project*

The cultural concern of the pioneers of *The Jerusalem Bible* can be clearly seen in the fact that they wanted to recruit several well-known authors for the steering committee; these were to be particularly responsible for watching over the literary quality of the text that was edited. In the very first draft of which we have a trace, they are called “Catholic writers” or “good writers”.<sup>12</sup> Those who did in fact work with the Dominican friars deserved both adjectives: Albert Béguin, Michel Carrouges, Pierre Emmanuel, Robert Flacelière, Stanislas Fumet, Étienne Gilson, Bernard Guyon, Henri-Irénée Marrou, Henri Rambaud, Jean-Claude Renard, Alain-Zacharie Serrand.

The work was also divided up: on the one hand, exegetes would ensure the scientific dimension, and on the other, “accomplished writers would be asked ... to evaluate the literary quality.”<sup>13</sup>

As literary secretary of the steering committee, M. Carrouges was in charge of relations with the writers. Except for the notable J.-Cl. Renard, none of these authors was really avant-garde – far from it. Aside from Carrouges and Renard, Emmanuel, Fumet, and Rambaud were without doubt the most aware of the literary dimension of revelation because of their specifically poetic work. However, the archives of *The Jerusalem Bible* only kept traces of Carrouges’ activity. The other writers who were recruited – and who were the most active if one goes by their presence in the archives – were specialized in ancient (Flacelière, Marrou), medieval (Gilson), or classical (Béguin, Rambaud, Guyon) thought.

## **2. Clearly identifying what is at stake for hermeneutics**

The presence of scholars coming from various backgrounds, who were freer than the religious in the face of ecclesiastical issues still marked by the after-effects of the Modernist crisis, enabled the editorial committee to ask questions that remain strikingly relevant sixty years later. Father Chifflet one day spoke of the candor and effectiveness of the discussions between the exegetes and personalities such as Gilson or Marrou.<sup>14</sup> Marrou, who from the beginning was closely associated with the project for this new Bible, left two working letters<sup>15</sup> in the archives as well as a 20-page response to the preliminary note sent by Chifflet,<sup>16</sup> all dated between 1949 and 1950. In this last study,

the renowned scholar examines all aspects of the publication, from the typography to the theology, insisting everywhere on the need to “avoid scandal [and to] maintain the homogeneity of tradition.”<sup>17</sup> He became involved well beyond simple scholarly expertise, to the point of using the Psalter that had been translated by Father Tournay for his own prayer in order to test how inspiring it was before giving his opinion.<sup>18</sup>

### *The place of history*

At a time when the Catholic intelligentsia, along with a general movement in Western thinking, was fascinated by history, the steering committee received in 1951 a perceptive caution from Albert Béguin: “Historical consciousness can no longer be left out of our activities, but as fruitful as it is among those who master it, it distracts the attention of the others towards quite sterile curiosities. How many classical authors have been ruined for us in this way! And for the Bible, this is far more serious. It is very good to

<sup>12</sup> “Traduction française de La sainte Bible sous la direction de l’École biblique de Jérusalem”, working note with no mention of the date [1946?] and no signature [Th. Chifflet?], pp. 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Benoit, “Jerusalem Bible”, *op. cit.* (n.10), pp. 341-342.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous text with no title, *op. cit.* (n.6), p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> The first letter is a typed manuscript of two pages addressed to Chifflet in response to three installments that had just come out (1 and 2 Cor; Ezek; Koh), headed “Paris, June 6, 49” with a letter-head of the “Université de Paris, Faculté des Lettres: [“University of Paris, Humanities Faculty”] (cited henceforth as HIM, “Paris, June 6, 49”); the second is another typed manuscript of two pages addressed to Chifflet and with the heading “Le Curtillard de La Ferrière, Isère, August 15”; it gives first impressions of the Book of Revelation that had been prepared by Fr. Boismard.

<sup>16</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou, 20-page undated response [1951?], headed only by “Le Curtillard de La Ferrière (Isère)”. Cited henceforth as HIM, “Le Curtillard” to Th. Chifflet, “Note préliminaire en vue de l’établissement d’une ‘édition manuelle’ de la Bible de Jérusalem” [“Preliminary note in view of establishing a ‘manual edition’ of the Jerusalem Bible”] (typed manuscript, twelve pages, undated).

<sup>17</sup> HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n.16), p. 4

<sup>18</sup> “I am only formulating these criticisms after long usage; I have not stopped using this text for many months, and as time passed, I had a painful feeling of frustration; praying with this psalter is infinitely more arid, less enriching than with the Crampon or the Pianum (I do not speak of the Vulgate with its obscure scintillating misinterpretations).” (H.-I. Marrou, “Note sur le livre des Psaumes” [“Note on the book of Psalms”] attached to HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n.16).

want to make it more widely read, but if that happens in order to make it an object of superior entertainment, it would be just as well to return to ignorance of it and to the time when the average Christian was satisfied with the texts included in the liturgy. The risk is to get the average Christian used to removing to historical distance texts that should help him precisely to situate it anew in a constant present. 'Jesus in his time', as someone else says! That is to say, the Jesus who is contemporary with Augustus and Tiberius. But what we have to find again is Jesus *hic et nunc*.<sup>19</sup> A little further on in the same letter, the Pascal specialist Béguin insisted on the half-wisdom that a too systematically historicizing annotation risked inducing among the readers: "The reader who is not trained comes to the point of never reading the text in its continuity anymore. Through scruple or through conscientious instinct, he automatically "goes to see". Thus he is invited to a reading that is half-learned, which is the worst stumbling block: he will not be more capable of understanding the scientific and critical questions, and he will lose the ability to read the Bible 'like a novel'. But one must be able to read it like a novel."<sup>20</sup>

#### *The choice of text*

In an anonymous, undated note, "Traduction Française de *La Sainte Bible sous la direction de l'École Biblique de Jérusalem*" ["French Translation of *The Holy Bible under the direction of the École Biblique in Jerusalem*], the trust placed in the conclusions of textual criticism is clearly stated: "The translation will be made from a critically established text [*sic*]. The commonly accepted corrections will be kept. Sobriety as regards conjectures not supported by the translations will be maintained. Adventurous reconstructions will be avoided. In the hopeless passages, it is better to put suspension points than to substitute oneself for the sacred Author; then in a footnote, a literal translation of the received text can be given and a reconstruction suggested."

In the same spirit, together with his other academic colleagues and based on his experience as a philologist, Marrou asked for the utmost sobriety: "We are bringing the Bible, the text itself, and not (which seems to me to be hardly an honest operation) what we experts think it is today in the present state of research; hypotheses, conjectures, historical considerations or literary history, all that is 'human, all too

human'; we do not have the right to sell forcefully our little personal ideas to a public that is asking us for the word of God (I'm exaggerating a little; but that is in order to make 50% allowances!)."<sup>21</sup>

It was clear that "literary" meant something quite different to the exegetes, who were passionate about criticism, and to their academic colleagues, as the quotation marks used by Albert Béguin in a petition testify: "For goodness sake, let us impose on ourselves the strictest sobriety here. In my opinion, everything that has to do with 'literary' criticism can be greatly shortened without causing any damage, and it would even bring serious advantages."<sup>22</sup> For them, "literary" did not mean "having to do with hypotheses as regards the genesis of the text", but rather "having to do with the poetry of the text". Marrou never stopped reminding the group of the legitimacy of poetry and of the literary importance of processes as simple as repetition or asymmetry – where textual and "literary" criticism saw corruptions or errors in transmission. Comparing the biblical text with the greatest works in literature, he commented that the number of corrections or conjectures by his exegetical colleagues came as much from cultural and rhetorical prejudices as from philological science. Thus "Father Tournay seem[ed] to Mister Marrou to be too sure of his poetry."<sup>23</sup> We shall return to this.

#### *Translation between science and art*

As to the translation, very soon people were aware of having to make a choice. The desire to write in "beautiful" French brought with it the risk of impoverishing and vulgarizing the inspired word and of dismembering specifically biblical concepts. "Attention will

<sup>19</sup> Albert Béguin, hand-written six-page letter with the letter-head of the review *Esprit*, dated September 6, 1951 and addressed to Father Chifflet in response to a note for the manual edition of *The Jerusalem Bible*, which had been sent to him (cited henceforth as: Béguin), pp. 2-3. The author is referring to the success in the bookstores of Daniel-Rops, *Jésus en son temps*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> HIM, "Le Curtillard", *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Béguin, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> "Remarques formulées par le Comité Directeur de la traduction de la Bible, pendant l'année 1946/47" ["Comments expressed by the steering committee for the translation of the Bible in the course of the year 1946/47"], anonymous text, p. 2. Cited henceforth as: "Remarques".

be paid to preserving the abrupt and strong character of the Hebrew, the suppleness of the Greek in certain books. A flat original must remain flat in translation, but the poetry must not become prosaic.”<sup>24</sup> But in wanting to give a taste of the original at any price, was there not the risk of transforming the French into hideous jargon? The same 1946 working document ends with a double denial: they did not want to deprive the books of their color and singularities by translating them too sleekly, nor did they want to write an unintelligible French under the pretext of being more faithful to the original. They placed themselves between two extremes: the translations of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and *Genesis*, recently published by Edmond Fleg.<sup>25</sup>

Father de Vaux believed that he could suggest a third way. “There is the famous dilemma: ‘Translation into *beautiful* French in which consequentially [*sic*] the translator’s style replaces that of the author, or a translation that sticks to the text, even if the laws of the French language have to suffer a little. I believe that between these two extremes there is a middle way, and that is the one I desire for our Bible: a translation into *good* French, which is to say correct French, which keeps the savor of the original text, an expression of a different culture from ours, which respects the inequality of the ancient text’s style.’ (Letter of March 15, 1947 from Fr. de Vaux).”<sup>26</sup> Thus the group was well aware of the necessity to make a fundamental choice between allegiance to an inveterate convention of “*correct* French” and the audacity of inventing new ways of speaking or writing French.

### *The cultural challenge*

If Marrou is to be believed, the question was to “recreate a biblical culture”. That presupposed that the little that already existed was respected: it demanded that the phrases that had become traditional, such as “vanity of vanities” or “valley of tears” be kept, at least in notes.<sup>27</sup> While it was impossible to translate each word systematically by the same word, translators should come as close to this as possible, following the example of the Septuagint.<sup>28</sup> All the members of the steering committee agreed in preserving certain Semitisms that had become “biblicisms” in French, but not without reservations. “Thus ‘the bosom of Abraham’, ‘Let your loins be girt’, ‘the horn of salvation’ will be kept (while explaining them in a note, of course).”<sup>29</sup>

However, the literary specialists in the steering committee had in mind a more ambitious project. “Some (Mr. Marrou) even wanted to go further: to try by means of the literal translation of most of the Semitisms to recreate a biblical culture (which the old translations in Germany and in the Anglo-Saxon countries did).”<sup>30</sup> For from the Vulgate to Luther’s Bible, the great biblical translations played a major role in the respective cultures in which they were created. They profoundly colored the target language and gave the culture that produced them stories, personalities or ways of speaking that permeated even to folklore.

Ever since Saint Jerome, translating the Bible has led to introducing new ways of thinking one’s own world, even to new ways of speaking and writing one’s own language. As disgusted as he was with the old Latin translations,<sup>31</sup> through contact with the Sacred Scriptures, the Ciceronian Jerome ended up inventing a new way of writing Latin. Strange as it may seem, his desire to be faithful to the biblical text at the expense of classical rules of elegance led him to invent a language that responded perfectly to the classical ideal of a popular language acceptable to the good taste of the scholars.<sup>32</sup>

Now “in France, the Bible was never the literary monument that it is in England and Germany. There is this serious point: it cannot be *quoted*. When an English person quotes a verse of Scripture, he

<sup>24</sup> “Traduction française de La sainte Bible”, *op. cit.* (n. 12), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> “Remarques”, *op. cit.* (n. 23), p. 5. At the time, André Chouraqui had not yet published his odd etymological translation, otherwise his name would without doubt have appeared here together with that of Fleg (Cf. Edmond Fleg, *La Bible. Le Livre du Commencement* [Paris: Minuit, 1959] and A. Chouraqui, *La Bible: traduction définitive* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1989]).

<sup>26</sup> “Remarques”, *op. cit.* (n. 23), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> “Remarques”, *op. cit.* (n. 23), p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> In his famous *Letter to Paulinus of Nola*, Saint Jerome speaks of the *simplicitas et quaedam vilitas verborum* of the Bible. He needed time to discover there the literary beauties of which he was fond – not without ambivalences, as the nightmare he reports in *Ep 22* shows.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Alain Michel, *In Hymnis et Canticis: culture et beauté dans l’hymnique chrétienne latine* (Philosophes médiévaux, 20; Paris: Vander-Oyez; Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1976) 41-43.

reproduces words and the order of words with scrupulous respect, a translation of genius. In France, the text that comes to mind is a more or less precise recollection of... Crampon.”<sup>33</sup> Also, if Marrou and his literary colleagues are to be believed, a good translator should consider himself to be an author: “a translation is lifeless if it is not the work of a *writer*, and thus in part an original invention,”<sup>34</sup> as Albert Béguin wrote. The same author also demanded that translators be responsible for establishing the text that is presented to the reader, without laying upon the latter the burden of notes which he would not be able to carry: “Why invite him to check what in his semi-ignorance he is incapable of judging?”<sup>35</sup>

In short, the literary people who advised *The Jerusalem Bible*’s steering committee were more aware of the poetic dimension of revelation than the committee. On the one hand, the scholars who were fond of “historical consciousness” and of “exegetical science” wanted to carry out the scholarly program set out by Pius XII in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in order to catch up on the delay of Catholic scholarship in the biblical domain. On the other hand, the great academics or the recognized authors, who had nothing to prove as regards their own science, noted in their respective domains the limitations of historical commentary on works, whose religious importance was also linked to their poetic strength.

### 3. The choices made in the 1940s and their limitations

At the time *The Jerusalem Bible* was launched, science and reason had the upper hand: they seemed capable of succeeding in all the battles which literature and religion might have tried to fight with them. Looking back, they seem to have dominated the choices made in the initial phases of *The Jerusalem Bible*.

#### *The text: critical recklessness?*

Marrou “as a historian” wrote a comment that Claudel would certainly have signed as a poet: “I spend my time protesting against the pride of the philologists who see themselves a little too easily as the Holy Spirit: their conjectures are worth the time they remain in fashion; our text, under the pretext of being

‘up to date in science’ must not have aged in two years!”<sup>36</sup>

The great trust that was placed in the results of criticism shows up clearly in the “Rules for the Translators” that accompanied the project’s first draft. The translators were invited to place their entire trust in the critical editions, and “in hopeless cases” to leave a line of suspension points in the text rather than to translate the received text; this would be relegated to the notes.<sup>37</sup> Further on, they were urged straight out to *clarify* the original text: “The changes in persons will be explained if the original leads to confusion; the phrases will be broken up or the proposals connected according to the laws of French syntax, for these modifications are not infidelities; they are the work of a true translator!”<sup>38</sup>

In a response to various translation drafts that Father Chiffot had sent him, Marrou judged this way of getting past a difficulty from an academic point of view: “This freedom in relation to the witnesses of textual tradition reminds me of the errors in the older literary criticism of the Latin and Greek texts.”<sup>39</sup> He considered this to be naive from the poetic point of view: “After all, why would the Spirit not dictate to him a limping rhythm, but one rich in meaning? (What do we know about it?) Are the corrections or glosses that are introduced afterwards and that enrich the meaning necessarily corruptions? Could they not also be inspired? Such a composition

<sup>33</sup> Julien Green, *Journal: 1943-45* (Paris: 1946) 241-242, recounting a conversation with André Gide on October 16, 1945.

<sup>34</sup> Béguin, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4. Analogously, from the political category the author uses the expression “semi-skilled” that was suggested by Pascal to designate those who, having understood a part of social reality (for example, the arbitrary nature of power that is in place), hasten to denounce its imperfections without taking the time to think about the practical and social consequences of their denunciation, which risks precipitating a war of all against all. The semi-skilled are distinguished from the simply ignorant, but also and above all from the truly skillful. The latter are well aware of the limitations of reality, but respect the conventional order of things with a lively awareness that the height of knowledge is always a learned ignorance (cf. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, fragments 263-264).

<sup>36</sup> HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> “Traduction française de La sainte Bible”, *op. cit.* (n. 12), p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

‘method’ would not be surprising in any way; literary history often shows us the poetic beauty and darkness that are acquired at the price of deletions and alterations in what starts as a more banal text (I am thinking of the successive texts of ‘L’Après-Midi d’un Faune’ as edited by Dr. Mondor).<sup>40</sup>

Above all, he considered this to be harmful at the religious level. The renowned patristic scholar was annoyed by the exegete’s audacity, which he described ironically in these terms: “Father Tournay is not respectful enough of the New Testament’s authority: his commentary, which accumulates the references (*acerbit cadavera* – you said it!) does not bring out the very solemn explicit quotations from our Ps. [in the New Testament].”<sup>41</sup> He issued this severe judgment: “We were expecting a translation from Father Tournay; he proposed to us a reconstruction; we wanted to make *the* Psalter available to the French reader, that is to say the text which the Church venerates and uses by this name, and we have printed *a* Psalter, the Tournay Psalter, which is *one* hypothesis, as remarkable as it might be technically, but which we cannot spread among the public by giving it, through our adoption of it, an authority that it cannot claim to have.”<sup>42</sup>

*The translation: choosing good French or beautiful French?*

The writers were urging to a fundamental audacity, that of inventing biblical French rather than conforming to rules that were too conventional. But in spite of the desire to distinguish between the necessary “good” French (grammatical French) and “beautiful” French, which risked ending up with translations that were too uniform, it is clear that the rules given for translation were at least as much stylistic as grammatical.<sup>43</sup>

If the only fixed rule had been grammatical correctness, this would have made it possible to vary the levels of language, from Mallarmean Hermeticism to Celinian prosaicism, from Proustian abundance to Durasian terseness (which was in gestation then!). For several contributors, it was necessary to invent a new kind of French. “The Septuagint system (taking a Greek word as the mechanical equivalent of such and such a Hebrew word, and willy-nilly introducing it wherever the Hebrew word appears) ends up with a language that is at first sight barbaric, but for the initiated, it preserves much of the richness of the

original. [...] Of course this is not to defend the paradox of the inspiration of the Vulgate’s mistranslations that was dear to Claudel!”<sup>44</sup> Even though he denied having a position that was too close to Claudel, Marrou proved to be as sensitive as the great poet to Scripture’s special poetry.

It was necessary to keep the poetry of traditional literalism. For example, instead of the flat translation of Ps 84:6-8 as “valley of nettle trees”, Marrou asked that “valley of the weeper” be kept; in the same way, he regretted that *de virtute in virtutem* was reduced to “from terrace to terrace”. In the margin of Marrou’s text, Chiffot rapidly noted: “Tournay maintains, cf. Abel RB 1947 (521-533).” The hermeneutic weight of Marrou’s objection was ignored: to his comment based at one and the same time on poetry and on piety, a simple scholarly note was opposed!<sup>45</sup>

Systematic anaphora had to be dared: ever since the beginning, Marrou had stood up against “the *scholarly* prejudice that condemns repetition, a prejudice that is more wide-spread in French than in any other language.”<sup>46</sup> However, the process of repetition was not trusted: after Marrou’s comment, the “Remarques” of 1946-47 add: “nevertheless, the prejudice really does exist in French; it is so profoundly rooted that in most cases it must be taken into account.”<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> HIM, “Note sur le livre des Psaumes”, attached to HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16).

<sup>41</sup> HIM, “Remarques sur le Ps 119 *Dixit Dominus*” attached to HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16).

<sup>42</sup> HIM, “Note sur le livre des Psaumes”, attached to HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16).

<sup>43</sup> This kind of confusion was only clearly detected thirty years later, in the analyses of the “new criticism” (cf. Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971) 45-47; “Ecrivains et écrivains”, *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964) 147-154; and *Le degré zéro de l’écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1953).

<sup>44</sup> HIM, “Note sur le livre des Psaumes” attached to HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16).

<sup>45</sup> “Comments on the *The Jerusalem Bible* installments published recently (meeting of the steering committee on January 16, 1951)”, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> “Remarques”, *op. cit.* (n. 23), p.2. In the same way, he refused to let the biblical translation become a scholarly exercise in which the student must absolutely show his master that he has understood well all the nuances, thus translating into a very heavy language (*ibid.*, 3).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Some Hermeticism had to be risked: Michel Carrouges wanted a direct translation that preserved the “mystery” of biblical symbols.<sup>48</sup> He deplored the translations and notes that tried to *explain* these symbols instead of letting the reader *experience* their meaning.<sup>49</sup> He too believed that a true biblical recasting of the French language should be attempted rather than aiming for a translation that was as clear as possible. But perhaps in reaction against certain unfortunate attempts like those of Fleg to render the “Hebrew genius” into French, or against the Baroque and polemical exegesis of Paul Claudel, several possible French poetic renderings were dismissed by the main translators as leading to horrible jargon. Finally, a French style that was in conformity with certain academic criteria following the neo-classical rules for beautiful language was preferred.

*The annotation: the exegete’s omnipresence*

Thus, while inventiveness was encouraged, literary creativity was muzzled. Consequently, it was no surprise when the balance between the text and the annotations was overthrown quite quickly in favor of the latter, since this corresponded so greatly with the thirst for newness and the expectations of an entire public: “Public reception showed that readers gave more importance to the annotation, that in their eyes it was even the principal contribution of the new Bible. In response to this appeal, the notes underwent gradual development in the course of publication; this, to be sure, without relaxing in the least the care accorded to the translation.”<sup>50</sup> Over the course of the years, *The Jerusalem Bible* became the main vehicle for critical hypotheses in Catholic circles. Parallel to that, the public itself gave the work a more secular name: already in the 1960s, *La sainte Bible, traduite en français sous la direction de l’École biblique de Jérusalem* [The holy Bible, translated into French under the direction of the École Biblique of Jerusalem] became *La Bible de Jérusalem* [The Jerusalem Bible], a simpler (and more ambivalent<sup>51</sup>) title that was also less religious.

The book’s design evolved in the course of the various editions. According to its promoters, *The Jerusalem Bible* met the “expectations of a wide educated public.”<sup>52</sup> The scientific aspect of the first installments and of the first edition in one volume corresponded well with the optimistic mentality of the post-war generations: finally it was possible to

read the “true” text, and the “true” history was accessible. The 1973 and 1998 revisions also reflected the spirit of the time, attempting to “comply with the desires of contemporaries for a more literal translation”<sup>53</sup> in the former, and giving a less unified vision of the origins of Christianity and of the biblical canon itself in the latter.

*Under-estimating the cultural weight of tradition*

Unfortunately, in spite of the warnings by the steering committee’s literary advisers, a certain depreciation of tradition went hand in hand with the trust that was placed in modern criticism.

Father Chiffot’s archives contained a letter that did not come from an author who was recruited by the steering committee. This is a short message addressed to Father Maydieu, the editor at Le Cerf, by an incensed Paul Claudel. The renowned poet had just received the very first installment (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*) and was shouting out his indignation over the translation of Zechariah 13:6. Following historical research, the choice had been made to translate a passage that literally says “What are these wounds between your hands/arms” [*ben yadekha*] as “And if he is told: What are those wounds on your body?, he will say: Those that I received among those who love me”<sup>54</sup>, with a note inviting the reader to see there either a prophetic custom of self-laceration or an allusion to squabbles among friends – where centuries of textual translation ever since the Septuagint and the Vulgate had kept the translation “in the midst of your hands”, which constituted an obvious christological prophecy of the cross: “Then

<sup>48</sup> Michel Carrouges, typed document of ten pages accompanied by a short hand-written letter dated simply “Monday”, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> For example, he rejected the “eyes burning with anger”, which replaced the “eyes like a blazing flame” (Rev 19:12) or the prosaic reduction of “the sea” (Rev 21:1) to a “symbol of instability” (*ibid.*, p. 3).

<sup>50</sup> Benoit, “Jerusalem Bible”, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 345.

<sup>51</sup> There is another *Jerusalem Bible* that was edited by Harold Fisch (Jerusalem: Koren, 1962) and is a revised version of Anglo-Jewish Bibles that are wide-spread in the Jewish homes and synagogues of the English-speaking world; it is based on *The Jewish Family Bible* by M. Friedlander (1881).

<sup>52</sup> “Traduction française de La sainte Bible”, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 348.

<sup>53</sup> Benoit, “Jerusalem Bible”, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 348.

<sup>54</sup> *Aggée, Zacharie, Malachie*, translated by A. Gélin (Paris: Cerf, 1948), p. 54.

he will be told: Whence come these wounds that you have in the midst of the hands? And he will answer: I was pierced with these wounds in the house of those who loved me.”<sup>55</sup>

Claudél was categorical: “This is a real *forgery* in such an important matter! And it gives a sad inkling of the rest of the work.”<sup>56</sup> The poet’s severity was echoed by minds as open as the Jesuit patristic scholar Jean Daniélou<sup>57</sup> or the great Dominican theologian (and supporter of Father Chifflet) Yves Congar. He also deplored the lack of a mystical sense and of christological references in these first installments, asserting that only messianic typology makes it possible to grasp the “real meaning” of the Bible.<sup>58</sup>

In the midst of the steering committee, Henri-Irénée Marrou affirmed that “a translation of Scripture that is really Catholic must place a text into the hands of the faithful, which is not naked, but, as it were, clothed in tradition.”<sup>59</sup> When he gave his verdict on the Tournay Psalter, he recalled that “the need not to destroy the every-day Psalter, the one with which the Church has been praying and meditating for so many centuries, should make one infinitely prudent.”<sup>60</sup>

At the basis of this tradition, Marrou was sensitive to what today is called intra-biblical exegesis: following the Fathers of the Church, he underlined over and over again the need to read the Bible as a whole and to highlight as much as possible the inter-textual links between the two Testaments. According to him, a Christian reader must not read the Old Testament as a historian who is trying to place him- or herself back into the mentality of the first Jewish readers: “The use made by the NT of a passage colors that passage itself for us.”<sup>61</sup> He even went so far as to demand that the translations of Ps 110 be modified in order to make it comply with the teaching on the Trinity: “As for the famous v. 3, I do not easily agree with sacrificing the “*genui te*”, one of the foundations of Trinitarian theology, and I would adopt the modified corr. of the Pianum Ps...”<sup>62</sup> In a letter of June 6, 1949, he protested in the same way against the silence on the patristic identification of the fall of Satan in Ezek 28:12ff. as if this were a purely adventitious meaning: “Is this not one of the passages in which the full, directly inspired meaning goes beyond its first application, even in an exegesis that is not Claudelian: does not the overflowing lyrical description of that petty Ishtobaal II imply that we are dealing with something more than a simple king of Tyre?”<sup>63</sup>

*The common factor in these limitations: forgetting language*

With the distance given by time, it is moving to note that this debate between *The Jerusalem Bible*’s steering committee and the literary specialists it had invited replayed fifteen centuries later the argument between Augustine and Jerome.<sup>64</sup> One is also struck by the tensions between the thinker and the poet, science and literature, modernity and tradition that appear right from the beginning of the founding documents and the first discussions of the project. What the disciples of Hans-Georg Gadamer today call *forgetting language* was certainly at work in the entire enterprise – that is to say, neglecting the “essential link of thought with the texture that is prior to the language” and “the constant rhetorical

<sup>55</sup> *La Bible, traduction de Lemaître de Sacy* (Paris: Laffont, 1990), p. 1188. Cf. also the *King James Version*: “And one shall say unto him, What *are* these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, *Those* with which I was wounded *in* the house of my friends.”

<sup>56</sup> Paul Claudél wrote another letter to Fr. Maydiou on May 3, 1949, which is published in *Dieu Vivant* 14 (1949), pp. 78-81 and in *J’aime la Bible* (Paris: Fayard, 1955), pp. 62-67.

<sup>57</sup> Jean Daniélou, Recension de *Aggée, Zacharie, Malachie*, translated by A. Gélin, etc., *Etudes* 259 (1948) 407-408.

<sup>58</sup> Yves Congar, “L’Ancien Testament, témoin du Christ”, *La Vie Intellectuelle* 17 (1949) 334-343, here pp. 342-43.

<sup>59</sup> HIM, “Paris, 6 Juin 49”, *op. cit.* (n. 15), p. 1. In his “Note sur le livre des Psaumes”, attached to “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16), he points out the liberties taken with Ps 110 (109) in these terms: “I am happy that you are giving me the opportunity to utter my (legitimate?) indignation: this Ps is one of those that satisfied me the least; I think Fr. Tournay behaved with it as if he were dealing with an unpublished text that he had just discovered in some papyrus and not with one of the texts that has been most venerable, polished and patinated in the course of so many centuries of tradition!”

<sup>60</sup> HIM, “Note sur le livre des Psaumes” attached to “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16).

<sup>61</sup> HIM, “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 2. Origen claims that before the Incarnation of the Word, it was more or less impossible to give clear examples of the Scriptures’ inspiration; this inspiration was only really obvious once the Scriptures had been fulfilled by Jesus (Origen, *De Principiis*, IV, 1, 6-7; SC 252).

<sup>62</sup> HIM, Comments “Sur le Ps 110 *Dixit Dominus*” attached to “Le Curtillard”, *op. cit.* (n. 16).

<sup>63</sup> HIM, “Paris, 6 Juin 49”, *op. cit.* (n. 15), p.1.

<sup>64</sup> For pastoral reasons Saint Augustine refused Jerome’s translation of Jona 4:6, even if it was more accurate: not to scandalize hearers who were used to listening to and meditating the Septuagint (*Ep.* 82, 35, CSEL 34,386).

incarnation of the meaning”,<sup>65</sup> whence flows the need to be attentive to the interpretative tradition.

“What has been well conceived expresses itself clearly, and the words for saying it come easily”<sup>66</sup>... The culture of the Dominicans that was implied in the project was certainly neoclassical, inherited from the “humanities” and from the rhetoric classes of which the education system could still be proud at the time. Their vision of the word and of literary communication was somewhat conceptualized and idealist, overestimating the value of clarity and dissociating too much the “content” from the “form”, the latter appearing to be accidental. This led to favoring the search for *the* literal meaning that was most often reduced to a reconstituted original meaning...

The traces of collaboration with the “good authors” recruited by the steering committee, which are preserved in the archives, confirm this tendency: quite obviously, the academics were listened to more than the poets, and the philosophers (Gilson) more than the literary specialists (Marrou). The Dominicans preferred the “scientific” attitude of the former to the “wise” vigilance of the latter.

The neoclassical orientation of the committee’s director shows in the somewhat too clear distinction between form and meaning that is present in the first working documents. It can be felt in the choice of beautiful language that was made for the translation. It can be found in one of the goals demanded by Father Benoit for the work that was to be done: “to free [the reader] from asking for information which Holy Scripture did not intend to give or from being offended at the archaic and often outmoded garb with which its teachings are adorned.”<sup>67</sup> An annotation conceived as information or as a doctrinal commentary risked unduly distancing thought from language and meaning from its verbal support. The under-estimation of language shows in the theology of Scriptural inspiration, of which the same Father Benoit was one of the main artisans.<sup>68</sup> Influenced, as a good Dominican, by the treatise on prophecy in the *Summa of theology* of Saint Thomas Aquinas which was taken up by Leo XIII in the encyclical *Providentissimus*,<sup>69</sup> he remained fascinated by the psychological aspect of inspiration and attached himself almost exclusively to what we call today subjective inspiration. In order to come to agreement with Marrou, he would have had to reflect at greater length on the objective inspiration of the

texts – an idea which was not yet studied much, even to our day.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, with the distance of time, it is possible to say that the hermeneutic situation of *The Jerusalem Bible* was paradoxical. Of course, the complexity of human authorities implicated in the divine authority of the Scriptures had been rediscovered – and that should have given a push to assigning a privileged place to the poetic and polyphonic dimension of the Bible as well as to giving all its weight to the history of the Scriptures’ reception as condensed in Tradition. However, in the 1940s, the “linguistic turn” that Western thought was in the process of taking in the English-speaking world had not yet reached the European continent and still less biblical studies.

## II. A PREHISTORY OF THE BIBLE IN ITS TRADITIONS

### *The point of departure*

In September 1999, Father Claude Geffré, then director, organized a scientific conference at the École Biblique on the state of Catholic exegesis sixty years

<sup>65</sup> Jean Grondin, “L’universalité de l’herméneutique et de la rhétorique: ses sources dans le passage de Platon à Augustin dans *Vérité et méthode*”, *Revue internationale de philosophie* 54 (2000) 469-485, here p. 475. “Forgetting language” is a question that arises not only for metaphysicians and theologians, but also for biblical scholars. The Word of God is not a simple communication of ideas. It was especially with Paul Beauchamp that the exegetes really began to remember language: he liked to say that the Spirit can only be found if the letter is not avoided (see his treatment of the biblical personality as “between two” in P. Beauchamp, *Le Récit, la lettre et le corps: essais bibliques* [Cogitatio fidei 114; Paris: Cerf, 1982], especially chapter ii).

<sup>66</sup> Nicolas Boileau (1636-1711), *Art poétique*, Song 1, verses 111-112, quoted in N. Boileau, *Satires, Epîtres, Art poétique* (J.-P. Collinet [ed.], Paris: Poésie/Gallimard, 1985).

<sup>67</sup> Benoit, “Jerusalem Bible”, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 342.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. P. Benoit, notes in P. Synave and P. Benoit (eds), *Thomas d’Aquin, Somme théologique* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue des Jeunes, 1947), pp. 286-293, 302-305; “L’inspiration” in A. Robert and A. Tricot (eds.), *Initiation biblique* (Paris: Desclée, 1954) 6-45; “Note complémentaire sur l’inspiration”, *Revue Biblique* 63 (1956) 416-422.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. J. Burthchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969) 234-237.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. François Martin, *Pour une théologie de la lettre: L’inspiration des Écritures* (Cogitatio fidei 196; Paris: Cerf, 1996).

after the death of Father Lagrange (1855-1938). During one of the sessions, the future of *The Jerusalem Bible* was brought up. It had been revised in depth for its second edition and partially for the third edition. It could continue to be improved here and there as it was reprinted (that is the case at present).

However, it was becoming urgent to take into account the transformations in the very presentation of the Bible, which exegesis had undergone over the course of the last decades. The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls made it obligatory to rethink the relationship between the ancient translations of the Bible, and it somewhat relativized the critical search for the original text. In addition, Dominique Barthélémy had underlined the development of *The Jerusalem Bible* as regards the establishment of the text, which over the course of the editions led the exegetes to greater humility. Whereas in 1956 the claim was made that their work gave access to the “true texts”, already in 1973, “the viewpoint [had become] less ambitious”: the Hebrew text was translated and the earlier classical translations were only used when necessary.<sup>71</sup> Another step in the same direction was no doubt necessary.

Where archaeological remains were concerned, the work of the new Israeli archaeologists brought with it questions regarding not only the dating of the Pentateuch traditions that was normally accepted, but also the way the origin of Israel should be represented.

In addition, there was the renewal of contemporary hermeneutics, which in particular restored the place of the reader in defining the meaning of the text – and with this, the importance of reception history in the study of literary works. Exegesis could only benefit from these developments. It was now established that stating the history of Israel and putting traditions into writing in the present never ceased shedding its light and its interests on the past, which had to be kept alive and inspiring. Certainly, tradition could no longer be considered as a phenomenon that followed the writing; rather, it appeared more and more as a dynamic that accompanied it.

Finally, it was appropriate to rethink at depth the very model of editing the Bible, in particular in the Catholic context, which is so sensitive to the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, and this in the ecumenical spirit demanded by the rediscovery of the plural nature of the biblical text.

The tremendous success which was – and remains – that of *The Jerusalem Bible* thus opened up ample room for enriching the edition of the Bible. Without going from total-history to total-literature, it was necessary to give due place to revelation’s linguistic conditioning throughout the Scriptures. For this, the biblical translators would have to make their own the freedom that modern and contemporary language has rediscovered in dialogue with the classical ideal (and no longer submitted to it). They would have to use that freedom not in order “to seize the Bible” by displaying originality at all costs, but on the contrary, to combine it with a constant concern for philological, exegetical and theological truth in order to be as faithful as possible to the linguistic, literary and poetic mediations of revelation used by the believing traditions. In other words, they should use their scientific knowledge in order to be witnesses of the kindness of the living God who left humanity a written trace of the passage of His Word.

The École Biblique thus undertook to open up a new project, the working title of which was at first “The Jerusalem Bible in its Traditions”, before becoming more simply, “The Bible in its Traditions”. In this context, the École organized and published a series of conferences on exegetical, theological and hermeneutic questions. These were at the same time opportunities for its professors to take up contact with colleagues from the entire world and to interest them in the scientific process that is in the pipeline.

#### *The authority of Scripture (2000-2001)*

There were in fact two successive conferences, the proceedings of which were published in one single volume: *L'autorité de l'Écriture*.<sup>72</sup> The aim was to clarify the relationship between scripture and tradition in the active sense of the two terms (tradition becomes scripture), then the relationship between Scripture and Tradition in the sense of commentary, of reception, of constituting a book that has authority. Interest would focus both on earlier days (the patristic centuries in which the Canon of the Scriptures finally emerged as well as the great theological

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Dominique Barthélémy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), vol. 2, p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> J.-M. Poffet (ed.), *L'autorité de l'Écriture* (Lectio divina, hors série; Paris: Cerf, 2002).

commentaries) and right up to recent times (biblical and patristic renewal leading to the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*).

Scripture would prove itself to be more contemporary with Tradition than had been thought. Their relationship is based more on a real synergy than on a chronological succession of two entities that are foreign to one another. Orthodox tradition underlines the spiritual dynamic of this process, which is in no way static, does not confine itself to the text but wants to transmit a living Word, without forgetting that active tradition's ecclesial and liturgical dimension. While in its banal sense the word seems to evoke the past, tradition in fact restates in the present that past, in which it perceives seeds of the future. There is nothing surprising in the fact that Tradition and the Eucharistic liturgy are so closely linked (cf. 1 Cor 11 and 15).

The rediscovery of the ancient Church's various traditions lets another major component emerge: the plural is to be found not only on the side of tradition, but also on the side of the text itself. Interest in the Syriac tradition is founded on this perspective, as is the renewal of the study of the Septuagint and its impact on relations between the Massoretic text and the Greek texts of the Old Testament, and on their reception in the New. Kerygma and narratives are crystallized in and for diverse communities, and through their variants, the texts witness to the oneness of the christological event in the diversity of its reception.

*The Bible, the Book and history (2005)*

On the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fr. Lagrange's birth, the École Biblique organized another conference, which was echoed by a similar event in Toulouse.<sup>73</sup> This conference made it possible to perceive better the prophetic intuition of the founder of the École Biblique. For Fr. Lagrange tried to hold together profound historical information and a theological perspective inspired by the best in patristics and the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas. In his inaugural lecture on November 15, 1890, the founder of a School that was to be dedicated to the study of archeology and history began by praising at length the reading of the Fathers. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he consciously dared to speak with an "almost excessive (zeal) for history", and he already foresaw that contemporary studies would underline that the Bible is

not a data base but a story, a scripture, where multiple voices that are sometimes in tension with one another cross paths and respond to one another.

The concept of biblical history as well as the annotation and commentary cannot avoid being affected by this dimension. The theological or spiritual perspective does not depend on a simple post-redactional step; it is often part of the writing of the texts itself, including those that had been qualified as "historical". The consequence is clear: the point is not to choose between a historical-critical reading and a so-called spiritual reading of the texts, but rather to implement a hermeneutic that is adapted to texts which are rooted in history, inspired in the concrete way they were written, and inspiring through the tradition that accompanies them.

*The literal meaning (2007)*

Under these circumstances, what becomes of the "literal meaning" of Scripture, and more broadly, of the literal meaning of a text? The most recent conference that came together at the École in the context of "The Bible in its Traditions"<sup>74</sup> brought specialists from many disciplines into dialogue with one another: literature of the ancient Orient, of the Old and New Testament, patristic and medieval readings, modern and contemporary literary reception of the Bible, in particular that of Paul Claudel, who dedicated a large part of his work to commenting Scripture and proved to be severe as regards the biblical criticism of his time.

To the extent that contemporary hermeneutics can restore the rights of theology in thinking about language, it could also make it possible to redefine the opposition between "literal meaning" and "spiritual meaning" by dropping the too simple equivalence of literal meaning with original historical meaning, which was fostered by modern scholars a short while ago. However, this should be done without

<sup>73</sup> J.-M. Poffet (ed.), *La Bible: le livre et l'histoire*. Actes des colloques de l'École biblique de Jérusalem et de l'Institut catholique de Toulouse (nov. 1005) pour le 150<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la naissance du P. M.-J. Lagrange, o.p. (Cahiers de la Revue biblique 65; Paris: Gabalda, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> O.-Th. Venard (ed.), *Le sens littéral des Écritures*. Actes du colloque de l'École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem (novembre 1007) (Lectio divina, hors série; Paris: Cerf, 2009).

tipping over into a too easy identification of the literal meaning with the game of undefined meaning that is fostered now by post-modern scholars. The rediscovery of the poetic, expressive and meta-literary functions of the word invites one to give the text's polysemy all its place, including in an exegesis that is concerned with the historical system of reference. Thus, the various possible approaches to Scripture must be envisaged in terms of complementarity and not of competition. Diversified annotation (bearing on the text, on the context and on the reception) should serve this plan.

## 2. A long period of gestation (1999-2009)

### *Experimentation*

Parallel to this intense reflection, various experiments were carried out at the École Biblique, some of them in the form of courses and seminars, with a view to developing a model of editing the Bible that reflects the present state of biblical scholarship.

Several experiments in translation and annotation were tried. Etienne Nodet directed a small team that worked on the commentary to a Psalm and a pericope of the Letter to the Philippians. Justin Taylor was interested in the First Letter of Saint Peter. Christophe Rico and Jean-Michel Poffet started on a new translation of the Gospel according to Saint John.

The necessary working tools were created. J. Taylor defined the position of *The Bible in its Traditions* in view of the texts that were to be translated. C. Rico and Olivier-Thomas Venard started a fundamental reflection on the literary nature of the Bible and the kind of translation that was desired. Marcel Sigrist together with O.-Th. Venard and E. Nodet developed the first elements in the annotation grid. The chapters that will follow in this volume are the result of all that work.

In 2004, O.-Th. Venard and Bieke Mahieu (a historian, student at the École, and project assistant) together with some twenty volunteer specialists (including patristic scholars, specialists in Jewish studies, theologians, literary specialists and art historians) launched the project in "life size", starting with the first gospel. Their work on the Passion according to Saint Matthew, which is in the process of being completed, made it possible to refine the techniques for collaboration, the annotation grid, the

literary genre of the various types of notes envisaged, as well as answering many detailed technical questions.

Towards the end of that period, the homage given to Dom Henry Wansbrough, the main artisan of the second edition of *The Jerusalem Bible* in English (*The New Jerusalem Bible*), was an opportunity to rediscover the archives of *La Bible de Jérusalem* at Le Cerf publishers in Paris and at the École in Jerusalem. That led to the pleasant surprise of seeing that the intellectual questions raised by *The Bible in its Traditions* were in a straight line with those debated at the outset of *The Jerusalem Bible*. As had been the desire since the beginning, the new project was really fulfilling the former one.

### *Publicity and recruiting collaborators*

As the instigator of *The Jerusalem Bible*, the publishing house of Le Cerf could not but be interested in *The Bible in its Traditions*. The Master of the Order of Preachers, Fr. Carlos Alfonso Aspiroz Costa said already in 2002 that he saw in it a project for the whole Order. In December of that same year, the directors of Le Cerf came to the École for a weekend of intense work. Two years later, on November 26, 2004, a meeting gathered together 26 possible collaborators at Le Cerf in Paris. The countries represented were Canada, Argentina, the United States, Belgium, Switzerland and the École Biblique of Jerusalem. By the end, those who took part were convinced that the project was important, but that carrying it out would not be easy. The next day, a smaller gathering came to the formal decision to create a "demonstration volume" which would bring together several drafts of various books in the biblical corpus. That was the starting point for this work.

The project is being made known to the ecclesiastical and to the academic worlds along parallel lines. The researchers of the École who are involved in the project present it in many institutional centers of study (monasteries and seminaries) where they are invited to teach. More formally, the Director of the École, J.-M. Poffet, has presented it in France (Paris, École Pratique des Hautes Etudes in 2003; the Congress of the French Catholic Association of Biblical Studies; the École Normale Supérieure), in Italy (International Pauline Congress at the Abbey of St. Paul-outside-the-Walls, Rome) and in Brazil and Argentina (Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires). J. Taylor

has presented it at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; O.-Th. Venard at the Institute for theological studies in Brussels... The United States have not been forgotten: after various more modest forms of information (an article in a review or an informal talk),<sup>75</sup> O.-Th. Venard and J. Taylor together with M. Sigrist and Gregory Tatum officially presented *The Bible in its Traditions* during the summer session of the *Catholic Biblical Association of America* in Chicago in August 2006. Several American colleagues expressed their desire to take part in the project; over the following years, the attempt was transformed into an ongoing seminar, led by the editorial committee of *The Bible in its Traditions*, during the summer sessions of the CBA.

#### *Institutionalization*

Starting in 2005, an editorial committee made up of the members of the École Biblique who were working directly on *The Bible in its Traditions* was set up with the first task of creating the “demonstration volume”. Presided over by J. Taylor and served by its secretary-archivist (Marc Leroy), this committee gathered several times a month, and each of these meetings was the occasion for a formal report which was voted and put into the archives. The committee’s first task was to develop as precisely as possible the proceedings to be followed for the translation and annotation of the biblical text. The committee fulfilled this task by adopting, correcting and enriching the ways that had been initiated by the team already at work on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. This was the *Vade Mecum* that was published simultaneously in French and in English in 2006.<sup>76</sup> The first contributions were not slow in arriving.

#### *Towards the demonstration volume (2006-2008)*

Over the course of these two years, some fifty collaborators from several countries offered us pericopes from various biblical books from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. Thus, a long process of dialogue began between the author or authors and the editorial committee. The latter immediately began to read systematically and in great detail what was offered. Over the course of the working sessions with one or several members of the editorial committee or through exchanges over the internet, a fruitful dialogue was set up with most of the contributors, and this makes it possible to ensure the hermeneutic coherence of the work as a whole. Thus the general model was adapted to the problems specific to the various examples of the corpus represented in the volume. These exchanges were facilitated by a grant given to the École by the Consul General of France in Jerusalem.

<sup>75</sup> Thus M. Sigrist presented the project in the context of several American universities; O.-Th. Venard presented the main lines in Washington, D.C. (Dominican House of Studies, John Paul II Cultural Center) and published “The Bible in its Traditions”, *The New Project of the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem Presented as a ‘Fourth-Generation’ Enterprise*, *Nova et Vetera* symposium, *English Edition*, around: “Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 2006/4, pp. 142-159.

<sup>76</sup> Comité Editorial de *La Bible en ses Traditions*, *Vademecum de collaborateur à “La Bible en ses Traditions”*, and *The Bible in its Traditions: Conventions and Abbreviations. Vade mecum for the Use of the Contributors to the Demonstration Volume*, Jerusalem, EBAF, 2006.

