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Beyond a Confessional Paradigm? Richard Simon and the Vernacular Bible

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This article presents a new account of Richard Simon's work as a biblical translator. Having first contextualised Simon's views on the vernacular Bible in the contested world of late seventeenth-century French Catholic biblical translation, it then examines how they were engaged with and disputed by contemporaries (in particular, Antoine Arnauld). It contends that Simon's novelty did not consist in applying history and philology to the Bible in order to reach a confessionally neutral version, but rather in reconceptualising the relationship between multiple legitimate biblical translations to craft a new form of Catholic vernacular Bible.

The study of the vernacular Bible in early modern Europe no longer harbours under the sway once exerted by the so-called 'Protestant paradigm'. This saw attitudes towards the Bible in the vernacular and lay access to the Scriptures taken to be touchstones of the era of the Reformation and its subsequent crystallisation in opposing confessional camps. As Protestants made a novel call for every lay person to have access to translations of the Scriptures, so those on the Catholic side reacted, erecting swift prohibitions on vernacular biblical reading and implementing – as best they could – swingeing controls on the publication and circulation of biblical texts.[1] These overarching narratives have been superseded by new accounts of the relationship between Protestant and

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[1] Andrew Gow, 'Challenging the Protestant paradigm: Bible reading in lay and urban contexts of the later Middle Ages', in Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas

Catholic views and the late medieval world: rather than 'revolutionary manifestos', early sixteenth-century pleas for vernacular translations were actually the result of – and owed their success to – earlier shifts in late medieval piety and reading practices that spawned a vibrant vernacular biblical culture.[2] The period of and following 1520 has escaped the 'polemical straitjacket' of confessional historiography, replacing a dichotomy between Protestant and Catholic approaches to Scripture with a new understanding of the similarities and tensions between, and within, members of different confessions towards manuscript, print and the spoken word.[3] On the Protestant side, this has meant recognising how insistence on the correct interpretation of the Scriptures in their 'original' languages potentially also accorded an authoritative role to learning and scholarship in scriptural exegesis.[4] On the Catholic side, it has been shown how the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities towards Scripture in the vernacular was marked not by monolithic papal decrees, but by a diversity of opinion (often but not exclusively divided by geography) and a willingness to be flexible according to the needs, requirements and traditions of given regions.[5] In both Protestant and Catholic settings these variegated narratives have been complemented by still-incipient book historical research that has challenged the view that reading practices divided neatly along confessional lines.[6]

Even with these shifts, the centre of gravity in the study of the early modern vernacular Bible has remained for the most part within the sixteenth century and with it, especially in the context of Catholic historiography, the issues raised by the twin poles of the Reformation and the Council of Trent. While this has allowed scholars to appraise in considerable scope and detail the temporal and geographical shifts that occurred in this period, it has perhaps also underplayed just how far views on the Bible in the vernacular could, at least in some locales, remain a consistent source of contestation well into the seventeenth century. This was

E. Burman (eds), *Scripture and pluralism: reading the Bible in the religiously plural worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Leiden 2005, 161–91.

[2] Sabrina Corbellini, Mart van Duijn, Suzan Folkerts and Margriet Hoogvliet, 'Challenging the paradigms: holy writ and lay readers in late medieval Europe', *Church History and Religious Culture* xciii (2013), 171–88 at p. 173.

[3] Alexandra Walsham, 'Unclasping the book? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the vernacular Bible', *Journal of British Studies* xlii (2003), 141–66 at p. 143.

[4] See, for example, Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*, Cambridge 1982, 36–8.

[5] Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo: la censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura (1471–1605)*, Bologna 1997; Wim François, 'Vernacular Bible reading in late medieval and early modern Europe: the "Catholic" position revisited', *Catholic Historical Review* civ (2018), 23–56.

[6] Thomas Fulton and Jeremy Specland, 'The Elizabethan Catholic New Testament and its readers', *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* vi (2019), 251–75.

particularly true in France, where tracing the history of attitudes towards vernacular biblical translation from the early sixteenth to the later seventeenth century reveals a history of striking contrasts. On the one hand, this saw periods of unremitting censorship, as when, in the early 1520s, the Parisian Faculty of Theology led a move against all new vernacular translations that culminated in their official prohibition.[7] On the other hand, there existed moments when the secular and ecclesiastical authorities enthusiastically encouraged lay biblical reading, as when, in the era following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in late autumn 1685, Archbishop François de Harlay de Champvallon and the Jesuit François de La Chaise oversaw the publication and circulation of over a million books to the so-called *nouveaux convertis*, among them about 150,000 copies of the New Testament and a similar number of versions of the Psalms.[8] This, furthermore, took place in a period marked by new Catholic biblical translations, including the ecclesiastically sponsored edition of Denis Amelote and, emanating from Port-Royal, both new biblical translations and novel justifications for lay Catholic biblical reading.

The late seventeenth-century effervescence of French Catholic vernacular translations has attracted scholarship focused almost overwhelmingly on the Port-Royal or 'Jansenist' side. One aspect of this has been on the print culture in which these editions emerged, and especially the circumstances in which the so-called 'Mons' New Testament was published abroad and then imported into France.[9] Above all, their study has become increasingly synonymous with the work of Bernard Chédozeau, whose succession of volumes and edited collections have mapped in considerable bibliographical detail the history of Port-Royal's publications in this and related fields.[10] Chédozeau has also been responsible for imposing on the field a specific interpretative schema that separated Port-Royal from the so-called 'Ultramontane' and 'French Roman Catholic' positions.

[7] Wim François, 'The condemnation of vernacular Bible reading by the Parisian theologians (1523–31)', in W. François and A. A. den Hollander (eds), *Infant milk or hardy nourishment? The Bible for lay people and theologians in the early modern period*, Leuven 2009, 111–39.

[8] Bernard Chédozeau, 'Bossuet et les Protestants: "La voie de charité" et les distributions de livres aux nouveaux convertis (1685–1687)', *Liame: Bulletin du Centre d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine de l'Europe méditerranéenne et de ses périphéries* x (2002), 7–131, esp. pp. 17–26, 49–70.

[9] Christine Bonnefon, Delphine Côme, Kari Desservettaz, Frédéric Manfrin and Arnauld-Amaury Sillet, 'Contribution à l'identification de quelques contrefaçons de la fin du XVIIe siècle: l'exemple du Nouveau Testament dit de Mons', unpubl. ENSSIB Mémoire de recherche 2004.

[10] See, especially, Bernard Chédozeau, *La Bible et la liturgie en Français: l'Église tridentine et les traductions bibliques et liturgiques (1600–1789)*, Paris 1990; *Port-Royal et la Bible: un siècle d'or de la Bible en France, 1650–1708*, Paris 2007; and *Le Nouveau Testament autour de Port-Royal: traductions, commentaires et études (1697–fin du XVIIIe siècle)*, Paris 2012.

This framework was chiefly devised to provide a means of grouping together the attitudes towards lay access to the Scriptures in the vernacular, with one group, the Ultramontane, forbidding it completely, a second, the 'French Roman Catholic', permitting it on the basis of ecclesiastical approval (following 'Rule IV' of the Tridentine Index) and a third, associated with 'Port-Royal', which not only permitted the vernacular Scriptures to all lay readers but even went so far as to insist that such readers had a religious duty to try to read God's word.[11]

Chédozeau's approach was useful for the attention it drew to the extent of the diversity of opinion that existed within seventeenth-century Catholic France on the subject of the Scriptures in the vernacular. Yet its value as an interpretive device should not be overstated. In part, its shortcomings relate to Chédozeau's choice of central question. In making, that is, the dividing issue that of access to the Scriptures, it has had the unfortunate result that it associates together in a single grouping those who otherwise held widely different views about the Bible. Further, it also overlooks the extent of debate on a host of additional issues, notably the question of which text should serve as the basis for vernacular translations and how this necessarily related to the status of the Vulgate. Finally, the emphasis on delineating the views of specific general groups has meant less of a focus on the precise intentions of individual translators (a tendency in part encouraged – particularly in the case of the New Testament – by the comparative uncertainty regarding who was responsible for which parts of Port-Royal's work).

Two views of biblical translation

This article is intended to correct these imbalances by examining the approach to biblical translation taken by the biblical scholar Richard Simon (1638–1712). Having been educated by the Oratorians and Jesuits in Dieppe and Rouen, Simon thereafter studied in Paris before joining the Oratory in 1662. There he forged a promising early career as a scholar and published several works and translations on the Greek Church and Jewish customs that would see him praised by the congregation in 1675 for his 'diverse works of evident erudition'.[12] His burgeoning

[11] For a recent statement of this position see idem, 'Bibles in French from 1520 to 1750', in Euan Cameron (ed.), *The new Cambridge history of the Bible*, III: *From 1450 to 1750*, Cambridge 2016, 285–304 at pp. 291–304. For additional commentary on Chédozeau's work, and suggested modifications to his schema, see Els Agten, *The Catholic Church and the Dutch Bible: from the Council of Trent to the Jansenist controversy (1564–1733)*, Leiden 2020.

[12] Paul Auvray and François Monfort, 'Richard Simon d'après des documents inédits ou peu connus', *Oratoriana* 1 (1960), 46–69 at p. 50: 'divers ouvrages pleins d'érudition'.

success would soon be cut short, however, when in 1678 his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* came – just on the cusp of publication – to the attention of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. Bossuet reacted violently against the work and headed moves to take immediate action against it, leading to its prohibition by the Conseil du Roi, the destruction of the vast majority of its first print run and Simon's expulsion from the Oratory.[13] Simon would long be affected by Bossuet's opposition, and never again enjoyed the same sort of institutional role or position as he had at the Oratory. Yet, in part facilitated by his close relationship with the Dutch printer-publisher Reinier Leers, he would come to publish a succession of major publications addressed to the Bible, chief among them the authorised edition of the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1685) and an even more extensive set of three volumes dedicated to the text and history of the New Testament.[14]

Simon has long been viewed as a crucial figure in the history of biblical scholarship, and especially, *via* the concept he devised of the 'critical history', for marking a watershed moment in late seventeenth-century attitudes towards to the Bible: the moment at which the text of Scripture, it is said, was first submitted to sustained scrutiny independent of religious or theological criteria.[15] Recent studies have challenged this view of Simon and his work in two decisive ways. First, they have demonstrated that Simon's work did not constitute a complete break with earlier traditions of learning and scholarship, but rather how far his Old Testament scholarshp was related to, and intended to engage with, existing erudite debate.[16] Second, they have reaffirmed the close connections that existed between Simon's scholarship and his confessional views. It has long been recognised that Simon purported to link his work to contemporary apologetic concerns, notably, for example, in the context of the Old Testament, insisting that the uncertainties involved in construing the Hebrew text necessitated an authoritative ecclesiastical interpreter. A series of recent studies, however, have delved much deeper, and shown how across a range of issues pertaining to the study of the New Testament – such as the history of the New Testament canon, the nature of the original Gospel of Matthew, or the way in which the use of allegory in the New Testament depended on contemporary Jewish

[13] A brief summary of these events is provided in Patrick J. Lambe, 'Biblical criticism and censorship in ancien régime France: the case of Richard Simon', *Harvard Theological Review* lxxviii (1985), 149–77.

[14] Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament*, Rotterdam 1689; *Histoire critique des versions du Nouveau Testament*, Rotterdam 1690; and *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament*, Rotterdam 1693.

[15] For a classic formulation of this view, subsequently widely repeated, see Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne (1680–1715)*, Paris 1935, 184–202.

[16] T. Twining, 'Richard Simon and the remaking of seventeenth-century biblical criticism', *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* iii (2018), 421–87.

custom – Simon's accounts were framed in such a way that they provided precisely targeted scholarly critiques of Protestant views on these same subjects.[17]

As much as Simon is best known for his work as a scholar of the Bible, he was also considerably exercised throughout his career by the subject of biblical translation. His views on the correct way to translate the Bible formed a central part of his critical histories of the Old and New Testament, played a key role in his polemical confrontation with Antoine Arnauld and saw him involved in a cross-confessional translation scheme with a group of French and Genevan Protestants. In 1702 Simon published his own translation of the New Testament into French and had, at least according to subsequent reports, intended to complete a translation of the whole of the Bible.[18] Previous accounts of Simon's activities in this sphere have closely linked them to his broader scholarly preoccupations, arguing that his work as a translator was marked by a novel application of history and philology to vernacular translation.[19] More recently, stress has been put on how far Simon directly crafted his approach with a view to rendering new French biblical translations that pushed in a theologically neutral or ecumenical direction.[20] Whether the emphasis is placed on Simon's supposedly novel method or his overarching confessional preoccupations, both these lines of argument concur on a central claim regarding his work and its place in the history of seventeenth-century biblical translation. Until Simon, that is, it is agreed that biblical translation was necessarily enmeshed in a defined confessional setting that Simon attempted to transcend by employing historical and philological learning, thereby opening the way towards a potentially post-confessional future.

[17] See, respectively, Dmitri Levitin, 'European scholarship on the formation of the New Testament canon, *c.*1700', in Dmitri Levitin and Ian Maclean (eds), *The worlds of knowledge and the classical tradition in the early modern age: comparative approaches*, Leiden 2021, 366–433, and 'From Palestine to Göttingen (*via* India): Hebrew Matthew and the origins of the synoptic problem', *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* vii (2022), 196–247; Kirsten Macfarlane, 'Christianity as Jewish allegory? Guilielmus Surenhusius, rabbinic hermeneutics, and the Reformed study of the New Testament in the early eighteenth century', in Piet van Boxel, Kirsten Macfarlane and Joanna Weinberg (eds), *The Mishnaic moment: Jewish law among Jews and Christians in early modern Europe*, Oxford 2022, 378–400.

[18] Antoine-Augustin Bruzen de La Martinière, 'Éloge historique de Richard Simon prêtre', in his *Lettres choisies de M. Simon*, Amsterdam 1730, i. 44.

[19] See, for example, Hazard, *La Crise*, 199; Michel de Certeau, 'L'Idée de traduction de la Bible au xviième siècle: Sacy et Simon', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* lxvi (1978), 73–92; and Chédozeau, *Le Nouveau Testament*, 67, and 'Bibles in French', 303.

[20] John Woodbridge, 'Richard Simon and the Charenton Bible project: the quest for "perfect neutrality" in interpreting Scripture', in Martin Mulsow and Asaph Ben-Tov (eds), *Knowledge and profanation: transgressing the boundaries of religion in premodern scholarship*, Leiden 2019, 253–72; Nicholas Mithen, 'Richard Simon and the *tiers parti*', *Church History and Religious Culture* cii (2022), 60–82 at p. 80.

There are reasons to draw back from, or at least to modify subtly, this overarching claim regarding Simon's intervention in the confessionalised world of biblical translation. Initially, it is necessary to address an issue that these earlier treatments take for granted, relying, as they do, on the understanding that Simon put forward a single and unequivocal attitude towards vernacular biblical translation throughout his career. This, however, was not the case, and in his published works running from the late 1670s to the early eighteenth century, Simon put forward two quite different views on how the Bible ought to be translated.

One of these was enunciated most clearly in the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* itself, where, at the start of book III, Simon outlined a projected design for a 'new version' of Scripture in the vernacular.[21] Simon framed this project in terms that cohered with the arguments he had made in the first part of the work. There, and in contrast to many previous Catholic scholars, Simon had foregrounded the pre-eminent place that any biblical critic had to give to the 'original' text of the Scripture, which in the case of the Old Testament meant the Hebrew text.[22] The bulk of book I had thereafter developed a novel historical argument that traced the origin and subsequent transmission of that text in unprecedented detail.[23] Now, in book III, Simon followed through on what one might well take to be the implications of this earlier emphasis, arguing that the central ambition for any act of translation was for the new version to resemble as closely as it possibly could the 'original' text. In the context of Scripture, Simon explained, this meant the translator had to focus on effectively translating the Hebrew text of the Old Testament (and, although it was not discussed at this stage, by implication the Greek text of the New Testament).[24] With this overarching ambition established, the rest of the first and the following three chapters set out to explain how this goal could be accomplished. Simon outlined succinctly how the 'rules of criticism' could be used to establish the most probable reading of a now lost original text, provided a brief discussion of how to recover the meaning of given Hebrew terms according to their ancient uses, and gave a series of sustained examples for how to apply his methods.[25] Simon also added some points regarding the *mise-en-page* of the eventual edition, highlighting that in places of considerable textual ambiguity the margins could be peppered with plausible variant readings drawn from a wide variety of sources.[26]

Simon put forward a second view regarding biblical translation in a series of later works. This was first briefly gestured towards in his 1687 'Lettre à

[21] Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, Rotterdam 1685, 352.
[22] Ibid. sig. ****3r, pp. 8–11, 269–70. [23] Twining, 'Richard Simon', 446–60.
[24] Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, 352–3. [25] Ibid. 353–71.
[26] Ibid. 354–7.

Monsieur l'Abbé P. D. & P. en Th. touchant l'inspiration des Livres Sacrés', before being developed in his critical studies of the New Testament, particularly the *Histoire critique des versions du Nouveau Testament* (1690) and the *Nouvelles Observations sur le texte et les versions du Nouveau Testament* (1695). It culminated, meanwhile, in its fullest elaboration in the preface to his 1702 translation of the New Testament.[27] Throughout these works Simon pulled back from the singular emphasis he had earlier attached to the need to translate according to the 'original' texts of Scripture. Instead, he proposed that vernacular translations of the Bible ought to be based exclusively on the Vulgate.[28] Simon was unrelenting on this point, and used it not only to promote his own translation but also to criticise other recent Catholic translations, including those by Amelote and – most especially – by Port-Royal.[29]

It is possible to situate these two views in Simon's *oeuvre* in two slightly different settings, framed, in each case, towards somewhat different objectives. The view presented in the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* can be traced to the mid-1670s, when Simon became involved in a planned Protestant scheme to translate the Bible conceived by those connected to the Huguenot Church at Charenton, among them Jean Claude and Pierre Allix. According to Simon, he was first contacted regarding this project by his Protestant friend and acquaintance Henri Justel, who was – Simon informs us – concerned as to the capacities of his coreligionists to complete the work.[30] Simon, who would subsequently claim he had been engaged in considering such work for a considerable time, provided Justel with a brief plan for just how a translation of the Bible ought to be completed.[31] The Protestants involved in the project apparently approved of Simon's submission, and thereafter asked him for a few sample chapters to serve as an example of his approach.[32] While they divided the work of translation among themselves, this did not end Simon's involvement with the scheme and in exchange for some financial recompense he agreed to offer them his assistance as they completed the work, providing them with his own notes and translations and

[27] Idem, 'Lettre à Monsieur l'Abbé P. D. & P. en Th. touchant l'inspiration des Livres Sacrés', in his *De l'Inspiration des livres sacrés: avec une réponse au livre intitulé, defense des sentimens de quelques theologiens de Hollande sur l'histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, Rotterdam 1687; *Histoire critique des versions du Nouveau Testament*; *Nouvelles Observations sur le texte et les versions du Nouveau Testament*, Paris 1695; and *Le Nouveau Testament de nôtre seigneur Jesus-Christ*, Trevoux 1702.

[28] Idem, 'Lettre à Monsieur l'Abbé P.', 14; *Histoire critique des versions*, 410–14; and *Le Nouveau Testament*, i, sigs a2r–a3r.

[29] See, for example, idem, *Histoire critique des versions*, 376, 410–14, and *Nouvelles Observations*, 189–90.

[30] Idem, *Réponse au livre intitulé, defense des sentimens*, 77. [31] Ibid. [32] Ibid.

reviewing their translations.[33] This seemingly productive interconfessional collaboration did not end successfully. The Charenton project became linked to a similar venture in Geneva and the whole endeavour ruptured once it was discovered that Simon, a Catholic, was involved.[34] It did, none the less, have a meaningful by-product in Simon's case, which is that the pages inserted at the beginning of book III of the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* regarding how to translate the Bible were based on those he had presented to Justel.

Simon's second view concerning biblical translation comes from a later period in his working life, one indelibly marked, as it was, by the after-effects of the prohibition of the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* in 1678. In the immediate aftermath of these events, Simon had initially attempted to justify his conduct and published a succession of pieces legitimising his work in the context of earlier Catholic scholarship and attacking, often polemically, the work of contemporary Protestants such as Isaac Vossius and Jean Le Clerc.[35] By the later 1680s and early 1690s some, albeit somewhat scanty, evidence exists that suggests Simon was attempting with even greater zeal to rehabilitate his image among contemporary Catholics, especially in Paris. Letters from this period contain reports that Simon was trying to endear himself to the Jesuits in order, at least according to the scholar and antiquary Claude Nicaise, to obtain a benefice.[36] This period seems to have reached its apogee in and following 1692, when Simon became increasingly linked to the archbishop of Paris, Harlay de Champvallon. According to Simon, he was, at this time, and with the archbishop acting as his backer and *protecteur*, on the cusp of publishing a revised edition of his critical histories of the Old and New Testaments, newly refashioned in four volumes as the '*Bibliothèque sacrée*'.[37] While Harlay de Champvallon's death in late summer 1695 cut short these plans, the period was none the less notable for Simon's first Parisian publication in many years, the *Nouvelles Observations*, a book which, although largely dismissed or overlooked by subsequent scholarship, Simon himself insisted ought to be considered the fourth volume of his critical history of the New Testament.[38] The preface to this work aptly reveals Simon's apparent shift in perspective. Where he had previously adeptly

[33] Ibid. 77–8.

[34] See the account provided in Jacques Le Brun and John D. Woodbridge, 'Introduction', to their *Additions aux recherches curieuses sur la diversité des langues et religions d'Edward Brerewood*, Paris 1983, 27.

[35] Twining, 'Richard Simon', 473–84.

[36] Claude Nicaise to Jean Le Clerc, 26 Nov. 1691, in Maria Grazia and Mario Sina (eds), *Epistolario*, II: *1690–1705*, Florence 1991, 60.

[37] Richard Simon, *Bibliothèque critique*, Paris [=Trevoux] 1708–10, ii. 464–6.

[38] Richard Simon to Jean-Alphonse Turrettini, 14 Nov. 1694, in Paul Auvray, *Richard Simon (1638–1712): étude bio-bibliographique*, Paris 1974, 217. For a dismissive characterisation of the *Nouvelles Observations* see ibid. 109.

exploited the presses of the Dutch Republic to circulate his work as widely as possible, he now insisted that he would henceforth only acknowledge works as his own that were published in Paris and with the approbation of the relevant doctors.[39] He also moderated a number of his earlier views, including the harshness with which he had previously referred to Augustine.[40] The years following this would also see Simon envisage that it might be possible for him to try and restore some links with the Oratory.[41]

It is possible to draw on a number of potential explanations to account for Simon's apparent shift in his views. In the first instance one can point towards a desire to render his plans for vernacular biblical translation more acceptable to contemporary Catholic opinion, and especially the contemporary Catholic authorities, by unequivocally foregrounding the ecclesiastically sanctioned Vulgate. This, at least, is apparent in the preface to the *Nouvelles Observations*, in which Simon, insisting that he had never intended to be of any other *parti* than the Catholic Church, explained that in this and his works on the New Testament he had definitively retracted the proposals he had adumbrated in the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* for a new vernacular translation of the Scriptures.[42] This was, Simon now clarified, only a suggestion he had wanted to submit to the 'judgement of the learned' and he had since altered his views, having greatly benefited in this regard from the advice of Archbishop Harlay de Champvallon himself.[43] The latter had, as indicated above, helped organise the distribution of books to the *nouveaux convertis*, including copies of the New Testament in Amelote's translation (a version Simon even criticised for not following the Vulgate as strictly as it could have done), so this appeal to the prelate, while perhaps not necessarily reliable, does possess more than a hint of verisimilitude.

Yet, elsewhere, Simon himself presented reasons that suggested he believed his revised plans could be justified on grounds beyond those demanded by the exigencies of the day. His expositions on this score were not uniform, however, and possess features that put them in tension – if not necessarily contradiction – with one another. As early as the letter on inspiration Simon indicated that, while he did not regret the earlier exposure of his views in the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, he was none the less keen to emend them.[44] The plans he had put forward there, he outlined, had shocked some readers for the way in which they centred on the Hebrew text rather than the Latin Vulgate. He had done so, he now wanted to qualify, only in order to propose a version that might be useful

[39] Simon, *Nouvelles Observations*, sig. a2r–v.
[40] Ibid. sigs a3v–a4r.
[41] Auvray, *Richard Simon*, 74–5.
[42] Simon, *Nouvelle Observations*, sigs a2v–a3r.
[43] Ibid. sig. a3r.
[44] Idem, 'Lettre à Monsieur l'Abbé P.', 14.

for individuals ('particuliers') who wanted such an edition for their 'instruction'.[45] Simon underlined the equivalence of such a version with those used in the ancient Church, where one could consult works of Scripture with many such versions 'joined together' ('jointes ensemble') to clarify the meaning of the Septuagint, then the version of the Bible used by the Church.[46]

This was a curious analogy. Simon's projected edition was notable precisely because it did not revolve around the Vulgate in the manner that this comparison implied. Further, if by it Simon intended to refer to the *Hexapla*, Origen's great assemblage of multiple versions of the Bible in six parallel columns, he was also well aware that this potentially fulfilled many functions beyond simply allowing individuals to clarify the meaning of the ecclesiastically sanctioned text.[47] It is therefore intriguing that in later works, and especially in the preface to his translation of the New Testament, Simon reformulated his justification for his editorial choices. It was, he proposed, undoubtedly a general rule that ideally one ought to translate any work from its 'original' version into another language.[48] There was, none the less, a single exception to this in the case of translations of the Bible into the vernacular when the new version was destined for the 'use of the people'.[49] Any such version, Simon now insisted, necessarily had to translate that version which was read in church.[50] It was on this basis, and in line with the decrees of the Council of Trent, that the text of his work presented a translation of the Vulgate.[51] This, however, and as we will shortly see, was not Simon's only modification of his scheme as, in the course of this period, he developed both a novel format and a novel legitimation of his practice that attempted to square the demands of confession with those of criticism.

Antoine Arnauld, Richard Simon and translating the 'true word of God'

In moving to compose his translations of the Bible Simon sought to enter what had become an increasingly well-populated field of vernacular biblical translation in late seventeenth-century France. Other contemporary translations included the translation of the New Testament by Simon's Oratorian contemporary, Denis Amelote, which was sponsored by the French Assembly of the Clergy in the early 1660s and subsequently

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] See the discussion in idem, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, 198–9.
[48] Idem, *Le Nouveau Testament*, i, sig. a2r.
[49] 'cette regle qui est vraye dans sa generalité, souffre quelque exception dans les traductions de la Bible en langue vulgaire, qui sont destinées aux usages du peuple': ibid.
[50] Ibid. sigs a2r–a3v.
[51] Ibid.

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distributed in immense quantities to the *nouveaux convertis*. A second translation stemmed from those associated with Port-Royal and, beginning with the so called 'Mons' New Testament in 1667 had, by 1693, culminated in the complete translation of the Old Testament.[52] Even the Jesuits, frequent critics of Port-Royal and at times hostile to the very notion of vernacular translations *tout court*, had by the 1690s published their own version of the New Testament, an edition spearheaded by Dominique Bouhours. This plethora of biblical editions was complemented by a burgeoning vernacular religious, devotional and controversial print culture. In this context, once more, a key role was played by those associated with Port-Royal who, especially from the mid-1650s, had begun to publish a wide array of works aimed towards a vernacular audience that frequently went through multiple editions, ranging from translations of the Church Fathers and the Psalms to liturgical editions and the heavily illustrated 'Bible de Royaumont'.[53]

Debate churned too regarding the legitimacy of vernacular biblical translation. This covered a series of different issues, among them: whether the Church had historically permitted translations of the Bible into the vernacular and, related to this, whether it ought to be permitted in the present day; on the basis of which texts any such translation ought to be allowed and, in particular, whether the Vulgate should be preferred to versions in the 'original' languages; and who ought to be permitted access to vernacular translations and whether this required ecclesiastical permission. A particular catalyst for the intensification of these controversies was the publication of the 'Mons' New Testament, which elicited considerable opposition and thereafter the development of an enormous pamphlet literature debating the legitimacy and merits of the work between those associated with Port-Royal and their opponents.[54] The course of these disputes ultimately witnessed a complex pattern of reaction and counter-reaction: as they fostered a widening theological public who were following, or at least aware of, the issues – songs, for example, regarding Port-Royal's position were sung on the Pont-Neuf – so too did members of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities attempt to muster a response, which contributed to their effort to impose – with varying levels of success – the strictest print controls hitherto seen in early modern France.[55] The enforcement of

[52] On the publication of the 'Mons' New Testament, the first edition of which was almost certainly published in Amsterdam, see n. 9 above.

[53] For surveys of these works see Chédozeau, *Port-Royal et la Bible*.

[54] Yuka Mochizuki, 'Un Prélude à la "guerre civile de la langue Française": la polémique littéraire autour du Nouveau Testament de Mons', *Chroniques de Port-Royal* li (2002), 429–65.

[55] Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS Français 12618, 1–8; Anne Sauvy, *Livres saisis à Paris entre 1678 et 1701*, The Hague 1972, 5; Daniel Roche, *Les Républicains des lettres: gens de culture et lumières au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1988, 29–46;

these controls conduced to create a distinctive late seventeenth-century print culture, with innumerable potentially controversial works composed in French and destined for the French market printed in the Low Countries. The movement of books was also linked to the migration of people, especially, from the later 1670s on, the departure of many Huguenots and, on the Catholic side, a significant contingent of those associated with Port-Royal to that region.

One such migrant who played a key role in the debate concerning the vernacular Bible and broader controversial print culture was Antoine Arnauld. Arnauld was indefatigable in writing against the opponents of Port-Royal's works and campaigned vociferously both on their behalf and, more generally, in favour of an expansive vision that encouraged and enjoined reading of the Bible in the vernacular to all lay people.[56] Having begun writing in earnest on such issues in the immediate aftermath of the 'Mons' New Testament's appearance, Arnauld thereafter continued to propound these views against any detractors, notably engaging in a considerable debate over the Catholic Church's historical attitude towards lay scriptural reading with Charles Mallet, a cathedral canon of Rouen.[57] The culmination of these conflicts came while Arnauld was resident in the Southern Low Countries in a series of volumes directed against the Louvain theologian Martin Steyaert. Steyaert had himself once been inclined to Jansenist views, but by the later 1680s he had turned considerably hostile to them, and would in this period play a key role leading a series of anti-Jansenist campaigns, notably against the Oratorian community in Mons.[58] Steyaert was especially inimical to Jansenist positions regarding lay biblical reading and the quality of their biblical translations, and in order to criticise both he drew on Simon's work, especially the castigation of the 'Mons' New Testament Simon had presented in his critical histories of the New Testament.[59] It was Steyaert's use of Simon that appears to have prompted Arnauld to direct his ire against the former Oratorian, and in the fifth, sixth and seventh of his *Difficultez proposées à Mr. Steyaert* (1691–2), he developed a sustained critique of Simon's work.

Raymond Birn, 'Book production and censorship in France, 1700–1715', in Kenneth E. Carpenter (ed.), *Books and society in history*, New York 1983, 145–71.

[56] See, for example, Elizaveta Al-Faradzh, 'Salvation in the vernacular: the New Testament of Mons and post-Tridentine piety', *Early Modern French Studies* xlii (2020), 38–54.

[57] See Antoine Arnauld, *De la lecture de l'Écriture Sainte contre les paradoxes extravagans & impies de M^r. Mallet*, Antwerp 1680, at sigs A1r–[A7r] for the terms of this aspect of the debate.

[58] Émile Jacques, *Les Années d'exil d'Antoine Arnauld (1679–1694)*, Louvain 1976, 546–66, 667–76.

[59] Ibid. 668–9. For more on debates concerning lay biblical reading in the Southern Low Countries in this period see Agten, *The Catholic Church and the Dutch Bible*.

It is unlikely that Arnauld was surprised to find himself responding to Simon, since Simon had long been – and would continue to be – a persistent critic of Port-Royal's theological positions and patristic and biblical scholarship.[60]

This debate, and Simon's own subsequent responses to Arnauld and his criticism of Port-Royal's biblical editions, merit extensive treatment in themselves, covering as they did many diverse questions involving the history of lay reading within the Church (on which Simon could muster unparalleled knowledge of medieval French translations held only in manuscript), whether lay biblical reading was permissible in the present time, and the use and value of manuscript evidence in biblical translation (especially including the value of Codex Bezae). In the context of this study, however, it is necessary to focus on the way in which Arnauld paid close attention to Simon's own exposition of his views on vernacular translation, and specifically the ways in which Arnauld recognised that these had apparently changed between those elaborated in the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* and Simon's later publications. Arnauld fixed on this subject in the course of considering the issue of which text (or texts) should be used as the basis for any translation. Simon had, in his work on the New Testament, been especially critical of the 'Mons' translation, arguing that the translators' willingness to mix all too indiscriminately the Latin Vulgate and the original Greek created an unreliable farrago.[61] Biblical translators, Simon here insisted, ought to present a uniform translation of a single text.[62]

Simon's charges were not entirely inaccurate. In crafting their New Testament translation, those at Port-Royal had been notably ecumenical in their attitude towards the Greek and Latin versions, choosing, as they explained in their preface, to 'unite', in a 'certain way', the two in order to judge the text's most probable meaning.[63] In those instances where the texts themselves differed, they pursued a variety of strategies. When a word or passage from one was absent from the other, for example, they included the text and marked it with a letter 'V' or 'G'.[64] In places where the Greek text was different from the Vulgate, meanwhile, they generally followed the Vulgate (putting the meaning of the Greek in the margin), except, they noted, in 'some places' where 'habiles gens' agreed that the Greek was preferable.[65] Underlying these strictures was a

[60] John D. Woodbridge, 'La "Grande Chasse aux manuscrits", la controverse eucharistique et Richard Simon', in Ouzi Elyada and Jacques Le Brun (eds), *Conflits politiques, controverses religieuses: essais d'histoire européenne aux 16e-18e siècles*, Paris 2002, 143–75.

[61] Simon, *Histoire critique des versions*, 396–434.

[62] Ibid. 413–14, and *Nouvelles Observations*, 300.

[63] 'qui unist en quelque sorte la Version Vulgate & le texte Grec': *Le Nouveau Testament de nostre seigneur Jesus Christ*, Mons [=Amsterdam] 1667, sigs [**8v]–***1r, at sig. [**8v].

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

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clear willingness to give considerable weight to the Bible in its 'original' language, twinned with the view that the Council of Trent's decree regarding the Vulgate had only meant to insist it contained nothing 'against the faith' ('contre la foy').[66] These views had considerable authority within the *milieux* associated with Port-Royal. It is worth noting in particular how they were shared by others in Paris during the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century, notably Hebraists who held positions at the Collège de France such as Siméon de Muis and Valérian de Flavigny, both of whom – although further research on this is needed – appear to have had direct connections with Port-Royal.[67] There was, further, a close parallel between Port-Royal's earliest biblical publications and those of de Muis, with both notably including translations from the Psalms directly from the Hebrew.

In writing against Simon, Arnauld channelled the strongest versions of these arguments, putting it that if all biblical translations intended for the people had to be done solely on the basis of those used in public worship, then Jerome himself had evidently erred.[68] His central contention was that those who could only understand their vernacular language deserved access to a translation of Scripture that most closely approximated the translator's judgement regarding 'the true word of God' ('la vraie parole de Dieu').[69] Port-Royal's method was here necessitated by the way in which the faults of copyists and vicissitudes of the texts' transmission meant it was vital to use a range of different ancient translations in order to capture the 'meaning of the first original, dictated by the Holy Spirit'.[70] This meant that in some places it had to be recognised that it was the Greek text, rather than the Vulgate, that contained 'the meaning of the canonical scribe' ('le sens de l'Ecrivain Canonique'), a view which the Council of Trent had done nothing to undermine.[71] In insisting solely on the uniform translation of the Latin version used in Church, Simon did little less than deny people access to the genuine version of revelation.[72]

[66] Ibid.

[67] For an account of de Muis's views, closely followed by de Flavigny, see Timothy Twining, *The limits of erudition: the Old Testament in post-Reformation Europe*, Cambridge 2024 (forthcoming). For de Muis and de Flavigny's potential links to Port-Royal see Jean Lesaulnier, 'Les Hébraïsants de Port-Royal', in his *Images de Port-Royal*, Paris 2002–22, ii. 125–44 at pp. 128–9, and 'La "Seconde Renaissance" d'un théologien, Antoine Arnauld', in his *Images de Port-Royal*, i. 339–59 at p. 356.

[68] Antoine Arnauld, *Septiéme Partie des difficultez proposées à Mr. Steyaert*, Cologne 1692, 85.

[69] Ibid. 95–6.

[70] 'La plus considerable perfection d'une version du Nouveau Testament est de representer autant qu'il se peut quant au sens le premier Original dicté par le Saint Esprit': ibid. 143–4 at p. 144.

[71] Ibid. 126.

[72] Ibid. 95–6.

Conducted almost entirely in works published in the Low Countries, the conflict between Arnauld and Simon put forward claims that could unsettle at least some fellow Catholics. The early modern Catholic world had witnessed a wide range of views regarding the relationship between the different versions of the biblical text and the place of multi-lingual biblical scholarship. It was, however, only in the second half of the seventeenth-century that authoritative views, especially those in Rome, hardened considerably in favour of the Vulgate to the exclusion of other versions.[73] Both Simon and Arnauld defied this trajectory. For Arnauld, lay readers were entitled to the best possible approximation of the word of God, and they ought therefore to be furnished with versions that drew on both the Vulgate and editions in the Bible's 'original' languages. For Simon, meanwhile, translations for the people ought to be made on the basis of the Vulgate, but only because of the Council of Trent's decree regarding its use in public worship, not on any specific grounds regarding its text. Arnauld's criticisms on this score were perceptive, and Simon himself appears to have taken them seriously and attempted to respond to them directly in how he presented and justified a series of full-length biblical translations.

The critic as translator: sources

Before proceeding to this analysis it is first necessary to pause and briefly examine the body of evidence that can be drawn on to substantiate this claim and evaluate Simon's practice as a translator. This covers three main sources. First, and most disparately, there are the numerous comments throughout his published works and correspondence where Simon indicated his preferred ways of translating particular biblical passages and also where he castigated others for their mistakes or shortcomings. These are key, since some of the broader principles regarding the relationship between Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition adumbrated in these works implicitly undergirded Simon's account of the legitimacy of his design for a vernacular Bible. A second source, as readily evident from the discussion above, is Simon's complete translation of the New Testament, published in 1702. The third, finally, is Simon's unpublished manuscript translation into French of the whole of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

Unlike the other two sources, this third requires some additional discussion. It has long been known that Simon completed more work in this area than solely the translation of the New Testament. This was indicated by

[73] Twining, *The limits of erudition*.

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Jacques Le Long, who referred to the Pentateuch translation in his *Bibliotheca sacra* in 1709, commenting that it was then in the possession ('penes') of the bookseller Frédéric Léonard.[74] At some stage in the next decade or so it had left Léonard's possession. This appears to have been known to Le Long, or at least to the editor of the subsequent 1723 edition of his work, Pierre-Nicolas Desmolets, who indicated that 'it was' once in Léonard's hands ('fuit penes').[75] While the precise course of events remains uncertain, what is known is that by that same year the manuscript was offered at auction in Germany, whence it eventually entered the library of the Halle theologian Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten.[76] Baumgarten subsequently published a discussion of its contents and a brief extract from it in his *Nachrichten von merkwürdigen Büchern* (1752–8).[77] Listed in a catalogue of his library completed for its sale after his death, the history of the manuscript thereafter was long uncertain, and throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of Simon's work was frequently listed as missing or lost.[78] It had, however, entered the collections of the Hofbibliothek Aschaffenburg by the early nineteenth century, where it remains today as MS 48. Having been identified in Josef Hofmann and Hans Thurn's catalogue of the library's holdings in 1978, its existence was subsequently noted by some scholars of Simon's work from the mid-1980s onwards.[79] It was only, meanwhile, in 2019 that

[74] Jacques Le Long, *Bibliotheca sacra*, Paris 1709, ii. 21.

[75] Idem, *Bibliotheca sacra*, ed. Pierre-Nicolas Desmolets, Paris 1723, i. 322.

[76] For notice of the auction at which the manuscript was offered see Johann Wilhelm Theodor Leichner to Mathurin Veyssière de La Croze, 26 Feb. 1723, in Johann Ludwig Uhl (ed.), *Thesauri epistolici Lacroziani*, Leipzig 1742–6, i. 237. Baumgarten was born in 1706 and it consequently seems improbable that he purchased it at this auction.

[77] Siegm. Jac. Baumgarten, *Nachrichten von merkwürdigen Büchern*, Halle 1752–8, lx. 471–6.

[78] J. G. Schmid, *Bibliothecae Baumgartenianae*, Halle 1765–7, iii, appendix p. 34. See, for example, Aug. Bernus, *Notice bibliographique sur Richard Simon*, Basle 1882, 40, and Jean Steinmann, *Richard Simon et les origines de l'exégèse biblique*, Paris 1960, 396. The manuscript was identified and briefly described in P. Le Page Renouf, 'Notice of an unpublished translation of the Pentateuch, by Father Richard Simon of the Oratory', *The Atlantis* iv (1863), 259–67, but this was not noted by subsequent scholarship on Simon.

[79] J. Hofmann and H. Thurn, *Die Handschriften der Hofbibliothek Aschaffenburg*, Aschaffenburg 1978, 117. The manuscript's existence was brought to the attention of scholars of Simon's work by Rudolf Smend at a conference in 1985, and briefly referred to in John D. Woodbridge, 'German responses to the biblical critic Richard Simon: from Leibniz to J. S. Semler', in Henning Graf Reventlow, Walter Sparn and John Woodbridge (eds), *Historische Kritik und biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung*, Wiesbaden 1988, 65–87 at pp. 79–80. See Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach, 'Les Sources rabbiniques de la critique biblique de Richard Simon', in Jean-Robert Armogathe (ed.), *Le Grande Siècle et la Bible*, Paris 1989, 207–31 at p. 211; Jacques Le Brun, 'Conférence de M. Jacques Le Brun', *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études, section des sciences religieuses* cv (1996–7), 443–6; and Rudolf Smend, *Kritiker und*

John Woodbridge presented an assessment of the manuscript (albeit without identifying its location).[80]

The manuscript itself is a clean copy, evidently prepared for a printer rather than a working draft. Although a front flyleaf has a small square slip of paper attached to it that reads 'Man. 48' with a figure '1700' written below it, this almost certainly dates from after the text had entered the Hofbibliothek Aschaffenburg's collections and there is no additional commentary confirming or justifying the significance or rationale behind this figure.[81] It has a title page that reads 'Le Pentateuque traduit par Richard Simon avec ses Remarques' but no other contents, such as a preface, besides the translation itself.

In his evaluation of the manuscript, Woodbridge did not discuss in depth the issue of its origin. Instead, he simply asserted that it was 'integrally related to the Charenton Bible Project' with which, as we have seen, Simon had been involved in the mid to late 1670s.[82] Woodbridge thus associated the work with the project outlined at the beginning of book III of the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* and took it to be a key piece of evidence for Simon's apparent attempt to craft a translation that was devoid of confessional prejudice and, as such, would be acceptable to members of all confessions for its 'perfect neutrality'.[83]

This ascription was plausible in some respects. In particular, it was based on some of Simon's own testimony, when he detailed in later publications that he had provided those completing the Charenton Bible project with his own translation and notes on the majority of the Pentateuch (and, some time after, the materials he had prepared covering the prophets).[84] The evidence on this score is not unequivocal, however, as Simon elsewhere only referred to having sent Claude, who was responsible for translating the Pentateuch, the notes he had made on the Pentateuch.[85] Further, and as Woodbridge himself acknowledged, linking the extant manuscript translation to the Charenton project creates some problems. He noted, for example, the 'puzzling enigma' presented by a version that claimed it possessed 'perfect neutrality' while also, as, for example, at Genesis i.1, referring to 'notre Vulgate'.[86] These and related difficulties could be overcome by suggesting that the manuscript does not originate

Exegeten: Porträtskizzen zu vier Jahrhunderten alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, Göttingen 2017, 69–70 n. 9.

[80] Woodbridge, 'Richard Simon and the Charenton Bible project'.

[81] Hofmann and Thurn detail the manuscript's earlier shelfmarks in the library: *Die Handschriften*, 117.

[82] Woodbridge, 'Richard Simon and the Charenton Bible project', 256.

[83] Ibid. 266–70.

[84] Referring to 'sa Version & ses Notes sur la meilleure partie du Pentateuque': Simon, *Réponse au livre intitulé, defense des sentimens*, 78.

[85] Simon to Jean-Baptiste du Hamel[?], [s.d.] 1699, in *Lettres choisies*, iii. 288–9.

[86] Woodbridge, 'Richard Simon and the Charenton Bible project', 269

from this early period of Simon's career but rather much later, and might best be associated with the period in which he translated his New Testament edition. The translation, like the New Testament edition, was not made on the basis of the 'original' texts but rather chiefly follows the Vulgate.[87] The system of notes it employs, meanwhile, closely matches those found in the key and text of the New Testament edition, containing precisely the same positioning of the notes and system of abbreviations (with the sole exception of those which refer to New Testament manuscripts).[88] Thus, it appears most plausible that Simon completed it in the later 1690s and very early 1700s, in the period during which he had most probably intended to publish a translation of the whole of the Bible before these plans were cut short and ultimately broken off following the prohibition of his New Testament translation.[89]

A Bible for the 'people'

Immersed in a world newly awash with translations of the Scriptures into French, both Catholic and Protestant, Simon frequently commented on how desperately they needed to be corrected and improved. Above all, Simon insisted that all the other contemporary versions were vitiated by the degree to which they had followed the theological preferences of their translators and often bowed to the demands of contemporary controversy, rather than what he referred to as the 'literal' sense of the text.[90] Quite what Simon meant by the concept of the 'literal' sense can be difficult to pin down precisely, since he did not set out his meaning systematically. Indeed, he often employed it as an offensive weapon, a means of castigating those who had supposedly failed to locate it satisfactorily. In this context the 'literal' meaning was frequently set against a range of

[87] This point was also made by Adolphe Lods on the basis of Baumgarten's printed extracts. See his 'Les Parrains de la "Bible du Centenaire" au XVIIe siècle', *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* i (1921), 409–27 at pp. 425–7. A full study of the manuscript is currently in progress.

[88] Compare Simon, *Le Nouveau Testament*, i, sig. [i6v], and Hofbibliothek Aschaffenburg, MS 48, fos 1r–3r.

[89] On this plan, and these reasons for breaking off the work, see Bruzen de La Martinière, 'Éloge historique', 97. This, it is thus contended, is more plausible than Lods's claim that the work might post-date 1702, as suggested in Lods, 'Les Parrains de la "Bible du Centenaire"', 426. On the prohibition of Simon's New Testament see John D. Woodbridge, 'Censure royale et censure épiscopale: le conflit de 1702', *Dix-huitième siècle* viii (1976), 333–55.

[90] See, for example, Simon, *Histoire critique des versions*, 446–7 (criticising the 'Mons' New Testament). On the notion of the literal sense see the discussion in Brian Cummings, 'Literally speaking, or, the literal sense from Augustine to Lacan', *Paragraph* xxi (1998), 200–26.

alternative but often related meanings that Simon could describe as the 'mystical', 'spiritual' or 'allegorical' senses. Comments on this score, including such binary comparisons, ran throughout Simon's critical works and could be aimed as often against given Church Fathers as contemporary Jansenists, all of whom too often allowed themselves to interpret Scripture chiefly according to their own imagination.[91] In contrast to this, Simon's pleas in favour of the 'literal' sense associated it with an alternative set of concepts which together tended to insist it was recoverable *via* the correct scholarly methods, including employment of the rules of criticism to establish the most probable text, attention to the grammatical meaning of the text, and the sense intended by the work's author in the context of the linguistic (or other) conventions of their time.

At this stage, it must be clarified that Simon was none the less keen to insist that recognising the import of recovering the 'literal' sense of Scripture was not be taken to be equivalent to saying it provided the sole basis for the Christian religion or doctrine. At times this was revealed in both his works and his correspondence where he referred to the dangers connected to what he called the 'purely literal' ('purement literal') approach, which he associated with the 'new antitrinitarians'.[92] Simon himself avoided this potential trap, he maintained, since unlike them he took care to separate the literal interpretation of Scripture from tradition, the latter of which provided the essential underpinning of the truth of Catholic religion. At its core was a view of tradition that focused on identifying those 'true unwritten traditions' ('veritables Traditions non-écrites') that had been immediately received from Christ by the Apostles and which had thereafter existed uninterrupted until the present day.[93] While Simon defended these broad claims throughout his work by referencing how they aligned with unimpeachably orthodox Catholic sources (especially the Council of Trent), in practice he justified them through recourse to an innovative (and fairly idiosyncratic) account of the origins of these traditions. The true unwritten traditions of Christianity, Simon explained, had to be understood historically, which meant recognising that they had been based on the Christian inheritance of first-century Jewish modes of allegorical interpretation.[94] Simon drew on a number of earlier sources to forge this account, especially highlighting his debts to scholars such as the Jesuit Juan Maldonado and Hugo Grotius. Simon's claims did, however, represent a signal innovation. Where Grotius had argued that

[91] From many such examples see Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, 386; *Histoire critique des versions*, 361; *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs*, sig. *2r, 46, 244; and *Le Nouveau Testament*, i, sigs [a6r–a7r].

[92] Simon to 'Monsieur ***', 1691, in *Lettres choisies*, iii. 172.

[93] See Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, sigs [***4v]–****1r.

[94] Ibid. sigs [***4v]–****1r, 97–101.

such modes of argument could not be relied on because they were non-literal modes of exegesis, Simon instead claimed that they were reliable precisely because they were based on ancient Church-authorised exegetical traditions.[95]

Simon's account of the relationship between tradition and Scripture underpinned his scholarly approach, providing at once a firm foundation for Catholic religion while allowing textual scholars to investigate the Bible's literal sense in the knowledge that it was not the foundation of religious belief. In his critical histories, this meant he had created a space in which he could legitimate and justify conducting an historical analysis of every aspect of the text's history. In his work on biblical translation, it saw him design an edition of the Bible that remained a definitively Catholic product while none the less preserving a carefully calibrated view of the relationship between the Vulgate and the Bible in its 'original' languages. Thus, in its definitive formulation, the main text of Simon's translation presented a translation of the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate, since it was that version which was read in the Church. This was then supplemented by a system of textual notes. While these fulfilled more than one function, ranging from clarifying the meaning of difficult or obscure Latin terms to offering aetiologies of the history of particular points of confessional dispute, their chief role was to provide information as to places where the 'original' text read differently to the Vulgate. Simon had thus created, as he put it, in a neat turn of phrase, a Bible that would function as a 'sort of little Polyglot' for the people.[96]

Simon framed his plan to use the 'original' languages in this way in august Catholic terms, producing a succession of extracts from Richard FitzRalph's *Summa de quaestionibus Armenorum* to show that in the era before the Reformation scholars and churchmen had described the relationship between the Hebrew, Greek and Latin texts in a manner akin to himself. Rather than an independent development on Simon's part, however, it seems more probable that his final design, and his attempt to legitimate it, also constituted an effort to head off any criticism that resembled that which had earlier been raised by Arnauld. In the face of the claim that his plans would fail to provide the public with the best possible version of the biblical text, he now instead put it that he had provided two texts that were, in a certain sense, both true: the one a genuine translation of the version of Scriptures used in the Church, the second a veritable version of the 'original' text. As such, he had thus both followed ecclesiastical tradition, and with it the Council of Trent, in favour of the

[95] Idem, *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveaux Testament*, 244–53; Macfarlane, 'Christianity as Jewish allegory?'

[96] 'ce qui forme une espece de petite Polyglotte': Simon, *Le Nouveau Testament*, i, sig. a5v.

Latin Vulgate as the basis for the main text, while, with his supplemental system of critical notes, he produced 'the same effect, as if one had translated the whole of Scripture on the basis of the originals'.[97] The result was that his work provided a textual format that would be acceptable to partisans of either of two separate Catholic constituencies, which was to say either those who favoured the 'original' texts or those who were attached to the Vulgate.[98] One could no longer say, he put it, in terms that hearkened back directly to Arnauld's criticism, that he had not put into the 'hands of the people the true word of God'.[99]

As Simon's reference to his edition as a 'sort of' or 'kind of' polyglot implies he also implicitly recognised that his scheme did not exactly map onto that existing format. Where the celebrated early modern polyglot Bibles, especially those of Antwerp and London, were necessarily learned products, destined in the first instance to be used by scholars, Simon's vernacular translations diverged considerably in their popularising ambitions, intended as they were for the 'use of the people'.[100] This matters since while previous accounts have claimed Simon's New Testament marked a watershed on account of its novel employment of historical and philological exegesis, they have rarely elaborated precisely what this meant in practice. In particular, it might instead be argued that such claims overplay the novelty of Simon's text-critical comments, while underplaying the novelty of their use in this specific format and the audience for which Simon fashioned them. Elsewhere, Simon elaborated clear schemes for editions aimed at contemporary scholars in multiple languages, including, for example, his projected four-column edition of a polyglot Bible in the mid-1680s.[101] Here, and in contrast, his manuscript translation of the Pentateuch and his New Testament translation mark a notable moment in the vulgarisation of historical and philological scholarship for a vernacular audience.

One might well demur, on the basis of the account provided in this article, from the claim that Simon's activity as a biblical translator – or his scholarship more generally – constituted a decisive break with his predecessors owing to a novel use of history and philology in order to transcend the links between the Bible and its use by different confessions. Such, it might be said, in itself constitutes an unrealistic possibility considering the external constraints that impinged on any would-be biblical translators,

[97] 'ce qui produira le même effet, que si on traduisoit toute l'Ecriture sur les originaux': ibid. i, sig. a3r.
[98] Ibid. i, sig. a3v.
[99] 'entre les mains du peuple la veritable parole de Dieu': ibid. i, sig. a5r.
[100] Ibid. i, sig. a2r.
[101] For a brief summary of this scheme see Twining, 'Richard Simon', 481–4.

especially if they intended their translations to be used by the Catholic population of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century France. It is telling, for example, that even Port-Royal, despite Arnauld's views, ultimately fell back on the Vulgate for their translation of the Old Testament. For Simon himself, his efforts were once more not enough. In spite of his attempt to foreground the Vulgate and its ecclesiastical import, his exertions foundered once more on the implacable opposition of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, who succeeded in having Simon's New Testament translation prohibited.[102] On these grounds, there is some justification for the lachrymose narrative often told of Simon's career following initial censorship of the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, a story of a scholar who, despite his best efforts to square the requirements of criticism and confession, ultimately saw his career frustrated.

There is, nevertheless, an alternative viewpoint that recognises the ways in which Simon attempted to craft a new vision of the relationship between different versions of the Bible from within a Catholic perspective. On this view, an account of Simon's design of his Bible for the people might instead focus on how he came to draw increasingly clear lines regarding which versions of the biblical text were suitable for which specific contexts: as much as searching for the 'original' text might be a liberty permitted to individuals, so was it none the less vital that the people had access to an exact translation of the version used in the Church. Simon thus began to push towards multiplying the different ways in which one could have a true version of the Bible. He did not, that is, appeal – as earlier scholars might have done – to the inescapable plenitude of divine meaning in order to legitimise multiple possible translations. Rather, he specified the existence of multiple translations that were in their own sense true and linked to their own specific uses, in this case dividing between one that was public, authorised and ecclesial, and a second that was applicable to private study.

On this interpretation, Simon's work loses much of the destructive character subsequent historians have often affixed to it. Rather than undermining the authority of the biblical text or reducing it to history and philology, he instead intended to demarcate between different true interpretations of the biblical text appropriate to discrete settings (all, it should be noted, underwritten by his account of the relationship between Scripture and tradition). One might here find in Simon's work a nascent development of the division between different types of 'Bible' that other scholars have located further into the eighteenth century.[103] This point takes further sustenance from the way in which his critical scholarship was not solely

[102] Woodbridge, 'Censure royale', 333–55.

[103] Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: translation, scholarship, culture*, Princeton 2007, p. xiii; Michael C. Legapsi, *The death of Scripture and the rise of biblical*

directed towards a hunt for the 'original' text, but rather the much broader ambition to chart and understand what the Bible had been (and meant) at every point in its historical transmission. In so doing, rather than undermining the Bible or inaugurating a crisis in knowledge, we might instead see Simon pursuing the construction of different truths, and separating out facets of the present and historical life of Scripture that had previously been held together.

studies, Oxford 2010, pp. vii–ix; and, generally, Daniel J. Watkins, *Berruyer's Bible: public opinion and the politics of enlightenment Catholicism in France*, Montreal 2021.

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