Having presented, in general and in detail, the case for the books of the New Testament, it is worth my while examining the main ways in which the authority of these books has been questioned and the reservations expressed in regard to the apostles who published them. Mohammedans usually explain the necessity for the coming of their prophet by saying that, as the canonical books of the Jews and Christians were completely corrupted, God needed to send a new prophet to earth to teach men the true religion. It would pointless to refute them since they provide no real evidence for what they suggest. The Jews and philosophers, ill-disposed towards Christians, have made specific attacks on the writings of the Evangelists and the apostles. They have shamelessly called them forgers or at the very least ignorant men who allegedly misquoted the books of the Old Testament. They accuse them of completely distorting the meaning of the passages they quote. Such are the strongest objections raised against the authority of the New Testament, a reply to which must be provided.

Turning first to objections raised by Jews, their premise is that when a document is produced as proof, it must be in the original wording of the document, or in certified copies. This, they say, the disciples of Jesus have failed to do. If the Old Testament passages they quote are compared with the original Hebrew, one finds that in more than one instance they have departed from it, which shows either that they are guilty of forgery, or that their sources were corrupt and therefore quite unreliable.

My response to this is that when the apostles preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ they had no need to use the Hebrew text of the Bible. It was on the contrary more appropriate to reproduce passages from the Old Testament as they appeared in the Greek versions that were in common use. Not many
Jews at that time knew the Hebrew language whereas Greek was in use throughout the Empire. Accordingly, since Jesus did not send his disciples to preach the Gospel to a select group of learned Jews who knew Hebrew, but to all nations on earth, most of whom spoke Greek, not only must they have spoken to them in Greek, but also quoted them passages from the Old Testament as they appeared in the long familiar Greek version. At that time there was also a complete Bible in Greek produced several centuries before by Jews and which for this reason was above suspicion. It is therefore unjust to accuse Evangelists and apostles of forgery when citing Scripture other than in the original, since they used Scripture as used and approved of by the Jews.

Admittedly if the people whom the Gospel was proclaimed had known Hebrew, it would have been better to quote the Hebrew original than the Septuagint: the original is always preferable to a translation. But given the situation with which they were then faced, the apostles very wisely preferred the Greek text to the Hebrew Bible which hardly anyone understood. For this reason from its earliest beginnings the Church has only used the early Greek version of the Scriptures, and apart from Syria, the entire eastern Church recognises no other.

I do not consider it necessary to prove that when they wrote, the apostles quoted passages from the Old Testament in the Septuagint and not from the Hebrew text: possessing the rudiments of the two languages is sufficient to be aware of this. I admit that at one stage St Jerome sought to prove the contrary, adducing passages from the Old Testament quoted in the New and which, he said, are only present in the Hebrew original. But it can easily be seen from what he himself says that he only defended this viewpoint in order to give more authority to his new translation from the Hebrew, seeing that the most learned men of his time were strongly opposed to this translation and accused him of trying to introduce Judaism into the Church.

Accordingly we see how St Jerome here responds to his opponents, justifying himself as best he can: “Let our adversaries teach any accepted proof not in the books of the Hebrews; argument over.” As evidence for what I am saying, I need no other witness than Jerome himself, who established the following general principle for all quotations from the Old Testament, not only in the writings of the apostles but in those of their disciples: “when the apostles or apostolics address the people, they habitually use the testimony

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1 Jerome, Preface to Commentary on Isaiah bk. 15 (PL 24:513D).
2 Ibid., 513–514.