MOSES, PLATO AND FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS. CASTELLIO’S CONCEPTIONS OF SACRED AND PROFANE IN HIS LATIN VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

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Castellio’s Latin Bible constitutes, rather like the translator himself, something of an odd man out among 16th century Latin Bible translations. It provoked an overtly hostile reaction in the Genevan circles as witnessed by Beza’s swingeing attacks on it in 1556 and 1563. Indeed, Castellio’s Bible was only republished twice during his lifetime. The first edition of 1551 was followed by two further expanded and corrected imprints in 1554 and 1556. The one important addition to the 1554 version was a series of extracts from Flavius Josephus, made up to correspond to the length of a medium sized biblical book. These merit some attention and I shall return to them later on. The final 1556 edition also contained an index. This was also the edition reprinted posthumously by Petrus Perna in 1573. However, the text did not gain real popularity until the late 17th century with the edition of Thomas Fritsch which appeared in Frankfurt in 1697. Ferdinand Buisson and Hans Rudolf Guggisberg after him estimate at thirteen the number of editions of the complete Bible published between 1551 and 1778 which implies ten editions from the late 17th and from the 18th centuries.

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1 See Beza’s preface to his Novum D. N. Iesu Christi Testamentum. Latine olim a vetere interprete nunc denuo a Theodoro Beza versum, cum eiusdem annotationibus in quibus ratio interpretationis redditur (Geneva, R. Estienne, 1556) in Biblia utriusque Testamenti (Geneva, R. Estienne, 1556–1557) and his Responsio ad defensiones et reprehensiones Sebastiani Castellionis, quibus suam Noui Testamenti interpretationem defendere... conatus est (Geneva, R. Estienne, 1563).

2 Biblia interprete Sebastiano Castalione una cum eiusdem annotationibus, (Basel, J. Parcus and J. Oporinus, 1551).

3 Biblia interprete Sebastiano Castalione una cum eiusdem annotationibus. Totum opus recognovit ipse et adjectit ex Flavio Josepho Historiae supplementum ab Esdra temporibus usque ad Machabaeos itemque a Machabaeis usque ad Christum (Basel, J. Oporinus, 1554). Biblia interprete Sebastiano Castalione una cum eiusdemque annotationibus ...Accessit quoque rerum et verborum memorabilium index (Basel, J. Oporinus, 1556).

4 Biblia sacra ex Sebastiani Castalionis postrema recognitione cum annotationibus eiusdem et historiae supplemento ab Esdra ad Machabaeos inde usque ad Christum ex Josepho, index praeterea novus et is quidem locupletissimus (Basel, Petrus Perna, 1573).

5 Biblia sacra ex Sebastiani Castellionis interpretatione... (Frankfurt a/M, Thomas Fritsch, 1692). See also H. R. Guggisberg, Sebastian Castellio 1515–1563 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), p. 333.

These appeared especially in Germany and in England where John Locke was one of the most prominent English admirers of Castellio’s version. As Guggisberg points out, Locke spent the years 1683–1689 in the Netherlands where he would have become familiar not just with the Basel scholar’s writings on religious tolerance but also with his Bible. After his return to England in 1693 Locke entered into correspondence with the Dutch historian Philip van Limborch concerning the likelihood of reprinting the Bible in Amsterdam. However, it was not in Amsterdam that the project came to fruition but in London where the work was printed in 1699, if Buisson and Guggisberg are to be believed.7

The object of this paper is to examine Castellio’s Latin Bible and his other biblical works with a view to analysing his views on the relationship between the sacred and the profane. It is important to note before going any further that Castellio differed from his contemporaries in one important respect with regard to biblical language. Naturally, he considered the Holy Spirit as the author but he did not view the message of the Bible as in any way linked to its language. The biblical message was accessible to all those who had faith, regardless of whether they were literate or illiterate, learned or unlearned. This left room for scholars to interpret the letter of the Bible according to human criteria of grammar, syntax and language and also, as we shall see, to complement the biblical text with apocryphal writings.8 In the particular case of a Latin translation of the Bible, this meant translating it as accurately as possible into as good Latin as possible and this in turn meant classical Latin. This view of the Bible is to be contrasted with Beza’s as expressed in the preface to his Annotations on the New Testament (1565). For Beza and indeed for Erasmus, the Holy Spirit speaks in Hebrew and Greek which therefore acquire the status of holy or inspired languages.9 Beza therefore follows Greek syntax in his

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