In the history of the Church, there are encounters that not only edify but also shake, purify, and foster growth. One of the most fascinating—and often misunderstood—is the intellectual and spiritual exchange between Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Jerome.

Far from being a mere disagreement between scholars, their controversy reveals something deeply human: how even saints, in their sincere search for truth, can clash intensely… and yet still build up the unity of the Church.

This episode is not just ancient history. It is a spiritual compass for today's believer.

A Fiery Context: The Church in Formation

We are in the 4th and 5th centuries. Christianity has emerged from the catacombs and now faces a different challenge: defining revealed truth with precision in the face of divergent interpretations.

- Saint Jerome, from Bethlehem, dedicates himself to translating the Bible into Latin (the **Vulgate**), with an almost ascetic obsession for textual fidelity.
- Saint Augustine of Hippo, bishop in North Africa, develops a profound theology that will shape centuries.

Both love the truth. Both love the Church. But they do not always agree on the path.

The Core of the Controversy: Scripture, Truth, and Authority

1. **The Translation of the Bible: Fidelity or Tradition**

One of the most delicate points was the translation of the Old Testament.

Saint Jerome chose to translate directly from Hebrew, moving away from the **Septuagint** (the Greek translation traditionally used by the early Church).

Saint Augustine, on the other hand, expressed concern.

Why?

- He feared that abandoning the Septuagint would create confusion among the faithful.
- He believed that this translation held a providential authority within the Church.

Here a tension emerges that remains relevant today:
Should historical precision or received tradition take precedence?

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2. **The Episode in Galatians: Can an Apostle "Simulate"?**

Another focal point of discussion was the interpretation of Galatians 2, where Saint Paul rebukes Saint Peter.

Saint Jerome argued that the confrontation had been a kind of **"pedagogical simulation"** intended to instruct the faithful.

Saint Augustine, firmly, opposed this view:

> *If we admit that the apostles pretended, how can we fully trust the truth of Scripture?*

For Augustine, truth had to be absolute. There could be no deception, not even for didactic purposes.

Here a crucial theological issue emerges:
the inerrancy and truthfulness of Sacred Scripture.

The Thorny Issue: The "Apocryphal" Books of the Old Testament

One of the most relevant points—and one that still generates debate today—is the question of the biblical canon.

Jerome and His Critical Position

Saint Jerome distinguished between:

- **Canonical books** (according to the Hebrew canon)
- **Ecclesiastical books** (such as Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, and Maccabees)

These latter books, which the Church today calls **deuterocanonical**, were considered by him useful for edification, but not with the same doctrinal authority.

Augustine and the Defense of Ecclesial Tradition

Saint Augustine clearly defended the inclusion of these books within the canon.

For him:

- The authority of the Church is essential for discerning Scripture.
- Living tradition surpasses purely philological criteria.

This position was confirmed in councils such as Carthage (397).

Were There Retractions? A Key Point

Saint Jerome: Nuance and Development

Although initially critical of the deuterocanonical books, Saint Jerome:

- Ultimately included them in the **Vulgate**
- Recognized their liturgical and spiritual use in the Church

It was not a total explicit retraction, but rather an **obedient integration** into ecclesial tradition.

Saint Augustine: Firmness Without Rigidity

Saint Augustine did not retract his positions on these matters, but he always demonstrated an attitude that was:

- Humble
- Open to dialogue
- Deeply ecclesial

In fact, in his *Retractationes*, he revisits many of his own works, showing that even the greatest doctors are still on a journey.

A Powerful Spiritual Lesson: Truth Is Sought in Communion

What is most impressive about this controversy is not the disagreement… but how they lived it.

- They wrote intense letters, sometimes harsh.
- There were misunderstandings.
- Yet they never broke communion.

This leaves us with a vital lesson for today:

 One can disagree without dividing.
 One can defend truth without losing charity.

Biblical Illumination: Correction in Truth

Scripture itself sheds light on this episode:

> *"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body."*
> *— (Ephesians 4:25)*

And also:

> *“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”*
> *— (Proverbs 27:17)*

The controversy between these saints was precisely that:
a mutual sharpening in truth.

Practical Applications for Today’s Believer

1. **Do Not Fear Theological Debate**

Faith is not fragile. Truth does not break when examined.

2. **Love the Church Even in Its Tensions**

Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome never placed themselves above the Church.

3. **Seek Truth with Humility**

Both were geniuses… and yet they kept learning.

4. **Balance Reason and Tradition**

A challenge for today:

- Neither cold rationalism
- Nor unthinking traditionalism

But a living, incarnate faith.

Conclusion: A Controversy That Still Lives

The discussion between Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Jerome is not a closed episode of the past.

It is a mirror.

In a world where differences lead to division, they teach us something radically countercultural:

 Truth is better sought together than alone.
 Holiness does not eliminate conflict—it redeems it.

And perhaps the greatest lesson is this:
God does not fear our questions… but He asks that we raise them within the communion of the Church.