

# Translation of Bible Now Used at Mass, a 'Blunder' or 'Fresh and Vital'?

Catholics in the United States have a long reputation for docile obedience to Church authorities. Initial comments about the switch from Latin to English and change in rituals at Mass and sacramental rites were, therefore, as expected, all favorable.

But the changes, now six months old, are beginning to run into criticism.

A Baltimore priest, Father Gomar DePauw, organized a "Traditionalist Movement" and claimed he had 30 bishops and "the majority" of lay people who wanted to go back to the old Latin arrangement without hymn-singing and congregational praying.

A similar organization has been set up in England headed by well-known convert Arnold Lunn. This

group has asked the bishops to allow at least one Latin Mass each Sunday. Some French Catholics have insisted on responding "et cum spiritu tuo" to the priest's greeting "Le Seigneur soit avec vous."

These have been more or less just incidental pockets of opposition in a massive, if often only passive, acceptance of the changes.

Criticism has now, however, been voiced from within the ranks of the hierarchy itself.

Bishop Robert Dwyer of Reno, Nevada, in a column printed in several western Catholic papers, took the translators of the Bible to task for what he claims they "foisted" on U.S. Catholics, "a blunder" he says that should be remedied "as soon as possible."

His public statement apparently expresses many similar but privately stated complaints to the translators from other bishops because Monsignor Myles M. Bourke, chairman of the translating committee, recently issued an eight page "reactions of the translators to recent criticisms."

The June issue of "Liturgy" the monthly bulletin of the Liturgical Conference, an advisory agency on liturgy matters, said there is need for "dialog in the Church between those who are enthusiastic about the conciliar reform in its beginning stages and those with serious reservations about the reform as they see it."

"In 'The Church Tomorrow,' Father George Tavard describes in moving fashion the procedures of the

preparatory commissions of the Council, the way in which these men of different nations and different beliefs thought their way toward, not a majority decision, but unanimity.

"This must always be the Christian goal and the Christian desire. 'Triumphalism' can be a temptation for a reforming majority, too. And what we seek in the Holy Spirit is always unanimity, consensus, the 'sense of the meeting.' This does not mean retreat, but it does mean dialog. It means listening—and listening to complaints."

Below are the first major statements in this dialog—the one by Bishop Dwyer and the other by Monsignor Bourke. They are probably not the last comments that will be made on the subject.

## Prelate Terms New Text a 'Poor Thing'

By BISHOP ROBT. DWYER

Ours is the language of Langland and Chaucer, of Shakespeare and Milton, of Wordsworth and Keats, of Lincoln and Newman.

Ours is the tongue which has given utterance to the exalted poetry of the Authorized Version and to the militant prose of Pilgrim's Progress.

Other languages have their undisputed merits and excellences, French its clarity and classic precision, German its extraordinary range and vigor, Italian its suppleness and its wonderful music, but English uniquely is capable of suggesting the ultimate fears of things.

Why this should be beyond our ken, one of those imponderables which defy explication, though pennumerable (and none more sensitively than that of the late Maurice Baring) have addressed themselves to the task. We are dealing here, unmistakably, with the mystery of the significance beyond meaning, of reverberation beyond sound.

Since this is true it might be expected that the most sacred thing we know should be clothed in our mother-tongue in language somehow expressive of its holiness and beauty.

The supreme act of sacred drama to man would seem to demand a verbal-venture not wholly unworthy of its mood of solemn exaltation.

If the English language is capable of rising to the sublime heights of perception and eloquence, of prose transubstantiated into the very essence of poetry, then surely, we think, it should find its perfect utterance.

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ance in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Translated from Latin  
But as a matter of fact this does not follow. There is no known way of producing automatically a liturgical text which will fully conform to these exacting specifications.

To begin with, the Mass in English is a translation from the Latin, the language in which, in this Western world of ours, its phrases were framed and molded and incorporated into the very warp and woof of our collective memory.

Nor should it be overlooked that the Latin of the Mass is not Latin in its classic purity, nor the language of the great poets like Virgil and Juvenal, nor of the orators like Seneca

and Cicero, nor of the annalists like Livy and Tacitus.

It was the Latin, rather, of the people, simple and clear enough to be commonly understood and so to be loved and remembered.

With the passing of time it has taken on a rich patina of familiarity and intimate reference, so that its phrases and rhythms, even its individual words, have for us endless echoes, innumerable connotations.

So it is that to render the Mass in English is primarily a test of the translator's art.

There can be no question of taking liberties with the text or of presuming prosaic license or of taking off from a fundamen-

tal idea and soaring forthwith into the empyrean.

Phrases Inspired

The liturgy of the Mass, its sacred text, is a plain, even bald, statement of its essential meaning, a repeating—and a formal recasting of the words of Our Divine Lord at the Last Supper, to which have been added in the course of time appropriate readings and prayers designed to set the mood and prepare the mind for the central action of the Sacrifice and the blessed privilege of sharing the Eucharistic Banquet.

It does not call for the play of individual interpretation or commentary. There is no room for improvisation, and the Church, in her anxiety to safeguard the purity of faith and worship, has made it clear that nothing may be permitted to distort in any way the meaning of the Mass, were the distortion phrased in the most glorious poetry known to man.

Even in the restricted area of translation there is no guarantee that the spirit of poetry, of high and noble utterance, will be given the translator.

There are times and seasons when the gift is imparted, when somehow the inevitable phrases come almost by inspiration, but again there are long stretches where the translator plods his weary plowman's way through clouds of prose.

The late Msgr. Knox, after he had completed the monumental task of putting into English the whole of the Old and New Testaments, wrote a sparkling essay on The Trials of a Translator.

It was by way of an apology for his work, a justification of the vagaries and idiosyncrasies

which both endear it to us and baffle our comprehension of it.

The sum and substance is that there are days when the translator wields a burning pen spelling our flaming words, but for the most part, alas, he holds a stiff intransigent pencil. And the result is the uneven product we delight in and despair of.

Now the men who Englished the Bible at the behest of Royal James, that thwarted and tormented son of Mary Stuart, happened to be touched with a genius for words and phrases.

The language itself was molten, and they possessed the chameleonism of pouring it into deathless molds, catching the spirit of the original Hebrew and Greek in such a way as to transmute it into an English which distorted nothing of the meaning yet added towering dimensions to its understanding.

Sonnets Are Poignant

The Hebrew prophets came alive again in 17th century English prose as they had never lived in Greek or Latin or French; and there is no question but that the impact of their utterance gave strength and toughness to the whole Puritan movement.

Translators such as these men, or like Archbishop Cranmer a generation earlier, giving to the rendition of the Mass and Office we know as the Book of Common Prayer, or the still earlier William Caxton, making the exploits of Reynard the Fox a part of our English mythology, these are men of mark.

Oddly, it would seem that the impulse failed toward the end of the 17th century. Thereafter the work became more and more pedestrian, and though it may have gained in accuracy it steadily lost the power of capturing the essential spirit of the original.

In our times we have but few



BISHOP DWYER  
'no use pretending'

translators genuinely worthy of their salt. Hilaire Belloc could do it when the mood was on him, and his rendering of du-Bellay's sonnets are almost more poignant than the French.

There are those who say that C. K. Scott Moncrieff's translation of Proust is essentially an evocation of The Remembrance of Things Past.

Msgr. Knox, for all his caprices, did a magnificent job with the Bible, though the objection that he left it an Edwardian period piece has occasioned justification.

Legend Is Legend

But woe and alack, the poor thing, that is currently foisted

## 'Traditionalist' Priest Endorses Prelate's View

New York — (NC) — The Catholic Traditionalist Movement distributed to newsmen here a letter by Father Gommar A. De Pauw praising Bishop Robert Dwyer's criticism of the translation of the Bible being used in U.S. vernacular Masses.

Father De Pauw was leader of the movement until April 7 when he disassociated himself from it at the order of his superior, Cardinal Lawrence Shehan of Baltimore.

The Belgian-born priest, a professor of moral theology at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, Md., said in New York, where he was reached by N.C.W.C. News Service, that he is not connected with the movement.

## Translators Say 'Emotion, Ignorance' at Root of Criticism

By MONSIGNOR MYLES BOURKE

It is obviously impossible to formulate and state here all the principles governing the translation that has been undertaken by various members of the Catholic Biblical Association under the direction of the Bishops' Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. What follows is a statement of some principles which have been operative from the beginning of the work, or were adopted during its progress. At the outset, it may be useful to remark that the translators are all priests and professors of Sacred Scripture (or Greek) in Catholic seminaries and universities.

The minimum that should be presupposed, therefore, is that they are in good faith, are not trying to undermine Catholic belief, and are striving to produce a competent translation which will be accepted in modern theological and ecclesial circles. This preposition may seem uncalled for, but it would not be made if there were not reason for it.

1. Basic Aim

The basic aim of the translators has been to produce a faithful version of the Greek original in acceptable modern English. The translation has not been based on the Latin Vulgate—a point of which some of the critics seem to be unaware. The translators have not felt obliged to use archaic "Bible English," or to subject the text to a formal solemnity derived from a situation which is really extrinsic to it. In this aim differs from that of the revision committee of the commonly used "Revised Standard Version," which is not a new translation. It goes without saying that faithfulness to the

original does not mean slavishly reproducing the Greek, either in respect to single words or to sentence structure.

It might be mentioned that in translating the text into modern rather than archaic English, those engaged in the work have been following the directions of the Bishops' Committee; cf. the letter of the late Bishop Brady to the New Testament Committee chairman (November 27, 1957). It should also be clear that since the Greek New Testament is not uniform in style, it would be a poor translation which would not reflect the original's variety of style, and in which, for example, the Gospel according to Mark would read no differently than the Epistle to the Hebrews. The fact that many people do not realize this is a matter of no importance; the translators' duty is to be faithful to the original, not to be guided by popular misconceptions.

2. Relation to the Liturgy

The translators have always kept in mind the fact that the translations will be read in public, and they have generally tried to make it suitable for such use. However, they have felt obliged to render the text as faithfully as possible, with all its informal, conversational, and even derogatory nuances.

It is one thing to compose a liturgy today—or to reform the one we have—and to give it a noble, formal, and solemn style consonant with the needs of the twentieth century and its mode of expression in prayer. This should certainly be done for all parts of the liturgy which are not directly the Word of God, for they are man's expression of his relation to God. But it is another thing when the Word of God is used in the liturgy (e.g. in the readings of

the epistle and gospel); for its own autonomy must be respected. What right has anyone to impose a uniformly solemn, formal tone on a text which does not always have it?

3. Differences due to the Greek Text

Generations of Catholic church-goers have grown accustomed to translations based on the Latin Vulgate. The new C.C.D. translation may disturb some because it is based on the Greek, which is often more nuanced in its expression than the Vulgate. Since Pope Pius XII recommended that vernacular translations of the Bible be based on the original languages, the disturbance will have to be tolerated for a while, until Catholics become accustomed to a translation based on the original. This does not imply that Saint Jerome mistranslated or failed to understand the text. Rather, much has been learned about the New Testament since his time. And if popular disturbance had been taken seriously into account, it is doubtful that the Vulgate would have played the important role it did in the history of the Western Church. The opposition to Jerome's work is too well known to need recounting here.

4. Revision by a Literary Editor

Though the translators have always tried to use good English expressions and style, and have never consciously introduced jargon, slang, or "Bible English," they realize that they are not consummate English stylists. It has always been their intention to engage a literary editor to whose critical judgment and examination the whole work is to be submitted. The translation of the New Testament is not finished, and passages from certain books had to be submitted for use in the vernacular liturgy before literary revision of the work was possible. The completed text will have the benefit of such revision before it is published.

However, it might be pointed out that the translators, far from being unaware of the need of a literary editor, submitted parts of the work to such an editor twice in the past. In both cases, the results were unfortunate. The two men who were called on to act in that capacity were recognized English stylists, but their knowledge of the original language and of biblical exegesis was minimal. Their emendations were often distortions of the meaning of the text. This is not said in criticism of either of those men, but sim-



Mass facing the people with prayers said by the congregation in their language instead of Latin—these are major aspects of current "dialog" in Catholic Church with strong pro and con spokesmen. Picture shows opening rite of first of three Liturgical Weeks scheduled for this summer. This one was held in Baltimore. Next two will be in Portland, Oregon, and Chicago, both in August.

ply to indicate the great difficulty of finding a literary editor who is thoroughly equipped for the task.

Reactions of the translators to some recent criticisms

Though the translators of the C.C.D. New Testament have been at work for over eight years, the translation is not yet finished. The translators are only too painfully aware of the inadequacies of their version in certain places. They could point to more passages than the critics have, if they were put to it. Because the task is not yet finished, they are glad to learn from the critics. Since they are still at work it will be possible for them to correct many of the passages where the translation stumbles.

However, it is evident to them that the general effect of the new translation of the New Testament (at least of what is being used in the liturgy) is good, and has been welcomed by many. They are grateful to the many persons

(Bishops, Priests, Sisters, Brothers, lay adults and children) who have commented on the intelligibility of the epistles and gospels which are being read in the new liturgy. To cite but two examples, the editorial in the Portland (Oregon) "Catholic Sentinel," March 12, 1965, and the remarks of Dom Kevin Seatz, O.S.B., in "Liturgical Arts," February 1965, p. 36. The difficulty is that those who think well of the translation have not been so vocal as those who have criticized it. When the negative criticisms are justified, they will be taken into consideration for future revision and correction. But there is no reason to think that the vociferous element is the majority.

Many of the reactions to the new translation are such that the translators feel constrained to protest vigorously either against them or against the implications contained in them. For, first of all, many of the unfavorable reactions have stemmed from factors which are not related to the transla-

tion as such. We shall list a few of these.

a) The new translation is being unfavorably judged in many quarters because it is associated with the liturgical changes that are not universally appreciated. Consequently, it has become the whipping-boy for those who want no change or a return to the Latin liturgy. This is an emotional reaction which is not really based on the translation itself, but sees it only as an example of the "new changes." A prime example of this reaction was the so-called Catholic Traditionalist Movement.

b) Criticism of the new translation has often been due to the way it has been hurriedly read or stumbled through by priests and lectors who have not prepared the reading in advance. When a new translation is used, one cannot simply expect to read it perfectly. Let alone proclaim it, as the new liturgical mode demands—without preparation. Familiarity with the older form is a men-

ace in this regard: it is a pitfall for the unprepared reader. No matter how good a translation is, it cannot succeed when it is not read properly.

c) A new translation needs some time to be appreciated. This is especially true of a translation that is used in the liturgy. As Cardinal Shehan said in his Easter Message, "... we should give our ear a chance to grow accustomed to the new text and a few short months are not enough time for that to happen."

d) Another source of the criticism of the new translation is the use of it in the missal along with other parts of the Proper of the Mass which, when biblical, are derived often enough from other translations of the same passages. There is no agreement, at times, between the Scripture readings (in the epistle and gospel) and the chants (Introit, Offertory, and Communion, antiphons, and gradual). Two different translations of the same passage occur, one new and unfamiliar, the other old and familiar. The lack of agreement attracts attention, and the difference arouses antagonism or even suspicions of incompetence. Much of this will be eliminated when the chants are made to harmonize with the readings. The incongruity is unfortunate but the translators of the New Testament are not responsible for it.

e) Many criticisms of the new C.C.D. translation come from what can only be termed ignorance. This is of two sorts: (1) Ignorance of the Scriptures themselves; (2) Ignorance of English. As for the first sort, it is apparent in many of the comments. For the first time, people are hearing passages of the Bible which were not normally read before in English (e.g. the readings of the weekday Masses in Lent).

Now people who do not read the Bible itself suddenly realize that God's inspired Word contains such passages as Ezekiel 18, 5-6. The reaction is one of scandal and distaste. But it reflects the situation only of those who have no acquaintance with the Bible. One cannot change such passages in the translation. That would be to exercise an unwarranted censorship on the Word of God.

To brand an accurate translation of such passages as "immature" is very strange indeed. It is obviously up to the Roman Commission on the Liturgy to decide whether such passages belong in the liturgical service and are to be read in public. But it is not the job of the translators to bowdlerize them.

The same sort of ignorance is displayed towards New Testament. (Continued on Page 5)

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