

# Why One Bible for All Christians?

(By Religious News Service)

One of the less publicized but highly significant decisions of the Second Vatican Council was set forth in an article of its decree on Divine Revelation which stressed the need for making the Bible both more universally available and more universally read.

Declaring that "easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful," the article then went on to say that "if, given the opportunity and approval of Church authority, translations are produced in cooperation with the separate brethren, all Christians will be able to use them."

By this action, Vatican II not only supported what Biblical scholars had been seeking for years—a Bible for common use by Protestants and Catholics—but gave the Christian unity movement what was generally regarded as a tremendous boost.

But the big news came early in November when Pope Paul VI authorized the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity to study the possibility of producing common Catholic-Protestant Bibles. Named as personal assistant to Augustin Cardinal Bea, head of the secretariat, to direct the studies was an American Jesuit, Father Walter M. Abbott, formerly an associate editor of the weekly review, America.

The choice of Father Abbott was considered highly appropriate. An authority on the Scriptures, the 43-year-old Boston-born priest had for many years championed a common Bible and was largely responsible for stimulating interest in the idea during Vatican II.

Coincidentally, the news of Father Abbott's appointment came just after he had—along with three other experts, two Protestant and one Jewish—completed work on a Bible Reader readily adaptable for use in U.S. public school courses that promote study "about" the Bible.

His colleagues were Dr. Rolfe Lanier Hunt, associate editor of the International Journal of Religious Education; the Rev. J. Carter Swaim, minister of the Covenant United Presbyterian Church in New York and former director of the Department of the English Bible of the National Council of Churches; and Rabbi Arthur Gilbert, director of the Department of Religious Curriculum Research of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

In accordance with the Pope's authorization, the Vatican unity secretariat has already begun to gather information about the translation, production and distribution of the Bible throughout the Catholic Church. At the



New York—(RNS)—Pope Paul's unprecedented authorization for Catholic study of the feasibility of a common Catholic-Protestant Bible has added importance to the work of this interreligious group of Bible scholars and educators. The four experts shown here have been working on a Bible Reader, readily adaptable for use in public school courses that promote study "about" the Bible. They are, left to right, Dr. Rolfe Lanier Hunt, associate editor of the International Journal of Religious Education; Rabbi Arthur Gilbert, director of the Anti-Defamation League's Department of Religious Curriculum; Father Walter M. Abbott, S.J., assistant to Augustin Cardinal Bea in conducting the study directed by the Pope; and Rev. J. Carter Swaim, minister, Church of the Covenant here and former director of the NCC's Department of the English Bible.

same time, the various national episcopal conferences, have been informed about the study concerning a common Bible and sent a questionnaire on the needs, possibilities and difficulties in each area with regard to Bible translation and distribution.

In some countries, bishops have already worked out plans for cooperation with local Bible societies, and it is expected that this experience will provide useful models for wider directives emanating later from the Holy See.

Father Abbott meanwhile represented the secretariat at the annual meeting of the Advisory Council of the American Bible Society in mid-November. This organization—the largest of the Bible societies—discussed the possibility of cooperating with the Catholic Church in Society projects in various countries.

Bible societies around the world, almost entirely Protestant organizations, have been the Bible mankind's most widely read book and stimulating its translation into 1,200 of the world's 2,200 languages and dialects.

Said Father Abbott: "The great asset of the Bible societies is in their scholarship in vernacular tongues and with their experience in rendering the Bible into meaningful wording in them. Working with them will make possible much better translation than we could ever have produced ourselves in many cases."

The chief of translations for the American Bible Society is Dr. Eugene A. Nida. Hailing the Vatican announcement, he said the possibility of a joint Protestant-Catholic Bible meant that "the Church politicians have caught up with the scholars." Intercultural translations of the Bible, he said, had become possible as long as half a century ago when Protestant and Catholic scholars began to agree on what Greek and Hebrew manuscripts were the best ones to use as a basis for translation.

In a statement also welcoming the Vatican announcement, Archbishop Jakovos of New York, head of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, said the production of a Bible acceptable to all Christians would be of "prime importance" in the quest for Christian unity. He said: "We would want one Bible for all Christians provided that

scholars of all the Churches would cooperate in such a project and provided that the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate would authorize its use."

The announcement from Rome came some six months after Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, had created a stir in the Biblical field by giving his imprimatur, or official approval, to the Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, first published by the Oxford Press in England in 1962. The text of the Oxford Bible was that of the Revised Standard Version, which was translated and published in 1946 and 1952 under the sponsorship of the National Council of Churches. The cardinal's approval meant that for the first time Catholics and Protestants had a common Bible but one that could be used only for such non-liturgical purposes as Bible readings and study groups.

Last October, however, a new Catholic Bible translation appeared which its sponsors indicated could be used also by non-Catholics. This was the Jerusalem Bible, a complete new English translation from original sources made by Catholic scholars in Great Britain.

According to Father Alexander Jones, general editor of the new translation, it was the first Catholic one from original sources since the fifth century, when St. Jerome produced the Latin Vulgate.

As a leading proponent of a common Protestant-Catholic Bible, Father Abbott is following in the footsteps of another Jesuit, the late Father Robert A. Dyson, professor of Biblical exegesis at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, who declared during a visit to New York in 1959: "If we are going to work for unity, one of the vital things is to have all Christian denominations using the same Bible."

Since then, an impressive array of Protestant and Catholic churchmen in various countries have discussed and encouraged the proposal, although pointing out difficulties arising from differences in terminology and exegetical understanding.

Among those listed on the Catholic side, in addition to Cardinals Bea and Cushing, have been Bernard Cardinal Alfrink of Holland; Franz Cardinal Koenig of Austria; Leo-Joseph Cardinal Suenens of Belgium; Joseph Cardinal Frings of Germany; John Cardinal Heenan of England; Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan of Atlanta, Ga.; Archbishop John P. Cody of Chicago; and Bishop John J. Wright of Pittsburgh, Pa.

Favorable Protestant reaction has come meanwhile from such authorities as Anglican Archbishop Edwin Morris of Wales; Methodist Bishop Fred Pierce Corson of Philadelphia; William F. Albright, prominent Methodist Biblical scholar; F. P. Brice, Rylands professor of Biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, England; and Dr. Douglas Horton, of the International Congregational Council.

Although Father Dyson died without having written anything about the idea of a common Bible, the proposal was taken up by Father Abbott who published an article in America (Oct. 24, 1959) saying that "if cooperation in Biblical scholarship could give us a common translation of the Bible, we would then be talking about the same Commandments, and there would be hope for better observance of the one great Commandment."

Discussions on a common Bible were climaxed in 1963 when Father Eugene H. Malv, president of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, was able to report in a widely published article that "a version

of the Bible acceptable alike to Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants of the English-speaking world—whose total population for outnumbers that of any other language group—has become a definite possibility." An official theologian at the faculty of Mount St. Mary Seminary of the West in Norwood, Ohio.

Archbishop Hallinan was quoted around the same time as saying that "we would all rejoice if out of the world meetings of Protestants and Catholics there would emerge the commitment to work on the production of a common Bible for too long our Bibles have been arsenals from which both sides took texts to throw at each other." The same idea was voiced by Bishop Wright, who contended that "a common Bible... is very possible," and by Archbishop Cody who said "such a Bible would be one of the great results of the Vatican Council."

It is interesting to recall that shortly before the opening of Vatican II in 1962, Cardinal Frings and other bishops of Germany set a notable example by giving Catholic scholars permission to prepare a new translation of the Bible in collaboration with Protestant scholars.

In February, 1961, Cardinal Alfrink and the other Dutch bishops accepted a new translation of the New Testament which had been made by the Catholic Bible Society of St. Willibrord with the help of Protestant scholars. In France, a French translation of the Gospel According to St. Luke—a joint Catholic-Protestant project—had been produced for distribution by Catholic and Protestant clergymen. And in 1962, the Welsh bishops agreed to an investigation into the possibilities of a translation of the Bible into their language by a committee of Catholics and Protestants.

## Nuns in Public School May Break Segregation

New Orleans — (RNS) — Archbishop Philip M. Hannan has offered to help a public high school which has been beset with problems brought on by a federal court's order to desegregate.

The Roman Catholic prelate's offer of teaching nuns was refused because public school officials, in order to avoid the question of church-state separation, said they preferred to have lay teachers.

The problems for the school in Plaquemines civil parish (county) first started with the establishment of five private schools. These were set up to evade a New Orleans Federal District Court order to desegregate six grades in Plaquemines public schools this Fall.

The public grade and high schools in Belle Chasse were closed in mid-October when enrollment dropped from 1,800 to fewer than 100 pupils in the 12 grades. The drop in the number of teachers was proportional.

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### Prelate Give OK to Y

Fort Wayne—(RNS)—Bishop Leo A. Pursley of Fort Wayne-South Bend has approved Catholic membership in Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Association units "for those who have reason to join."

The bishop said he based his decision on assurances from "Y" units in the 14-county diocese that they do "not promote any specific Christian creed or practice" and that they encourage "each member to be faithful to the teachings and practices of his own Church."

Bishop Pursley initiated dialogue between Catholic youth and "Y" leaders by sponsoring a meeting of the two groups last spring.

### Franciscans To Up-date Rule

Chicago — Attention of the entire Franciscan world will be focused here from Nov. 27 to Dec. 3, as provincial directors, councilors and lay chairmen of the Franciscan Third Order meet to up-date the Rules and Constitutions of the Order.

The action is in keeping with suggestions and directives of Vatican Council II. Each of the 16 provinces in the United States and Canada will be represented by a Franciscan priest director and a lay chairman. Theme of the study week is "How to Implement the Call to Holiness."



**Medals for GI's in Vietnam**  
New York—(RNS)—Some 16,500 religious medals for U.S. soldiers in Vietnam are blessed by Cardinal Spellman. Looking on is Anthony B. Carmele, chairman of the Knights of Columbus' New York Chapter which donated the medals.

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