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The English Bible

The custom that colleagues and former students of a teacher greatly beloved and highly esteemed should organize the production of a Festschrift to honor his name and to signalize his contribution to their discipline and profession is one of the happiest traditions that attach to scholarship. In the age of the anti-hero, when the leading literary figures of the day draw men small and mean, and when the role of the humanities, from the theater of the absurd to the distortions of the visual arts, is apparently to denigrate man and all his achievements, it is good to find the custom still healthily maintained among scholars of acknowledging the stature and contribution of one of their fellows and of proclaiming by a collection of essays on the subjects of their discipline their admiration and affection for him. Those of us who have known Jacob M. Myers chiefly by his writings recognize our indebtedness to him, and I as one of those am appreciative of the opportunity to join with his nearer colleagues and friends to salute a scholar for whom affection on his home campus is worthily matched by the high regard which his contributions to Old Testament studies have won for him throughout the wider ecumene of the biblical disciplines.

Since Professor Myers has recently made a notable contribution¹ to a series which required of him that he become in no small way a biblical translator, I offer some comments on the present position with regard to the Bible in English translation. Some of the paragraphs are taken, with the permission of the editor, more or less directly from an article on the same general subject but in a rather more popular style which recently appeared in the *Queen's Quarterly*.²

It is a remarkable fact that the beginnings of the English Bible mark the beginnings of the English language itself, and that in all the developments, from the heterogeneous dialects of the Nordic invaders of Britain to the homogeneous world language of today, the English Bible has very fairly kept pace, and indeed has often led the way.

Beowulf is a truly splendid epic but, like the other few heroic poems of its kind, it belongs to the old pagan world of the time before either the Nordic peoples or their dialects had been fused into the new dynamic unity. Because of its typically oral character and the sparseness of the written remains, we are left largely to guess at the range and versatility of the literary tradition from which the poems come. They are the last few evidences of a culture which has passed away. But the nine precious lines of Caedmon's Creation Hymn, even if we now possess them only in the Latin translation, and the tradition of Bede's Gospel of John in the Northumbrian dialect, point to the new literary tradition which was to grow and increase into the immensely rich repository of the English language in many centuries and in many lands. The achievements of Shakespeare, Scott, and Yeats have been enhanced by Longfellow and Eugene O'Neill, and are now being further enriched by West African songwriters, Maori poets, and Eskimo novelists—all in the one common speech. The Bible in English, which was there at the beginning of it all, has not only played a major role both in the diffusion and in the development of the language but is even today making new and vigorous contributions to its strength and well-being in all parts of the world. The King James Version in the past and the Bible in Basic English in the present have been major influences to ensure that the local versions of pidgin English should remain simply what they are, and that Standard English should maintain itself fairly well as one and the same the world over. "Poetry," said John Wesley, "is the handmaid of Piety." For the English language, the Bible has repaid that service many times over.

The tradition that began with Caedmon and Bede and went on to Alfred the Great and his laws can be documented from at least the end of the ninth century. The translation known as the Vespasian Psalter, dating from about that time, gives us an example of the Kentish dialect; North Mercian is evidenced by the almost contemporary gloss to the Harewood Gospels. Northumbrian is supplied by another gloss, that to the Lindisfarne Gospels; West Saxon is well represented by the half-dozen or more Gospel manuscripts dating from the early tenth century through to the end of the twelfth. Indeed, the considerable West Saxon works of Abbot Aelfric (c. 955–1020), both in the instance of his biblical translations and in his freer compositions such as the Homilies, illustrate the growing maturity of a language which had become richly expressive. Since during the twelfth and thirteenth cen-

turies English was in a period of eclipse as a result of the Norman invasion, there is naturally little direct evidence of fresh translations, but at least some copying of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts continued. Margaret Deanesly,³ who is concerned to stress the lack of a complete English Bible before the time of Wycliffe, nevertheless mentions the Psalterium Triplex of Eadwine, which was compiled about 1120 and included an Anglo-Saxon as well as Norman-French and Latin versions. She also mentions that while the earliest manuscripts of the verse paraphrases of Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel, popularly attributed to Caedmon but more probably the product of a folk tradition, are to be assigned to the tenth century, the latest are to be assigned to the middle of the thirteenth.⁴ The resurgence of English as a consequence of the Hundred Years' War is first testified by the writings of Richard Rolle (1300–1349), whose Middle English Psalter achieved a considerable circulation. So also, though to a lesser degree, did the somewhat later Psalter of William of Shoreham. But Richard's Psalter was in the Northern dialect, and William's in the West Midland. The literary significance of the Lollard Bible, which appeared in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, was that for the first time a work in English was assiduously copied and actively promulgated in all parts of the country, so that the language of London and the East Midlands had an opportunity to reach up into Yorkshire and the North⁵ and as well as down into Somerset and the West. It is fair to say that while Chaucer and his peers gave Middle English its literary standards and its self-confidence among the upper classes, the Lollard Bible did as much if not more for its coherence and unification in all strata of society. From the beginning through to the emergence of Modern English in the fifteenth century, in all the major developments such as the liberation from gender, the reduction of inflections, the evolution of the tenses, and the great enrichment of vocabulary, the tradition of the Bible in English marched with the linguistic progress, recording the new developments, and sometimes pointing the way ahead.

William Tyndale, therefore, brilliantly fresh and original in the field of translation as we know him to have been, was nevertheless the heir to a tradition already rich, and in the choicest phrases of the Reformer, the attentive ear can from time to time detect echoes of his Lollard predecessors, Nicholas of Hereford and John Purvey.⁶ Even so, the beginning of the story of "The English Bible" proper clearly belongs to Tyndale, and from his time until our own the story is really the narrative of the successive revisions which his splendid version underwent. Coverdale's Bible, the Great Bible, the Geneva Version, the Bishops' Bible—they were all Tyndale revised, and the King James Version itself owed more to Tyndale than to any of the revisers. It has been calculated that of the King James Version, at least

two-thirds is clearly attributable to Tyndale.⁷ While Miles Smith was formally referring to the Bishops' Bible when he said that the aim of the revisers was to make not a bad version good but, rather, a good version better, it was really of Tyndale's work that he was speaking. Thus it was basically one and the same work, "The English Bible," that appeared in those successive editions from 1525, the date of Tyndale's first New Testament, through to 1611, when the King James Version finally appeared.

The influence of the King James Version upon the growth and development of English language and culture, both at home and in the many distant lands to which trade and empire dispersed the island speech, has been much observed and often commented upon. The King James Bible, more than any other work, has been the arbiter of style for many centuries wherever English has established itself. In his essay, "The Noblest Monument of English Prose," John Livingstone Lowes has aptly written: "Its phraseology has become part and parcel of our common tongue—bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh. Its rhythms and cadences, its turns of speech, its familiar imagery, its very words, are woven into the texture of our literature, prose and poetry alike."⁸ This might be thought too extravagant a judgment, but when we reflect how much more at ease we are with the King James Version than with the language of its "Translator's preface to the Reader" (which was the normal prose style of the day), or consider the difference between the sermons of Latimer, who was not influenced by this version, and the writings of John Bunyan, who was, we begin to recognize how its simplicity of style and force of language have impressed themselves upon us all.

Nevertheless, even after the King James Version had, by its own sheer excellence, driven from the field all its competitors, including even the doughty Geneva Version, which had been the Bible of Spenser, Shakespeare, and the Pilgrim Fathers, and which had effectively taken Standard English into the popular life of Scotland,⁹ it did not reign for the next three and a half centuries altogether unchallenged. As early as the time of the Commonwealth, a Quaker named Robert Gell, published *An Essay toward the Amendment of the Last English Translation*, in which he asked that a new and better version should be undertaken. It is significant that John Wesley placed Gell's treatise upon the reading list of his itinerant preachers, and that he himself issued a revised version of King James along with his *Notes on the New Testament*. But not even Wesley, successful editor, plagiarizer, and publisher that he was, could disturb the serene rule of the King James Version in Britain, in North America, and, indeed, wherever the English language was spoken and read. As Adam Clarke, the great orientalist of the early nineteenth century, remarked: "While the common translation is authorized by Law, and has alone dictated salvation for nearly two hundred years, the

majority of the people will not readily admit that it can be easily mended; or that any attempt to do this can be wholly destitute of danger to the cause of Divine Revelation." As is well known, the King James never was "by law appointed." The familiar words "Appointed to be read in Churches," which still appear on British printings and which have given the version its other surrogate, the Authorized Version, were simply transferred from the Bishops' Bible and its predecessors, notably the Great Bible of Thomas Cromwell, and were never formally justified either by royal license or by an Act of the Convocations of the Church of England. This circumstance reminds us that a version lives or dies by popular acceptance or neglect, and that the edicts of authorities, ecclesiastical or lay, do not have much influence on the matter.

The Revised Version of 1885¹⁰ is a case in point. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the pressure for a more accurate and a more modern rendering had become very strong, and it was undertaken in Britain by resolution of the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury of the Church of England in 1870, but the revision was governed by some very stringent rules. The work was to be not a new translation but a revision of King James, and the revisers bound themselves to make changes only by a two-thirds vote and, moreover, to employ only such words as were established in the language in the seventeenth century, unless it was clearly apparent that no appropriate word of that period was available. It is not surprising therefore that the version which emerged was a very conservative revision, and that a great deal of its best work was to be found in the marginal notes, to which were consigned those proposals which gained a simple majority of support but which failed to win two-thirds approval. An American company of revisers, invited to participate in the task, was a little more adventurous, so that the edition of the Revised Version published in the United States in 1901 as the American Standard Version differed from the English edition in a number of small particulars, but more particularly in substituting "Jehovah" for the traditional "the Lord."

Cautious as the revision was, the furore it caused was immense. One of the most vehement critics in England was Dean Burgon of Chichester, a fundamentalist of extreme views, who assailed the new version in the *Quarterly Review* in the most vehement terms: "that most unfortunate production," "the grossest literary imposture of the age," "insufferable pedantry," "impertinent priggishness." These are but a few of the phrases which the outraged Dean allowed himself, so that the *Leeds Mercury* was moved to remark: "In a series of what would be called in anyone but a dignitary of Church impudent assumptions, the Dean pours forth a good array of ecclesiastical Billingsgate."¹¹ However, the final outcome was that the version

was warmly welcomed by scholars and largely ignored by the great mass of Bible readers on both sides of the Atlantic. They continued unperturbed to read and quote the King James Version.

Thus, the effect of the Revised Version was to emphasize the need for a more thoroughgoing revision rather than to supply that need, and this was further increased by the appearance of a number of notable private versions, the best known being the second version of James Moffatt (1913), the *Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917), the *American Translation* of Goodspeed and Powis Smith (1923 and 1927; Apocrypha, 1938), and the version of J. B. Phillips (1947; complete New Testament, 1958). All these have their virtues, but none could be thought of as taking the place of the King James Version as "The English Bible." Plans for a further revision of the American Standard Version were set on foot in the United States as early as 1937, but owing to the incidence of World War II, they had to be carried to completion by United States and Canadian scholars without very much participation by the scholars of other countries. The new version was designated the Revised Standard Version. The New Testament appeared in 1946, the Old Testament in 1952, and the Apocrypha in 1957.

The Revised Standard Version may fairly be described as a remarkable success. It accomplished what it set out to do, which was to continue the tradition of "The English Bible," but in such a way as to commend the old version to a new age. It is of course open to criticism on many smaller points, but is guilty of perhaps only one major fault: it tends to be conservative in well-known and much-loved passages, but once off the comparatively narrow and well-beaten path of popular passages, it becomes much more ready to call a spade a spade and not disguise it under some ecclesiastically dictated euphemism. A case in point is Is 53, where *hly* is still translated "grief," and "sickness" is left to the margin, presumably because "the Suffering Servant" is widely held to be a christological prophecy and there is no tradition of disease in the story of Jesus. Therefore tradition has dictated that the trait must be obscured in translating the Isaiah passage. On the other hand, in a book like Zechariah we notice a much greater readiness to forsake the Masoretic Text and to accept readings from the Greek or Syriac or even conjectural amendments. Perhaps in the revision of a classic, this practice is not altogether indefensible; the version has made whole passages in the prophets or in the epistles intelligible as they never were in the King James, and it has done so without ruthlessly wounding susceptibilities in "best-loved passages." Certainly, until quite recently, the Revised Standard Version was the one version other than the King James which was read in churches, meditated upon in the home, and almost uni-

versally quoted by scholars. In 1965, the British hierarchy of the Roman Church gave its imprimatur to a Roman Catholic edition, and the Revised Standard Version thereby became the one ecumenical version to bridge the Protestant-Catholic divide.¹² More than any other version it deserves to rank as "The English Bible" of the twentieth century.¹³

The Revised Standard Version New Testament had hardly appeared, however (and certainly had had no time to prove its worth), before a movement was begun in Scotland for a new British translation. After thirteen years of concerted effort, the translators appointed by the combined non-Roman Catholic churches in Britain produced their New Testament in 1961. What was distinctive with regard to this version was that it broke with four hundred and fifty years of history, and gave us not a further revision of "The English Bible," the Bible of Tyndale, Coverdale, Geneva, and King James, and of the Revised Standard Version, but an entirely new translation. The old familiar cadences of a leisurely, mannered style were abandoned, and a modern, taut prose was substituted. This is very apparent if we take a well-known passage (Mt 11: 28-30) and read it first in the King James, then in the Revised Standard and finally in the New English Bible:

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| KJ | Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. |
| RSV | Come to me, all who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. |
| NEB | Come to me, all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy; and I will give you relief. Bend your necks to my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted; and your souls will find relief. For my yoke is good to bear, my load is light. |

The King James and the Revised Standard are undoubtedly the same work, but in the new translation the whole feel of the passage is different. The new style tends to be rather broken, staccato, and even in narrative portions it does not flow very easily. One gets the impression that each phrase has been individually translated but that no one has gone over the whole to make of the phrases a continuous, flexible unity. In the Epistles, this may be almost an advantage, for one often gets the impression from the Greek that the writers, particularly Paul, thought in spurts and expressed themselves in sudden phrases. But in the narratives of Acts and the Gospels, this lack of stylistic continuity is a distinct loss. It makes itself severely ap-

parent if one reads, for example, the story of the walk to Emmaus (Lk 24) first in King James and then in the New English Bible. In Britain, as one would expect, the New Testament version was somewhat uncritically accepted, and has gained fairly wide acceptance; but in North America and in the English-speaking world generally, it has been given a cordial rather than an enthusiastic reception. Whether the New English Bible as a whole would prove a serious rival to the Revised Standard Version on the worldwide stage could not be known until the appearance of the Old Testament and Apocrypha. For this we have had to be patient for almost another decade, but the long-awaited volume appeared in March 1970, and we can begin to make at least preliminary judgments.

Before we do so, there are two other developments which have to be noted. First, a modest, untrumpeted translation of the New Testament was put out in 1968 by the American Bible Society, in paperback and with charming line drawings interspersed in the text, under the title "Good News for Modern Man: Today's English Version." The translator was Robert Bratcher and the line drawings are by Annie Vallotton. The Preface states that the intention was to meet the need of people everywhere who use English as a means of communication: "Today's English Version of the New Testament attempts to follow, in this century, the example set by the authors of the New Testament books, who, for the most part, wrote in the standard, or common, form of the Greek language." It has proved brilliantly successful. Everyone who uses it for either private or public reading is struck by its simplicity, its directness, and its vitality. Even those who have long accustomed themselves to the New Testament in Greek have a sense of fresh acquaintance with passage after passage, and are led to suspect that the impact of this version upon them is something very like the impression which the original writings made upon those to whom they were first addressed. Like the King James Version, "Today's English Version" bids fair to establish itself by its own sheer worth.

One small point is that this "common English" translation naturally eschewed "thou's" and "thee's." In the New Testament, the Deity is addressed relatively seldom, and this change of style was interesting but not revolutionary. But then also in 1968 there appeared the Jerusalem Bible. This is indeed a notable translation in many respects. Its progenitor is *La Bible de Jérusalem*, so called because it was prepared by scholars of the French Dominican Bible School in Jerusalem. They availed themselves not only of the very best assistance of modern scholarship but also of that newfound enthusiasm for the Bible which *aggiornamento*, both before and since Vatican II, has engendered throughout the Roman Church. This splendid French version then became the inspiration and guide for a new Roman

Catholic Bible in England. This version, also called "The Jerusalem Bible," not only dispenses with "thee" and "thou," in the Old Testament as well as in the New, but it also boldly returns to the Divine Name "Yahweh" instead of employing the surrogate "the Lord," by use of which translators for over two thousand years have reverently avoided the use of the Divine Name. Thus what we have heard for centuries as "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" becomes:

Yahweh, our Lord,
how great your name throughout the earth!

It is in the Psalms that the Jerusalem Bible scintillates. For example, the King James grandly but somewhat obscurely proclaims: "For lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled and hasted away." This becomes in the Jerusalem Bible:

There was a rallying, once, of kings,
advancing together along a common front;
they looked, they were amazed,
they panicked, they ran!

No more graphic conveyance of an irrational, fear-inspired rout is possible. Not only in the Psalms but throughout both Testaments, this is a very readable, attractive, and thoroughly commendable version of the Bible in the best literary style of our own day. At one bound, the Roman Church in England has overcome the shame of centuries and has produced a Bible which can afford comparison with the very best that the Protestant world has to offer.

The appearance of the Old Testament and Apocrypha of the New English Bible was therefore, in view of what had gone before, an event of very considerable importance. British biblical scholarship has for a century been rivaled only by the German tradition for erudition, perceptiveness, and freedom from conservative constraints. The new version comes from a tradition enriched by mature scholarship, literary sensitivity, and informed popular interest. These scholars were men trained by George Adam Smith and Arthur Samuel Peake, and their literary sensitivity had been tuned by Robert Louis Stevenson and Gerard Manley Hopkins, and played upon by T. S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, and Winston Churchill. The omens were surely set for a truly great translation.

It is impossible to review the Bible as one would any other work. Its vastness, variety, and familiarity all combine to defeat the attempt. What

one can do is to take soundings; to choose a number of passages which have made their mark in previous translations, and to turn hopefully to others which have struck home in the Hebrew or the Greek but which have hitherto failed in translation. A version has to be lived with for many years before its strengths and weaknesses can be fully known. But there are some immediate reactions to this New English Bible which can be formulated. For instance, the decision to retain the older form of second-person address may have been defensible in 1946, but in 1970 it strikes one as sheer anachronism. It is not merely that "thou" belongs to a special outdated language of "religion only" but also that the whole use of auxiliary verbs is involved. In order to avoid "thou castedst" one writes "thou hast cast" and the style straightway becomes less taut. This is not so noticeable in prose narratives, in which the new version acquits itself fairly though not outstandingly well, but it shows up at once in poetical passages. Compare Ps 104, for example, from the New English Bible with the Jerusalem Bible's rendering:

NEB Thou hast spread out the heavens like a tent,
 and on their waters laid the beams of thy pavilion;
 who takest the clouds for thy chariot,
 riding on the wings of the wind;
 who makest the winds thy messengers
 and flames of fire thy servants;
 thou didst fix the earth on its foundation
 so that it never can be shaken;
 the deep overspread it like a cloak,
 and the waters lay above the mountains.

JB You stretch the heavens out like a tent,
 you build your palace on the waters above;
 using the clouds as your chariot,
 you advance on the wings of the wind;
 you use the winds as messengers
 and fiery flames as servants.
 You fixed the earth on its foundations,
 unshakeable for ever and ever;
 you wrapped it with the deep as with a robe,
 the waters over-topping the mountains.

It is manifestly unfair to build overall judgements on a single passage. The present writer can only say that the literary success of the second passage as compared with the awkwardness of the first has up to this point in his reading seemed to him to be representative of the two versions. "Thou didst fix" is bad enough, but "Thou it was who didst fashion my inward parts" (Ps 139: 13) is surely unforgivable.

Is 52-53 (to take another sampling) is in important details very questionable as an accurate translation, and as a whole very difficult for public

reading; even for private reading, the passage emerges as irritatingly staccato in its flow of ideas. Here are the verses which Handel has made so familiar, as they appear in the Revised Standard and in the New English versions:

RSV He was despised and rejected by men;
 a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
 and as one from whom men hide their faces
 he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
 Surely he has borne our griefs,
 and carried our sorrows,
 yet we esteemed him stricken,
 smitten by God and afflicted.

NEB He was despised, he shrank from the sight of men,
 tormented and humbled by suffering;
 we despised him, we held him of no account,
 a thing from which men turn away their eyes.
 Yet on himself he bore our sufferings,
 our torments he endured,
 while we counted him smitten by God,
 struck down by disease and misery.

The first translation has a rhythm derived from the King James, which the second wholly lacks. Nor do finer points of greater accuracy compensate for this loss. "Grief" in the second line of the RSV has, as we have seen, long been recognized as needing to be rendered by "disease." Why, then, does the NEB sidestep the difficulty by using the less direct word "suffering," and then gratuitously introduce "disease" into the last line? Some of the individual phrases in the chapter cannot readily be derived from the Hebrew at all: "after all his pains he shall be bathed in light" (vs 11) appears to be an example of sheer invention.¹⁴ The whole passage emerges as an uneven mixture of doubtful innovations and cautious conservatism.

When one further discovers that in the NEB not only is "the Lord" retained in the old style but that in crucial passages like Ex 3 and 34 "Jehovah" unblushingly makes its reappearance, one is reluctantly forced to conclude that this version is neither of our age nor for our age. In view of the twenty and more years of devoted labor, dedicated to this task by scores of scholars who stand in the finest traditions of linguistic and literary skills, this is a truly tragic conclusion at which to arrive. One wants desperately to be able to hail this version as a superb achievement. Honesty compels us to say that it is very doubtful whether, like its great predecessor, the King James Version, the New English Bible will drive all its competitors off the market by virtue of its own sheer excellence.

The year 1970 will nevertheless clearly be remembered as a vintage year for the Bible in English, for in the late fall of that year a second major venture reached completion and was published in its entirety. The New American Bible is the product of the Catholic Biblical Association of America and is sponsored by the Bishops' Committee of the Confraternity on Christian Doctrine. The translation was undertaken in response to the Papal Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), and the work was begun as early as 1944. In span of years, the parallel with the NEB is very close, but the publishing history has been quite different. The Confraternity New Testament had been issued in 1941, and this was a revision of Douai-Rheims-Challoner. Thus, although it took cognizance of the Greek text, it was essentially a translation of the Vulgate. But the 1943 Encyclical gave a new status in the Roman communion to the original language versions behind the Vulgate, and the Catholic Biblical Association charged with responsibility for the Confraternity Bible turned to the Old Testament in Hebrew and Aramaic with a new zest. *Genesis to Ruth* was published in 1952, *Job to Sirach* in 1955, *Isaiah to Malachi* in 1961, and *Samuel to Maccabees* in 1969. The New American Bible of 1970 consists of these parts of the Confraternity Old Testament (the first three having been revised, the first of them to the extent of a new translation of Genesis) together with an entirely new version of the New Testament based on the twenty-fifth edition of the Nestlé-Aland Greek Text but with reference also to the United Bible Societies' 1966 text. The work is issued by a number of publishers in various styles. The typical edition published by the St. Anthony Guild Press includes an appendix of textual notes relating to the original languages, while the Catholic Press edition is a more ecclesiastical version, printing the sayings of Jesus in red and including such features as a charming modern version of the Jesse Tree. The scholarship of the New American Bible is beyond reproach. Full advantage has been taken of the latest Dead Sea Scroll discoveries and of the more recent advances in New Testament textual criticism. The version dispenses with the archaic form of second person address, and achieves a strong, taut rendering of poetry, as, for example, in the book of Psalms. In a passage such as Deut 5, we notice one or two noncurrent words and phrases—such as “I enjoin on you,” “goods of all sorts which you did not garner,” “wonders, great and dire,”—but for the most part it is a straightforward, clean, and effective version which is well calculated to encourage biblical studies by both laity and clergy in the Roman communion. In some of the Old Testament narrative passages, the unaffected style is particularly effective. Here, for example, is part of the story of Elisha and the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4: 18–24:

The day came when the child was old enough to go out to his father among the reapers. “My head hurts,” he complained to his father. “Carry him to his mother,” the father said to a servant. The servant picked him up and carried him to his mother; he stayed with her until noon, when he died in her lap. The mother took him upstairs, and laid him on the bed of the man of God. Closing the door on him, she went out and called to her husband, “Let me have a servant and a donkey. I must go quickly to the man of God, and I will be back.” “Why are you going to him today?” he asked. “It is neither the new moon, nor the sabbath.” But she bade him good-bye, and when the donkey was saddled said to her servant, “Lead on! Do not stop my donkey unless I tell you to.”

The urgency of the distraught mother comes through very clearly, and the simple force of the Hebrew is conveyed with great fidelity.

In the New Testament, the style is more consecutive, less staccato than in the NEB, largely because of a greater readiness to use conjunctions, participial phrases, and subordinate clauses. This shows itself in a narrative like that of the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins:

NEB When that day comes, the Kingdom of Heaven will be like this. There were ten girls who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five prudent; when the foolish ones took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the others took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was late in coming they all dozed off to sleep. But at midnight a cry was heard: “Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” With that the girls all got up and trimmed their lamps.

NAB The reign of God can be likened to ten bridesmaids, who took their torches and went out to welcome the groom. Five of them were foolish, while the other five were sensible. The foolish ones in taking their torches, brought no oil along, but the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their torches. The bridegroom delayed his coming, so they all began to nod, then to fall asleep. At midnight, someone shouted, “The groom is here! Come out and greet him!” At the outcry, all the virgins woke up and got their torches ready.

There can be little doubt that in many small ways the American is linguistically more conservative than the British. “Can be likened” is not so idiomatic as “will be like”; “torches” is not so common on either side of the Atlantic as “lamps”; and, a little further on, “dealers” is more formal than “shop”—though an American would of course say “store.” The difference between the two reveals itself even more clearly in the argumentative passages of Paul's letters, as at the beginning of Rom 8:

NEB The conclusion of the matter is this: there is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ Jesus, because in Christ Jesus, the life-giving law of the Spirit has set you free from the law of sin and death. What the law could never do, because our lower nature robbed it of all potency, God has done: by sending his own Son in a form like that of our own sinful nature, and as a sacrifice for sin, he has passed judgement against sin within that very nature, so that the commandment of the law may find fulfilment in us, whose conduct, no longer under the control of our lower nature, is directed by the Spirit.

NAB There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has freed you from the law of sin and death. The law was powerless because of its weakening by the flesh. Then God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, thereby condemning sin in the flesh, so that the just demands of the law might be fulfilled in us who live, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

The British version is more effective, more communicative (and in this particular passage more consecutive in literary style) than the American, simply because it gets away from the original Pauline sentence structure and concentrates on getting the ideas across—but it lays itself open to the charge of being interpretative and paraphrastic, which the members of the Catholic Biblical Association were particularly concerned to avoid. Since they were producing a public version, one to be used in the liturgy as well as in the home, they were right to be sensitive on this point. And the American decision to use modern English second-person forms of address more than compensates for its greater linguistic conservatism in lesser matters.

The overall significance of the NAB lies, in the present writer's opinion, in three major considerations. First, the Confraternity took advantage of the 1943 Encyclical to get back to the original languages. The domination of the Roman Church by the Vulgate has at last been broken. The gyrations of Ronald Knox in trying to argue the case for the Vulgate as the proper basis of translation for the Bible in English now appear quite ludicrous. Thus the great gulf between Roman and Protestant biblical scholarship has been bridged. Even the small but important fact that the NAB uses the common forms of Old Testament names reinforces this happy new situation. Second, the inclusion of such familiar Protestant names as Frank Cross and J. A. Sanders in the list of translators is a reminder that Catholic and Protestant scholars now work with identical views as regards the canons of the art of translating. The third is a point which was already strongly made by the appearance of the Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version—that there is no longer any justification for a threefold division of

the Canon into Old Testament, Apocrypha, and New Testament. The Old Testament does include Sirach, and Wisdom, and Tobit, and Maccabees, and the rest; and "The English Bible" should now clearly exhibit this fact.

The end of the matter, then, is this: we have just completed a remarkable century of biblical translation. It was in February 1870 that the resolution for the revision of the King James Version was moved in the Convocation of Canterbury, and this led to the English Revised Version and the American Standard Version, and these, in turn, to the Revised Standard Version, the Jerusalem Bible, the New English Bible, and the New American Bible. The long reign of the King James Version has been ended in all the major communions. To read publicly the King James Version of 2 Cor 5: 11–6:2, a truly noble passage, has become impossible, because we do not know what intonations to employ, since we no longer know what the translators were trying to say—whatever it was, they did not say it. But we still do not have a version which can replace the King James everywhere in the English-speaking world. The version which comes nearest to this is the Revised Standard Version in its Catholic edition. But the unity of the English language and the possession of one English Bible have gone together since the time of Wycliffe—with, it should be added, special thanks to Challoner. The next stage of the present task is surely, then, already in sight: it is to complete our own century of translations with a new version "not justly to be excepted against" (as Miles Smith said when he introduced the King James Version) in any land or in any church. This would fittingly crown our own century of translation, just as the 1611 version crowned and fulfilled the labors of the sixteenth century. With the present splendid but competing versions to hand, the councils of churches in Canada, the United States, Australasia, and Great Britain should call upon the churches of the English-speaking world to set a new generation of scholars to work in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, India, in the Caribbean, Britain, North America—wherever English is spoken,—to produce a new version which should not be Catholic or Protestant (nor, in the Hebrew Scriptures, Jewish) but common to us all. It would be based not on the Vulgate but the original languages: it would contain not the Jewish-Protestant Canon but the larger, richer Canon of the Vulgate, and it would be rendered into not British nor American but World Standard English, for the benefit of all.

For whether we live in Boston, Massachusetts, or Boston, Lincolnshire, in London, Ontario, or London, England, in Bridgetown, Barbados or Melbourne, Australia, whether we are Christian, Jew, or Gentile, we are all, by virtue of being English-speaking, culturally the descendants of Adam and Eve. As a result we draw a bow at a venture, we cherish the apple of our eye, we seek the pearl of great price, and we know full well that we are

our brother's keeper. The Bible will never again in the future influence the culture of the English-speaking peoples as it has done in the past, and perhaps it is well that it should not. But we who are the inheritors of this great tradition, stretching from Caedmon and Alfred the Great to S. H. Hooke, C. H. Dodd, Luther Weigle, Louis Hartman, and others who are happily still with us, should not now let the tradition dissipate into merely regional versions. "The English Bible" is, apart from the English language itself, probably the strongest cultural link which unites all English-speaking peoples; thus, in a world which is fast becoming one technologically, the unity of religious and literary culture takes on a new and greater significance. It must not be only our scientists who have symbols in common. Moreover, splendid and remarkable as the new versions are, none of them has all the virtues; they can all gain immeasurably from each other. We ought therefore to put our minds to the task afresh; for no man, not even a biblical translator, having once put his hand to the plow, can afford to look back until the task is fully accomplished. And this side of the Kingdom of God, that will never be.

NOTES

¹ *I and II Chronicles, Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB, New York: Doubleday, 1965.

² "The Lively Oracles," *Queen's Quarterly* 77 (Autumn 1970), 333-48.

³ *The Lollard Bible*, Cambridge, England, 1920, pp. 139-40, 143-45. (For the earlier period, cf the same writer's *Sidelights on the Anglo-Saxon Church*, London, 1962).

⁴ Cf also R. W. Chambers, "On the Continuity of English Prose," an Introduction to Harpsfield's *Life and Death of Sir Thomas Moore*, London: Oxford University Press, 1932, pp. xci-xcii.

⁵ There is some indirect evidence that it also circulated in Scotland. A Lowland Scots version was prepared as late as the beginning of the sixteenth century, but it appears never to have circulated because it was overtaken by the appearance of printed versions of Tyndale's New Testament, which thus also took over the role of introducing Standard English into Scotland—which was, it should be remembered, still politically and socially a very separate country from England. The Bible in Standard English was for centuries one of the strongest cultural links between the two. Cf Deanesly, *Lollard Bible*, p. 359, and the reference below to the Geneva Version.

⁶ Cf C. C. Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage of the King James' Bible*, Philadelphia, 1941, pp. 46-47.

⁷ Cf B. F. Westcott, *A General View of the History of the English Bible*, 3d ed. rev. by H. A. Wright, London, 1905, p. 158.

⁸ *Essays in Appreciation*, Boston, 1936.

⁹ The Geneva Version was officially accepted by the General Assembly of the Kirk (1560) and was the first Bible to be printed in Scotland (1579). Cf F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible*, London, 1961, pp. 91-92.

¹⁰ New Testament, 1881; Old Testament, 1885; Apocrypha, 1895; American Standard Version, 1901.

¹¹ *William F. Moulton: A Memoir*, by W. Fiddian Moulton, with a chapter, "Biblical Work and Opinions" by James Hope Moulton, London, 1899, pp. 101-2. Billingsgate is both the name of the great London fish market and also of the strong language used by its porters.

¹² The same edition was authorized for use in the United States by the imprimatur of Cardinal Cushing in May 1966. Cardinal Cushing also contributed a foreword to the American edition of the Catholic RSV.

¹³ The principles underlying the revision are given in two pamphlets: "An Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament," 1946; and "An Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament," 1952. Cf Luther Weigle, "English Versions since 1611," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade, Cambridge, England, 1963. Dean Weigle was Chairman of the Revision Committee.

¹⁴ The explanation for much of the translation of the passage is to be found in G. R. Driver's contribution to *In Memoriam Paul Kahle* (eds. M. Black and G. Fohrer, Berlin, 1968) entitled "Isaiah 52: 13-53: 12; The Servant of the Lord." The article proposes many brilliant linguistic theories and not a few conjectural emendations. Whether they should have been accepted to the degree that they have in NEB is very questionable.