

THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

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FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Readers will be well aware of the significant change in the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards the Scriptures, as revealed in a variety of ways during the last 25 years. There has been the scholarly activity of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. There was the remarkable papal encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) which, in the opinion of many, marked a decisive turning away from traditional Roman attitudes to matters of scholarship and the text of Scripture. There has been much activity in the production of new translations, some of which have already made a considerable impact in terms of their scholarly and literary excellence. There is much evidence that the new spirit engendered at the Second Vatican Council is making itself felt throughout the whole of the Roman Catholic world, and inevitably the leaders of the Bible Society movement are finding themselves under constraint to think long and deep about some of the possibilities now opening out before us.

Firstly, it would now seem to be clear that the Latin Vulgate of Jerome is no longer regarded as the sole authoritative text of all Scripture. With the acknowledgement of the Greek and Hebrew texts as being of prior authority, and the recognition of the place of critical Biblical scholarship in the whole field of translation, a new situation has come into being. All this has meaning, however, only in relation to the possibility that the Church of Rome is recognizing the importance and urgency of our contemporary need that all men everywhere should have access to the Word of God in their own mother tongue. If that is not fundamental Bible Society doctrine it would be hard to say what is.

How then are we to approach this new opportunity? It would appear that in many places Roman Catholic authorities would be very happy to be permitted to use existent Bible Society texts for their own purposes. In other contexts they would be glad to co-operate with the Bible Society in current projects for translation or revision.

While acknowledging that all this constitutes an immense challenge, it would be unwise not to recognize that there may also be difficulties. The purpose of this editorial is to invite translators to share their views and opinions with the Editorial Board and to do so without delay. In the late autumn a

number of Bible Society representatives are expecting to discuss technical problems of translating with a group of Roman Catholic scholars, and this will be for us a very important meeting. Those who represent you will need to be fully informed. We shall certainly need to know something of the past history of Bible Society relationships with the Roman Catholic Church. In this respect the Editor has tried to do his part, having read through most of the files of the nineteenth century, when this was a burning issue. On the whole it was a dull, depressing and arid experience. Much of the discussion was marred by a spirit of rancour, suspicion and self-assurance. The all-important thing seems to have been to score points. However sincere and well-meaning the pamphleteers may have been, their methods and attitudes defeated any constructive object they may have had. Let us hope and pray that in the latter half of the twentieth century we shall do better in this respect. If we really can find a common basis for working together, it would not be the first time that the Bible has proved the essential link of union in our sadly divided Christian world. But this is something which cannot be simply imposed from above. It must grow out of the realities of local situations. It is just here that you can help us. Here is an opportunity in which there is a new development and we just cannot, if we are honest, afford to close our eyes, but at the same time we are aware of the many problems which may be involved in any such development, and this is why it is so important for us all to consult.¹ If you have any ideas to express, please write to the Editor as soon as you can.

¹ Readers might find it helpful to read the chapter on 'Roman Catholic Translations in the Mission Fields' in *Roman Catholicism and the Bible*, by Olivier Béguin; Lutterworth Press, London, 1963; price 5/-.

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