

## **The Douay Bible: A Testimony to Tradition (Second in a Series)**

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### **Intro**

An earlier installment on the Douay-Rheims Bible (or Douay Bible) began with its historical milieu: Protestant England of the sixteenth century. Next, we glanced at the translators: Cardinal William Allen and Fathers Gregory Martin, Richard Bristow, William Reynolds, and Thomas Worthington. Further, we looked at the release of this revered Scripture version. Now, for our latter and final installment we will examine the translation methodology, survey subsequent revisions, compare a contemporary Catholic version with the Douay Bible, and recommend outlets for acquiring this text.

### **The Translation Methodology for the Douay Bible**

Prior to examining the translation method for the Douay Bible, the special task of translating Biblical manuscripts needs some explanation. It is believed that we do not have possession of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek documents, called “autographs,” that were composed by the inspired authors of sacred Scripture. The autographs such as Ezekiel’s clay tile (cf. Ez. 4:1) or St. Paul’s parchment (cf. 2 Tim. 4:13) have corrupted over time, were lost, or suffered destruction. It is possible that some autographs are extant and may be discovered in the future. At the present time, translators must rely on numerous copies based upon the autographs; the copies are called “manuscripts.” The most valuable manuscripts are Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

Essentially, three kinds of translation methods are applied to the manuscripts. The methods are known as Formal Equivalence, Dynamic Equivalence, and Paraphrase. Formal Equivalence strives to translate the manuscripts as “literal as possible” (word for word) into the vernacular. Dynamic Equivalence attempts to translate the manuscripts by “capturing the intended meaning” (thought for thought) into the vernacular. The Paraphrase yields a “free composition” (rephrasing or restating) into the vernacular from manuscripts or a previous translation. Each method has strong points and weak points. The Formal is very accurate, but may be awkward to read. The Dynamic is readable, but can manifest a translator’s personal bias. The Paraphrase provides familiarity by employing common speech, but often lacks accuracy. All translation methods, to a degree, involve some interpretation by the translator as he works from one language to the next.

How does each translation sound to the ear or appear to the eye? Let us glance at the Old Testament; Psalm 1:1 will serve as a test case. A Formal rendering is found in the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (1965/1966):

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seats of scoffers.

A Dynamic verse is given in the Jerusalem Bible (1966):

Happy the man who never follows the advice of the wicked, or loiters on the way that sinners take, or sits about with scoffers.

A Paraphrase is discovered in The Living Bible (1976):

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow evil men's advice, who do not hang around with sinners, scoffing at the things of God.

Observing the different translations, one can detect the literal, less literal, and least literal. For the sake of comparison with these three renderings, the Douay Bible (1914 reprint) states:

Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence.

What kind of classification is the Douay Bible? As we mentioned in our first installment, the main point of reference for the text was the Latin Vulgate. However, the translators didn't ignore the Hebrew and Greek tongues, or disregard the vernacular translations in circulation at the time. In view of these facts, the Douay Bible should be labeled a "second-generation" Formal text — English via Latin through Hebrew/Greek.

### **Revisions to the Douay Bible**

The Douay Bible was not perfect. With hindsight, no translation stands without some improvement. The Right Reverend Henry G. Graham comments about the Douay version:

We need not declare it perfect in all respects, either in regard to its English style or its employment in words from foreign languages; we need not feel the less affection or admiration for it... (*Where We Got the Bible*, p. 147).

Not surprisingly, the Douay Bible has undergone revision. The best-known revisions are associated with Bishop Richard Challoner (d. 1781). Noted for his dedication and piety, this distinguished prelate held the appointment of Vicar-Apostolic of the London district. Interestingly, the Catholic Church in the United States was under his jurisdiction from 1758-1781. Bishop Challoner's revision of the Douay Bible was justified — since the 1700s, the English tongue had developed and some parts of the revered translation had become obsolete. As well, the bishop's work was not limited to the text; he also revised the extensive notes. Utilizing the 1592 Clementine Vulgate, Bishop Challoner revised the Rheims New Testament in 1749 (published likely in Dublin). There followed a four-volume edition of the entire Bible in 1750 (released in Dublin or London); this included a second edition of the New Testament. He produced a third edition of the New Testament in 1752, reprinted in 1772 and 1777. The entire Bible was reprinted in 1763-1764 (probably at Dublin).

Bishop Challoner's revisions did yield some unflattering observations. The famed Cardinal Newman said of Bishop Challoner's Old Testament:

We may pronounce that they issue in little short of a new translation... Challoner's version is even nearer to the Protestant than it is to the Douay; nearer, that is, not in grammatical structure, but in phraseology and diction (*Tracts: Theological and Ecclesiastical*, p. 416).

After his death, subsequent revisions were common in English speaking countries, although the bishop's three main revisions still continued to function as a basic text.

After the scholarly efforts of Bishop Challoner, one future revision to the Douay Bible would hold a place of distinction; credited to Father George Leo Haydock (d. 1849). This Biblical scholar of Northern England undertook a new edition of the Douay Bible, while maintaining two basic texts: the 1750 work of Bishop Challoner and a 1794 New Testament revision associated with Dublin's Archbishop John Thomas Troy (d. 1823). Father Haydock's edition would prove its worth because of the extensive annotations he garnered from the great saints, popes, theologians, Fathers, and Doctors of the Church. This erudite edition was released in Manchester (1812-1814), Dublin (1812-1813), Edinburgh/Dublin (1845-1848), and the United States in New York (1852-1856). Accessible reprints for this prized text will be discussed later.

A popular Douay Bible published in the United States was the Confraternity Edition. Conducted under the patronage of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the revision to the New Testament appeared in 1941. This text rested upon the Latin of the Clementine Vulgate. The format of this text was printed in paragraphs, rather than the individual verse forms utilized by Bishop Challoner. For clarity's sake, the Confraternity edition attempted a modern English expression by departing from Latin sentence structure. In addition, quotations of the Old Testament, when cited in the New, were set off by italics to aid study. Regarding the Confraternity's Old Testament revision, it began in 1952 and was never completed; appearing in parts over the coming decades. This incomplete Old Testament endeavor had recourse to the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. The Catholic Biblical Association of America (before *aggiornamento*) had a role in the revision.

What is the difference between the various Douay Bible editions? The New Testament text of 1 Corinthians 13:1 will shed light on this question. The following sample verses reflect the Douay Bible of 1582, Challoner's revision of 1749, and the Confraternity edition of 1941. The 1582 original states:

If I speake with the tonges of men, and of Angels, and have not charitie: I am become as sounding brasse, or a tinkling cymbal.

The 1749 Challoner text says:

If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

The 1941 Confraternity version has:

If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

The difference between editions, at least with respect to this Pauline passage, is relatively minor.

### **The Douay Bible and The New American Bible**

The New American Bible of 1970, with its revised New Testament of 1986 and revised Psalms of 1991, is well known throughout the United States. It is the Scripture text employed at Mass for the *Novus Ordo Missae* (1969-1970). This Bible version's prefaces state that the translation was composed with the assistance of non-Catholics. This ecumenical Scripture endeavor claims support for such a novelty by appealing to the Second Vatican Council's *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), no. 22. This Bible translation is cited in most works that come from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Reading the Douay Bible alongside The New American Bible is an illuminating experience.

Restricting ourselves to the Gospel of Saint Luke, let us examine from among these two translations a beautiful verse in Holy Writ. The Douay Bible in Luke 1:28, which records the heavenly messenger Gabriel in Nazareth greeting the Blessed Virgin Mary, contains in part:

And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace.

The New American Bible says in part:

And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one!"

This contemporary rendering is wanting — the underlying Greek term, *kecharitomene*, indicates more than just favor. Numerous Biblical study resources can be consulted that testify to the richness of this term. Further, the rendering in the New American Bible appears not to consider the Latin phrase *gratia plena*; found in past and present editions of the Vulgate.

The fact remains that there are no compelling reasons for the translation changes to some of the most familiar passages in sacred Scripture. The outstanding Biblical scholar, Monsignor John E. Steinmueller, concurs:

Attempts at producing "modern" translations of the Bible frequently result in the use of contemporary language which "dates" the text much more objectionably than does the retention of antiquated wordings. There are expressions in the Douay and King James Bibles which are so well known as to have been made household words; and nothing can be gained by changing them (*The Sword of the Spirit*, 69).

Space limitations prevent further comparisons between the Douay Bible and New American Bible. The reader is encouraged to consult the following select Gospel

passages in both versions for additional comparisons: Matthew 16:18; Mark 10:9; Luke 11:2-4; and John 15:13.

### **Reprints of the Douay Bible**

Reprints of the Douay Bible are available from Catholic publishers such as TAN Books (1.800.437.5876), Loreto Publications (603.239.6671), and Catholic Treasures (1.800.257.4893). TAN and Loreto sell high quality single volume editions. Catholic Treasures may have the finest reprint: a three-volume set reproduced from the single volume edition compiled by Father Haydock. These reprints include a Bible dictionary, Old Testament volume, and New Testament volume.

For those who don't require a mint condition reprint, second-hand bookstores can be sought for used copies of the Douay Bible. In spite of some wear and tear, many serviceable editions are still in circulation which were printed during the early 1900s. Those with a computer can pursue this inquiry on the Internet at [www.bookfinder.com](http://www.bookfinder.com).

### **Conclusion**

The difficult task of translating ancient documents is no small feat; especially within the epoch of the 1500s and 1600s. The Douay Bible translators enjoyed none of the advantages that we possess today such as word processors, CD-ROMS, or the Internet with its unending data. Contemporary readers of the Douay Bible should recall the scholarship and sacrifice that were directed to making this translation. The Church Militant should reflect with gratitude upon our Fathers in the Faith who strove to safeguard the inspired word. The contemporary Good News Bible: Catholic Study Edition (1979), with its smiley-faced "line drawings" affixed to its pages, will probably not yield the same happy reflection.

As we close our far too brief study of the Douay Bible, let each of us appreciate the notes on Job 1 and 42 found in the 1609-1610 Old Testament:

Job stood immovable in the service of God for example to us that we fall not for anie worldlie damage, losse of dearest friendes or corporal afflictions. And blessed be God, by whose blessing we may now say: O happy English Catholiques, that patiently suffer the very same kind of tribulation.... God condemned the errors of Job's friends; it is, then, folly to disregard the Church's condemnations of such men as Luther, Calvin, and Beza.

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