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Bad Translation:
The Sources of Catholic Dogma
translated by Roy J. Deferrari

Review Author: James T. Griffin

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It must also be said that the numerous half-truths throughout the book seem to invalidate its thesis. He has accurately diagnosed the evils of our times in the superficiality of modern living but he seems to prescribe an immoral remedy when he presents (and thereby condones) the artists' bohemian gropings as possible solutions. He fails to see the error in them. The author is indeed right in seeking the answer to the problem of self-realization in the discovery of the nature of the human self—its purpose. But in this regard he himself seems to betray an unawareness of what man's end truly is. Again, there is truth in his concluding statement that the Outsider may finish as a saint, but not in the premise upon which the conclusion is based. True, the Outsider may end up a saint, *if* he discovers that man's end is the Beatific Vision, and *if* he finds the "inside" in a body of transcendent values —the Mystical Body of Christ where true freedom is realized.

The Outsider therefore in its entirety is a half-truth. It is the *inquietum cor nostrum* but unfinished. The danger in it lies in that it tends to add to St. Augustine's verse not St. Augustine's *donec in Te, Domine* but the existentialist's *donec in te, Homine.*

ANTONIO V. ROMUALDEZ

BAD TRANSLATION

THE SOURCES OF CATHOLIC DOGMA. Translated by Roy J. Deferrari from the thirtieth edition of Henry Denzinger's Enchiridion Symbolorum. St. Louis. Herder. 1957. Pp. xxxiv, 653, (67).

THE trials of a translator are many, as Ronald Knox has demonstrated well in his masterful *Trials of a Translator.* His book is the fruit of the blood and sweat and tears which went into his translation of the Bible. No doubt Dr. Deferrari could write a book in similar vein. And one of his trials would be reviewers like me who are commissioned by editors to evaluate a book.

The idea of translating into English Henry Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum* is an excellent one. For with the modern's

interest in theology there is a need for a handy handbook of reference in which the sources of Christian dogma may easily be checked in the English vernacular.

But the execution of the idea is another matter. It would require skill in both Greek and Latin, for the earliest sources are in Greek and the rest down to our own day in Latin. Moreover, the skill must be not in the Greek of Demosthenes and the Latin of Cicero, but in the ecclesiastical Greek of St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Clement of Rome, in the medieval Latin of Innocent III and Gregory X and in the modern variations of Leo XIII and Pius XI.

Secondly, there is needed a knowledge of Ecclesiastical History and of the development of Dogma to understand the condition of the Church in the time when the document was produced to recreate for the twentieth century the precise nuances of certain phraseologies.

Thirdly, a sound knowledge of the vernacular with a feeling for the beauty and accuracy of the translated passages is another requirement for a competent translator.

Finally (and absolutely essential) is a solid training in theology, since most if not all of the matter to be translated had to do with the sublime truths of faith and morals which Christ commissioned His Church to teach.

The responsibility to produce a work worthy of such a background is a grave one. The book will be accepted by Catholics and non-Catholics alike as an authentic, although not thorough (for it is only an enchiridion, a handbook), presentation of the teachings of the Church in her more solemn moments.

Dr. Deferrari's competence in both Greek and Latin is well known. His competence on the other three levels is unknown to me. It is my sad but necessary task to provide the translator with the trial of saying that his book is a failure. It fails because on numerous occasions it presents as Catholic Dogma what is at best confusing gibberish and at worst outright heresy.

The gibberish is due to a failure to bridge the gulf between the Greek and Latin originals and modern English prose. It is due in some cases to a rather rigorous adherence to the original Greek and Latin which cannot be rendered literally without being

rent and torn in the process. Some examples of such gibberish are:

"...but being united from the womb itself he (the Word) is said to have endured a generation in the flesh in order to appropriate the producing of His own body." (p. 49)

"from this last canon Lateranensis has been taken word for word." (p. 150)

"From the letter to the Archbishops Apostolic in Byzantium, in Greece,... and in the Oriental (sic) Indies..." (p. 551)

"From the Codex of Canon Law promulgated on May 19, 1918, variously, see in Index systematicus." (p. 561)

"As regards ecclesiastical burial the Roman Ritual must stand firm." (p. 561: *Quoad sepulturam ecclesiasticam standum Rituali Romano.*)

"Whether...it is permitted to reject the traditional interpretation in the Catholic schools as more remotely desired and devoid of solid foundation...?" (p. 560) (*longius petitam* is better turned as "far fetched" than "remotely desired.")

Examples might be multiplied endlessly.

The need for historical perspective is clear from the poor handling of the errors of Peter John Olivi in the Council of Vienne (pp. 189-190). It is not a problem of "the soul as *a* form of the body" but of "the soul as *the* form of the body," which is quite another matter. I also noted the confusion of Sens with Soissons on page 150 note 3 which reads "His (Peter Abelard's) errors were already condemned in 1121 in the Council of Sens (sic), collected by St. Bernard, and set forth and rejected in the Council of Sens." The translator failed to note the difference between *Senonensi* and *Suessionensi*. Again, in listing the errors of Martin Luther the impression is given that they were handled by the Fifth Lateran Council which actually ended three years before Luther was condemned in the Bull *Exsurge Domine* of 15 June 1520. The same erroneous heading is used for Leo X's pronouncements on usury (p. 238), on the relations between the Pope and the Councils (p. 238), and on the Indulgence (p. 239), all of which are subsequent to Fifth Lateran.

But there is more than gibberish here. The heresies are there too for all to see. They are so glaring that it is a wonder that the *censor deputatus* missed them. Yet, the fact is that he

did (this book has a *Nihil obstat* and an *Imprimatur*). Some examples are:

In the Vatican Council which wished to insist on the value of revelation for the knowledge of natural truths without in any way belittling the power of the human intellect, the translator by omitting the *non* in the phrase *"quae in rebus divinis humanae rationi per se impervia non sunt"* makes such truths *"impenetrable* to human reason"! Vatican wanted to vindicate human reason and its power: the translation would contradict that.

In the Council of Ephesus two Christological errors are found. First, when the translator writes "...(we say) that the Word uniting with Himself according to person is a body animated with a rational soul, marvelously and incomprehensibly was made man...." The Greek of St. Cyril hardly says *that.* Rather we might put it this way: "... (we say) that the Word, having hypostatically united to Himself flesh, marvelously and incomprehensibly was made man...."

Second, when the Greek *proton* is misplaced and we read that "...in the first place no common man was born of the holy Virgin; then the Word thus descended upon Him..." Rather, "...it was no ordinary man who was first born of the Holy Virgin and upon whom only afterwards did the Word descend..."

In Chalcedon too we come across this translation: "the distinction of natures removed on account of union"—which is precisely the doctrine of the Monophysites who are being condemned. This error of the translator occurs in his Latin version, but not in his Greek which he renders correctly: "the distinction of natures nowhere removed on account of the union."

In Florence where the *Filioque* doctrine is so important, the translation leaves the impression that the Holy Spirit was begotten by the Son. I quote: "...without being Father, the Son Himself possesses this from the Father, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son from whom moreover He was eternally begotten."

To charge a book with heresy is not to say that the author is a heretic in the formal sense. His soul may be far from heresy; but his words which bear the message to his readers serve to bring a message not of revealed truth but of heresy.

It is probable that Dr. Deferrari committed much of the translating to a number of nuns who are mentioned in his preface. This fact is certainly mitigating in any condemnation of the book. Yet it does not absolve the translator from his responsibility.

In summary, the idea of providing "the students of our institutions of higher education" and "persons of cultivated tastes" with an "accurate as well as readable translation" of the basic dogmas of our faith is excellent. The courage of undertaking it is laudable. Thus far it has not been executed. The book, because of its defects both in accuracy and readability, needs complete revision. I am informed, as this goes to press, that Herder, the publisher, is preparing a new and corrected edition. Until it appears moderns "with little Latin and less Greek" may reap a rich harvest in reading *The Church Teaches* by the Jesuit Fathers of St. Mary's College, Kansas; Father Paul Palmer's two first volumes, *Mary in the Documents of the Church* and *Sacraments and Worship;* and Schroeder's *Decrees of The Council of Trent.*

JAMES T. GRIFFIN

SHORTER NOTICES

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMAN DIFFERENCES. By Leona E. Tyler. Second edition, New York. Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. 1956. Pp. viii, 562.

PART Two of this book deals with varieties of individual differences: intelligence, school achievement, vocational aptitudes, personality, interest and attitudes, perception. Usually Dr. Tyler presents the statistical data and points out whether the results are "statistically significant" or not. At the end of each particular study she clarifies any discrepancy in the statistics and further shows the reason for the conflict in some of the verbal conclusions of the various researchers. If she can not resolve the conflicts she warns caution in accepting the conclusions while at the same time insisting that much of the results will be valuable and of practical usefulness in dealing with other human beings. Her