

A NEW VERSION OF THE EPISTLES¹

THE Bishop of London first published this book in Australia in 1943 when he was Archbishop of Brisbane, and the present English edition includes a few alterations. In the Preface he explains how the letters were freshly translated from the Greek into an entirely modern medium, and then rewritten into a freer translation with occasional explanatory phrases. The result he has called either a free translation or a close paraphrase. A careful study of his text shows that it is frequently a very close translation, although the title of paraphrase has freed the translator's conscience from an obligation to strict adherence to the original word—or phrase—order, has permitted the insertion of phrases or even whole sentences, and has sometimes made possible a completely English idiom to replace that of the original.

Naturally the Catholic reader will make comparisons with the Catholic versions familiar to him: the Challoner-Rheims of 1749, and the new translation of Mgr Knox of 1945. He might also compare the American Revision of 1941, which is too little known in this country apart from its use in Fr Stedman's *Daily Readings* and *Sunday Missal*, and which is in fact a new version with great merits as a literal translation (usually very close to the Greek), which is easily readable, and which is in 'biblical' English with many archaisms removed and without notable Americanisms. For checking according to the Greek he will of course turn to the Westminster Version of 1931.²

The question might here be raised of the borderline between translation and paraphrase. Dr Wand calls his a paraphrase, Mgr Knox calls his a translation, although at times it is more paraphrastic than Dr Wand's. For instance, 11 Thess. 2:1:

W—In connection, brothers, with the coming of the Lord . . . , we ask you . . .

RAK—There is one entreaty we would make of you, brethren, as you look forward to the time when our Lord . . . will come.

¹ *The New Testament Letters*, prefaced and paraphrased by Dr J. W. C. Wand, Bishop of London. (Cumberlege, Oxford University Press; 7s. 6d.) This book appeared in September, and the present review has been held up because the writer felt that the excellence of this book demanded so much more than a single reading through at short notice.

² In our comparisons we shall use the following abbreviations: Rh—Rheims version, revised by Challoner; USA—American revision of the above; RAK—Mgr Knox's version; WV—Westminster version; W—Dr Wand's paraphrase.

Or again—II Tim. 4:3:

Rh—. Will heap to themselves teachers.

W—. . . Will collect teachers.

RAK—. . . Will provide themselves with a continuous succession of teachers.

Naturally the confessed paraphrase is generally entitled to be freer, for instance for *meketi hudropotei* in I Tim. 5:23 we have:

WV—Drink no longer water only.

Rh—Do not still drink water.

USA—Stop drinking water only.

RAK—No, do not confine thyself to water any longer.

W—But you need no longer be a total abstainer.

In this passage we can see the stages from a literal translation (WV and Rh), and the 'eased' translation of the American Revision, to the paraphrastic translation of Mgr Knox and the complete paraphrase (yet remaining exact in the idea) of Dr Wand.

An important distinction is virtually drawn by Dr Wand in his Preface, when he explains that his aim is 'to reproduce the argument of each writer in a readable form', and that nowadays when books are so plentiful, the New Testament writings should be presented so that people may 'read them in their own homes'. He does not therefore intend to present the Word of God as such, as for public reading thereof, but rather an explanation of the Word of God to be read in private. An official version, for public reading in church, has to restrict its paraphrase to translation of the content of the original words. Dr Wand himself, however, in his review of Mgr Knox's version in the *Sunday Times* (17/2/46), wrote that 'the main object of a good translation is to produce in the mind of its readers the same effect as that which was produced by the original in the mind of those to whom the writings were first addressed'. There is no doubt that Dr Wand's version does this most effectively. To quote his review again: 'The service performed by the new versions should be to stab the reader broad awake. The astounding character of the message should stand out all the more clearly when expressed in contemporary vernacular'. It would be impossible in an article such as this to do more than give the merest taste of how Dr Wand carries this out himself.

It is however the reviewer's task here first to satisfy the Catholic readers' enquiries on three points:

1. Is the version entirely sound *vis-à-vis* of Catholic teaching?
2. Is the rendering faithful to the text, and the paraphrase never too remote?
3. Does the version 'get across' in its entirely modern medium?

To these it can be safely answered Yes on all points, with only the slightest qualifications.

1. Very few passages will cause any discomfort to the Catholic reader, and then they are not vital points. There are hardly more than half a dozen, of which four are in I Cor. The first two are on St Paul's celibacy. In I Cor. 7:1 the sentence 'It is good for man not to touch a woman' is put as an enquiry, with a non-committal answer following, though Paul's celibacy is implied in the translation of 7:7. And in 9:5 the old reading of the AV is followed in the translation 'Have I no right to take to myself a wife from among our sisters?', a rendering stigmatized by Challoner as erroneous and corrupt (though Dr Wand does not, as does AV, suggest that he did so). In I Cor. 12:10 'the working of miracles' is translated 'psychological powers'. I Cor. 15:4 etc., Christ 'was raised' following RV, instead of the traditional 'rose' in the middle voice. In other Epistles, Rom. 2:16 for 'according to my Gospel', 'if my version of the Gospel is true' rings false; in Philipp. 2:6 (the kenotic passage), 'Although he shared the condition (*morphe*) of God' sounds inaccurate, and in Gal. 4:4 God sent his Son 'born by means of a human birth' sounds a trifle Nestorian. I have found no other awkward places, and other doctrinal passages are translated in an orthodox way. The preface (and the prefaces to the Epistles are of outstanding value to the general reader) to Hebrews says merrily: 'The letter is anonymous, and efforts to determine who wrote it, however fascinating to scholars, have produced no certain results'; that to II Peter doubts the authenticity and suggests that perhaps it contains fragments of Peter's writings. These two sentiments may not be quite acceptable to us, but all other ascriptions are entirely orthodox.

2. The rendering is faithful throughout, even when the paraphrase or the modern idiom takes it far from the exact words of the original. Thus an occasional apparent departure from original metaphor is usually fully justified on closer investigation. For instance (after the recounting of the mighty deeds of the Old Testament) in Heb. 12:1:

Rh—And therefore we also having so great a cloud of witnesses over our head . . . let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us.

W—Now this great host of heroes fills the spectators' seats around the arena in which our contest is to take place. To do well in their eyes we must . . . run with endurance the course that is set for us.

Of course *nephos* the cloud is used in Greek for a crowd, and the metaphor of these verses as a whole is the stadium. Even the most far-fetched divergence (I Cor. 15:8) can be explained:

Rh—He was seen by me, as by one born out of due time.

RAK—I too saw him, like the last child that comes to birth unexpectedly.

W—He was seen by me—your poor little runt of an apostle.

since a 'runt' is primarily an undersized, dwarfed and despised creature, and the context is one of self-abasement. The 'refuse' and 'off-scouring' of I Cor. 4:13 is, in view of Greek usage, probably justifiably

paraphrased 'like those poor wretches whom the authorities at Athens throw into the sea to represent the sins of the people' (cf. note in WV).

At times the Bishop indulges in brilliant slang, such as in II Cor. 12:11, 'Even if I am nothing, I am not at all inferior to your super-apostles', a rendering which corresponds so cleverly to the slang of the original: *ton hyperlian apostolon*. Or James's 'respect of persons' (2:1) translated 'snobbishness' for *prosopolempsia*, which is not found in classical authors either. Again in Rom. 3:6 for the parenthesis:

Rh—I speak according to man.

RAK—Even according to our human standards.

W—Excuse the anthropomorphism.

Or in Philipp. 1:23 for Rh 'I am straitened between two', he has 'I am on the horns of a dilemma'. The *apeitheis* in Tit. 1:16 (Rh incredulous, RAK disloyal) are rendered 'always "against the government"'. And in I Cor. 8:13 'I will become a downright vegetarian', for which the usual translations are far too solemn. Lastly Gal. 3:3:

Rh—Are you so foolish?

RAK—Are you so far out of your right senses?

W—How can you be so silly?

3. For examples of 'readability' here are a few typical passages. Outstandingly beautiful is the opening of I Jn., which captures the style perfectly:

I am going to write to you about the Word of Life. He existed from the beginning, before time was; yet I have listened to him; I have seen him with my own eyes; I have really looked at him, and have touched him with my own hands. What that Word revealed to us was Life. I have really seen Eternal Life. And now I am testifying to it and announcing it to you.

Or an 'everyday' passage from St Paul in Philemon 7-10:

I have been specially encouraged lately, my dear brother, by the thought of your love and generosity, for you have relieved the brothers of many anxieties. Consequently there is no need for me to urge you to do your bounden duty in the particular matter about which I am writing. . . . I want to enlist your sympathy on behalf of a convert I have made here in prison—a veritable son born to me while in chains. It is none other than Onesimus.

And Col. 4:19, 'dear Dr Luke sends greetings'.

And two glorious passages from Ephesians:

(2:13-16) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were such outsiders have been brought into the very heart of things by his self-sacrifice. He himself is our peace. He has broken down the dividing wall that separated Jew from Gentile. . . . He has made the two races one. . . . He has established peace and has put an end to the old hostility by reconciling both to God through the offering of his own body on the cross.

(3:16-19) I pray that . . . Christ will take up his abode in your heart. Then you will be deeply rooted and securely grounded in love, and you will be strong enough with the rest of the Brethren to grasp in all its breadth and length and height and depth the conception of the love of Christ. That is a subject of knowledge which surpasses knowledge. Nevertheless through it you will attain to the complete measure of the Wholeness which is God.

The passage in Jude 13 (about wicked men within the community) makes a striking picture in the new version:

They are like shooting stars, for which is reserved utter and final darkness for ever.

The reader will be able to judge of the merits of these passages for himself by reading them together with the Greek text or a literal translation.

Finally, there are some particular points to be noted. The sub-headings are well inserted. The original chapter-numbers are retained (except in Gal.—one wonders why). The beginning and end of an Epistle are sometimes (by a re-shuffling of sentences) brought into an ordinary English form (e.g. Eph.). St Paul, when he writes alone, is made to use the first person singular. Objections which he puts to himself are skilfully given as quotations, e.g. I Cor. 6:12, 'There are some who claim that as Christians they have a right to do anything. Perhaps, but not everything is fitting. "To us", they say, "everything is lawful".' A clever device which brings a sense of modernity is the use of ordinary numbers, as in I Cor. 10:8, '. . . with the result that 23,000 perished in one day'. A Catholic smiles at the occasional rendering of 'the saints' as 'our Church members' (e.g. Philipp. 4:22), which sounds so Anglican! Or 'our assembly' in Heb. 10:25 as 'our Church meetings'. Quotations from the Psalms and Prophets are often given in verse, but it must be confessed that it is usually frightful doggerel and a blemish on the work. Isaias in Rom. 10:20 is one of the worst. Rom. 11:34 is very funny doggerel indeed, but unworthy of the prophet. These verse portions should be rewritten to the high standard of the prose. In various places St Paul quotes from an unknown source, which is presumed to be a hymn of the early Church, but Dr Wand unconcernedly puts in (e.g. Eph. 5:14) 'That is the point of our baptismal hymn' (cf. also I Tim. 3:16, II Tim. 2:11)—probably, however, a legitimate conjecture.

The Bishop of London has earned the esteem and gratitude of both the student and the general reader for his scholarly, skilful, dignified, gay, orthodox and, above all, loving labour.

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