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**Franciscan Monument:
The Chinese Translation of the Old Testament
by the Biblical Institute of the Franciscan Fathers**

Review Author: Ricardo Arconada

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States. Once a man has swallowed its false assumptions of materialism and determination, the Communist interpretation of history follows with a high degree of plausibility. The Masonic interpretation of history, with its absurd pretensions of Masonic continuity with ancient times, is merely ludicrous. Communism, as such, is committed to the violent smashing of the entire existent order. Masonry, as such, has shown no official policy of universal destruction. In general, to compare the evils of Communism with those of Masonry is somewhat like comparing the evil works of Satan himself with those of a secretive, paranoiac, "mixed-up" juvenile delinquent.

It is likely that Father Weiss has other evidence, as yet undisclosed, for the present-day affinity of Masonry and Marxism. In the opinion of this reviewer, however, the book, in its present form, is vulnerable in the portions discussed above. This is unfortunate, for hostile critics might attempt to discredit the whole work by attacking these portions, and thus distract attention from the evils of Masonry so solidly proven in the other parts of the book. Perhaps it would have been better if the author had not himself introduced the *red* herring into his otherwise well-wrought attack upon a great evil, Freemasonry.

JAMES J. MEANY

FRANCISCAN MONUMENT

THE CHINESE TRANSLATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. Translated and edited by the Biblical Institute of the Franciscan Fathers. Peking-Hongkong. 1946 to 1954. 8 volumes. \$10.00 the set.

The majority of the Chinese-speaking Catholics in the Philippines seem to be unaware of the existence of this fine Catholic translation of the Bible into their mother tongue. It assuredly deserves to be better known, for in this version with its rather complete commentary, Chinese Catholics have at their disposal a real treasure.

The translation and commentary are the work of the Franciscan Fathers of Peking and Hongkong.¹ The translation was made, not from the Latin Vulgate, which is the official liturgical text of the Church, but from the original languages. Consequently it may not be used in public liturgical services²; but for almost

every other use, in study, private reading and meditation, it can be highly recommended.³

Not only was the translation made directly from the original languages, it is also what may be called in technical terminology a "critical" translation; that is, the translators were not content to render into Chinese the original texts as found in modern Hebrew Bibles, but they endeavored, before translating, to restore the texts to their original purity, particularly in those passages in which the text appears to have been altered in the course of transmission.

The note on the title page of the English translation of the Old Testament being published at the present time by the Catholic Biblical Association of America, viz., "The Holy Bible, Translated from the Original Languages with Critical Use of All the Ancient Sources," may well be applied to the Chinese translation of the Franciscans; and this is one of the features which distinguish it from the famous Union Version of the Protestants.

However, though the translators are to be commended for their efforts to restore the original text as far as possible, our impression is that at times conjectures as to the original reading have been adopted too readily and changes introduced without sufficient justification.

The language in the Union Version and that of the Franciscans is very similar. Frequently terms and grammatical constructions are identical; the simple and elegant Ku Yu, so highly appreciated in the Union Version has, for the most part, been retained in the Catholic translation. Where the language of the two versions differs, the differences were demanded either by the critical changes made in the original text before translating or by the already existing differences of religious vocabulary among Protestants and Catholics. (Tienchu — Shangti, for example). Very few, if any, of these divergences were occasioned by differences in doctrine, since the latter are based as a general rule not on the *reading* of the text or version, but on its interpretation.

Nevertheless, despite their great similarity, the vocabulary and phraseology do differ often enough in the two versions. The newer translation often provides us with real improvements over the old. At times, however, the changes it has introduced result in no little loss in conciseness and elegance, without sufficient com-

pensation either in clarity or more current modes of expression. Nor can unreserved approval be accorded the novel transliteration of almost all Hebrew proper names. The publication of W. R. Leete's *Dictionary of English Proper Names in Chinese Christian Literature* (Shanghai, 1950) has made it only too evident that the use of proper names among Christians in China is sufficiently confused already. The policy followed in the Franciscan translation can only add to the confusion.

The Catholic translators have endeavored, and commendably so, to present to Chinese Catholics a popular version in the ordinary language of the people. Occasionally words are used that are common only in certain regions of China, but on the whole the effort to achieve a popular version, has as far as the language is concerned, been successful. But the version will never prove really "popular" if it continues to be available only in its first edition. That edition is more suited to the student of the Scriptures than to the ordinary reader of the Bible.

Students of the Bible whether in Seminaries or in discussion clubs (like those of the Catholic Chinese Youth in Manila) will find excellent aids to a better understanding of the Bible in the abundant and diverse helps accompanying the text. Introductions and analyses precede the text; a schematic outline is given of the contents of each book; prominent subject headings are interspersed throughout the body of the text; and additional annotations are frequently appended at the end of chapters. These annotations sometimes are in the form of short treatises or excursions on questions related to the preceding portions of the text. At the end of the volumes there are helpful indexes and maps. The maps however are not too well done nor very suitable.

Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio. The fear of being obscure seems to have been one of the major preoccupations of the translators. The result is crystal-like clarity. But even clarity can be pushed to extremes. The attentive and assiduous reader is at times vexed not a little by the frequent repetitions he meets. The introductions preceding individual books often repeat details already contained in the more general introductions which precede groups or classes of books (v.g. Pentateuch, Historical Books, etc.); they recur again in the logical divisions and analyses, and finally the notes often provide still another repetition of the same matter.

The boredom resulting from such repetitions is felt most acutely when the reader, after having followed the text rather easily—the

translation itself being quite readily intelligible—turns to a note to which his attention has been called by a reference number, and then discovers that the note contains practically nothing more than the text itself slightly amplified. In this respect the Chinese translation suffers by comparison with other modern versions, v.g. the *Bible de Jérusalem*, the *Bibbia Salani*, Cantera-Bover, or the American Confraternity Version.

Fortunately this tendency to repetitiousness, though particularly marked in the later volumes, is not characteristic of the work as a whole. Nor does the criticism just offered imply that there is any dearth of truly useful and necessary explanatory material. The data contained in the introductions and notes is extremely rich and varied. At times it may even be too minute and too technical. Textual criticism, literary criticism, historical, geographical, archaeological, patristic, ecclesiastical notes as well as explanations of non-Catholic exegetes (quoted somewhat indiscriminately)—all these elements are to be found in abundance. Cross references to parallel passages, so helpful for explaining the Scriptures by the Scriptures, are supplied, at times, it would seem, exhaustively. Ascetical reflexions are rare; rare, too, are comparisons with Chinese literary forms, historical events or religious conceptions. In this respect the commentary is not, properly speaking, Chinese; it is an occidental composition translated into Chinese.

As for the quality of this multifarious data, it may be characterized as soundly conservative yet prudently progressive. When adopting textual changes or hazarding exegetical explanations the editors generally indicate the reasons which to their mind justify the decisions arrived at. The reasons are not always convincing; especially when authorities are quoted with some sort of vague formula like, "according to many authors," or "as scholars both Catholic and non-Catholic propose," etc.

There is not space in a limited report of this kind to substantiate all the preceding statements by actual quotations. However we have already reviewed at some length, while we were still in China, parts of the work as it was being published. The interested reader may consult the *China Missionary Bulletin*, (Shanghai) 1949, 201-203, for a review of the Pentateuch; *Études Missionnaires*, 1950, 110-111 for one on the volume: *Historical Books I*; and *Mélanges Missionnaires*, 1951, 137-142 on *Historical Books, II*.

From the Prophetic Books we shall adduce one example, in which many of the characteristics referred to above are apparent.

It is the treatment accorded the problem of the so-called Deutero-Isaias (Isaias 40-66), a problem at once familiar and of considerable importance.

The question is discussed in the general introduction to the prophetical books (pp. 26-27); farther on it is treated more at length in its natural place in the special introduction to the book of Isaias, (pp 188-194); the problem is taken up again in the preface to chapters 40-66 (pp. 401-405); it is mentioned also in many of the notes to these same chapters.

The information contained in these different treatments of the problem is full, clearly set forth and enriched with citations of the views of many authors representing practically every school of thought. However, the position of the commentator himself does not seem to be altogether consistent. At first he defends quite clearly and expressly the decree of the Pontifical Biblical Commission which declared that there is no really valid argument against Isaian authorship of these chapters (pp.188-194). Elsewhere in the work (for example in the very title adopted for the second half of Isaias—*Wai tsi—Deutero-Isaias*) his conservative stand is so modified that chapters 40-66 are held to have been composed only at the end of the Exile (p. 401) by men who were influenced by Isaias and were in possession of his writings. The similar question, however, with regard to Zacharias is treated with more firmness and logic (last volume, pp. 583-585).

A work as extensive and ambitious as this commentary and translation of the Old Testament would hardly have been human had it made its first appearance without some imperfections. A number of these have been pointed out in the course of this review with the hope that they may be eliminated in future editions. Further suggested improvements are: the printing of the notes on the same page as the text to which they refer; and some sort of distinction in the manner in which poetic and prose passages are printed, so that the poetry may be readily distinguished from the prose.

But we cannot conclude without a word of deep admiration and appreciation for the work as a whole. The First Plenary Council of the Church in China decreed the formation of a Committee for the translation of the whole Bible into Chinese and laid down some principles to be followed in the execution of the task. In 1940 steps were taken to carry out this decree, but the

Committee was never actually constituted, and the task remained undone. As a consequence the "official" translation does not exist.

In its stead this private Franciscan version of the Old Testament has been published, and a translation of the New Testament is in preparation by the same translators. Undoubtedly the words of praise and gratitude addressed by the Plenary Council to those who had already translated parts of the Bible would be repeated today, greatly amplified, to the diligent and courageous men of the Duns Scotus Biblical Institute, and particularly to their director, Fr. Allegra, O.F.M., as well as to his enlightened and far-seeing Superiors.

RICARDO ARCONADA

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¹ The eight volumes were published between 1946 and 1954, almost one volume per year; the first three volumes were published in Peking, the remaining five in Hongkong, where the translators took refuge before the Communist occupation of the North Capital.

² *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 26 (1934) 315; 35 (1943) 270.

³ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 35 (1943) 309-310.

⁴ *Primum Concilium Sinense*, anno 1924 (Shanghai, 1930), no. 35.

WORKER PRIESTS

SAINTS IN HELL. By Gilbert Cesbron. Translated from the French by John Russell. New York: Doubleday. 1954. Pp. 312. \$3.75

The small body of French priests, less than a hundred in all, who after the war entered upon the hazardous and heroic experiment of the worker-priests, have quickened the imagination of Europe and America to an altogether astounding degree. In a time of unparalleled moral and political chaos, their courage moved like a new breath of the Spirit; they carried into the spiritual underground of France a Good News that was all the better for being uttered in their sweat and patience.

The great idea was born at a time when greatness seemed lost, and ideas had degenerated into that sort of philosophizing every good Frenchman has come to be ashamed of. From Abbé Godin to Cardinal Suhard the idea took form and was launched. Within a few years of the war's close, the workers who were priests could be found in the Renault assembly lines, in the mines of the north, in the Lyon silk factories and on the docks of Bordeaux.