

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT AND VERNACULAR BIBLES

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IN THE opening decades of the sixteenth century Catholic theology was breathing a new life. Under the stimulus of the humanism of the Renaissance new intellectual horizons appeared; new questions were being asked, and a new theological method had been discovered for handling the problems which this new Christian humanism was posing. In philology, history, and criticism a modern approach to the sacred sciences opened for humanistic scholarship. Its ultimate aim—the restoration of Christianity by a return to its primitive sources, to Holy Scripture, therefore, to apostolic tradition, and to the Fathers of the Church—is succinctly expressed in the Erasmian formula *restitutio christianismi*. The achievement of this important goal which the *theologia nova* had established for itself involved the abandonment of the medieval concept of religion in favor of the purer Christianity of the ancient Church; it aimed at transcending the middle period (Middle Ages) separating the contemporary from the ancient world, and at discovering there, in antiquity, the *vera philosophia Christi*, as the humanists expressed it.¹

The success of this program of intellectual reform required the cooperation of learned men, skilled in theology, history, and criticism but especially in the three biblical languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. For apart from these ancient languages meaningful contact with the text of Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church was considered excluded; and exclusion from these two precious sources of religious truth signified exclusion from the true wisdom which Christ had transmitted to His Church. In the person of scholars such as Johannes Reuchlin (d. 1522) and Desiderius Erasmus (d. 1536) the Church found men capable of executing this grand enterprise, at least of stimulating it. The biblical learning of the humanists was neither

¹ For "the classic document epitomizing the most salient features of the *philosophia Christi*," see Erasmus' letter to Paul Volz in the preface of the *Enchiridion* (1518); cf. L. W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963) pp. 222 ff., and P. Mesnard, "Un texte important d'Erasmus touchant sa 'philosophie chrétienne,'" *Revue thomiste* 47 (1947) 524-49.

bookish nor academic; it was broad and humane, aiming at placing Holy Scripture in the hands of the Christian community, and thus at opening a new chapter in the history of Catholic spirituality.²

The whole movement of ideas, especially the linguistic and historical aspects of this new theological humanism, was bitterly resented by the representatives of the old Scholasticism, which was then in the last stages of its development. Under the weight of a tired tradition the theology of the late medieval schools, apart from the work of a few exceptional doctors such as the illustrious Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464) and Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), was basically committed to a conventional style, method, and form; involved in logical constructs whose significance was mostly academic, it was too often concerned with recondite speculation. Systematic, propositional, and dialectical in spirit, it resented the style and method which characterized the approach of the new humanism, and the full weight of its scorn was directed against all that this modern theology promised to accomplish through philology and history.³

As the autumn shadows of the Middle Ages grew darker, theology turned more and more to the logical order, to propositional and doctrinal concerns. Concrete reality, the personal, human experience, and the like attracted its interest only in a secondary way. Captive of *ratio theologica*, this essential theology was deprecated for its irrelevance both by the humanists and by the Reformers. In the pages of the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum* it became the laughingstock of Central Europe, and it felt the sharp bite of the satire of Erasmus and the invective of Luther. More than one theologian feared that the invasion of theology by dialectic was threatening to displace its supernatural character by excessive rationalism.⁴ The equilibrium of theological method was

² Erasmus' well-known remark is relevant here: "I would to God that the ploughman would sing a text of the Scripture at his plough-beam; and that the weaver at his loom with this would drive away the tediousness of time. . . . I would that all the communication of the Christians should be of the Scripture; for in a manner, such are we ourselves, as our daily tales are." Cf. M. Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible* (Cambridge, 1920) p. 11.

³ Cf. the invaluable study of this problem by R. Guelluy, "L'Evolution des méthodes théologiques à Louvain d'Erasmus à Jansenius," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 37 (1941) 31-144.

⁴ For example, Pierre d'Auriole contended that "a proper theological argument can be built on merely probable conclusions which are not necessarily theological but possibly metaphysical in nature." Cf. H. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963) p. 200.

disturbed. Most remarkable in the development of theology in the centuries between 1200 and 1500 is its gradual drift away from the *sacra pagina*, its traditional point of interest and immediate concern. In consequence of this deviation biblical theology waned in the Schools, and the direct influence of the Bible on Catholic life grew less. It is not surprising, therefore, that the papal legate at Trent, Cardinal Marcello Cervini, should remind the fathers of the Council that learning Scripture indirectly through the theologians, rather than directly from the sacred text itself, was an abuse;⁵ nor should it be surprising that the fathers of Trent, whose biblical education was meager in so many respects, neglected to provide a vernacular Bible for the use both of the clergy and of the laity.

The years between 1450 and 1525 were decisive for the future history of the Bible in the Christian Church. During this period all the requisites for the production and dissemination of a vernacular Bible were at hand. In the middle of the fifteenth century the printing press had been developed by Johannes Gutenberg, and in a short time the printed book became a relatively common commodity. The same century witnessed a marked development in philology, especially in the scientific pursuit of Hebrew and Greek, grammars, lexicons, and texts of the ancient authors were increasingly available, and the humanism of the day, with its intense interest in the literature of pagan and Christian antiquity, seriously cultivated these languages. In 1516 Erasmus brought out his edition of the Greek New Testament, a veritable landmark in the history of biblical studies in that it displaced the *Vulgata latina* as the direct source of exegesis. The Complutensian Polyglot of Cardinal Ximénez (d. 1517), completed even before the appearance of Erasmus' edition and first circulated in 1521, gave added impetus to Bible study. These two Catholic works stand at the head of the biblical movement of the sixteenth century.

But these scientific and technical advances touched the scholar more than the people, since biblical studies remained within the cadre of "the three sacred languages." Thus, the Dominican Hebraist Santes Pagninus (d. 1541) made a new Latin translation of the Bible from the original languages, and Augustinus Steuchus (d. 1549) revised the text

⁵ Cf. *A. Massarelli Diarium* 3 (ed. S. Merkle, *Concilium Tridentinum* 1, 1 [Freiburg, 1901] 506). Hereinafter this collection is cited as *CT*.

of the Old Testament on the basis of the Hebrew Bible. But the new learning had not produced a vernacular Bible under official Catholic auspices that was widely disseminated among the people.⁶ And yet this was one of the pressing needs of the day. The popular response to the translation of Scripture which emerged from Protestant circles shows that this work was answering a pressing need.⁷ Erasmus sensed keenly the necessity of a vernacular translation of the Bible which could be entrusted to the people as fundamental to their spiritual life, and pleaded for this concession before Leo X in the dedicatory preface to his Greek New Testament. Herein he echoed the sentiments of many Catholics. Yet in France vernacular Bibles were restricted by University (Paris, 1526), by Church (Synod of Sens, 1528), and by state (Parliament, 1543); and in England the Oxford censure (1408) of the Lollard Bible was still operative a century later. Meanwhile the "Gospel crusade" of the Reformers had created a revolution.⁸

It has been said that "the translation of the Bible into the language of the people" was "the pacemaker of the Lutheran reform."⁹ Whether this precisely expresses the character of the movement, the question of the meaning of the Bible in itself and in relation to the Church and to Christian life had become a major issue for both Catholic and Protestant theology by the middle of the sixteenth century. In view of the

⁶ It is simply a point of fact that there were vernacular Bibles (e.g., in German and Romance) in existence before 1500, and that they were neither condemned nor approved by ecclesiastical authority. They were not, however, the "common property" of the Church, since late-medieval piety did not stress the need of individual and personal Bible reading.

⁷ "... between 1534 and 1620 about one hundred editions of the Bible came from Wittenberg—a total production of perhaps 200,000 copies (not counting issues of single Testaments and books; if they are included with the product of other towns the number of editions rises to 430)" (M. H. Black, "The Printed Bible," *The Cambridge History of the Bible* [ed. S. L. Greenslade; Cambridge, 1963] pp. 432–33). Within a decade Luther's translation of the New Testament (1522) reached almost one hundred editions. No Catholic (e.g., Eck's and Emser's) version could match it.

⁸ Luther's description of the corrosive effect which his Bible preaching exercised on the old Church brings out the character of his religious revolution: "All I have done is to further, preach and teach God's Word; otherwise I have done nothing. So it came about that while I slept or while I had a glass of beer . . . the papacy was so weakened as it never was before by the action of any prince or emperor. I have done nothing; the Word has done and accomplished everything. . . . I let the Word do its work." Cf. W. Pauck, *The Heritage of the Reformation* (Glencoe, 1961) p. 28.

⁹ H. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent 2* (St. Louis, 1961), 67–68.

events leading to the Council of Trent (1545-63) it is understandable that the first question which was posed at this synod was biblical: the definition of the canon of Holy Scripture. This opened the way to further discussions, on the value of the *Vulgata latina* and the other ancient versions, on the relation of Scripture and tradition to one another, on the norms of interpreting the sacred text and its emendation, and finally on the abuses connected with the treatment of Scripture. This latter issue involved the important question of the position which the Council should take with respect to the preparation and the use of vernacular Bibles in the Church.

On March 1, 1546, in particular congregation, Cardinal Cervini informed the fathers that the question of the biblical canon and apostolic tradition had been sufficiently discussed; now they must move in a new, though related, direction: *ad reformationem*. This motion—to handle dogma and reform *pari passu*—was in accord with the conciliar procedure adopted on January 22. First the abuses that concern Scripture were to be enumerated and characterized by the fathers; then a plan for their correction was to be drawn up and approved by them. The method was efficient and sound. "Bible science in transition, the reading of the Bible—a burning problem in the Church's life—this was the background of the reform debate."¹⁰

The first to address himself to the problem of biblical reform was Anthony Filheul, Archbishop of Aix in Provence. The systematic arrangement of his remarks suggests that he had carefully considered the highly important question of the abuses which had grown up about the use of Scripture. The areas of reform he reduced to four: first, *circa editionem*, "because not all the texts are in agreement, in fact many are corrupt"; second, *circa interpretationem*, "because many people twist the evidence, the words and sayings of Holy Scripture, into a perverse sense"; third, *circa impressionem*, because Bibles should be possessed and used only if they are corrected and emended. He further contended that the preparation of vernacular (French, Italian, Spanish) Bibles, if such should be made, be entrusted to "docti et periti"; but this position he maintained with important restrictions and reservations. Thus he argued:

It would perhaps be better if vernacular translations were not printed, because

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

reading and interpreting Scripture are not granted to all; indeed in our time vernacular Bibles are possessed even by young ladies (*mulierculas*). Thus they fall into most serious errors, for they want to interpret Holy Scripture off the top of their heads; and they attempt to set their hands to that before which learned men, who have devoted their life time to study, claim they are insufficient. Let women and uneducated lay people be content to be directed and governed in this matter by the preaching of those learned men to whom the office of preaching has been committed.¹¹

In a word, Scripture is a dangerous source of religious error for the faithful, for the simple laity and the ill-instructed. It is not, therefore, to be read by them. Rather, in learning the mysteries of salvation they should depend on the preaching and teaching of the clergy. This narrow concept of the role of the Bible in Catholic life was not peculiar to Trent nor was it formed under the impact of the Reformation. It expresses rather a medieval pattern of thought whose roots go back to (and even beyond) the days of Innocent III (d. 1216).¹²

The fourth and last abuse which Archbishop Filheul listed touched one of the most decadent areas of the pre-Tridentine Church, the abuse *circa praedicationem*, which was the product of the defective clerical education of that period. His description of this abuse and its remedy is expressed in words which offer valuable insight into the poor state of pastoral life in the sixteenth century; it especially illustrates the low state to which biblical preaching had then fallen:

Preachers should not bring into their sermons those ridiculous and inane stories which St. Paul (1 Tim 4:7) commanded us to avoid. For it is not the fable of Jove and the like which are to be preached, but the sacred gospel. Let those who preach build their sermons on the exegesis of learned men. Let them teach the people to observe God's commandments, that they might strongly adhere to the faith and obey all the commandments of God and the Church, and not deviate in anything from the decrees of the Church.¹³

Preachers, he insisted, are to persuade "the people to the love of God,"

¹¹ A. Massarelli *Diarium* 3 (CT 1, 1, 500); *Acta* (CT 5, 2, 22). The Acts of March 1 only report on the proceedings in the "class" of Cardinal Cervini. We are not informed on the "classes" of Cardinals Pole and Del Monte.

¹² Cf. M. Deanesly, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff. Note the significant remarks of Bartolomé Caranza de Miranda (*Comentarios sobre el catequismo cristiano*) on the prohibition of Spanish Bibles in the vernacular. Cf. J. Enciso, "Prohibiciones de las versiones bíblicas en Romance," *Estudios bíblicos* 3 (1944) 529-30.

¹³ A. Massarelli *Diarium* 3 (CT 1, 1, 501); *Acta* (CT 5, 2, 23).

and to aim at His honor and the upbuilding of souls. That ministers of the Christian Church needed to be reminded of their obligation to preach the gospel precepts is a curious paradox of the time.

After Nicholas de Tudeschis had addressed himself to the question under discussion without, however, substantially advancing the state of the problem, Marco Vigerio della Rovere, Bishop of Sinigaglia, rose to present his formulation of the abuses connected with the use of Holy Scripture in the Church. The manifold factors involved therein he reduced to a serious defect both in the quality of the preaching and in the quantity of competent preachers on hand. Profoundly moved by the flagrant lack of reverence with which Holy Scripture was treated by certain churchmen of the day, he harangued his fellow bishops in pointed terms. He stressed the outlandish misappropriation of the sacred text for secular, even theatrical purposes, its subordination to ends unworthy of the Christian religion, and its crude mishandling in a public, scandalous way.¹⁴ The tolerance, even complacency and good humor, of the episcopacy before this outrageous degradation provoked the bishop almost to the point of open anger. His speech very rightly underlined the biblical crisis of the mid-sixteenth century, but it did not clearly trace the origins of the abuse of Scripture to the current poor clerical education, an abuse of the first order precisely in that it did not provide the clergy with solid biblical learning.¹⁵

For Tommaso Campeggio of Feltre, the problematic of the Bible reform centered in its irresponsible interpretation by unlearned and frivolous persons. Here was the heart of the matter for him. From this single abuse he derived all the others (for example, Communion under two species, marriage of the clergy, abrogation of fast and abstinence, detestation of the Mass, and the like) then current in the Germany of the Reformation. But he adamantly refused to admit in principle that

¹⁴ Cf. *A. Massarelli Diarium* 3 (CT 1, 1, 502, and n. 4). The bishop had in mind, among other abuses, such irreligious language as Christopher Marcellus is reputed to have used in addressing Julius II at the Lateran Council: "Tu alter Deus in terris."

¹⁵ Both Thomas Casellus, O.P., Bishop of Bertinoro, and Girolamo Seripando, General of the Hermits of St. Augustine, were well aware of the significance of education in the reform movement. The latter declared to the fathers in this session: "Qui igitur docere vult sacras literas, bene eas prius discat, ut et bene docere possit." At a later date the Council would take up the whole matter of clerical education and discuss it thoroughly. It is regrettable that the high hopes of the humanists terminated in the creation of the seminary system. Cf. H. Jedin, *op. cit.* 2, 99-124.

the existence of a multiplicity of different versions of Scripture was in itself an abuse of the Word of God. "Some editions," he explained to the fathers, "render word for word; others, sense for sense; while others differ from one another, because the same words often have a different meaning." Nor would he agree that vernacular translations of the sacred books (liturgical and biblical) were of their nature an abuse.¹⁶ His remarks concluded with this much-needed advice on a perennial problem in the pastoral life of the Church:

Let preachers abstain from contracting for a certain fixed sum [for their services], lest they convey the impression that they are selling the Word of God or placing their work on an auction block. Let them be content with food and pious alms that may be offered spontaneously rather than seeking them importunately.¹⁷

The point was well made, for the exchange of money in connection with preaching the gospel had become a glaring abuse of the times.

But the question of the vernacular Bibles which Bishop Campeggio raised here proved delicate, sensitive, and ultimately divisive. Bishop Martirano of San Marco reacted vigorously, declaring that he "detested the translating of Holy Scripture into the vernacular."¹⁸ It seems to me, he said, that "the greatest abuse is the fact that the sacred books are printed in the vernacular." Apart from homilies, vernacular translations should be prohibited. His contention received immediate support from Bishop Giacomelli of Belcastro, who rose and made it clear to all that he was of the same mind as his episcopal colleague. "In no wise," he declared, "should permission be given for the translating of the sacred books into the vernacular." He was followed by the Bishop of Astorga, who stated his negative position this way: "The unlearned should not translate the sacred books; this is the work of scholars and competent men. But still I think that Scripture should not be translated into the vernacular by either learned or unlearned men."¹⁹ The issue was important, parties formed about it, and before the debate ended tempers ran high. The two positions (negative and

¹⁶ It was in the course of this speech that Campeggio appealed to St. Jerome's supposed translation of the liturgical books into the Illyrian tongue ("Illyrico idioma") as an argument from ancient tradition. Cf. the valuable note on this point by S. Merkle, *CT* 1, 1, 503, n. 3.

¹⁷ *A. Massarelli Diarium* 3 (*CT* 1, 1, 504); *Acta* (*CT* 5, 2, 25).

¹⁸ *Acta* (*CT* 5, 2, 25); *A. Massarelli Diarium* 3 (*CT* 1, 1, 504).

¹⁹ *A. Massarelli Diarium* 3 (*CT* 1, 1, 504-5).

positive) were stated in clear, strong terms and most of the fathers were not indifferent to them.

In view of the complexities of the problem (both programmatical and procedural) which faced the Council as a whole, the legates decided in a conference on March 4 to ask the general congregation to approve the formation of a special steering-committee to list the abuses connected with the use of Scripture and to suggest the remedies which the Council should prescribe.²⁰ In a brief session on March 5 the general congregation (consisting of the three conciliar "classes") after some discussion and revision gave its approval to the execution of the suggested project. The committee counted the following eleven members: eight fathers, namely, Anthony Filheul (Aix), Diego de Alba y Esquivel (Astorga), Juan Fonseca (Castellmare), Marco Vigerio della Rovere (Sinigaglia), Tommaso Sanfelice (La Cava), Pietro Bertano (Fano), Cornelio Musso (Bitonto), and Girolamo Seripando; and three theologians, namely, Ambrosius Catharinus, O.P., Richard of Le Mans, O.Min.Conv., and Alfonso De Castro, O.F.M.²¹ The eleven were allowed twelve days, until March 17, in which to formulate their proposals.

On March 8-9 a special congregation composed of theologians (*omnes theologi ordinum caeterique doctores*) assembled to discuss the problem of biblical abuses. Apropos of the first meeting, Massarelli notes in his diary for the day: "In this session not a word was spoken by the bishops, the whole program was turned over to the theologians."²² For the legates very wisely believed that the fathers should not act "without having first heard the advice of the theologians." On March 9 Alphonso De Castro, Spanish Franciscan and theologian of Cardinal Pacheco, took the floor to answer the question "whether the sacred books should be translated and printed in the mother tongue." The character of his diffuse but elegant discourse can be judged from the

²⁰ Cf. *CT* 1, 1, 508. It was in this meeting that the Cardinal of Trent felt obliged to defend "the dancing prelates" (who had taken part in festivities at his home on March 1) against the charge of lack of religious dignity. Cf. also Severolus, *CT* 1, 1, 36.

²¹ Cf. Severolus (*CT* 1, 1, 35-36). Unfortunately, though perhaps by necessity, the committee was made up solely of Latins (Spanish, French, Italian), who may not have fully grasped the urgency of the need of a Catholic version of Scripture in the vernacular. Of the theologians, De Castro and Catharinus published works against the use of the vernacular Bibles. The latter's position, however, was not totally negative.

²² *CT* 1, 1, 510.

first book of his *Adversus omnes haereses*, a work whose negative, perhaps even reactionary thinking reveals the profound conservatism of its author. According to him all theological error is traceable to vernacular Scripture, "the mother and origin of all heresies."²³ This is the tenor of his treatise and very probably the theme of his discourse before the fathers, who listened to him "with wondrous attention." The influence of his thought re-emerges later in the month, in the speeches of Cardinal Pacheco against the tolerance of vernacular Bibles in the Church. But De Castro was not the only theologian who wrote on this problem. Extant are various other treatises from the Tridentine circle on the same theme.²⁴

Only after the theologians had been heard did the committee commence its work. On March 17 it was ready to report to the general congregation assembled *in aula maiori*. After preliminary remarks by Cardinal Del Monte, the Archbishop of Aix presented the findings of the *ad hoc* committee and its recommendations to the fathers of the congregation. Four major abuses and their remedies were listed: (1) abuse: the existence of textually different, even contradictory, editions and versions of Scripture; remedy: the acceptance of one authentic text "whose authority should be so great with all that it should not be lawful for anyone to appeal to another edition"; (2) abuse: the corrupt text of the Latin Vulgate (also of the Hebrew and Greek texts); remedy: the preparation of a pure, reliable, and uniform text of the Hebrew, the Greek, and the Latin Scriptures; (3) and (4) abuses: private interpretation of Scripture and its uncontrolled publication; remedies: ecclesiastical supervision both of its dissemination and of its

²³ De Castro published his *Adversus omnes haereses libri quattuordecim* in Paris in 1534; another edition, dedicated to Cardinal Pacheco, appeared in Venice in early 1546, in the days before the fourth session of the Council. For a résumé of the position of this work on the vernacular Bible, cf. F. Cavallera, "La Bible en langue vulgaire au concile de Trente," in *Mélanges E. Pöschard* (Lyons, 1945) pp. 44 ff.

²⁴ As early as 1534 Cochlaeus had written his *Pro Scotiae regno apologia* against Alexander Alessius, who had attacked the Scotch bishops for their opposition to vernacular Bibles. The latter answered with a treatise entitled *An liceat laicis legere Novi Testamenti libros lingua vernacula? Disputatio inter Cochlaeum et Alexandrum Alessium*. The work of De Castro in this area has already been noted above. In 1552 Catharinus brought out his *An expediat Scripturas in maternas linguas transferri?* And four years later F. Furius published the *Bononia, sive De libris sacris in vernaculam convertendis libri duo*. Other treatises from the Tridentine circle can be found in CT 12, 2, 528 ff.

understanding, "so that no one may deviate from the sense of Holy Mother Church."²⁵ The report, as outlined by Archbishop Filheul, was then analyzed by the Bishop of Bitonto, who explained to the fathers the considerations which had motivated the committee of bishops and theologians in formulating their plan.

In view of the discussion which had taken place at Cardinal Cervini's private "class" on March 1, it is surprising to note that the report which this committee made on March 17 passed over in silence the important question of the vernacular Bible. This omission, by no means indeliberate, did not escape the notice of the fiery Cardinal Pacheco.²⁶ For him, the existence of vernacular Bibles was an important abuse; he wanted it, therefore, listed as such by the committee, so that after a full discussion later it would be officially recognized by the Council as an outstanding misuse of Scripture. "Let those," he warned, "who have been assigned to listing the abuses, take note of translations of Scripture into the mother tongue." His remark and all that it implied did not go unheeded or unchallenged; for there were fathers at the Council who believed that it was imperative, in view of the unsettled character of the times, that the Church put translations of the Bible into the hands of the people. One of them was Cristoforo Madruzzo, Cardinal and Prince-Bishop of Trent. The words in which this eminent churchman rebutted the position of his Spanish colleague are worth citing in full; they provide a unique position-statement of the vernacularists at Trent:

I would not, he said, if I could help it, oppose the views of my Lord of Jaën; but in view of that freedom of speech which God has given to us, I am compelled to speak what seems to me so true that it cannot be concealed: that is, that we never suffer that the translation of the Bible into the vernacular be enumerated among abuses. For what would our adversaries say to those people to whom they are daily preaching idle things, if they were to learn that we wish to snatch from the hands of men the Sacred Scriptures which the Apostle Paul thought should never be severed from our mouth. For my part, I am well aware of the fact that

²⁵ Cf. Severolus (*CT* 1, 1, 36-37); *Acta* (*CT* 5, 2, 29 ff.). Note that the Archbishop of Aix, who had previously (March 1) wanted vernacular Scripture to be considered an abuse, was now silent on the question.

²⁶ Massarelli (*Diarium* 1; *CT* 1, 1, 356) has provided a vignette of Pacheco that is worth citing: "E huomo questo Don Petro Pacecco piccolo, di color planco, con poca barba, astuto di eta d'anni 55, capo qua nel concilio della natione Spagnola et dell'imperiali del regno di Napoli."

the Our Father, the Creed, and other such things, which every father of a family in Germany is accustomed to teach his sons, even while they are very young, were taught to me in our Germanic language. And from instruction of this kind no scandal ever within the memory of man has come. And I would that professors of Hebrew and Greek had never come to Germany; for then we would be free today of this distress, and unfortunate Germany would not have been overwhelmed by so many wretched heresies. For heresy has never arisen from simple people and those who only know their native tongue, but from those who claim that they are learned. Therefore, fathers, I beg you not to consider for an instant enumerating this [vernacular translation of Scripture] among the abuses. Let us not even discuss whether it can be called an abuse.²⁷

To these impassioned, personal words of his colleague Cardinal Pacheco replied simply but directly: "I did not say that this is an abuse, but I said that we should consider whether it is an abuse, since in this matter I know that laws have been passed in Spain and are observed there; and these laws were confirmed by Paul II."

In all probability this questionable piece of information stems from the Cardinal's theologian De Castro, who speaks in his *Adversus omnes haereses* of the praiseworthy edict of the most illustrious Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella, which most severely punishes those who translate the sacred books into the vernacular.²⁸ But this legal consideration left the Cardinal of Trent unmoved. His retort was sharp and dangerously pointed: "Pope Paul and all the popes can at times err and could err. I do not say that they have erred. But the gospel of the Apostle Paul, who wished that the gospel of Christ never be taken from our mouth, could not err. And so I say there should be no controversy about this matter."²⁹ The congregation was then closed by Cardinal Del Monte, who was suffering acutely from the gout. "On another day," he remarked wisely to the fathers, "we will deal with the abuses of Scripture and their remedies."

On Monday, March 22, the conciliar legates, Cardinals Pole and

²⁷ Cf. Severolus (*CT* 1, 1, 37).

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 38. P. M. Revilla simply denies the existence of any such legislation promulgated by Ferdinand and approved by Paul II; cf. "La controversia sobre las versiones vernáculas de la Biblia en el Concilio de Trento," *Religión y cultura* 10 (1930) 96, n. 1; 93, n. 4. F. De Castro, in his *Adversus omnes haereses* 1 (Venice, 1564) 144, speaks of the "laudandum . . . edictum" of their Catholic Majesties; and E. Eshes (*CT* 5, 2, 31, n. 1) inclines to accept his testimony.

²⁹ Cf. Severolus (*CT* 1, 1, 38).

Cervini, met at the residence of Cardinal Del Monte to prepare the agenda for the next day's particular congregations. Among the four points listed on the schedule appears the following: "to examine the article on the translation of the sacred books into the vernacular—should it be proposed, or dropped in order to remove dissension among the fathers?"⁸⁰ To the legates it seemed that this article should be passed over by the Council in silence rather than discussed further. Three considerations commended this approach. There was, first, the grave scandal given by the sharp exchange between Cardinal Madruzzo and Cardinal Pacheco at the last general congregation (March 17) when this article had been discussed. Prelates, especially those recently arriving in Trent, were wondering how it could be that these two churchmen, both cardinals, did not think the same. Second, there was the clear division of the whole Council on this delicate question, with each party, negative and positive, firmly adhering to its own position. There was, third, the important consideration that the decision of the Council, whether to accept or reject vernacular Bibles, would not be universally received by all parts of Christendom. The non-acceptance of a conciliar decree by a section of the Church would vitiate the Council's intent to promulgate what is "to be observed by all the Christian people." Therefore, it would be more fitting "to allow each nation freedom in this matter, so that where it would be good, vernacular versions would be allowed, where bad, prohibited." Ultimately this principle would be the basis of the Council's solution of the problem which the vernacular Bible posed.

Massarelli, who within a matter of days was to become the first official secretary of the Council, was appointed by the papal legates to report to Cardinal Pacheco the proceedings of their meeting, especially their recommendation to drop from further consideration the article dealing with vernacular translations of the Bible. Obviously this special mission was inspired by the hope that the five cardinals might be conciliated, and that the subsequent debates on the biblical question might proceed in a more irenic spirit. It failed. Pacheco's response was abrupt. "Under no circumstances," he declared, "should this article be left undiscussed and intact." Then he proceeded to reply to the threefold consideration of the legates. First, the prelates should

⁸⁰ A. Massarelli *Diarium* 3 (CT 1, 1, 518).

not conclude to personal enmity between the two cardinals because of the diversity of their views on this important question. "For each one," he said, "must freely voice his thoughts in the congregation without reference to friendship or to any other consideration." Second, the affirmative side of the question is defended by very few, since the Spanish, the French, and many Italian prelates—the greater part, therefore, of the Council—incline to the negative side.

The following remark of Pacheco illustrates the national (Latin) tendencies of the Council in the matter of vernacular Bibles:

It should be of great moment and consideration that these two vast realms, Spain and France, so detest the translating of Scripture that they have forbidden it by many long-standing edicts, by the most severe penalties and strictures; in fact, recently, in these very days, the University of Paris (which has more than a hundred and fifty doctors) not only voiced the opinion that a version of the sacred books should not be made into the vernacular, but also declared that those who make them should be regarded as heretics.²¹

Basic to Pacheco's thought is the conviction (common at the time in certain circles) that free Bible reading in the vernacular led directly to heresy. "Let each one consider for a moment whence so many heresies have arisen in the Christian world. He will discover that they have come from no other source than from versions of the sacred books in the vernacular." Here Germany was brought forth as star witness in proof of the truth of this assertion. But these remarks only show how poorly the Cardinal understood the origins of the Reformation in Germany. It was not the vernacular Scripture which had created the new theology. On the contrary, the new evangelical concept of Christianity demanded that the Bible as norm of faith be read by all. Obviously such an approach to the Word of God required that it be translated into the language of the people.

In replying to the third consideration Pacheco assumed a more conciliatory position. Because of the disturbed situation prevalent in Christendom, he conceded the possibility of allowing the different nations to act differently in this matter according to their individual needs. This point of view was not radicated in a liberal view of the Bible and Bible reading, but in the *de facto* religious crisis which had seized the Church, especially in Germany. But even in conceding the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 519; cf. F. H. Reusch, *Der Index der verbotenen Bücher* 1 (Bonn, 1883) 146 ff.

need of vernacular translations in some countries, Pacheco remained adamant on the necessity of leaving certain books of the Bible untranslated. The formulation of his thought is relevant to the origins of the post-Tridentine suspicion of uncontrolled reading of Scripture:

Now, he said, not even those who hold the affirmative side of this question would be willing to admit that the Apocalypse of John, the Epistles of Paul, especially to the Romans, Ezekiel, and the like should be entrusted to simple people, to rustics and to women [*mulierculas*]. For these biblical books are in certain respects so obscure that even doctors and the most competent theologians are not ashamed to admit that they do not understand them. Those who hold the negative side would never prohibit the reading of the Proverbs of Solomon, the Psalms, the Acts of the Apostles, and the like.³²

Of all the Tridentine bishops no one voiced the negative position more clearly and openly than this Spanish cardinal; and the concept of Bible reading which he described here to Massarelli, with its cautious, restrictive attitude towards both the vernacular language and the biblical corpus, was to be influential for centuries after the Council had closed.³³

In spite of Cardinal Pacheco's strong insistence that the question of the vernacular Bible be discussed, the legate Del Monte succeeded in keeping it off the agenda for the March 23 meeting of the congregation. The schedule of the day's business included three principal points: first, the decree on Scripture and tradition; second, the report on the biblical abuses; third, the formulation of a decree on these abuses. From Massarelli's report of the day's business it appears that the fathers were mainly interested in the first point. In fact, the question of the biblical abuses scarcely entered into the debate. But a remark made by Pietro Bertano, O.P., Bishop of Fano, in replying to a series of objections apropos of the proposed decree on Scripture and tradition, is significant:

We have accepted the Vulgate edition among all others because it was accepted

³² A. Massarelli *Diarium* 3 (CT 1, 1, 520, and n. 1, where the editor shrewdly observes of the books [Apocalypse, Pauline letters, and Ezekiel] that Pacheco would refuse to the laity: "These books were always used by those who wanted to reform the Church").

³³ For example, Clement XI, in the Constitution *Unigenitus Dei Filius* (Sept. 8, 1713), listed among the Jansenistic errors of Pasquier Quesnel the following: "Lectio sacrae Scripturae est pro omnibus." Cf. C. Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums und des römischen Katholizismus* (Tübingen, 1924) p. 398.

traditionally by the Church and by St. Jerome and because of its antiquity; nor did it seem to the fathers that they should not confirm the use of the Vulgate, seeing that the Church has always done this. . . . Editions other than the Vulgate are not to be rejected, because in fact some of them are good; but we have judged that this one is better than the others. Indeed, some of them have been edited by heretics, but that is not a reason for their rejection.³⁴

At the end of the long day it was unanimously agreed that the commission which had been formed on March 5 should prepare the official decree on biblical abuses for consideration by the Council. Some days later, on March 27, the fathers, assembled under the presidency of Cardinal Cervini, officially recognized the committee and its portfolio.

The work of the general congregation which met on April 1 under Cardinal Del Monte was devoted to procedural matters touching on the conduct of the conciliar business; but it also handled some doubtful points that had been raised with reference to the decree on Scripture and tradition, and which had to be settled before the decree would be ready for official and public promulgation. After this matter had been sufficiently discussed, the Cardinal turned the debate in another direction. "Now," he said, "there is the question of the abuses of Scripture about which there has been so much discussion. I am referring to those four abuses which have been listed by the committee and distributed among you. But, please," he concluded, "let us be brief about it." At once the Cardinal of Trent gave his approval to the work of the committee. Not so Cardinal Pacheco, who wished to continue the debate on this point: "There are many things, he said, which make me doubt; and it seems that our prudence before the multiplicity of translations of the Bible will prove meager unless, after approving the Vulgate, all other editions be rejected, and at the same time all the translations which have been made by heretics be repudiated."³⁵

Pacheco not only insisted on forcing a discussion of the delicate question of the vernacular Bible, but proposed a simple rejection of every version of Scripture (including the Septuagint) in Christendom save the Latin Vulgate.

³⁴ *A. Massarelli Diarium* 3 (CT 1, 1, 527); *Acta* (CT 5, 2, 37). In the course of this speech Bertano tried to enhance the dignity of the Latin Vulgate by appealing to its use by Christ and His disciples. What he meant by this is difficult to say. The editor's comment on it is droll: "Doctrina vere mirabilis."

³⁵ Severolus (CT 1, 1, 41-42).

Bishop Bertano of Fano stood up to reply to this outrageous demand. His remarks are a liberal attempt to formulate the position of the Tridentine Church on the multiplicity of versions and translations (even those made by heretics) of Scripture which were then circulating:

If I may, he began, I will quite easily resolve these doubts. For it is to be noted that we do not consider it an abuse that there are various different translations of the Bible, since this was tolerated from the most ancient times and should be tolerated today; but we say that it is an abuse that there may be many translations considered authentic, and that we use these in disputations, exegesis, and preaching. Moreover, we wish that the Vulgate edition be accepted as the one only authentic version, not only because it is ancient and has always been in the hands of Christians, but also lest there be given to our adversaries a pretext of saying that up until now we have not had reliable books. "For," they will say, "if they have not had reliable books, how can they have had good doctrines and good ceremonies?" We do not reject other versions, since we do not want to restrict Christian liberty. Moreover, we do not even want to reject the translations of the heretics, and that on the basis of the example of antiquity. For it is evident that Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion were indeed heretics, and still their translations were not rejected by the ancient Church. It comes down to this, that never in the past were those who made translations branded publicly as heretics.³⁶

It is probably at this congregation that Cardinal Madruzzo delivered his celebrated defense of the vernacular Bible. If this speech be rightly placed in this setting, then it was delivered in direct reply to the whole position of the conservative Spanish Cardinal.³⁷

As every knee bends at the name of Christ, declared Madruzzo, so every tongue—Chaldean, Hebrew, Greek, Syrian, Latin, Arabic, Illyrian, and the vernacular of all nations and peoples—should confess with the Apostle that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father. Scripture has been given to man for his upbuilding, hope, and consolation. Why, therefore, do we want to snatch the benefit of the vernacular Scripture from the hands of the Christian people, and give comfort to the Protestants who say that we are holding it back from the simple Christian thirsting for the pure waters of the gospel? If the gifts which Christianity distributes are common to all, why should not the Scripture be open to all? Are we to keep the gospel from men

³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁷ C. Madrutius, *De vertendis libris sacris in linguam vulgarem* (CT 12, 2, 528 ff.; and E. Ehses, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 ff.). Cf. also H. Jedin, *op. cit.* 2, 83, n. 1.

just because our Savior said: "Do not give holy things to dogs nor throw pearls before swine"? Then the Cardinal continued:

Perhaps there are other reasons why we deny the people the benefit of vernacular Scripture? For example, of old the heresy of the Poor Men of Lyons was rooted in it? Not at all! Arius, Novatus, Sabellius, Cerinthus, Novatian, Paul of Samosata, Photinus, Eunomius, and a whole phalanx of old heretics were learned in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; and in our own day, Luther, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Melanchthon, Bucer, and others of this brand are remarkably skilled in these three languages. Should, therefore, the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin Bibles be abolished? Should the reading of Paul be prohibited because Peter predicted that heresies would arise from the Pauline letters? Because at times scandals have arisen from the vernacular Bibles (just as frequently from the Greek and Latin versions), should they be all gathered together and be burnt? Or because the gospel was a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, should it no longer be preached? By no manner or means! For this is the everlasting lot of the gospel: to some it is destruction, to others it is the power of God unto salvation; to some it is the fragrance of life unto life, to others the stench of death unto death.³⁸

Heresies have been born from learning and education as well as from simplicity and ignorance; nevertheless, education has never been forbidden nor has learning been condemned.

Madruzzo concluded with words the like of which had rarely, if ever, been heard in the ecclesiastical synods of the Middle Ages. They form a high-water mark in the history of the Bible in the Catholic Church:

To the glory of Christ, therefore, let us read—at random and systematically, not however without preparation but religiously, chastely—and according to our capacity let us reread—not just in Hebrew or Greek or Latin but in the vernacular too—Jesus Christ, in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek nor Latin nor barbarian. For the vernacular language itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, who because of His mercy is with us unto the consummation of the world. Let no age, no sex, no condition, no station be prevented from reading Holy Scripture. For the mind of each and every just man is the seat of wisdom; and every good heart that loves Christ can be the receptacle (*bibliotheca*) where the book of Christ rests. For the Lord did not exclude the laity, when in Isaiah He promised that He would give us a multiplicity of sons of the Church taught by the Lord; for indeed Jesus Christ wishes that He be read by those by whom He also wished to be heard, that is, by the people, and in truth with far more success than by the scholars and teachers, by the Pharisees and the scribes.³⁹

³⁸ *CT* 12, 2, 529.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 529–30.

Despite the massive force of Madruzzo's statement of his case, Cardinal Pacheco persisted in his position: "Translations," he insisted, "have not been listed among the abuses." But before Bishop Bertano could reply to this new attack, Cardinal Del Monte shut off further debate with the crisp remark: "It is not up to anyone who wishes, to propose new questions. This belongs to our office." With a sound of the bell the congregation was terminated.

The work of the fathers who assembled on April 3 was defined by Cardinal Del Monte in these words: "Today we will treat of the four abuses of Scripture. Therefore, the Fathers may express themselves on this point." The first to speak was Cardinal Madruzzo, who made three recommendations: first, that the biblical texts should be emended at Trent rather than at Rome; second, that the interpretation of Scripture should be ecclesiastical rather than private; and third, that the sacred books should not be published anonymously. Disregarding the remarks of his colleague, Pacheco immediately raised his voice in protest:

There are many things in the list of abuses that offend me, especially this: the acceptance of the Vulgate edition as authentic without the rejection of the other editions. This seems to me to accomplish nothing. Moreover, it is my desire that all other editions and translations, even that of the Septuagint, be totally rejected; but above all to be reprobated are those translations which have been made by heretics.⁴⁰

Then the Cardinal addressed himself to the third abuse, the interpretation of Scripture. Here he recommended that all who are not university doctors be prohibited from interpreting the sacred text and that the laity especially be excluded from this pursuit, "because it belongs to the laity to learn, not to teach." The Archbishop of Sassari and the Bishop of Fiesole agreed with the Cardinal's position as he had stated it.

Under the astute leadership of Cardinal Del Monte the fathers were able in this congregation to reach some acceptable conclusions which could be proposed in the definitive session of April 8: that all books of the Bible printed anonymously be prohibited, and that one Latin edition of Scripture be declared authentic for use in the Church. The candid comments which the Franciscan Bishop Dionisio de Zanettini

⁴⁰ Severolus (*CT* 1, 1, 42). Pacheco's remarks here perfectly echo the sentiments which he expressed on April 1; cf. *supra* n. 35.

made at this meeting proved entertaining in the midst of the tension which had developed in the course of the discussions. Contending that the bishops lacked learning and competence, he urged that the authority over the publication of the Bible be entrusted uniquely to the Holy See:

The matter comes down to this, that those who have the authority of approving books cannot understand them; those who have the knowledge do not have the authority. I do not say that there are not some learned bishops; there are, but few. Wherefore, the whole project will collapse if this authority be given to the bishop, since there are many of them who will consent to the publication of this or that book *per una fogazza*.⁴¹

The witticism was greeted by the fathers with howls of laughter; but the Bishop's central point, "those who have the knowledge do not have the authority," was well made and is still relevant.

There remained two further questions to be considered by the congregation. The first question was whether the Council should declare itself in favor of an authentic version of the Bible in each of the languages ("in uno quoque idiomate"). Here the congregation divided. Some of its members thought that the expression "in each of the languages" signified only the three biblical languages, and that in consequence the decree should read "in uno quoque idiomate, sc., hebraeo, graeco et latino," to be understood in a restrictive sense excluding the vernaculars. Others believed that the words "in uno quoque idiomate" should be accepted in a universal and inclusive sense, and that therefore the languages of which there was question in the expression included both biblical and vernacular languages. Madruzzo's formula read "Placet sine graeco, hebraeo et latino." That is, he wished the term *idiomate* to be taken in its broadest sense, without restriction to the three biblical languages. Pacheco formulated his thought in the opposite sense: "Placet sine illis verbis: in quoque idiomate." He intended thereby merely to approve the Vulgate as the one authentic version, without approving any other version in any other language ancient or modern. Madruzzo stood for vernacular

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43. Cf. *A. Massarelli Diarium* 3 (CT 1, 1, 43, n. 2) and H. Jedin, *op. cit.*, 2, 84. *Una fogazza* might be translated as "an omelette without salt and butter," or "bread without yeast" or simply "a dud."

Scripture, Pacheco against it. "The Council," wrote Severolus, "seemed partly to favor the one, partly to favor the other." A middle group was neutral: it neither favored nor opposed the vernacular but wanted to accept only the Latin Vulgate as the authentic version for the Church. When the vote was taken, it reflected this tripartite division: 22 neutral votes, 14 for Pacheco's position, and 10 for Madruzzo's.⁴²

The second question posed to the congregation dealt with the interpretation of Scripture, specifically with the possible exclusion of the laity from its interpretation, that is, from the composition of biblical commentaries. To this Madruzzo (with Pole and Cervini) replied negatively, Pacheco (with Del Monte) affirmatively. The division was sharp, for it involved not only the conciliar prelates, but also the presidents of the Council—in fact, the five cardinals who were in attendance. This disagreement could well give rise to that kind of scandal which the legates wished to avoid in the uncertain opening days of the Council. Cardinal Pole prudently refused to arbitrate the dispute, and the matter was wisely and quietly put aside.

In the general congregation of April 5 Bishop Musso of Bitonto outlined seven points (*capita*) which he thought should form the basis of the decree on the abuses of Scripture. The first three, intended as positive reform measures, provided for the erection of theological prebends, the preparation of a catechism and a *compendiosa introductio* for biblical studies, and the renovation and regulation of preaching. These three points introduced a new element, the pastoral, into the decree. The last four items listed by the Bishop were substantially those which had been drawn up in the general congregation of March 17 as the principal abuses of Scripture. The subsequent (April 6) discussion of these seven points proved that the decree as proposed by the Bishop was too complicated to be handled without further substantial debate. At this point the fathers were unwilling to be distracted from their program by allowing the dialogue to move in a new, unforeseen direction.

⁴² Cf. S. Ehses, *op. cit.*, pp. 45–46. The decree on which the fathers were asked to vote read: "Utrum placeret, habere unam editionem veterem et vulgatam in uno quoque idiomate [sc. graeco, hebraeo et latino] qua omnes utantur pro authentica in publicis lectionibus, disputationibus et praedicationibus et quod nemo illam recere audeat aut illi contradicere?" It was adopted without the words "in uno quoque . . . latino" (*Acta* [CT 5, 2, 66]).

A majority decision of the general congregation of April 7 decided that the Council should promulgate the dogmatic decree on Scripture and tradition, and the reform decree on the four principal abuses of Holy Scripture. Other considerations, even those closely related to these two central matters, were to be passed over, at least for the moment. On April 8 the fourth solemn session of the Council was held in the cathedral church of St. Vigilius. More than fifty prelates were in attendance. The three papal legates, Cardinals Del Monte, Cervini, and Pole, presided. Archbishop Salvatore Alepo celebrated the Mass of the Holy Spirit, and after the solemnities Bonuccio, General of the Servites, preached a celebrated sermon whose open, magnanimous spirit was to have serious repercussions later. Then the Archbishop ascended the pulpit and read the two decrees: one dogmatic, on the canon of Holy Scripture and on apostolic tradition; one reform, on the correction of the abuses connected with the use of the Bible in the Church.⁴³

The Council solemnly accepted and recognized the last four of the seven abuses which Bishop Cornelio Musso had outlined in the general congregation of April 5, and which date back to the general congregation of March 17. These it would bend every effort to correct by applying the proper remedies. But the whole problem of the vernacular Bible was passed over in silence. Translations of Scripture were declared to be neither an abuse nor a benefit. Thus the Council, in prescinding from a decision between the positions of Madruzzo and Pacheco, prescinded from declaring itself on one of the burning issues of the day. Its principal concern was with the Latin Vulgate, the standard and authentic version of Scripture for the Latin Church because of its venerable antiquity. "Of the different editions and Latin translations of Sacred Scripture," it declared, "only the Vulgate edition is to be received and regarded as the authentic one."

Catholics have good reason to be grateful that the obscurantism of Cardinal Pacheco and his followers did not prove decisive in a positive way at Trent. That it did not prevail is due to a number of different factors, but especially to the prudence and courage of the papal legates, who refused to allow the universal interests of the Church to be curtailed by particularism. While it is true that the Council did not

⁴³ Cf. Severolus (*CT* 1, 1, 49).

explicitly approve of translations of the Bible in the language of the people, it is equally true that it did not condemn the preparation and dissemination of such popular versions. This represents a compromise which was grounded in the hope (of those, at least, who appreciated the crisis which gripped the Church) that each nation would handle the problem in accord with the character of its needs. Unfortunately this moderate, reasonable plan did not fully prevail. Unforeseen in the early sessions of the Council was the coming of Giovanni Pietro Caraffa to the papal throne as Paul IV and the decline of the humanistic element in the Council.

In 1559, during the unfortunate recess (1552-62) of the Council after the sixteenth session (April 23, 1552), Paul IV, a churchman with whom heresy had become almost an obsession, had a catalogue of forbidden books drawn up. This first papal index was published at his instigation by a decree of the Roman Inquisition. Here, in accord with the restrictive and coercive method of the Caraffa pope, explicit provision is made for controlling the use of the Bible: "No Bible translated into the vernacular, German, French, Spanish, Italian, English, or Flemish, may in any manner be printed or read or possessed without permission in writing from the Holy Office of the Roman Inquisition." In 1562, after the Council had reassembled, a committee of prelates and theologians was formed and commissioned to prepare an *Index librorum prohibitorum*. The magnitude of the task, however, exceeded the competence of the fathers. Time was running out. In the twenty-fifth and last session (Dec. 3-4, 1563) of the Council it was resolved that the whole project should be entrusted to the Holy See. Accordingly, some months later, on March 24, 1564, Pius IV published the bull *Dominici gregis custodias*, which set down ten rules basic to the Index. Its fourth rule describes the method which is to be followed where there is question of the Bible in the vernacular:

We have learned by experience that if the sacred books, translated into the vernacular, are indiscriminantly circulated, there follows because of the weakness of man more harm than good. In this matter the judgment of the bishop or the inquisitor must be sought, who on the advice of the pastor or the confessor may permit the reading of a Bible translated into the vernacular by Catholic authors. This may be done with the understanding that from this reading no harm, but an increase of faith and piety, results. The permission must be in writing. But he who

dares to read or possess Scripture without this permission cannot receive absolution from his sins until he has returned the Bible to the ordinary. . . .⁴⁴

It was cautious legislation such as this that was to prove influential in creating the unbiblical atmosphere of the post-Tridentine Church, an atmosphere which has only begun to clarify in our own day under the impact of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

⁴⁴ C. Mirbt, *op. cit.*, p. 341.