

The Jerusalem Bible and the role of the Newman Association

Anne Crowther

The Jerusalem Bible published in 1966 was founded on scholarship of the 1940s and 1950s gathered in *Le Bible de Jerusalem*. This was a time when, as Dom Henry Wansbrough put it in the *Scripture Bulletin*, in 1985, “Catholic biblical scholarship was still timid and still looking over its shoulder at the condemnation from Rome received in the early years of the century”.

So it was still considered perilous to specialise in scripture when Fr Alexander Jones, the future editor of The Jerusalem Bible, began to teach at St Joseph’s Seminary, Upholland, in 1936. But for his students of scripture the Encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), which gave approval to analysis of the Bible by Catholics, and to new translations from the original tongues, was not startlingly new. Without realising it they had already been enjoying the first taste of the biblical revival.



During the Easter week of 1940 Fr Jones, joining a number of other priests, attended a meeting at St Edmund’s House, Cambridge, and formed the Catholic Biblical Association with the aim of promoting bible study for “small but eager societies which have hitherto lacked the tools”. Even during the Second World War a movement was gathering pace in several countries. The idea for a new French translation of the Bible (although there were already other new bibles then in circulation) came from a Dominican: Fr Thomas-Georges Chiffлот, the assistant director of the Dominican publishing house, Editions du Cerf Paris, in 1945. For him the other bibles took “too timid a critical stance”. The new work would be subject to what was until then a subversive concept: literary control – “helping the exegete to avoid the pitfalls of professional jargon”.

The project was immediately accepted by Fr Roland De Vaux, Director of *Ecole Biblique*, Jerusalem, a French academic establishment founded in 1890. Several professors of the school became involved. The first of 43 books appeared in 1948 and the last in 1954 but they cost an Englishman more than £20. The one-volume edition *Le Bible de Jerusalem* published in 1956 was nearly 1,700 pages in length and strongly bound so that it would “lie open flat upon the desk”. Priced at 1,800 francs (about £2), “we now have the best bible in the world” wrote Fr Jones in *The Life of the Spirit* (1956). “French?” he continued, “It may now be announced that an English translation is afoot”. In due course the contract for an English translation, named The Jerusalem Bible, was signed between Longman’s, Green and Co and *Editions du Cerf* in March 1958.

Michael Longman, an Anglican lay reader, had as a director of Longmans, Green & Co developed “the relatively unprofitable theological side of the business” noted Asa Briggs in *A History of Longmans and their Books*. When he came under pressure to accept limits to the “large number of religious titles which he was proposing” Michael Longman established a new imprint, Darton, Longman & Todd, with John Todd, Tim Darton and Elizabeth Russell as his associates. The firm was owned by its employees.

But the broader team that came together as collaborators – 27 were listed in the First Edition – arose through relationships which had developed over an extended period. Thus the head of French at Huish's Grammar School, Reginald Trevett, who was also organist and choirmaster at St George's RC Church in Taunton, was one of the collaborators who developed The Jerusalem Bible. And among the people attending a biblical study group held at Reginald Trevett's home during the Second World War were John and Kenneth Todd and their friends from Manchester, Roy Norbury and Alex Thomson who together, as conscientious objectors, established a land community and a school for evacuee children in the area.

John and Kenneth Todd came from a family of iron and steel merchants, Todd Brothers, in St Helen's and Widnes. The firm followed a strict religious policy of refusing employment to Catholics and the family home, Woolton Park, was sold to become the lodge of the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool. But in spite of all that John and Kenneth were received in 1944 into the Catholic faith at the same St George's, Taunton, by Canon Richard Iles.

It was much later, in January 1958, that Fr Thomas-Georges Chiffot from Paris visited St Joseph's Seminary, and the same month Fr Alexander Jones met Ronald Senator, future professor at Guildhall School of Music and the London University Institute of Education. The occasion was the fourth Ecumenical Conference to be held at Spode House (near Rugeley, Staffordshire) where Fr Jones delivered a paper on biblical inspiration. In those days three to four thousand visitors came every year to Spode House, though 75 was the maximum that could be accommodated at any one time.

Ronald Senator could read both Hebrew and French, having received training from the Jesuits while living in the Monastery of Lyon for the purpose of becoming a Carmelite. Mary Gill, widow of Eric Gill, the sculptor, became his godmother when he converted to Catholicism after graduating from Oxford University. Fr Jones invited him to translate "two or three books" for The Jerusalem Bible.

Senator lived for a period in the Cistercian Community on Caldey Island (off Tenby, South Wales.) One member of the original community on Caldey Island, and Prior from 1921, was Dom Wilfred Upton who became the first Abbot of the Benedictine Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire. This was home for the concrete poet and wartime Army intelligence office Dom Sylvester Houédard who also became a collaborator for The Jerusalem Bible.

In this way a curious variety of people came together on the project. Another, a little later, was Martin Redfern who volunteered, on the advice of Fr Laurence Bright, the Dominican theologian, the services of the London Circle of the Newman Association to develop an index of biblical themes for *Le Bible de Jerusalem* in the English translation.

Joseph Blenkinsopp SDB also supervised such a bible study group. After being approached by John Todd he used the Standard Hebrew Bible by Rudolf Kittel as a source for the translation of the Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles for The Jerusalem Bible, and similarly the Maltese Prospero Grech OSA used his student copy for the Book of Habakkuk.

Perhaps the most famous of the collaborators was the *Lord of the Rings* author J R R Tolkien. He translated the very short book of Jonah (without using the word "whale").

The role of the Newman Association

The London Circle included half a dozen graduates, new to working in London, who formed a Theological Studies Group. They met at each other's homes for bible study under the guidance of Fr Laurence Bright, originally an Oxford mathematician (who during the Second World War was borrowed for early preparatory work on for the atomic bomb). It happened that later Martin Redfern became owner of the publishing firm Sheed & Ward, though paradoxically the firm, under previous proprietors, had declined an invitation to the major Catholic publishers to submit tenders to publish The Jerusalem Bible.

The Theological Studies Group (TSG) was set up within the London Newman Circle in the early 1960s but spread to other circles from there. Laurence Bright tutored two, if not three, groups himself and recruited scripturally expert tutors for the others. They were called TSGs rather than Bible Study Groups because, according to Martin Redfern, "we didn't want the authorities taking too close an interest in this dangerously Protestant activity".

The pattern was that a biblical passage would be selected for study, with particular reference to both the literary-critical background and to the biblical-theological themes. Members would write an essay, send it to Fr Bright and then meet for discussion. They found it helpful to use the (French) Jerusalem Bible, with its excellent introductions and notes, alongside other commentaries. So it seemed natural that, at Laurence Bright's instigation, they should approach DLT when the plan for the English translation was announced. They were recruited to compile an index of theological themes as they occurred in the footnotes.

Regular attenders at the meetings on Saturdays at the Redferns' house included John Bryden, Celia Capstick, Mary McCarthy, Iain Davidson, Theya Molleson, Tony Ricci and Peter Worden. They undertook a laborious task of recording on index cards the footnotes on the latest galley proofs, then collating and cross-referencing the data on to further cards. "All in all, it was a lot of fun," says Martin Redfern, who remains a Newman member and is at present chair of the Ealing Circle.

The work of the London Circle of the Newman Association on biblical themes started in 1962-63 and continued into 1965 which was the year Martin Redfern joined Sheed & Ward, with Laurence Bright later becoming editor there. The TSG met "mid-morning to late afternoon" every Saturday at Martin Redfern's house: "Moir and I were the only ones who were married," he explains. Michael Longman, on his way home from the office would, on Fridays, call on Martin Redfern living in West London in, first, Rossall Crescent and, later, Freeland Road, and bring him bundles of galley sheets.

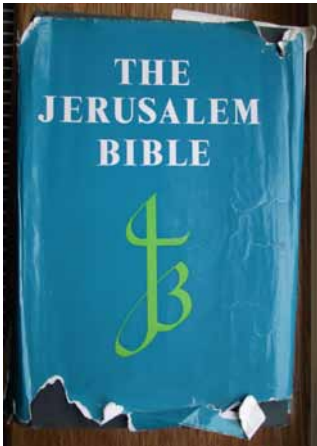
Number 16 Freeland Road was a three-storey Victorian house with large rooms in one of which was a table tennis table. The Saturday lunchtime meal consisted of stew, rice and French bread (and because the French baguettes were only eaten by the Redfern family on Saturdays they were therefore named by their children "index bread"). Afterwards the team of indexers relieved the stress of the collation and cross-referencing by playing table tennis, darts or cards.



Martin Redfern

But he was too busy with other work to undertake very extensive commitments in respect of the bible project.

After a deterioration in health Alexander Jones was transferred to lighter duties as Chaplain to St Vincent's School for the Blind and Partially Sighted, West Derby.



A first edition of the Jerusalem Bible from 1966: tattered but treasured

of the Catholic Blind Asylum. Joe Lambton would regularly be requested to repair the parlour television set.

The College Principal Fr Louis Hanlon had, before his untimely death in a car crash early in 1965, made preliminary arrangements for two of The Jerusalem Bible collaborators to deputise for Alexander Jones during his official leave to complete the bible during the Easter and Summer terms of 1965. Fr Hanlon was a catechetical specialist: he was a visiting professor to the Lumen Vitae Institute, Brussels in 1958 which was, before the founding of the London College of Catechetics in 1965, with Strasbourg and Paris the only place where full-time training in catechetics could be obtained. His choice of cover for the summer term (May 3rd - July 16th 1965) was the Principal of the new London College of Catechetics, Hubert Richards.

Another Jerusalem Bible collaborator was the Dominican Aldhelm Dean, a member of the Society of St Gregory, which was established to promote a wider understanding and love of Gregorian chant and to give greater impetus to congregational singing. Music was seen by him as a vehicle for prayer. He wrote in *Liturgy* (January 1956): "That prayer should be vocal is encouraged by the only explicit instruction on prayer given in the Gospels, which began *"when ye pray say..."* Dom Dean, who was responsible for the Book of Hebrews, started his career as an apprentice of the agricultural machinery makers Ransome, Sims & Jeffries, of Ipswich, but later became an acknowledged authority of Gregorian chant.

Another member of the Society of St Gregory, Patrick Morrison, who was involved in developments in liturgy on the Continent, saw that the Society was not moving in the direction Church music was likely to go: that is, towards Mass in the

vernacular. In 1958 he established a splinter group, the Church Music Association, with a yearly grant of £10,000 from the hierarchy, to pioneer the new idea of congregational singing in the vernacular. Composers were now encouraged to write and publish music for the new English Liturgy though written approval from the National Commission for Catholic Church Music was required to be printed in all new music before it could be sung in church.

The announcement that The Jerusalem Bible had been approved for liturgical use was published in *The Tablet* on October 29th, 1966. But progress was not always smooth. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) from The Jerusalem Bible was set to music by William Tamblin, editor of Church Music, the Church Music Association's magazine. Although broadcast by the BBC it was censored by the Royal School of Church Music for including the setting of the word 'yes', as in 'Yes, from this day forward'. William Tamblin responded that this was representative of "the level of the censorship in those days". Nevertheless Tamblin continued to source psalm settings from The Jerusalem Bible for the parishioners of Father Harold Winston, founder of the St Thomas More Centre for Pastoral Liturgy in North London. In America settings from The Jerusalem Bible are in evidence in the supplement to *The Hymnal* (1940). Under the title *Songs for Liturgy and More Hymns and Spiritual Songs* this collection was published in 1971. Another story of the transition into the liturgy was told by a further Jerusalem Bible collaborator, Fr Douglas Carter (Books of Maccabees and Acts). He was in his last parish (1959-1969), the scattered rural community of St Joseph's Church at Thame in Oxfordshire, when he enjoyed an "unexpected and moving experience". He heard Psalm 21 (*Thanksgiving for the King*) at the stripping of the altar taken up quite spontaneously by the whole congregation.

The 1967 Summer School of the Society of St Gregory was held at Christ's College Liverpool between July 31st and August 7th. 170 people participated with members paying fees of £13 while non-members paid £13 10s. Dom Dean, "an invaluable presence for many years at the summer schools", suffered a major heart attack during the week-long course. The remainder of his life was lived at Quarr Abbey where he had before returned after the death of his mother who had lived in one of the estate cottages at Worth Abbey.

Evalina 'Eva' Burnley was living in Egremont, Wallasey, when she typed the complete edition of The Jerusalem Bible for Alexander Jones "and without complaint, often re-typed every word with the greatest accuracy". Eventually the proofreaders, who were mostly retired schoolteachers, priests and theologians, celebrated the completion of their task with a party held in a Brighton beach hut. But, reading in bed, Mrs Hilda Darton, wife of Tim, the publisher, opened one of the first copies of the printed book and found an error in Genesis 1:1. Every copy was returned to the printer.

Other problems had to be endured. For example, on the day following the Bible's launch on October 20th 1966, a reception with a Chinese buffet spread was laid on for church leaders gathered at Westminster. Moreover Tim Darton was scheduled to appear on television to publicise the new Bible. But fate spoiled the party: on that day in mid-Glamorgan 144 people, including 116 children, were killed in the Aberfan mining disaster. The publicity campaign was very badly timed.

There were further difficulties when Michael Longman eventually decided to publish a revised version of The Jerusalem Bible based on the 1972 revision of *Le Bible de Jerusalem*. Dom Henry Wansbrough, the distinguished biblical scholar of Ampleforth College, was asked to look through the revision of the Letter to the Hebrews. He commented: "I thought there were many places where it was less than the original."

Although the editors of *Le Bible de Jerusalem* communicated after this that any revision must either be made by Wansbrough (or another unnamed former student of L'Ecole Biblique) it was Darton, Longman & Todd's intention that only when the revised texts were ready would Wansbrough's expertise be used. In what was subsequently called "the bombshell" Pierre Benoit of *Le Bible de Jerusalem* wrote to DLT refusing to allow the revised version to be called The Jerusalem Bible unless it was actually edited by Wansbrough.

That took a long time. The housemaster's room at Ampleforth School was a place where pupils were welcomed at any time to relax and chat. But it was at Dom Henry Wansbrough's desk in the corner of that room during seven years of 45-minute lesson breaks between teaching full-time, and with early morning work, that *The New Jerusalem Bible* was prepared. It was finally published in 1985.

Anne Crowther is a historian

Concerning Circles

New Members

Recruitment has been going well lately and we can now welcome the following new members who have been elected at recent Council meetings. They are attached to Circles as shown:

Ms F.Boyle (Glasgow), Miss M.M.Brennan (Wimbledon), Mr J.M.Burling (Wimbledon), Mr J.Connell (North Merseyside), Mrs M.P.Farley (Wimbledon), Mr B.L.A.Greaney (Birmingham), Mr C.A. & Mrs E.M.J.Hinton (Hertfordshire), Mrs P.Hoare (North Merseyside), Mrs E.M.Jenkins (Aberdeen), Mr B.Miller (Aberdeen), Mr M. & Mrs P. McElroy (Hertfordshire), Mr D.Morley & Dr M. Murphy (North Merseyside), Miss M.Priddle (Surrey Hills), Mr P.E. & Mrs R.M.Robinson (North Staffs.), Mr K.P.Sadler (Aberdeen), Mrs S.Sleigh (Aberdeen), Dr M.Spencer (Wimbledon), Dr M.Weaver (Birmingham), Mr A.E. & Mrs T. Whittaker (North Merseyside), Mrs C.J.Williams (Wrexham).

Requiescant in Pace

Your prayers are asked for the following members who have died recently:

Prof. R.J.Brech (Unattached), Prof. J.H.Burns (Ealing), Mr A.N. Charlton (Tyneside), Mrs M.R.Coll (Aberden), Mr C.R.A.Cunliffe (Unattached), Mrs M.M.Cunningham (North Merseyside), Mr D.Fernback (Hertfordshire), Dr M.Hodkinson (Unattached), Mr F.K.Longworth (Wimbledon), Mr D.Shorthouse (North Glos).

Kenneth Longworth was a previous Chairman of the Wimbledon Circle and lived to see its recent successful revival.