

# 1989 Preface of The Douay-Rheims Bible

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Preface dated August 24, 1989 From the Tan Books Printing.

The DOUAY-RHEIMS BIBLE is a scrupulously faithful translation into English of the Latin Vulgate Bible which St. Jerome (342-420) translated into Latin from the original languages. The Vulgate quickly became the Bible universally used in the Latin Rite (by far the largest rite of the Catholic Church).

St. Jerome, who was one of the four great Western Fathers of the Church, was a man raised up by God to translate the Holy Bible into the common Latin tongue of his day. He knew Latin and Greek perfectly. He was 1500 years closer to the original languages than any scholar today, which would make him a better judge of the exact meaning of any Greek or Hebrew word in the Scriptures. Besides being a towering linguistic genius, he was also a great saint, and he had access to ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the 2nd and 3rd centuries which have since perished and are no longer available to scholars today. St. Jerome's translation, moreover, was a careful, word-for-word rendering of the original texts into Latin.

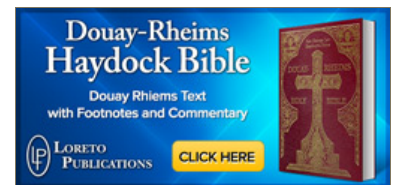
The Latin Vulgate Bible has been read and honored by the Western Church for 1500 years! It was declared by the Council of Trent to be the official Latin version of the original. Hear what the Sacred Council decreed: "Moreover, the same Holy Council ... ordains and declares that the old Latin Vulgate Edition, which, in use for so many hundred years, has been approved by the Church, be in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions held as authentic, and so no one dare or presume under any pretext whatsoever to reject it." (Fourth Session, April 8, 1546). As Pope Pius XII stated in his 1943 encyclical letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, this means the Vulgate is "free from any error whatsoever in matters of faith and morals." And the Douay-Rheims bible is a faithful, word-for-word translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible of St. Jerome.

In their translation, the Douay-Rheims translators took great pains to translate exactly. Contrary to the procedure of the modern Bible translators, when a passage seemed strange and unintelligible they left it alone, even if obscure, and "let the chips fall as they may." The modern Bible translators, on the other hand, will often look at an obscure passage, decide what they think it means, then translate into words that bring out that meaning. The result is that the English is usually (not always!) easier to understand, but it is not necessarily what the Bible says; rather, it is their interpretation and understanding of what the Bible says. Moreover, the Holy Ghost may have hidden several additional meanings in the passage. Those meanings may

well be completely translated out!

Sometimes the question is raised: Why translate from a translation (the Latin Vulgate) rather than from the original Greek and Hebrew? This question was also raised in the 16th century when the Douay-Rheims translators (Fr. Gregory Martin and his assistants) first published the Rheims New Testament. They gave ten reasons, ending up by stating that the Latin Vulgate "is not only better than all other Latin translations, but than the Greek text itself, in those places where they disagree." (Preface to the Rheims New Testament, 1582). They state that the Vulgate is "more pure than the Hebrew or Greek now extant" and that "the same Latin hath bene farre better conserved from corruption." (Preface to the Douay Old Testament, 1609).

The present Bible is the Challoner revision (1749-1752) of the Douay-Rheims Bible. Catholics owe the saintly Bishop Richard Challoner (1691-1781) a great debt of gratitude for undertaking this work. Challoner was one of those courageous priests who traveled around offering Mass secretly for small groups during the religious persecutions in England. Such Catholics needed a Bible, and had needed one for 100 years. The Douay-Rheims Bible had been printed a few times on the Continent but had never really spread to England. Some Catholics in England were even reading the King James version -- a situation which Bishop Challoner knew had to be rectified.



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Some of the passages in the original Douay-Rheims Bible were needlessly obscure. As an extreme example, Ephesians 6:12 read, "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood: but against Princes and Potestats, against the rectors of the world of this dankness, against the spirituals of wickedness in the celestials." The spellings were archaic, and the verses were not set off by new lines for clarity. Challoner rectified these problems, checking carefully against the Clementine Vulgate and the original-language texts. On the whole, Bishop Challoner's revisions were minor. He replaced certain anglicized Latin words and archaic words and expressions, rearranged the word order of the sentences, and yet maintained the overall word-for-word accuracy of the 16th/17th-century Douay-Rheims Bible.

The Challoner revision of the Douay-Rheims Bible was a godsend. It became the standard Catholic Bible in English until the mid-20th century (when the Confraternity Bible was published). It continued to be called the "Douay-Rheims" because of its similarity to the original Douay-Rheims Bible. The great work *English Versions of the Bible*, by Frs. Pope and Bullough, states that English-speaking Catholics the world over owe Dr. Challoner an immense debt of gratitude, for he provided them for the first time in history with a portable, cheap and readable version of the Bible, which has stood the test of 200 years of use. Moreover, it is more accurate than any modern Bible because it is based on ancient texts, no longer extant, which were "captured" and "frozen," so to speak, by St. Jerome (342-420) in his Latin Vulgate. The Douay-Rheims is thus the most reliable English-language Bible there is. We look forward to the day when the Christian world will rediscover this fact and come to a renewed appreciation of the monumental work of St. Jerome, of the Douay-Rheims translators and of Bishop Richard Challoner -- men who were raised up by God to make the Bible available to the English-speaking world.