

## REVIEWS

THE GOSPEL TRANSLATED INTO MODERN ENGLISH. By J. B. Phillips.  
(Geoffrey Bles; 12s. 6d.)

THE FOUR GOSPELS. A New Translation, by E. V. Rieu. (Penguin  
Books; 2s. 6d.)

THE HOLY BIBLE: Revised Standard Version. (Nelson; 30s.)

We are admonished by Mr Phillips to accept it as the criterion of a good translation that 'a conscientious translator is faithfully conveying the meaning of his author to our minds and our hearts'. Unfortunately his own translation only passes the first half of this test. Of his integrity there could be no question; nor of his technical skill. But it is impossible to accept his valuation of the artistic quality and style of the Gospel writings. He tells us: 'though we may not like it, there is in fact very little sublime simplicity or simple grandeur in the original Greek of the four Gospels. We face a queer paradox—that the earliest and most reliable accounts of the life of the very Son of God were written in a debased language which had lost its classical beauty.' A quite contrary judgment underlies the Penguin translation. In his delightful, if not entirely trustworthy Introduction, Mr Rieu declares: '... the decision to place the volume side by side with other masterpieces of ancient art brings home to me a truth I did not realize before I undertook my task. The Four Gospels are spiritually supreme largely *because* they are great literature. The two values interlock. . . . The Church, when it canonized the Four, displayed the excellence of its literary as well as its religious judgment . . . it follows that any translation of the Gospels which neglects their artistic qualities is bound to fail.' And as for the Greek in which the Gospels are written: 'Diction, grammar and syntax have all undergone modification and loosening. But the language is still Greek, still beautiful, simpler than that of Plato and Demosthenes, but still charged with untranslatable subtlety.'

Not that this question whether the language used in the Gospels is or is not in itself a debased language is decisive in judging of the quality of their writing. It might perhaps be held that Yiddish is a debased language; but not that anything written in that language must be a debased kind of writing. If the Gospels had been written in the style that Mr Phillips' translation imputes to them, one would have to say that the spirit of the Gospel prevailed in spite of the Gospels. "I assure you", said Jesus, "that unless a man is born from water and from spirit he cannot get into the kingdom of God. . . . The wind blows where it likes." . . . "How on earth can things like this happen?" replied Nicodemus. "So you are one of Israel's teachers", said Jesus, "and you do not know about this sort of

thing? Believe Me, we are talking about something we really know . . . yet men like you will not accept our evidence. . . . No one has ever been up to Heaven except the Son of Man who came down from Heaven. The Son of Man must be lifted above the heads of men—as Moses lifted up that serpent in the desert. . . .” Or again: “You must let the children have all they want first. It is not right, you know, to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” But she replied. . . . “If you can answer like that”, Jesus replied, “you can go home. The evil spirit has left your daughter.” It is not the roughness of idiom against which one would protest, but the coarse, jockeying tone of the style.

No such reproach could be levelled against the Penguin Four Gospels. “Think of the wind—it blows where it will and you hear its voice, but whence it comes and where it goes you do not know. Such is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” “How can these things be?” said Nicodemus. Jesus said: “You are Israel’s teacher. Yet you know nothing of all this? I assure you that we speak of what we know, we testify what we have seen.” The rendering is gracious, lively and tender. It lacks weight and depth, but it has purity. It lacks weight and depth—it moves too lightly along the surface—because it does not sufficiently grasp the symbolical-theological patterns. The author shows no sign of an expert acquaintance with the Hebrew or the Greek Old Testament. Without such knowledge how could he possibly know which are the key-words and images in the Gospels—which are the words requiring to be kept as technical, as if in inverted commas, and which are the images which must at all costs be preserved? Not being an expert in New Testament exegesis, what right has he—for example—to feel so sure that our Lord’s words to Mary Magdalene, ‘Do not hold me’, should be changed to ‘Do not be alarmed.’? Though he is a delightful guide to follow, one cannot feel safe with him: it seems a matter of luck how far he can go from one verse to another without tripping or falling.

If the excuse can be made for the amateur translation that it induces people to read the Bible when otherwise they would not, then certainly the Penguin translation is to be strongly recommended. Of its kind it is truly admirable. Yet one may perhaps wonder whether the present flood of such translations is not becoming something of a danger; whether with their slurring over or smoothing out of what may be called the technicalities of the Bible they may not be encouraging us to skim and so prevent us from ‘searching’ the Scriptures. So that it is a comfort to turn to the mighty translation of the Bible (apart from the Deuterocanonical Books) which the Standard Revised Version offers to us, or rather hands back to us neatly repaired. It is a revision of the Revised Version of 1885, made by a distinguished group of American Protestant scholars, working together for some fifteen years, to effect such alterations

as they judged necessary in accordance with the new findings in the fields of textual, archaeological, linguistic and more general historical studies. They have also sought to get rid of archaic or ambiguous expressions; but have otherwise avoided tampering with the style. It is, in fact, in no sense a new translation but strictly a revision or correction of the old. Over the detailed merits and demerits of this revision there could be endless argument; but that it does in many ways contribute to a more accurate reading of the Bible could not be questioned. So in this doubly Revised Authorised translation we have a work which no serious student of the Bible would be happy to be without. It is not the ideal translation: it cannot be said to give us *the* Bible. But it might be said to give us *a* Bible, and not just one more imperfect rendering of it. Like the Vulgate, it is not just a copy-book, but a world in itself, a sort of satellite world to the Bible.

RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

THE TWO SOVEREIGNTIES: The Relationship Between Church and State.

By Joseph Lecler, S.J. (Burns Oates; 16s.)

The study of the relations of Church and State which Fr Lecler has undertaken is one which should prove of the greatest practical value to the student of such matters, whether the author's ultimate conclusions are or are not accepted. Broadly it may be said that, in Fr Lecler's view, the medieval claim to a sovereignty, almost direct, over the secular power, like the converse Caesaro-papalism which preceded it, was justified by the particular circumstances of the time and that, in our day, the Popes have commended a rather different approach, extending to a claim normally to a *potestas indirecta*, and no more.

Thus, of Caesaro-papalism the author writes that it was 'a solution consonant with a phase of history which has now vanished. No contemporary government claims to be the guardian of the Church's discipline or the arbiter of the Faith.' Then, of the 'six-century-long absence of laymen from the field of culture and political science', Fr Lecler comments: 'How could the ecclesiastical power, constantly called upon as it was by the princes to supply them with information and advice, avoid coming to regard as normal its far-reaching interventions in the temporal sphere? Were not the civil power and the ecclesiastical power both in churchmen's hands?' He speaks of Pope Nicholas I threatening to anathematise Lothair II, and, of course, cites the familiar cases of Gregory VII and Innocent III as examples of acknowledged supreme papal power in the secular sphere. As was said by John of Salisbury, 'The Pope possesses the two swords'—and justifies the theory of 'direct power', a papal jurisdiction over temporal affairs.

These medieval claims were not maintained intact. 'As the modern period wore on, the Church's interventions in temporal affairs became