

• THE NEW WESTMINSTER HYMNAL •

First Published in 1940, the same year the “Blitz” began. (During World War II, Nazi airplanes kept up a constant bombing campaign against England.)

It was at this time also that Ronald first mentioned (as far as is known to anyone) the ambition which may have been in his mind since, on his conversion, he was first introduced to the Douay Bible, of attempting his own translation of the Vulgate.

There had been indications during the preceding year that the project might be officially encouraged. At the Low Week meeting of the hierarchy in 1936 Ronald had been appointed to a committee to revise the *Westminster Hymnal*. Some converts from Protestantism repine at their lost opportunities for congregational singing. Indeed, many adult English Catholics do not hear a hymn from one year’s end to another. Ronald attributed this silence to the low literary quality of many Catholic hymns.

He took the work of revision very seriously, and his taste, more than that of any other individual, pervaded the committee, whose deliberations were protracted for two years. He attended every meeting, succeeded in introducing several hymns from Catholic sources which had previously been known only to those who used the *English Hymnal*, and the work of comparatively modern poets such as Francis Thompson, G. K. Chesterton, Lionel Johnson, Canon Gray, and ‘Michael Field’. More than this he made 47 translations from the Latin, out of a total of 106, only 9 of which were by living writers, and contributed 4 original hymns. The new book bears his personal marks clearly; it was issued in 1940 and cordially welcomed by informed critics. Catholic parishes are slow to change their habits. They still sing what the oldest members learned at school. A full generation must pass before the innovations, so patiently debated, are allowed to fulfil their work of enrichment.