

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE, TODAY AND TOMORROW*

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The rapid multiplication of English translations of the Scriptures throughout the second half of the 20th century might well prompt more than one bewildered reader to rephrase the Preacher's melancholy observation so as to read, "Of the making of many translations of the Bible there is no end!" (Eccles. 12:12). During the past 40 years (to go no farther than that), beginning with the publication in 1952 of the Revised Standard Version until the publication in 1990 of the New Revised Standard Version, 27 renderings in English of the entire Bible were issued, as well as 28 additional renderings of the New Testament.

Such a proliferation provokes a number of questions. Why were so many versions produced? Is there really a need for such a variety of translations? Is it not uneconomical of time and human resources to undertake what, in many cases, are largely duplicated efforts? What is the best Bible? Before such questions can be answered, it is necessary to survey, however briefly, the making of several of the English versions that are widely used today. Because of the limitation of space, consideration will be given to the following, in chronological order: the Revised Standard Version (1952), the Jerusalem Bible (1966), the New American Bible (1970), the New English Bible (1970), the Good News Bible (1976), and the New International Version (1978). Several of these have subsequently appeared in revised form.

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THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1952)¹

Steps to produce a suitable revision of the excessively literalistic American Standard Version of 1901 were undertaken in 1928 when the copyright of that version was acquired by the International Council of Religious Education. In the same year the Standard Bible Committee was appointed, with an original membership of 15 scholars, to have charge of the text of the American Standard Version, and to make further revision of the text should that be deemed necessary.

For two years the committee wrestled with the question of whether a revision should be undertaken, and if so, what should be its nature and extent. Finally, after revisions of representative chapters of the Bible had been made and discussed, a majority of the committee decided that there should be a thorough revision of the American Standard Version, which would stay as close to the King James tradition as it could in the light of present knowledge of the Greek text and its meaning on the one hand, and present usage of English on the other.

In 1930 the nation was undergoing a serious economic depression, and it was not until 1936 that funds could be secured and the work of revision could begin in earnest. The contract was negotiated with Thomas Nelson and Sons, publishers of the American Standard Version, to finance the work of revision by advance royalties, in return for which the Nelsons were granted the exclusive right to publish the Revised Standard Version for a period of 10 years. Thereafter it was to be opened to other publishers under specific conditions.

With the financial undergirding thus provided, it was possible to schedule regular sessions of both the Old Testament and New Testament Sections. Expenses for travel, lodging, and meals were provided for the members. No stipends or honoraria, however, were given to RSV Committee members, who contributed their time and expertise for the good of the cause.

After serious work had begun a hope was expressed that cooperation of British scholars might be obtained, thus making the version an international translation. The war years of 1939-1945, however, made such collaboration impossible. In the summer of 1946, after the war was over, an effort was made to secure at least a token of international collaboration in the work on the Old

¹ See Members of the Revision Committee, Luther A. Weigle, Chairman, *An Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament* (Chicago: International Council of Religious Education, 1946), and idem, *Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament* (New York: Nelson, 1952).

Testament, the RSV New Testament having been published in February 1946. Such partial collaboration was not to be forthcoming, for in that same year delegates of several Protestant churches in Great Britain decided that work should begin on a wholly new translation, one that made no attempt to stand within the tradition of the 1611 King James Bible. The outcome of this effort was the New English Bible, published in 1970.

Meanwhile, work continued on the RSV Old Testament. After 81 separate meetings, totaling 450 days of work, the complete Bible was published September 30, 1952, the Feast day, appropriately enough, of St. Jerome. The new version was launched with an unprecedented publicity campaign. On the evening of the day of publication, in the United States, in Canada, and in many other places, 3,418 community observances were held with over one and a half million persons attending.

The fanfare, however, did not protect the new version from adverse criticism. Unfounded and malicious accusations were brought against several members of the committee, alleging that they were either Communists or Communist sympathizers—allegations that, at the insistence of Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, were eventually printed in the official United States Air Force Training Manual! Finally, after a thorough investigation conducted by nonpartisan authorities, this entirely unsupported charge was rebutted as "venomous nonsense" on the floor of the House of Representatives in Washington and the edition of the manual in question was withdrawn.²

Meanwhile a pastor of a church in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, publicly burned with a blow-torch a copy of what he termed "a heretical, communist-inspired Bible." The ashes were put in a tin box and sent to Luther Weigle, dean of Yale Divinity School, who had served as convener of the Standard Bible Committee. That box, with its contents, is in the Bible Committee's collection of books and archives, a reminder that, though in previous centuries Bible translators were sometimes burned, today it happily is only a copy of the translation that meets such a fate.

In 1971 the second edition of the RSV New Testament was issued. This incorporated a number of changes that reflect the Greek text as adopted for the third edition of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, which serves throughout the world as a standard text for translations and revisions made by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Among such changes

² *The Congressional Record*, vol. 106, Part 3 (February 25, 1960), 3505-07; Part 5 (March 29, 1960), 6872-74; and Part 6 (April 19, 1960), 8247-84.

was the transfer of the ending of the Gospel according to Mark and the *pericope de adultera* (John 7:53-8:12) from the RSV footnotes into the text, though the passages continue to be separated from the context by a blank space to show that they were not part of the original text.

Soon afterward a significant step was taken by scholars of the Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain. Under the leadership of Dom Bernard Orchard, O.S.B., and Reginald C. Fuller, a proposal was made to divide the books of the Apocrypha into two sections, those books the Catholic Church regards as deuterocanonical and those that are not so regarded. In an edition issued by Collins Press of Glasgow in 1973, these two sections were bound separately between the Old and New Testaments. The volume therefore had four sections: the 39 books of the Old Testament, the 12 deuterocanonical books or parts of books, the First and Second Books of Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh (three books that are part of the traditional Apocrypha but are not included among the deuterocanonical books); and the 27 books of the New Testament. No Catholic notes were included, since this Bible was to be "common," for use by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike.

It should be noted that in such an arrangement Roman Catholics made a significant departure from the accepted practice through the long history of their church. The separation of the deuterocanonical books from their places throughout the Old Testament is essentially an accommodation to the Protestant arrangement of the books of the Bible.

In May 1973 a specially bound copy of the Collins RSV "Common" Bible was presented to Pope Paul VI. In a private audience granted to a small group, comprising the Greek Orthodox Archbishop Athenagoras of London, Lady Priscilla Collins, Sir William Collins, Herbert G. May, and the present writer, the Pope accepted the copy as a significant step in furthering ecumenical relations among the churches.

Worthy as the "Common" Bible is, however, it fails to live up to its name, for it lacks the full canon of books recognized as authoritative by Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Armenian, and other Eastern churches accept not only the traditional deuterocanonical books received by the Roman Catholic Church, but also the Third Book of Maccabees. Furthermore in Greek Bibles Psalm 151 stands at the close of the Psalter, and the Fourth Book of Maccabees is printed as an appendix to the Old Testament. Since these texts were lacking in the "Common" Bible presented to Pope Paul, on that occasion Archbishop Athenagoras expressed to the present writer the

hope that steps might be taken to produce a truly ecumenical edition of the Holy Scriptures.

In 1972 a subcommittee of the RSV Bible Committee had already been commissioned to prepare a translation of 3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151. In 1975 the translation of the three additional texts was made available to the five publishers licensed to issue the RSV Bible. The Oxford University Press took steps immediately to produce an expanded form of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocrypha*, the edition of the RSV that had earlier received the imprimatur of Cardinal Cushing of Boston.

This expanded edition was published by the Oxford University Press on May 19, 1977. A special prepublication copy was presented by the present writer to His All Holiness Dimitrios I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and titular head of the several Orthodox churches. In accepting the gift, the Ecumenical Patriarch expressed satisfaction at the availability of an edition of the sacred Scriptures that English readers belonging to all branches of the Christian church could use.

Thus the story of the making of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible with the expanded Apocrypha is an account of the triumph of ecumenical concern over more limited sectarian interests. At last (and for the first time since the Reformation) one edition of the Bible had received the blessing of leaders of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox churches alike.

THE JERUSALEM BIBLE (1966)

The name, The Jerusalem Bible, indicates something of the origin of this edition. Beginning in 1948 a group of French Dominicans and others at the Ecole Biblique de Jerusalem produced a series of commentaries, each containing one or more books of the Bible translated into the vernacular, with introductions of moderate length and with copious notes. In 1956, two years after the completion of the series (which ran to 43 fascicles), a one-volume edition was issued, in which the notes were greatly compressed and the introductions sharply abbreviated. This compendious edition, entitled *La Sainte Bible traduite en français sous la direction de l'Ecole Biblique de Jerusalem*, contains, therefore, the quintessence of a great amount of solid and responsible scholarship contributed by about 40 collaborators. The English edition was prepared under the direction of Alexander Jones of Christ's College, Liverpool; it embodies the introductions and notes of the one-volume French edition. The translation of the scriptural text of most of the books was made from the original languages, and, in the case of a few books where the initial draft was made from

the French, it was later "compared word for word with the Hebrew or Aramaic by the General Editor and amended where necessary to ensure complete conformity with the ancient text" (p. v). It was perhaps inevitable that the names of the original scholars who produced the *Bible de Jerusalem* have been replaced by the names of the nearly 30 British collaborators in the work of translation and literary revision.

The resulting volume is an impressive piece of bookmaking. About twice as thick as the French edition, it measures 6 1/2 by 9 1/2 inches and weighs five pounds. The scriptural text is printed in one column per page, with generous margins (especially when poetry is involved) and with running heads indicating the contents of sections and paragraphs. The commentary at the foot of the page, however, is set in a type size that is almost painfully small.

So much by the way of describing the background and production of The Jerusalem Bible; something should be said now about the scholarship reflected in both translation and comments. Let it be said at the outset that during the past generation the differences between the results of Protestant and Roman Catholic biblical scholarship have been reduced almost to the vanishing point, and a great expanse of common ground now exists in matters pertaining to discussion of date, authorship, literary composition, and similar matters of biblical studies.

The wording of The Jerusalem Bible has a contemporary ring about it. The archaic forms of the second person pronouns ("thee," "thy," etc.) are dispensed with. The editor acknowledges that the decision, reached after some hesitation, to represent the divine name by "Yahweh" will probably seem to many readers to be unacceptable, but "those who may care to use this translation of the Psalms can substitute the traditional 'the Lord'" (p. vi). Isaiah 7:14 is rendered, "The maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son," to which the following comment is attached: "The Greek version reads 'the virgin,' being more explicit than the Hebr. which uses *almah*, meaning either a young girl or a young, recently married woman." In the annunciation (Luke 1:28) the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary are rendered, "Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you," with the added comment, "The translation 'Rejoice' may be preferred to 'Hail' and regarded as containing a messianic reference, cf. Zc 9:9; 'so highly favored,' i.e. as to become the mother of the Messiah." The New Testament references to the **adelphoi** of Jesus are rendered in a straightforward manner, "the brothers of Jesus," with the added comment, "Not Mary's children but near relations, cousins per-

haps, which both Hebr. and Aramaic style `brothers,' cf. Gn 13:8; 14:16; 29:15; Lv 10:4; I Ch 23:22 f."

Occasionally the translators have ventured to paraphrase, sometimes not altogether happily. Thus 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 is rendered, "Now for the questions about which you wrote. Yes, it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman; but since sex is always a danger, let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband." Here the opening of verse 2 is given an unfortunate twist ("but since sex is always a danger"); literally the Greek reads, "but because of fornications," which probably means, "but because there is so much immorality." This was certainly true in Corinth.

Since in various passages the manuscripts of the Bible differ from one another, translators must make choices between variant readings. In the textual criticism of the New Testament, The Jerusalem Bible usually reflects current judgments widely held among Protestant and most Roman Catholic scholars. Thus the ending of Mark's Gospel (16:9-20), which is lacking in the earliest witnesses, is declared to be probably non-Markan, and the *pericope de adultera* (John 7:53-8:12) is recognized as not being part of the original Fourth Gospel, for "it is omitted by the oldest witnesses (MSS, versions, Fathers) and found elsewhere in others; moreover, its style is that of the Synoptics and the author was possibly Luke. Nevertheless, the passage was accepted in the canon and there are no grounds for regarding it as unhistorical." The comment on John 5:3b-4 states that "the best witnesses omit `waiting for the water to move' and the whole of v. 4."

In these three cases the passage is retained in the text; in 1 John 5:7b-8, however, the spurious passage is given only in the comments, where it is recognized that the reference to the Trinity is a gloss that crept into inferior manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate. In these cases The Jerusalem Bible is in the mainstream of textual scholarship. On the other hand the text-critical judgment expressed at John 1:13, though previously advocated by a few scholars, is scarcely correct. Here the translators abandoned the evidence of all Greek manuscripts and, on the basis of several Old Latin and Syriac manuscripts, with limited patristic support, they adopted the singular number, "who was born," thus making the Fourth Gospel testify to the virgin birth of Christ.

THE NEW AMERICAN BIBLE (1970)

In 1944 the Bishops' Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine invited a group of Catholic biblical scholars to un-

dertake the first Roman Catholic translation of the Scriptures in America to be made from the original languages. The committee inherited the work that had been begun in the preceding decade, when many of the same group of scholars began translating the Bible from the Latin Vulgate (the New Testament of this version had been published in 1941).

During the following years several portions of the translation appeared, each containing one or more biblical books of the new rendering. The reissuing of these earlier materials permitted the introduction of certain modifications. For example the Book of Genesis, first published in 1952, was completely retranslated and is now provided with new and expanded exegetical notes that take into account the various sources or literary traditions. Finally, in 1970, a quarter of a century after work first began, the New American Bible was published. This work represents capable and dedicated scholarship and provides a rendering of the Scriptures in modern American idiom, along with brief introductions to each biblical book as well as many literary and theological annotations.

In the Old Testament the translators have departed more than a few times from the Masoretic Hebrew text. According to information in the preface, the Masoretic Hebrew text of 1 and 2 Samuel was in numerous instances corrected by the more ancient Hebrew manuscripts from Cave 4 of Qumran. In the case of the Psalms the basic text is not the Masoretic text but, as the preface states, "one which the editors considered [to be] closer to the original inspired form, namely, the Hebrew text underlying the new Latin Psalter of the Church" (the reference is to the *Liber Psalmorum cum Canticis Breviarii Romani*, 2d ed., 1945).

Here and there in the Old Testament and particularly in the Minor Prophets the sequence of verses and sections of material have been rearranged where scholars have reason to think that the lines were accidentally disordered in the transmission of the text. With regard to the Tetragrammaton, happily the translators have used "LORD" rather than the utterly un-English "Yahweh." As is true of most translations of the Bible prepared by a committee, the several books of the Scriptures are the work of different translators. Therefore it is not surprising to find differences among the books as to the technique of translating and the style or "color" of the rendering. To some extent the reader of the New American Bible is forewarned of such diversity by the statement in the preface that "the editors did not commit themselves in the synoptic gospels to rendering repeated words or phrases identically." Such freedom in rendering can be justified and is in ac-

cord with the policy adopted by the New English Bible as well as several other modern speech renderings.

On the other hand it is difficult to justify the many apparently arbitrary divergences in the rendering of several technical or quasi-technical words and phrases. The word **makarioi** is translated "blest" in the Matthean and Lucan beatitudes, whereas in the seven beatitudes of the Book of Revelation it is rendered "happy." The expression **h|basileia tou?geou?** occurs 46 times in Mark and Luke. Sixteen times it is rendered "the kingdom of God," once "God's kingdom," once "kingdom of heaven"(!), and the remaining instances "*the reign of God*." Within a single chapter (Luke 18) and even in adjacent verses one finds the following disparate renderings (italicized here): "Let the little children come to me. Do not shut them off. *The reign of God* belongs to such as these" (v. 16). "Trust me when I tell you that whoever does not accept *the kingdom of God* as a child will not enter into it" (v. 17). "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the *kingdom of heaven*" (v. 25). "There is no one who has left home or wife or brothers, parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God" (v. 29).

A similar type of arbitrary divergence occurs in Matthew 3:2 and 4:17. In the former passage John the Baptist preached, "Reform your lives! The reign of God is at hand," and in the latter Jesus preached, "Reform your lives! The kingdom of heaven is at hand." In both cases the Greek has **h|basileia tw| ou?anw|**. It is difficult to believe that the committee of translators (who are technically trained scholars) would have been guilty of perpetrating such slipshod work. One may hazard the guess that, after the scholars had finished their painstaking work, having utilized a concordance and a harmony of the Gospels to make certain that parallels are treated as parallels, the subcommittee on English "style" made arbitrary alterations here and there, which, perhaps because of the press of time in meeting the publisher's deadline, were not submitted to the scholars for their approval.

With regard to fitness of language, the Book of Psalms gives the impression that meticulous care was taken to provide a rendering with a certain liturgical and literary timbre. In general the language is dignified without being archaic, and expressions are used that evoke a sense of grandeur and the numinous. Only rarely have the translators nodded, as when, for example, in Psalm 24:1 what is meaningful to the eye will almost certainly be confusing to the ear: "The Loan's are the earth and its fullness." In other parts of the Bible the reader is struck by a certain typically American quality of English idiom—plain, flat, and mat-

ter of fact. The long and involved Greek sentences in Ephesians (e.g., one sentence extends from 1:3 to 1:14) and in other epistles are properly broken into smaller units. At the same time one can point out a number of rather uninspired, pedestrian renderings. For example it is difficult to regard the following as idiomatic or felicitous English: "Be on the lookout against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadduces" (Matt. 16:6); "For fear of disedifying them [the kings of the world]" (17:27); "Buy ointment to smear on your eyes" (Rev. 3:18).

The introductions and annotations to the books of the Bible display a happy combination of information concerning sources, authorship, date of composition or redaction, and outline of contents, along with attention to the religious and theological dimensions inherent in the material. The amount of theological interpretation varies from book to book, but in general it is adequate. For example the comment on the final words of Luke 2:14 ("Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests") is as follows: "An allusion to the mystery of divine election that bestows the gift of faith upon people of divine choice. To these, the messianic mission of Jesus also brings a special gift of peace, the restored friendship between God and man."

The messianic interpretation of various Old Testament passages is suggested both by annotations and by section headings. The lengthy annotation on Genesis 3:15 concludes with the statement that "the passage can be understood as the first promise of a Redeemer for fallen mankind. The woman's offspring then is primarily Jesus Christ." At Genesis 49:10, which by a slight change in the Hebrew text is translated, "while tribute is brought to him [Judah]," one is told that "a somewhat different reading of the Hebrew text would be 'until he comes to whom it belongs.' This last has been traditionally understood in a Messianic sense. In any case, the passage foretells the supremacy of the tribe of Judah, which found its fulfillment in the Davidic dynasty and ultimately in the Messianic Son of David, Jesus Christ." Of Balaam's prophecy that "a star shall advance from Jacob" (Num. 24:17) the reader learns that "many of the Fathers have understood this as a Messianic prophecy, although it is not referred to anywhere in the New Testament; in this sense the star is Christ himself." Psalm 45 is described as a "Nuptial Ode for the Messianic King," and the annotation declares that "Catholic tradition, in keeping with the inspired interpretation given in Hebrews 1, 8f., has always understood this psalm as referring, at least in a typical sense, to Christ and his bride, the Church." Psalm 72 is given the heading, "The Kingdom of the Messiah."

Both Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and Psalm 22 are applied to the Passion of Christ. The words, "the LORD begot me, the firstborn of his ways" (Prov. 8:22), so hotly debated during the Arian controversies in the early church, is furnished with an annotation that concludes with the statement, "Here that plurality of divine Persons is foreshadowed which was afterward to be fully revealed when Wisdom in the Person of Jesus Christ became incarnate."

The controversial passage of Isaiah 7:14, which is translated, "The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel," has, as one would expect, a lengthy annotation, part of which may be quoted here:

The church has always followed St. Matthew in seeing the transcendent fulfillment of this verse in Christ and his Virgin Mother. The Prophet need not have known the full force latent in his own words; and some Catholic writers have sought a preliminary and partial fulfillment in the conception and birth of the future King Hezekiah, whose mother, at the time Isaiah spoke, would have been a young, unmarried woman (Hebrew, *almah*). The Holy Spirit was preparing, however, for another Nativity which alone could fulfill the divinely given terms of Immanuel's mission, and in which the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God was to fulfill also the words of this prophecy in the integral sense intended by the divine Wisdom.

THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE (1970)³

In May 1946 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland received an overture from the Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane recommending that a translation of the Bible be made in the language of the present day. After several months of negotiating with representatives of other major Protestant denominations of Great Britain, as well as the University Presses of Oxford and Cambridge, a Joint Committee was formed which entrusted the actual work of translation to four panels of scholars, dealing respectively with the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, the New Testament, and the literary revision of the whole. The convener of the panel of Old Testament scholars was G. R. Driver of Oxford University; the convener of the Apocrypha panel was G. D. Kilpatrick, also of Oxford; and C. H. Dodd, professor emeritus of Cambridge University, served as convener of the New Testament panel and as general director of the entire project.

The procedure adopted for the work of the panels was as follows. Each book or group of books was assigned to an individual

³ See Geoffrey Hunt, comp., *About the New English Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

translator, who need not be a member of one of the four panels. The first draft of the translation was circulated in typescript to members of the appropriate panel, who worked through it individually and jointly in committee sessions along with the translator. When the draft had been thoroughly discussed and revised, perhaps several times, it went to the literary panel for suggestions on improving the English style. The final form of the version was reached by agreement between the two panels.

The New English Bible is a totally fresh translation; it is not a revision of earlier versions. The aim of the translators was to cut loose from all previous renderings and to "render the Greek, as we understood it, into the English of the present day, that is, into the natural vocabulary, constructions, and rhythms of contemporary speech. We have sought to avoid archaism, jargon, and all that is either stilted or slipshod."⁴ The result is a version that is marked by a vigorous and colorful English style, tending at places to be periphrastic with interpretive additions.

The following are examples of the insertion of words for which there is no express warrant in the text (for convenience of explanation the inserted words are italicized here; they are not italicized in the NEB): "Those who sleep *in death*" (1 Thess. 4:13); "*in the province of Asia*" (Rev. 1:4); "in his body of flesh *and blood*" (Col. 1:22); "*guardian* angel" (Matt. 18:10; Acts 12:15); "*human* body" (Rom. 12:4); "his *life's* blood" (Rev. 1:5); "tongues *of ecstasy*" (1 Cor. 13:8). In other cases the literal rendering is supplanted altogether by a periphrasis. Thus "scribes" becomes "doctors of the law" (Mark 15:31, etc.), the parable of the talents is now the parable of the bags of gold (Matthew 25:14-30); the word traditionally translated "saints" is rendered "God's people" (Col. 1:2, etc.); "beloved" as a term of address becomes "dear friends" (1 John 4:7, etc.); and the verb "it is written" (Rom. 12:19) becomes "there is a text which reads." Instances of this kind of paraphrase could be multiplied. Because of such freedom in rendering the text the principal reviewer of the New Testament of the New English Bible in The (London) *Times Literary Supplement* (March 24, 1961, p. 178) concluded his review with the words, "If one's sole concern is with what the New Testament writers mean, it [the new version] is excellent. It is otherwise if one wants to find out what the documents actually say."

With regard to the style of the New English Bible, one finds a mixture. To give their rendering contemporary flavor the translators include an occasional colloquialism, such as, "They has-

⁴ Introduction to the NEB New Testament (1961), x.

ten hot-foot into crime" (Prov. 1:16), and, "This is more than we can stomach" (John 6:60). On the other hand one notices also a tendency to use pedantically precise words, as well as rare and difficult ones. Examples include asphodel, batten, bustard, dis-train, felloe, hoopoes, keen (as a verb), lapis lazuli, panniers, reck, ruffed bustard, runnels of water, and stook. Even educated readers need a dictionary for some of these.

THE GOOD NEWS BIBLE (1976)⁵

The New Testament of the Good News Bible was issued in 1966 by the American Bible Society under the title *Good News for Modern Man*. The idea for such a rendering arose in the following way. For a number of years the American Bible Society had received requests from Africa and the Far East for a translation specially designed for those who speak English as an acquired language. Late in 1961 a secretary of a denominational Board of Home Missions in America wrote the Society inquiring whether there was available a rendering that would be suitable for use among new literates and among foreign language groups in the United States.

As a result of such requests the Bible Society decided that the time had come to prepare a common language translation of the scriptures in English. Robert G. Bratcher was invited to draw up initial drafts of the books of the New Testament. These were sent to translation consultants of the American Bible Society and to the Translations Department of the British and Foreign Bible Society. On the basis of comments and suggestions, Bratcher introduced a variety of modifications in the rendering. After its publication on September 15, 1966, other comments and suggestions from readers started coming in. On the basis of these, on October 1, 1967 a second edition was published, incorporating many changes in both style and substance. As a result of its subsequent use in many parts of the world, and of further comments received since then, a third edition was issued in 1973. Meanwhile work had already begun on the preparation of the Old Testament, and with the assistance of several other scholars this was issued in 1976; the Apocryphal or deuterocanonical books appeared in 1979.

The Good News Bible is not a word-for-word translation. Instead it adopts the principles of what Eugene A. Nida of the American Bible Society calls "dynamic equivalence" or, more re-

⁵ See Eugene A. Nida, *Good News for Everyone; How to Use the Good News Bible* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977).

cently, "functional equivalence." Customs not known today are reworded; thus, "anointed my head with oil" (Ps. 23:5) becomes "welcomed me as an honored guest." The rendering avoids slang but uses colloquialisms of contemporary American speech, such as, "She nagged him" (Judg. 14:17), and, "You smart aleck, you" (1 Sam. 17:28).

The version has won wide acceptance because of its ready intelligibility—even if there is some truth in the contention that it has made clear some passages that are unclear in the original.

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (1978)⁶

As mentioned earlier, when the Revised Standard Version appeared in 1952, it received severe criticism from many who regarded themselves as conservative in theology and politics. Subsequently several Bibles were published under conservative auspices (e.g., the Amplified Bible in 1965, the Modern Language Bible in 1969, and the New American Standard Version in 1971), but none of them succeeded in becoming the standard Bible for conservative Protestants.

The effort that finally culminated in producing such a version began in the 1950s when committees were appointed by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (in 1956) and by the National Association of Evangelicals (in 1957) to study the feasibility of preparing a new translation. In 1961 the two committees met together and merged as a joint committee. Over the next few years additional scholars became interested and were added to the committee, and in 1968 Edwin H. Palmer became the full-time executive secretary of the project. Work began in 1968, and the Gospel of John was published in 1969; in 1973 the New Testament was issued. Finally, after several Old Testament books appeared separately, the entire Bible was finished in 1978.

The New International Version is so named because more than one hundred translators from 34 religious groups, working in 20 teams in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, participated in the project. Each team was composed of five persons: two cotranslators, two consultants, and one English stylist. Each team's work went to an intermediate editorial committee (either of the Old Testament or the New

⁶ See Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); also issued as *The Making of a Contemporary Translation; New International Version* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987).

Testament), then to the General Editorial Committee, and finally to the 15-member Committee on Bible Translation.

Early in the development of plans for the project, financial backing for the work was promised by the New York Bible Society. It is understandable that the hourly wages for more than a hundred translators, the cost of their transportation as well as accommodation of room and board for the many months they met in committee, the many incidental expenses for secretarial labor, duplicating equipment, and other items eventually surpassed the budget the New York Bible Society was able to provide. Another source of revenue became available when the Zondervan Bible Publishers, having contracted with the New York Bible Society to be the sole commercial publisher in America for the new translation, advanced funds to help defray the costs. Eventually, according to James Powell, then president of the newly renamed International Bible Society, the total editorial cost reached approximately eight million dollars.⁷

At the publication of the completed version the reception accorded the new rendering was remarkable. Within the first year of its appearance the publisher, Zondervan Publishing House of Grand Rapids, had sold more than 1,200,000 copies. It is reasonable to assume that in time this translation may replace the King James Version as the Bible of conservative Protestants.

Five years after the publication of the New International Version the translation committee reviewed its work on the basis of criticisms that had been received. In the summer of 1983 the translators made approximately 930 changes which they labeled "limited revisions." In November 1985, 16 additional changes were made, and in November 1986 nine more revisions were added.⁸

The revisions are of different kinds. Some are revisions of footnotes, sectional headings, punctuation, and verse division. A large group of revisions substitute word equivalents, such as changing "dumb" to "mute" in Matthew 9:33 and "house-tops" to "roofs" in Luke 12:3. All in all, the revisions, though rather numerous, do not reflect a major change in translation philosophy.

The New International Version is more colloquial than the Revised Standard Version, less free than the New English Bible, and more literary than the Good News Bible. Occasionally the

⁷ Burton L. Goddard, *The NIV Story: The Inside Story of the New International Version* (New York: Vantage, 1989), 100.

⁸ For more information about these changes, see Robert P. Martin, *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1989), 711-72.

translators have taken liberties with the text, sometimes by omitting words and sometimes by adding words. In Matthew 5:2, for example, contrary to all the Greek manuscripts, the NIV simply omits the words "he [Jesus] opened his mouth" and provides no English equivalent for the phrase. On the other hand, for what appears to be doctrinal reasons, the translators have inserted the word "your" in Matthew 13:32 ("it [a mustard seed] is the smallest of all your seeds") and the word "now" in 1 Peter 4:6 ("the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead"), neither of which is in the Greek text.

REVISION AFTER REVISION

Several of the versions mentioned above have undergone further revision. Additional work by Dominican scholars in Jerusalem resulted in the production of a heavily revised French edition of *La Sainte Bible* (1973), which, in turn, was translated into English by Henry Wansbrough and other monks at Ampleforth Abbey in Yorkshire. Their work was published in 1985 with the title *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Besides correcting defects of the 1966 edition, attention was given to the reduction of masculine-oriented language in passages that involve both men and women. The translators state in the preface, "Considerable efforts have been made, though not all costs, to soften or avoid the inbuilt preference of the English language, a preference now found offensive by some people, for the masculine; the word of the Lord concerns women and men equally."

In 1978, only eight years after the publication of *The New American Bible*, plans were drawn up for a thorough revision. The preface to the revised edition of the New Testament (1986) reads as follows.

Although the scriptures themselves are timeless, translations and explanations of them quickly become dated in an era marked by rapid cultural change to a degree never previously experienced. The explosion of biblical studies that has taken place in our century and the changing nature of our language itself require periodic adjustments both in translations and in the accompanying explanatory materials.

In the new edition a particular effort was made to increase consistency of vocabulary. With regard to the Synoptic Gospels where, as mentioned earlier, the first edition was lax, special care was taken to reveal both the similarities and the differences of the Greek. Furthermore where the meaning of the original is inclusive of both sexes, the translation seeks "to reproduce such

inclusivity insofar as this is possible in normal English usage without resort to inelegant circumlocations or neologisms that would offend against the dignity of the language." In general the generic use of "man" is avoided, though it is retained where the committee could find no satisfactory equivalent.

Nineteen years after the publication of *The New English Bible* a revision appeared under the title *Revised English Bible* (1989).⁹ The changes in wording are in the direction of a more conservative and less adventuresome rendering. For example, in speaking of Achsah, instead of "she broke wind" (Josh. 15:18), the rendering is, "she dismounted." Instead of "all men's knees run with urine" (Ezek. 21:7), the text now reads "all knees will turn to water." Paul's advice, "Have nothing to do with loose liv-ers" (1 Cor. 5:9) now becomes, "Have nothing to do with those who are sexually immoral." On the other hand no change was made in Proverbs 14:29, "There is a rod in pickle for the arrogant," or in Song of Solomon 1:7, "That I [the bride] may not be left picking lice as I sit among my companions."

Attention was also paid to the inherent bias of the English language toward masculine nouns and pronouns. The translators state in their preface that in passages "of the Bible which evidently apply to both genders ... the revisers have preferred more inclusive gender reference where that has been possible without compromising scholarly integrity or English style."

In 1974 the Policies Committee of the Revised Standard Version, which is a standing committee of the National Council of Churches, authorized and charged the Standard Bible Committee to make necessary changes in the RSV in the following respects: (1) paragraph structure and punctuation; (2) the elimination of remaining archaisms, while retaining the flavor of the Tyndale-King James tradition; (3) changes in the interest of accuracy, clarity, and euphony; and (4) the elimination of masculine-oriented language relating to people so far as this can be done without distorting passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture.¹⁰

Working in accord with these four mandates, the translators followed the maxim, "As literal as possible, as free as necessary." As a consequence the NRSV, published in 1990, remains essentially a literal translation, expressed in reverent, dignified

⁹ See Roger Coleman, *New Light and Truth: The Making of the Revised English Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Bruce M. Metzger, Robert C. Denton, and Walter Harrelson, *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

language. Paraphrastic renderings have been adopted only sparingly, and then chiefly to compensate for a deficiency in the English language--the lack of a gender-inclusive pronoun in the third person singular number.

The NRSV is the most ecumenical of all English versions of the Bible. It contains not only the 66 books of the Protestant canon, but also the books of the Apocrypha, books that were included in the King James Version. To these apocryphal books, designated deuterocanonical by Roman Catholics, are added three other texts accepted by Eastern Orthodox churches, namely, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, and Psalm 151. The NRSV Bible is thus the only English Bible that contains all the books accepted as authoritative by Christians of all major denominations in the world.

CONCLUSION

Obviously English translations of the Bible differ for a variety of reasons. Not only do translators understand differently the meanings of various rare Hebrew and Greek words, but also the theory of the translation process may vary from formal equivalence to dynamic or functional equivalence. Furthermore the level of English and the style of syntax have been adapted to the reading public for which the revision is intended.

Throughout the last decade increasingly more attention has been directed to the problem raised by the traditional use of "man" and "men" where these words restrict or obscure the meaning of the original text. Besides the steps taken in correcting such matters in the latest revisions of the Jerusalem Bible, the New American Bible, the New English Bible, and the Revised Standard Version, the translators of several other modern English versions have also begun to pay attention to such matters. In 1992 the Good News Bible of the American Bible Society incorporated necessary changes in the elimination of many masculine-biased renderings concerning humankind. It has also been reported that by about 1995 the translation committee of the New International Version will decide whether to eliminate masculine-biased language pertaining to humankind. It also appears that Kenneth N. Taylor, translator of *The Living Bible*, is at work on what he calls *The New Translation*, of which the first section, entitled *The Letters of the New Testament*, has now appeared (1990). According to the preface of this edition, one of the outstanding features of *The New Translation* is "its correct translation of such statements as 'He who has the Son has life' so as to become 'Whoever has the Son has life.' Since God's grace is for men and

women alike, a valid translation must reflect this. It may be an unimportant point for many readers, but to others, both in and outside the church, it is important and helpful."

In the future, no doubt other translations of the Bible will be made into English, if for no other reason than the continuing modification of English usage and style. There will also be experimental renderings of audiovisual projects (such as those now being sponsored by the American Bible Society), with interactive multimedia software. A pilot project, involving the account of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20), is to be produced in modern video format, along with a computer-video interactive Bible learning resource.¹¹

The question is often asked, Which is the best version of the Bible to use? It is impossible to give a simple answer to this question. It is rather like asking, Which is the best place to go for a vacation? The answer depends on what the individual wants. So too with versions of the Scriptures; different translations are intended for different purposes. For detailed and intensive study, especially in preparation for teaching, a word-for-word translation would probably be best. In working with children and those for whom English is a second language, a dynamic equivalence translation probably would be preferable. In other contexts, - whether personal devotions, family devotions, meditation, or extended reading - readers today have available a rich variety of versions, and individuals can make their own judgments as to the most useful version. But in the last analysis, whichever version one prefers, the important thing is to read it and to respond to its message. As Johannes Albrecht Bengel put it succinctly in the preface to his 1734 edition of the Greek New Testament, "*Te totum applica ad textum: rem totam applica ad te*" ("Apply yourself wholly to the text: apply the whole matter to yourself").

¹¹ See the several articles on "The Scriptures in Audio Visual Format" in the *Bulletin of the United Bible Societies*, 160/161 (1991).

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