

**A FEW NOTES CONCERNING
TRANSLATION ETHICS WITH REFERENCE
TO THE BIBLICAL TEXT**

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Ever since the "craftiest" of the created creatures uttered this question: "Did God [Elohim] say?..." (Genesis 3:1, NRSV) the word from God has been under constant attack. Despite the severity and universality of the attacks, God has preserved His Word. The exact "how's and wherefore's" are largely beyond human scrutiny, yet enough is perceivable for observers to note the general parameters; both of the preservation process and of the attack processes. One of the current methods employed by the evil one, is the production of various texts which appear to be the word of God, texts which are also endorsed by those who appear certified or qualified to do so.

Since the confusion of languages occurred at Babel, one would be safe to assume that the communication of God's Word requires translation. Translation is a process of communicating between two different languages. The languages may be similar—Latin and French or very dissimilar—Swahili and Tagalog. The effort required to fully communicate betwixt various languages is related to the similarity/dissimilarity of the languages involved. This simple fact is in opposition to one of the tenets of modern linguistics:

...all varieties of language are absolutely equal as instruments of communication and thought. [1]

Modern linguists fear the "rating" of languages. This fear is connected with an aura of evolutionary concepts intermingled with anthropology which have invaded the domain of modern language studies. Language is an important part of culture, and they reason that all cultures are equal, and hence so are their languages! Value judgments are forbidden, societies which promote homosexual behaviors and which practice human sacrifice, are equal to societies which try to adhere to basic Judeo-Christian principles! Languages and societies are not "equal".

Modern linguists currently are concerned with the synchronic study of language usage. Hence, historical linguistics and a solid diachronic analysis of language suffer a lack of attention. Many theories associated with a synchronic observation of language usage are not relevant to the task of Bible translation. Bible translation is concerned with the written language, and many current language theories apply only to the oral use of language. Some of these "theories of speech" have polluted the science and craft of Bible translation. Unfortunately, *how* a translation sounds and its stylistic idioms seem more important than actual basic literal translation. Feelings become more important than accuracy.

In the English speaking world, Bible translation is controlled by several similar monopolies. These monopolies serve the interest of a single group. These monopolies produce,

nearly, every major Bible translation since the mid-twentieth century. Exceptions are noted and private efforts continue to surface, but they are not those which line the pews of most religious organizations, nor which are placed in public places. The Bible producing monopolies are: the *American Bible Society*, the *International Bible Society* and the *United Bible Societies*. Several smaller organizations also work under the umbrella of these three organizations. The intellectual foundation for all of these Bible producing/translation organizations is focused, primarily, within the *Society of Biblical Literature* (SBL), and to a lesser extent the *American Academy of Religion*.

The NIV (a product of the *International Bible Society*) relied upon the efforts of numerous evangelical scholars, yet the final editing was controlled by an editorial board whose agenda was concerned mainly with style as opposed to accuracy.

The SBL has over 5,000 supporting scholars from all the major universities and political centers. Universities such as Harvard, Brandeis, the Hebrew University, University of Copenhagen, Berkeley, Chicago, Cornell, Princeton, Yale, Oxford, and many evangelical seminaries, are staffed and even directed by members of this intellectual cartel. Various "grants" both public and private add monetary fuel to their largely tax deductible efforts. Young promising scholars are groomed and programmed to enter the rewarding and exciting field of Bible translation and associated literary productions, including manuscript (Qumran scrolls) research.

Major publishing houses are a business, if they do not exact a profit, they will cease to publish. The Bible is a best seller. In America alone, in 1996, well over 400 million dollars was spent purchasing Bibles. Most publishing concerns, (though not all) which undertake the production of a Bible, desire to be successful. A well made Bible is not cheap to produce—especially if high quality paper and bindings are part of the production. To insure a successful venture, publishers desire that the edition is produced by recognized (i.e. "vested") scholars. As with the case of the *International Bible Society*, many of its ground-level translators are on the "company payroll" financed by sales of the product. Associated with the production of the biblical translation, (in this instance the *New International Version*), are commentaries, concordances, and a vast plethora of associated spin-offs. Thus a growing industry exists and is thriving. In 1987, the *International Bible Society*, (formerly the *New York Bible Society*) had an operating budget of nearly 10 million dollars. In 1995, it had more than doubled to 22.6 million dollars. [2]

One of the most disconcerting aspects of the industry, is that some of the scholars which serve the *American Bible Society* and the *United Bible Societies* and staff the SBL, are not apparently, Christians; they deny the reality of miracles, they deny inerrancy, they deny a

literal creation, and treat many portions of the Scriptures as fabricated myths from bygone cultures! Divine inspiration simply does not appear as rational to many of these scholars. A few (naive in their association) may be genuine believers but their voice is not heard above the din of the humanistic oriented scholars.

To be free from such monopolies is not easy. To be an independent Bible scholar, and to not be dependent upon their "translations", one must learn the original languages and acquire good Greek and Hebrew editions and manuscript copies. Once years of study has given the student a working ability with the original languages, the communication of these profound Biblical truths often requires translation with a subordinate explanation.

When a sincere believer investigates the text and marvels at accurate insights, his/her perceptions will often offend the ecumenical religionists. Orthodoxy and dogmatic adherence to human creeds is demanded by the religionists. Individuals who hold to the literal plain meaning generated by a pure grasping of the Scriptures are branded as heretics. Publishing houses usually avoid such risky "deviates". Membership into career launching societies is quite often barred to those who cling to their learned observations which often stem from prayerful, personal study.

Actual translation from Koine Greek (the language of the original New Testament) to English is not as difficult as some translators seem to suggest. Some of the aspects of Koine Greek facilitate such translation. Koine Greek is not dependent upon word order as is English, though word order is used in a variety of ways in Koine Greek. Because Koine Greek is a highly inflected language, syntactical relationships are more concrete. That is, they are observable in the written text. English and many other modern languages rely heavily upon pragmatics and other paralinguistic techniques to effectively communicate, especially at the oral level. Written Koine Greek is not so hindered.

God's Word is preserved for us today, in ancient languages, their various speech acts are forever in the background. It is the written Word which commands our attention and study. God's foreknowledge has provided for this event, and His written word is completely understandable without assisting speech acts.

Further assistance for the translation of Koine Greek, in reference to the sacred Scriptures, comes from the fact that believers already know much of the Author's intent. Discourse analysis is not an ominous chore! God is communicating with very profound languages (Koine Greek, Hebrew and some Aramaic) each of which are highly inflected languages, well suited for written data. He is not trying to deceive anyone. Truths, prophecy, Laws and guides for modern living, are all clearly delineated in the Holy Scriptures. It serves as a guide to ancient history as well, as many archaeologists are increasingly learning. As

"Thy Word giveth light", the Word is well designed to be understood by all believers. Translation is included in God's efforts to provide His Word for all believers.

Since the intent of the Scriptures is fairly evident, the verbal contexts are grasped as accords to the Author's intent. This context often prescribes meaning (semantics) to the components of the context—words, phrases, sentences. Hence a context-free analysis is ludicrous as regards God's written Word. Yet many wild notions are derived from the Scriptures simply because the context is ignored. This ignorance has generated some corrupt "translations" as well. Many modern linguists focus upon context-free texts, which focus often utilizes principles foreign to proper Bible translation. The context of God's Word is primarily these overriding canons:

- (1) His Word is truth of a Divine origin ("God-breathed")
- (2) His Word contains parables, figures of speech, metaphors and other types of basic literary conventions, all should be translated literally
- (3) His Word is Holy, and is Alive, unique among all other texts!
- (4) His Word was originally penned via humans, and it miraculously incorporated the various personalities of these penmen!
- (5) It has singular interpretations, and also has a large variety of applications which stem from the singular interpretation of each passage.
- (6) It is coherent, complete, and self validating. It stands on its own.

Man, encouraged by the enemy, delights in dragging down the lofty precepts of the Scriptures. Vulgar (as in "rude") translations are one method of subjecting the Scriptures to human irreverence. The type or register, of a translation's language can reflect the level of respectability accorded to the text. Some English paraphrases are noble, and may indeed be based upon the underlying Greek text. However, many of the paraphrases radically alter the Author's intended expression. One current example is seen in this paraphrase of Philippians 3:2b,3:

...knife-happy circumcisers, I call them. The real believers are the ones the Spirit of God leads to work away at this ministry, filling the air with Christ's praise as we do it. We couldn't carry this off by our own efforts, and we know it. (from *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson. Published by NavPress).

Peterson, a former pastor and current SBL member, claims the above text is an actual translation. His precise words, from a 1993 interview in *Christianity Today* (December 13, 1993, page 41) are:

While we are calling what I've done a paraphrase, I've also had the feeling that it is true translation.

He supports his definition by declaring that the Koine Greek of the New Testament is "street language", and hence he feels justified in lowering its register to that of trash-level language. Indeed, Koine Greek was spoken by the common person, but the literary papyri, and texts by dignitaries in all parts of the Hellenistic empire use the same basic register in their written documents! Many non-literary papyri contain very poor language, common in many letters and private documents, the New Testament is not at this "low" level of register or style. Peterson could declare that Koine Greek, *as seen in the New Testament* is also the common language style of kings and the elite class. Instead he seems to falsify the issue. His paraphrase may have some good phrases, but its overall result is destructive to the original intent of the Scriptures, which is truth and a Divinely engineered sequence and form.

The *American Bible Society's* new paraphrase is also billed as a translation from the original Greek. (As was the *Good News for Modern Man* (the TEV)). This new paraphrase is called the *Contemporary English Version* (the CEV). In this highly promoted paraphrase, the venom injected by Eugene Nida (another SBL club member) is everywhere evident. Nida (an ABS paid scholar), suggested that the theory of "dynamic equivalence" be applied to God's Word. It was, and is no longer even presented as a theory. Indeed, transforming passive Greek structures into active structures, is passed off as proper translation. The *New International Version* is one of the exponents of this theory. Concepts and words are added to the passive constructions, agents and objects of the Greek verb which may not be actual agents or objects, are added to the verb so as to create a passable active construction in the English "translation". The results pervert the Word from God, they add man's assumptions to the original sacred text.

The tensions which exist betwixt extreme literal translations and paraphrases are very real. There are Greek terms which cannot be translated via a single English word. Greek verbs pack a lot of information into a single word, such as: the number of the subject, transitivity, duration, mood potentialities, aspect, and person. At times, one Greek word can be defined as a complete sentence. Hence, a strict literal word-for-word effort cannot perfectly express the much fuller Greek in English. Words are often added in the English translation, and a humble caution is experienced by translators who are believers. The goal is not a sweet sounding text, not a pretentious text, nor an overly simplistic text, nor one which only incorporates a supposed level of "dynamic [or "functional"] equivalence". The goal is **complete equivalence**, which is the term used by Dr. James Price. [3] Paraphrases fall far short of this goal.

Another theory propagated by E. A. Nida, is his concept of "inspiration". Dr. Nida does not claim that the original text is the focus of inspiration, rather he labors to shift the focus of inspiration to the reception of the reader. That is, he believes that the important aspect is: is the *reader* inspired when he/she reads the text? [4] Thus, concern over the original language and semantics is reduced. This sublime tenet is very popular among professional translators today. Emphasis is laid upon the "feeling" which the new "translation" generates. One suspects that it should also be "politically correct" as well.

Indeed, a number of translations reflect "political correctness". One only needs to compare the various editions of the NIV and the TEV to note changes which suit those who worship the mother of Jesus, or language which suits major religious sentiments (as per the change in Acts 2:38 of a preposition. The NIV's first edition's "translation" "...so that your sins may be forgiven" was quickly changed to the current "...for the forgiveness of your sins") —as it had offended popular Baptist theologies. Today numerous Baptist churches use this popular version [but only the second edition!] as their standard Bible. Imagine God being referred to as the "Father-Mother" (per the 1995 *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version*) which gender bending shows no respect for the original masculine terms.

Several modern "translations" are geared to the growing charismatic movement. One of the cornerstones of the charismatic movement is that God's written Word is not complete; and that today, men and women can "prophesy" and speak in "tongues" and actually **add** to the Word of God. One of the many texts, which forbids such behavior, is often mistranslated in many Bibles; it is I Corinthians 4:6, which reads thusly in the CEV:

Friends, I have used Apollos and myself as examples to teach you the meaning of the saying, "Follow the rules." ...

The TEV is here curiously similar! The NIV is a bit more accurate. Paul is referring to the *written* Word of God, the babes in Corinth (though "Spirit-filled") were going beyond the written text of the Word. Though this may be a "saying", Paul is, most likely, referring to texts just prior quoted (2:9), but he may also be referring to portions of the Law and his earlier epistles. All of these logical truths are lost when "written word" (γεγραπται) is mysteriously ignored. Here is the NASB's literal rendition:

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written...

The CEV's "Follow the rules" is a sad paraphrase, and it removes from the readers' mind the actual written text which is being referred to. Is this translation? Such attempts may generate the anger which God expressed to earlier "prophets" as seen in all of Jeremiah chapter 23, especially verse 30!

Another version is the *Black Bible Chronicles*, by a Ms. P. K. McCary (published by the *African American Family Press*). This paraphrase presents such sentences as; "Don't waste nobody." and "You shouldn't be takin' nothin' from your homeboys.", both are of the famous 10 commandments! Urban children who grow up learning the Scriptures in such an idiom may be forever hampered with a very distorted view of the actual nobility of the Holy Scriptures.

Translators themselves, may not be entirely to blame. Many educational institutions have adopted liberal linguistic theories, and have made them part of their curriculums. When aspiring translators are educated, their minds may be infused with some real liberal and twisted linguistic theories. For example some may encounter this text in their educational journeys, a text which appears to enlighten a student's mind as to the **real** understanding of the Greek verbal system. I am referring to the second edition of Dr. Stanley Porter's 1992 work entitled: *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, published by the JSOT Press, of Sheffield, England. [Porter is also a SBL club member]. The book is presented as a standard grammar of the NT. But, alas! it simply serves as a stage to present Stanley Porter's radical theories. Porter boldly, ignores the diachronic lessons which the Greek language exhibits. In declaring that the morphological form of a verb is one depicting aspect *as opposed* to tense/time, a deceptive foundation is laid. Mycenaean Greek, Classical

Greek, and Modern Greek demonstrate the clear fact that aspect *and* tense/time concepts are both employed in the form of the Greek verb [notably in the indicative mood]. He never does explain why he thinks the Koine Greek is exceptionally unique. His theory, though useful and enlightening, is misleading, especially when presented in what appears to be a general work. He also has some bold notions concerning conditionals and particles. The book should be titled: "Some Grammatical Theories..." .

Christians, need to be informed that some scholars who make their Bible translations, may be men and women who are not believers. Pagans with degrees have no business manhandling the Word from God (especially when textual variants are evaluated and decisions are needed). Yet, an alarming number of commercial Biblical translations are generated by extremely liberal theorists. *Wycliffe Translators* is infested with linguistic theories which were created in the dark recesses of pagan institutions by scholars on the tax deductible payrolls of various societies. These same scholars bring linguistic theories from liberal institutions and experiment with them upon the text of God's Word, and then sell (or "give") their experiment to the naive public or naive tribesmen! *Wycliffe Translators* have produced a few real fine translations, perhaps due to Divine intervention!

A Christians' defense against such onslaught is strategically diverse! Learning the original languages and using critical Greek and Hebrew editions is best (better: utilize copies of various ancient manuscripts of the Scriptures). Another tactic is to write letters to "Christian" (or evangelical) publishers, and demand to know the beliefs of the translators who make the books they sell. The ability of pagans to appear as angels of light is amazing. The Christian should also inspect the lifestyle and behaviors of these same peoples (if possible). Teachers and pastors have strict guidelines to adhere to, and it is the students' responsibility to "judge" or inspect his/her instructors (the epistles to Timothy and Titus are clear in the criteria needed for evaluating deacons and others). Another tactic, is to compare various translations. The indwelling Holy Spirit can, and does assist! However, very young or immature saints, may not have the experience necessary to recognize the urgings of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Certain past scholars were well known for their piety, they had a great and high regard for the text of God's Word. Most of the KJV translators were such men, Tyndale, and Martin Luther were such men. The Greek editions of S. P. Tregelles and Tischendorf are the works of men who dearly loved the Lord. Seek out the respected and well known versions which are reputed to be accurate. Being literal to the Greek and Hebrew is best. Deviations (paraphrase) have no true limits, a coarse-sounding literal translation is much better than a real slick-sounding paraphrase.

One example of a translation "problem" is literal translation of mid-Eastern cultural idioms from the Bible era, into a modern conception. Especially if the literal rendering has no current equivalent. For instance what does the "eye of a needle" convey to modern readers? or what does an "unveiled woman" indicate? One of my favorites is found in Romans 12:20b, (a quote of Proverbs 25:22):

...if [thine enemy] he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." (The *American Standard Version*, 1901.)

This passage has generated many unusual interpretations. Some modern "translators" would argue that the translation should pose the passage in modern idiom, in modern familiar concepts. Instead of "coals of fire" perhaps something like this—"when your enemy needs a jump (his battery is dead) give him a jump and a tank of gas". Though such a rendering communicates the concept (giving and forgiving) such rendering is not translation. Instead it is paraphrasing, it is interpretation, and it could do irreparable damage to the real integrity of the text. Translation is not commentary. In one sense, translation may be called interpretation, but only in that it is an effort to accurately render in precise fully equivalent terms the source language, interpreting the meanings of the words. Unfortunately many "translations" add theological and cultural/social interpretations into this mix. This results in what I term as improper mixing of translation and interpretation.

A paraphrase may be a form of translation, but it is generally not an accurate faithful rendering of the historical text. Imagine Shakespeare's shock if he heard his text as "friends, Romans, countrymen, give me your attention". The explanation of a cultural idiom belongs to the sermon, to the teacher. The urban-ghetto language used in the *Black Bible Chronicles* [see above] is an example of imputing cultural idioms into the actual sacred text. The text itself, should not be altered. Notes can be used (as in most study Bibles), but the altering of the literal text must not be tolerated, the standard is not to be recast, even though translations can improve and should improve. Rather than lowering the register (or level of speech style) of the Biblical text to that of "street-level" trash, why not patiently and lovingly, raise the language register of the young readers? This would be a true and valuable education.

God has provided teachers! Though good teachers may be rare they do provide an important function. The Jews of long ago, developed highly constructed Midrashes [commentaries] of the Holy text to explain and clarify and amplify, but they honored the text, it remained pure. Many of their Midrashes are questionable, yet they altered not the

text. The sermons and commentaries can change, but leave the text as is! A good accurate translation will preserve the original text's cultural idioms and nuances. Subjective assumptions belong in the notes.

Some paraphrases can be beneficial. Persons who are just learning English and children can benefit from using a paraphrase which is very simplified language. But the paraphrase must never be seen as the *standard* by which to fully evaluate God's Word. Some publishers avoid the term "paraphrase" and are claiming that their production is an actual "translation" (which designation implies a measure of accuracy, which is not seen in paraphrases). The *New Living Translation* now proclaims itself as a translation, instead it [i.e. the first edition] is a true paraphrase and one of the better paraphrases at that. Believers who are shopping for a Bible need to realize what a paraphrase is, and not to trust the publisher's promotional chicanery. Their definition of translation can be deceiving. One of the best tests I know of for recognizing the differences between a paraphrase and a true translation is this one. Using the original Greek text of the NT, have a translator render the Greek text into an English translation. Then, have another translator take that resultant English translation (not seeing the original Greek text) and "back-translate" the English into its original Greek form. Now, compare the two Greek texts; if both are almost identical, then we are dealing with true translation. If they are widely divergent, then a paraphrase (or other "method") is suspected.

Once a student is capable, the student should advance to a true, literal translation. Suggested versions which are literal would include: *The New American Standard Bible*, the *King James Version*, and the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV). Recommended paraphrases are: Philips, *New Testament in Modern English* and *The New Testament in the Language of the People* by Charles Williams, the first edition of the *New Living Translation* is also admirable.

According to *Publisher's Weekly* (in 1996) there were over 450 English translations and paraphrases of all or portions of the Bible, many of which vie hungrily for your attention and check book. Your Bible buying experience should not be haphazard, nor should you rely upon the advice of a salesperson. A pastor who has set a good example and who is truly humble may be able to offer helps and suggestions. Again it is best to take your time and to prayerfully examine each choice. A finely crafted leather-bound Bible can last you a lifetime, and become a valued and trusted companion.

The only weapon Satan fears, on this earth, is the written Word of God. It is the believers' Sword. If Satan cannot remove the Sword (Word), he will attempt to dull it. The great deceiver has found a very successful way to dull the edge, he uses men and women who appear to be qualified saints, mass produced pagan scholars. Satan is not so obvious as he was

in the garden, but his goals have not changed. He abhors any saint feeding upon the written Word and thus hopefully, growing and becoming an effective mature warrior. Going back to Eden, let each believer search and find out what does "God say"? It is not wise nor safe to let others (strangers!) feed you, especially if you can feed yourself. We live in a very dark dispensation!

In closing this essay on translation ethics, the author would like to apologize to any SBL members who are indeed genuine believers! It is known that such creatures exist! The SBL, on the surface, appears to be a harmless association. Via membership, a scholar is listed in the "directory" and is thus accessible, he/she need not contribute to the organization's publishing endeavors. He/she can be made to feel welcome in a powerful group environment. But the SBL must be evaluated on the basis of exactly what it does support and produce. The many monographs and publications of the SBL are 90% destructive liberal criticisms of the integrity of the inspired Scriptures. One only needs to examine their publications! However, some of their foreign language contributions are valued resources, but when dealing directly with the Holy Scriptures, one finds an unusually high number of truly destructive compositions. Hence associated scholars, are a part of this dark design [deny it though they may, it is a "dark design", an intended plot].

Other societies exist which do in fact honor the text of God's Word. Further, there are in *Wycliffe* and the *American Bible Society* genuine saints, doing a fine work for God, such believers know that this writer is not directing his warnings against them. It is hoped that these men and women will alter these societies for the good. Aristotle and Jesus Christ do not mix well, especially since "faith" and "miracles" supply such a poor premise in a syllogistic argument. God's Word shall endure forever. Aristotle's logic will perish.

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- [4] Nida, Eugene A.. and Jan De Waard. *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1986. p. 177. Dr. Nida's other works also expose his translation ethics as well.