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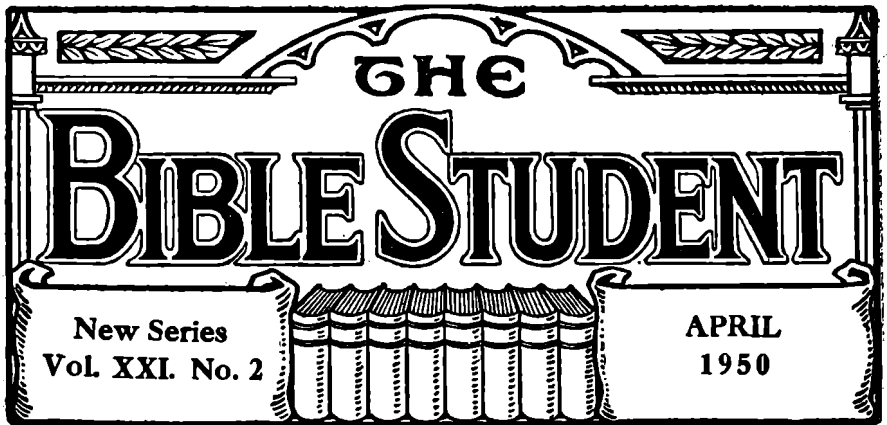
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What You Should Know ABOUT THE MODERN VERSIONS*

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Every now and then, Christian friends come to me and ask, "Can you recommend a good modern language version of the New Testament which I can give to a friend—something easy to understand?"

There are a number of good modern language translations. The object of this article is to classify some of them—especially the more recent—according to style, purpose and value.

In surveying New Testament translations, one finds considerable variety. Some versions are colloquial and idiomatic; others are literal to the extent of being awkward. Still others seem to strike a happy medium between the two extremes.

There are definite advantages in a simple, easy-to-read translation. Many readers who have not been reared in Christian teaching find it difficult to understand the three-hundred-year-old language of the King James Version. They are unaccustomed to its formal, majestic phraseology, its antique literalism and expressions no longer used or understood. Although some of these archaisms have been weeded out of the American Standard Version, its over-precise rendering of words and phrases still make it difficult for some to grasp.

In putting the New Testament into more understandable, everyday language, some translators have gone too far in their effort to be colloquial and idiomatic. Some have added explanatory words and phrases, occasionally even whole sentences, to aid the reader in understanding the trend of argument. This is all right as long as a person recognizes it for what it is—a more or less free paraphrase of the New Testament, rather than an accurate translation.

Take, for example, Arthur S. Way's *Letters of St. Paul and Hebrews*. I quote a passage selected at random, his rendering of 1 Corinthians 9:1—

"I have met two protests—1, the protest of your intellect, which objects to curtailment of its 'rights'; 2, the protest of your appetite, which objects to curtailment of pleasures not sinful. My answer to the first is my own example. Am I not emancipated from the Mosaic Law? Am I not a true apostle? Have I not with my own eyes seen Jesus our Lord? Is not your life in union with our Lord in my work?"

* We are indebted to the courtesy of MOODY MONTHLY for this article (slightly abridged). A previous article by the same writer on the same subject appeared in "B.S.", issue of July 1948, which is worth re-reading.

When this is compared with the King James Version, the fact that this is more than translation is very evident. You will notice immediately the extended transitional and explanatory words, occupying almost two-thirds of the passage. It is somewhat of a translation and commentary wrapped up in one package.

A very recent translation of this kind is found in J. B. Phillip's *Letters to Young Churches*. Its free colloquial style is evident in every sentence. Observe his treatment of 1 John 3:2—

“Oh, dear children of mine (forgive the affection of an old man!) have you realised it? Here and now we *are* God's children. We don't know what we shall become in the future. We only know that, if reality were to break through, we should reflect His likeness, for we should see Him as He really is!”

This highly interpretative paraphrastic style is interesting, to be sure. But one can readily see that it goes beyond the bounds of accurate translation and is of little use for meticulous Bible study. The translator himself speaks of this in his preface to the work.

It is also interesting to note Phillip's departure from some of the commonly employed New Testament terms, such as “grace,” rendered “His generous dealing” (Rom. 3: 24); “glory of God” given as “beauty of God's plan” (Rom. 3:24); and “righteousness” in 2 Timothy 3:16 translated “good living.” We would object to a general departure from the use of such significant biblical words, but this kind of treatment is of some value in causing us to define our terms more closely.

In 1941 *The New Testament in Basic English* was published. Basic English is a simple form of the English language which, with a comparatively small vocabulary, is designed to convey the sense of anything which may be said in English. Only one thousand different English words have been employed in this version. The work is designed to be used as a simplified form of the New Testament in English wherever the English language has taken root. One can readily see its value, especially for those with but a limited knowledge of English. Naturally, because of its restricted vocabulary, it has shortcomings. The translators have found it difficult to parallel the Greek text and bring out delicate shades of meaning. All in all, the Basic New Testament reads something like an elementary school reader.

Less colloquial and of higher literary quality are such translations as those of Weymouth, Moffatt, Goodspeed and Verkuyl. Among liberal circles, the translations of Moffatt, the English

scholar, and Goodspeed, the American scholar, are most popular. While we must not minimize the excellent literary and idiomatic quality of the Moffatt and Goodspeed versions, caution must be taken in their use because of the liberal bias which now and again crops up in them. Weymouth and the more recent Verkuyl translations are without this bias, although notes introduced in the latest editions of the Weymouth version show definite liberal trends.*

A significant translation comes to us from a contemporary Catholic scholar, Monsignor Ronald Knox, of the English hierarchy. Its full title is: *The New Testament in English, a New Translation*. Knox has followed the Vulgate. Where the Vulgate is ambiguous, the Greek text has been consulted. Where the Vulgate reading differs from the Greek, the meaning of the Greek is given in a footnote.

Knox's work has some excellent qualities. It is written in clear, readable language for everyday people. The translator manifests an appealing narrative style. He does not overstrain in his attempt to be idiomatic. One sees in this work evidence of fine scholarship and a reverent spirit. Here is an example of his style—

"Once justified, then, on the ground of faith, let us enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, as it was through him that we have obtained access, by faith, to that grace in what we stand. We are confident in the hope, attaining glory as the sons of God; nay, we are confident even over our afflictions, knowing well that affliction gives rise to endurance, and endurance gives proof of our faith, and a proved faith gives ground for hope" (Rom. 5: 1-4).

One might expect theological and ecclesiastical bias to creep in here and there, especially in the footnotes. This is the case with the standard Roman Catholic versions, such as that of 1941, in which the obvious meaning of many texts is distorted by material in the footnotes. But this is not so with Knox's translation. Most of the notes are of a critical and historical nature and have only a very slight Roman Catholic flavor.

Perhaps, as a Bible student, you are looking for a modern translation which conveys some of the finer shades of meaning in the Greek text, such as the time element and kind of action found in Greek verbs, case function of nouns, and the more specific meaning of prepositions. As you can readily see, in-

* For a more detailed evaluation of the Weymouth and Verkuyl translations, see the author's first article.

clusion of such elements in the text is likely to make a translation somewhat cumbersome, perhaps robbing it of some of its easy-to-read quality. Yet there are several translators who have brought out the shadings of the original text in very readable versions.

One of the best of these is Williams' translation, *The New Testament: a Translation in the Language of the People*. The volume has been out of print for some time, but is now available once more. For accuracy and perspicuity of translation, this is one of the finest private translations produced in recent years.

As students of the Greek New Testament are well aware, the present tense in the Greek possesses the predominant idea of continuing action; the imperfect, durative action in the past; the aorist, punctiliar action; and the perfect, completed action. Observe how Williams treats the Greek verbs in his rendering of Luke 7:22, 23. This is typical of his handling of the present tense—

“And so He answered them, ‘Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind *are seeing* and the crippled *are walking*, the lepers *are being healed*, the deaf *are hearing*, the dead *are being raised*, and the poor *are having* the good news *preached* to them.’” (Italics designate the verbs in question.)

Again, note his rendering in a yet more significant passage, the verbs of which have definite theological implications when considered in the light of their tense—

“But if we *continue to live* in the light, just as He is in the light, we *have unbroken fellowship* one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son *continues to cleanse* us from all sin. If we claim, ‘We are already free from sin,’ we *are deceiving* ourselves and the truth is not in our hearts” (I John 1: 7, 8).

The problem of the believer's relation to sin is further clarified when we read: “No one who continues to live in union with Him practices sin” (I John 3:6).

In like manner the continuing or durative action of the imperfect tense is brought out in such passages as Luke 7:44: “She *continued to wipe* them off with the hair of her head, and she *kept right on kissing*”; and Luke 8:23, “*were filling up . . . were in impending peril.*”

Few translators have done much with the aorist other than employing the historical past in the English. But notice how Williams brings out the punctiliar idea (action as point of time):

“Then He aroused Himself and reproved the wind and the surge of the water, and they *stopped at once and instantly there came a calm*” (Luke 8: 24).

Bible students will be pleased with his unusual but accurate rendition of Matthew 16:19—

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you forbid on earth *must be what is already forbidden* in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth *must be what is already permitted* in heaven."

This is the only modern translation, ever to come under my scrutiny, which conveys the true force of the future perfects in the Greek text. (Young's *Literal Translation* has a somewhat similar rendering.) By thus taking into account the significance of the tense used in this verse, the difficulty and misunderstanding often connected with it, are cleared up.

Williams has also taken care to convey the various shades of meaning found in certain forms of Greek nouns. The meaning of the passage becomes more specific when we read in Romans 15:5: "May God who gives men *patient endurance* and *encouragement*, grant you such harmony with one another . . ."

Finally, Williams translates certain New Testament words in their fuller meaning. In passages where the forensic sense of *righteousness* is called for, he uses the expression *God's way of man's right standing with Him* (Rom. 1:14; 3:21, 22). The word *gospel* becomes *good news*, and *grace* is rendered *unmerited favor*.

Montgomery's *Centenary Translation* also has many excellent qualities. It is published in small, handy form in clear, readable type. It comes a bit closer to the earlier standard versions in its style than do some of the others. I frequently use it in my home for devotional reading and find it well suited for such a purpose. Notice the style of the translator as seen in the translation of John 1:1-5:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was face to face with God, and the word was God. He was face to face with God in the beginning. All things came into being through him, and apart from him nothing that exists came into being. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overwhelmed it."

The treatment of this passage shows that the translator has adhered fairly closely to the word order of the older standard versions, and at the same time has brought out more pointedly the force of the Greek.

It may be that you are looking for a literal translation, that is, one which follows the Greek text very closely, even to the very order of the words. The practical value of such a translation is somewhat questionable. After all, it is the *sense* of the Greek text with which we are primarily concerned, and to adhere slavishly to the word order of certain Greek idioms many times

makes no sense. Each language has its own peculiarities, and it is for the translator to ascertain as nearly as possible the true meaning of the Greek text, then to convey that meaning through careful choice of the English idiom. This does not mean that he should play fancy-free with the Greek text, without adequate reason for changing word order and grammatical structure. The translator must carefully study the grammatical and syntactical elements of the original text, and then set about to render it into English—good English—not as Spurgeon said of the Revised Version: “strong in Greek and weak in English.”

But for the purposes of Bible study one may have some reason for making use of rigidly literal translations. The best known of those in this category is that by Robert Young. His manifest aim was to give a rigidly literal translation of the Scripture (including the Old Testament), reproducing the words in their original order and representing them as far as possible by the same word. The work boasts of being valuable in making clear what the Scriptures “really say.”

On reading this translation one finds that it is not as rigidly literal as it purports to be, but reads almost as does the King James Version. There are even passages where the translator’s literalism has obscured rather than helped convey the sense. We see it in 2 Thessalonians 1:3—

“We ought to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because increase greatly doth your faith, and abound doth the love of each one of you all, to one another . . .”

How much more natural and clear it would be to render this in good idiomatic English, such as—

“We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, as is fitting, because your faith is abundantly growing, and the love of each one of you toward another is continually increasing.”

* * * * *

Here are some final suggestions for the use of New Testament translations. First of all, do not be restricted to any one translation. Remember that in some degree, any translation possesses an element of interpretation. In the case of the modern highly idiomatic translations, however, the interpretative element is sometimes too prominent. For sound Bible study it is best to have either the King James Version or the American Standard Version at your elbow for comparison. When making preparation for a message or Sunday school lesson, you will find it helpful to have several translations on hand.

Furthermore, be alert for any possible *theological bias* in a translation. As we have pointed out, there are instances where liberal writers have wrongfully permitted liberal ideas to affect their translations. Moffatt and Goodspeed are the outstanding examples. Another we might mention in this connection is the translation of Knoch, *The Concordant Version*, in which basic laws of translation have been laid aside, and which sets forth Knoch's own heretical ideas.

One other suggestion may be made: modern translations should be chosen with a view as to whether they are to be used for general reading or for meticulous study. For all around use, the writer considers Montgomery's and Williams' translations as two of the best.*

“ACCESS”

A Word Study

BY W. WILCOX

We are constantly reminded of the enrichments resulting to the believer by his being saved of God. In the vocabulary of the New Testament, words with common meanings transfigured by new spiritual content are employed to bring home to us the fulness of that which God has done for us in Christ. Such words may not occur often, but they come into sentences pregnant with meaning and lighting up with new ideas the context in which they are found. Such words provide a fascinating study to the Bible Student.

We have such a word in that rendered “access”, found in the New Testament in the noun form three times, Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12. Of this word Wuest, in one of his inimitable word pictures, says that in the papyri the word has been found used in a technical sense of a landing stage. It is thought that it was used as a nautical term of the approach of a ship to a haven or harbour where it could land. Thus the total idea would be “access into and rest in a haven or harbour.”

In Rom. 5:2, the R.V. shows the force of the perfect tense

* Apropos to the above article it will be of practical interest to read our reference to the “Students’ Guide to the Versions of the New Testament” in NOTES OF NEW BOOKS on page 4 of cover in this issue.—Ed. “B.S.”