

"Preparing a New Bible Translation Today"

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In each of the last two years Christians of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod have celebrated unusual blessings from the hand of a gracious God. 1975 was an occasion for reviewing God's grace in calling the synod into existence and giving it 125 years of life and activity. 1976 was another year to recall God's special mercy, this time in permitting America to serve as a haven for the Gospel for two centuries.

Both essays to be read at this convention have been planned to call attention to still another evidence of God's amazing grace, evidence no less impressive than the century-and-a-quarter life of the synod or the two-century life of our fatherland. Both convention essays deal with the theme of Bible translations. The convention theme, "Publish and Conceal Not," implies another blessing of God, a blessing not as obvious, perhaps, but every bit as impressive. The sovereign God, who dwells in a light no one can approach, has given us reliable information -- the only reliable information -- about who He is, and who we are, and what the purpose of life is. And unlike previous generations of Christians, we can enjoy this written revelation in such abundance, in such a variety of translations, that we actually have to make a choice. We must choose which translation we want to use as we conduct our private meditations and our public worship, and as we plan our synodical program of printed materials for years ahead.

It was not always so. Christians of other ages have not been as fortunate as we. In the 14th Century John Wyclif, a professor of theology at Oxford University in England, was attacked for his earnest attempt to give the people of England the Holy Scriptures in their mother tongue. Even Wyclif's death didn't stop the church's attack on him. 31 years after his death the church authorities excommunicated him and attempted to destroy everything he had written, including his translation of the Bible. In the 15th Century John Huss, a priest in Prague, Czechoslovakia, undertook to revise the Czech Bible and to publish it. For his attempts to publish and conceal not he was deposed, thrown into a dungeon, and then burnt at the stake by Holy Mother Church.

About the time Luther published his German New Testament, an English priest named William Tyndale wanted to do for his native land what Luther was doing for his. Such vast changes had taken place in the speech of Englishmen since the days of John Wyclif a century and a half earlier that Tyndale felt the former translation was no longer usable. He managed to finish his translation of the New Testament,

but before he could finish the translation of the Old Testament he was arrested by the English church authorities, strangled, and burned at the stake.

It is distinct evidence of God's mercy to us that we can, in good conscience and without hindrance, engage in the work which occupied Luther for several decades of his life, the work which cost William Tyndale his life -- the work of helping to prepare a Bible translation which will speak God's timeless truth in the language of people today.

Some of you will remember that the matter of a new Bible translation is not a recent development in the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod. If you can remember back 25 years, you may recall that when the Revised Standard Version of the Bible was published in 1952, the synod appointed a committee to study it. The 1953 synod convention Proceedings contain the report of that committee. Let me quote just a sentence from it: "The appearance of the Revised Standard Version has incited anew the study of Bible translations, also among us, and made us conscious anew of weaknesses in the Authorized Version. ..." That convention resolved that the synod prepare and publish a trial translation of some New Testament book. Two years later the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly printed a trial translation of the Epistle to the Galatians.

That was 25 years ago. Since the members of WELS are still interested, and properly so, in contemporary Bible translations, the topic assigned for this essay is

PREPARING A NEW BIBLE TRANSLATION TODAY

There are particularly three problems that confront the Bible translator, and he must address himself to all three. Discussion of the translator's response to each of these problems will form the three parts of this essay. The translator must, first, determine as closely as possible the wording of the original text. Then he must determine precisely the meaning of that original text. And finally he must find the right English words and expressions to convey the meaning of the original text.

I

Part of the problem facing the 20th Century translator is one that is not immediately apparent to the Christian who reads, say, the King James Version. Before we can begin the actual work of putting the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures into English, we must determine the wording of the original text.

The time allotted to this essay in the convention's schedule does not allow for a thorough treatment of this subject, which is a complex one. In our seminary's

curriculum, eleven weeks of one New Testament class are allotted to a study of just this matter. If the essayist's presentation, therefore, seems sketchy, he will take part of the blame, but the rigid time limitation ought to share part of it, too.

When the Bible translator sits down to translate the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures, his work is complicated by the fact that we today no longer possess the original documents of the Bible books, the so-called "autographs," the very documents written by Moses and David and Isaiah and Matthew and Paul and all the rest. If we still had those autographs, the work of compiling a Hebrew Old Testament and a Greek New Testament would be simple indeed. But, in God's good providence, the autographs have all been lost.

Why were they lost? Well, for a number of reasons. For one, things wear out. Moth and rust corrupt, and the process of decay took its toll. Add to that the fact that ancient Jewish authorities treated worn-out Bible scrolls the way Americans treat a tattered American flag; they destroyed them. And, finally, one dare not forget the destruction of precious documents perpetrated by the enemies of Christ's Church, from the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians down to the Romans, who as late as 300 A.D. ordered all the sacred books of Christians to be burned.

All right, then; if all of the original documents of the Bible have been lost, what does a Bible translator have to work from? What the Bible translator works with (or, for that matter, the pastor beginning his sermon study each week) is an edited text drawn from various copies of the autographs and from translations made from these copies. These are the precious manuscripts and fragments written on brittle papyrus or on leather and stored in the sands of an ancient Egyptian cemetery or in the storage room of a Cairo synagog or in a cave on the west shore of the Dead Sea or salvaged from a wastebasket in a monastery on Mt. Sinai. Lacking the autographs, the original documents, scholars have reconstructed the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament by cross-checking thousands of copies and translations of copies. But what complicates the problem is that the many copies and translations of copies which we possess are not all in agreement.

The reason for this is not hard to understand. All of the ancient manuscripts were handwritten. Can you imagine yourself copying an entire Bible book without making any spelling mistakes, especially if you're not a very good speller to begin with, as some of the early copyists were not? Some of the variant textual readings are simply errors in copying: a word misspelled, a word omitted, a word written twice, a whole line or two omitted. Then, years later, other copyists

made the same kind of corrections many of us do when we read a new book and come across a misspelled word or an obvious mistake.

How does the Bible translator deal with the problem of variant readings in Old and New Testament manuscripts? Well, we could do what the Muslim caliph Othmann did when he discovered variant readings of the Koran. He chose one as the official text and destroyed all the rest. He managed to standardize the text of the Koran, but at what cost?

The Bible translator, on the other hand, will instead try to evaluate the various manuscript readings, to try to come as close as possible to the original reading. The following are just a few of the criteria used to evaluate variant readings. Normally the older reading is preferred to a later reading. The more difficult reading is normally preferred, since the copyist was more apt to clarify the wording than he was to make it harder. The shorter reading is usually preferred, since copyists were more apt to insert explanatory material than to omit any of the sacred text. The reading with the widest geographical support is preferred over readings of manuscripts which come from the same area of the early Christian Church. You can imagine that evaluation of the variant readings is a matter of concern for the Bible translator, who must ask himself: "Which of these readings belongs in the text and which in a footnote?"

The work of comparing and cross-checking variant manuscript readings is known as "textual criticism." Unfortunately, this has been criticized by some Christians as unbecoming to a Christian Bible student. But that is not being fair. Textual criticism is not in itself hostile to faith or destructive of it. It was mentioned before that this discipline is part of our seminary curriculum. All of our translating from the Old Testament and the New Testament is done from texts of the Bible which list the important variant readings in a paragraph at the bottom of the page; these are called "critical editions."

Let us be frank to admit that opinions of scholars may at times differ on whether a given passage belongs in the text or in a footnote. Just one example. The King James Version (KJV) includes 1 John 5:7 in the text. The passage reads: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." The second half of this passage, the reference to the Trinity, is not found in any Greek manuscript or translation before the 15th Century. The overwhelming weight of the ancient texts is against it. Luther quite properly omitted it in his German Bible. A century after Luther's death the passage was added to the text of Luther's Bible, and it is still in the German Bible.

When it comes to evaluating the ancient manuscripts, the 20th Century Bible translator has an immense advantage over his counterparts of several centuries ago. Some of the most helpful manuscripts for determining the original Hebrew and Greek text came to light after the KJV had been prepared. Let me mention only three:

Less than 20 years after the KJV was published, an important New Testament manuscript, Codex Alexandrinus, going back to 450 A.D., was presented to the King of England. Another ancient document is Codex Vaticanus, a magnificent manuscript which contains the Old Testament and most of the New Testament and which has been dated at about 325 A.D. This precious document, considered a chief authority among the older texts, was kept unused in the Vatican library at the time the KJV was prepared; it was not made available to the editors of a Greek text until 1868!

One very valuable manuscript discovery occurred during the lifetime of most of the convention delegates. In 1947 several Arab goatherds looking for a stray goat in the wild and stony desert west of the Dead Sea stumbled upon some dusty scrolls in a cave. One of those scrolls was later found to contain the 66 chapters of the Prophet Isaiah. The scroll has been dated at about 100 B.C. Now remember that the KJV translation of Isaiah was made from a manuscript dated at about 900 A.D. You see that the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll is almost a thousand years earlier than the Hebrew Isaiah manuscript from which the KJV translators worked. It is amazing testimony to the faithfulness of God in preserving His Word down through the ages that the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll has basically the same text as the much later one from which the KJV was translated.

There are variant readings, a number of which are quite generally adopted as solutions to difficult passages in the KJV translation of Isaiah. In about a dozen instances, the New International Version (NIV) translation of Isaiah follows the reading of the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll in preference to the much later Isaiah manuscript. In one instance (Is 14:3-4) the difference in readings amounts to spelling a Hebrew word with an "r" instead of a "d." In another instance (Is 21:8) letters are transposed, and the meaning of the word is changed considerably. To see what a difference the shifting of a single Hebrew letter makes, compare the translation of these two Isaiah passages in KJV (which followed the later manuscript) and NIV (which followed the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll):

Is 14:3-4 (KJV): "And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, That thou shalt take up this proverb against the King of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!"

NIV: "On the day the Lord gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended!"

Isaiah 21:6.8-9 (KJV): "For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. ... And he cried, A lion: ... And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen."

NIV: "This is what the Lord says to me: 'Go, post a lookout and have him report what he sees.' ... And the lookout shouted ... 'Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: "Babylon has fallen, has fallen!"'"

The first duty of the translator, then, is to adopt the most accurate and most reliable text of the passage before him. He can do this only by comparing the variant textual readings that have come to us. As he does this, the translator will have to admit that although there are several thousand variant readings, generally they are not very significant. Accepting any of the variant readings would not change the body of Christian doctrine. This surely is evidence of God's providential care. Not only did He mercifully give us the message of heaven in the language of earth; He preserved that sacred text down through the centuries for us.

II.

At the time the KJV translators did their work in the early 1600's, the world had only one body of Hebrew literature, and that was the Hebrew Old Testament. Now imagine for a moment that you are one of the KJV translators. You're translating an Old Testament book, and you come across a Hebrew word you don't recognize. You check it out and discover that the word is not found in any other Old Testament book, either. It's used only once in the entire Old Testament. How are you going to translate that word? You've got a problem, haven't you? The problem grows in size when we learn that there is not only one such word, but 1500 Hebrew words used only once in the Old Testament. Here we can see the second problem involved in preparing a new Bible translation today: determining the meaning of the original text.

Back to that translating table in the early 1600's where you've just come across a Hebrew word you don't recognize and which is not used anywhere else in the entire Old Testament. (Remember, too, that three-and-a-half centuries ago there was no other body of Hebrew literature to which you could go for help in defining the unknown word). What could you do? Since words, like people, often have families, you could take a guess at the family the word belongs to. That can be risky

business, though, and there are times when the KJV translators guessed wrong. A better way to arrive at the meaning of an unknown word is by studying the setting, the context in which the word is used. Or there might be a parallel passage elsewhere in the Scripture which could shed some light on the difficult word.

It is again as we determine the meaning of the original text that the person preparing a new Bible translation today has a distinct advantage over translators of previous centuries. The spade of the archeologist has placed language resources at our disposal which shed valuable light on the ancient languages in which God gave us His written revelation. The late 19th Century saw the papyrus discoveries in Egypt -- partly from tombs, partly from the wrappings of crocodile mummies, mostly from rubbish heaps. These documents -- official reports, private letters, wills, business contracts, invitations to dinner -- date roughly from the 4th Century B.C. to the 4th Century A.D. The reason why these papyri are of such interest to us is that they were written not in classical Greek but in the everyday Greek spoken by the common people of that period. Since that is the Greek the Holy Ghost chose to use for the New Testament, the papyri discovered at the close of the last century are of tremendous help for understanding the language of the New Testament.

In the 20th Century archeological research has made several discoveries which shed much needed light on the language of the Old Testament. Until about 40 years ago the only Hebrew literature the world had was the Old Testament. And then in 1928 the plowshare of a Syrian farmer struck a stone, a stone which turned out to be a tombstone from a buried civilization. Several years later, thousands of clay documents were uncovered at that site which gave us a vast literature in an ancient language related to Hebrew. These were the discoveries at Ugarit, several hundred miles north of ancient Israel. With this second body of ancient Hebrew literature many Old Testament word meanings became clearer, and our understanding of Bible backgrounds grew.

To see just one example of how the Ugaritic discoveries have helped to determine the meaning of a Biblical word, consider Isaiah 2:12, 15-16. KJV translates: "The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty ... and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures." The last word in that sentence is a word the KJV translators didn't know what to do with, and so they guessed at its meaning (and nobody can blame them for doing that, either, since this is the only time the word occurs in the Old Testament). But the Ugaritic documents uncovered in

the early '30's use that word to describe a ship. NIV therefore translates the same passage:" The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty ... for every lofty tower and every fortified wall, for every trading ship and every stately vessel."

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls 30 years ago has already been referred to. Here was another treasure trove of ancient Hebrew documents, some of them manuscripts of Old Testament books, some of them commentaries, others religious literature of various kinds. By giving us these documents God has provided us with still another point of reference for studying the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

A little over a year ago two Italian archeologists surprised the world by announcing the discovery of another large body of documents in a language related to ancient Hebrew. At Tel Mardikh, forty miles south of Aleppo, Syria, these archeologists located the site of Ebla, an ancient kingdom of which we had previously known nothing. 15,000 clay documents have been uncovered from the royal archives dating back to several hundred years before the time of Abraham. There are lists of government officials and of taxes paid; there are trade agreements and international treaties; there are scientific lists of animals and birds and fish; there are hymns to the gods. There are even 32 tablets with comparative word lists in two languages. Once again a merciful God has seen fit to place into our hands some more tools for studying the ancient language of the Old Testament. The vast amount of Hebrew literature discovered in the last forty years will help the student of the Old Testament to be more aware not only of word meanings but also of language patterns and figures of speech which Bible writers used, and of customs to which they referred.

To translate any passage of the Bible, whether for a new Bible translation or in preparation for next Sunday's sermon, a man must determine the meaning of the original text. Just in this connection, can you see the wisdom of the synod's decision years ago to require that all men studying for the ministry in the Wisconsin Synod be able to read the original languages of the Bible? Protestant seminaries all across America do not expect their pastors to acquire Greek and Hebrew reading skills. And Lutheran seminaries which at one time included Greek and Hebrew in their course requirements are dropping these required courses and making the study of the original languages optional for the future pastor.

Martin Luther showed where he stood on the matter when he said: "As much as we love the Gospel let us hold on to the languages in which God gave us His Word."

III.

All right; the Bible translator has compared the variant readings of the passage under consideration and has determined what the original text was. He has studied the various words and phrases and knows what they mean. Now the biggest job lies ahead. Luther used to emphasize that one can be very smart in the ancient languages and yet be an incompetent translator. After all, learning a foreign language is more or less scientific process which is within the reach of almost anybody of average intelligence. But to carry the message of a Bible passage from one language into another language is an art. That is the third and greatest problem anyone will face who prepares a new Bible translation today: finding the right English words to convey the meaning of the original text.

What are the guidelines that a Bible translator ought to follow as he seeks to say in understandable American what the holy men of God originally said in Hebrew and Greek? At the risk of oversimplifying, let me mention four guidelines, four criteria, which characterize a good translation. It must be faithful to the original text. It should be beautiful. It should be idiomatic. And of course it must be clear.

Before applying these criteria to a number of Bible passages in the balance of this essay, it ought perhaps be emphasized that there will never be anything like a perfect translation. No translation receives unanimous support. The KJV was not universally accepted at the time it appeared. One of the foremost British scholars of the day declared the new translation to be "so ill done" that it would grieve him as long as he lived. "Tell his Majesty that I had rather be rent in pieces by wild horses than that any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor parishes." He actually counted the "idle words" in various passages for which, he said, the translators would have to give account on the Day of Judgment. (Bruce, The Books and the Parchments, p. 219).

As people who believe in the divine inspiration and the absolute inerrancy of the Scripture, we must insist that a translation be faithful to the original text. Of course the translator should remember that he's translating into a modern language, but it's even more important that he remember he's translating from an ancient document.

Isaiah 7:14 contains the well-known prophecy: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." A number of contemporary Bible translations translate that passage: "A young woman is with child ..." -- a translation which is unacceptable because it does not say what the original text says.

Isaiah 53:5 reads in the NIV: "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Dr. Beck's translation of that same passage begins: "He is punished to make us happy ...". But does the text speak about being happy or being at peace with God?

In 1 Timothy 3:2 St. Paul gives an admonition regarding pastors. "A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife." The Revised Standard Version translates: "A bishop must be above reproach, married only once." This translation imports a thought into the passage which is not there in the original text.

A second criterion for measuring the acceptability of a new Bible translation is its beauty. Admittedly this is a highly subjective criterion, and opinions will vary. But surely we can agree that a translation which is stilted where the original is natural, which is heavy when the original is graceful is not a good translation.

You are familiar with St. Paul's admonition to Timothy: "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content" (1 Ti 6:6-8). Now compare that with the same passage in a recent Bible translation: "Of course there's a big profit in religion if you're satisfied..."

There should be rhythm in a Bible translation, and a sense of proportion, and simplicity, and stateliness, and precision. Ideally, as the 20th Century reader reads the translation, he ought to receive an impression similar to the impression the first reader received when he read the original document. The Scripture deserves a translation that is not only faithful but beautiful as well. Ordinary, everyday American speech -- "coffee and doughnuts," if you will -- is not what most Christians are looking for in the sacred Scriptures. Newspaper English is a cut below what the Bible reader wants. Your essayist does not like the imperative "Don't!" in the Ten Commandments. "Don't steal!" doesn't sound right to this pair of ears. God didn't give us the Ten Suggestions but the Ten Commandments. "You shall not murder" (NIV) sounds more like the Lord of heaven and earth speaking to His creatures.

A third criterion. 350 years ago a man offering a proposal of marriage to his lady might have said: "My beloved, my bowels yearn for thee." But you didn't say that to your wife when you proposed. Or what would you think if this evening the delegate sitting next to you said: "Let us go hence to the coffee shop over against the bank?" You'd probably think this was a joke. The person preparing a new Bible translation will want to be sure the language of the translation is

Idiomatic.

Every language has its own idioms, its own speech patterns, and these cannot always be transferred from the original language to the modern one. There are differences between the way we form sentences today and the way Hebrew and Greek writers formed them. Most Hebrew sentences begin with the word "And." For example, of the 31 verses in the first chapter of Genesis, 29 begin with "And." The American language does not construct sentences that way, and an idiomatic translation will speak the way we speak.

At the time of the New Testament, Greek hearers apparently were accustomed (or had the intelligence) to hear long and complicated sentences which are simply not used today. A good translation of the New Testament will therefore break up St. Paul's long sentences into two or more shorter ones.

Dr. Eugene Nida, veteran Bible translator, tells of a letter he received which said: "I would be so glad to help in translating the Bible, and if you would send me a dictionary and a grammar of some of these primitive languages, I would be happy to dedicate my spare time to the translation of the New Testament" (Nida, God's Word in Man's Language, p. 56). But translating word for word, as if each Hebrew or Greek word had an exact equivalent in English, is not translating. And yet some of the more literalistic translations of yesterday and today move in this direction.

"A man is justified by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Ga 2:16) may have been the way people talked in years gone by, but today we would say: "A man is justified by faith in Jesus Christ." Small details of idiom can make or break a translation. The New American Standard Bible quotes the prophet Isaiah as saying: "My loins are full of anguish" (21:3). But who talks like that today? "My body is racked with pain" is what we would say.

Will the average Bible reader understand Proverbs 28:25, which says: "He that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat," without knowing that "being made fat" was the Hebrew way of saying "he shall prosper"? If the original passage contains an idiom, an expression, which we don't have in English and which would therefore mean little or nothing for the contemporary reader, then the careful translator will not translate that passage word for word. Luther emphasized this truth when he wrote: "What purpose does it serve unnecessarily to remain with the Hebrew words so rigidly that people can get no sense out of them?"

In Luke 12:35-36 KJV quotes Jesus as saying to His disciples: "Let your loins be girded about ... and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord." All of

us know that 20th Century English doesn't have the idiom "Gird your loins about." That's a phrase, therefore, which you wouldn't want to translate word for word, but idiom for idiom. Listen to how the Good News Bible translates that passage: "Be ready for whatever comes, with your clothes fastened tight at the waist." What is the reader supposed to think when he reads that last statement? By contrast, NIV gives that idiom its 20th Century equivalent: "Be dressed ready for service ... like men waiting for their master to return."

2 Samuel 22 records a song of praise which David composed after the Lord had given him victory over his enemies. KJV translates verse 46 in this way: "Strangers shall fade away, and they shall be afraid out of their close places." That's a literal translation from the Hebrew, but what does it say? Compare that with the NIV translation of the same passage: "Foreigners lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds."

A good translation is idiomatic. Luther, who knew that, once said: "I made Moses talk German. I made him so German nobody knows he was a Jew." Luther was a master translator.

One final criterion by which to measure a Bible translation is its clarity. A good translation is clear. According to Luke 1:78, Zechariah said at the birth of his son: "The dayspring from on high hath visited us." What's "dayspring?" Will the average reader know that it's "the rising sun from heaven?" Paul's admonition to the Thessalonian Christians is translated "Comfort the feebleminded" (1 Th 5:14). Is it immediately clear to you that Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians to "Encourage the timid"? At Mt. Sinai Moses spoke to the Israelites about the blessings God would shower upon them if they would remain loyal to Him. One of those blessings is described in Leviticus 26:10. KJV translates: "Ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new." Is it clear from that translation what blessing God is promising His people? The tentative NIV translation of that promise of God to the Israelites reads: "You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new."

In preparing a contemporary Bible translation, the translator ought to strive to speak clearly. Very frankly, right here is where, in the opinion of many, KJV is no longer meeting the deepest spiritual needs of many people. They don't have too much difficulty reading the Gospels, but they are experiencing a great deal of difficulty reading the epistles of Paul and Peter, and most of the Old Testament. To a greater degree than many of us like to admit, the KJV uses words which have gone out of use, others which have changed in meaning, and language

patterns which sound distant and remote from the 20th Century. A question that was plaguing the congregation in Corinth at Paul's time was the question: "IS it right for a Christian to buy and eat meat from an animal that was sacrificed to an idol?" According to KJV, Paul's answer to the question was: "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (1 Co 10: 25). 17th Century Englishmen knew that the "shambles" was the meat market, but does that help the 20th Century American?

One of the most beautiful chapters of Old Testament Messianic prophecy is Isaiah 9. You will immediately recognize verse 2 ("The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light...") and verse 6 ("For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"). The verse which introduces these precious prophecies of the Savior is of course the first verse of the chapter. It refers to Zebulun and Naphtali, two northern tribes of Israel, tribes which would be the first to feel the invasion of armies invading from the north. Listen to Isaiah 9:1 in KJV: "Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations." And then follows the prophecy of the Savior: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light..."

In the essayist's view, that translation is simply incomprehensible. It's passages like this that have made the Old Testament difficult for people to read in KJV. Your essayist recalls some years back when a young lady from the congregation he was serving asked whether she could discuss a problem. She was an intelligent young lady, committed to Jesus Christ. She happened to be a student at Dr. Martin Luther College and later spent several years as a Christian day school teacher. She stated her problem very forthrightly: "Pastor, I've been trying to read the Old Testament, but I'm having trouble. I'll begin reading Isaiah or Micah, and I'll get stuck; I won't understand what I'm reading. So I'll start over again, and again, and half an hour later I haven't made much progress at all. This young Christian was embarrassed at not being able to read God's Word with greater understanding.

She was and is not alone in this difficulty, and translations like the translation of Isaiah 9:1 read a moment ago may just be part of the problem. It is the essayist's conviction that KJV is not meeting the deepest religious needs of God's people today. Listen to another translation of that same passage, which intro-

duces two beautiful prophecies of the Savior: "Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" (the tribes which were first to be hit by the invaders from the north) "but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles by the way of the sea, along the Jordan" (Galilee was the scene of Christ's ministry). "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light ..." "Unto us a child is born..."

A good translation is clear. If it's to meet the needs of people, a Bible translation should be intelligible not only to the scholar, but also to the unlearned reader. One grows tired of hearing people say: "Anybody who wants to can find his Savior in the KJV." Now surely we all agree that faith in Jesus Christ is the absolutely fundamental article of Christianity. But in His Word God has more to tell us than just this fundamental article. Think of how the apostle Paul criticized the Corinthian Christians for being immature. They had made such slow progress in Christian knowledge that he says: "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it" (1 Co 3:2). Mature Christians need to advance beyond the bare fundamentals of Christianity and not remain spiritual infants (Heb 5:11-14). But this means they've got to be able to read more than the narrative sections of Genesis, a few psalms, and the four Gospels with understanding and profit. All of Scripture is given by inspiration of God. All of Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. God holds us accountable for reading Isaiah and Hosea as well as Matthew and Mark.

It's natural for each of us to think of a contemporary Bible translation in terms of himself. "Do I like this new translation?" "Do I need a new translation?" But is this the only question we should be asking? Have we been called to be Christians only for our own sake? Is the Church of Jesus Christ an ark which safely carries its occupants in watertight compartments through stormy seas and polluted waters to a heavenly destination? Or did God also intend the Christian Church to be a lifeboat, moving in among drowning people, reaching out to help them escape that pitchblack nightmare known as hell? The God-given assignment of the Wisconsin Synod, as stated in its constitution, is "to extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church." In determining our attitude toward Bible translations, we can ill afford to ask only: "Does this translation meet my spiritual needs?" We need to ask also: "Will this translation help to meet the spiritual needs also of those outside of God's family, those who have never learned to call God 'Father'?" Or is it possible that this translation

is putting an obstacle, a roadblock, in the way of the inexperienced person who simply cannot comprehend its language?"

The matter of preparing a new Bible translation today is not a matter we can afford to take lightly. The officers of the synod who assigned this topic for discussion at this convention were not merely providing the delegates with some busy work. God has put His written revelation into our hands -- to hold and to share. Being stewards of God's sacred secrets is solemn business. But it is our Father's business, and He has made it our business.

John C. Jeske

