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The Translation of the Bible into Slovak

Karel Gabris

Historical Survey

Christianity came to Slovakia, which forms the eastern part of the Czechoslovakian Republic, partly from the western Frankish Empire, and partly from the East when in the 9th century the missionaries Cyril and Methodius came from Saloniki. Their great missionary success among the Slavic people was made possible to a certain degree by bringing with them those parts of the Bible which they had already translated into Old Slavonic, a language which was understood by the people of the Great Moravian Empire. After arriving in what is now known as Slovakia they then translated the whole Bible into Old Slavonic for which St. Cyril had invented characters. The translation was made from the Greek, the Old Testament as well. An old legend from that time tells us that St. Methodius had translated the Holy Scriptures, except the books of the Maccabees, in six months. This translation spread very quickly among nearly all the Slavs, and continued to be used by them even when it was shortly after superseded in Slovakia, where it originated, by the Western Latin translations.

Until the end of the 18th century, this translation in Old Slavonic was the only Slavic translation which was made in Slovakia. But, in the meantime, Czech translations were introduced in Slovakia; moreover, these translations were in a language which was readily understood by the Slovak people. The Czech translation of the New Testament made in 1475 became the foundation of several Czech translations. After the invention of printing, the so-called Venetian Czech Bible of the year 1506 became widespread in Slovakia, then the Nurnberg Czech Bible and especially the numerous editions of the Czech Bible published by Melantrich, the old Czech publishing house. But it was the so-called Kralicka version which became of greatest importance for the Slovak Evangelicals. This translation was sometimes even published abroad; it was made by the translation committee of the fraternity "Unitas Fratrum" during 1579-94, and among the translators was also the learned Slovak, Dr. Jesenius. The Slovak Evangelicals have used this translation until the present day. It is a translation in the Czech language which is very beautiful and which

is closely related to the Slovak language, but today its language is rather antiquated. Therefore the Slovak Evangelicals of the 20th century have undertaken to make a Slovak translation which will completely meet the devotional and church needs of the Slovak people.

It is true that there is a 19th century translation in Slovak, but it cannot be used. It was made by the Catholic Canon Georg Palkovic, who translated directly from the Vulgate without taking into consideration the original languages; it is also inadequate from the linguistic point of view, since it was not made in the written language now used, but in a dialect. Catholic theologians have published other translations of Holy Scripture also, especially in the 20th century, but these have little value because of an excessive dependence on the Vulgate, and also because of their poor literary quality.

The Evangelicals, who form a fifth of the Slovak people (they number about 450,000) were, until recent times, also very much attached to the Kralicka Bible, because it provided them with documentary proof that they belonged to the groups of adherents of the Bohemian reformation. As long as the language of the Kralicka Bible was perfectly understood in Slovakia, a few improvements of this 16th century translation sufficed. Daniel Krman and Matthias Bel were especially noted for such emendations and they published their edition of the Kralicka Bible in Halle in the year 1722. The first Evangelical Slovak translation of the whole Bible was made by J. Rohacek who translated from the original languages, and whose translation is very valuable because of its recognition of the original text. However, this translation again employs almost exclusively a single dialect of Slovak, is slavishly literal, and is therefore in many respects unusable.

A New Slovak Translation — Principles

The Slovak Evangelicals have undertaken a new Slovak translation by means of Translation Committees which started work about twenty years ago. The results of this work could be seen first in 1942 when the New Testament was published, and again in 1952 in a revised edition of this translation, to which was also added the translation of the Psalms. At the present time work is in progress on the translation of the other Old Testament books as well as on a further revision of the New Testament.

a) In making this Slovak translation, use is made of previous versions, but it remains in principle a new translation from the original languages, while the most recent exegetical and theological knowledge regarding the text is utilized. Therefore the translators make use of the new editions of the Nestle New Testament and Kittel's editions of the Old Testament. Besides that they take into consideration all modern translations and exegetical works. Some difficulty arises only because of the lack of new exegetical works from time to time.

The use of the original Biblical languages should afford the translators the fullest knowledge of the original meaning of the Biblical text. It is not here, of course, a question of verbal inspiration but

rather the realization that when we follow the Biblical languages, we are nearest the words of God's revelation as it has come to men since early times. This theological insight makes it possible to implement the principle of the Reformation that the Scriptures should be relied upon to the exclusion of all possible additions from tradition. For the Slovak Evangelicals this is of especially great importance since, as a minority church, they constantly have to base their position on the Bible. For this they need a truly faithful translation of the Bible.

b) In taking into consideration already existing translations, the new Slovak translation pays attention not only to modern versions, but also in particular to the Kralicka Bible used hitherto. Whenever possible the wording of the new translation keeps close to that of the old; in this manner an easy transition is made possible from the previous translation to the new one. We have to remember that the Slovak Evangelicals have an especially keen sense for a certain traditional concept of everything connected with the church, and that therefore too great a deviation from the generally known Bible translation would be dangerous. However, this consideration for the old translation should not, of course, influence the accuracy and precision of the new translation.

c) Finally, there is the very important principle of striving for absolutely the right literary style in the new translation. When we remember that in public worship the Slovak Evangelical church has used up till now almost exclusively the language of the Kralicka Bible —a language which is basically Czech, and although very near to Slovak, has nevertheless many differences—we see the great difficulty in this translation: We have to create a new linguistic style of the Slovak language which has not existed up until now. Many people feel that the Slovak wording of the Scriptures has lost something not only of the antiquity, but also of the sanctity of the language. The translators have to strive for the preservation of the religious character of the language, but at the same time to make use of a really living language which is perfectly understandable to the readers. In the past the Bible translation helped to develop through the years a certain linguistic style also for liturgical purposes. It is expected that this new Bible translation will also be instrumental in creating a new style of language which will be used in the liturgy. Therefore, the translators' responsibility is the greater, since they have to create a style which can be employed in worship.

The secularization of the entire way of thought which also reveals itself in the language of modern man, creates difficulties in the translation, because the users of the new translation only very rarely meet with religious expressions in daily life. In the past even the everyday language of the Slovak Evangelicals was filled with Biblical expressions and idioms; it is not so now, however. This requires that the translators choose those expressions: (a) which in everyday language do not have a different or even opposite meaning from that required in the Bible; (b) which make the meaning of the text absolutely plain to the reader; (c) which are usable for liturgical purposes.

The translators must in particular consider how they should translate the figurative language of the Scriptures, whether and to what extent quite new comparisons may be used. By taking over the old (although quite Biblical) figures and comparisons there is a danger that the text may become unintelligible or that it may even convey to the modern reader something entirely different from its true and original meaning. Today we cannot expect the reader to have special aids at his disposal for in the Slovak language commentaries on only a few books of the Bible have been published, and even those are unobtainable for most readers. Therefore the text of the new translation must be completely unambiguous for every reader.

The Method of Work

A special method of work has been developed for the translation of the Slovak Bible. It is worth while considering this method and making such comments as might further improve the work of the committees.

The new Slovak translation is the work of the committee. As the translation is being made on account of the needs of the church this to a certain degree determines the method followed.

At the present stage there is a difference in the method followed for the Old Testament, of which an entirely new translation is being made, and that for the New Testament, the already completed translation of which is undergoing its second revision. But in both parts of the Holy Scriptures one can observe very well the whole methodological progress as it makes itself felt, little by little, throughout the whole Bible. In particular we notice that the first translation does not (necessarily) give us the definitive translation; it still needs to be checked in practical use.

a) The first part of the work was done (and is still being done in the Old Testament) by the various translators who each independently translated several books or parts of the Bible. They make their translation from the original languages but, at the same time, compare their translation with several other versions. Sometimes they record possible alternative renderings. Their work is not subjected to any restrictions of time; the important thing is that their translation conveys the meaning of the original as well as possible. At the same time they record in a card file the individual Hebrew and Greek words together with their respective translation of these words. This card file is used for the work of the Committee and serves the translators as a kind of concordance for consistent translation.

b) The translation then comes before the Editing Committee, which carries out the second stage of the work. This Committee is formed of theologians and experts in the Biblical languages, and takes more into consideration the functioning of the language into which the Bible is being translated; it therefore secures the help of linguists who already in the committee stage draw attention to the use of certain Slovak terms (and especially idioms). It examines one section of the Bible after the other; during the reviewing of each book, its translator

is also present even if he is not already a member of the Editing Committee. All members have the proposed translation in front of them; they read it together and make their comments on it. In the second session of the Committee they decide on the wording which seems most theologically appropriate. They then submit this text to the linguists who are not connected with the Committee. These check the translation, but only with regard to the purity of the language and disregarding the fact that it is a translation of the Bible. Their comments on the purity of the language, in turn, are submitted to the Committee in a further session, and this meeting is the last one before the translation goes into print. At the same time, an adjustment for concordancy is made so that the translation of the various words in the original are consistently rendered throughout the different books of the Bible. Of course, they are not always translated in exactly the same way, but nevertheless attention is paid that different expressions are not used for example for identical phrases in the Synoptic Gospels. Similarly, care is taken that there is the necessary agreement between the text of the Old Testament and quotations from it in the New Testament, especially when these are literal.

The Form of the Edition

After all this has been done, one can start with the preparations for the printing. The Biblical text which has previously been printed with separate verses, is now divided into sections according to the meaning of the text. Individual verses are now marked with the verse number in small type above the text. (In the first edition of the New Testament in 1942 the verses were marked in the margin of the text. This did not work well and, therefore, in the second edition the verses were marked in the text, that is to say with the verse numbers above the text.) Each section has a heading which indicates the content or the situation which it describes. In the translation of the Psalms, each Psalm has a section heading in two parts: the first title is usually an introduction of the first words of the Psalm, while the second title denotes the character of the Psalm. For example, in Psalm 95 there is this double section heading: "O come, let us sing unto the Lord—Invitation to praise God and to obedience towards Him"; or in Psalm 104: "O Lord, how manifold are thy works—Praise of God's creation".

The edition of the new translation has no extensive notes on or explanations of the Biblical text. Only when it is necessary to explain features of Biblical culture for a better understanding of the text is the meaning of a translated word given in a foot-note. In these cases it usually involves weights and measures, the value of money, and so forth. The translators discussed for a long time the possibility of making more extensive annotations. However, it was decided to print some brief notes, because (a) the translation has not yet been finished in its entirety, (b) until now we do not possess commentaries in Slovak on the whole Bible, (c) due to the differing stages of the work on the Old and New Testaments (as mentioned above) it is not possible to make uniform comments in the Old and New Testaments.

Appropriate Biblical maps are also being published with the translation.

In the edition of the New Testament, quotations from the Old Testament are indicated at the bottom of the page. In the third edition of the translation of the New Testament it is intended to note also the parallel passages within the New Testament. The literal quotations of the Old Testament are printed in the New Testament in bold type. In this manner, the Old Testament text can easily be distinguished from the New Testament text.

Where it became necessary to amplify the text for better understanding, these additions were put in round brackets ( ); the words enclosed in round brackets are thus the supplement by the translator. Whenever departures are made from Nestle's text of the New Testament, and whenever the text is a translation of a special, different Biblical manuscript, it is put in square brackets [ ]. The reader is therefore able to gain some impression as to the unequivocal or ambiguous meanings of important passages of the Biblical tradition, or of the different readings in the various manuscripts.

The hitherto existing editions of the New Testament have been printed without an introduction; this will be issued as soon as the whole Bible is translated.

The method of work here described was pursued during the translation of the New Testament and is still being employed for the work on the Old Testament. But after the publication of the New Testament the necessity of further revision soon became apparent. Ten years after the first edition (1942) the second text was published (1952), and now the third text is in preparation. In this revision work we are profiting from the experience gained from use of the translation in practical church life. Already we have found that the translation has been very well received and it should develop into an important element in the life of the Church, as should be expected from a good translation.

Special Points on the Translation

The translators have to overcome difficulties which result from the difference of language structure between the Biblical languages and a modern Slavic language such as Slovak. This difference is in quantity as well as in quality.

The difference in quantity is, for example, that the original Biblical wording has to be translated in a much more round about way by using more words or even a whole extra clause. For example: *ho patêr humôn ho ouranios* in Mt. 5:48 is translated by a whole relative clause "your father who is in heaven". In particular, Greek participles have to be translated by using whole clauses, as also the genitive absolute and the accusative and infinitive constructions.

There are more differences in quality:

a) The Slovak language is very sensitive to the correct use of the pronoun, especially the reflexive pronoun, and also the proper rendering of the genitive. When translating the objective genitive and the subjective genitive, both the theological as well as the linguistic

aspects have to be considered in order to obtain an adequate rendering. For example: Rom. 8:35 *agapê tou Christou* cannot just be translated "love of Christ", for this could be either subjective or objective genitive and it would be impossible to recognize the true meaning. It has therefore to be translated "the love which Christ has toward us".

b) Many passive forms in the Greek have to be translated in the Slovak language by means of the active or middle form. Originally, the linguists asked for the removal of all the passives from the translation. But for theological reasons not all the passives could be replaced by active or middle. For this reason some of the passives remained in the translation even at the cost of a linguistic concession, so that the true meaning of the text is expressed. In other passages the passive form had to be rendered by long circumlocutory clauses in the active mood.

c) There is a great difference between the Biblical languages and the Slovak language in the use of the negative. Slovak expresses negation by the double negative, e.g. "nobody . . . must not", unlike German or English, for example, which do not have this double negation. This use of two or more negatives necessitates the repetition of some words in the translation, in order to make the meaning clear. For example, in Jn. 3:16b there is a special problem in translating the Greek *pas* (everyone, whoever): when constructed with the participle *pisteuôn* (who believes), the word *pas* should be translated "nobody", for it receives its quality from the negative expression *mê apolêtai* (should not perish). However, when constructed with the positive *echê* (have), this translation is wrong and *pas* should be translated "everyone". Thus we translate the word *pas* twice although it occurs only once in the original. If the word were translated only once, the meaning of the text would be reversed. We translate therefore ". . . that *nobody* who believes in him should perish, but that *everyone* have everlasting life." And even here it would be best to repeat after the word "everyone" the qualification "who believes in him".

d) Individual Hebrew and Greek expressions in the original necessitate a translation in various ways, as in all modern translations. Here the maintenance of a 'concordance' by the translator is very important so that the expressions used should not contradict each other.

The poetic parts are translated in free verse. This style is used in several New Testament passages and in the whole book of Psalms. It is expected that it will be employed to a considerable extent in the translation of those books of the Old Testament which are written as poetry in the original. As in all modern Bible translations, the problem of poetic form, which is quite different from the poetry in the Biblical languages, has to be overcome. But these are general problems, and have been mentioned in the article by Hilaire Belloc, "On Translation", *The Bible Translator,* Vol. 10, No. 2.

I only mention here some of the peculiarities of the translation of the Holy Scriptures in the Slovak language. I hope to return some other time to further peculiarities.

Usage of the Translation

The new translation is being done by the Committee of the Evangelical A.B. [1] Church. But this Church is not making it for itself alone; it is expected that other reformed churches in Slovakia will also use this translation. The New Testament and Psalms will be introduced into the services of the Slovak Evangelical A.B. Church this year (1959). The parts of the Bible not yet translated will continue to be taken from the Kralicka Bible. This Kralicka Bible will remain an important monument of the moving history of the evangelical churches in Slovakia. In the future it will be used for worship in the home. The introduction of the new translation is no expression of ingratitude towards the translation which has meant so much to the church. This introduction of a new translation is demanded by the necessity of implementing the principle of the Reformation that there should be an intelligible text of the Bible.

The work on the Bible translation is accompanied by the increasing interest in our Biblical inheritance. After the translation has been finished it will be possible to proceed towards thorough expository work. For this we shall be guided by the great experience we have acquired when translating the Bible.

Mark 10:11 Once Again

Peter Katz

It is only now that I happen to see Dr. Turner's discussion of *μοιχᾶται ἐπ' αὐτήν* (Vol. 7, Oct. 1956, pp 151f.). It makes the striking point of introducing as a parallel the Septuagint of Jeremiah 5:8 *ἕκαστος ἐπὶ τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ πλησίον αὐτοῦ ἐχρεμέτιζον.* In another Jeremiah passage, 13:27, the two nouns are even combined, *καὶ ἡ μοιχεία σου καὶ ὁ χρεμετισμός σου.* One might therefore be inclined to accept his suggestion that adultery with the second woman is the true translation, which is confirmed by the *ἐπί* found in Jer. 5:8.

I cannot tell whether this interpretation was considered by earlier interpreters. However, at least to one reader it seems precluded by the train of thought common to Mark and its synoptic parallels. In Mark 10:11f. mention of the "other woman" is strictly confined to *γαμήσῃ ἄλλην.* Everything else is concerned with the original couple, first with the husband, then with the wife, and *καὶ ἐὰν αὐτή* (or the variant reading *καὶ ἐὰν γυνή*), as is easily realized, refers back to *τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ. Μοιχᾶται ἐπ' αὐτήν* does not add materially to what is expressed by the verb alone in the parallels, and in Mark 10:12. Moreover, this *ἐπ' αὐτήν* is very different from the *ἐπί* found in Jer. 5:8; *neighing to* indicates the direction, but the same could not be said about *ἐπ' αὐτήν* in Dr. Turner's interpretation. This *ἐπί* c.acc. stands for a *dativus incommodi:* she suffers from his action. Thus Wellhausen: "bricht *ihr* die Ehe".

[1] A.B. = *Augsburgische Bekenntnis,* i.e. Augsburg Confession.