

9. The information given should make it clear that the translators' recognition of untranslatability is a token of respect for the Bible, not a proof of depreciation.
10. You shall not fear the void, but the fear of the void.

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“THOU” AND “YOU” IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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One problem in translating the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is that of the frequent alternation between “thou” and “you” forms. This problem is usually neglected by native speakers of English using modern translations, since in modern English “you” is used for both singular and plural.

The Greek text, however, moves frequently between the equivalents of “thou” and “you,” raising two questions:

- (1) What is the reason for this alternation? and
- (2) How should it be dealt with in translation in the majority of languages, which distinguish between “thou” and “you”?

The evidence can be simply summarized. At this stage in our discussion, we take as a starting-point the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), a relatively literal translation based on a critical text, but we shall replace “you” by “thou” forms where the Greek uses the second person singular. The same result could be obtained more simply by using a rather literal modern translation in another language, such as the French *Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible* (TOB), but since we are writing in English we shall start from NRSV.

There are eight “thou” passages, of varying length, in the Sermon on the Mount:

- (1) “So when thou art offering thy gift at the altar . . . Truly I tell thee, thou wilt never get out until thou hast paid the last penny” (Matt 5.23-26; vv. 21-22 and 27-28 use “you” forms.)
- (2) “If thy right eye causes thee to sin . . . ; it is better for thee to lose one of thy members than for thy whole body to go into hell” (Matt 5.29-30; vv. 27-28 use “you” forms, and vv. 31-32 use third person forms, of which more later.)
- (3) “But if anyone strikes thee on the right cheek, turn the other also . . . Give to everyone who begs from thee, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from thee” (Matt 5.39b-42; vv. 38-39a and 43-48 use “you” forms.)
- (4) “So whenever thou givest alms, do not sound a trumpet before you . . . and thy Father who seeth in secret will reward thee” (Matt 6.2-4; vv. 1 and 5 use “you” forms.)
- (5) “But whenever thou prayest, go into thy room . . . and thy Father who seeth in secret will reward thee” (Matt 6.6; vv. 5 and 7-9a use “you” forms.)

- (6) “But when thou fastest, put oil on thy head . . . and thy Father who seeth in secret will reward thee” (Matt 6.17-18; vv. 16 and 19-20 use “you” forms.)
- (7) “For where thy treasure is, there thy heart will be also If then the light in thee is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matt 6.21-23; vv. 19-20 and 24-34 use “you” forms.)
- (8) “Why dost thou see the speck in your neighbor’s eye . . . then thou wilt see clearly to take the speck out of thy neighbor’s eye” (Matt 7.3-4a and 5; vv. 1-2 and 6 use “you” forms; v. 4b is quoted speech using the singular.)

Some of the transitions from “you” to “thou” (and back) are rapid. To quote passage (5), for example, in its context:

“Truly I tell *you*, they have received their reward. But whenever *thou* prayest . . . *thy* Father will reward *thee*. And whenever *you* pray”

Few commentators give a comprehensive explanation of these variations. The UBS Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew comments on 5.23: “**You** is singular, as if Jesus is speaking to each individual among the disciples,”¹ but does not offer any advice on how the distinction between singular and plural should be conveyed in translation. On 6.3, the Handbook remarks more fully:

In Greek the “you” of v. 1 is plural, while in verses 2-4 “you” is singular. Verses 5 and 7-14 use the plural form, but v. 6 is in the singular. The alternation between singular and plural takes place throughout the Sermon on the Mount and is apparently of no exegetical significance. Translators should use the form of the second person that is most natural in their language.²

General commentaries do not take the matter much further. One of the two most comprehensive current commentaries on Matthew notes on 5.17: “The switch to the second person singular . . . probably reflects the secondary connection between 5.21-2 and 23-4.”³ On 6.21 it discusses, without coming to any firm conclusion, Matthew’s use of “thou” where the parallel in Luke 12.34 uses “you.” On 7.3, it remarks: “As is so typical of the Jesus tradition, the abstract (7.1-2) now melts into the concrete (7.3-5): prosaic utterance becomes vivid parable.”⁴ No general explanation of the alternations is offered. The other detailed commentary remarks: “The fact that [7.]3-5 shift[s] from the second personal singular to the plural points very probably to the evangelist’s combination of logia derived from different strata of oral tradition.” But there is no independent evidence of this, and the writer continues: “To be sure, the same shift is found in the Lukan parallel (Luke 6.41-42)”⁵

Certain explanations of these variations can be immediately dismissed. There is no significant *textual* evidence to suggest that “thou” forms were originally “you,” or *vice versa*. Indeed, if there were any such evidence, it would tend to be explained in terms of the scribal tendency to smooth things out; but this has not happened. The only possible exception is in 6.21, where important witnesses have

1 Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine (N.Y.: UBS, 1988), 133.

2 *Ibid.*, 163.

3 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (vol. 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 517.

4 *Ibid.*, 632.

5 Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1993), 168.

the plural (twice) in place of the singular, but this is probably by assimilation to Luke 12.34.

Nor can the variations be explained in terms of *source criticism*, as if, for example, "you" forms came from Q (the common source of Matthew and Luke), and "thee" forms from some other source. It is generally agreed that the Sermon on the Mount, as Matthew presents it, is a collection of sayings spoken on different occasions. There are parallels to some of these sayings in Luke, and others, such as 6.1-4, 16-18, are found only in Matthew. But these differences do not correspond at all to the variations between "thou" and "you." On the contrary, similar variations occur in Luke also, for example in 12.57-58 (v. 58 is a parallel to Matt 5.25): "Why do *you* not judge for *yourselves* what is right? Thus when *thou* goest with *thy* accuser before a magistrate . . ." Where there are parallels between Matthew and Luke, the same forms, whether "thou" or "you," are normally used, suggesting that the variations go back behind the gospels to their common source. The one exception is in Matt 6.21 (passage 7 above), where the parallel in Luke 12.34 has plurals: ". . . where *your* treasure is, there *your* heart will be also," probably because Luke has just identified Jesus' hearers as the "little flock" (v. 32) of "his disciples" (v. 22).

An explanation in terms of *discourse structure* may be more promising. Most of the "thou" passages in Matthew's Sermon occur at what modern editions and translations present as the end of a section or pericope, or at least the end of a paragraph. Passage (1) comes at the end of Jesus' comment on the command "Thou shalt not murder" (5.21); passage (2), at the end of his comment on "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; (3) is almost the whole of his comment on "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"; (4) is the whole of the saying about almsgiving; (5) forms the end of a paragraph about prayer; (6) forms the end of a paragraph about fasting; (7) 6.21 is the conclusion of a warning against storing up treasure on earth, and 6.22-23 forms a separate paragraph about the light of the eye; and (8) is the conclusion of a warning against judging. One may therefore tentatively and provisionally conclude that "thou" passages tend to form conclusions, and that the use of singular forms may in some cases increase emphasis; but this does not occur in any uniform or mechanical manner. It is difficult, for example, to see why "when thou prayest" (6.6) should be more emphatic than "when you pray" (6.5, 9). Some conclusions, such as ". . . do not worry about tomorrow" (Matt 6.34), use plural forms.

Possibly related to both source criticism and discourse structure is the question of the *audience* to which the various parts of the Sermon on the Mount may originally have been addressed. It is generally agreed that the so-called "Sermon" is a collection of sayings spoken on different occasions. If this is so, the question of the addressees of each "thou" passage must be discussed individually. Luke 12.54-57, the parallel to Mark 5.23-26, is said to be addressed to "the crowds" (v. 54); the tone and content of both passages suggest a general audience. The same appears to be the case for Matt 5.29-30, 36; and 6.2-4, 6 which have no parallel in Luke. Luke 6.29-30, the parallel to Matt 5.39-42, follows a passage which is said (v. 20) to be addressed to the disciples. Luke 12.34, the parallel to Matt 6.21, is also in a passage addressed to the disciples (v. 22), just described as a "little flock" (v. 32). Both evangelists use "thou" in the following passage (Matt 6.22-23; Luke 11.34b-35), which, according to the wider context in Luke (12.22)

is also addressed to the disciples, as is Luke 6.41-42 (compare v. 20). There is therefore no consistent agreement between the two gospels regarding addressees, and thus no evidence that all the “thou” passages were addressed to a specific audience. It is possible that the question of audience was not of primary importance to the evangelists or their sources, and that at least in some cases the original audience can no longer be identified.

In the search for further evidence, it is natural to cast the net wider than the Sermon on the Mount itself. As is well known, this is one of five blocks of teaching in Matthew, which have been compared to the five books of the Law of Moses. Evidence from the other four blocks is however limited. Matthew 10.5-42 consists of instructions to the twelve disciples, and naturally uses “you” forms. Matthew 13.3-52 consists almost entirely of parables and their explanation, generally using third person forms except where characters in the stories speak to one another (vv. 27-28). Matthew 18.6-35 consists of instructions to the disciples (v. 1), including parables (vv. 12-14, 23-35). “You” forms predominate, but there is a transition to “thou” forms in vv. 8-9 (= Mark 9.47):

“If thy hand or thy foot causes thee to stumble . . . it is better for thee to enter life maimed” (Verse 6 uses a third person “whoever” form, and v. 10 returns to normal “you” forms.)

Matthew 23.2-39 is said to be addressed to “the crowds and [Jesus’] disciples” (v. 1), but it is largely an attack on scribes and Pharisees, using “you” forms. It concludes with a lament over Jerusalem, which moves from the singular: “How often have I desired to gather thy children together” (v. 37) to plurals, beginning “your house,” in vv. 38-39 (= Luke 13.34-35). This is naturally explained as a transition from addressing the city to addressing its inhabitants; this passage therefore does not help to explain the transitions in chs. 5-7.

Before extending our search beyond the five discourses in Matthew, it is important to note in several of them a form of address which we have not yet mentioned. These are neither “thou,” “you,” nor the mainly third person forms typical of the parables, but a series of sayings which have a more general application. Some of these sound like rules, possibly addressed to the community in and for which Matthew’s gospel was written. They are distinguished by the use of expressions such as “whoever” (ὅς ἄν, 5.31; 10.14, 42; 18.5; 23.16a, 18a; ὅς ἐάν, 5.32; 18.5; 20.26; ὅς δ’ ἄν, 5.21, 22a,b; 18.6; 23.16b, 18b; ὅστις [δ’ ἄν], 5.39, 41; 7.24ab; 10.32-33, 60; 13.12ab; 18.4; 23.12ab); “everyone” (πᾶς [ὅστις] 5.22, 28, 32; 7.8, 21, 24, 26; 10.32; 13.12ab, 52), “(he) who” (ὅς, 10.38; ὁ, 13.43), and conditional expressions using ἐάν (“if”: 5.19, 32; 10.42; 16.19ab, 25; 18.15ab, 16, 17a,b). These common expressions are not confined to the discourses, but some if not all of them occur frequently enough in the discourses to be distinctive. Several of them, as the above references indicate, occur close to one another, suggesting that they may sometimes be used as synonyms or stylistic variants. To this class of expressions may perhaps be added general sayings such as the Beatitudes (5.3-10; compare 11.6).

At this point the similarities between the discourses of Jesus in Matthew, and those of Moses in the Pentateuch, become too striking to be ignored. A few of the many examples of (sometimes rapid) alternation between “thou” and “you” forms

may be quoted, using for this purpose the 1885 English Revised Version, which retains the distinction:

- Exod 22.22-23 Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If *thou* afflict them in any wise
- Exod 23.13 And in all things that I have said unto *you* take *ye* heed: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of *thy* mouth.
- Lev 19.19 Ye shall keep my statutes. *Thou* shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind
- Lev 25.17 And *ye* shall not wrong one another; but *thou* shalt fear *thy* God: for I am the Lord *your* God.
- Deut 27.2 And it shall be on the day when *ye* shall pass over Jordan unto the land which Yahweh *thy* God giveth *thee*
- Deut 30.19 I call heaven and earth to witness against *you* this day, that I have set before *thee* life and death

Modern commentaries on the books of the Pentateuch rarely comment on these alternations, and then only on individual occurrences, without offering any general explanation. For example, John Durham remarks on "thou" forms in the Decalogue (Exod 20.2-17): ". . . each single member of the covenant community is involved,"¹ but passes by most other occurrences without comment. In this, he is entirely typical.

Perhaps the most detailed account of thou/you alternation in the Pentateuch is still that found in Sir George Adam Smith's commentary on Deuteronomy, published in 1918, partly on the basis of a paper delivered in 1900.² After carefully analyzing the text and previous studies of it, he concludes cautiously:

[T]he attempt to trace separate editions throughout both Discourses and Laws mainly on the difference of S[in]g[ular] and Pl[ural] is . . . most precarious if not utterly impossible . . . As for the Discourses . . . , the distinction between Sg. and Pl. may often be more naturally interpreted as due to the difference between exhortation and narrative than as significant of difference of authorship . . . [T]he Sg. prevails in the hortatory, the Pl. in the narrative, sections of the Book and not only so but a number of Sg. interruptions in Pl. sections coincide with the rise of the narrative to the pitch of exhortation, and some Pl. interruptions in Sg. sections occur where the exhortation becomes reminiscent and approaches the narrative style. But although all this is generally, it is not always, the case: signs remain of an inconsistency which, however, on the evidence of other books, we must always allow to a writer.

It is clear, on the one hand, that these conclusions cannot be directly transferred from Deuteronomy (or the whole Pentateuch) to Matthew. Yet, on the other hand, the points of contact between the two books are not limited to the frequent alternation between "thou" and "you" forms. Legal provisions are often introduced by "whoever," sometimes in Deuteronomy (18.12, 19; 22.05), and more often in Exodus (for example, 21.12-17), and Leviticus (for example, 11.24-

1 John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1987), 284.

2 G. A. Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), lxxiii-lxxxviii, here lxxxvii-lxxxviii.

27; 15.19-22; 23.21). Another type of laws, described as casuistic, consists of those introduced by “if” or “when”: examples are Exod 21.1, 7, 18, 20, 22, 26, 28, 33, 35; Lev 12.39; 15.16, 19, 25; Deut 13.1, 6, 12; 15.7, 12.

The reasons for the differences between these categories have been much discussed by OT scholars. Our concern is simply to point out points of contact with forms of expression in the gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon is of course not a body of legislation; yet the long passage in which Jesus is presented as interacting with the Law (Matt 5.21-48) suggests that the two have a common base on which the contrasts are built. Moreover, the suggestion that there is something in common between the five discourses in Matthew and the five books of Moses continues to be taken seriously.¹

To sum up our survey so far, we have noted three kinds of address in the Sermon on the Mount and other discourses in Matthew, all of which have points of contact with pentateuchal passages: “thou” sayings, apparently but not necessarily addressed to individuals; “you” sayings, normally² addressed directly to a number of people present; and more general sayings, apparently not addressed only to those present. The variations of form lend variety to the style of the Sermon. It is possible that some of the alternations, though not all, may be explained by varying degrees of rhetorical emphasis, with “thou” passages tending towards the top of the scale, associated particularly with exhortation; “you” passages in the middle; and the more general, third person, sayings lower on the scale. It is also possible that third person sayings tend to be those appropriated or adapted by the community in and for which Matthew wrote.

It remains to consider how these different forms may be translated. This is primarily a function of the receptor language. In older English “thou” could be used to heighten emphasis, as in Charles Wesley’s hymn “Come, sinners, to the gospel feast,”³ one verse of which runs:

Sent by my Lord, on *you* I call,
The invitation is to all;
Come, all the world; come, sinner, *thou*!
All things in Christ are ready now.

The same effect has sometimes been used in sermons: for example, the seventeenth-century French preacher J. B. Bossuet generally addressed his congregation as “Christians” or “my brothers,” but could also use “thou” forms in passages of high intensity.⁴

In the majority of languages, which distinguish between “thou” and “you,” the question arises whether the function of (especially) “thou” forms is the same in biblical passages and in the receptor language. Translations, even modern translations, vary considerably in the extent to which they address this problem.

We take as samples for analysis the Sermon on the Mount, and an OT passage of comparable length, Deuteronomy 5-7. We exclude from consideration the

1 The suggestion, made in Benjamin W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (London: 1930), is favorably discussed, for example, in W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 59.

2 It is not clear whether the scribes and Pharisees attacked in ch. 23 were actually present.

3 *Hymns and Psalms* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1983), 460.

4 Near the end of his sermon “On Death,” preached on 22 March 1662; in *Sermons choisies* (8th ed.; ed. A. Rébelliau; Paris: Hachette, 1905), 285-308, here 304-5.

“thou” passages 5.27, 31, which the context clearly shows to be addressed to Moses. (FRCL¹ and PV make this explicit in v. 27 by adding “Moses”; ITCL does so by translating “thou alone”).

The translation options in other “thou” passages in Deuteronomy 5–7 may be tabulated as follows:

	ERV	TOB	FRCL	PV	EB	GECL	RV95	SPCL	ITCL
5.6-21	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou
6.2-3	thou	thou	you	you	thou	you 2	thou	you	you
						thou 3			
6.5-13	thou	thou	thou 5-9	thou 5-9	thou ²	you	thou	thou	thou ³
			you 10-13	you 10-13					
6.18-21	thou	thou	you	you	thou	you	thou	you	thou
7.1-6	thou	thou	you	you	thou	you	thou	you	you
7.9	thou	thou	you	you	thou	you	thou	you	you
7.11	thou	thou	you	you	thou	you	thou	you	you
7.12-24	thou	thou	you	you	thou	you	thou	you	you 12-16
									thou 17-26
25b-26	thou	thou	you	you	thou	you	thou	you	thou

On this table the following comments may be made.

1. ERV and TOB are entirely consistent in translating “thou” and “you” forms as found in the Hebrew text, without apparently considering how far they are appropriate, or have the same function, in the receptor languages.
2. EB and RV95 are generally consistent, but make occasional modifications, apparently in order to avoid too sudden changes between “thou” and “you” forms. EB makes the transition from “thou” to “you” in the middle of 6.14.⁴ Both EB and RV95 use “thou” in 7.25a⁵, as in the preceding and following verses.
3. ITCL appears the least consistent of the translations consulted. It adapts “thou” forms to “you” in 6.2-3, but then surprisingly changes to “thou” in v. 4, so that the plural “Ascoltate, Israeliti” of v. 3 becomes “ASCOLTE, Israel” in the following verse. 6.14, 16-17 are translated using “thou” forms, to fit in with the context. In 7.12b-26, which in the original uses “thou” forms except in v. 25a, ITCL uses “you” in 12-16, but then changes to “thou” for the rest of the chapter.
4. SPCL generally adapts to the use of “you” forms, except for the Decalogue (see below) and in 6.5, where, in contrast to the surrounding verses, Israel is addressed as “thou.” Similarly in PV and ITCL, Israel is addressed in “thou” forms in 6.5-9, but then, following a section heading, 6.10-17 use plural forms.
5. GECL generally uses “you” (familiar second person) forms, but in 6.3a, 4 the “people of Israel” is addressed as “thou,” in contrast to vv. 3b, 5, where

1 Abbreviations of biblical translations are explained at the end of this article.

2 Verse 14a “thou;” 14b “you.”

3 Verse 14 “thou.”

4 “Und *du* sollst nicht andern Göttern nachfolgen, den Göttern der Völker, die um *euch* her sind.”

5 “Die Bilder ihrer Götter sollst *du* mit Feuer verbrennen”; “*Quemaras* las esculturas de sus dioses en el fuego”

plural forms are used, although the appeal to “Israel” is repeated in v. 4. The reason for this alternation is as unclear as its effect on readers of a functional equivalent translation.

- All translations consulted, even functional equivalent ones, use “thou” forms for the Decalogue (5.6-21). Whether this is a relic of formal correspondence, the result of pressure from church tradition, or both, is not clear. The commandments are addressed to “all Israel” (5.1), which Moses addresses as “you” in vv. 4-5.

What appears to emerge from this sampling is that none but the most strictly formal equivalent translations consulted are entirely consistent; that the functional equivalent translations move to a greater or lesser extent towards the use of plural forms; but that there are exceptions of which the most striking is the Decalogue.

We continue with a survey of the same translations of the “thou” passages in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), including also the *Nouvelle Bible Segond* (NBS).

	ERV	TOB	FRCL	PV	NBS	EB	GECL	RV95	SPCL	ITCL
5.29-30	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou
5.39b-42	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou
6.2-4	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou
6.6	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou ¹	thou	thou
6.17-18	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou
6.21-23	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	21 you	thou	thou	thou
							22-23 thou ²			
7.3-5	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou	thou

The evidence of this survey is even more remarkable than that from the Deuteronomy 5–7 sample. With a single exception in GECL, all the translations consulted, whether traditional or functional equivalent, translate “thou” and “you” literally, leaving readers to find their own explanation for the alternation. This practice is all the more difficult to understand in the case of those translations which, in Deuteronomy 5–7, found it appropriate to use “you” forms in many cases where the text had “thou.”

Various explanations may be considered, but none is satisfactory. It is true that in three cases (6.3, 6, 17), a “thou” passage in the text is introduced by an emphatic pronoun accompanied by a “but” (δέ); but in each case, the contrast is not between a group and an individual as such, but between “the hypocrites” (6.2, 5, 16) and a (typical) follower of Jesus. Or the “thou” may be explained as a rhetorical device, similar to Paul’s “thou Jew” (σὺ Ἰουδαῖος, Rom 2.17; Gal 2.14); but even when all allowance has been made for the editorial nature of Matthew’s introductory reference to “the crowds,” it is unrealistic to think of Jesus, surrounded by hearers, referring rhetorically to someone who is present only in imagination. It is similarly implausible to think of Jesus singling out one of his hearers for special attention.

In the absence of any more satisfactory explanation, one is driven to understand the translators’ practice as due to one or both of two factors. Church

1 “Thou” also in v. 5, where the text has “you.”

2 Verse 21: “Denn *euer* Herz wird immer dort sein, wo *ih*r eure Schätze habt.”

tradition, at its strongest in the case of familiar words of Jesus as in the Decalogue, may be pressing in the direction of formal correspondence. Or translators, unable themselves to understand the reason for the alternation of "thou" and "you" in the text, may be passing the problem on to their readers, most of whom will be unqualified even to address it, and who will therefore tend, in the case of most receptor languages, to perceive the text through a mist of unnaturalness.

To sum up: First, we recommend that translators or revisers of functional equivalent translations consider, in consultation with potential readers, whether or not the alternation of "thou" and "you," in the Sermon on the Mount and comparable passages elsewhere in the Bible, has in the receptor language some positive effect, such as an increase of emphasis where the equivalent of "thou" forms is used. Second, if not, we recommend that "you" forms be considered for consistent use in passages where a group of people is addressed.

Abbreviations

ERV	English Revised Version (1885)
FRCL	La Bible en français courant (1997)
SPCL	Dios habla hoy (1983)
GECL	Gute Nachricht Bibel (1997)
EB	Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers (1985)
ITCL	Parola del Signore (1985)
PV	Parole de Vie (2000)
RV95	Santa Biblia Reina-Valera 1995

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THE GOSPEL IN SLANG: with Special Reference to the Contemporary Polish Context

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Recent months have seen renewed interest in the issue of translation of the Bible into non-standard varieties of Polish, both as a result of the publication of several rather innovative versions and, perhaps even to a greater extent, because of the animated debates they triggered in academic as well as ecclesiastical circles. Various theological, philosophical, and linguistic issues resurfaced as questions related to the nature of the Scripture, the hermeneutical process, and the translator's role and freedom were brought into the discussion—some of them rarely noticed or seriously considered so far in the Polish context. In the following paragraphs, my purpose is twofold (hence the division into two major sections). I will first outline the scope of the debate, indicating the chief points of contention, and then offer a brief critical analysis of one of the most controversial among the new Polish Bible versions, entitled *Dobra czytanka wg św. ziom'a Janka* (lit. *The*