

from the River of Egypt to the great River Euphrates, and will include the territories of the tribes of the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaims, Amorites, Canaanites, Girschashites and the Jebusites."

EUGENE H. GLASSMAN

## LETTER TO A FRIEND

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*What follows is really a personal letter, but it is being printed here as an article because of the good comment it contains about translation. It has actually been somewhat revised and expanded from the form in which it was written, for the sake of readers who did not see the letter to which it is a reply.—Editor.*

Tehran, IRAN

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you very much for your interesting and thoughtful, not to say concerned, letter regarding my translation work. If it were possible to talk over these things in person I could explain my position more easily than trying to write it all out in a letter. In fact, there is far too much to write; but I will still make the effort to cover at least the main objections which you have raised with regard to the United Bible Societies' newest translation into English.

While I am now working for the UBS, I was taken on as a Translations Advisor in West Asia, not as their defense attorney. It is not, therefore, my responsibility to try either to prove or disprove any of the allegations that you have levelled at their new translation, "Today's English Version", the NT of which is called "Good News for Modern Man". As with every other translation which I have ever seen—and I personally own quite a number of them—there are good things about TEV (at least, things which I like) and also some things which I do not care for. I have heard and read many criticisms regarding it, including some of the published literature on the subject. While some of the points raised may be legitimate, some of them strike me as nit-picking. I do not mean this last remark to refer to *you*, however; but by way of getting into the subject let me give you some examples of what I mean.

Some of the critics I have heard or read find fault with the TEV because it uses quotation marks while the King James Version does not. They say, probably rightly, that this puts the translator in the position of an interpreter since he has to decide, for example, whether the quotation in John 3 stops at verse 13, 15, 16, 19 or 21. Whether the quotation marks are there or not, however, the *reader* has to decide this since there is no infallible way of knowing. Incidentally, in the nature of the case every translator has to be an

interpreter, for a glance at a Greek or Hebrew lexicon shows that practically every major word may have several meanings. The translator decides in each instance which of the several meanings he thinks fits best; and this is why translations so often differ in more ways than just in style or level of language.

One such person who criticizes the TEV, after pointing out that the Greek and Hebrew do not have quotation marks, goes on to insist that he has always taken this passage in John 3 to be a direct quotation from the lips of Christ, all the way up through verse 21. Fair enough! (a) The Greek and Hebrew texts admittedly do not have quotation marks; and (b) *he* has always taken the whole passage to be a quotation. On (b), however, it seems not to have occurred to him and his fellow critics that there just might be some other Christian, not a member of his denomination, who cannot be included in his "we" and who might have a different idea!

Similarly, such people are nearly unanimous in their condemnation of the TEV for having some people address Jesus with only a polite "Sir" when, according to them, the word "Lord" should have been used (as in the KJV). That these critics read selectively is obvious from the fact that they never bothered to look at the TEV's rendering of John 13.6, 9, 25, 36; 14.5, 8 (to give only a few examples) where the word "Lord" *is* used. Nor do they trouble themselves about those instances (for example Mt 27.63, the high priests and Pharisees speaking to Pilate—and Jn 12.21, some Greeks speaking to Philip) where even the KJV translates the same Greek word quite rightly as "Sir".

The same people also usually resent the fact that in the TEV (and some other modern versions) personal pronouns referring to Jesus are not printed with capital letters. It is rather strange to find them in one breath criticizing the TEV for introducing quotation marks which the Greek text does not have, but in another breath condemning the TEV for not capitalizing the personal pronouns when they refer to Christ. The Greek text does not have capitals, either; but it does not serve the purpose of their argument to mention this little point. All they want to do is to infer, without any logical or convincing proof, that the TEV attempts to deny the deity and lordship of Christ.

Why is it that the translators of the TEV and other modern versions are, by using quotation marks, inserting their own opinions into the Scriptures but the KJV translators did not do so when they used capital letters? It seems hardly to have been noticed by these critics that such "evangelical" versions as the Living Bible and Charles B. Williams' NT also use quotation marks, as do practically all of the newer translations. (I will admit, however, that they may be confusing as well as needless in some of the translations we are working on in the Third World these days; and I don't think I would have any objection to leaving them out altogether in the new common-language Urdu translation.)

Occasionally critics of the new Bible translations comment on the practice of having the Scriptures copyrighted. One goes so far as to point out, in contrast, that the beloved King James Version has not been copyrighted, nor has it been corrupted all these years! A favorite verse quoted in this regard

is 2 Peter 2.3 (especially the words “make merchandise”, from the KJV), the clear suggestion being that the only reason for “stooping” to the practice of copyrighting is to make money. Yet usually the very publications which specialize in criticizing modern versions are themselves copyrighted! And occasionally they even have their sale price printed right on their front covers (a practice that Bible publishers do not follow). So, who is merchandising?

Since I myself have had some books copyrighted I know a little about these laws. A copyright is good for 28 years, after which it may be renewed for another 28 years. After that I presume that a work goes into the “public domain” and anybody can print it who wants to. This is why there are so many editions of the very old classics put out by a variety of publishers today; no one has to pay royalties on an old book. It is also probably true that there were not any copyright laws in the 17th century or good King James would undoubtedly have made use of them himself.

But let's carry this matter a little further: to say that the KJV has not been corrupted in all these years is to close one's eyes to history. In the early years of that version, when printing techniques were not very well developed, there were many, many misprints. H. S. Miller in *General Biblical Introduction* (1952) points out (on page 366) that “an edition of 1613 is said to have varied from that of 1611 (the original) in more than 400 places. In fact, there were two 1611 editions, differing from each other ‘in hundreds of minute matters’.” He then quotes Schaff as stating that “We have a standard translation, but not a standard text. There are no two editions alike, unless those printed from the same stereotyped plates, and there is absolutely no standard edition. A committee of the American Bible Society, in examining six different editions of the KJV, discovered nearly 24,000 variations in text and punctuation.”

One edition of the KJV came out with the word “not” inadvertently dropped out of the 7th commandment—and became known in history as “The Wicked Bible”. Another edition came out not with the word “princes” but “printers” in Psalm 119.161, thus reading: “Printers have persecuted me without a cause”! The original of Matthew 23.24 had “strain *out* a gnat”, which makes sense; but a typographical error eventually crept in, which is still perpetuated to this day as “strain *at* a gnat”.

Some people who complain do not like the format of the TEV, its paperback appearance (in some editions), its line drawings, and the fact that it is also published in separate portions. One of my correspondents, while in general sympathetic with what we are trying to do in the UBS these days, did admit however that “to be purely honest with myself and you I do hold the black-bound Bible (KJV) with the gold letters just a bit more ‘sacred’ than even a KJV in any *other* color or binding.” Where are we told in the Scriptures that a “real Bible” should be printed on India paper, bound in black leather and trimmed in gold? For that matter, where are we told that only the complete Bible ought to be distributed and that the distribution of portions of it is wrong? We do well to remember that the early church never had the NT (let alone the complete Bible) bound as a single book. Instead, just Gospels, letters and portions were circulated here and there, by people who carried them in their travels. These portions were written to meet

particular needs in particular places. It was only later that a "canon" was developed and all of the accepted books were put together into what we now know as "The Bible".

On another aspect of this question of format, in one African country the Bible Society had a black-bound Bible that did not sell well at all because (it was learned on investigation) black was associated with witchcraft. When the Bible Society took off those covers and put on new bright yellow covers (the color that stood for "joy" in that area), they sold 5,000 copies in three months! Is it better to have 5,000 copies of the Bible in black that are merely collecting dust on the shelves, or 5,000 copies in bright yellow that people are anxious to buy and read? I think the answer to that should be obvious; but unfortunately we Americans tend to think only in terms of our own way of doing things and to suppose that everybody in the world should look at "reality" just as *we* see it.

I am aware of the usual arguments that are put forward when any new translation comes out, particularly if it has not been sponsored by a "fundamentalist" group. It is said that the translators are trying to get rid of the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the blood atonement, miracles, and all. Let me assure you that I am not engaged in such an effort; nor do I know anyone in UBS circles who is. As far as I know my own heart—and I, of course, am not exempt from the limitations of Jeremiah 17.9; nor are the critics of the TEV—my theology through all these years has not changed one little bit in any essential point. But I have had the opportunity during nearly 30 years in the Lord's service to observe that piety is not always coupled either with common sense or with intellectual honesty. What I mean is that I distinguish between a "fundamentalist theology" and a "fundamentalist mentality". With the former I am in hearty agreement: I am not looking for, preaching, or translating "any other Gospel" but that which "I received" from the Lord Jesus Christ when at 14 years of age I was "born again" through personal faith in Him. With the latter "mentality", however, I am forced to disagree, since I have seen what it has done to the church of believers—not modernists and liberals, mind you, but—brothers and sisters in Christ who, while sometimes even speaking in tongues, seem unable to speak (civilly, at least) to each other.

To be sure, I can understand your concern (and that of others) in the changing of the wording in the TEV with regard to the "blood of Christ". However, rather than seeing something sinister in it, I take it to be an effort—based on Nida and Taber's *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969) and Wonderly's *Bible Translations for Popular Use* (1968) to make it clear that it was not so much the chemical composition of blood as a "thing" that was uppermost in the NT writers' eyes as it was the "event" of dying. In any case, it is a moot point whether "death" or "dying" is the best way to translate the Greek word in any particular verse, and I am not sure that I would always translate the way TEV does. In Matthew 26.28, for example, which I have translated into Urdu, a literal back-translation into English would read: ". . . because this is that blood of mine which confirms the covenant of God and is about to be shed for the sake of forgiving the sins of many." Because

this is literal in English it may sound a bit clumsy to you; but I can assure you that it is not clumsy in Urdu. And, anyway, even the TEV in this verse does use the word "blood". So what exactly is the basis of this complaint? Furthermore, if, as you and some others suspect, the purpose of the TEV was to "get rid of" the teaching regarding the blood atonement of Christ, how come we still find this word being used? I have just given one example from Matthew. But what about 1 John 1.7 which still says in the TEV that "the blood of Jesus, his Son, makes us clean from every sin"? And why do we find so many references to this blood in Hebrews 9 and 10, which are crucial to this teaching on atonement (9.22, to take a very famous key verse, for example)? It appears to me that such allegations are unfair, since they only take into account selected references rather than "the whole truth".

In your fear that "many people are clamoring for a bloodless religion" you have given two examples on the other side. The fact that, as you have suggested, one man was deterred from shooting into a crowd when he heard the group sing, "There is power in the blood," and that a thief ran away when an old woman he was attacking prayed aloud, claiming the power of the blood of Christ, does not "prove" very much in terms of general human experience. They are interesting and even touching testimonies of how God was pleased to deliver people on certain occasions because of their faith in that blood. But church history is full of people who had an equally strong faith but who were not delivered and often went to their death for the sake of their faith. The last part of Hebrews 11 is abundant testimony to this. Even Daniel's three friends (Dan 3.16-18) were prepared to admit that while God *could* deliver them He just might possibly *not choose* to do so. It is always risky to build (or support) doctrines on such isolated experiences.

In any case, you will be glad to know that we are not translating the TEV! Our committee is translating the *Greek* New Testament. In the process we may get a good idea or suggestion from the TEV, Living Bible, J. B. Phillips, William Barclay, the Jerusalem Bible and many others. But it is not our purpose to render any of these into Urdu.

One point you made is well-taken, namely, that "there is a vast difference between a translation and a paraphrase". Nida, Taber and Wonderly in their textbooks on translation principles observe that it is legitimate in a translation to "make explicit" in the new (receptor) language what was "implicit" in the original (source) language to the original hearers or readers. For example, the word "Jordan" nowadays could refer to (a) the river that separates Israel from Jordan, (b) the Hashemite Kingdom ruled over by King Hussein, or—at least here in Iran—(c) one of the main north-south highways running through Tehran (actually, not very far from our house). When a reference in the Gospel might not be clear to a new reader, it would not be going beyond the limits of honest rendering to say the "River Jordan", even though the word "river" is not in the Greek, since that is certainly what those who first heard the message understood. Otherwise, today's reader, particularly if he is not well-educated, could easily misunderstand, or just not understand at all. In a sense, this is (in some people's understanding) a paraphrase, but it is not a paraphrase in the precise sense in which we

understand that term. What is the advantage of merely translating words without regard to their meaning or impact for *today's* reader or listener? Failure to take this into account is not to communicate God's message but only to put certain ink forms on a piece of paper. Because we have had plenty of such translation in the past, we are still at the job of trying to communicate the Gospel.

In his early days Cameron Townsend of the Wycliffe Bible Translators got his inspiration for new and colloquial Bible translations when he was in Guatemala with Spanish Bibles for Indians whose language was Cakchiquel. One day an Indian said to him (regarding the Spanish Bibles), "Why, if your God is so smart, hasn't He learned *our* language?"

I think you would agree with me that Psalm 139.13-16, for example, is not English as people understand it today. Maybe it was so in 1611—I don't know. But my point is that if God is to speak to men today so that they can understand and respond (and if this is not the goal why bother?) then He will not ignore their culture, their grammar, their idioms and their view of life. In other words, He will speak to them in their own tongue, not in a Greek or Hebrew form of English, German, Urdu, Persian, or what have you.

Having taken the time to say all of this, I want to close this letter by adding that I appreciate very much your prayers and concern. Through my reading and some of the things that I myself have heard I realize that translating is a difficult task, in which one faces all sorts of dangers, and many people who want to criticize what is done. I take some comfort in the fact that translators have always been people who are persecuted. St. Jerome as long ago as the late 4th century A.D., when translating the Bible into Latin, complained: "So great is the force of established usage that even acknowledged corruptions please the greater part, for they prefer to have their copies pretty rather than accurate." William Tyndale was kidnapped, strangled and burned at the stake in 1536 A.D. for daring "to cause a boye that dryveth the plough" to know the Scriptures in common English. And many people seem unaware of the fact that the King James Bible has not always been as "beloved" as they would like to think. The Pilgrims, for example, would not even allow it on board the "Mayflower", preferring the Geneva Bible of 1560 instead. But, as someone recently reassured me: "Cheer up: nowadays they only burn the translation; in the old days they burned the translator!"

Those who engage in making God's word available to all people everywhere in a language that they can understand and at a price they can afford to pay do not expect universal acceptance, let alone praise. But if, because of their efforts, even some praise accrues to *Him* whom they love and serve, then their labor will not have been in vain.

With our love, best wishes and gratitude, I am,

Sincerely yours, and His,

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