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THE ORDER OF FIRST TRANSLATIONS OF SCRIPTURE IN MISSION FIELDS

This is an article written for the 'International Review of Missions', October 1918, by the then Translations Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Dr Robert Kilgour.

The number of languages into which some portion of Scripture has been translated now reaches 1,232, and political developments have taken place which make other details out of date; but this is not to suggest that, as the programme of translation has developed since 1918, there has been any significant change in the order of priorities. The fundamental principles on which Dr Kilgour based his article remain valid. This is reprinted in the belief that it will prove of value to present-day readers and translators. Ed.

In all the great languages of the world some portion of the Bible has now been printed. But of the 511 languages included in the list of the British and Foreign Bible Society, only about half possess complete New Testaments, while of these not more than 132 have complete Bibles. Though Scripture is now available, in some form, for seven-tenths of the human race, the remainder has still to be provided for. So there is yet much linguistic land to be possessed.

The question naturally arises: In what order ought the books of the Bible to be translated? Ought we to pick out a certain book, e.g. a Gospel (and if so, which Gospel?) for a beginning? Or ought we to choose some particular passage, e.g. the parable of the prodigal son, or the Sermon on the Mount, and publish that before we proceed to any complete book? Or does a connected Gospel harmony, or a Bible history, form the best introduction to a fuller knowledge of The Book of books? If we start with St Matthew, ought we to translate right through the New Testament before attempting anything in the Old? Ought we to commence the Old Testament with Genesis and work right through to Malachi? Or should we choose some other book, e.g. the Psalms or Isaiah, for a beginning, and afterwards add book to book till the whole Bible is complete?

The problem is not so simple as it appears. The order of the books in our western Bibles differs from that given in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. There is textual precedent therefore for variation. But the problem is eminently a practical one, since most modern translations have been, and will be, prepared with a definitely evangelistic purpose. The experience of others, therefore, will furnish guidance to their successors.

The B.F.B.S. library, with its editions of versions of some part of God's Word in over 650 languages and dialects, presents unique data for obtaining

the necessary historical information. Omitting the ancient and medieval versions, and also translations of merely philological interest, we have examined what may be termed distinctively missionary versions in some 580 different tongues in order to determine (i) which book was published first of all in each case; and (ii) which books were afterwards added, and in what order.

I

In 397 languages, the earliest portion of God's Word is one or more of the Gospels, or some part thereof. In 29 other languages the four Gospels together, or with some other piece of Scripture, are found first. At least one of the Epistles begins Bible translation in nine languages; the Acts in one; the whole New Testament in 44. Some Old Testament book, or part thereof, was printed before any other piece of Scripture in 16 languages. Scripture selections, Bible histories, or liturgical epistles and Gospels come first in 84 other tongues.

The complete Gospel of St Matthew occurs first and alone in 132 languages, from A to Z both alphabetically and geographically, from Addo in West Africa to Ziryen in North-east Russia; along with some other Scripture portion (apart from cases of the four Gospels together) it is first in 11 more tongues; and, in part (often the Sermon on the Mount), in 25 instances; in all, 168.

St Mark similarly is first complete in 108 tongues, ranging from Aneityum in the New Hebrides to Wiza in North-east Rhodesia; twice along with some other book; and three times in part, totalling 113.

St Luke occurs first complete in 64 instances—for Aymara Indians in Peru, for Eromangans in the South Seas, for Koreans in the Far East, for Lushais in Assam and for several African tribes; along with another book, in five other tongues; and, in part, four times; thus accounting for 73 languages.

St John's Gospel complete is the earliest translation in 39 languages, including Cree, Japanese, Quichua, the tongue of the Incas, Ronga for Portuguese East Africa; it appears once, in Tukudh on the Yukon, with John's Epistles; and, only a few chapters as a beginning, in Galla, Abyssinia, in Lifu and in Tanna, islands in the Pacific; in all 43 cases.

The four Gospels together appear as the first piece of Scripture in 23 languages, as far apart in distance and in civilization as the Eskimos in Greenland and readers of Hindi and Persian in Asia; and, along with some other book, but not yet the complete New Testament, in six more; making 29 in all.

In Ratuana, New Britain, the Book of Acts was printed fifteen years before the next issue, the whole New Testament, appeared.

When the liberated Yoruba slave, Samuel Adjai Crowther, afterwards bishop, set out to translate the Bible into his mother tongue, he began with the Epistle to the Romans. A paraphrase of Romans and 1 Corinthians is the earliest Scripture published in Luba-Lulua, Belgian Congo. The Epistle to the Galatians is the first book in Rarotonga. For the Delaware Indians,

1, 2 and 3 John are the earliest portions of the Bible; and 1 John comes first in Nguna, New Hebrides. A translation of James in the Chinese dialect of Shaowu, Fukien, is the only Bible book in that colloquial. 1 Thessalonians is the earliest portion of Scripture in Ndui-ndui, the speech of Oba, or Lepers' Island, in the New Hebrides.

In 44 languages the complete New Testament is the earliest printed edition of Scripture. These include John Eliot's Massachusetts version (1661) and Ziegenbalg's Tamil version (1715), the pioneer translations in North America and in India respectively. The New Testament came first in 24 languages produced by the bold labourers at Serampore in the early days of the last century. Many of these are in dialects no longer current, or have been superseded by later work. But to start with a whole New Testament was characteristic of men who always 'expected great things'. Even their title pages read: 'The Holy Bible, Vol. V, containing the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', though in many instances the first four volumes never appeared.

In modern days we have not come across any instance when publication was delayed till the whole Bible was ready. But in 21 languages some part of the Old Testament was published before any portion of the New Testament. Two begin with Genesis—Cape Dutch, or Afrikaans, and Karaite Turkish, the language of Jews in the Crimea. Genesis and Exodus constitute the first publication in Ruk, spoken in the Caroline Islands; but its readers were already in possession of a New Testament in Mortlock, a cognate language which they could understand. Some portion of the Book of Genesis begins Bible work in six languages: these include Dakhini, the form of Hindustani used in the Deccan, Batta Toba for Sumatra, and Central or Mombasa Swahili. The complete Pentateuch precedes any New Testament book in Galwa, French Congo, and in Ruthenian. American Baptist missionaries in Swatow, China, and Bishop Steere of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa, in Zanzibar Swahili, both begin with Ruth. In Chewa, on the west of Lake Nyasa, Esther is the only piece of Scripture on our record. The Book of Psalms appears first in Manda and Mpotu, dialects spoken round Lake Nyasa, and in Ossete, Central Caucasus. Jonah is the first printed book in Galla, Bararetta, South Abyssinia, and (with a few verses of St Matthew) in Lamba, North Rhodesia. The first book containing Scripture in Maori included Genesis 1-3, Exodus 20, Matthew 5: 1-30, John 1, the Lord's Prayer and seven hymns; the first in Western Swahili, gave the parables and miracles; that in Arawak, Guiana, the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension; that in Bullom, Sierra Leone, Matthew 1-2, John 1, the Ten Commandments and Gospel stories. In several instances nothing beyond such Bible stories has yet been published. Liturgical epistles and Gospels, selections from the Anglican Prayer Book, or similar works, contain the first piece of Scripture in ten other languages.

II

A few representative languages grouped geographically must serve to illustrate the order in which the Bible translation followed the first portion published.

Asia

Early in the last century most of the great Indian languages possessed some part of Scripture. In Tamil the New Testament was followed by Genesis to Judges, the Psalter, Ruth to Song of Songs, major and minor Prophets. The Old Testament in Urdu begins with Genesis, then come the Pentateuch, Isaiah, Proverbs. The Bible was not completed until a later date. In Hindi, the order is Gospels, New Testament, Bible.

The Serampore translators divided the Old Testament into four volumes: 1, the Pentateuch; 2, Joshua to Esther; 3, Job to Song of Songs; 4, Isaiah to Malachi. Usually the volumes were issued in this order; but in Bengali volume 2 appeared after volumes 1, 3 and 4, and in Oriya volumes 2, 3 and 4 before the Pentateuch. In Kanarese the Gospels, Acts, Ephesians and Philippians came before the New Testament. In Nepali, the language of the Gurkhas, the first books published when mission work was actually begun were Luke and Acts, then Genesis, followed by Matthew, Mark and so on till the whole New Testament was complete. Part of Exodus, Proverbs and the Psalms appeared before the complete Bible. Santali, a Kol language spoken by an aboriginal tribe in lower Bengal, begins with Matthew, then follow the Psalms, Mark, a few chapters of Genesis, next Luke, John and the remainder of the New Testament in the usual order. Daniel and the minor Prophets were published before the Bible was completed. A Gospel harmony is the first portion of the Scripture in Tibetan; then come Acts, Romans and Colossians before any complete Gospel was provided. After that we find Matthew, John, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and only when all these have been issued appeared the Gospel of Mark. Then follow James and Jude, 1 Timothy to Philemon, 1 Peter to 3 John, Genesis and Exodus 1-20. Many years afterwards, Deuteronomy came before Psalms, Leviticus, Numbers and Joshua. In Burmese, Matthew was followed by Ephesians, then John, Hebrews, John's Epistles, Acts appeared before the New Testament; and the Psalms, 1 Samuel to Job, before Genesis to Ruth. The Dutch translators who produced Matthew in Malay in the seventeenth century—the earliest translation in modern times for evangelization purposes—printed Matthew to Acts, then turned to the Psalms, and Genesis, before they finished the New Testament. Luke in Pangasinan is the first Gospel in any language of the Philippine Archipelago. It was followed by Matthew, Mark, John, Acts, New Testament and the Pentateuch before the Old Testament. While Robert Morrison, in the face of seemingly unsurmountable obstacles, was secretly printing the Acts in Chinese Wenli from wooden blocks in the back premises of a shop in Canton, John Lassar, an Armenian, and Joshua Marshman, one of Carey's colleagues, were producing a version of Matthew and Mark in India in the same language. Morrison's next books were Luke and St Paul's Epistles. Serampore produced John's Gospel and his Epistles, while at Canton, Galatians, James, 1 and 2 Peter were printed and the New Testament completed soon after. Morrison at once undertook the translation of the Old Testament beginning with Genesis, after which he published the Psalms.

The earliest extant edition printed in Japanese is St John's Gospel translated by the Dutch missionary, Gützlaff.¹ He completed a draft of the New Testament and part of the Old, but only John's Gospel and Epistles were printed. Thirty-four years later a version of Matthew was published. Mark and John were also secretly printed. Then followed Luke, the Acts, parts of Genesis, the book of Proverbs, Jonah, the New Testament, the Psalms, before the complete Bible.

Korea possessed metal type in 1403; but no version of Scripture was printed till 1882 when Luke was published at Mukden. The subsequent order is John, Acts, Matthew, Mark, Romans, the New Testament, selections from the Psalms, the book of Genesis, the Psalms, Proverbs, Exodus, 1 and 2 Samuel, Malachi, 1 and 2 Kings; Isaiah did not appear till 1908 and three years later the whole Korean Bible was issued.

Africa

As might be expected, Africa and Oceania show the greatest growth in the number of Scripture translations in new languages during the turn of the century. Swahili, the great lingua franca of 'the coast', begins with a translation of Genesis 1-3 in the Mombasa dialect. The first books in Zanzibar Swahili are Ruth and Jonah, then come Matthew, the Psalms, Luke, 1 Kings, John, 2 Kings, Ephesians, Philippians, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, James, 1 John, Genesis, Galatians, Colossians and Philemon, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Revelation, Exodus. In the meantime, Deuteronomy had appeared in Mombasa Swahili followed by 2 Chronicles, Luke, Gospels, the Psalms, before the New Testament and Bible.

In the language of Uganda the order is Matthew 1-13, John, Gospels, Acts, and right on till the New Testament was completed. Exodus and Joshua were the first Old Testament books, followed by Genesis, the Psalter, Daniel, before the whole was ready.

The first book of Scripture in Western Nyanja was Mark. The subsequent order is John, New Testament, Genesis, Esther.

In Madagascar the missionaries of the London Missionary Society, in spite of terrible difficulties, printed the whole Malagasy Bible within seven years. Luke was quickly followed by the whole New Testament, then Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, 1 Samuel to Job, Isaiah to Malachi—the latter books being finished during the earlier days of the great persecution.

In Shona the order is Mark, Matthew, John, Luke, Acts, Genesis, New Testament.

The first complete book which Robert Moffat translated into Chuana was Luke, followed by Bible extracts. Then came the New Testament, the first edition of which was taken out to the Cape by David Livingstone on his first voyage. Before the complete Old Testament there were published the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Genesis, Exodus.

Hausa, the most widely spoken language in the Sudan, is represented first by a few chapters of Matthew, then the complete book, John, the Acts,

¹ Gützlaff was of German nationality but was in the service of the Netherlands Missionary Society from 1826 to 1828.

Genesis, Luke, Exodus, Mark, the New Testament, the Psalms, Isaiah, Deuteronomy.

After Bishop Crowther had translated Romans into Yoruba he proceeded as follows: Luke, Acts, James, 1 and 2 Peter, Genesis, Matthew, Exodus, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. His colleague, Thomas King, also an African, made a version of John, Daniel, Acts, Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians. The two collaborated in the remainder of the New Testament.

Crowther also began the translation in Nupe. The earliest book contained Matthew 1-7. Afterwards Matthew was completed, then Luke, John, Mark and the Psalms. A later worker translated Acts, and completed the New Testament.

The order of translations in the San Salvador dialect of Congo is: the Sermon on the Mount, Mark, Matthew, Jonah, 1 John, Luke, New Testament, 1 Samuel, Genesis, the Psalms and Proverbs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Judges, Ruth.

Oceania

The many islands of the South Seas with their varying languages, differing often on two sides of one small island, reveal a corresponding variety in the treatment of our problem.

Tahiti had the earliest Polynesian version. On a press whose floor was paved with stones from a heathen temple the Gospel of Luke translated by Henry Nott with the aid of King Pomare II was printed. John, Acts and Matthew were followed by Daniel, Ruth and Esther, translated by John Williams. The subsequent order in the New Testament was Galatians to Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1, 2 and 3 John, Revelation, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians. Then came the Psalms, Isaiah, the minor Prophets, and, in 1838, the complete Bible, the first in any language of Polynesia.

First translations in the languages of several other islands owe their origin to this Tahiti version. The earliest portions in Rarotonga—John, Galatians and Hebrews—were translated from Tahiti. The missionaries proceeded with 1 Peter, Mark and Matthew before the New Testament was completed in Rarotonga. The order in the Old Testament is Genesis, the Psalms, Exodus, Proverbs to Song of Songs, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua to 2 Samuel, 1 Kings to Esther, Isaiah, Lamentations and then the whole Bible.

From the Rarotonga version, a national teacher made a translation of Mark in Dauī, followed afterwards by Acts, John and last of all by the Gospel according to St Matthew.

Six years after mission work was started in Samoa, Matthew was in the hands of Samoan readers. Then came a New Testament history based upon the Gospels and Acts. This prepared the way for a New Testament, the books of which were printed separately but in our order. The Old Testament began with a version of the Psalms. This was followed by Genesis and Exodus before the Bible was completed.

From Samoan, Mark was translated into Niué; then came John, followed by the four Gospels, Acts, Philipians, 1, 2 and 3 John, all in one volume,

and latterly, the New Testament. The Old Testament began with Genesis and the Psalms.

In Fiji the missionaries first printed verses, then Scripture lessons, afterwards Mark, Matthew and Acts, New Testament, Old Testament.

In the New Hebrides group the first language in which any piece of Scripture was produced was Aneityum, into which J. Geddie translated Mark. Thereafter came Matthew, Luke, John, Revelation 1-3, Jonah, Acts, Galatians to Philemon, then Genesis, selected Psalms, New Testament, the whole Book of Psalms, and afterwards the Bible.

In Eromanga, the 'Isle of Martyrs', the order is Luke, Genesis, Matthew, Acts, New Testament.

In Mota, New Hebrides, Bishop J. C. Patteson began with Luke, then he proceeded with Acts, John, 1 John, lessons from the Gospels, selections from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah. Afterwards he published Matthew, more Old Testament selections, Mark, James, selections from the Epistles and Revelation, Genesis to Ruth, and the Psalms.

Maori begins with selections, then come Ephesians, Philippians, Luke, New Testament, the Psalms, Old Testament.

America

In the American continent, the Eskimos of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay had the Gospel of St Luke as their earliest Scripture, then came the four Gospels and Acts, next Genesis, after that Romans to Revelation, Exodus and the Psalms.

For many of the dwindling Indian tribes Gospels and sometimes whole New Testaments, in one case a whole Bible, have at some time been prepared. For the Muskoki, or Creek Indians, the earliest book was John, and a few verses of Matthew and Mark. Next came Matthew, Epistles of John, James, Titus and Ephesians, Acts, Romans, New Testament, Genesis and the Psalms.

In Guarani, a language widely spoken in Paraguay, the first piece of Scripture is the Sermon on the Mount, then comes the Gospel according to St Luke followed by the New Testament.

III

In the light of this historical summary, we may seek to discover what principles, if any, have guided the order of books in the various translations. It might be imagined that different stages of savagery or civilization, or the varying psychological characteristics of the peoples whom the message was intended to reach, were responsible for the choice. But any such inference breaks down before the fact that the same Gospel comes first in Ainu, North Japan, and in Carib, West Indies, in Eskimo, Greenland, and in Tabele, South Africa, for the Chinese scholar who knows High Wenli and the New Hebridean in the island of Aniwa. We are told that the genealogies in Matthew and Luke appeal specially to the eastern reverence for ancestors.

But the Aymara Indian in South America, the Yahgan of Tierra del Fuego, the barbarous folk of Eromanga 'the lowest of all the tribes inhabiting the New Hebrides', all possess the third Gospel as the earliest in their tongue. People with a tendency to mysticism, the Indian for example, ought to be (and many are) attracted by the Gospel of St John. But of the thirty-nine cases in which this Gospel is the first piece of Scripture, only two are in India—Bhojpuri in Bihar and Brahui in Baluchistan, hardly representative Indian tongues; four are for people on the Indian frontiers; six are Chinese; one is Japanese; twelve are African, including Kikuyu and several Congo dialects; five are in the Americas; six in Oceania; and two are for places in Europe.

Several missionaries have begun with a book of selections of Bible stories, or the life of Christ in a connected narrative. Workers among North American Indians, Anglican missionaries in Melanesia, Rhenish missionaries in the Dutch East Indies¹ and in Africa, Moravians both among Eskimos and Tibetans, London Missionary Society agents in New Guinea, Baptists in Assam, Presbyterians in Central Africa are among those to whom this method has appealed. This list of names and places disposes of any idea that such selections are peculiar to any one mission or any one country.

Translators themselves seldom record their reason for beginning with any particular book. Robert Morrison explained that he began with Acts because he 'hoped to have received the Gospels from Bengal'. Henry Nott, the bricklayer who translated the Bible into Tahiti, writes in 1819 that he had finished John and Acts and hoped to begin Genesis. In 1833 he reports that he had 'done several of the lesser prophets, finished Genesis and purposed to proceed from Dan to Beersheba'. Jerome's explanation of why he came to write on the minor Prophets and Amos as the last of them: *Non enim a primo usque ad novissimum, juxta ordinem quo leguntur, sed ut potuimus et ut rogati sumus, ita eos disseruimus*—'As we have been able and as we have been asked', might be the confession of any modern translator.

The fact that St Mark has only sixteen chapters may sometimes explain why it was chosen first. A mission press has not usually the resources for printing off a large edition of many pages. A short Epistle, therefore, offers certain advantages to a missionary anxious to give his people as soon as possible portions of the Word of God. The beautiful pastoral story of Ruth, and the simple, picturesque, and truly missionary message of the book of Jonah have no doubt weighed with translators who have given these among the first books in a new tongue.

IV

The experience of modern missions seems to be best summed up, then, in the following order of Bible translations:

- (1) The history of our Lord Jesus Christ as given in the Gospels;
- (2) The history of the Early Church in the Acts and the Epistles;
- (3) The Psalms for devotional use; and
- (4) The Historical Books and the Prophets of the Old Testament.

¹ Indonesia.

This does not mean that it appears necessary to complete each of these groups before beginning another. Indeed, it may often be found helpful to provide at least a book in more than one of them before finishing any single group. The main point is, that at an early date at least one Gospel (St Mark is the simplest and most concise) should be prepared in the language of the people. The issue of even a tentative translation, rough and needing much revision, is valuable if it has been prepared with all the care possible at the time.

In some languages one or more Gospels may be all that is required, since a cognate tongue may supply the rest. In Uganda there are several dialects, e.g. Nkole, Teso, Soga, in which only Gospels were required; for readers soon preferred Ganda as the dominant language. But where there exists no such resource, the Acts or perhaps an Epistle may next be added, followed by the Psalms or one of the Prophets. As soon as convenient, an attempt should be made to provide a complete New Testament.

The question of the Old Testament stands on a somewhat different footing. Some missionaries have hesitated before translating the Old Testament at all: some would put only selected parts into the hands of their readers. When Ulfilas translated the Scriptures for the Goths in the fourth century (fragments of the Gospels, in the order Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, are contained in the famous Codex Argenteus at Uppsala) Gibbon says he 'prudently suppressed the four books of Kings as they might tend to irritate the fierce and sanguinary spirit of the barbarian'. In modern times the version of the Bible in literary Mongolian by Swan and Stallybrass excluded the Song of Songs. But Christian readers surely have a right eventually to the heritage of the complete Christian Bible in some language they can understand. Every great language should ultimately possess a whole Bible.

After all, the fact remains that the Bible is the one universal book, the whole of it capable of being translated into all kinds of languages. Has not this inquiry given us another vision of this universality? For we have found that no part of it is limited to any one country or any one stage of civilization; but that its message is so divinely human that it makes its appeal to all lands, all ages, and all peoples.