K. I. LOGACHEV

THE 1876 RUSSIAN BIBLE

Professor Logachev is scientific co-ordinator at the Leningrad Orthodox Theological Academy.

For Russian-speaking Christians, 1976 was the centenary of the Russian Bible. The first one-volume edition of the complete Bible in Russian had on its title-page the date 1876. The phrase "the complete Bible" means here the books that the Russian Orthodox Church has traditionally included in the Old and New Testaments since the time of the compilation of the Slavonic Bible of Gennadius in 1499—in other words, both the books accepted as canonical by the whole of Christendom and the books called "Apocrypha" by Protestants.

The 1876 Russian Bible, published "with the blessing of the Most Holy Ruling Synod" is now (in its various reprints, which embody insignificant variants) the only Russian biblical text officially accepted by the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church. It is therefore important to give a brief description of some special features of this text.

A word of caution seems to be necessary from the beginning. The very name, "the 1876 Russian Bible", is purely conventional. What was published under one cover in 1876 was not one unified translation, but a conglomerate of different versions. The centenary is thus not that of a translation, but of a publication.

In the Russian Orthodox Church the Russian Bible in general appeared after the Slavonic Bible and still exists in parallel with the latter. It is therefore impossible to make a serious study of the Russian Bible tradition in isolation from that of the Slavonic Bible.

Little is known of the ways in which the Slavonic Bible penetrated into Russian territories before 1499. But one fact is certain: from a very early date, Russian began to influence the language of the Slavonic Bible. This influence took various forms in different places, throughout the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, with the result that Russian Bible manuscripts of this time differ greatly in the form of the language used.

From the beginning, the Russian Orthodox Church has a bilingual (Slavonic and Russian) character. When they became Christian, the eastern Slavs accepted liturgical texts which had been translated from Greek for other Slavonic peoples. This bilingualism was not undermined by Russian influence on manuscripts of the Slavonic Bible; it became even more pronounced in the post-Mongolian period, and remains important today. On the one hand, Russian Orthodox church services and (with rare exceptions) readings from Holy Scripture are in a form of Slavonic which shows slight Russian influence, while on the other hand, Russian is used for preaching, for theological and similar writings, and for the training of priests.

Of course, the relation between the two languages has not remained unchanged. For example, the present practice of using the 1876 Bible text for quotations in preaching and so on (as mentioned above) dates only from 1917; before that date the Slavonic Bible was almost always used in these areas. But such developments can best be seen in the light of a comparative study of the two texts.

The 1876 Russian Bible derives neither from the earlier Russified Slavonic Bible manuscripts, nor from Russian vernacular translations which appeared from the fifteenth to the early eighteenth century in Russia and abroad (mainly close to the western frontier of Russia). These vernacular translations had almost no influence among Russian Orthodox believers, because from the late fifteenth century the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church officially supported only the Slavonic Bible. From the late fifteenth century onwards, there began a process of stabilization of the Slavonic Bible text. The most important steps in this process were the manuscript Bible of Gennadius (1499), the printed Bible of Ostrog (1581), the Moscow Bible (1663), and the Bible of Elizabeth (1751). The text of the 1751 Bible of Elizabeth, like the 1876 Russian Bible, is not a unified translation, but a conglomerate of different translations.

The eighteenth century, when the definitive Slavonic text was established, was also the period in which the Slavonic and Russian languages prepared for their final separation, and the time when Russian academic theology was born. The appearance, in the late eighteenth century, of the first scholarly Russian Bible translations, is mainly the result of two factors. These translations were made by Archimandrite (later Archbishop) Methodius Smirnov. They were published by the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church as "interpretations" of the definitive Slavonic text.

From a modern standpoint, the translations of Archimandrite Methodius may be seen as beginning a natural and healthy movement towards a translation of the Bible in the national language. To describe this development as natural and healthy implies that academic theologians become aware of tensions created by the development of the language, try to give expression to the exact meaning of Holy Scripture in the only possible way, namely, by use of contemporary literary language, and make available for public discussion the final results of their labours. These results are translations which have value, not only for the edification of the church, but also for theology.

Unfortunately, this natural and healthy process was suddenly interrupted in 1816 by the personal demand of Czar Alexander I that a complete Russian translation should be made, without any preliminary experiments, for non-liturgical use throughout the nation. The first step was to be a complete Russian New Testament. Work on the translation was inevitably hurried. The New Testament was published in 1819–21. After slight revision in the late 1850s and early 1860s, it became part of the 1876 Russian Bible.

At that time, it was officially stated that the Slavonic Bible would remain the only one to be used in services of the Russian Orthodox Church. This meant that the mass of Russian Orthodox believers, for whom attendance at church services was the most important moment in their spiritual lives, were to continue hearing Holy Scripture read in Slavonic, so that they would increasingly miss its meaning, for biblical Slavonic was not the Russians' mother tongue, and had now ceased to be used in non-Church literature.

The greatest need of the Russian believers, whether of the 1820s or of the 1860s, was therefore a translation which would help them to understand the exact meaning of the readings of Holy Scripture at their church services. A translation which served this purpose had therefore to be parallel in text and

meaning to the Slavonic Bible. In essence, it would have to be an exact translation from Slavonic to Russian. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the translation begun in 1816 is officially called "a translation from Slavonic" (not "from Greek"). This phrase reflected the acute need of Russian believers rather than the nature of the translation. Notwithstanding this need, the New Testament of the 1876 Bible diverges in many places, both in text and meaning, from the New Testament of the 1751 Bible of Elizabeth, and in many cases is little clearer.

In 1824, those concerned with the translation tried to take account of these divergences by expressing their intention to work as closely as possible to the "Greek original". In fact, it seems that only a small proportion of these divergences can be explained on the basis of differences of text and meaning between the Slavonic and the Greek. For example, in 1 Pet 1.9, the Russian text states that salvation has finally been achieved by faith, while the Slavonic and Greek texts state that salvation is the completion of faith. In 1 Cor 8.3 the Russian text states that he who loves God receives knowledge from God, while the Slavonic and Greek texts state that he who loves God is known by God. In 2 Thess 2.6, the Russian text states that he who gives himself out to be God cannot appear in his time, while the Slavonic and Greek state that he who gives himself out to be God will appear in his time. Individual words and entire phrases were transferred mechanically from the Slavonic to the Russian text. If they "sounded Russian", that was enough. No attempt was made to check whether such Slavonic words and expressions meant the same in Russian. As a result, many exegetically simple points are unclear in the Russian text, just as they are unclear for an ordinary Russian believer who reads the Slavonic text. For example, an ordinary Russian believer cannot understand from the Russian New Testament who are the "sons of the bridechamber" referred to in Mt 9.15; nor can he see any link between the statement that Judas was a thief, and the following statement (which explains the first) that Judas took care of what was put into the common purse (Jn 12.6).

Many works written in Russian make the interconfessional Russian Bible Society responsible for weaknesses of the first draft of the Russian New Testament, and consequently for many weaknesses in the New Testament part of the 1876 Russian Bible. This does not seem to be borne out by the historical evidence. The Society itself did not translate the New Testament into Russian, nor did it prepare the rules for the translators. The Bible Society was not responsible for the great speed at which the translators' work was done. Essentially, all that the Bible Society did was to publish the new translation. It is true that the Bible Society set up a special committee to examine the translation, but it consisted entirely of Orthodox members.

The Old Testament of the 1876 Russian Bible has its own history. In contrast to the New Testament, it was the result of a lengthy process of preparation, including the publication and wide discussion of many preliminary translations which appeared under their authors' names. The preparation of preliminary Old Testament translations was envisaged by special decisions of the Synod. There was therefore reason to hope that the Old Testament translation would be more objective than that of the New, for which there had

been no preliminary work (the translations of Archimandrite Methodius were not used). However, before the Old Testament translation reached its final form, the translators were ordered to use as the basis for the final draft an artificial mixture of the Massoretic text and the Septuagint which had no text-critical justification. As a result, the 1876 Old Testament is parallel in text and meaning neither to the Massoretic text, nor to the Septuagint, nor to the Slavonic Old Testament (itself based on the Septuagint). Thus neither the Old Testament nor the New, in the 1876 Russian Bible, is an exact interpretation of the liturgical readings from the corresponding parts of the Slavonic Bible.

It is clear that such a major task as the preparation of a Bible to be used in church life alongside another biblical text called for a very thorough theoretical basis. Unfortunately, in the case of the 1876 Russian Bible, the most important theoretical questions remained unsolved. For example, although the need of the wide masses of Russian believers for a Russian Bible was recognised, since the Slavonic Bible had become incomprehensible, no answer was given to the important question of the reason for this incomprehensibility. Was it always due to the Slavonic language itself, or was it due in many cases to the excessive literalism of the late fifteenth to mid-eighteenth century revisers of the Slavonic Bible? Would it be enough to replace a Slavonic word by a Russian one, or were new principles and methods needed for preparing a Russian Bible translation? These related questions were neither asked nor answered. Nor was there any serious study of the language form to be used in the 1876 Russian Bible. As a result, the language of this translation was not the literary Russian of the day.

There is no doubt that the 1876 Russian Bible edified ordinary Orthodox believers who read Holy Scripture without making any attempt at detailed investigation of the biblical message. From this point of view, it was an advantage to use archaic language, closer to the slightly Russified Slavonic of the church services. But the theological value of the translation would have been greater if it had used a pure contemporary literary language.

Such a view is not new. Russian theologians began to point out the weaknesses of the 1875 Bible, even before it was finished. No uncritical defence of this version, which became known as the "Synodal translation", appeared until the 1920s. Neither Russian theologians nor the highest church leaders spoke in its defence. On the contrary, a meeting of the Russian Bible Commission was held in Petrograd on January 31, 1916. The highest members of the Orthodox hierarchy, leading clergy, the highest state official in charge of church affairs, and professors of the Petrograd Theological Academy, were all present. The meeting approved of the statement, expressed in a report, that the 1876 Russian Bible could be considered neither as an exact interpretation of the Slavonic Bible, nor as a basic source for Russian Orthodox theology.

The position taken up by the Most Holy Ruling Synod after this meeting was very remarkable. Although the 1876 translation had received its own blessing, the Synod did not prevent the truth about it from being promulgated. Indeed, the Synod itself assisted this process. The main report of the meeting was published by the Synod which also, in 1917, published the proposals of

the Russian Bible Commission to the Pan-Russian Orthodox Church Council, held in 1917–18, for improvements in the Slavonic and Russian biblical texts. For its part, the Council set up a Biblical Section, which in turn recommended the organization of a special Biblical Council at the highest level of the administration of the Russian Orthodox Church. Thus both the Synod, and the Council of 1917–18, gave evidence of their responsible attitude to Holy Scripture, and of their complete impartiality in Bible work.

This action by the Synod and the Council confirms once again that the "Synodal translation" (that is, the 1876 Russian Bible) is no more than an unsuccessful stage in the still unfinished process of making a national Bible translation for Russian-speaking believers.

LOUIS DORN

CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE IN TWO HEBREW NARRATIVES

The Rev. **Louis Dorn** was an Honorary Translations Advisor working with the Philippine Bible Society from 1968 to 1974, and is presently a Th.D. candidate at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

Introduction

One of the problems Bible translators encounter in their work with people of other cultures is that the order of narrating events is in general under syntactic constraints of discourse structure different from those of English and of Indo-European languages. For example, translators in the Philippines have found that when working with tribal groups not influenced by western culture, the flashbacks of Mark 6:14–29, the narrative of the death of John the Baptist, cannot be handled in the order of the Greek text. John's arrest is mentioned before his admonition to Herod, and his death is referred to implicitly in v. 14 and explicitly in v. 16 before it is narrated in v. 27. The Indo-European hearer has no problem keeping the chronological sequence in proper order in his mind because of the tense markers. The Philippine tribesman is confused. Furthermore, in many of the tribal languages, at certain points in the narrative a connecting link is required, repeating the previous event in relation to the new one, to add clarity to the order of occurrence; e.g., "when *a* was completed, then *b* was done; after he had finished *b* he did *c*."[1]

Similar problems have been noted in other countries, as Philip Stine reports from Africa. In his experience also Mark 6:14–29 was a text that forced restudy of the discourse structure of the languages involved and a rearrangement of the text in translations.[2]

[1] Much of this information was discussed at the Bible Translations Seminar for Minority Languages, Baguio City, Philippines, March 16–20, 1970.

[2] Philip C. Stine, "On the Restructuring of Discourse," *The Bible Translator* 25 (1974): 101–106.