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ARCHIVES

# BRIEF STUDIES

## A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT \*

\* This is the outline of a paper read to the Eastern Pastoral Conference of the North Wisconsin District in 1951 and 1952 and mimeographed at the request of the conference. Without endorsing all the judgments expressed by the writer, the C. T. M. is presenting it to its readers as an example of diligent Bible study that attempts to remain objective and yet is uncompromising in doctrine. Other conferences may want to use this outline as a basis for a discussion of the R. S. V. of the New Testament and as a guide for a similar study of the Old Testament. — ED.

A careful comparison between the A. V. and the R. S. V., sometimes on the basis of the Greek text, reveals:

### *Happy Translations:*

1. Due to the use of a better text and papyri discoveries. Examples:  
Mark 1:23, 27; Mark 6:20; Mark 9:22, 23; Luke 2:2; Luke 16:9;  
John 20:9.
2. Due to
  - a) The practice of adopting the English of our present-day speech in place of archaic expressions: (The first reference is from the R. S. V.; the second from the A. V.) "Anxious" for "take no thought" (Matt. 6:34); "interest" for "usury" (Matt. 25:27). The word "usury" today has an objectionable meaning which the passage does not intend to convey. "Sternly" for "straightly" (Mark 1:43); "crowd" for "press" (Mark 2:4); "went out" for "resorted" (Mark 2:13); "tax office" for "receipt of custom" (Mark 2:14); "was hungry" for "was an hungred" (Mark 2:25); "appointed" for "ordained" (Mark 3:14); "plunder" for "spoil" (Mark 3:27); "afraid" for "fearful" (Mark 4:40); "flow of blood" for "issue of blood" (Mark 5:25); "power" for "virtue" (Mark 5:32); "bag" for "script" (Mark 6:8); "kept safe" for "observed" (Mark 6:20); "leading men" for "estates" (Mark 6:21); "immediately" for "by and by," "platter" for "charger" (Mark 6:25); "some" for "divers" (Mark 8:3); "sin" for "offend" (Mark 9:42); "test" for "tempt" (Mark 10:2); "spread" for "strawed" (Mark 11:8); "know" for "wist" (Luke 2:49); "trade with" for "occupy" (Luke 19:13); "love" for "charity" (1 Cor. 13:1); "affection" for "bowels" (Phil. 1:8);

"passion of lust" for "lust of concupiscence" (1 Thess. 4:5); "precede" for "prevent" (1 Thess. 4:15); "restrains" for "letteth" (2 Thess. 2:7).

- b) Improvements in rendering terms for coins, sometimes incorrectly translated in the A. V., and usually unintelligible to American readers: Matt. 20:2 (The generosity of the householder over against the niggardliness of the laborers is slighted by rendering "penny," A. V.); Matt. 18:28; Mark 6:37; Mark 12:15; Mark 12:42; Mark 14:5; Luke 10:35; Luke 12:59.
3. Due to a more accurate rendering of individual words and phrases: Matt. 14:8 ("prompted," not "instructed"); Matt. 15:27 ("yet even the dogs," not "yet the dogs"); Matt. 23:24 ("strained out," not "strained at"); Matt. 23:35 (distinguishing between "temple" and "sanctuary"); Matt. 25:15 ("paid," not "covenanted"; in harmony, too, with Zech. 11:12); Matt. 28:19, 20 (distinguishing between "make disciples" and "teach"); Mark 3:18 ("Cananaean," not "Canaanite"); Mark 4:36 ("leaving" for "sent away"); Mark 6:27: ("soldier of the guard," not "executioner"); Mark 6:50 ("terrified," not "troubled"); Mark 6:52 ("understood," not "considered"); Mark 6:56 ("market places," not "streets"); Mark 11:17 ("robber," not "thief"); Luke 18:12 ("get," not "possess"); John 1:63 ("writing tablet," not "writing table"); John 13:10 (distinguishing between verbs "bathe" and "wash").
4. Due to the practice of translating less literally when the sense is better expressed by a free translation: Mark 7:9 (irony!); Mark 7:11-13 ("Corban"); Luke 3:23 (Jesus' age). Similar translations: Mark 1:44, 45; Mark 2:19, 21; Mark 4:15, 30; Luke 24:25; John 9:14.
5. Due to a better knowledge of the Greek grammar: Mark 9:18 ("has just died" — effective aorist); Matt. 3:14 ("would have prevented" for "forbade," imperfect expressing conative action); Luke 8:23 (fine distinction between aorist and imperfect); Luke 1:59 (Inchoative force of imperfect). Similar instances: Mark 2:2; Mark 4:37; Mark 5:8; Luke 5:6.

*Articles:* Insertions of definite article in the A. V. are corrected by the R. S. V. in Matt. 1:20; 2:13; 28:2; Luke 2:9 ("an angel," not "the angel" often a manifestation of Jehovah in the Scriptures); also in Mark 1:45 ("a city" not "the city": Jesus was unable to enter not only the city of Capernaum but any city); also in Luke

2:12; Luke 22:17. Similarly, omissions of the definite article in the A. V. are corrected by the R. S. V. in Matt. 5:21; 5:1; 8:32; 10:12. However, the article is omitted by the R. S. V. in verses like John 2:17 ("zeal" for "the zeal"), because the English idiom does not tolerate the use of the article before proper names and abstract nouns. On the other hand, the R. S. V. does not follow this general rule in translating "Christ," which is an official title and not a proper name. With a few exceptions the Gospels have the article prefixed to the title "Christ," and while the article is usually omitted by the A. V., it is translated "*the* Christ," with the proper effect, by the R. S. V. (Matt. 11:2; 22:42, etc.).

*Unhappy Translations:*

1. Due, possibly, to the desire to render the thought in the language of today. Perhaps the translators were anxious to offer something original as to language. This could account for their reluctance, in some instances, to repeat words and phrases of the A. V., even though these may be more accurate. Since the R. S. V. claims to be a revision and not a new modern-speech translation, we feel, moreover, that time-honored phrases and expressions in the A. V. which are readily understood should have been retained. Examples: Matt. 1:12 ("deportation," which occurs nowhere else in the A. V., for "carrying away"); 2 Cor. 5:14 ("controls" for "constrains," see Greek word); John 14:26 ("Counselor" for "Comforter"); Heb. 2:10 ("pioneer" for "captain" of our salvation).

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that "testament" appears nowhere in the R. S. V. The Greek word is always translated "covenant." And yet the volume bears the title "The New Testament." At least a footnote, it seems to us, would be desirable, explaining that "covenant" is an equivalent for "testament."

Luke 22:19, 20, one of the *sedes doctrinae* on the Lord's Supper, is omitted in the text but added in a footnote, questioning the purity of the text. The same holds true of the doxology of the Lord's Prayer in Matt. 6:13. The omissions are probably warranted on textual grounds, although there are differences of opinion on the authority of the texts in question. However, all other *sedes doctrinae* on the Lord's Supper contain the lines which have been omitted in Luke 22:19, 20.

Matt. 21:22, changing the order of the words in the Greek text, puts the emphasis on faith and not on the fact that prayer is answered. Also in Rom. 4:24 and in 1 Cor. 15:58 the emphasis is

changed as a result of not following the order of the words in the Greek text. 2 Cor. 5:21 puts the emphasis on "for our sake" instead of on "Him." Gal. 5:5 ignores the emphasis on "we," dictated by the Greek text. In Acts 13:19 the force of Paul's scathing rebuke is weakened, we believe, by the free translation of the R. S. V. The R. S. V. misses the New Testament hope, which enters into and enriches patience, when it translates, in 2 Thess. 3:5, "the steadfastness of Christ" instead of "the patient waiting for Christ," A. V. That the genitive here used may be objective is possible. We wonder, too, why the R. S. V. has translated "according to the flesh" in John 8:15, while rendering the same Greek expression "according to worldly standards" in 1 Cor. 1:26, and "from the human point of view" in 2 Cor. 5:16.

Negative forms, which are good idiomatic English and at times forceful expressions, are unnecessarily changed in Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1. In other passages the R. S. V. retains Paul's way of at times saying things negatively (1 Cor. 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 4:13). We believe, too, that too often "and" and "for" are omitted. When this is done, something may be lost in the intent of the writer. See Romans 8, Paul's powerful argument for justification by faith, enforced and strengthened by repeated "and's." Omissions of "also" and "even" are also quite frequent (e.g., Matt. 8:9). Repetition of words peculiar to the Greek, often for emphasis' sake, are also omitted in John 8:31; John 6:63.

## 2. Due to interpretations rather than translations:

- a) Arbitrary translation of "thou," "thy," and "thee." At times these pronouns are retained. At other times they are changed for contemporary pronouns. The pronouns are Biblical. They are based on the style of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. If changes are adopted, what shall become of our language of devotion and worship, which is full of them? Scores of our best-loved hymns will have to be discarded or re-edited, and our liturgy will have to undergo a complete overhauling. Note, too, that "thou" distinguishes between the singular and the plural. "You" does not. Sometimes this is important. *But this is more serious:* The revision committee agreed on the practice of letting "thou," "thy," and "thee" stand when they refer to the deity. What, then, shall we conclude concerning these translations in the R. S. V., where "you" and not "thou" are used in addressing Christ? — Matt. 16:16; Matt. 20:21; Acts 1:6. According to the rule set

up by the revision committee these translations minimize the deity of Christ.

- b) Less offensive are the following interpretative renderings: "At his own expense" for "own hired house" (Acts 22:20), we hold, is too free and borders on being an interpretation instead of a translation. The same holds true of "adrift at sea" for "in the deep" (2 Cor. 11:25). Some commentators believe that a graver peril is meant than merely being adrift at sea. For "Men and Brethren" (Acts 2:29), occurring thirteen times in Acts, the R. S. V. translates "Brethren." But the expression is somewhat formal and not to be confused with the more intimate term "Brethren" (Rom. 15:30). We also believe that too much freedom has been exercised in such passages as Heb. 6:14, where a Hebrew idiom has been eliminated and the emphasis lost. Ignoring the niceties of language and style, the plural of the Greek is translated with the singular in Mark 7:21; Matt. 15:19. Similarly, "And it came to pass" and "behold" are omitted in Luke 5:12. Other passages either omit "behold" or translate "Look" or "See," as in Matt. 7:4; 12:2; 13:3; 23:34; 26:46.

The interpretative rendering in Eph. 5:32 ("I take it to mean") suggests that Paul was not clear in his mind on the matter he is speaking of. 1 Tim. 3:2 is either against polygamy, celibacy, or the remarriage of bishops. The R. S. V. chooses the third and translates "married once." It interprets instead of leaving the matter open as the A. V. does. This would make pastors married twice in conflict with God's will. Another *crux interpretum* advisedly left open by the A. V., but interpreted by the R. S. V., is 1 Cor. 7:36, 2 Cor. 11:25, and 1 Thess. 4:4. Rom. 9:5 is another example of an interpretation instead of translation. The A. V. translation is both accurate and natural. The R. S. V. regards the words which ascribe deity to Christ as a benediction to God and places in a footnote the words: "Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever." The R. S. V. is inconsistent in writing "Lord" with a capital letter in Matt. 21:3 and with a small letter in Mark 2:28. However, in other passages the R. S. V. has "Lord." In Mark 15:39 the R. S. V. rendering, "a son of God," is grammatically possible, but A. T. Robertson's Grammar (page 780) says the phrase may be definite, depending upon the context. In this case we believe the context favors the definite phrase, "the Son of God" (A. V.) — a testimony to the deity of Christ. The A. V. and the R. S. V. render the Greek word

*proskuneo* as "worship" in the passages in which the word refers to Christ. Sometimes, however, the R. S. V. selects the first meaning of the word, "bow down before," as in Matt. 8:2 and Matt. 9:18, indicating that respect, and not worship, was the intention of the leper and the ruler. But we believe that "worship" and not "bow down before" should have been used in Matt. 15:25 (the Canaanite woman whom Jesus lauded for her great faith), and in Matt. 20:20 (the mother of James and John, who regarded Jesus as the promised Messiah).

Is the literary style of the R. S. V. an improvement over the A. V.? We believe it does not compare with the unique literary beauty and charm of the A. V. Placing both versions side by side, read in succession such passages as Matt. 5:3-11 (the Beatitudes), Matt. 23:1-39 (the scribes and Pharisees denounced), and 1 Corinthians 13 (in praise of charity; granting, however, that the word "love" is better than "charity"). Observe rhythmic and pleasing notes which are lost by R. S. V. changes of words and expressions in Matt. 11:20; Luke 9:50; Luke 11:7; John 4:36; 2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Tim. 1:15; Philemon 17; 1 Peter 1:8; 1 Peter 1:4; Luke 2:10; Luke 15:31; Matt. 26:34; Acts 17:28; Matt. 11:28; Rom. 8:18; Matt. 20:15; and Rom. 16:5.

#### *Conclusion*

Because of its many improvements over the A. V. both as to clarity and accuracy we believe the R. S. V. may well be recommended to our people. It is doubtful whether the average layman would ever discover the translations which leave something to be desired as to accuracy and which are liable to the charge of being interpretations instead of translations. Even the leaders among our laity know all too little about the Bible. The R. S. V., being more "readable" than the A. V., may go a long way toward inducing our people to become diligent readers of the Book of books. Remember, too, that inaccuracies abound in the A. V. We believe the merits of the R. S. V. of the New Testament outweigh its demerits. We believe, furthermore, that the improvements in the R. S. V. should be pointed out to our members. This will remove objections which are bound to arise over the absence of hallowed and time-honored words and phrases. However, we would hesitate recommending the R. S. V. for liturgical purposes. We believe the revision should go through the testing process of examination and re-examination before we consider adopting it as a substitute for the A. V. at our altars, at our lecterns, and in our pulpits. A. F. FERGIN, Antigo, Wis.