

# Concordia Theological Monthly



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# BRIEF STUDIES

## CRITIQUE OF THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION OF THE EPISTLE OF ST. JAMES

(At the direction of the Houston Convention the Board for Parish Education has again appointed a committee whose special concern is to give guidance to the church regarding modern versions of the Bible. Professor Franzmann, a member of this committee, has prepared this article on the basis of study material presented at a recent meeting of this group. The committee urged its publication for two reasons. It is to be in the nature of a report on the work carried on by the committee. Since it deals with a short book of the Bible, the whole study could be published here. In the second place, the hope was expressed that it might serve as a pattern or guide for similar studies which pastoral conferences or individuals might undertake and forward to the committee, Rev. O. E. Feucht, Secretary. — ED.)

### I. *General*

In clarity and intelligibility the Revised Standard Version rendering of the Epistle of St. James is generally excellent; the difficulties a present-day reader will have with the Epistle in this version will be due, in the main, to difficulties in the Epistle itself, not to any lack of clarity in the version. In fidelity to the original the RSV rendering is generally superior to that of the King James Version. In oral quality the version must be ranked high also; it reads well aloud, and there is no tongue-twisting roughness. It should serve well for public reading. In connection with the idea of public reading it may be well to mention that the version rates high on the score of dignity also; it never sinks to banality.

### II. *Criticism on Stylistic Grounds*

The following renderings strike one as stylistically dubious:

1:7, 8: "For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord."

This is smooth English and probably to the twentieth-century-*Reader's-Digest* sort of taste, but it loses the impact of the peculiarly Jacobean style. Goodspeed, for example, has preserved this feature of James' style (the delayed and therefore unexpected hammer blow) without loss of readability or clarity: "Such a man must not expect to get anything from the Lord—an irresolute person like him, who is uncertain about everything he does."

1:17: "Father of lights *with* whom there is no variation or *shadow* due to change."

*with*: This is archaic; is it really intelligible today? Goodspeed's rendering is better: "about whom."

*shadow*: This does not convey the suggestion (astronomical) of the original and gives no clear picture. Why not follow Bauer: "*eine durch die wechselnde Stellung (der Gestirne) eintretende Verfinsternung*," and translate: "Who suffers no change and undergoes no eclipse"? or Menge: "*Bei dem keine Veränderung und keine zeitweilige Verdunkelung stattfindet*"?

1:26: "This man's *religion* is vain. 27. *Religion* that is pure and undefiled. . . ."

This is misleading in its literalness, like the King James' Version. Goodspeed reproduces the nuance: "His *religious observances* are of no account. A *religious observance* that is pure and stainless in the sight of God . . .," and avoids the possibility of purely social-gospel understanding.

3:1: "Let not many of you become teachers."

This again is overliteral; compare, e. g., Menge: "Drängt euch nicht zum Lehreramte, meine Brüder!" The following *gar* clause says, in effect: "Weigh the responsibility of what you are doing." It is not merely the fact that there are many teachers that is alarming, but that many are pushing their way into the office without considering the responsibility involved.

3:13: "By his good life let him show *his works in the meekness of wisdom*."

This is overliteral and therefore not altogether clear. Goodspeed's rendering is freer and better: "Let him show by his good life *that what he does is done in humility of wisdom*."

4:14: "Whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? *For* you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanished."

"For" is hardly English idiom; if the *gar* is to be reproduced at all, an unemphatic "why" would probably serve as well as anything: "Why, you are a mist. . . ."

5:8: "*Establish* your hearts." This is a bit tame for *sterixate*. "Strengthen" is used by Revised Standard Version elsewhere and would suit here, too. The Septuagint uses the Greek verb in Judg. 19:5, 8 of "fortifying" oneself with food.

On the other hand many felicitous renderings should be noted, such as the following:

1:21: "put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness" (cp. the King James Version).

2:3: "you *pay attention* to the one who wears the fine clothing." The Revised Standard Version is no more free in its translation here than the King James Version and successfully modernizes the now obsolete expression of the King James Version.

2:14: "Can *his* faith save him?" This is a vast improvement over the King James Version, which ignores the definite article with "faith."

2:15: "Ill-clad" instead of the literal "naked." This is an improvement.

2:18: Here the Revised Standard Version very happily retains the emphatic position which "faith" has in the original: "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my *faith*."

2:20: "Do you *want to be shown*, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren?" "Want to be shown" successfully reproduces the ingressive aorist of the original: "come to know," "get to know."

3:7: "Can be tamed and has been tamed" is a happy reproduction of the present and the perfect tenses in the original.

3:17: "Without uncertainty or insincerity" is as neat and pointed as the original.

3:18: "And the harvest of righteousness" — the word "harvest" is a happy substitute for "fruit," since it indicates that the word fruit is used in an anticipatory or proleptic way.

4:4: "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world *makes himself* an enemy of God." This is perhaps somewhat overtranslated but the best one can do in English.

5:13: "Let him sing praise" is an improvement over the King James "sing psalms."

5:17: "Of like nature with ourselves" is an improvement over the King James Version's "subject to like passions as we are."

### III. *Criticism of Interpretation*

2:4: "Have you not *made distinctions among yourselves* and become judges with evil thoughts?"

This rendering does not fit either the situation or the context:

1. The situation does not deal with distinctions within the Christian brotherhood, but with the attitude of the Christian brotherhood corporately over against visitors in their place of assembly, who are distinguished only as rich and poor.

2. As for the context, James goes on to reproach his readers with the fact that they do not look upon men with the eyes of God (v. 5);

in despising the poor and fawning on the rich the Christians have denied their divine Father and their own divine sonship (1:18); they have involved themselves in a self-contradiction, they have "wavered," as Goodspeed puts it; they are not being what they by God's bringing forth are (1:18). The German translators, Menge, Le Seur, Rendtorff, all reproduce the verb with the idea of self-contradiction, and this suits well also with the insistence of James on the wholeheartedness and "perfection" of the Christian and his polemics against the two-souled man.

2:7: "Blaspheme that honorable name by which you are called?" This can hardly be right. The participle "called" is an aorist, and the allusion is to the fact that this name was pronounced over them at some definite moment in their lives; it is perhaps a reference to their baptism.

The name is an object of blasphemy; it is therefore probably a sacred name rather than some designation of the Christian brotherhood; it is more likely that the rich would call them by a name which they, the rich, deemed in itself derogatory than that a name which the Christians apply to themselves should be ill-spoken of by the rich.

2:22: "Faith was completed by works." James' whole argument is, not that faith must receive an addition, a *plus* of works, but that faith "has" works, includes and involves works in itself, or it is no faith that deserves the name.

Linguistically the verb *teleioo* does not necessarily mean completion by the addition of something hitherto lacking in a quantitative sense; compare John 18:28, where the verb is used of the fulfillment of something written in the Scriptures. A freer rendering such as Goodspeed's is, in the last analysis, more accurate here: "Faith found its highest expression in good deeds." It is interesting to note that men as far removed from one another theologically as Goodspeed and Ropes on the one hand and the German Rendtorff on the other hand are united in this rendering of the passage.

3:6: "The tongue *is* an unrighteous world among our members. . . ."

"Is" is a rather tame rendering for the verb which the Revised Standard Version translates as "makes himself" in 4:4. The suggestion of Ropes in the *International Critical Commentary* is excellent: "presents itself."

5:11: "You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the *purpose* of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."

It is difficult to see just what is intended by this translation; one may question whether there is a certain New Testament instance of the Greek word *telos* in the sense of "purpose." And there is no need to go beyond normal, well-established usages of the word, as Good-speed's rendering, for instance, shows: "You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen *what the Lord brought out of it*, for the Lord is very kind and merciful." The comments of Dibelius, and the parallels which he adduces in his commentary, should be considered here.

5:3: "You have laid up treasure *for* the last days." The use of "for" to render the Greek *en* obscures the eschatological tension of the admonition of James; he is saying, in effect: "The last days have already dawned; and you, the rich, act as if nothing had happened, as if God's hour had not yet struck!" Gerhard Kittel selects just these verses, the opening of chapter 5, as a prime example of the immediacy and intensity of the eschatological expectation in James.

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#### RENAISSANCE OR REFORMATION

(NOTE: A free translation from *Grundriss der Kirchengeschichte*, Rudolph Sohm [Leipzig: Verlag Georg Boehme, 1890], pp. 122—128.)

Entering upon the year 1500 in the Germanies, we note over the portals of this eventful era the inscription "Renaissance." A cry of release seems to pervade the entire intellectual world. Rejoice, rejoice, for the world of classical antiquity has been reawakened. Here now is the true Aristotle, the divine Plato; here the masterworks of art and science, of resplendent beauty, immortal Homer's brilliance! See how it enlightens us anew!

This is the period of Raphael and of Michelangelo, a period in which a new generation, exalted in spirit by the glory of the literature of antiquity, is searching out everything that is profound; a passionate, proud, and buoyant generation, supplanting the universalistic ideas of the Middle Ages with the heroic figures and political ideas of the past. It is a period in which the third estate steps into the foreground of world history to find in the new and vital environment its place in the sun, supporting the new thoughts and making the cities the centers of culture. Life took on an entirely different form from that of the medieval world. The asceticism of the monastic life was out of place in an atmosphere of beauty, esthetics, and excitement found in the spirit of nationalistic fervor.

From the Italian peninsula there emanated over the Occident a new atmosphere, fresh as the dew of the morning, pregnant with creative processes the nature and extent of which man could but guess at. But was this in truth the regeneration, the renaissance so longingly sought during the fifteenth century? Was this the Gospel the aging world of the Middle Ages was looking for? Certainly not. The fifteenth century did not seek for renaissance; it sought for reformation. The century did not look for a revival of art and science, but a revival, a rebirth in the Church, of its head and its members, all members; not a revival of the literature of antiquity, but a revival of the great story of salvation as it had been proclaimed in the pristine era of the Church of Jesus Christ. The century wanted reform of the abuses of church life, of the corruption of the clergy. It wanted uncovered the treasures of the sources of the age of inspiration and revelation. The great trouble was that the Church had lost itself in the world, and its salt had certainly lost its savor. The tragedy was that the demands and commands of the Christian Church were trodden underfoot in large part by the very men ordained and consecrated to be examples to the flock. The decadence in church life was crying to heaven, and this decadence was sensed most by those who had made articulate the need for reform. And so, despite the *joie de vivre* of the Renaissance, there is noted the undercurrent of dismay over the new spirit, and in thundering notes is heard the cry for a renaissance of the religious life.

What had the great reform councils accomplished — Pisa, Constance, Basel, occupying the entire first half of the fifteenth century? What a fervor for reform! Almost it seemed as if the very Papacy itself stood in jeopardy of losing its existence. What great hopes, what great plans, and, yet, what futility! Nor were the efforts on the part of the secular authorities crowned with more significant success. The result of their efforts: the disintegration of the medieval Church and the rise of national *Landeskirchen* striving for independence. But could the culture, the subtle and mighty forward movement of the Renaissance bring about the sought-for reform? How could it when in its bosom it nurtured paganism! Though outwardly identified with the Church, this movement emphasized man and ignored Christ. The Renaissance of art and science was certainly no revival of morality. It was precisely this revival of art and science which gave ammunition, thus to speak, to that breed of Italian city regents who represented the very acme of ruthless and violent tyranny and whose geniality was achieved only because they considered themselves privileged to transgress every one of the Commandments of the Decalog. And what a contrast! These

regents represented, on the one hand, the best in the acquaintance with the spirit of the Renaissance and, on the other, the nadir of vice and shamefulfulness. This was the age of a Cesare Borgia and of a Machiavelli. And it might well be said that even the Madonna masterworks of a Raphael were but distortions of religious expression and positively exalted the sensuality of the human figure. Only in the Sistine Madonna may we find an exception to this evaluation.

And if we view the Papacy of this Renaissance period, we meet again the disgusting and immoral and unmoral figures of Innocent VIII and an Alexander VI. The Renaissance Popes run the gamut from this Innocent to the connoisseur Leo X. What impulse did these charlatans give to the reform of the Church? Great and wondrous is the papal period of Leo X—for the history of culture, but how insignificant for the history of the Church. It was the Renaissance itself which gave to these men the direction toward the worldly, the temporal. Selling his birthright as head of the Church for the mess of voluptuous and tyrannical pottage of dominion and power, this man was more interested in the church state than in the state of the Church.

In the last analysis the interests of the Renaissance were opposed to the interests of the Church. And the high tide of intellectual life which in 1500 pervaded the Occident seemed at first sight to foster the downfall of the Church rather than to bring it rescue. In the Germanies, however, the intellectual movement that was the Renaissance developed into a pattern somewhat different from that of the ultramontane one. These lands comprised the seat and heartland of the great reform effort of the century. Here were convoked the great councils which shook the medieval world. And here in the beginning of the 16th century the spiritual emphasis was still preponderant. It was this emphasis which gave the German Renaissance movement, Humanism, a peculiarly spiritual direction. Here the profundity of religious experience and the seeking for certitude of one's salvation were too prominent to be supplanted by anything that might tend to move this consciousness out of focus. This trend certainly became articulate in the publication of the New Testament by Erasmus and the Old Testament in the original languages by Reuchlin. Here it was that philology was utilized to undergird theology, and it was hoped that such knowledge of philology would be instrumental in bringing about an immediate revival of the pristine glory of the Church. But despite these well-intentioned designs which raised to new heights the awareness of the New Testament, the movement failed to bring to the knowledge of the man in the street the significance of this effort, and in its intellectual dress it was unable to retard the decadence of the



Church. True, the German Humanists were not indifferent to the Church as were the brethren in Italy. But the development wanted the fire and enthusiasm of positive convictions. The cynicism of "Praise of Folly" could not bring about reform. Emphatic in its negations as are all strictly intellectual trends and movements, the German movement was weak in affirmations, seeing the faults and foibles but lacking the elemental force which alone could bring about creative processes which would affect a world or bring to history something great and positive. In 1517 the great Lateran Council disbanded, satisfied with establishing the supremacy of the Papacy and the immortality of the soul. (This was indeed a step in the right direction and one needed by the enlightenment in Italy.) The Bishop of Isernia said: "The Gospel is the source of all wisdom, virtue, all goodness and all wonderful; the Gospel, I say, the Gospel!" How correct, yes, even more nearly correct, perhaps, than he imagined! But then already there was coming to manhood the young hero whom God selected and sent to make known what was long forgotten, the Gospel, the full and complete Gospel of salvation in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

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