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Battling over Bibles:
Episodes in the History of Translating the Scriptures

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A S LONG AS PEOPLE TAKE the Bible seriously, they are going to translate it. And as long as people take the Bible seriously, they are going to argue about translations! Although clearly a long way from our Lord's "new commandment" that His disciples love one another, it is nonetheless a mark of religious vitality—if not of charity—that Christians care enough about the Bible to denounce translations and translators who do not render the Word of God faithfully or, at least, so they think. Whether we are talking about Jerome's Vulgate or the NIV 2011, the first appearance of these versions created controversy. The same has been true with respect to many versions in between. The story of translating the Bible is also the story of controversy in the Church.

Obviously, in a short paper like this, we are not going to recount the entire history of translation controversies. Instead, I would like to focus on three particular eras that were marked not only by major efforts to put the Bible into the vernacular but also by major arguments over the character and quality of such versions. Our focus will be on the Bible in English; but we will begin with Luther and the Reformation as the period when vernacular Bibles became characteristic of Protestant Christianity. Then we will shift to the 19th century, when New Testament textual critics were able to persuade church leaders that the venerable King James Version had to give way to something better; and then

finally to the late 20th century when feminists began their assault on traditional English.

By beginning with the Reformation, I do not mean to suggest that translating the Bible came into vogue only with Martin Luther. That's not even the case with respect to the German Bible (there were at least 14 editions in print before Martin Luther),[1] nor is it true with respect to the early Church that employed not only the Greek Septuagint for its basic Bible but also quickly produced translations fitted to the mission field in Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Latin.[2] Nonetheless, it is still the case that theology and the printing press gave dramatic impetus to the production of vernacular Bibles in the 16th century. And not surprisingly, Martin Luther was at the source and center of this development.

We cannot understand the success of Luther's reformation movement apart from the "new technology" of his day. Although Luther was himself an impressive personality, it is hard to imagine the Reformation without the printing press. By printed works in the vernacular, especially pamphlets, the catechism, and the Bible, Luther communicated directly with ordinary people who embraced his faith and made it their own.[3]

But why the Bible in particular? Given some of Luther's basic beliefs about the Bible, viz., that the Scriptures alone are the source and standard for Christian doctrine and practice[4] and that every Christian is responsible for knowing and applying the Scriptures,[5] it is not surprising that Luther and his colleagues produced and promoted Bibles in the

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[1] M. Reu, *Luther's German Bible* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1934; reprint, St. Louis: CPH, 1984), 27-39.

[2] James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: CPH, 1995), 38.

[3] This has often been remarked upon. An excellent work that demonstrates just how effectively Luther employed the printing press is Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994). For a much broader look at the ways in which the printing press facilitated the transformation of western civilization (including religion) in the early modern period, see Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[4] E.g., "We ought to see that every article of faith of which we boast is certain, pure, and based on clear passages of Scripture." *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), LW 36:107 (WA 6:560.27-29).

[5] E.g., "We ought to march boldly forward and test all that they do, or leave undone, by our believing understanding of the Scriptures... it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error." *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), LW 44:135-36 (WA 6:412.29-31, 37-38).

language of the people. Although the Reformer had published a few translations of biblical material before 1522, it was not until he was at the Wartburg that he actually undertook the project that would last him the rest of his life, putting the Word of God into the German tongue. It was a collaborative effort, of course. Nevertheless, Luther was its driving force and the one person more than any other responsible for its accomplishment.[6]

As noted above, the German Bible was already in print before Luther undertook the task, but previous editions were based on the Latin Vulgate. Luther wanted something different—and better—a Bible based upon the original languages and translated into an idiom that ordinary Germans could understand. Moreover, unlike his predecessors, he had access to printed editions of both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament as well grammars and lexicons, Latin translations, and philological commentaries to help in understanding.[7]

Up until 1521 and his great confession before the Diet of Worms, Luther had neither time nor opportunity for such demanding work as translating the Bible; but afterwards, when his prince, Frederick the Wise, had him taken off to the Wartburg for safekeeping, Luther began the task that would last him the rest of his life. Beginning in December, 1521, with the Greek New Testament, he completed a German translation by the time he returned to Wittenberg in March of 1522. With the help of Melanchthon and others, the work was revised and then transmitted to the printers for publication in September 1522.[8]

And this was just the beginning. With the New Testament now being published, Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues turned to the Old and published it in parts as they completed them, the Pentateuch coming out in 1523 and the last of the prophets in 1532. Only in 1534 did a complete Luther Bible finally appear, and it was a magnificent achievement. Beautifully printed and illustrated, this work opened up

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[6] Eric W. Gritsch, "Luther as Bible Translator," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 62-72.

[7] See Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General View of the History of the English Bible*, 3rd ed., rev. William Aldis Wright, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 126-29, for brief description of what was available for original language biblical studies at the time of Luther. For a more detailed discussion, see Basil Hall, "Biblical Scholarship: Editions and Commentaries," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3: *The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1963), 38-93.

[8] Willem Jan Kooiman, *Luther and the Bible* (Phil.: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 90-95, 118-21.

God's Word to the German reader as never before. Here the pious layman could read the entire narrative of God's revelation from the story of creation all the way through the book of Revelation with its visions of the end times. And when he didn't understand something, he had Luther's prefaces and notes to help him![9]

Prior to Luther's death, 12 more editions of the entire Bible appeared in Wittenberg. In addition, between 1522 and 1546, there were at least 22 official editions of the New Testament; and outside of Wittenberg, more than 250 editions of the Bible and portions thereof appeared during the same period. One scholar has estimated that during Luther's lifetime a half a million complete Bibles and parts of Bibles were printed in the German tongue.[10] It's no wonder then that Luther's German influenced the development of the German language in this period, for it seems that everyone who could read German was reading Luther's German during these years!

Of course, there were those who did not like what they read, and so, as was true of Luther's other works, his German Bible also received its fair share of criticism. The motivation was primarily theological, for those who opposed Luther's Bible also opposed his theology. However, besides theology, strictly speaking, Luther's critics also revealed what is a recurring theme in the story of Bible translations, viz., translation traditionalism, for there are always some Christians who resist a new version of the Bible whenever it appears. But why? One plausible explanation is this: the first translators to successfully produce a well-received and popular text naturally create the impression among their readers that their version *is* the Bible. Thus, the Old Latin *is* the Bible in the 4th century; the Vulgate *is* the Bible in the 16th; and the King James Version *is* the Bible in the 19th. So subsequent translators appear as innovators who are departing from the Word of God. This situation arose already in the days of Jerome who had to answer such criticism when he prepared the Vulgate, and among the critics was no less a figure than St. Augustine.[11]

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[9] Ibid., 131-63, 174-77.

[10] Ibid., 178.

[11] Basically, Augustine thought that Jerome should stick to *revising* the Old Testament of the Latin Bible by means of the Septuagint rather than translating afresh from the Hebrew. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 217-18, 266-67, 270-72.

However, by the time of the Reformation the traditionalists were lining up behind that same version—more or less[12]—to which Augustine had initially taken exception.[13] That, of course, is how traditionalism works: given enough time, what was once a novelty becomes an integral element in the lives of people that they cannot imagine doing without. Something that has stood the test of time has thereby demonstrated its value. Furthermore, when it comes to the Bible, traditionalists instinctively suspect that attacks upon a venerable version are the consequence of a new theology, i.e., advocates of a new biblical text are rejecting the old doctrine as well as the old version. And sometimes they are correct. This is a very important point, so permit me to repeat it. Sometimes traditionalists are correct in their fears that a new translation means advancing a new doctrine. This certainly was the case in the 16ᵗʰ century.

If we look, for example, to one of Luther's earliest critics, Jerome Emser,[14] who not only criticized Luther's New Testament when it first came out but also published a version of his own in 1527,[15] we find that he placed his specific criticisms of Luther's Bible into the context of a general charge that Luther was a heretic. By the time the September Bible appeared in 1522, Emser had already written against Luther—and

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[12] What made it out of the Middle Ages was not exactly Jerome's work. See Raphael Loewe, "The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate," *The Cambridge History of the English Bible*, vol. 2: *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1969), 102-54.

[13] This became evident at the time of Erasmus's first publishing the Greek New Testament and accompanying Latin translation (1516) when his opponents reacted against him and asserted the primacy of the Vulgate. See Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 199-211.

[14] For Emser's biography, see Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. "Emser, Hieronymus." There are more extensive treatments in Heribert Smolinsky, *Augustin von Alveldt und Hieronymus Emser: Eine Untersuchung zur Kontroverstheologie der Frühen Reformationszeit im Herzogtum Sachsen* (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983), 24-47, and Kenneth A. Strand, *Reformation Bibles in the Crossfire: The Story of Jerome Emser, His Anti-Lutheran Critique and His Catholic Bible Version* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1961), 21-34.

[15] *Das naw testament nach lawt der Christlichē kirchen bewertē text, corrigirt und widerumb zu recht gebracht* (Dreszden: Wolffgang Stöckel, 1527). This appeared in the same year as Emser's death. Based largely on Luther's first German New Testament, Emser's version has been examined by Strand, 61-73, and Heinz Bluhm, *Luther Translator of Paul: Studies in Romans and Galatians* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 133-53, 507-36.

Luther against Emser.[16] Not surprisingly, the papal apologist was not enthusiastic about Luther the translator. According to Kenneth Strand, Emser viewed Luther's work as that of a man already found guilty of heresy. "Why then," Emser asked, "should we Christians accept so quickly the New Testament translation of one individual and especially of an openly declared heretic [*von einem offenbaren erklerte kerzer*]?"[17] Emser went on to indict Luther for departing from the traditional Latin text prepared by Jerome at the request of a pope and used by the Church for over a thousand years, and for failing to translate the text literally. Instead, he claimed, Luther had omitted words, letters, and entire sayings and had translated in a confused manner. What's more, Luther had also accompanied the biblical text with heretical glosses and introductions. In other words, for Emser, Luther's "New Testament" was just one more attempt by a heretic to advance his own false views of religion. Departures from the traditional text also indicated departures from traditional doctrine.

Obviously, we are not going to agree with Emser's characterization of Luther's work as heretical, but we must acknowledge the fundamental accuracy of his charge regarding Luther's agenda. The Reformer was using his translation of the Scriptures to promote his own understanding of Christianity over against others, and in fact, he was quite open and honest about it. At the outset of the Preface to his New Testament, Luther complained about "many unfounded [*wilde*] interpretations and prefaces" that have resulted in no one knowing what is "gospel or law, New Testament or Old." This situation required a biblical text with notes and prefaces to rescue the common man from "his former delusions" and to guide his reading so that, as Luther argued, "he may not seek laws and commandments where he ought to be seeking the gospel and promises of God."[18]

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[16] See Smolinsky, 221-309, David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists 1518-25* (Minn.: Fortress, 1991), 73-74, 86, 90, 95-96, 102, 135-38, 153, 207-08, and 230-33.

[17] As quoted in Strand, 38, but for the original see Emser's, "Vorrede," *Auss was gründ und ursach Luthers dolmatschung uber das nawe testament dem gemeinen man billich vorbotten worden sey* (Leipzig: Wolffgang Stöckel, [1523]), aiii'. I consulted the microform copy that is available in the IDC collection, *Flugschriften des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts* (Zug, Switzerland: Inter Documentation Co., 1979), Fiche 318-21, No. 1-905. Emser wrote another critique of Luther's Bible, his *Annotationes Hieronymi Emser uber Luthers naw Testament gebessert und emendirt* (Dresden: [Emserpresse], 1524). In this paper, I have based my summary of Emser's criticism on Strand's work.

[18] LW 35:357 (WA DB 6:2.2-11).

The Gospel, in particular, became the theme of Luther's preface, because it was the ultimate purpose for which God had given the Scriptures. "See to it," Luther wrote, "that you do not make a Moses out of Christ, or a book of laws and doctrines out of the gospel, as has been done heretofore and as certain prefaces put it, even those of St. Jerome. For the gospel does not expressly demand works of our own by which we become righteous and are saved; indeed it condemns such works. Rather the gospel demands faith in Christ: that he has overcome for us sin, death, and hell, and thus gives us righteousness, life, and salvation not through our works, but through his own works, death, and suffering in order that we might avail ourselves of his death and victory as though we had won it ourselves."[19]

But what about the traditional Latin text, departures from which were also a part of Emser's critique? Although Luther did not address this question in his New Testament preface, for some years he had already been assessing the Vulgate by means of the original language texts. In his early lectures on Romans (1513–15), he referred frequently to the Greek and at times used it to correct the Vulgate.[20] Likewise in his early publication on the Penitential Psalms (1517), he admitted to using Reuchlin's translation from the Hebrew for the text of his commentary in addition to the Vulgate.[21] Then in the very first of the 95 Theses, he implicitly faulted the Vulgate in comparison with the Greek. For in his subsequent defense of the statement, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [*poenitentiam agite*] [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance," Luther argued explicitly "first from the Greek word *metanoeite* itself, which means 'repent' [*poenitentiam agite*] and *could be translated more exactly* by the Latin *transmentamini*, which means 'assume another mind and feeling, ... have a change of spirit [emphasis mine].'"[22]

Later, on more than one occasion, Luther clearly expressed his appreciation for the biblical text in the original languages. For example, in his advice *To the Councilmen of Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools*, Luther wrote that "it was not without purpose that God caused his Scriptures to be set down in these two

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[19] LW 35:360 (WA DB 6:8.3-11).

[20] For examples of Luther's correcting the Vulgate by means of the Greek, see LW 25:386, 427-28, 492, 501 (WA 56:395.25-26; 435.11-12; 498.29-499.2; 507.4-6). According to the index (LW 25:534) of the English translation to the 1515-16 lectures on Romans, there are 58 references to the Greek text just in Luther's glosses.

[21] WA 1:158.8-10.

[22] LW 31:83-84 (WA 1:530.16-17, 19-22).

languages alone—the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek. Now if God did not despise them but chose them above all others for his word, then we too ought to honor them above all others."[23] Not surprisingly, then, for his German Bible, Luther translated the New Testament Greek and the Old Testament Hebrew.[24]

When it came to translating the Scriptures, therefore, Luther was no traditionalist. Besides the text, Luther also employed a style and vocabulary that annoyed his critics, for instead of a literal translation, Luther committed himself to readable German. Another of Luther's critics, Friedrich Staphylus, described Luther's proceedings this way:

> For it is evident that Luther in his translation hath bothe corrupted the text omitting and altering the very words and also hath depraved the sence of the text by false and hereticall gloses partly added in the margin, partly foisted in the text it self. So by clipping awaie the termes of the text, and patching on the suttle shiftes of his owne braine, he hath gaily coloured his pernicious doctrine with the painted shethe of pretended scripture.[25]

Staphylus went on to offer seven examples of Luther's "lieger-demain" as he called it. Among other points, the Catholic apologist charged Luther with mistranslating Ephesians 6:13 by omitting the phrase, "as the perfect" (*"als die volkommen"*) in order to advance his doctrine of man's total depravity. However, this was really a question

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[23] LW 45:359 (WA 15:37.17-22). Luther's respect for the originals was closely connected to his view of Scripture's inspired origins. See Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther's Approach to Scripture* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2004), 141-46.

[24] According to Kooiman, 91 and 131, this meant Erasmus's 2nd edition (1519) of the Greek New Testament (along with Erasmus's translation into Latin) and the Brescia printing (1494) of the Soncino edition of the Hebrew (1st ed. 1488).

[25] Friedrich Staphylus, *The apologie of F. Staphylus. Intreating of the true understanding of holy scripture* (Antwerp: J. Latius, 1565), fol. 66r-v. Friedrich Staphylus (1512-1564) was a German theologian and imperial councilor, who converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism in 1552. A doctor of theology, he represented the Catholic side against Melanchthon, his former teacher, at the Colloquy of Worms in 1557. His *Apologia* first appeared in 1561, well after Luther's death, but I am using it here because the Catholic apologist, Thomas Stapleton, translated it into English as a part of his polemic against English Protestant Bibles. See my *The Battle for the Bible in England 1557-1582* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 91-109. For Staphylus's life and work, see *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 17 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), s.v. "Staphylus, Friedrich," and *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 11 vols. (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1957-67), s.v. "Staphylus, Friedrich."

of the underlying text since the phrase in question is in the Vulgate ("*omnibus perfectis*") but not the Greek.[26] Staphylus also accused Luther of misleading readers in his rendering of Romans 3:20 in the interests of justification by faith *alone*, since Luther employed *nur* ("only") in his translation ("*Durchs Gesetz ist* nur *erkantnus der Sünden* [emphasis mine]")[27] even though a literal translation of either the Latin or Greek would simply say, "By the lawe we have knowledge of sinne." So this is a criticism of Luther's style. Staphylus also criticized Luther's word choice in 1 Timothy 4:14 against the sacrament of ordination, for Luther had rendered *presbyteriou* (Latin, *presbyterii*) as *Der altisten* (literally, "the elders") instead of "priesthood."[28]

In short Luther's critics saw his choice of words, style, and text as evidence of his heretical bent. Although such critics were not especially convincing in their own times,[29] they did move Luther to write in defense of his translation efforts, and in so doing, he provided insights into his own thinking about the task of Bible translation.[30] For example, in answer to those who complained about his departure from a literal translation, Luther explained that he was not interested in a translation that employed stilted and unnatural German. He wanted one that ordinary people could understand. This is what he wrote:

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[26] For these textual comparisons, I am using a modern critical edition of the Vulgate, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Robertus Weber, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969, 1983) and a contemporary reprint of the so-called "textus receptus." This is H KAINH ΔIAΘHKH *The New Testament: The Greek Text Underlying the English Authorised Version of 1611* (n.p.: The Trinitarian Bible Society, n.d.).

[27] For Luther's German, I have quoted in the text the version recorded by Staphylus but I have tested the accuracy of Staphylus's charges by examining a facsimile of the *September Bible*: Martin Luther, *Das Neue Testament Deutsch. Wittenberg 1522: "SEPTEMBERTESTAMENT"* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

[28] Staphylus, fol. 66ᵛ–73ʳ. His other complaints include 1 Corinthians 9:5 (against clerical celibacy), Acts 3:1 (against canonical hours), Acts 3:12 (against meritorious works), and Colossians 2:8 (against the social order).

[29] Nonetheless, Emser's New Testament, after revision by Johann Dietenberger and Johann Eck, went through 65 subsequent editions. OER, s.v. "Emser, Hieronymus."

[30] See especially his *On Translating: An Open Letter* (1530), LW 35:177-202 (WA 30ᴵᴵ:632-46), and *Defense of the Translation of the Psalms* (1531), LW 35:203-23 (WA 38:9-17, 69). For Luther as a translator, see Kooiman, 96-117; Gritsch, "Luther as Bible Translator"; Bluhm, *Luther Translator of Paul*; Heinz Bluhm, *Martin Luther: Creative Translator* (St. Louis: CPH, 1965); Reu, *Luther's German Bible*, 257-84; and W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and Their Background* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1955), 167-212.

We do not have to inquire of the literal Latin, how we are to speak German.... Rather we must inquire about this of the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the market place. We must be guided by their language, the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly. That way they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them.[31]

This principle was an important one for Luther, though not absolute. For Luther conceded that "where everything turns on a single passage," one must keep to the original "quite literally [*nach den buchstaben behalten*]."[32] Luther offered an example in John 6:27, "Him has God the Father sealed [*versiegelt*]." "It would have been better German," Luther added, "to say, 'Him has God the Father signified [*gezeichent*],' or 'He it is whom God the Father means [*meinet*].' But I preferred to do violence to the German language rather than to depart from the word."[33] Elsewhere, Luther cited a couple of other instances in which he retained a literal rendering, one of them Psalm 68:18, "Thou has led captivity captive." A more idiomatic rendering would have been, "Thou hast set the captives free." But in this instance, Luther preferred to keep the literal because it pointed to Christ's redemptive work. "These," he said, "are the captivities that Christ has taken captive and done away: death can no longer hold us, sin can no longer incriminate us, the law can no longer accuse our conscience."[34] In this instance, Luther retained the literal rendering for the sake of its theological significance.

But Luther provided yet another example that pointed in another direction. In Psalm 91:5–6, the Psalmist wrote, "You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday." This time, Luther's concern was the difficulty of knowing what particular misfortunes were pointed to by the images of terror, arrow, pestilence, and destruction. So in order not to foreclose any possible interpretations, Luther retained a literal translation.[35] In this case, uncertainty about the meaning motivated Luther's decision.

Clearly, therefore, one should not interpret Luther's remarks about a readable vernacular text to mean that he never translated literally.

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[31] LW 35: 189 (WA 30^II:637.18-22).

[32] LW 35:194 (WA 30^II:640.20-21).

[33] LW 35:194 (WA 30^II:640.22-24).

[34] LW 35:216 (WA 38:13.15-17).

[35] LW 35:216-17 (WA 38:13.22-14.32).

Nevertheless, it remains true that the Reformer worked diligently to make his version understandable to the person who was going read it or hear it. In defending his translation in particular instances, he continually raised the question, "What German could understand something like that [*Welcher deutscher verstehet solchs*]?" as if to say, why translate at all if your reader will not comprehend the message? For Luther, translating the Bible was for the purpose of communicating God's Word and that required clear, natural German.[36]

A good translator, therefore, had to be an expert in *two* languages—the original and his own! Luther described his translation process for the Old Testament in this way:

> [The translator] must see to it—once he understands the Hebrew author—that he concentrates on the sense of the text; asking himself, "Pray tell, what do the Germans say in such a situation?" Once he has the German words to serve the purpose, let him drop the Hebrew words and express the meaning freely in the best German he knows.[37]

First, what does the Hebrew say? Then, how would a German say it? That was Luther's method.

Given the demands of such a method, it's clear that not everybody can be a successful translator. But Luther certainly was. He knew his Hebrew and his Greek – and he knew his German, as the success of his Bible through the centuries demonstrates. Of course, for Luther himself, linguistic and literary merits were hardly the point. He wanted a Bible in the language of the people so that they might learn from it all about Christ as their Savior from sin. That was its purpose. That was its goal.

Luther was not the only one in the sixteenth century to think this way. So what the Reformer started, others pursued. In England, for example, Luther inspired the first translators, William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, directly;[38] and what they began *in English* after the example of Martin Luther, their successors built upon so that the King James Version of 1611 is really a culmination of previous efforts and its

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[36] LW 35:189 (WA 38:637.26). Also LW 35:190, 191 (WA 38:638.1-2 and 638.16-17).

[37] LW 35:213-14 (WA 38:11.28-32).

[38] Bluhm, *Creative Translator*, 169-232, and Heinz Bluhm, "Martin Luther and the English Bible: Tyndale and Coverdale," in *Martin Luther Quincentennial*, ed. G. Dünnhaupt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984).

text is directly related to the versions that came before it.[39] In fact, one of the editors of the King James Version wrote in the preface:

> Truly… wee never thought from the beginning, that we should neede to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one… but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principall good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our indeavour, that our mark.[40]

So the very first rule given to the translators was that "The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit." A later rule specified that when faithfulness to the original required a departure from the Church's text, then the KJV translators should use the English text found in Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, the Great Bible, or the Geneva versions.[41] In this way, the King James Version became heavily indebted to its predecessors and, in fact, a commonly quoted statistic is that in those parts originally translated by Tyndale, 90% of the King James text is still Tyndale's version.[42]

Therefore, what began in England with Tyndale as a radical departure from the traditional Bible eventually became the founding of another tradition! Through the course of the sixteenth century, new versions of the English Bible started with the text of a predecessor and "improved" it, usually by bringing it more into line with the original languages. So in the late 1530s, when the King of England first authorized an official Bible for his church, the principal translator in charge of this project, Miles Coverdale, did not start afresh but employed an earlier version which, in turn, had incorporated much of Tyndale's pioneering effort into its own text. As an "official" Bible, Coverdale's achievement, the so-called Great Bible of 1539, was an important

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[39] Works that do an excellent job of tracing these relationships include: Charles C. Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible 1340-1611* (Phil.: University of Pennsylvania Press 1941) and Westcott, *History*, 123-284.

[40] "Preface to the Version of 1611," in *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611*, ed. Alfred W. Pollard (London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1611), 369.

[41] For the rules, see David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 7-8.

[42] See, for example, G. E. Duffield, "Introduction," in *The Work of William Tyndale* (Appleford, Bershire, England: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1964), xxxv-xxxvi, and J. F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (London: SPCK, 1937), 108; but Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 15, says only 83%.

milestone in the construction of a tradition. Thirty years later, when Queen Elizabeth authorized a new official Bible, the Bishops' version of 1568, the result was a revision of the Great Bible; and in 1611, the King James Version was a revision of the Bishops.'[43]

But all the while English Protestants were translating and improving their version of the Bible, English Catholics were attacking such efforts from the perspective of their own tradition. As was the case with Luther's Bible, so too with the English versions from Tyndale (1525) to King James (1611), there developed alongside the Bibles a body of controversial literature regarding the merits of various English versions as well as the propriety of the enterprise in the first place. The English debate proceeded along the same grounds as that surrounding Luther's Bible: text, style (including terminology), and, especially, doctrine.

This is hardly surprising, at least in the beginning, because William Tyndale's pioneering work reflected Luther's in several respects. For example, Tyndale's very first effort at publishing the New Testament, the so-called Cologne Fragment (1525) included only the first several chapters of Matthew since the imperial authorities interrupted it before the printer could complete it.[44] Nonetheless it clearly displayed Lutheran influence. For one thing, there was the table of contents. Tyndale's work reproduced Luther's organization of the New Testament books that reflected the Reformer's questioning the canonicity of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation, by grouping them, unnumbered, at the end.[45]

Tyndale's prologue also revealed Lutheran influence. The first three pages were basically a translation of the first two pages in Luther's introduction to the September Testament.[46] Even more importantly,

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[43]   Westcott, *History*, 67-121.

[44]   For the story of Cologne Fragment, see Mozley, *Tyndale*, 56-66, and Edward Arber, ed., *The First Printed English New Testament translated by William Tyndale*, facsimile ed. (London: n.p., 1871).

[45]   (The New Testament) [Cologne: Peter Quentell, 1525], fol. Bv[r]. This is the first item in T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525-1961*, rev. ed. by A. S. Herbert (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968). I have consulted the copy in the microfilm collection produced by University Microfilms International (Ann Arbor, Michigan), *Early English Books I (Pollard and Redgrave, STC I), 1475-1640*. For a summary of Lutheran influences evident in this edition, see David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 108-33, and F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 31-36.

[46]   Cf. *The Cologne Fragment*, fol. Aii[r]–Aiii[v] (top two lines) and *"Vorhede,"* *The September Bible*, [fol. 2[r-v]]. Mozley, 63, estimated that nearly half of Luther's introduction made it into Tyndale's but that Tyndale added so much additional material that the Luther portion was only an eighth of the total.

Tyndale's work demonstrated Luther's understanding of the Gospel: "The righteousness that before God is of value, is to believe the promises of God, after the law hath confounded the conscience." Tyndale explained, "When God's law hath brought the sinner into knowledge of himself, and hath confounded his conscience and opened unto him the wrath and vengeance of God; then cometh good tidings. The Evangelion sheweth unto him the promises of God in Christ, and how that Christ hath purchased pardon for him, hath satisfied the law for him, and appeased the wrath of God. And the poor sinner believeth, laudeth and thanketh God through Christ, and breaketh out into exceeding inward joy and gladness."[47]

Clearly, Tyndale was advancing Luther's view of justification by means of an English Bible. And what he began in 1525 with the Cologne Fragment, Tyndale continued in subsequent editions of the English Bible and his other writings. In his first major revision of the New Testament, published in 1534, Tyndale did not reprint his original preface. He wrote a new one, but he did include several prefaces to New Testament books, and most of them show a marked dependence upon a Luther original.[48] The longest of Tyndale's prefaces is by far the one to Romans, which is a translation or paraphrase of Luther's preface to the same book. Like Luther, therefore, Tyndale recommended Romans as "the principall and most excellent part of the newetestament, and most pure Evangelion, that is to saye gladde tydinges and that we call gospel, and also a lyghte and a waye in unto the hole scripture. I thynke it mete, that every Christen man not only knowe it by rote and with oute the boke, but also exercise him selfe therin evermore continually, as with the dayly brede of the soule." Later in the same piece, Tyndale summarized

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[47] William Tyndale, "A Pathway into the Holy Scripture," in *The Work of William Tyndale*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Appleford, Berkshire, Eng.: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1964), 12-13. Tyndale reworked his prologue into a separately published "Pathway." Duffield's modern language edition of the latter is careful to point out differences between the two, but I have checked my quotations, cited from Duffield, against the original edition, *The Cologne Fragment*, fol. Bii[r].

[48] See specifically the prefaces to 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians (almost an exact translation), 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy (almost an exact translation), 2 Timothy, Titus (almost an exact translation), Philemon, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and the three epistles of John. These are conveniently found in William Tyndale, *The New Testament*, ed. N. Hardy Wallis, facsimile ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1938), and LW 35:357-411. According to William A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535*, reprint ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 144-45, "Hardly a thought expressed in these pieces [Tyndale's prefaces] is not to be found in the German's prefaces." On the other hand, Daniell, *Tyndale*, 326, calls them "almost, but not quite, pure Luther."

Paul's message just like Luther, "Here of cometh it, that faith only justifieth, maketh rightewes, and fulfilleth the lawe, for it bringeth the sprete thorowe Christes deservinges, the sprite bringeth lust [i.e., delight], looseth the hert, maketh him free, setteth him at liberte, and geveth him strength to worke the dedes of the lawe with love, even as the lawe requiyreth. Then at the last out of the same faith so working in the herte, springe all good works by there awne accorde."[49]

Tyndale, however, was not a carbon copy of Luther. In some of these 1534 prefaces, he took direct issue with Luther though not by name. Regarding the epistle to the Hebrews, for example, Tyndale offered an orthodox explanation for the "hard knots" that Luther had cited in order to show why he questioned the book. Tyndale concluded his preface with a rhetorical question, "And seinge the pistle agreeth to all the rest of the scripture, yf it be indifferentlye loked on, how shuldit not be ofauctoryte and taken for holye scripture?" Even more forcefully, regarding James, Tyndale, while acknowledging Luther's various arguments against the book, nevertheless stated, "Me thynketh it ought of right to be taken for holye scripture."[50]

The connection between Tyndale and Luther did not escape the defenders of the old religion in England. From the beginning, they indicted Tyndale as a heretic right along with Luther. Probably the best known of Tyndale's critics, Thomas More, wrote *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529) and included in the title this phrase, "the pestilent secte of Luther and Tyndale, by the tone bygone in Saxony, and by the tother labored to be brought into England." More's *Dialogue* is a wide ranging criticism of the reformers that included an attack upon their translations of the Bible – an attack best summarized in More's own words, "Who so callyth [it] the newe testament calleth it by a wronge name except they wyll call it Tyndals testament or Luthers testament. For so had Tyndall after Luthers counsayle corrupted and changed it frome the

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[49] Tyndale, *The New Testament* (1534), 293, 297. Here's Luther in the same places: "This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul" (LW 35:365) and "So it happens that faith alone makes a person righteous and fulfils the law. For out of the merit of Christ it brings forth the Spirit. And the Spirit makes the heart glad and free, as the law requires that it shall be. Thus good works emerge from faith itself" (LW 35:368-69). For the Luther original, see *The September Bible*, fols. ai^r and ai^v.

[50] Tyndale, *The New Testament* (1534), 502, 521.

good and holsom doctrine of Cryste to the devylysh heresyes of theyr owne that it was clene a contrary thing."[51]

Although More claimed that deliberate mistranslation affected more than "a thousand textys" in Tyndale's New Testament, he restricted himself to discussing just seven of them in order to document Tyndale's deliberate avoidance of traditional terminology for the sake of promulgating false doctrine. According to More, these included using "seniors" (later editions "elders") for "priests"; "congregation" for "church"; "love" for "charity"; "favor" for "grace"; "knowledge" for "confession"; "repentance" for "penance"; and "a troubled heart" for "a contrite heart." By such substitutions, More claimed, Tyndale would "make the people wene [i.e., know] further that such artycles of our faythe as he laboreth to destroy and whyche be well proved by holy scripture were in holy scripture nothynge spoken of."[52] In other words, Tyndale rejected traditional terminology in order to reject traditional doctrine.

Basically, More was right, and Tyndale admitted as much in his *Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (1531) while, of course, insisting that the new theology – and translation – were correct. On the one hand, Tyndale defended his particular renderings as accurate expressions of the Greek; but on the other, he contended that yes, indeed, the new terminology corrected current and false opinions. For example, Tyndale argued that by "congregation" instead of "church" readers would understand "the whole multitude of all that profess Christ" rather than just "the juggling spirits" of the Roman clergy.[53] He also defended "repentance" instead of "penance" since the text was not referring to any works of satisfaction but rather had in view, "Repent, or let it forethink you; and come and believe the gospel, or glad tidings, that is brought you in Christ, and so shall all be forgiven you; and henceforth live a new life."[54]

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[51] Thomas M. C. Lawler, Germain Marc'hadour, and Richard C. Marius, eds., *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 6: *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), Part I: 285. For the More/Tyndale debate, see Rainer Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968), 36-119, and Heinz Holeczek, *Humanistische Bibelphilologie als Reformproblem bei Erasmus von Rotterdam, Thomas More und William Tyndale* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 279-358.

[52] More, *A Dialogue*, Part I, 290.

[53] William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, Parker Society Edition (Cambridge: University Press, 1850), 14-15.

[54] Ibid., 23.

Like Luther, Tyndale offered his translation in order to advance the true and saving doctrine, so he chose his terminology accordingly.[55]

The More-Tyndale debate occurred just a few years after the appearance of Tyndale's first complete New Testament (1526), but it raised issues that continued to appear over the course of the century in connection not just with Tyndale but later versions of the Bible as well. The most thorough of the Catholic critics of the Protestant versions during the Reformation period was Gregory Martin, himself the principal translator of the Rheims New Testament (1582), the first Catholic version in English.[56] Besides the New Testament, Martin also published an extensive analysis of the Protestant Bibles,[57] and to the translation itself he appended an introduction that justified the entire undertaking. In that introduction he defended his text, terminology, and style, all in the interests of a vernacular Bible, profitable for instruction in life and doctrine, and "specially for deciding the doubtes of these daies."[58]

By 1582, of course, the Council of Trent had declared the Latin Vulgate to be "authentic Scripture";[59] and Martin listed the council's decision as his fifth reason (out of 10) for translating "the old vulgar Latin text, not the common Greeke text." His first reason, however, was not ecclesiastical authority as such but pure traditionalism: "It is so auncient, that it was used in the Church of God above 1300 yeres agoe, as appeareth by the fathers of those times." In subsequent reasons he claimed the authority of both Jerome and Augustine and maintained, "It is that, which for the most part ever since hath been used in the

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[55] It's interesting to observe that Luther used similar non-traditional terminology in his *September Bible*. In the following examples, I have placed Luther's terminology next to that of Jerome Emser's New Testament. I used the 2nd (1528) edition, *Das Naw Testamēt, So durch L. Emser saelige vteuscht, und des Durchlewchtē Hochgebornē Furstē und herr Georgē hertzogen zu Sachssen, etc.* (Leyptzick: Valten Schuman, 1528) This is available in the microform collection, *Early Printed Bibles* (Leiden: IDC, 1989), HB-230/1.

Luther used "Elltissten" not "Priestern" (Titus 1:5); "gemeyne" not "Kirchen" (Mt. 18:17); "Bessert euch" not "Thuet buss" (Mt. 3:2); and "holdselige" not "voll genaden" (Luke 1:28).

[56] *The New Testament of Jesus Christ, translated faithfully into English, out of the authentical Latin....* (Rhemes: John Fogny, 1582). For a demonstration of its "Catholic" character, see my *Battle for the Bible*, 187-210. The Old Testament came out only many years later, 1610-11. For Martin's biography, see OER, s.v. "Martin, Gregory."

[57] *A discoverie of the corruptions of the holy Scriptures by the Heretikes of our daies...* (Rhemes: John Fogny, 1582).

[58] Pollard, *Records*, 301. Martin worked with others on the translation so the introduction may also include the contributions of others.

[59] H. J. Schroeder, ed., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1941), 18, 297.

Churches service, expounded in sermons, alleaged and interpreted in the Commentaires and writings of the auncient fathers of the Latin Church." In other words, long standing usage had created a prejudice in favor of the Vulgate.[60]

Similarly, tradition also contributed to Martin's choice of terminology, since he employed words like "advent," "penance," "chalice," "aultar," and "host" to show readers that such ecclesiastical terms "procede even from the very words of Scripture." Conversely, like Thomas More, Martin repeated the charge that Protestant translators used "usual English words...to deceive the reader." In fact, Martin argued for a Latinate style that reflected not only the vocabulary of the Latin text but also its word order: "We presume not in hard places to mollifie the speaches or phrases, but religiously keep them word for word, and point for point, for feare of missing, or restraining the sense of the holy Ghost to our phantasie." Admittedly, this could result in rather awkward English, e.g., "Against the spirituals of wickedness in the celestials" (Eph. 6:12) or "As infants even now borne, reasonable, milke without guile desire ye" (1 Peter 2:2). To clarify any ambiguities, the Rheims New Testament included copious marginal notes and annotations. Encumbered by no doctrine of the perspicuity of the Scriptures, the Catholic translators did not have to produce an easy-to-read version, and in point of fact, they did not.[61]

Protestants did not leave Martin's claims and criticism unanswered. In fact, the King James translators used their introduction "To the Reader" to respond in part to their critics, defending their use of the Hebrew and Greek texts and their choice of vocabulary. With respect to the latter, they positioned themselves between extremes, rejecting not only the Catholic insistence on Latinate (and hardly English) terms but also the Puritan (actually, Tyndale's) policy of avoiding "olde Ecclesiastical words," and instead, "betak[ing] them to other," e.g., "washing" for "baptism" and "congregation" for "church." But this retreat from Tyndale was only partial – perhaps another tradition was beginning to settle in. "Elders" and "repentance" both stayed in the text.[62]

The degree to which Protestant biblical traditionalism had set in by 1611 is difficult to assess, but it was strong and clear more than two hundred fifty years later when the Church of England prepared a successor to the King James. The modern era of English Bibles began

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[60] Pollard, *Records*, 302-303. Regarding the Latin text, see my *Battle for the Bible*, 187-201.

[61] Pollard, *Records*, 308.

[62] Ibid., 370, 375-76.

in 1881 with the publication of the Revised New Testament.[63] The Old Testament followed in 1885.[64] Ever since, there has been a more or less continuous stream of Bibles designed to replace their predecessors. Even though the revision of 1881/1885 did not unseat the King James as the standard English Bible, it raised important issues, especially regarding the Greek text, that undermined confidence in the Authorized Version and paved the way for subsequent versions.

By the middle of the 19th century, English Bible scholars were starting to call for a new Bible, especially a New Testament, on the grounds that the Greek text available in the 16th century was in many instances an inaccurate representation of the original. Prompted by the discovery of many more manuscripts, including Tischendorf's Sinaiticus from the fourth century,[65] and equipped by the development of textual criticism, by the 19th century New Testament scholars were printing Greek New Testaments, designed to replace the *textus receptus*, of previous centuries.[66] One consequence was a decision by the Church of England in 1870 to prepare a new version of the Bible.[67]

At that time, however, the force of traditionalism was so strong that the decision was made only to produce a *revision* of the King James and not a brand new Bible. Rule #1 for the revisers required them "to introduce as few alterations as possible into the Text of the Authorized Version consistently with faithfulness"; and Rule #2 ordered the revisers "to limit, as far as possible, the expression of such alterations to the language of the Authorized and earlier English versions."[68] The result then was a deliberately archaic version of the Scriptures but based on a "modern" Greek text (the Hebrew remained basically the same) translated into old-fashioned English. Such a proceeding seems strange to

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[63] *The New Testament...translated out of the Greek: being the version set forth A.D. 1611 compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A.D. 1881* (Cambridge: University Press, 1881).

[64] *The Holy Bible translated out of the original tongues: being the version set forth A.D. 1611 compared with the most ancient authorities and revised...*, 5 vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1885).

[65] Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 62-65.

[66] Ibid., 152-85.

[67] For the story of the Revised Version, see Bruce, 135-52, and David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 2:218-61.

[68] For the rules regarding translation, see Norton, *Bible as Literature*, 2:219-20.

contemplate at this late date, but such is the pull of translation traditionalism.

Of course, the Revised Version was an extreme example. Nevertheless, the shadow of the King James Version hovers over subsequent versions of the English Bible to this very day and its influence defines an entire family of vernacular Scriptures, the so-called Great Tradition,[69] each member of which has committed itself in some degree or other to retaining the language and style of the King James Version. The Preface to the most recent addition to the family, the English Standard Version (2001), described itself as standing "in the classic mainstream of English Bible translations over the past half-millennium" that began with William Tyndale.[70] To those who were raised in this tradition, the ESV is a Bible that still "sounds like" the Bible, e.g., "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1); "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3); "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt. 5:5); and "In those days a decree went out from Caesar August that all the world should be registered" (Luke 2:1). Well, you can't have everything—but you get the idea. In versions like the ESV, translators have not chosen an English style that perfectly reflects a modern idiom but one that retains the "sound" of previous Bibles.

But the commitment to traditional language, present to one degree or another throughout the Great Tradition, was not enough for some. Already in the 19th century, the Revised Version provoked a backlash, led by John W. Burgon, an eminent scholar and Dean of Chichester Cathedral.[71] Even before the Revised New Testament appeared, he had already tangled with textual critics over the authenticity of the "last twelve verses of Mark,"[72] so he was the perfect scholar to comment on an entire New Testament that rested on a non-traditional text. Burgon's

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[69] My first exposure to the term, "Great Tradition," for the King James family of translations was in the title of Arthur L. Farstad's *The New King James Version in the Great Tradition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989).

[70] "Preface" to *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, a Division of Good News Publishers, 2001), vii.

[71] For Burgon's biography, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 61 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "Burgon, John William."

[72] John William Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark Vindicated against Recent Critical Objectors and Established* (Oxford: J. Parker, 1871).

review of the new version[73] was comprehensive, and he attacked style and theology as well as the text. But this last point is perhaps the most important, because even today – when no one is reading the Revised Version any more – the question of the Greek text of the New Testament remains an important one. For Burgon, biblical textual criticism was both scholarly *and* theological, "I...strenuously insist that *the consentient voice of Catholic Antiquity* is to be diligently inquired after and submissively listened to [emphasis original]." To determine what that "voice" is demands scholarly expertise but "submissively" to listen to it is a theological position.[74]

First of all, Burgon rejected the textual criticism of his day as entirely too subjective. He dismissed efforts to explain variant readings by trying to answer the question, What is a copyist most likely to have written, as hopeless: "We venture to declare that inasmuch as one expert's notions of what is 'transcriptionally probable' prove to be the diametrical reverse of another expert's notions, the supposed evidence to be derived from this source may, with advantage, be neglected altogether."[75]

For Burgon, one should rely exclusively on the external evidence, not just the extant manuscripts and ancient versions but also the testimony of the Church fathers who frequently quoted the New Testament and so represented additional witnesses to the original text.

> It...stands to reason that we may safely reject any reading which, out of the whole body of available authorities—Manuscripts, Versions, Fathers—finds support nowhere save in one and the same little handful of suspicious documents. For we resolutely maintain, that *external Evidence* must after all be our best, our only safe guide.... We refuse to throw in our lot with those who, disregarding the witness of *every other* known Codex—*every other* Version—*every other* available Ecclesiastical Writer,— insist on following the dictates of a little group of authorities, of which nothing is known with so much certainty as that

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[73] John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised: Three Articles Reprinted from the* Quarterly Review (London: John Murray, Albemarle St., 1883). I have used the electronic edition available at <http://books.google.com/books?id=nXkw1TAatV8C&pg=PA556&ots=NzPAkekfgn&dq=Revision+Revised>. Accessed on 10/17/12. An abridged version is available in David Otis Fuller, ed., *True or False? The Westcott-Hort Textual Theory Examined* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1973), 123-215.

[74] Burgon, "Preface," *The Revision Revised*, xxvi.

[75] Ibid., 252.

often, when they concur exclusively, it is to mislead [emphasis original].[76]

But what is it that led Burgon to placing confidence in the majority of the witnesses instead of the earliest? Was it a kind of textual democracy? The variant reading with the most votes wins? Not really. Instead, the preponderance of that evidence was the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who not only inspired the text but has also preserved it!

> The provision, then, which the Divine Author of Scripture is found to have made for the preservation in its integrity of His written Word, is of peculiarly varied and highly complex description. First, by causing that a vast multiplication of copies should be required all down the ages beginning at the earliest period, and continuing in an ever-increasing ratio until the actual invention of printing, He provided the most effectual security imaginable against fraud.... It is a plain fact that there survive of the Gospels alone upwards of one thousand copies to the present day.[77]

Finally, Burgon also believed that "under the Providence of God" the Reformation era editors of the text, limited though they were to a relative handful of manuscripts, produced a printed Greek text whose "general purity...is demonstrated by all the evidence which 350 years of subsequent research have succeeded in accumulating."[78] In other words, Burgon's attack on the critical text of his day amounted also to a defense of the basic Greek text upon which the King James Version stood and was supported by a careful examination of all the evidence that God in His goodness had preserved.[79]

So, how persuasive were Burgon and his allies in defending the traditional text? On the one hand, neither the Revised Version nor its American cousin, the American Standard Version (1901), replaced the KJV in most homes and churches.[80] So from that perspective, perhaps one could declare Burgon and company the winners. However, when

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[76]   Ibid., 19.

[77]   Ibid., 8-9.

[78]   Ibid., 250.

[79]   But Burgon did not think the *textus receptus* was beyond improvement. See Doug Kutilek, "What did John Burgon Really Believe about the Textus Receptus and the King James Version?" electronic reprint from *As I See It* 1(1998):n.p. <http://www.kjvonly.org/doug/kutilek_burgon_textus_pr.htm> Accessed 10/11/12.

[80]   Bruce, 152.

the Revised Standard Version (1946, 1952) came along and began a new period of translation proliferation, only one of the better known versions, the New King James,[81] used anything other than a modern, critical text of the Greek New Testament. Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad did succeed in printing a "majority text,"[82] but so far no major translating effort has followed it—not even those arising from the more conservative elements of American Christianity like the Southern Baptists.[83]

However, as we noted at the outset, the underlying text is only one issue that concerns translation traditionalists. They are often concerned about terminology and style as well. But the issue that trumps them all is ideology—the perception that translators are using a new Bible in order to promote new doctrine. And sometimes, as we have seen, the critics are correct. Recalling this point is important as we take a brief look at the present era of Bible translations that began in the 1980s with the first attempts at accommodating *feminist* interests in English Bibles.

Feminists scored a major victory when the New Revised Standard Version (1989) appeared.[84] Still another representative of the Great Tradition, the New RSV incorporated many changes that arose from purely textual and linguistic considerations, but it was also motivated by changes in English style. In the preface "to the reader," Bruce Metzger, chairman of the translation committee, described their task this way: "to continue in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony, and current English usage." As a result, Metzger continued, "the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation." In general, this characterization is true of other versions in the Great Tradition as well.

However, Metzger went on to devote an entire paragraph to what the New RSV translators viewed as one of their most pressing stylistic challenges, dealing with "linguistic sexism," i.e., "the inherent bias of

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[81] The "Preface" of the New King James identifies its New Testament text as the *Textus Receptus*. See *Holy Bible: The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), v.

[82] Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds., *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

[83] The preface to the *Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2004), ix, identifies its New Testament text as the Nestle-Aland, 27th edition.

[84] *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989).

the English language towards the masculine gender."[85] As a result, the New RSV employed a series of linguistic gymnastics in order to escape a literal rendering of the text if it would involve using the inclusive "he," "him," or "his." Among other techniques, this meant replacing the singular by the plural, personal statements by impersonal ones, third person pronouns by second and first person, and direct quotations by indirect discourse. This new sensitivity also meant that the New RSV would avoid masculine terminology for masculine originals in order to accommodate feminist concerns, e.g., "brother" became "brother or sister," "neighbor," "kin," "believer," and "another member of the church."[86] What had been standard English style and terminology a generation previously—and for countless generations before that—now had to go.

Of course, the assault upon traditional English went far beyond Bible translations and was a part of a larger feminist agenda that aimed at radical social equality for men and women.[87] But it clearly had theological ramifications as well. For example, just a few years prior to the appearance of the New RSV, feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza had called for new translations of the Bible as part of reworking the entire Christian tradition in the interests of liberating women "from oppressive patriarchal texts, structures, institutions, and values."[88] But reworking the biblical text in the interests of a theological agenda, she insisted, was already evident in the Bible itself: "The early Christian authors have selected, redacted, and reformulated their traditional sources and materials with reference to their theological intentions and practical objectives."[89] Furthermore, she contended that since

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[85]　Bruce M. Metzger, "To the Reader," NRSV, [ix].

[86]　For numerous examples of all of these, see Wayne Grudem, "What's Wrong with 'Gender Neutral' Bible Translations?" (n.p.: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 1996), available at <http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/wayne_grudem_1997_whats_wrong_with_gender-neutral_bible_translations.pdf>. Accessed 10/13/12. See also my "The English Bible in a Post-Modern Age" in Paul T. McCain and John R. Stephenson, eds., *Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1999), 155-63.

[87]　For a very helpful overview, see Jennifer Saul, "Feminist Philosophy of Language," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/feminism-language/>. Accessed 10/13/12. For some of the concrete feminist "corrections" to traditional English that are later to be found in English Bibles, see Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* (New York: Lippincott and Crowell, 1980).

[88]　Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Her Memory: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1983), 33.

[89]　Ibid., 49.

the communities that produced the New Testament documents were themselves "patriarchal" and "androcentric," contemporary readers could not simply accept such documents at face value but had to read them "in such a way that they can provide 'clues' to the egalitarian reality of the early Christian movement."[90] Fiorenza believed that "every translation is also an interpretation influenced by the contemporary perspective of the translators."[91] Therefore, she advocated producing a Bible that would invite feminist interpretations of the Christian tradition. With the New RSV, Fiorenza was on her way.

And not just with the New RSV. Many other major Bible translations have accepted feminist conventions regarding English style to one degree or another. These include the Revised English Bible (1989), Today's English Version (1992), the Contemporary English Version (1995), the New Living Translation (1996), and finally, the New International Version (2011).[92] However, by 2011, in all fairness, the argument was no longer between those who wanted to change the English language for ideological reasons and those who did not, but between those who believed that the language had now changed in a feminist direction and those who nevertheless wanted to defend their Bibles from the feminist ideology behind the changes.

So have the feminists won their crusade against traditional English? Without putting it quite this baldly, the Committee on Bible Translation for the NIV has contended that contemporary usage now necessitates a wide array of changes from the 1984 NIV.[93] But these also happen to be changes that accommodate a feminist agenda to erase gender differences. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, an evangelical organization committed to maintaining traditional, biblical distinctions between men and women in the home and in the church,[94]

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[90] Ibid., 41.

[91] Ibid., 46.

[92] See William W. Combs, "The History of the NIV Translation Controversy," (n.p.: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 14. <http://www.dbts.edu/pdf/macp/2011/Combs,%20History%20of%20NIV%20Translation%20Controversy.pdf>. Accessed 10/13/12. Combs's entire essay is a well-documented presentation of the entire controversy.

[93] "One of the main reasons the task of Bible translation is never finished is the change in our own language, English. Although a basic core of the language remains relatively stable, many diverse and complex linguistic factors continue to bring about subtle shifts in the meanings and/or connotations of even old, well-established words and phrases." "Preface," *Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), vi.

[94] See their self-description at <https://www.cbmw.org/>. Accessed 10/13/12.

has carefully compared the 1984 version of the NIV to the 2011 version. Here are some examples of their findings.[95]

(1) Incorrectly changing "father" to "parent" or something else.

1984 NIV: *Proverbs 15:5* "A fool spurns *his father's* discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence."

2011 NIV: *Proverbs 15:5* "A fool spurns *a parent's* discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence."

The Hebrew word is *'ab*. Fifteen other verses make the same change. Why?

(2) Incorrectly changing "son" to "child."

1984 NIV: *Proverbs 13:24* "He who spares the rod hates *his son*, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."

2011 NIV: *Proverbs 13:24* "Whoever spares the rod hates *their children*, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them."

The Hebrew word is *ben*. In 33 places, the new NIV changes the gender-specific "son" to something else. Why?

(3) In at least one instance, this has Christological significance.

1984 NIV: *Psalm 8:4* "What is man that you are mindful of him, *the son of man* that you care for him?"

2011 NIV: *Psalm 8:4* "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, *human beings* that you care for them?"

In Hebrews 2:6 this passage is applied to our Lord and so the 2011 NIV cites the verse with "son of man" language in spite of the fact that that phrase is not present in the 2011 NIV Old Testament. Why the confusion? Is it really necessary?

(4) Incorrectly changing "man" to some gender-neutral term when the original clearly intends a masculine person.

1984 NIV: *1 Kings 9:5* "I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have *a man* on the throne of Israel.'"

2011 NIV: *1 Kings 9:5* "I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have *a successor* on the throne of Israel.'"

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[95] "An Evaluation of Gender Language in the 2011 Edition of the NIV Bible: A Report from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood," (Lexington, KY: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2011), 10-13. <https://www.cbmw.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/cbmw-final-analysis-of-2011-niv.pdf>. Accessed 10/13/12. These are just a few of the examples cited in the report, but for the data in detail, see also <http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison>.

The Hebrew is *'ish*. In 278 places in the new NIV, masculine words like this have been translated in a gender neutral way. Why?

(5) Incorrectly changing "brother" to "brother or sister" or some other non-family word.

1984 NIV: *Luke 17:3* "So watch yourselves. If your *brother* sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."

2011 NIV: *Luke 17:3* "So watch yourselves. If your *brother or sister* sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them."

New Testament Greek is perfectly capable of saying, "brother or sister," as it does, for example, in James 2:15. But our Lord chose not to do so in this particular passage. So why did the 2011 NIV decide to translate *adelphos* in this way – and similarly in 62 other passages?

These are just a few of the 2766 such changes that the CBMW has documented.[96] And it may very well be that the answer in each case is simply, by 2011, we no longer talked that way! In which case, the traditionalists must either concede that feminist ideologues have won the battle over language or else insist that in translating the Scriptures, the end product should reflect the world of the Bible and not the world of the reader.

These are not easy issues to resolve, nor by treating them so summarily do I wish to suggest that they are. The point of this paper is rather different. Translation issues are perennial, and we have just scratched the surface. For example, ignoring the whole controversy over the RSV when it first appeared is almost inexcusable, since it was a real donnybrook and featured such episodes as one preacher publicly torching the offending text and others renaming it, the "Revised Standard *Perversion*" of the Bible.[97] But even without exploring that controversy, we can see that arguments over text, style, and ideology (or theology) arise right along with new translations. There's no escaping it. The Bible – God's Word – is basic to Christianity. So translating the Bible is one of the most important tasks that Christians can ever undertake, and debating the results of that enterprise will always follow. Personally, we may not enjoy the fight but we have no choice. After all, at least for now, we are still a part of the Church *militant!* LSQ

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[96] "An Evaluation," CBMW, 4.

[97] See, for example, Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 93-119.