

Receptor-Oriented Gospel Communication

(Making the Gospel User-Friendly)

EUGENE W. BUNKOWSKE
and
RICHARD FRENCH

A Booklet of Essays
Delivered at the
Fourth Annual
Missions and Communication Congress

Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana
September 28 - 30, 1988

135233

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LIBRARY
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA



CAMERON A. MacKENZIE

Prof. MacKenzie is an assistant professor in the departments of Historical and Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary and serves as Director of Library Services. Before joining the faculty in 1983, he served St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Detroit, Michigan, as pastor (1975-83) and as headmaster of its school (1972-83), where he was actively engaged in evangelizing the unreached—Arabs, Hispanics, low income, etc. Prof. MacKenzie received his A.B. from the University of Detroit, an M.A. in history from the University of Chicago, an M.A. in classics from Wayne State University, and an S.T.M. in New Testament from Concordia, Fort Wayne. His major interest is the English Reformation and Puritanism. Prof. MacKenzie and his wife, Meg, along with their four children, live at 6 Tyndale Place, Ft. Wayne.

RECEPTOR-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION IN TRANSLATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Prof. Cameron A. MacKenzie

After completing his studies at the University of Cambridge around 1520, Reformation England's first Bible translator, William Tyndale, took up residence in Gloucestershire as tutor in the household of one of the country's up and coming gentry. In addition to teaching, however, Tyndale also sought to convince others of the new and evangelical faith that he believed and practiced. After one particularly heated discussion in which his opponent had been driven to say, "We were better be without God's law than the pope's," Tyndale answered, "I defy the pope and all his laws....If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough know more the scriptures than thou dost." And so was born in the heart of William Tyndale, "receptor-oriented Gospel communication in translation."

Of course, Tyndale didn't say it that way. In fact, he said it more clearly. Writing in 1530 in the preface to his translation of the Pentateuch about the opposition to some of the holy Scriptures and the false interpretations of the Bible by others, Tyndale went on to comment:

Which things onely moved me to translate the new testament. Because I had perceaved by experyence, how that it was impossible to stablish the laye people in any truth, excepte the scripture were plainly laiyd before their eyes in their mother tonge, that they might se the processe, ordre, and meaninge of the texte.²

Certainly, Tyndale did not know much about the **theory** of translation. He couldn't discuss "dynamic equivalence" or "target"

languages; but he knew that the Scriptures were God's Word for the people not just for the clergy or the educated. In fact, he called upon the latter to help him find "the very sence of the tonge," the "meanyng of the scriptur", "the right englyshe worde" so that he could communicate to the ordinary Englishman for whom God had intended His Word.³

Of course, Tyndale was not the only sixteenth century figure concerned with translating the Bible into English, although he was the first of his era actually to do so. In fact, the period from 1525 to 1611 saw more English versions of the Bible produced than any other comparable period in history with the exception of our own century. Thus, Tyndale's version was succeeded by Coverdale's and Matthew's, and theirs by the Great Bible; and the Great Bible by the Geneva and Bishops' Bibles, until finally the King James version was published in 1611. Less well known versions were also produced—by Richard Taverner, John Cheke, and others. Why, even the Roman Catholics got into the act with the publication of their Rheims New Testament in 1582 and the Old Testament in 1609-10. Moreover, all these translations were available in a variety of formats, different editions, and with all kinds of accompanying matter—charts, notes, maps, and doctrinal treatises—all so that the reader would get the right message from the Book. Before 1525 there had been only a handful of manuscript Scriptures of the old Wycliffite version; but by 1611 printed Bibles in English were available by the thousands and tens of thousands.⁴

Nor were the English unique in western Europe at the time, for this same period saw the publication of numerous vernacular Bibles in German, Dutch, Italian, French, and Spanish. The printing press, of course, was an important factor in explaining this outpouring, for not only did it provide a way to disseminate the completed versions, it also made the scholarly tools of translation—the lexicons, the grammars, and, of course, the texts themselves—available to the community of scholars for the production of vernacular Bibles. More significant, however, than the printing press or the scholarly apparatus was the theological climate of the times, the period of the Reformation. Bibles are not translated into the vernacular unless people think the Bible an important book to read. That's one thing that has always comforted me about our own era. Despite the theological chaos of our times and the obvious indifference of many to the Gospel of Christ, the continuing

publication of Bibles in old and new translations suggests a vitality of the Christian spirit that is still drawing its strength from the Word.⁵

At any rate, people of sixteenth century Europe experienced perhaps the greatest upheaval of religious ideas and institutions in the history of Christendom; and coming out of that upheaval were the vernacular Scriptures. Probably no single individual had more influence on either the upheaval or the vernacular Scriptures than Martin Luther; and certainly, his influence on William Tyndale was paramount. Therefore, Luther's ideas regarding Bible translation are something we should not overlook even if our particular focus in this paper is on English Bibles.

Luther himself first published a German New Testament in 1522, and then for the rest of his life in conjunction with his Wittenberg colleagues he sought both to complete and to perfect the work thus begun. Consequently, the Old Testament books were all published by 1532; and in 1534 there appeared for the first time a complete Luther Bible. The latter underwent several revisions until 1546 when the last revision was printed that Luther himself had a hand in.⁶

Luther, however, not only translated, he also wrote about translating, and in at least three places he presented his principles of translating—in his "Preface to the Old Testament" (1523), his "On Translating: An Open Letter" (1530), and his "Defense of the Translation of the Psalms" (1532).⁷ But what are these principles? I think we can reduce them to three.

The first that Luther worked with in translating is that the end product must be faithful to the language into which the translator translates, i.e., that he must use the idiom of the people for whom he translates rather than the idiom of the original languages from which he translates. In an often quoted remark, Luther explained his procedure this way:

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 marketplace. 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.⁸

This principle was all important to Luther, since the reason he

translated the Bible was that people might read **and understand** God's Word. Therefore, in discussing this principle and in offering examples of it at work, he asked over and over again, "What German could understand something like that?" as if to say, why translate at all if your reader still can't grasp the word?⁸

Of course, this principle that a translation be comprehensible to those who read it has some corollaries for those who use it, not least among them that a translator must be an expert in **two** languages, the original tongue and that into which he translates. First, to be sure, he must understand what the sacred penman is saying. This means he must be at home in the Greek or Hebrew. A casual acquaintance with the original won't do. He has to **know** what is written before him. But secondly, he has to have an ear for the target language—not only know the words but how to use the words; for he is translating meaning not vocabulary, as Luther maintained: "Words are to serve and follow the meaning, and not the meaning the words."¹⁰ Therefore, Luther described his procedure thus:

(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.¹¹

Besides this first principle, however, that the translation speak the language of the people for whom it was intended, Luther operated with a second principle that somewhat modified the first and that he explained this way:

On the other hand I have not just gone ahead anyway and disregarded altogether the exact wording of the original. Rather with my helpers, I have been very careful to see that where everything turns on a single passage, I have kept to the original quite literally.¹²

Unfortunately, Luther did not say precisely when this literal principle overrides the first, but he did give a couple of examples. One is Ps. 68:18 which says of the Savior, "Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive." Now, says Luther, "it would have been good German to say, 'Thou hast set the captives free.' But this is

too weak and does not convey the fine, rich meaning of the Hebrew which says literally, "Thou hast led captivity captive,"—at which point Luther goes on to explain "captivity" as death and the law, which Christ through His redemptive work has rendered eternally harmless. Luther's point about translating, then, is that where there is no vernacular idiom that expresses the original fully, one should translate literally so as not to lose some meaning present in the original especially if it is of theological significance.¹³

Luther's second example, Ps.91:5-6, is the other side of the coin where the idiom of the original is obscure. Here the translator must be careful to convey the ambiguity and not make his translation more precise than the original justified. Luther wrote:

Likewise, in Ps.91:5-6 we have stuck to the Hebrew, "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," etc. Since they are expressed in obscure and veiled words, one might well interpret differently from another these four torments or misfortunes which a righteous person must endure for God's sake. Therefore we have tried to leave room for each person to understand them according to the gifts and measure of his spirit.¹⁴

In instances like these, therefore, either on account of the obscurity or the preciseness of the original, for which the translator can find no vernacular equivalent, he must retain the idiom of the original even if it makes the translation somewhat difficult for the reader, since otherwise the reader runs the risk of losing the meaning altogether.

Of course, the proper application of principles one and two is a difficult task; and much depends upon not only the skill but also the attitude of the translator, i.e., what he thinks the message of the Scriptures really is. Thus, Luther, who received a great deal of criticism for translating Rom. 3:28, "We hold that a man is justified without the works of the law, by faith **alone**" (emphasis mine) when there is no "alone" in the Greek text, defended himself on the grounds both that the German idiom demands it (principle 1) and that the "meaning of St. Paul" requires it.¹⁵ This latter point introduces a new principle into the discussion, however; but perhaps it is the most important, viz., that a good translator must also be a good theologian. Luther wrote:

Translating is not every man's skill as the mad saints imagine. It requires a right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing, Christian, trained, informed, and experienced heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian or factious spirit can be a decent translator.¹⁶

Luther did not recognize a kind of neutral or objective attitude toward the Lord. Either one was with God or not. Likewise toward God's Word. A man of faith understood it and the message of the Gospel that informed it, whereas the unbeliever did not. Since in applying the principles of translation, one sought to make the message clear, one who had not grasped that message was ill-suited to translate, however much he understood the languages. Luther summarized his position this way:

I think that if the Bible is to come up again, we Christians are the ones who must do the work, for we have the understanding of Christ without which even the knowledge of the language is nothing.¹⁷

For Luther, then, translating the Bible was an act of piety, a service of thanksgiving to the One who, as he said,

blesse me so much every hour of my life that if I had translated a thousand times as much or as diligently, I should not for a single hour have deserved to live or to have a sound eye. All that I am and have is of His grace and mercy, indeed of His precious blood and bitter sweat. Therefore, God willing, all of it shall serve to His honor, joyfully and sincerely.¹⁸

To attempt a translation of God's Word apart from such faith in God could only lead to failure. Skill in languages was absolutely necessary, but so was faith. Only together could they produce a good translator.

But, now, let's return to William Tyndale, upon whom Luther exercised a decisive influence both in theology and in translating. Even though Tyndale did not write the same kind of statement regarding his principles of translation that Luther did, it seems clear that he followed somewhat the same guidelines. Commenting on his style, for example, Tyndale's biographer compares him to Luther:

(Tyndale) too threw overboard the stilted jargon of translation style. Whatever else his version might be, he would make it

truly English readily understandable by the people, and readable. If its contents are not foreign to the heart, neither should its sound be foreign to the ear.¹⁹

Tyndale himself indicated that his whole purpose in translating was to put God's Word into the "mother tongue" of "the lay people,"²⁰ and so he called upon the educated to help him find the "proper English" or "the right English word"²¹ for the Greek and Hebrew.

Like Luther, too, Tyndale felt that in some places faithfulness to the original necessitated less than idiomatic English; but even here he desired to assist the ordinary reader with accompanying helps, for example "a table to expounde the wordes which are not commonly used, and (to) shewe how the scripture useth many wordes, which are wother wyse understonde of the common people, and to helpe with a declaracion where one tonge taketh nott another."²² Thus, if the text itself was not always immediately comprehensible, Tyndale still wanted his reader to understand the Word; and so, also like Luther, he added to the bare text prologues and notes. Indeed, in many instances, these are no more than translations and paraphrases of those prologues and notes that Luther incorporated into his own version.²³

Finally, Tyndale, again like Luther, approached his task as a Christian, offering his "newe Testament" to "brethren and susters moost dere and tenderly beloved in Christ" and defining his task as showing "light...to them that walk in dercknes, where they cannot bot stomble, and where to stomble ys the daunger of eternall damnacion." Indeed, to make the message of the Scriptures as clear as possible, Tyndale introduced his New Testament with a prologue in which he gave definitions for what he considered the basic concepts of the Scriptures, such as law, gospel, nature, grace, working and believing, deeds and faith. The list itself sounds Lutheran and so do Tyndale's explanations. For example, in describing the Gospel, Tyndale commented that it is the "joyfull tydings...of Christ...howe that he hath fought with synne, with dethe, and the devill, and over come them. Whereby all men that were in Bondage to synne, wounded with deth, overcum of the devill, are with oute there awne merittes or deservings losed, justified, restored to lyfe, brought to libertie and reconciled unto the favour of god, and sett at one with hym agayne."²⁴

We cannot, of course, at this time discuss fully the relationship between Tyndale and Luther. Suffice it to say that Tyndale, who probably had studied at Wittenberg and certainly was influenced by

Luther's own translation mentioned before: (1) put the Scriptures into the language of the people except (2) where some feature of the original cannot be rendered by idiomatic speech, and (3) approach the task as a Christian.

However, just as Luther's work met with fierce and determined opposition, so too in England not everyone was thrilled to read Tyndale's New Testament. Moreover, when we look at the opposition, we realize that Luther's principles are not so straightforward as at first they may seem. For one thing, there is the nature of the Gospel. In sixteenth century England, those who differed with Tyndale's conception of the Gospel also disliked his translation. Or, to put it another way: different gospels produced different translations.

The best illustration of this would be, of course, the Roman Catholics, and I will comment in just a bit on Catholic opposition to Tyndale. However, we can also illustrate the point on the Protestant side through the case of George Joye. Joye, a one time assistant to Tyndale, was approached by printers in Antwerp to assist in the publication of a revised edition of Tyndale's New Testament. Tyndale himself had promised one but in almost nine years after the publication of the first edition Tyndale had failed to produce one. So Joye said yes, and quickly started upon the task. His efforts, however, when they were published in August, 1534, enraged Tyndale. But why?

Certainly, Tyndale was displaying a scholar's jealousy for the fruits of his own labors and didn't appreciate someone else's tinkering with his work. More than that was involved, however, because Joye took it upon himself to "correct" Tyndale's rendering of the Greek word *anastasis* that Tyndale had translated as "resurrection." In about a dozen passages Joye changed it to "life after this" or something similar. This was Joye's "dynamic equivalent" of the Greek, motivated by concern for the doctrine of everlasting life, certainly a part of the Gospel but not undisputed by the Protestant party in England. The question arose, of course, after Protestants had rejected the Romanist doctrine of purgatory: if the souls of the departed are not in purgatory, where are they? Most like Joye thought the answer was "heaven"; but some believed that the souls of the dead entered a kind of suspended animation until the day of resurrection, that they were asleep until Christ should call them forth. In fact, both Joye and Thomas More, Tyndale's great Catholic foe, accused Tyndale of holding this second position, that of "soul sleep," though the evidence extant today

suggests more that Tyndale refused to take a position. "What God doth with them (i.e., the souls of the dead)," wrote Tyndale, "that shall we know when we come to them."²⁵

Our purpose here is not to probe this debate regarding the nature of God's promises in the Gospel, but simply to show that where translators disagreed about the definition of the Gospel, their translations also differed. Tyndale's answer to Joye was probably the right one, viz., that even if Joye's theology was correct—though Tyndale disputed it—Joye's translation was faulty. The Greek word meant "resurrection" and should be so translated. Tyndale argued:

If the text be left uncorrupt, it will purge hir self of all maner of false gloses, how sotle soever they be fayned, as a sething pot casteth up hir scome. But yf the false glose be made the text, diligentlve oversene and correct, wherewith then shall we correcte false doctrine, and defend Christes flocke from false opinions, and from the wycked heresydes of raveninge of wolves?²⁶

Tyndale sounds almost as if he thought it possible to produce a kind of neutral translation whereby the doctrinal disputes of the day could be settled objectively on the basis of the Word. In the great debates of the sixteenth century, however, that proved impossible, for Roman Catholics in England would no more accept Tyndale's Bible than they would Tyndale's doctrine. In fact, it was the latter that rendered the former unusable, since the Catholics too understood Bible translating as a theological enterprise. Once again, different gospels would produce different translations.

In a brief letter to another clergyman in 1527, Robert Ridley, chaplain to the bishop of London, outlined the Catholic case against Tyndale's New Testament. First of all, he objected to the matter that accompanied the text—the prologue, the notes, and the prefaces—as "al to gither most poisoned and abhominable hereses that can be thowht"; and on that ground alone, he was willing to reject the translation after the example of "paule & our savious christ (who) wold not take the trew testimonial of evil spretes that prased christe...saying quod filius dei erat, & quod ipse paulus servus esset veri dei." But the translation itself was not a true one, according to Ridley; and he cited several examples of what he considered translations with a heretical bent. For instance, he objected to

Tyndale's rendering the last part of Rom. 5:12, long a pivotal text regarding original sin, as "in so mych that every man hath sinned" instead of "in which (or in whom) every man hath sinned." Similarly, Ridley objected to Tyndale's John 10:30 "I and the Father are one" instead of "I and the Father are one **thing** or one **substance**." Furthermore, Ridley resented Tyndale's failure to use accepted ecclesiastical terminology:

By this translation shal we losse al thies christian wordes, penance, charite, confession, grace, prest, chirche, which he alway calleth a congregation, quasi turcharum et brutorum nulla esset congregation nisi vellit illorum etiam esse ecclesiam (as if there were no "congregation" of Turks and brutes unless he thought they also were a "church").²⁷

Finally, Ridley resented the enterprise as a whole. There was no need for all Christians to have and to read a Bible for themselves. Instead,

...it becummyth the people of truste to obey & folowe their rewellers which hath geven study & is lerned in such matters as thys. People showd heir & beleve, thai showd not judge the doctrine of paule ne of paule(s) vicares & successors bot be judged by their learnyng, as long as thai know no thyng contrary goddes lawes.²⁸

Ridley may have been the first to make the Catholic case against the Protestant Bible in sixteenth century England, but he was hardly the last. Over and over again, papal polemicists would attack the work of Tyndale and his successors, often developing the same three points as Ridley: (1) the additions of the translators—the annotations, introductions, etc.—are heretical; (2) the translation itself is marred by erroneous and heretical renderings; and (3) laymen are to learn their religion from the Church and not directly from the Bible.

Certainly, the most eloquent of Tyndale's detractors was Thomas More, Humanist statesman of Tudor England and ultimately Catholic saint and martyr. In 1528, the bishop of London licensed More to read heretical books for the purpose of refuting them; and in the next year, More published the first fruits of the bishop's commission *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*—a wide-ranging response to many elements in the Protestant program from justification by faith to iconoclasm.

Although More's comments on Tyndale's translation do not bulk large in the entire work, they are a sharp critique of the Protestant New Testament and reveal clearly that from More's perspective, heretical translators had produced a heretical text.

The tenor of More's criticism is clearly revealed in the subtitle of the work—"wyth many other thyngys touchyng the pestylent secte of Luther & Tyndale by the tone bygone in Saxony & by the tother laboryd to be brought in to England." As far as More was concerned, therefore, Tyndale's New Testament was simply a piece of a broader heretical movement to introduce into England the same religious confusion and chaos that was then characterizing Germany. Consequently, his objection to Tyndale's translation is not just that it is erroneous and inaccurate but that it is a deliberate perversion of the Bible for the sake of foisting heresy upon the unsuspecting.²⁹

Although More claims that deliberate mistranslation affected more than "a thousand texts," he enumerates only seven mistranslations and he elaborates upon only three of them. But what are the seven? Like Ridley, More objects to Tyndale's refusal to use traditional ecclesiastical terminology, for Tyndale had used "seniors" (later versions, "elders") instead of "priests"; "congregation" instead of "church"; "love" instead of "charity"; "favor" instead of "grace"; "knowledge" instead of "confession"; "repentance" instead of "penance"; and "a troubled heart" instead of "a contrite heart."³⁰

In a later work, More doubled this list; and in each case he sought to show that the traditional term was actually the better translation. Setting aside that question, however, we can certainly agree that More was correct in discerning a *theological* motive behind Tyndale's choice of terminology, for in each case, Tyndale has avoided a term fraught with theological significance and preferred instead more neutral terminology. But the choice of a neutral term is itself an implicit rejection of traditional theology; and one can hardly fault More for supposing that Tyndale had stacked the deck against the conservative position by choosing the terms he did. "First," More argues:

(Luther) would make the people believe nothing but plain Scripture in which point he teacheth a plain pestilent heresy. And then would with his false translation make the people (understand) further that such articles of our faith as he laboreth to destroy and which be well proved by holy Scripture were in

holy Scripture nothing spoken of but that the preachers have all this 1500 years misreported the gospel and englished the Scripture wrong to lead the people purposely out of the right way.³¹

More's point, then, is the same that we are trying to make: different theologies result in different translations, and to be Gospel-oriented you have to know what the Gospel is. For Thomas More, Tyndale's translation ought to be called Tyndale's Testament or perhaps Luther's Testament rather than the New Testament, for from his perspective they had changed **Christ's** doctrine into **their** heresies; and because **they** were responsible for it, it would be the ultimate folly ever to use it even if the obvious mistakes were corrected, "There would be no wise man, I (trust), take the bread which he well (knew) was of his enemy's hand once poisoned though he saw his friend after scrape it never so clean."³²

Some two years after the publication of More's *Dialogue*, Tyndale published an answer in which he responded point by point to all of the great Humanist's attacks, including those upon his translation. In particular, Tyndale defended his departure from ecclesiastical terminology on both linguistic and theological grounds. In a sense, therefore, though vigorously denying the charge of heresy, Tyndale admitted More's main point that what motivated him was a theological perspective, a certain understanding of the Gospel. And that is precisely why he employed some terms in his translation and not others.

Thus, for example, he argued that "congregation" was more apt than "church" so that the people would understand "the whole multitude of all that profess Christ" rather than just "the juggling spirits" of the hierarchy. Likewise, he defended his choice of the term "repentance" instead of "penance" on the grounds that his opponents used the latter term to teach the doctrine of justification by works of satisfaction whereas what the New Testament intends to convey by this term, according to Tyndale, is "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." For Tyndale, then, a Bible translation **was** a vehicle for teaching true doctrine rather than being simply a modern edition of ancient but irrelevant literature.³³

Roman Catholic criticism, therefore, of Tyndale's work did not

arise from an antipathy to English Bible *per se* but from antagonism to Tyndale's doctrine. Thomas More, for example, in spite of the fact that a "heretic" had produced the first printed New Testament in English, did not reject all attempts to put the Bible into the vernacular. In fact, he not only admitted that good translations were possible, he argued that they were desirable even if errorists could misuse them:

Whosoever would of their malice or folly take harm of that thing that is of itself ordained to do all men good, I would never for the avoidance of their harm take from other the profit which they might take and nothing deserve to lose.³⁴

The profit or advantage of such translations, however, for More was not the critical investigation or even rejection of the church's teaching but rather piety **under** the church's teaching. More was quite emphatic that lay readers should **not** "enserch and dyspute the grete secrete mysteryes of scrypture whiche though they here they be not able to perceyve." Instead, laymen should

...well and devoutly rede it and in that it is playne and evydent as goddes commaundementes and his holy counsaylys endeavoure our selfe to folowe wyth helpe of his grace asked thereunto and exercyse our selfe in such medytacyons prayours and vertues as the matter shall mynyster us occasion.³⁵

Furthermore, More argued that such translations as aids to piety be done under church auspices only, i.e., that bishops themselves sponsor them and license reading of them only for those who are likely to use them most profitably. This reflects the general Roman Catholic position that the Scriptures had to be interpreted in the context of the Church's authority. Thus, the **bare** scriptural text, however much it is God's Word, can only give rise to a multitude of opinions, as attested to by the variety of Protestant sects and factions. Accordingly, one must interpret the Scriptures by sound reason with the help of the church fathers and traditional glosses, and, especially, in accordance with the official dogma of the Church, for the Church is prior to the Scriptures both in time and authority, and God has promised to keep her from error in matters of faith.³⁶

The ironic thing about More's position is that when only a few years later English bishops did agree to license an English translation and lay Bible reading, as More had advocated, they were doing so

under royal authority, recently severed from papal authority, and the version they chose incorporated large portions of Tyndale's work—not surprisingly since the editors were Tyndale's former associates. In fact, it wasn't till more than fifty years later that English Roman Catholics finally produced a New Testament of their own; and, then, also ironically, they did so, not as More advocated, as an aid to piety, but as an instrument for investigating the religious controversies of the day or, as More might have put it, "enserchyng and dysputyng the grete secrete mysteryes of scripture." For what happened between the 1520's and the 1580's was the English Reformation: England became Protestant and so did the Bible, for the new religious establishment translated, published, and promoted vernacular editions of the Bible.

Accordingly, when from their exile in Rheims, France, English Catholics put their hand to translate the Scriptures, they did so to forge a tool against the Protestants. William Cardinal Allen, their leader, complained that Protestant spokesmen

have at their fingers' ends all those passages of Scripture which seem to make for them, and by a certain deceptive adaptation and alteration of the sacred words produce the effect of appearing to say nothing but what comes from the Bible.

For this the only remedy was a "catholic version of the Bible, for all the English versions are most corrupt."³⁷

As we would expect, therefore, the first English Roman Catholic Bible, the Rheims New Testament (1582) was far different from the first Protestant one; and in his introduction, its principal translator, Gregory Martin, indicated his points of difference with Protestant translators regarding canon, text, translation of particular words and phrases, and interpretation; and to make sure that everyone received the right message from the book, Martin and his co-workers incorporated copious and extensive annotations into the work that provided a Roman Catholic interpretation of the New Testament text.

From the standpoint of simply a translation, however, the point I'd like to make is that a different theology produced a different product. On the one hand, Tyndale, like Luther before him, had selected his phraseology and vocabulary from the voice of the people. The text read the way the people spoke. But on the other hand, Ridley and More objected to Tyndale's departure from ecclesiastical terminology that was rooted in the theology and vocabulary of the Latin Church.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Rheims New Testament should reflect a more latinized, even more obscure vocabulary that was the deliberate decision of its translator.

Martin and his co-workers rejected the doctrine of the perspicuity of the Scriptures. The Bible was **not** a clear book; and, therefore, its translation did not have to be immediately clear to the reader. Indeed, Martin argued that too much clarity could violate the principle of faithfulness to the original. Although he admitted that the end result might seem “to common English eares” a translation characterized by “rudeness or ignorance,” yet

to the discrete Reader that deeply weigheth and considereth the importance of sacred wordes and speeches and how easily the voluntarie Translatour may misse the true sense of the Holy Ghost, we doubt not but our consideration and doing therein, shal seem reasonable and necessarie.³⁸

Now, Martin’s concern was not mere pedantry nor was he motivated by a spirit of obscurantism, for he was wrestling with the difficulty of bringing **everything** the original suggests into English. For example, Martin pointed out that the relationship between *evangelizo* and *evangelium* is clearly evident in the Latin and the Greek but is lost entirely in English when the former is rendered “bring...good tidings” in the English versions. Therefore, Martin preferred to use a cognate, “evangelize,” even if that is not the clearest vernacular. In such cases, Martin argued, it is better to explain such terms in notes or in an appendix rather than “by putting some usual English wordes that expresse them not, so as to deceive the reader.”³⁹

Furthermore, Martin wanted his translation to show that the terminology of the Catholic Church proceeded from the biblical text. Therefore, he often used English cognates of the Latin rather than more common terminology to translate his text, such as “advent,” “traditions,” “altar,” “host,” “imposing of hands,” “penance,” “chalice,” “priest,” and “deacon.” Here, too, Martin set himself against Tyndale’s practice of replacing traditional terms by plain English.⁴⁰ Instead of going to the “mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace” as Luther had advocated, Martin went to the Church—her liturgy, theology, canon law, and Latin Bible—for the vocabulary of his translation, and so it is not surprising that we have such infelicitous readings as this for Eph. 6:12, “For our

wrestling is not against flesh and blood: but against Princes and Potestats, against the rectors of the world of this darkness, against the spirituals of wickedness in the celestials” or this for Heb. 13:16, “Beneficence and communication do not forget: for with such hostes God is promerited.”

Now, at this point perhaps we are tempted just to conclude -- “Luther and Tyndale got it right, the Catholics were wrong. So what else is new?” However, the history of English Bibles in the sixteenth century does not permit us so facile a conclusion, especially regarding the Catholic insistence upon traditional terminology and vocabulary, because once Tyndale’s work appeared in print in 1525, we begin to see the development of what we might call a Protestant Vulgate, or sanctified tradition of English Bibles. We mentioned before that when in the 1530’s Henry VIII first authorized or legalized the English Bible and had it set up in churches, his agents did not start afresh but began where Tyndale had left off. Furthermore, when English Protestants fled into exile during the reign of Queen Mary and some of them took refuge in Geneva where in 1560 they produced a Bible based upon the work of Theodore Beza and others, they didn’t start over but incorporated their improvements into the text of Henry VIII’s generation. So, too, the Bishop’s Bible of 1568 and Lawrence Thomson’s revision of 1576—Tyndale’s work continued to form the basis and foundation. Finally, in the first decade of the seventeenth century, when James I authorized scholars at Cambridge, Oxford, and Westminster once again to translate the Bible into English, they didn’t go out into the street or the marketplace for their words. Instead, they went to the traditions of their church and sought to retain the phraseology of the Bishops’, Geneva, Great, Coverdale, and Tyndale Bibles while still being faithful to the original.⁴¹

But in so doing were they being **unfaithful** to the principle of “receptor-oriented” Gospel communication? I don’t think so. Instead, they were being sensitive to the sensibilities of the receptors who for more than two generations had been listening to the cadences of Tyndale when the New Testament was read in their churches. Certainly, the English language had changed in those seventy-five years; but by seeking to retain as much as possible of the older versions, the King James translators, whether they knew it or not, were making a theological statement—that God’s Word doesn’t change and that the theological insights of the first generation of English

reformers, many of whom had sealed their confession with their lives, were still correct and valid despite changed circumstances. In other words, displaying a healthy respect for the traditions of the Church in Bible translations is not inconsistent with a clear proclamation of the Gospel, especially when those first translations are informed by the Gospel itself.

Although the English Roman Catholics did not understand the Gospel of Luther and Tyndale, they understood the nature of religious language, viz., that it is inherently conservative, because people instinctively react to changes in that language as if they were changes in theology. That may not always be the case, but it was certainly so in the 1520's in England. Tyndale's radical, new translation indicated a radically different theology. Therefore, Luther's principles of Bible translation were certainly appropriate if Englishmen were going to read God's Word in their own tongue. Once, however, the dust had settled and the Church had accepted Tyndale's work, then another principle began to operate, that of respect for sanctified tradition. It is not always easy to combine **absolute** clarity of Gospel proclamation with such a respect for tradition; however, if the communication is truly 'receptor-oriented' then the effort to combine them seems necessary, at least that was the case in Reformation England.

End Notes

1. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 8 vols. (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1843-49) 5:117.

2. William Tyndale, *The Pentateuch* (Fontwell, England: Centaur Press, 1967), p. 3.

3. William Tyndale, "Prologue to the First New Testament" in Alfred W. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible* (London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 112.

4. The story of the English Bible has been told often. See F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Bible in Its Ancient and English Versions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940); and S. L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible, 1525-1611" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol 3: *The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), pp. 141-74.

5. See Robinson and *The Cambridge History of the Bible* for the impact of the Reformation on the history of the Bible.

6. For Luther's Bible, see Hans Volz, "Continental Versions to c. 1600, 1. German" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* 3:94-109; Willem J. Kooiman, *Luther and the Bible* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961); Heinz Bluhm, *Martin Luther: Creative Translator* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965); and M. Reu, *Luther's German Bible* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934).

7. All three of these works are available in volume 35 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960). In the Weimar Asgabe, the first is in WA, DB 8:11-31; the second, *Ein Sendbrief D. M. Luthers. Von Dolmetzchen und Furbit der heiligenn*, WA 30 (II):632-46; and the third, *Sumarien uber die Psalmen, Und ursachen des dolmetzens*, WA 38:9-69.

8. LW35:189. *Man mus nicht die buchstaben inn der lateinischen sprachen fragen, wie man sol Deutsch reden...sondern, man mus die mutter ihm hause, die kinder auff der gassen, den gemeinen man auff marckt drumb fragen, und den selbigen auff das maul sehen, wie sie reden, und darnach dolmetzchen, so verstehen sie se den und merken, das man Deutsch mit in redet.* WA 30 (II):637.

9. LW35:189,190,191. *Welcher deutscher verstehet solchs?* WA 30 (II):637,638.

10. LW35:213. *Wie denn alle schulmeister leren, das nicht der sinn den worten, sondern die wort dem sinn dienen und folgen sollen, So wissen wir auch.* WA 38:11.

11. LW35:213-14. *Sondern mus darauff sehen, wenn er den Ebreischen man verstehet, das er den sinn fasse und dencke also: Lieber, wie redet der Deudsche man inn solchem fall? Wenn er nu die Deutsche wort hat, die hiezu diennen, so lasse er die Ebreischem wort faren und sprech frey den sinn eraus auff's beste Deudsch, so er kan.* WA 38:11.

12. LW 35:194. *Doch hab ich widerumb nicht allzu frey die buchstaben lassen faren, sondern mit grossen sorgen sampt meinen gehulffen drauff gesehen, das, wo etwa an einem ort gelegenn ist, hab ichs nach den buchstaben behalten, und bin nicht so frey davon gangen.* WA 30 (II):640.

13. LW 35:216. *Hie were es wol gut Deudsch gewest: "Du hast die gefangenen erloset." Aber es ist zu Schwach und gibt nicht den feinen reichen sinn, welcher inn dem Ebreischen ist, da es sagt: "Du hast das gefengnis gefangen."* WA 38:13.

14. LW 35:217. *Also haben wir Psalm xciden v. ind vi. vers lassen auff Ebreisch stehen, also: "Das du nicht erschrecken mussest fur dem grawen des nachts fur den pfeilen, so des tages fliegen, Fur der pestilentz, die im finstern schleicht, fur der seuche, die am mittage verderbet, etc." Diese vier plage oder ungluck, so ein gerechter leiden mus umb Gottes willen, weil sie tunckel und mit verdecken worten gered sind, mochte sie einer wohl anders deuten denn der ander. Darumb haben wir einem iglichen wollen raum lassen nach seines geists gaben und masse, die selbigen zu verstehen.* WA 38:13.

15. LW 35:188-89, 195. *Sonder der text und die meinung S. Pauli foddern und erzwingens mit gewallt.* WA 30 (II):640.

16. *Ah es ist dolmetzchen ja nicht eines iglichen kunst, wie die tollen Heiligen meinen. Es gehoret dazu ein recht, frum, trew, vlessig, forchtsam, Christlich, geleret, erfarn, geubt hertz.* WA 30 (II):640.

17. LW35:249. *Und achte, sol die Bibel erfur komen, so mussen wyrs thun, die Christen sind, als die den verstand Christi haben, on wilchen auch die kunst der sprache nichts ifs* WA, DB 8:30.

18. LW 35:193. *...der mir alle stunde sovil guts that, das, wenn ich tausent mal so vil und vlessig gedolmetzsch, dennoch nicht eine stunde verdienet hette zu leben, odder ein gesundt auge zu haben. Es ist alles seiner gnaden und barmhertzigkeit, was ich bin und haben. Ja es ist seines theuren bluts and sauren schweisses, darumb soles auch (ob Gott wil) alles nym zu ehren dienen, mit freuden unnd von hertzen.* WA 30 (II):640.

19. J. F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (London: SPCK, 1937), p. 82.

20. *Tyndale, Pentateuch*, p. 3.

21. Pollard, pp. 116,112.
22. Pollard, p. 116.
23. Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General View of the History of the English Bible* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), pp. 141-45.
24. Pollard, p. 113.
25. For an account of the controversy, see Mozley, pp. 268-84. Tyndale's remark regarding "soul-sleep" is from *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Testament*, Reprint of the 1534 edition (Cambridge: University Press, 1938), p. 17.
26. William Tyndale, "Yet once more to the christen reader" in *The New Testament*, Reprint of the 1534 edition (Cambridge: University Press, 1938), p. 17.
27. Pollard, pp. 124-25.
28. Ibid.
29. Thomas More, *A dyaloge of syr Thomas More...Wheryn he treated dyvers maters as of the veneracyon & worshyp of ymagys & relyques praying to sayntis & goyng on pylgrymage in The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963-),6:3.
30. Ibid. 6:285-86, 290.
31. Ibid. 6:290.
32. Ibid. 6:293.
33. Tyndale, *Answer*, p. 15.
34. More. 6:332.
35. Ibid. 6:314-17, 332.
36. Ibid. 6:330-44.
37. Thomas F. Knox, ed., *The Letters and Memorials of William Cardinal Allen* (London, 1882; reprint, Ridgewood, N. J.: Gregg Press, Inc., 1965), pp. 63-64. *Adversarii ad unguem tenent ex haeretica aliqua versione omnia Scripturae loca quae pro ipsis facere videantur, et quadam composita fraude ac mutatione sacrorum verborum efficiunt tandem ut nihil loqui videantur nisi ex Bibliis...omnes enim anglicae versiones sunt corruptissimae.*
38. *The New Testament of Jesus Christ, Translated Faithfully into English out of the authentical Latin...in the English college of Rhemes* (Rhemes: John Fogny, 1582), Preface, fo. ciii.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Charles C. Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible, 1340-1611* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941), pp. 210-22.