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## Theological Observer

### THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION-NOTHING NEW

With the plethora of Bible translations currently available, one must question the reasons behind the production of yet another one. It is true that Bible sales remain brisk today and thus make entry into this market potentially quite profitable. However, strong popular devotion to translations like King James Version or Living Bible makes it necessary that a new translation have some improvement or new approach if it is to snatch readers away from the favorites. Confessional Lutherans have longed for a new translation which would both escape the occasional faulty renderings and archaic language of KJV and also avoid the paraphrastic muddiness of Living Bible and Good News Bible. Despite the fact that some in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod apparently had a hand in its production, the New International Version does not appear to be any improvement over what is currently available.

Doctrinally, the NIV is to be commended for its basically conservative approach (Is. 7:14 — “the virgin . . .”; Ps. 2:12 — “Kiss the Son . . .”), though one gets a little perturbed at the RSV-style footnotes in Job 19:25ff. Even more disturbing, however, are the subtle inclusions of Reformed theology. In this tendency the NIV is potentially more insidious than the Living Bible with its coarse emendations, because the doctrinal problems are less easily recognized. For example, 1 Peter 2:8b (Calvin’s proof-text for election to damnation) reads, “They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what *they were destined for*”. One also bristles at the millennialistic implications of “they came to life” in Revelation 20:4.

There are also numerous renderings which, whether containing doctrinal error or not, cause one to wonder about the translators’ intentions. A “report of fornication” in Matthew 5:32 becomes “marital unfaithfulness” (does the latter cover what divorce courts call “gross neglect of duty?”). Those who ate with Jesus in Matthew 9:10ff. are called “tax collectors and ‘sinners’”; the placing of “sinners” in quotation marks seems to indicate that they really were not sinners at all. “Of the apostles” is deleted from the title of Acts on the basis of Codex Sinaiticus alone, without even a footnote, but no similar treatment is given to Mark 16:9-20, despite stronger witness against it.

Romans 1:3 reads, “as to his human nature,” but the parallel in the next verse reads, “through the Spirit of holiness,” which in context appears to allow for some sort of adoptionistic Christology. Also puzzling is Romans 1:17, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed” (are other ‘righteousness from God’ revealed elsewhere?).

The NIV had a golden opportunity to correct some of the mistakes of past translations, but instead has perpetuated most of them. The RSV’s queer rendering of 1 Corinthians 11:16 — “we recognize no *other* practice” — is retained, although the Greek Word means exactly the opposite — “no *such* practice.” The erroneous translation of Luke 2:2 — “while Quirinius was governor of Syria” — quoted by some as an example of an error in the Bible (since apparently at the time Quirinius was not governor of Syria, but rather was ruling Syria under martial law) is not corrected, despite the fact that the text employs a predicate participle rather than a noun. Also retained is the translation of John 3:5, “born of water and the Spirit.” It may at first seem trivial, but the text contains no article in front of either “water” or “Spirit.” The fact that in most translations “water”

lacks the definite article while "Spirit" has it has been used by certain fundamentalists to deny a connection between the Spirit and the water in baptism.

This observer has long desired a translation that would be more consistent than those available in its renderings of given words. Admittedly, a given Greek word does not always mean the same thing in all contexts; but when one word in Greek is translated five to ten different ways in English, such things as concordance study become impossible for most laymen. The NIV in this area is anything but an improvement. Two examples — *hades* occurs only ten times in the New Testament, yet the NIV translates these few occurrences with four different English words: "Hades" (Mt. 16:18, et al.), "hell" (Lk. 16:23), "grave" (Ac. 2:27, 31) and "the depths" (Mt. 11:23 and Lk. 10:15). *Thlipsis* occurs much more frequently, but does this justify ten entirely different renderings? Compare Matthew 13:21 ("trouble"); 24:9 ("persecution"); 24:21 ("distress"); John 16:21 ("anguish"); Acts 7:11 ("suffering"); 14:22 ("hardship"); Romans 12:12 ("affliction"); 2 Corinthians 8:2 ("trial"); 8:13 ("hard pressed"), and Revelation 7:14 ("tribulation"). The latter reference is the only occurrence of *thlipsis* in the New Testament which the NIV translates "tribulation." Since "tribulation" has become a technical term among millennialists for the seven-year horror period between the "rapture" and the establishment of the millennial kingdom, one wonders about the motives behind using "tribulation" in a millennialistic "proof-text," while employing other terms in passages which clearly teach that the "tribulation" began with Christ's ascension (e.g., Rev. 1:9).

Although there are certainly worse translations on the market, there appears to be little about the NIV which encourages replacing the New American Standard Bible, the Modern Language Bible (the "Berkeley" version), or even an expunged RSV with it.

## ROMAN CATHOLIC RECOGNITION OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

One remarkable development of modern church life has been Roman Catholic participation in ecumenical relations. Among the more theologically productive associations has been the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogues in the United States. A significant step in relationships between the two churches could be the possible Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession. This confession has a normative function in Lutheran Churches and at least an honored position among the Reformed. Recent Roman Catholic attention to the Augsburg Confession certainly gives this document an important place in any discussion of church reunion in Western Christianity. Historically it testifies to the formal rupture between Lutheranism, the Reformed tradition, and Roman Catholicism.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Archbishop of Munich, has been one among many German Catholic scholars who have studied Luther and has been a prime mover in seeking Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession. In a recent issue of the officially church approved theological journal *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* (XXIX [3], 1978, pp. 225-237), Ratzinger describes the nature of this recognition in his article "Anmerkungen zur Frage einer 'Anerkennung' der Confessio Augustana durch die katholische Kirche" — "Remarks on the Question of a 'Recognition' of the Augsburg Confession by the Catholic Church." Regretfully Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession will not resemble what Lutherans understand as confessional subscription.

The cardinal is quite forthright in seeing the Augsburg Confession within the context of Luther's, rather than Melancton's, theology. The cardinal makes no attempt to reconstruct the classical Lutheran understanding of the confessions. He knows that whatever ecumenical avenues appear open within the Augsburg Confession are closed by the other Lutheran confessions, especially the Smalkald Articles (p. 232). He also is not pleased with the Melanctonian division between the doctrinal (I-XXI) and abuse (XXII-XXVIII) articles within the Augsburg Confessions. From a Roman Catholic viewpoint all the articles are doctrinal, a concept clearly held by Luther, as the cardinal points out. The real subject of these articles is justification and not merely ceremonies. Any attempt to mollify the theology of the Augsburg Confession, in the opinion of the cardinal, "not historical" and "ecumenically worthless" (p. 236). Understanding the Augsburg Confession apart from Luther would be pure fiction and out of step with reality. It would hardly provide a sound scholarly foundation for ecumenical theology.

The cardinal is willing to ascribe to the Augsburg Confession what he describes as an "Entscheidungscharakter" in contrast to an "Erklärungscharakter" (p. 236). By this he means that the Augsburg Confession has a decisive and definite function within the processes and development of churches which share the Reformation heritage. But he would not grant it a normative function. Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession would mean that it would occupy an important place as Lutheran confessional theology joins in dialogue with the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.

Amazing is the cardinal's understanding of the confessional principle in Lutheran theology, though he obviously cannot accept it. Ecumenical-minded Lutherans have not infrequently attempted to isolate the Augsburg Confession from the rest of the Book of Concord and the writings of Luther in order to establish links with both Catholicism and Calvinism. This procedure the cardinal finds historically irresponsible and ecumenically counterproductive. There are, unfortunately, relatively few Lutherans holding to the classical views of confessional subscriptions which Cardinal Ratzinger accurately and vividly describes. The Leuenberg Concord subscribed by the large state-related European Lutheran Churches has in effect, stated that the Reformation controversies between Lutherans and the Reformed have been superceded in the modern era. Perhaps the cardinal can teach these Lutherans what it means to be Lutheran!

What the cardinal offers to Lutherans in the Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession is regrettably an imitation olive branch. Lutherans would have to surrender the *norma normativa* character of their confessions and be swept into the stream of Roman Catholic tradition with its inexact and indeterminate boundaries. The genius of Catholicism is that one organization embraces all. In the pope's house there are many rooms, and there is no reason why one cannot be reserved for the adherents of the Augsburg Confession.

Since 1555 the Augsburg Confession has had the debatable honor of having civil status in certain parts of Germany. In an age of vigorous ecumenical exchange it is unlikely that the Roman Catholic Church, especially in Germany, could avoid commemorating in some way the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980. The cardinal's understanding of the Lutheran Confessions is, sadly, more profound than most Lutheran pastors, but his understanding of what Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession means is unacceptable to true Lutherans.

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The Lutheran Church, in setting forth the Augsburg Confession, did not intend that it would describe one period of church development, but meant it rather as an ecumenical document in the sense of the three ancient creeds. The Augsburg Confession is the doctrine not merely of some German churches in the sixteenth century, but the doctrine of the *una sancta*, the doctrine delivered by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and believed by Christians everywhere. Within these perimeters all Christians in all times and places are embraced. They embrace the cardinal himself in so far as he accepts the doctrine of the Augustana.

David P. Scaer