

Inaugural Address

RICHARD J. SCHULTZ

I Believe One Holy Christian  
Church: What Does It Mean Today

BISHOP BO GIERTZ

Man: 1971

JOHN F. JOHNSON

The Faculty's Commission To Its President

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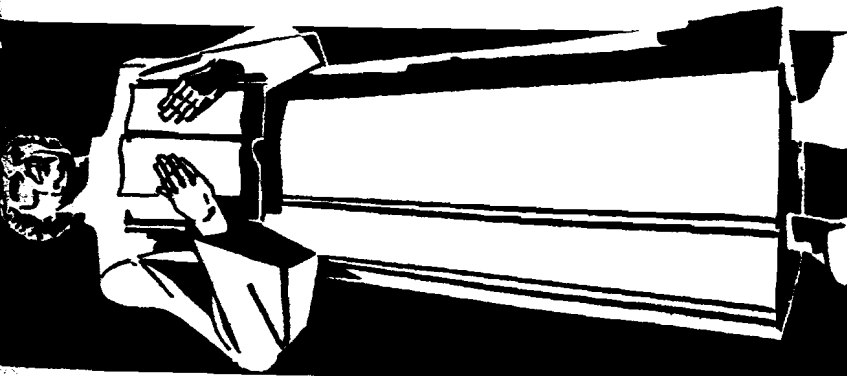
"Every Man In His Own Tongue"  
Or "The Use Of The Vernacular in  
Seminary Classroom And Pastor's Study"

RAYMOND F. SURBURG

The Revelation Of Christ  
And Scientific Research

SVERRE AALEN

Theological Refractions  
Pilgrim's Regress  
Book Reviews



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# “Every Man in His Own Tongue” or “The Use of the Vernacular in Seminary Classroom and Pastor’s Study”

RAYMOND F. SURBURG

THE PURPOSE of the Christian ministry is to bring God to man and man to God. To realize this objective the Bible must be used as a means to an end. The pastor must be a man well acquainted with God’s Book. As a Christian leader he must know his Bible better than any other book. The Christian minister must be an expert in the contents of the Bible and also in knowing how to help parishioners to learn and use God’s Word to mankind. The implications for the theological student and pastor are twofold: 1. The pastor should be able to use the Scriptures in the languages in which they were originally given; and 2. the pastor must be well versed in that version of the Bible in which he will deal with the people whom he is called to serve or wishes to reach with the message of life.

## I.

### *The Importance of the Study of the Bible in the Original*

Archibald T. Robertson of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was one of the greatest Greek scholars and linguists that America has produced. It was the conviction of this former eminent Southern Baptist theologian that if at all possible a Christian minister should know his New Testament in the Greek. Thus he wrote:

The real New Testament is the Greek New Testament. The English is simply a translation of the New Testament, not the actual New Testament. . . . But there is much that cannot be translated. It is not possible to reproduce the delicate turn of thought, the nuances of language in translation. The freshness of the strawberry cannot be preserved in any extract.<sup>1</sup>

The value of the knowledge of the Greek New Testament for the minister and competent student of the Bible has been ably demonstrated by Kenneth Wuest in many of his books. Let any student read Wuest’s *The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament* and he will be convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt of the value and importance of a working knowledge of the original New Testament.<sup>2</sup> To quote Wuest: “The student who uses his Greek Testament has access to more clearly presented truth than the student of the English Bible, and is therefore less liable to arrive at erroneous inter-

pretations."<sup>3</sup> Again he asserted: "All of which means that the expositor who knows and uses his Greek will be more accurate in his interpretation, and will present riches, more detailed, and deeper truth than the one who has only access to a translation."<sup>4</sup>

The study of the Scripture in the original must always be cultivated if a more thorough understanding of the full meaning of Scripture is to be known. Martin Luther in his *Letter to the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany* has correctly declared:

We shall not long preserve the Gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained; they are the casket in which we carry this jewel; they are the vessel in which we hold this wine; they are the larder in which this food is stored; and as the Gospel itself says, they are the baskets in which we bear these loaves and fishes and fragments.<sup>5</sup>

Again the Wittenberg Reformer asserted: "In proportion, then, as we prize the Gospel, let us guard the languages."<sup>6</sup>

Sound Biblical interpretation rests upon acquaintance with the original. Since scientific procedure always necessitates going to the sources; the study of the Bible in the original languages is required of those who would be authoritative interpreters of God's Word. Professor Thomas, in his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge University, asserted: "And there can be no right interpretation of the Old Testament which is not based upon the exact knowledge of the Hebrew language."<sup>7</sup> Another Old Testament scholar has declared that the majesty, dignity, and impressiveness of the original can be felt in their fulness only by the diligent student of the Hebrew text.<sup>8</sup> The eminent professor emeritus of Semitic languages at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Albright, wrote about translations of the Bible: "No translation which has yet appeared gives an adequate idea of the increase in our knowledge of Hebrew grammar, vocabulary and poetic style."<sup>9</sup> It was the contention of the Lutheran scholar Schodde that the mastery of the Biblical languages for a pastor was not a matter of choice but of mortal duty.<sup>10</sup>

In theological education it is essential that the original languages be emphasized and students be required to take New Testament Greek and under all circumstances ought to be encouraged to study Hebrew. Former President M. G. Evan's warning made many years ago should be taken seriously: "Unless in every department of human learning study of the sources be encouraged, there will not be a few to effect a higher level in human attainments for the many."<sup>11</sup> One day when Tennyson asked Jowett, the renowned translator of Plato and an Anglican clergyman, to give him a rendering of a passage in Job with which he has been having difficulty, Jowett replied that he did not know Hebrew. Thereupon the poet laureate of England exclaimed in surprise: "What! You a priest of religion

and not able to read your own sacred books."<sup>12</sup> It was a rebuke well deserved!

Charles Augustus Briggs, one time professor of Biblical theology at Union Seminary, New York City, reminded his students: "Hence it is that no translation is, at best the work of uninspired men who though holy and faithful, and guided by the Spirit of God, are yet unable to do more than give us their own interpretation of the sacred oracles."<sup>13</sup> Joseph Beet, a nineteenth-century British expositor, warned his readers that when reading the English Bible that they must never forget that they are using a translation.<sup>14</sup>

There was a time when all Protestant theological students attending standard theological seminaries, whether they were Baptists, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, or Mennonite, were expected to study both Greek and Hebrew and take interpretation courses that used the Hebrew and Greek. Early in this century, however, the conviction has become strong that the study of the original languages is not necessary for the average pastor but should be pursued by those students wishing to become professors or professional theological writers. A reason for the discontinuance of emphasis upon the mastery of Greek and Hebrew for an insight into the meaning of Scripture, rests upon the rejection of the uniqueness of the Biblical revelation and of its doctrine of verbal inspiration. Already many years ago Tregelles claimed:

A disbelief of the plenary inspiration of Holy Scriptures, and a neglect of the study of Hebrew, are two evils which, very extensively, and very naturally, prevail together . . . But if we view the Scriptures as literally the Word of God, if we regard it as a book not merely superintended, but suggested by the Holy Ghost, then surely it will be our object to know exactly what it means, and the sacred language will be studied diligently for that purpose.<sup>15</sup>

It will always therefore be necessary that a living connection with the Hebrew, Aramaic languages used in the Old Testament and the Koine Greek in the New Testament be kept up by the ministry of the Christian churches.

## II.

### *The Need for the Mastery of the Vernacular Version*

While it is greatly desirable that theological students and pastors be able to read the Bible in the original languages, it is all important that pastors be well acquainted with the Bible in the vernacular, that they be versatile in that language in which they will serve their people. It is vital that theological students and pastors know the contents of the Scriptures in the vernacular. There is a tendency when the primacy of biblical study is, on the basis of the original languages, urged to underestimate or denigrate a knowledge

of the Bible in the vernacular. One of the great needs of present theological training is to give the student a thorough knowledge of the English Bible. The disuse of the Bible in the home as well as a widespread misuse of the Bible has been responsible for Biblical illiteracy among candidates of the Christian ministry.<sup>16</sup> Because of the failure of many theological seminaries to teach the English Bible the majority of their theological graduates do not possess a grasp of the Bible in the vernacular which they ought to have. In some theological institutions the English Bible as the basis of interpretation is never used because of the belief that such exegetical procedure would be inferior or second-rate. The result of this attitude is also reflected in the practice of clergymen who later on in their ministries never pursue serious Scripture study in the vernacular.

It is a mistake to fail to appreciate the need for study of the vernacular version of the Bible by clergy. It was the conviction of A. T. Robertson that a pastor needed a thorough grip on the English New Testament whether he controlled the Greek text or not. In fact, the knowledge of one acts favorably upon the other. Neither replaces the other. Both the original and the vernacular are important for the pastor.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit saw to it that the apostles were able to speak in many different languages so that the assembled Jews and proselytes from all parts of the Roman Empire could hear the great works of God proclaimed in their native tongue. On the first Pentecost as Luke reported in Acts those in Jerusalem said: "Then how is it that each one of us hears them speak his own mother tongue? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea, in Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, in Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and in the district of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we all hear them telling in our own tongue what great things God has done (2:8-11)."<sup>17</sup>

The spread and growth of the Christian Church has been promoted and aided by translations. The Septuagint, the first translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, served the diasporean Jews from 250 B.C. onward and became also the Bible of the apostolic church and later of the Greek Orthodox Church. Christianity was spread by the various translations into Syriac, which were used both by Monophysites and Nestorian Christians. At one time Nestorianism stretched all across Asia, reaching even China as the famous Nestorian Monument has shown. The Peshitta became a mighty instrument for the dissemination of Christianity throughout Mesopotamia, Persia, India, and Chinese Turkestan. The Old Latin and the Vulgate were the agency through which Christianity was brought to North Africa, Spain, France, and Italy. In Egypt the various Coptic dialects, such as the Bohairic, Sahidic, Fayumic, and Akhmimic were responsible for the conversion of Egypt to Christianity

prior to the coming of Islam in the seventh century A.D. In England the Anglo-Saxon translation heads the many renderings into English that appeared on the British Isles. During the days of the Protestant Reformation vernacular translations beginning with Luther's September Testament played a tremendous role in promoting the teachings of the Reformers. Millions have been converted by the Word of God in translated form. It may be truly said that sinners on the whole have been saved by believing translations and saints have grown in grace by feeding on the same translations.

In 1886 and 1887 Dr. William Harper of the University of Chicago on the basis of carefully prepared questionnaires which were sent to theological seminaries and to pastors in active service discovered that the majority of Biblical students were not in a position to keep up with the intricacies of Biblical criticism presented on the basis of the Hebrew because of their inadequate possession of perspective in the Bible. As a result of these findings Dr. Harper changed his approach by turning to a study of the English by the broader study of whole books of the Bible in English instead of selected passages of the Hebrew. He issued the so-called *Inductive Bible Studies* which had as their objective to furnish a large grasp of the history and teachings of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>18</sup>

The Scriptures, it should be realized, are more than a depository of evidence. They are also a vehicle of communication, a means by which the pastor, the teacher, the parish worker, the lay worker directly communicate with his fellowmen. This use has been called "the instrumental function of the Holy Scriptures." Since the vernacular is the version of the Bible which the pastor uses in his teaching of the various age groups of the church, in the ministry of the sick, in counselling sessions, it follows that he ought to possess a knowledge of the Bible in that language which he is utilizing in ministry with his people. It is a psychological law that the mind normally acquires knowledge in terms of thought patterns provided by the mother tongue.

In this connection the question logically arises: Is it possible to do exact scholarly work on the basis of a translation. As has already been stated, no translation, however painstaking and scholarly it may be, can do more than give with approximate accuracy the thought and argument of an author. The remark of Dr. Goodspeed made by him in the preface to *The Bible: An American Translation* is in the opinion of the writer, an overstatement. "It has truly been said that any translation of a masterpiece must be a failure."<sup>19</sup> It is true that the idiom of one language cannot adequately and completely be transferred to another. And yet this does not mean that creative and worthwhile work cannot be done on the basis of a translation. Dr. Agar Beet, a firm believer in the importance of the study and use of the original languages in Biblical interpretation, holds that "the careful student may, however, as we shall see, do

much to lessen the danger involved in using a translation of the Bible, and indeed to no small extent reap the advantage to be derived from the study of the original."<sup>20</sup> Again Beet wrote: "There is no limit to the extent to which a careful student of the English Bible may lessen the distance between the sacred writers and himself."<sup>21</sup>

It was Emerson, the American man of letters, who contended: "What is best in any book is translatable." John Jay Chapman, in his essay on *Learning* has this to say about Shakespeare and his sources:

It is amazing how little of a foreign language you need if you have a passion for the things written in it. We think of Shakespeare as of a lighty lettered person; but he was ransacking books all the day to find plots and language for his plays. He reeks with mythology, he swims in classical metaphor; and if he knew the Latin poets, only in translation he knew them with the famished intensity of interest which can draw meaning through the walls of a bad text. Deprive Shakespeare of his sources, and he could not be a Shakespeare.<sup>22</sup>

Professor Louis Sweet maintained that "exact knowledge of an exact translation would constitute in a very high degree exact knowledge of the original."<sup>23</sup>

In what way does a translation of a literary masterpiece differ from the original from which it was made? There are three classes of facts that the student of a translation does not have, namely, meanings not known; meanings translatable neither directly nor by paraphrase; and meanings only to be expressed by paraphrase. Concerning the Bible the reader of it will discover that the first group are unknown even to the greatest of scholars; the second are only known to the greatest of scholars; the third may be expressed in translation and are available for the students in dictionaries and commentaries and other Biblical helps. Of the three classes of facts, the first two are very small, while the third is the largest by far. There are few Biblical words in existence today for which Biblical scholarship has not found accurate meanings. We cannot agree with the assertion of the former President of Crozer Theological Seminary who wrote: "The fundamental error is supposing that in studying the English Bible we are studying the Bible."<sup>24</sup> It is a faulty evaluation of the facts, when the claim is made that the difference between the original and the faithful translations are so great that the meaning and thought of the translations make impossible the apprehension of the ideas that the originals were endeavoring to convey.

While a translation cannot transfer that "elemental twang of any original version it does carry over enough of the content of the original in actual structural relationships and in recognizable meaning of terms to establish the thoughtful reader to realize it as litera-

ture."<sup>25</sup> There is enough in the version to indicate the mainstream of Biblical thought.

Students of the English Bible have had translations at their disposal since the sixteenth century that incorporated the ripest results of Biblical scholarship. Of the Authorized Version Westcott wrote:

From the middle of the seventeenth century, the King's Bible has been acknowledged Bible of the English-speaking nations throughout the world simply because it is the best. A revision which embodied the ripe fruits of nearly a century of labors, and appealed to the religious instinct of a great people, gained by its own internal character a vital authority which could never have been secured by any edict of sovereign rulers.<sup>26</sup>

The same may also be said about the British Revised Version (1881-1885) and the American Standard of 1901, which embody the best scholarship of their time. Since 1946 we have in America *The Revised Standard Version* and since 1961 *The New English Bible*. The pastor has at his disposal translations made by scholars who are critically oriented in their theology and translations by scholars who are conservative in their approach to the Bible. Theological approaches do effect translations and the pastor who would be faithful to the revealed Word of God as reflected in the original texts must be able to evaluate them and it is advisable to use a version that does not misrepresent the thought. Ultimately, a pastor will need to choose one version and use it in his pastoral and educational work.

In view of the scientific accuracy as well as literary finish of some English versions of the Bible, the proposition that the student cannot reach the Scripture in its literary beauty, and cultural power, as well as in its spiritual essence and form, is nothing short of absurdity.

The theological student and pastor need to adopt a method of Biblical study which will enable them to master the Bible. The best method is that known as the book method. The Bible has sixty-six different books. The books of Holy Scriptures are separate volumes or treatises, each having a distinctive character of its own and an ascertainable principle of internal unity. Study of the Bible by books is the most direct and attractive pathway to its inner and secret charm. In speaking about the advantage of the book method of study one of its staunchest advocates wrote:

The biblical book, therefore, presents itself for study not merely as a convenient and manageable literary unit; but, since it incorporates into itself and raises to a higher unity a variety of elements, each one of which gains new significance by the relationship, it possesses the charm and interest of the finished,



artistic composition. Of this fact, and the consequent stimulus to the mind involved in it, unhappily few people are aware. Study of the Bible by books is the most direct and attractive pathway to its inner and secret charm.<sup>27</sup>

The first step in the book method is to read one book at a sitting, a task that may be done with 47 books of the Bible between five minutes to one hour, depending on the length of the book. It is possible to make a detailed study of a book, word by word, and still never comprehend it as a whole or feel the impact of its message. The basis for the exact and fruitful study of any Biblical book must always be a grasp of its course of thought as outlined in the book itself. This procedure defines and reinforces the impression produced by reading, and affords a safe starting point for investigation. Wilbur Smith believes that the book method is too complicated to be used by the average lay Christian but admitted: "It is granted that this is a wonderful way for studying the Word of God. Its results are exceedingly rich; but I think, personally, that it is too much to ask of young Christians, to read through one book at one sitting, to discover for themselves the great fundamental teachings of the book, its construction, development, and paramount purpose."<sup>28</sup> However, the pastor as a professional student of Scripture should have no difficulty with the steps that are involved in using the book method.

Proponents of the book method have made the following suggestions for the study of a Biblical book:

1. Read an entire book thoughtfully and continuously with the sole objective that when through reading the reader will note the effect upon himself and list noteworthy results for himself.

2. Read the book, and re-read it until there results to the reader the discovery of (1) the organizing idea of the book; (2) the central or dominant thought of the book; (3) the aim of the book; (4) the theme or subject of the book.

3. Read the book for leading and subordinate characters; read the book for its geographical setting.

4. Read a book for its literary features as to style, peculiar characteristics, vocabulary, in order to classify it as to its place among literary productions.

5. Read the book in order to outline it. If possible, set forth its contents in one sentence. The reader should endeavor to discover into how many logical parts the book may be divided. A good practice is to condense the book in fifty words.

6. Read the book from the standpoint of the author; try to determine what can be known about the author's life, the time, place where written and the circumstances under which it was composed. After that the book should be read from the standpoint of those who were the first recipients. Endeavor to assess the effect the book had

on its first readers. Endeavor to establish the political, social and religious environment of the original writing.

7. Read the book in the light of the Bible's total message; try to ascertain its relation to other Biblical books. Has the book been quoted in other Scriptural books? What other Biblical Scriptures does it quote or use?

8. Read the book from the viewpoint of its usefulness to the Christian in arriving at formulations about God, Jesus Christ and of God's plan of redemption for man.

9. Read the book from the standpoint of its utility for giving answers to personal, social and world problems. What spiritual values does the book have?

10. Read the book in order to determine in what respects it is different from any other Biblical book. Why should the book be recommended for study to others?

11. The study of Biblical characters, chapters, verses, topics can be effectively combined with the book method of Bible study. The book method correctly and conscientiously pursued will yield by far the best results. There is no better method for Bible study. It is the method that will kindle the best kind of interest in the Word of God itself. By the use of this method the Christian pastor will be able to carry out the divine injunction: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed rightly handling the Word of Truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

#### FOOTNOTES

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