

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

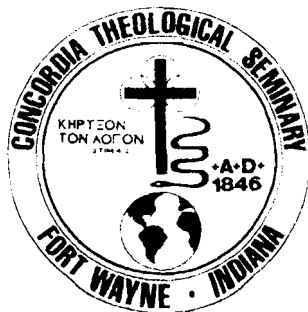
CTQ

Volume 45, Number 3

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LIT. BLDG.
FT. WAYNE, INDIANA 46825

JULY 1981

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Reformed and Neo-Evangelical Theology in English Translations of the Bible

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In 1975 the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in attempting to clear up some of the confusion in our church regarding the reliability of the various English translations of Scripture, issued a report entitled, "Comparative Study of Bible Translations and Paraphrases." Though obviously a product of serious research, the study suffered from several weaknesses. It considered only those passages which are cited in the Synodical Catechism's discussion of Christology — a subject of central importance to the Christian faith, to be sure, but not nearly as controversial on a popular level as, for example, eschatology. The report also failed to provide any rationale for judging any given translation to be erroneous. At times, indeed, it was difficult to ascertain the difference between a translation considered "acceptable" and one considered "not usable."¹

This essay, then, will attempt to supplement the CTCR's work by examining how the various English translations have handled passages involving the sacraments and eschatology — two major points of disagreement between Lutherans and those Christians who identify themselves as Reformed or neo-Evangelical. The translations to be considered are the following:²

- KJV: *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version.*
- NKJV: *The New King James Bible: New Testament.* Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1979.
- RSV: *The Revised Standard Version of the Bible.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1971.
- NEB: *The New English Bible.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- JB: *The Jerusalem Bible.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968.
- MLB: Gerrit Verkuyl. *The Modern Language Bible: The New Berkeley Version in Modern English.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969.
- NASB: *New American Standard Bible.* Glendale, California: Gospel Light, 1972.
- NIV: *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978.

- Beck (1): William F. Beck. *The Holy Bible: An American Translation*. New Haven, Missouri: Leader, 1976.
- Beck (2): William F. Beck. *The Holy Bible in the Language of Today: An American Translation*. Philadelphia and New York: A.J. Holman, 1977.
- LB: Kenneth Taylor. *The Living Bible Paraphrased*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 1971.
- GNB: *The Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version*. New York: American Bible Society, 1976.
- Phillips: J.B. Phillips. *The New Testament in Modern English*. New York: Macmillan, 1958.

I. Passages Dealing with the Sacraments

A. Matthew 3:11

Acceptable Renderings

- KJV: "I indeed baptize you with water *unto repentance . . .*"
- NKJV: "I indeed baptize you with water *to repentance . . .*"
- RSV, NEB, MLB: "I baptize you with water *for repentance . . .*"
- JB, NASB, NIV: "I baptize you in water *for repentance . . .*"
- Beck: "I baptize you with water *for a change of heart . . .*"

Incorrect Renderings

- LB: "With water I baptize *those who repent of their sins . . .*"
- GNB: "I baptize you with water *to show that you have repented . . .*"
- Phillips: "I baptize you with water *as a sign of your repentance . . .*"

The italicized phrases are the various translations' renderings of *eis metanoian*. The problem with all three incorrect renderings is that they have apparently ignored the obvious sense of *eis* in this passage. When it does not have a locational sense ("into," "towards," etc.), *eis* is commonly employed in the New Testament to indicate the purpose or intended result of an action. This usage is seen in the common phrase *eis apheresin hamartion*, "for (the purpose of) the forgiveness of sins"; the idea is that forgiveness follows as the intended result of such actions as the shedding of Christ's blood (as in Matthew 26:28). In Matthew 3:11, the sense would be "for (the purpose of) repentance"; John is asserting that baptism is designed to bring about repentance in a person's life. The latter three translations above, however, have reversed the order, making repentance a prerequisite for baptism. The reason for this alteration is clear; it brings the passage into harmony with Reformed notions that baptism is an act in which a person's conversion to Christianity is symbolized. This presupposition will be shown to have influenced the translations of several key baptismal texts in the New Testament.

Though it is listed as an acceptable rendering, NKJV's "to repentance" represents anything but a clarification of the passage. There appears to be a great tendency in translations produced by multi-denominational committees to preserve or create vague constructions so that no one school of opinion is offended. For the reader, however, more questions are raised than answered.

It should also be noted that, although "repentance" in English usually means "confession of sins," that is not the true meaning of *metanoia*, which literally means "a change of mind." What many do not realize is that the word "repentance" has changed meaning since King James' day. The KJV, in fact, states in several passages³ that God Himself "repented" of something; certainly this does not mean He confessed His sins. In this and related contexts, *metanoia* refers to the ongoing (note the present imperative *metanoete* in verse 2) process of revising one's thoughts and attitudes, purging those of materialism, egotism, etc., and replacing them with thoughts of trust in God's promises and obedience to God's law. John is asserting that baptism is a means of initiating this process.

B. Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3⁴

Acceptable Renderings

KJV, NKJV: ". . . preaching *the baptism of repentance* for the remission of sins." (In Mark, KJV replaces "preaching" with "did . . . preach.")

RSV, MLB, NASB, NIV: ". . . preaching *a baptism of repentance* for the forgiveness of sins." (In Luke, NASB omits "the.")

JB: ". . . proclaiming *a baptism of repentance* for the forgiveness of sins."

Incorrect Renderings

NEB: ". . . proclaiming *a baptism in token of repentance* for the forgiveness of sins."

Beck (Mark): ". . . preaching *that people repent and be baptized* to have their sins forgiven."

Beck (Luke): ". . . preached: '*Repent and be baptized* to have your sins forgiven.' "

LB (Mark): ". . . taught *that all should be baptized as a public announcement of their decision to turn their backs on sin*, so that God could forgive them."

LB (Luke): ". . . preaching *that people should be baptized to show that they had turned to God and away from their sins*, in order to be forgiven."

GNB: " '*Turn away from your sins and be baptized*,' he told the

people, 'and God will forgive your sins.'" (In Luke, "preaching" is placed at the front of this phrase, and "he told the people" is omitted.)

Phillips: "... proclaiming *baptism as the mark of a complete change of heart* and of the forgiveness of sins." (In Luke, "the mark" is changed to "a mark.")

In his recent *CTQ* article,⁵ Theodore Mueller demonstrated what should be obvious — that the key to understanding the description of John's baptism as a *baptisma metanoias* in Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 lies in John's own words on the subject, namely, "I baptize . . . *for repentance*" in Matthew 3:11. Unfortunately, an even greater number of translations reverse or confuse the relationship between baptism and repentance here than in Matthew's quotation. Beck and GNB apparently have taken Peter's statement on Pentecost ("Repent and be baptized," Acts 2:38) as the explanation of *baptisma metanoias*; the result is that repentance is seen either as prerequisite to or simultaneous with baptism (depending on how one interprets "and"), and the concept of repentance as a result of baptism is lost. NEB and Phillips go further, presenting the classic Reformed concept of baptism as an act which symbolizes ("token," "mark") a change in man which has already occurred. LB, however, is the most blatant of all in injecting Reformed theology into the passage. Here is found the concept of baptism as a kind of visual personal testimony ("public announcement") as well as a symbolic act ("to show"). Also noteworthy is the presence of "decision for Christ" theology — the forgiveness of sins is said to result from a personal "decision to turn [one's] back on sin," whereas the text clearly shows that forgiveness, like repentance, results from baptism.

It should be pointed out that even those translations judged "acceptable" are actually less than adequate. The mechanical reproduction of the genitive gives little help to the English reader as to what the precise relationship is between baptism and repentance. Though not introducing any alien ideas, the translation "baptism of repentance" will probably lead few readers to conclude that the real sense is "baptism resulting in repentance."

C. 1 Corinthians 11:29

Acceptable Renderings

KJV: "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, *not discerning the Lord's body.*"

NKJV: "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, *not discerning the Lord's body.*"

RSV: "For any one who eats and drinks *without discerning the body* eats and drinks judgment

upon himself.”

NEB: “For he who eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment on himself *if he does not discern the Body.*”

JB: “. . . because a person who eats and drinks *without recognizing the Body* is eating and drinking his own condemnation.”

NIV: “For anyone who eats and drinks *without recognizing the body of the Lord* eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

Beck: “Anyone who eats and drinks *without seeing that the body is there* is condemned for his eating and drinking.”

Phillips: “He that eats and drinks carelessly is eating and drinking a judgment on himself, *for he is blind to the presence of the Lord's body.*”

Incorrect Renderings

MLB: “For whoever eats and drinks *without due appreciation of the body of Christ* eats and drinks to his own condemnation.”

NASB: “For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, *if he does not judge the body rightly.*”

LB: “For if he eats the bread and drinks from the cup unworthily, *not thinking about the body of Christ and what it means*, he is eating and drinking God's judgment upon himself; for he is trifling with the death of Christ.”

GNB: “For *if he does not recognize the meaning of the Lord's body* when he eats the bread and drinks from the cup, he brings judgment on himself as he eats and drinks.”

The key to the correct interpretation of this passage is the meaning of the verb *diakrino*, occurring here as the present active participle. Classical Greek employed this word in three basic senses: “to separate,”⁶ “to recognize,”⁷ and “to decide.”⁸ In addition, there were various minor uses of this word that all had some connection to the process of making decisions.⁹ One might argue that Paul is using *diakrino* in the first sense, implying a failure to differentiate the body of Christ in the sacrament from ordinary bread.¹⁰ But there is no need to read extra words into the passage; it can be translated simply, “not recognizing the body,” i.e., not discerning its presence.

Three of the four translations judged to be incorrect have either added words to the text or adopted meanings for *diakrino* which do not occur elsewhere, resulting in renderings which attempt to avoid any notion of condemnation for failure to accept the Real Presence. MLB's idea of appreciation is unknown as a possible meaning of *diakrino* in the New Testament and elsewhere, as is LB's translation "thinking about." GNB's addition of "the meaning" contravenes the natural sense — to recognize or discern something primarily means to realize its identity (as in "I recognize that man," i.e., "I know who he is"); understanding its meaning or significance is secondary and might not be intended at all. The effect of all three versions is to present the Reformed idea that the Lord's Supper serves as a visual aid for meditation on the meaning and significance of Christ's (ascended) body and His saving acts, rather than as a vehicle by which Christ's body and blood enters believers.

The fourth incorrect translation (NASB) is technically possible given the range of meaning which *diakrino* has, though this word of itself does not imply "judging *rightly*." Furthermore, this rendering would appear to lack clarity. What is the nature of this judgment that one is to make concerning Christ's body? What criteria determine whether or not the judgment is correct? The probability is high that this translation makes it possible for various views of the Lord's Supper to coexist; Lutherans might understand this to mean "recognize the Real Presence," while Reformed individuals could view it as referring to "due appreciation" of Christ's death and resurrection.

D. Ephesians 5:26

Acceptable Renderings

RSV,

NASB: "... that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her *by the washing of water with the word.*"

NEB: "... to consecrate it, cleansing it *by water and word.*"

Incorrect Renderings

KJV,

NKJV: "... that he might sanctify and cleanse it *with the washing of water by the word.*"

JB: "... to make her holy. He made her clean *by washing her in water with a form of words.*"

MLB: "... in order that by cleansing her *by means of the washing in water* He may sanctify her *through His word.*"

NIV: "... to make her holy, cleansing her *by the washing*

with water through the word.”

Beck: “. . . to make it holy *by washing it clean with water by the Word.*”

LB: “. . . to make her holy and clean, *washed by baptism and God’s Word.*”

GNB: “He did this to dedicate the church to God *by His word*, after making it clean *by washing it in water.*”

Phillips: “. . . to make her holy, having cleansed her *through the baptism of his Word.*”

The wide variation in translating *to loutro tou hudatos en rhemati* in this verse necessitates that each approach be considered separately. The most obvious translational error is JB’s interpolation, “with *a form* of words.” How such a rendering was arrived at, and what meaning was intended, is not at all obvious. Possibly the “form of words” in mind was the statement in Matthew 28:19 (“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”), but this is only conjecture.

Two versions paraphrase part of this verse with the word “baptism.” Phillips “baptism of his Word” suggests a figurative sense of baptism, but Paul’s inclusion of *tou hudatos* renders this understanding impossible. In LB, “baptism” is apparently employed in its literal sense, but the idea that “baptism” and “water” are synonymous represents a rather brazen interpolation of Reformed opinion. In effect, baptism is being presented as “simple water only,”¹¹ possessing of itself no power from God to cleanse or sanctify people.

The same desire to break any connection between “the washing of water” and “the word” has apparently motivated MLB and GNB to re-shuffle the sentence order. It is difficult to understand, however, how the act of washing with water could by itself be a means through which the church is sanctified (MLB) or cleansed (GNB).

The correct sentence order is retained by KJV, NKJV, NIV, and Beck, but like MLB and GNB they have translated *en* as “by” or “through.” This results in a rather clumsy sentence structure; it is difficult to ascertain exactly what “by” or “through the word” modifies. Whether deliberately intended or not, it has the effect of permitting the reader to make the same break between the washing and the word as MLB and GNB openly suggest, in that “by” or “through the word” appears as a second expression of means. This may be another example of deliberate ambiguity designed to appease divergent schools of thought, though this is hard to believe in Beck’s case. Possibly he wished to indicate some

subtle distinction between the word as the proper means of cleansing and the water as the instrument, but it is questionable whether the English prepositions involved can convey such subtleties, especially to the average reader. It should also be noted that Beck's rendering involves another re-shuffling of this verse's contents.

The position of the phrase *en rhemati* in the sentence, along with the point mentioned above in connection with MLB's and GNB's rendering that this phrase could not indicate a second means of cleansing separate from "the washing of water," leads to the conclusion that it most likely modifies the word immediately preceding it, namely "the water." This appears to be the view of RSV and NASB. Admittedly, "with" could be used to indicate a means or instrument, but the natural flow of the sentence suggests rather the meaning "together with" or "connected with." Doubtless this was Luther's view of the passage, as he employs almost identical language in defining baptism — "water . . . connected with God's word."¹² This translation agrees with the basic use of *en* as meaning "in," "inside," and thus "surrounded by" or "encompassed by" (cf. *en Christo*). Paul is stating that the water of baptism is able to cleanse the church by virtue of its being encompassed by God's Word.

NEB is obviously not an ideal translation in view of its deletion of any reference to the washing. Nevertheless, the basic thought is retained — that Christ employed one unified procedure, the components of which are water and the word, to cleanse the church.

E. 1 Peter 3:21

Acceptable Renderings

- RSV: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you . . . as an appeal to God for a clear conscience . . ."
- NASB: "And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you — . . . an appeal to God for a good conscience . . ."
- Beck (1): "In the same way now the water saves you in baptism — . . . by asking God for a good conscience . . ."

Incorrect Renderings

- KJV: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us . . . the answer of a good conscience toward God . . ."
- NKJV: "There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism . . . the answer of a good conscience toward God . . ."
- NEB: "This water prefigured the water of baptism through

- which you are now brought to safety. Baptism is . . . the appeal made to God by a good conscience . . . ”
- JB: “That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is . . . a pledge made to God from a good conscience . . . ”
- MLB: “Its counterpart, baptism, saves you now . . . by . . . the earnest seeking of a conscience that is clear in God’s presence . . . ”
- NIV: “. . . and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also . . . the pledge of a good conscience toward God.”
- Beck (2): “In the same [way] also, baptism now saves you . . . by promising God to keep one’s conscience clear . . . ”
- LB: “That, by the way, is what baptism pictures for us: In baptism we show that we have been saved from death and doom . . . because in being baptized we are turning to God and asking him to cleanse our hearts from sin.”
- GNB: “. . . which was a symbol pointing to baptism, which now saves you. It is . . . the promise made to God from a good conscience.”
- Phillips: “And I cannot help pointing out what a perfect illustration this is of the way you have been admitted-to the safety of the Christian ‘ark’ by baptism . . . it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience.”

As in the case of Ephesians 5:26, this verse has received a wide variety of treatments from the various versions. The verse begins with the statement that baptism is an *antitupos* of the Flood, in which, according to verse 20, “eight souls were saved through water.” The Flood is, then, a prototype of baptism, a model after which baptism is patterned. There are obvious differences between the two, but they nevertheless share the same basic characteristic; they both are incidents of salvation through water. In Noah’s case, the water saved him and his family from the decadent, unbelieving society around them; in our case, the water of baptism saves us from the decadence and unbelief present in ourselves. Few of the English translations catch the full flavor of this relationship, but most nevertheless present similar concepts. Even the translation “symbol” (NIV, GNB) or “illustration” (Phillips) is basically correct; the Flood does, in fact, symbolize or picture how baptism works. LB, on the other hand, introduces a major error into the text by presenting *baptism* as picturing something.

Several translations refuse to reproduce the statement “baptism saves you” or “us” without some modification. Beck (1) introduces no error with “the water in baptism saves you”, but does not really improve the verse either. NEB changes “saves” into “brings to safety,” which, though a synonymous expression, might enable one to think that this refers to something other than eternal salvation. Phillips has employed a similar phrase in an expansion of the parallel between baptism and the Flood. By stating explicitly what “safety” is produced by baptism, this is certainly preferable to NEB, but it seems unnecessary to go to such lengths to “explain” the text; “baptism saves you” is not a particularly complicated or obscure phrase. LB, on the other hand, cannot be called an attempted explanation, but rather a wholesale re-writing of the phrase. The subject (“baptism”) is placed into a prepositional phrase, the direct object (“us”) becomes the subject, the verb is changed from third person singular present active to first person plural perfect passive, and the verb “show” is inserted. The result is another classic statement of Reformed theology and demonstrates to what lengths adherents of this theology must go to harmonize the Scriptural witness with their opinions.

The next part of the verse — Peter’s negative definition of baptism — was omitted above in the interest of brevity. None of the translations introduce any significant error into the text at this point, though only four correctly reproduce the original syntax: “not the removal of dirt from the flesh” (NASB; RSV, NIV, and Beck are similar). LB again involves a complete revision of the phrase (“not because our bodies are washed clean by the water”). The remaining versions construe *sarkos* as modifying *rhupou* (vice versa in the case of Phillips), which appears highly doubtful in view of the positions of these words in the phrase. These latter translations then miss the parallel between this construction and the construction employed in the succeeding positive definition. The following illustrates this parallel:

Baptism is not *sarkos* *apothesis* *rhupou*

Baptism is *suneideseos agathes* *eperotema* *eis theon*

Both phrases contain three basic parts in the same order — anarthrous genitive, anarthrous predicate nominative, and anarthrous prepositional phrase. It would only seem logical that the syntax of the two phrases would be similar. The syntactical relationships in the first phrase are seen better if the predicate nominative “removal” is converted into the equivalent verb: “Baptism does not remove dirt from the flesh.” Here “dirt” is the direct object of the verb and “from the flesh” indicates the sphere

or area in which the removal takes place. If the parallel holds, *eis theon* should be the object of the second verb and *suneidesios* should also indicate the sphere of activity. The resultant translation would then be, "Baptism asks God for a good conscience." Here "God" is the indirect, rather than direct object (this explains why the third part of the first phrase is a genitive and the equivalent part of the second is a prepositional phrase with *eis*) and "conscience" is the area in which the request is made, i.e., the object of the request.

The most common translation error here is the failure to see the specific parallel between *sarkos* and *suneideseos agathes*. KJV, NKJV, NEB, JB, MLB, NIV, and GNB all interpret the latter as the source or agent of the *eperotema*. It is hard to justify this in view of the fact that *sarkos* is anything but the source or agent of the removal in the first phrase. However, such a translation reflects the same viewpoint that LB states more bluntly — that baptism is an activity in which *we* do something either to gain salvation or to express gratitude for having received it. It should also be noted that if *suneideseos* indicates agency, there is then no information in the phrase as to the content of the *eperotema*.

The translation of this latter word is also a matter of some dispute, which in view of its etymology is rather surprising; *eperotema* comes, not unexpectedly, from *eperotao*, "I ask," "I request." *Eperotema* is thus employed in pre-Christian times to mean "question" or "request."¹³ Only in the second century A.D. and later do such specialized meanings as "pledge" or "answer to inquiry" appear, in such works as Justinian's Code. Yet despite the fact that these are post-Biblical, legal senses of *eperotema*, KJV, NKJV, JB, NIV, Beck (2) and GNB have chosen them over the original sense. Such translations fit in well with the Reformed concept of baptism as a response to salvation.

Other alien ideas in this part of the verse include the insertion by Beck (2) of the infinitive "to keep" (which removes the concept of baptism as initiating salvation), the insertion by Phillips of "it means" ("symbolizes"?), the latter's translation of *eperotema* as "ability," and MLB's translation of the same word as "earnest seeking." Of course, the worst by far is LB, which bears little or no relationship to the original text at all.

Those of a Reformed persuasion would probably greet the translation, "baptism is an appeal or request to God for a good conscience," with the question, "How can water do this?" If baptism is nothing more than water, of course, it could not. But if it is true, as suggested in John 3:5, Acts 2:38, and elsewhere, that

the Holy Spirit is present in baptism, this statement of Peter makes perfect sense. The Spirit intercedes for us in baptism, asking God to grant us that for which we as unregenerate sinners cannot ask — salvation, a clean conscience, etc. This truth should be of immense comfort to Christians, because we know that the Holy Spirit's requests to God are always answered in the affirmative.

II. Passages Dealing with Eschatology

A. Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30, and Luke 21:32¹⁴

Acceptable Renderings

- KJV: "Verily I say unto you, *This generation* shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." (In Mark, "that" is inserted before "this generation" and "fulfilled" is changed to "done.")
- NKJV: "Assuredly, I say to you, *this generation* will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled." (In Mark, "are fulfilled" is changed to "take place.")
- RSV: "Truly, I say to you, *this generation* will not pass away till all these things take place." (In Luke, "take" is changed to "have taken.")
- NEB: "I tell you this: *the present generation* will live to see it all."
- JB: "I tell you solemnly, before *this generation* has passed away all these things will have taken place."
- MLB (Mark): "I assure you, *the present generation* will not pass on until all this takes place."
- NASB (Matt., Luke): "Truly I say to you, *this generation* will not pass away until all these things take place."
- GNB: "Remember that all these things will happen before *the people now living* have all died." (In Luke, "happen" is changed to "take place.")
- Phillips (Matt., Luke): "Believe me, *this generation* will not disappear till all this has taken place."
- Phillips (Mark): "I tell you that *this generation* will not have passed until all these things have come true."

Incorrect Renderings

- MLB (Matt.): "I assure you, all these things will take place before *this present generation* passes on." Footnote: "The destruction of Jerusalem is a figure of the world's destruction at the return of the Lord."
- MLB (Luke): "I assure you that all this will happen before this generation passes away." Footnote: "The word 'generation' is translated from the Greek *genea* which

means (1) *generation*, i.e., contemporaries living on earth or the span of an individual's lifetime; (2) *race*; and (3) *family*."

NASB (Mark): "truly I say to you, *this generation* [footnote: "or, *race*"] will not pass away until all these things take place."

NIV: "I tell you the truth, *this generation* [footnote: "or *race*"] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

Beck: "I tell you the truth, *these people* will not pass away till all this happens."

LB (Matt.): "Then at last *this age* will come to its close." Footnote: "Or, 'after all these things take place, *this generation* shall pass away.' "

LB (Mark): "Yes, these are the events that will signal the end of *the age* [footnote: "Literally, 'of *this generation*.' "]."

LB (Luke): "I solemnly declare to you that when these things happen, the end of *this age* [footnote: "Or, '*this generation*.' "] has come."

Have the events which Jesus predicted as signs of the end of the world already been fulfilled, or do they still await completion? Many Christians of a "neo-Evangelical" persuasion believe the latter to be the case. They run into difficulty, however, when they read the traditional translation of Matthew 24:34 and its parallels, which clearly teach that these signs would already be manifested in the lifetime of Jesus' original disciples. In order to escape this conclusion, some translations have introduced alternate meanings for *genea* either in footnotes or in the text itself.

The footnote in MLB at Luke 21:32 is indeed correct as far as the classical usage of *genea* is concerned. What MLB and others have apparently failed to consider, however, is whether or not the New Testament recognizes the same range of meanings. Indeed, a study of MLB itself reveals no example of where *genea* is ever translated "race" or "family."¹⁵ It is especially clear that *genea* in the mouth of Jesus always means the contemporary generation of Jews, not the Jewish race as such.¹⁶ Those who nevertheless translate "race" are able to conclude that the signs of the end have yet to occur, since it is commonly accepted that the Jewish race has yet to pass away.

The translation "age" would be acceptable if it were made clear that this is a period of relatively short duration. LB, however, appears to suggest by "age" the entire New Testament period. This translation has the same effect as the translation "race."

Beck's translation "these people" could be understood to mean "those who lived at that time," but could just as easily be interpreted to mean "the Jewish race." This rendition is probably due to an oversight rather than a conscious desire to allow for neo-Evangelical opinion.

Finally, MLB attempts in Matthew 24:34 to make this text symbolic, calling the destruction of Jerusalem "a figure of the world's destruction" in a footnote. The actual words of Jesus in this chapter, however, support no such conclusion.

B. Revelation 1:9 and 7:14

Acceptable Renderings

- KJV: "tribulation," "great tribulation"
 NKJV: "tribulation," "the great tribulation"
 RSV, NASB: "the tribulation," "the great tribulation"
 Beck: "suffering," "great suffering"

Incorrect Renderings

- NEB: "the suffering," "the great ordeal"
 JB: "sufferings," "the great persecution" (footnote: "under Nero")
 MLB: "the distress," "the great tribulation"
 NIV: "the suffering," "the great tribulation"
 LB: "sufferer," "the Great Tribulation"
 GNB: "the suffering," "the terrible persecution"
 Phillips: "the distress," "the great oppression"

The Greek phrases that correspond to the above are *te thlipsei* and *tes thlipseos tes megales*. One might expect the word *thlipsis* ("tribulation") to be similarly translated in both verses, but unfortunately a neo-Evangelical eschatological opinion has been responsible for distinguishing the two in many versions. Though there are many controverted details, this opinion generally holds that the church will be subjected to an especially virulent persecution immediately prior to the Second Coming. The "proof-text" for this event is Revelation 7:14, from which the name of this persecution period is derived — "The Great Tribulation." Other passages in the New Testament, however, suggest that the tribulation has already begun — indeed, that it dates at the latest from the time of Pentecost. Revelation 1:9 is such a passage, where John states that he is a co-participant (*sugkoinonos*) in the *thlipsis*. It could be argued that the addition of *megales* in Revelation 7:14 makes this tribulation different from the one referred to in 1:9; but even if such be the case, this difference would not justify a translation which, in effect, locks the Tribulation doctrine into the text, preventing the reader from

deciding for himself concerning its nature. As this author has noted elsewhere,¹⁷ the extreme form of this tendency is reached in NIV, which translates *thlipsis* as “tribulation” in Revelation 7:14 but employs nine other words in all occurrences of *thlipsis* elsewhere.

JB presents a different opinion — that the tribulation referred to is Nero’s persecution. Many modernist scholars, indeed, view the book of Revelation as a colorful history of the church’s struggles with the Roman Empire.

C. Revelation 20:4

Acceptable Renderings

KJV, NKJV: “. . . and *they lived* and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” (KJV omits “for.”)

Beck: “*They lived* and ruled with Christ a thousand years.”

Incorrect Renderings

RSV, JB, MLB, NASB, NIV, Phillips: “*They came to life* and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” (RSV, MLB, and NIV omit “for”; NASB begins the sentence with “. . .and.”)

NEB: “*These came to life again* and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

LB: “*They had come to life again* and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

GNB: “*They came to life* and ruled as kings with Christ for a thousand years.”

This is the most obvious and yet also the most widespread translational error encountered in this study. The verb in question is *ezesan*, the third person plural aorist active indicative of *zao*, “I live.” The fact that this is an aorist verb precludes the translation “came to life,” since the idea of the aorist (from *aoristos*, “without boundary”) is to present the bare fact of an action, without reference to its inception, duration, or conclusion. Only if the verb had been an imperfect indicative would the translation “came to life” or “began to live” have been appropriate.

This translation harmonizes the passage with millennialistic theory, which holds that the two resurrections mentioned in Revelation 20 are both physical resurrections — one for believers prior to the millenium, the other for unbelievers afterwards. The translation “they lived” does not of itself rule out this theory, yet it enables one to consider other possible senses of “the first resurrection” besides a physical sense (such as that referred to in Romans 6:4).

The following table¹⁸ indicates the overall performance of the translations examined:

Version	Sacramental Errors	Eschatological Errors	Total Errors	CTCR ¹⁹ Rank
RSV	0	1	1	4
KJV	2	0	2	1 (tie)
NKJV	2	0	2	-
NASB	1	2	3	1 (tie)
JB	2	2	4	8 (tie)
NEB	3	2	5	7
Beck (1)	3	3	6	5
MLB	3	4	7	-
NIV	2	5	7	3
Beck (2)	4	3	7	-
Phillips	5	2	7	8 (tie)
GNB	6	2	8	6
LB	6	5	11	10

A comparison of this study and the CTCR study of Christological passages produces some interesting results. "Liberal" versions (RSV, NEB, JB) can be trusted more in sacramental and eschatological passages than in Christological ones, while the reverse is true for the "conservative" NIV. Paraphrases (especially LB and Phillips) appear to be universally inferior, whereas KJV and NASB are rather consistently accurate. Given the inherent superiority of NASB over KJV in such areas as modernity of expression and quality of the Greek text employed, NASB appears to be the best current English version. Of course, even in this case the CTCR recommendation remains valid: "Competence in the Biblical languages is indispensable in judging a version."²⁰

III. Conclusion

This brief survey of key sacramental and eschatological passages has revealed that Reformed and neo-Evangelical theology has indeed made deep inroads into several versions, especially so-called "paraphrases." The dangers of paraphrasing are amply demonstrated by the fact that even the work of an LC-MS theologian (Beck) makes unwitting allowances for Reformed opinions.

FOOTNOTES

1. E.g., p.7 of the report, where Phillips' translation of John 1:14 — "as of a father's only son" — is judged "not usable." At least at first glance this would seem to be a more literal rendering of *hos monogenous para patros*.

2. These are, with the addition of *The New King James Bible: New Testament*, *The Modern Language Bible*, and the Holman edition of Beck's translation, the same translations employed in the CTCR study.
3. E.g., Ps. 106:45, The LORD "repented according to the multitude of his mercies"; and Jer. 26:19, "The LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them."
4. The quoted sections of these verses are identical in the original.
5. Theodore Mueller, "An Application of Case Grammar to Two New Testament Passages," *CTQ*, 43, pp. 320-323.
6. E.g., Homer, *Iliad*, 7.292, where two combatants are parted.
7. E.g., Homer, *Odyssey*, 8.195, where the reference is to the recognition of a sign (*sema*). Cf. Matt. 16:3.
8. E.g., Herodotus, 1.100; Theocritus, 25.46; etc.
9. A notable example is the New Testament's use (e.g., Matt. 21:21) of *diakrinomai* to mean "doubt" or "waver."
10. Thus R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, p. 482, and F. Buchsel, "*krino*, k.t.l.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., G. Kittel, III, p. 946.
11. *Small Catechism*, IV, 2.
12. *Ibid.*
13. E.g., Herodotus, 6.67; Thucydides 3.53; etc. 1 Peter 3:21 is the only occurrence of *eperotema* in the New Testament; *eperotao* occurs quite frequently, always in the sense of "ask" or "request."
14. These three verses are identical in the original, except that Mark uses *mechris hou* instead of *heos an* (both mean "until"), and Luke deletes *tauta* ("these things"). Additional differences in the translations are noted after each version.
15. Thirty-four of the 38 occurrences of *genea* in the New Testament are translated "generation" by MLB. Two others are cases of inconsistent translation — Luke 11:31 has "age" while its parallel Matt. 12:42 contains "generation," and the quote of Is. 53:8 (which reads "contemporaries") in Acts 8:33 employs "offspring." The final two occurrences, in Acts 14:16 and 15:21, read respectively "in days gone by" (literally, "in past generations") and "from earliest times" (literally, "from ancient generations").
16. E.g., Matt 11:16, "But to what shall I compare this generation?" This is followed by an indictment, not of the entire Jewish race, but only of the ones living at that time who rejected Jesus and John the Baptist.
17. "The New International Version — Nothing New," *CTQ*, 43, pp. 242-3.
18. Six sacramental passages and six eschatological passages were considered. For purposes of tallying incorrect renderings, however, Rev. 1:9 and Rev. 7:14 were counted together, since the error involved a failure to translate the one like the other. Thus the highest possible "incorrect" score is six in sacramental passages and five in eschatological ones, for a total of eleven.
19. CTCR, *op.cit.*, p. 22.
20. *Ibid.*

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