

CONCLUSION

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). New renditions of the Bible can be helpful in accomplishing what Paul thus commended. And the admonition given in Doctrine and Covenants 91:4-6 with reference to the Apocrypha is applicable also here: "Therefore whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth; and whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom; and whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited. . . ."

"We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly. . . ." ("The Articles of Faith") That principle holds for the New English as well as for the old English. The King James Version will likely remain for many years to come as the official Bible of the LDS church, and it will continue to be tolerably well understood by "study and also by faith."

The prophet Joseph Smith once said, "You can get your 'longitude and latitude' better in the original Hebrew than in any of the translations of the Bible." Until we learn enough Hebrew to do so, however, it may be that all of the translation efforts will help us in our study.

THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE: THE NEW TESTAMENT

Richard Lloyd Anderson

Over a score of years ago a committee of English Protestant scholars planned a major Bible translation, conceived in concern for their age of apathy and dedicated to the proposition that contemporary language was essential. Millions of copies of the New Testament of the New English Bible (NEB) have been sold since its 1961 publication. It is appropriate to reconsider the NEB New Testament as now published in the complete new English Bible. Actually, the New Testament is the 1970 "second edition," though retention of the 1961 paging shows that relatively few changes have been made. In imitation of Voltaire's negation of the triple name of the Holy Roman Empire, the New English Bible may be portrayed as New, indeed English, and less consistently Bible, at least as it relates to the New Testament.

All will agree that the NEB is innovative, and it was planned that way. The New Testament preface remains defensive on the point of paraphrase versus translation, stressing that the NEB is the latter: "free, it may be, rather than literal. . . ." To understand the goal behind what the preface calls "natural vocabulary, constructions, and rhythms of contemporary speech," one has to go to the committee directives. The masses of inactive church members in England and the young could only be reached by modern language. Even church attenders needed this change, for the familiar King James English glided through "their minds almost without stirring a ripple." If practicalities loomed this large, there is bound to be more than one conflict of inter-

est between variety and accuracy. The King James Version (KJV) is just about as literal as a good translation can be; so "current usage" moves away from English approximations of Greek constructions and close English equivalents of Greek terms.

As publicity releases for new translations point out, the King James Version has problems of its own. Generations that savored Shakespeare were much better prepared for the vocabulary of the KJV than the present one. What communicated almost four hundred years ago is often mysterious today. Thus KJV has the Corinthians shopping in the "shambles" and Paul coming to Rome after being "let hitherto." Present communication does not use "eschew," "anon," "by and by" (meaning immediately), "pitiful" (in the sense of compassionate), "science" (in the sense of knowledge), and "prevent" (in the sense of precede). The list can be extended to impressive length. Thus any modern translation has the advantage of more vividly relating the profound experiences of the New Testament. Perhaps linguists tend to see Bible verses as individual translation problems, whereas the reader unfamiliar with the incredible events of the Gospels and Acts immerses himself in the story. After all, the most gripping adventure at sea in antiquity is Paul's journey to Rome, and nothing in human literature or history exceeds the raw courage of Jesus or the apostles in welcoming discomfort and danger; and facing evil and sickness with the miraculous power of God. The strength of the New Testament is its moving story, and the NEB tells it well. I learned that lesson in 1961 after stressing the limitations of the NEB New Testament to an unusually well educated Sunday School Class in the Berkeley First Ward. Afterwards, a professional labor mediator was forthright enough to say that he had never taken the New Testament seriously until he got one of the first NEB copies available, and attested that reading it had changed his life. Almost a decade of enthusiastic church service since his baptism proves the reality of his experience.

The narrative strength of almost any modern translation should not be viewed as forbidden fruit. The eighth Article of Faith stands for the proposition that the King James Version is used with reservations by Latter-day Saints. In his vigorous defense of the KJV (*Why the King James Version?*), J. Reuben Clark, Jr. hoped for "an accurate translation that shall be pregnant with the great principles of the restored gospel." The careful reader of President Clark's New Testament studies will see that his opposition to the Revised Version of 1881 and the Revised Standard Version of 1946 was only incidentally a matter of translation. He was mainly concerned with the Greek text that most modern versions have relied upon, including the NEB.

Possession of some 3,000 catalogued Greek manuscripts (and a like number uncatalogued) is both the joy and despair of the New Testament scholar. Because differences are quite limited — essentially word order, synonyms, and a relatively small number of disputed passages — the antiquity of this record is beyond question. New Testament scholars have played favorites among these manuscripts, choosing the oldest complete manuscripts, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, both discovered and/or published in the nineteenth century. Some

eighty papyrus manuscripts and fragments have since been catalogued, mostly dating prior to this time. President Clark strongly felt that KJV relied upon a text superior to the main nineteenth and twentieth century versions, and I agree with his position. The archaic language of the KJV remains for many a disadvantage, but the textual philosophy behind the Revised Version, Revised Standard Version, and the NEB detracts from their completeness as historical and doctrinal records of the primitive Church.

A further disadvantage of the NEB is its English idiom. The specifics of translating into "contemporary speech" may be quite different on each side of the Atlantic, if a committee insists on local color. In the NEB one still walks through cornfields (British for "grain"), measures distances in furlongs, money in pounds. Paul waits in Ephesus "until Whitsuntide," and Peter warns of the day when God "comes to hold assize." The list can be extended to impressive length. There are as many Anglicisms in the NEB as there are Elizabethan archaisms in the KJV.

The goal of idiomatic variety brings certain unfortunate consequences. First, Jesus and his apostles spoke the language of terse challenge. But, like the blend of content and form in good poetry, a change to current idiom generally disintegrates the power of the original. Thus the command for confronting lust becomes a pretty jingle: "If your right eye leads you astray, tear it out and fling it away." This adaption of Phillip's rendering of Matthew 5:29 was fortunately changed in the new edition of the NEB: "If your right eye is your undoing, tear it out and fling it away." This move back to literalism is a gain. Likewise, the vigorous call to the "first principles" (KJV, Hebrews 5:12) becomes in the NEB a reminder of "the ABC," precisely no call from childishness at all. In fact, this Phillips-NEB rendering distorts a term that means specifically "first principles" in most of its philosophical usages.

Another result of the NEB's idiomatic variety is the confusion of specific titles. The term *grammateus*, literally "scribe," may appear in the NEB as "lawyer," "doctor of law," "teacher," or "teacher of the law." Since there are other terms for both lawyer and teacher, this fuzzy terminology makes the NEB a poor translation for serious study. Of special interest to Latter-day Saints is the very frequent "saint" for those who have entered the covenant of "sanctification." To follow the variety of the NEB translation of "saint" is a study in chaos.

Doctrinal passages especially interest the Latter-day Saint reader, and here NEB (like other translations) has strengths and weaknesses. The essential doctrinal problem of the NEB is its repudiation of any obligation (in words of the preface) to reproduce "characteristic features of the language" of the original. Since language and thought are intimately interrelated, "the idiom of contemporary English" may teach the contemporary English gospel rather than the gospel of Christ and his apostles. For instance, speaking in tongues is a spiritual phenomenon that modern English does not easily describe because it is not a common modern experience. The result in the NEB is more adaption than translation. The Greek equivalent of "tongue"

is *glossa*, and it has the familiar double usage of referring either to the part of the body or the language produced by it. In the latter sense, the Greek New Testament uses *glossa* for the gift of the Spirit promised by Jesus, realized in the Book of Acts, and evaluated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Whereas the Greek of Mark 16:17 speaks of "new tongues," the NEB translates "strange tongues," a phrase repeated in the NEB renditions of 1 Corinthians 14, although *glossa* alone appears. Acts and 1 Corinthians generally use "tongues" without any adjective, but NEB seems too insecure to allow this simplicity; it frequently reads "tongues of ecstasy," which has uncomfortable connotations to the believer in the spiritual reality of its best practice. This fear is justified, for it is a natural (and naturalistic) next step for the NEB to translate the identical term repeatedly as "ecstatic utterance," "ecstatic speech," "ecstatic language," or simply "the language of ecstasy."

Contemporary doctrine may often be more of an issue than contemporary English. From the KJV to the present, reputable translations have constantly made the apostles and prophets the foundation of the Church in Ephesians 2:20, the natural reading of the Greek. Now the NEB attenuates the thought to "the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets." The addition of a word also changes a doctrine in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, where Paul prophesied that Christ's coming must be preceded by the *apostasia*, then already at work. Latter-day Saints look back upon the apostasy as having taken place and as having contaminated orthodox Christianity. But orthodox Christians are generally futurists on this issue, that is, accepting the prophecy but looking to its fulfillment just prior to the Second Coming, obviously a more comfortable position for the believer in Christian continuity. Paul's prophecy placed no modifier on the word *apostasia*, a term that meant to the Greeks revolution against established leadership. The reading of the KJV was simply "falling away," mirrored by other recognized translations as "rebellion," "great revolt," "apostasy," or "mass apostasy" in the very recent and Catholic New American Bible. Here the NEB takes the extraordinary step of supplying a word of time not found in Greek: There will be a "*final* rebellion against God" (emphasis added).

On the other hand, many readings in the NEB (as in other translations) support Mormon doctrine. To the throngs in the Temple, Peter predicted that God's favor would return to Israel in the "times of the restitution of all things," the KJV rendering. The Greek original is the most forceful term possible for a complete restoration; consequently the NEB (and most of the better recent translations) speaks of the latter-day "universal restoration." Another scripture of interest to Latter-day Saints is 1 Corinthians 15:29, where Paul alludes to the practice of "baptism for the dead" (KJV) to support the reality of the resurrection. Many Christian fundamentalists have denied that Paul meant a substitutionary baptism here. But the scholarly translations of the twentieth century have solidly supported the L.D.S. interpretation of proxy baptism, a phrase that several use. Here the NEB is typical of the recent modern translations in speaking of "baptism on behalf of the dead."

For Latter-day Saints accuracy must certainly be the most important standard of judgment in Bible translation. But the NEB is more readable than reliable. Since readability is also desirable, modern translations have their place. The L.D.S. Church is wise to retain its use of the King James Version, because its literalism permits a non-Greek reader to get as close as possible to the original language of the scriptures. In picking a supplementary translation, many of the last generation favored Goodspeed and many now favor Phillips. But both of these are characterized by the same freedom that moves the NEB away from translation and toward paraphrase. Certain conservative modernizations of the KJV have appeared. Although subject to the valid textual criticism of President J. Reuben Clark, the Revised Standard Version represents the best American scholarship, and it has the advantage of being a fairly conservative revision within the framework of the King James Version, in both goal and result. The NEB goal was different. Long ago a master of languages (George Barrow) said that translation is at best an echo. The New Testament of the New English Bible has more than its share of strange reverberations and muffled tones.

THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE: A LITERARY VIEW

Karl Keller

There is no use discussing the Bible as literature (whether the King James, the New English Bible, or any other version) with anyone who doesn't read it *as literature* but merely searches its pages for proofs of his predilections and prejudices. The proof-texting reader has never read the Bible.

One must remember, however, that it is because the Bible is great *literature* that it became important as theology, and not the other way around. It has had an amazing impact — and largely because of the way it is written. Great art doesn't merely reflect reality but creates it.

To fail to read the Bible as literature is to miss its intent. If Genesis is not read as epic, for example, its language will be easily distorted into a thousand foolish superstitions. If the Garden of Eden story is not read as myth, it becomes silly. If Jeremiah is not read as apocalyptic literature, it will lead one to disbelief. If the story of Job is read as a lesson in patience (the way Paul misread it) rather than as a collection of dramatized philosophical fragments championing man as rebel, it will have no impact. If the parables of Jesus are not read as riddles for excluding the weak-minded (as Jesus himself said they should be understood), they will be turned into soppy moralisms after the manner of the *Reader's Digest*. And so on through all its beautiful pages. If the Holy Ghost is to be found anywhere in its pages, it will be found by means of the literary form and style of the books, correctly understood and fully enjoyed.

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