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*“The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light”*

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*Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD*

# CAN WE TRUST THE MODERN VERSIONS

BY JOHN MOSTERT, D.D.

*Here are the good and bad features of seven new 'private translations'*

[We are indebted to the courtesy of MOODY MONTHLY for this very helpful article.

There is one more 'private translation' not mentioned by Dr. Mostert, by the late John N. Darby, which we have found exceedingly helpful. Darby was a great scholar, with a profound knowledge of the original (and several modern) languages, and would have been far better known but for his 'exclusive non-ecclesiastical' standing (though he was at one time a minister in the so-called Church of England). His work was first published many years ago, and is considered by many scholars and teachers as most reliable and accurate. In some editions there are valuable explanatory notes on certain words, tenses, etc. His publishers (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Dep., 25 Paternoster Row, London, E. C. 4.) brought out an excellently-bound edition in 1940 combining both O. T. (also his own translation, closely resembling the R. V.) and N. T., with footnotes. Personally, we find this work of even greater value than most of those referred to by Dr. Mostert.

Dr. Mostert wrote his doctor's dissertation at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary last year on the merits of the Revised Version of the New Testament. Exhaustive research went into that thesis and this article. He is now a member of the faculty at Moody Bible Institute.]

Modern language versions of the New Testament have come into prevalent use in recent years, being read extensively by many Bible students, and quoted often in sermons.

In view of their prevalence, certain pertinent questions arise. To what extent should we use them? Can they be of practical value in our Bible study? Which of them are trustworthy? Are any of them tainted by false teaching? What are their particular characteristics, and how do they compare?

The need of modern translations is generally recognized. They use the language current to the day in which we live. Besides that the discovery of ancient papyri has made considerable contribution to our knowledge of the language in which the New Testament was written. Consequently, scholars have sought in recent translations to give certain words their more exact meanings, laying due emphasis on the force of Greek tenses, and rendering idioms in what are more nearly their English equivalents.

Some translators have used rigid literalism, like Robert Young,

who renders Luke 16:31: "And he said to him, If Moses and the prophets they do not hear, neither if one may rise out of the dead will they be persuaded."

Rotherham's Emphasized New Testament has the same peculiarity.

The so-called Concordant Version is an example of extreme literality. The translator, A. E. Knoch, believes that every word in the Greek has one unvarying equivalent in English, and the English word must not be used to translate any other Greek word. This results in an extreme uniformity not at all warranted by the text. Readers should be warned against the use of this work, not only from a linguistic, but also from a doctrinal standpoint. It reveals the eccentricities of a self-taught man who attempted to set forth erroneous views in an impressive manner.

The majority of translators have sought to produce free, idiomatic, easily read and understood versions for the ordinary reader, so as, in Tyndale's words, "to cause the plowboy to know the Scriptures."

We shall consider seven of the outstanding "private translations" (produced by individuals, not committees) that have appeared since 1900 and are in more or less wide use.

#### **Weymouth's Translation**

Weymouth's translation has been in use forty-four years. The language is simple, clear, and dignified, avoiding both slang and literary elegance. Weymouth first sought to ascertain the sense of the Greek text, and then considered how that sense would be expressed in the English of his day—how the inspired writer would have written it had he been living in the twentieth century.

Notice how Weymouth has treated the first five verses of Romans 5. This gives a good idea of his style. "Acquitted then as the result of faith, let us enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have been brought by our faith into the position of favour in which we stand, and we exult in hope of seeing God's glory. And not only so: we also exult in our afflictions, knowing as we do that affliction produces endurance; endurance, ripeness of character; and ripeness of character, hope; and that this hope never disappoints, because God's love

for us floods our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

The tenses of New Testament Greek convey definite ideas as to kind of action, whether continued, punctiliar, or completed. Weymouth has to some extent brought out these shades of meaning, which are very inadequately expressed in the King James Version. For instance we read: "while we *are living* in darkness" in 1 John 1:6, and "*kept asking*" in John 10:24 (third edition).

We find improvements also in the rendering of Greek cases, prepositions, and other parts of speech. In the above passage (Rom. 5:5), the translator has substituted for the ambiguous expression "the love of God," the more specific phrase, "God's love for us," which the writer had in mind. This represents what is perhaps the most likely interpretation of the case—form behind the expression.

From a doctrinal point of view, Weymouth's translation is sound. The great passages concerning Christ and salvation are treated with reasonable accuracy. It is true that some undue interpretation has crept in, as in Philippians 2:7 where the *kenosis* of Christ is specified as "the emptying of his glory." The Greek text simply states that "He emptied Himself," and does not tell us that of which He emptied Himself.

Five editions of Weymouth have been published, the last in 1943. The earlier editions are recommended. Some unfortunate changes have been introduced in the more recent. Furthermore, some of the notes in the later editions definitely reveal the influence of the liberal school of thought, especially regarding the authorship of the books.

#### Moffatt's Translation

Moffatt's translation was published in 1912. It has been described as "a strikingly independent modern-speech translation, by a thorough Greek scholar interested in modern research, and written in an interestingly, fresh, brilliant, and stimulating style."

Moffatt treated the text as one would render any piece of contemporary Hellenistic prose. He took pride in the fact that he had found "freedom from the influence of the theory of verbal inspiration," and used a good deal of liberty in his treatment of

the text. In many instances explanatory words or phrases are added to make for smoother English reading. Although many excellent idioms are employed, there are those that go beyond the obvious meaning of the Greek text.

Needless to say, there are some excellent qualities found in Moffatt's work. Many of the words and idioms are fresh and stimulating. Kind of action in the tenses is graphically brought out in a number of passages, especially in dealing with the present and imperfect tenses (cf. 1 John 1:6; Rom. 8:13; Acts 2:45; Luke 7:45; 8:23). The finer shades of meaning in the cases and prepositions are frequently expressed.

There are, however, inaccuracies. These are especially apparent in the great doctrinal passages, in which the modernism of the translator is often reflected. Textual evidences concerning the deity of Christ are reduced to a minimum (cf. John 1:1-5; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 1:3).

Flagrant inaccuracies are seen in Matthew 1:16, where, contrary to the best textual evidence, Joseph is represented as "the father of Jesus," and Luke 3:22, which Moffatt has rendered: "Thou art my son, the Beloved, *today have I become thy father.*" In both of these passages Moffatt has made use of inferior readings as a basis for his translation. Their incongruity with the general teachings of Scripture is obvious. We consider these renderings an attack upon the virgin birth and deity of our Lord.

To the student who is aware of the translator's viewpoint and of the inaccuracies in translation, Moffatt's work may be of some value; but we do not recommend its use by the average reader who does not possess the background for such discernment.

#### Goodspeed's Translation

The New Testament: An American Translation was produced by Edgar J. Goodspeed, former professor of Biblical and Patristic Greek of the University of Chicago, and published in 1923 by the University of Chicago Press. Goodspeed's purpose was to present the New Testament in the simple and straightforward English of the present day, and also to give to it the characteristics of American speech in distinction from the English of Great

Britain. He emphasized the fact that it is the meaning, not the dress, of the New Testament that is of principal importance.

A good example of Goodspeed's free and interpretive style is seen in his rendering of Philippians 3:4: "If anyone thinks he can rely on his physical advantages, still more can I! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. . . ."

Monetary values are expressed in American terms, so that instead of "five talents" we find "five thousand dollars." The forms "thou," "thy," "thee" are avoided even in prayers.

Too great a freedom in translation is evident in many passages with undue changes in sentence structure and unnecessary addition of words which have no basis in the Greek text.

This work is affected by liberal theological bias. Passages of Christological significance have been modified and "toned down" without adequate textual warrant. John 1:1 is rendered, "the word was divine." This permits of loose interpretation, not in keeping with the proper force of the Greek text, which strongly declares that "the Word was *Deity*."

In Philippians 2:6, 7 the translator has Jesus grasping at equality with God, as though He did not already possess it. According to him, the *kenosis* (v. 7) consisted of the laying aside of this effort to attain equality with God. Colossians 1:15 represents Christ as merely "a likeness of the unseen God," and Hebrews 1:3 as "the *representation* of his being."

Another serious inaccuracy in translation is the repeated use of the term "uprightness," instead of "righteousness." In Romans 1:17 Goodspeed speaks of "God's way of uprightness" (also 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21, et al.). The emphasis is placed on moral character, in this way strongly suggesting the teachings of liberalism, which reduce Christianity to an ethical system and rob it of that important aspect of the atonement in which we see Christ as our righteousness.

### Montgomery's Translation

The New Testament in Modern English, or The Centenary Testament was prepared by Helen B. Montgomery and published in 1924 by Judson Press on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the American Publication Society, "to signalize the completion of a century of work in Bible distribution, translation, and publication by the Judson Press."

Mrs. Montgomery has dealt faithfully with the Greek text and for the most part, has guarded against undue interpretation. Fine work has been done in the rendering of some of the Greek tenses, the time and kind of action being clearly conveyed in many instances. Doctrinal passages have been handled with due reverence and care, and with no attempts to minimize the great Christological truths. Many renderings are impressively fresh. For the ordinary reader this is one of the finest of modern translations.

### Williams' Translation

The full title of this work is: The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People. It was produced by Charles B. Williams, professor of Greek in Union University of Jackson, Tenn., and published in 1927.

In describing the language employed, Williams states: "We have tried to use words, in phrases that are understandable by the farmer and the fisherman, by the carpenter and the cowboy, by the cobbler and the cab driver, the merchant and the miner, by the milkmaid and the house mistress, by the woodcutter and the trucker. If these can understand it, it is certain that the scholar, the teacher, the minister, the lawyer, the doctor, and all others can."

The translator has made a sincere attempt to convey the meaning of the Greek text faithfully. Results of latest research into the proper significance of certain words, cases, prepositions, and tenses are clearly evident.

The Bible student who is aware of the import of Greek tenses will be pleased to find such expressions as: "continues to live . . . practices sin" (1 John 3:6), for the present; "kept right on kissing" (Luke 7:44), for the imperfect; "stopped at once" (Luke 8:24), for the aorist; "already ripe for destruction" (Rom.



9:22), for the perfect; and "already forbidden in heaven" (Matt. 16:19), for the future passive participle.

As to doctrinal passages, there appears no undercutting of the great supernatural truths. For its practical use to the New Testament student, I consider this translation invaluable.

#### Verkuyl's Translation

The most recently produced private translation is that made in 1945 by Gerrit Verkuyl, New Testament Fellow of Princeton. The work is titled, Berkeley Version of the New Testament, with the additional phrase: "from the original Greek with brief footnotes."

Dr. Verkuyl has made use of the best Greek texts and most reliable ancient manuscripts. The language employed is a clear idiomatic English. Archaisms and obscurities of expression have been excluded.

Take a passage at random from John 14, and note the concise and suggestive idioms: "Peace I bequeath to you; My peace I give to you. I do not give you gifts such as the world gives. Do not allow your hearts to be unsettled or intimidated" (v. 27).

In comparing this with the Greek text we observe that Verkuyl has adhered reasonably well to the usual word order and sentence structure; that his language is dignified, yet clear and easily understandable; and that although he has not been slavishly literal in his translation, the sense of the text has been followed with a high degree of accuracy.

An interesting example of the use of the modern idiom is found in his treatment of Matthew 1: 18-21. In this account, which deals with the relationship between Mary and Joseph before the birth of Christ, Mary is represented as being "engaged" to Joseph, and Joseph represented as Mary's "fiance." The word "married" is not used to describe their relationship until verse 25: "He married Mary."

All of the standard versions, including the recently published Revised Standard Version, employ the words "husband" and "wife" in describing the premarital relationship. This is because the Greek words translated in this way were used in ancient times to describe both the premarital and marital relationships. The engagement

tie in those days was considered almost as binding as the marriage tie. To the ordinary reader the words "husband" and "wife" as applied to Joseph and Mary before actual marriage are confusing. The use of the strictly modern terms is therefore an improvement in translation.

Some improvement is registered in the treatment of tenses, cases, etc., although not to the same extent as in some of the other translations. No purely subjective opinions or liberal bias is evident in any of the doctrinal passages. We feel that the translator has done an honest and notable work in the production of this translation. Students of the New Testament will find it of real benefit and blessing.

#### Way's Translation

This work is placed last because it embraces only a part of the New Testament, also because it goes beyond the scope of being a pure translation. The Letters of St. Paul was published at London in 1901 by Arthur S. Way, an extensive translator of the Greek and Latin classics. The second edition, produced in 1904, was a revision of the first and included the letter to the Hebrews. The work is now in its seventh edition.

This translation is an extremely idiomatic, interpretive, and expanded rendering of the Greek text. The connection of thoughts, as Way conceived of them, the sequence of subjects, and the continuity of arguments are all incorporated. It comes close to being a paraphrase of the text, instead of just a translation.

For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:20, translated in the King James Version, "Quench not the Spirit," reads: "In your church gatherings do not repress manifestations of the Spirit's gifts." Philippians 3:3 is rendered: "Put no trust in a sign scored on the flesh."

Because of what the translator calls "lack of continuity of thought," many "links" are supplied in order to give the connections between thoughts. One of these is found in 1 Corinthians 9:1, which reads: "I have to meet two protests—(1) the protest of your intellect, which objects to curtailment of its 'rights'; (2), the protest of your appetite, which objects to curtailment of pleasures not sinful. My answer to the first is my own example. Am I not emancipated from the Mosaic Law?"

It can readily be seen that these so-called "links" can be helpful in giving the connection of ideas. They supply information not apparent in a casual reading of the text, and aid in understanding the trend of argument. The danger, of course, is that the reader take these interpolations as part of the inspired record.

In the translation of certain words there has been, in a number of cases, undue interpretation. For instance, Philippians 2:5 is made to read: "Let the same purpose inspire you as was in the Messiah Jesus." The word translated "correction" in 2 Timothy 3:16 (K.J.) becomes "for restoration of the lapsed."

Some passages read like a running commentary on the text, as Romans 3:25: "The essence of this atonement consisted in the shedding of His blood: the channel whereby we profit by it is faith in Him."

One cannot, however, overlook the many excellent idioms. "Helm straight my course" in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 very fittingly conveys the force of the Greek term, as also, "balancing the account with me" in Philippians 4:15, and "masquerade as an angel of light" in 2 Corinthians 11:14.

The first part of Hebrews 1:3 is beautifully rendered: "He is to God as the rays are which reveal to us all we know of the sun"; also Philippians 2:6: "He did not selfishly cling to His prerogative of equality with God." These are what we call expanded translations, but they more fully carry the true meaning of the original idioms.

There appears to be in this translation a greater attempt at literary elegance than in the others—elegance rather than simplicity. Because of this, some passages are somewhat complex and difficult to understand. Some also are weighed down with excessive expansion and interpretation.

Way's work provides interesting and instructive New Testament reading, but the reader must be constantly aware of the translator's method in dealing with the original.

We do not advise any student of the New Testament to limit himself to any one translation, regardless of its excellent qualities. Use a standard version as the main text and the others as aids to clarity of understanding and variety of expression.

Modern translations can be used in private and family reading

to good advantage. To many young people and new Christians unfamiliar with the archaic style of the King James Version, modern translations will be of decided value. Then, of course, every minister should have several at his disposal as an aid to his Bible study and preparation of sermons.

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH

BY A. McDONALD REDWOOD

The next part of the evidence for the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is—

(3) *The Testimony of the New Testament*: We may divide the subject into (a) the testimony of Christ; (b) the testimony of the other writers.

(a) Note first that the Septuagint Version of the O.T. (dating 250–150 B.C.) was in use amongst the learned Rabbis in the time of Christ, and both He and they, also all the writers of the N.T. (specially the apostle Paul), reveal complete familiarity with it. It was not, therefore, an unknown book to those whose business it was to read it in public in the Synagogues on the Sabbath Day.

On many occasions Christ Himself in his addresses referred to the Pentateuch, though not under that name but merely as “Moses”. “Offer the gift that Moses commanded” (Matt. 8:4; cf. Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14 with *Leviticus* 14:4, 10). “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts. . .” (Matt. 19:8; Mark 10:5 Cf. *Deuteronomy* 24:1). “For Moses said. . .” (Mark 7:10. Cf. *Exodus* 20:12; 21:17). In Mark 12:26 Christ refers to “*the book of Moses*” (with which cf. Luke 20:37) in quoting from *Exodus* 3:6.

Then again, He recognises the clear distinction between the three divisions of the O.T. as the Jews classified the books in that day, and when referring to these divisions the first five books He always designated simply as “Moses”. Turn to these references, viz., Luke 16:29, 31; 24:27, where “Moses” is distinct from