

In the 2010-2013 Triennium, the Faith, Worship, and Ministry Committee undertook a study of a the new translation of the Bible published as the *Common English Bible*, which they then commended for use in personal devotion and study. During the course of this work, it became apparent that it is not well known that there is a list of Bible versions which are *authorized for use in public worship in the Anglican Church of Canada*. The English translations so authorized are:

New Revised Standard Version
Revised English Bible
King James (Authorized Version) 1611
Revised Standard Version 1952 (and its revision as Common Bible)
New American Bible 1970
Today's English Version (Good News) 1976
New International Version 1978
New Jerusalem 1985

The most used French translation of the Bible is the Traduction oecuménique de la bible, or TOB. The recent translation of the Bible into Inuktitut is cause for celebration across the whole church. Many other language translations are in use across the country.

The following article is a reflection on the Bible as a 'translation' book, with particular attention to the English translations that have been authorized for use for public worship in the Anglican Church of Canada, and is offered for reflection. Please send any comments to the Director of Faith, Worship, and Ministry at fwm@national.anglican.ca,

The Bible as a 'Translation' Book

By Dr. Walter Deller, October 2013

Christianity has always been a “translation” faith. Even in the earliest Church, both Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus, when they read the Scriptures, that is, the books of the Hebrew Bible / Tanakh / First or Old Testament, likely read in at least Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic and Syriac. Most of the earliest Christian writing was in Greek, which was a common language across much of the Roman Empire. The Gospels themselves likely translated words originally spoken by Jesus in Aramaic into Greek. There were also versions of the Hebrew Scriptures in Latin, as well as diverse versions in Greek beyond the widely acknowledged older Greek version known as the *Septuagint* (LXX). There was sufficient divergence among versions that Origen of Alexandria, the greatest biblical scholar of Christian antiquity, created a word by word version, the *Hexapla*, that drew together four widely used Greek versions in columns alongside the Hebrew text and a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew letters.

Part of the history of Christianity's spread has been a narrative of the two-way encounter of cultures, languages and literatures in which the influence of those cultures on the good news of Jesus Christ and the “wonderful works of God” is as significant as the impact of Christians on the values and shape of the cultures they encounter. How and why particular translations or

versions come to dominate parts of the Church often have as much to do with political, social, and cultural forces as with doctrinal questions or matters of scholarly 'accuracy'. Thus for a range of such reasons the Greek version known as the *Septuagint* came to be the central 'authorized' version of the Hebrew Scriptures for the Eastern Church. By the early middle ages, Jerome's late fourth and early fifth century CE translation of the Old Testament into Latin, known as the *Vulgate*, had come to be the dominant 'authorized' version in the churches of Western Europe. Like Origen's scholarly work, Jerome's had been an attempt to create a consistent text that rendered as accurately as possible into Latin what he termed the "Hebrew truth".

This points to two significant but not unrelated functions within the life of the Christian community. On the one hand there is the evolution of a shared, technical, scholarly basis for discussing the meaning of faith and doctrine with others inside and outside the Church, and across linguistic and philosophical cultures. On the other hand there is the process by which the Church in its liturgy and public teaching shapes and forms communities of lively, faithful, and hopeful followers of Jesus. It is easy to forget that in times and places where fewer Christians were 'reading-literate', listening and seeing formed significant avenues by which most people took aboard the narrative of salvation. From a purely functional point of view it is not helpful to have different congregations hearing different versions of basic Christian texts.

The earliest "Englishing" of the biblical text began with the preaching of Augustine's mission to the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century, and as Christianity spread the vibrant Anglo-Saxon oral poetic genius absorbed and adapted large parts of the scriptures. Much of this may have disappeared in the Viking destruction of the great monastic libraries but it was substantive enough that the biblical translations in prose and poetic forms continued in popular use a century or more after the Norman conquest and the imposition of French as the language of court and high culture.

Over time, two forces impinged on the translation of the scriptures. One was a shift on the part of a larger and larger institutional church to focus on issues of control. The Bible has always been one of the sources of Christian imagination and of recurrent impulses to radical forms of spiritual and practical action. The other was the increasing breakdown of Latin as the dominant common language of western Europe and the emergence of modern European languages. So by the fourteenth and fifteenth century these forces combined with the political shifts taking place in Europe and movements for religious reform creating a demand for the translation of the scriptures into the vernacular (e.g. John Wycliffe et al. 1380-1400 app.). The rise of the new technology of printing in the fifteen and early sixteenth century contributed directly to the major explosion of translation in the period the reformation. Before 1500 there were printed Bibles in German, Italian, French, Dutch and Czech, but the English were considerably behindhand in this process. With the onset of the reformation, and King Henry VIII's distaste for heresy as well as his desire to stabilize England after a century of dynastic struggle, there was no rush to create and print an English Bible.

A third force in this period was the rediscovery of classical learning and textual study and the arrival of Greek scholars and texts in Europe after the fall of Constantinople. The work of de Valla and Erasmus made clear that there were complex textual issues in relation to the received

text of the Greek New Testament. Equally, the experience of translating was opening up the linguistic complexity of the process, especially the dilemma of carrying over accuracy with regard to the actual words of the source text, and to “meaning” as received and conveyed through tradition and teaching. Moreover in a politically fraught time, the impact even slight changes in renderings could have doctrinally, affected the willingness of authorities to permit a text's appearance and also the reception of the text by people accustomed to particular familiar forms and language.

So in the 1520-30's we find translations made by Tyndale into English with controversial annotations, by Luther into German, and by Olivétan into French. The first 'authorized' English Bible was a project of the Henry VIII's government, and this *Great Bible* of 1538 was prepared under the direction of Miles Coverdale, so that it could be placed in every church for public reading at worship and so that people would have common access to a Bible to consult. Early in the English reform the tension between the divisive impact of religious disputation on common and communal life, and the desire for renewed and lively faith among the people at large in a cohesive Christian state, find a balance in this notion of 'authorized' texts for public reading. The *Great Bible* had been translated from the Latin Vulgate. Over the next seventy years other key translations emerged, such as: the Protestant *Geneva Bible* (late 1550s and still popular into the mid-seventeenth century); the second authorized English Bible, the *Bishops' Bible*; and the *Rheims Bible*, a very latinate rendering created by continuing English Roman Catholics. All drew on the expanding Hebrew and Greek textual scholarship of the period. The *King James' Bible*, or *Authorized Version* of 1611, had the *Bishops' Bible* as its base. On the king's direction, the translation teams explicitly set out to create a version that would reflect his desired 'consensus' about church governance and other disputed issues. But the translators also drew on all the earlier English versions in completing their work.

The focus of Bible translation shifted over the next two or three centuries. The encounter with the peoples of the African, Asian, North American, South American and South Asian continents and regions generated Bibles in hundreds of languages, not least in Canada, where the processes of translating into some First Nations languages still continues. Lammin Sanneh, in *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (2008), argues, however, that at least in the case of Africa Christian missions with their focus on translating the Bible preserved languages that would otherwise have disappeared in the more general colonial onslaught and obliteration of other cultures.

The *Authorized Version* remained the norm in much of the English-speaking world, with periodic correction, and a slight updating in the 1870s. In 1901 the *American Standard Version* was published, reappearing again in 1952 as the *Revised Standard Version*, and later in the 1970s as the *Common Bible*. What the success of *RSV* heralded was another explosion of Bible translation in the English world. Having named that the *Authorized Version* no longer met the needs of the late twentieth century, a flood of private and committee translations began in the 1960s and 70s, all of which sought to render the biblical texts into more contemporary language, and the incorporate the linguistic discoveries of modern scholarship, particularly in Near-Eastern languages and Hebrew. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s the Bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada began to be approached formally for permission to use various of the new versions in

public worship. So by the early 1980s, the Bishops had added to the *Authorized Version (King James 1611)*: the *Revised Standard Version (1952)*, its later revision as the *Common Bible (1973)*, the *New American Bible (1970)*, *Today's English Version: Good News Bible (1976)*, and the *New International Version (1978)*.

Authorizing Texts in the Anglican Church of Canada

The growing numbers of new translations, versions of older translations, paraphrases, and styles of translation by the mid-1980s resulted in the Canadian House of Bishops setting out a list of criteria. In the norms that have evolved over the past twenty-five years, the process begins with a request to General Synod's Faith Worship and Ministry regarding the possibility of using a new translation in public worship. The Committee asks a range of scholars and other knowledgeable individuals within the Canadian church to comment on the new versions or translations suggested for approval. After receiving a reasonable quantity of comment, the Committee reviews the material, sometimes tries out passages from the version in its own worship, and makes a recommendation to the House of Bishops. After consideration of any issues raised, the House of Bishops then approves or does not approve the particular version in question.

Approval refers only to use for reading the public worship of the church. In personal and group Bible study, in preaching, teaching, work with children etc, many versions, translations, paraphrases, and annotated version are in use. In Canada these include translations of some or all of the Scriptures into various First Nations languages including Mohawk, several forms of Eastern, Western and Northern Cree, Inuktituk, Oji-Cree, Dogrib, Naskapi, and Northern Sauteaux. John's Gospel was translated into Mohawk by 1804, and the earliest Cree translations were made in the 1830s and 1840s with much of the work done by Henry Budd and other native translators. By the late 1850s John Hordern had translated and was locally printing the Gospels and other parts of the Bible in Moosonee.

All the versions approved for public reading in the Anglican Church of Canada are “committee” translations, that is, translations made under the oversight of a group of scholars and experts, often drawn from several denominations. Normally in the foundational work is undertaken by individual scholars, then reviewed, critiqued and debated by the larger committee to reach a consensus. Most such translations seek some overall consistency in style, and the handling of particular textual matters across biblical books. For this reason, translations which are translations of other translations are normally not approved (e.g. The original *Jerusalem Bible* of the mid-1960s, which, though a committee translation, was first translated into French, and secondarily into English.)

All Bible translators across history have laboured to be faithful to what they believed to be the eternal import and saving witness of the texts before them. This results in tensions, even for committees, between seeking to reflect with the most current scholarly accuracy the words of the original Hebrew or Greek, and seeking to reflect the dynamism and power of what the words communicated to their original hearers. All new Bible translations are also influenced by long histories of previous translations and ways the texts have been received and used by the Church in doctrinal and other matters. For this reasons the House of Bishops does not approve

paraphrases for public reading; in general they move too far in the direction of dynamic equivalence and often come from particular doctrinal biases or preoccupations. Abridgements such as the Reader's Digest version are also not approved. The move to dynamic equivalence often results in more colloquial language, and a narrower vocabulary range, so, the *Good News Bible*, despite verging on paraphrase, was approved in the 1970s by the House of Bishops because it was at that time the most accessible in terms of language use to the widest range of Canadian Anglicans. In the past forty years another issue has been how gender-inclusive language referring to men and women is being used, and in some cases attempts to reduce the explicitly male language for God. It is likely that the *New Jerusalem Bible* published in 1985 was approved in part for this reason as the first committee version available that had sought to use inclusive terms for people.

In choosing versions for reading in a liturgical context there may be legitimate tensions between the formative function of the familiar, where we hear and recognize linguistically the language of received faith, and the disruptive function of the unexpected language or linguistic forms that "make the Bible strange" and cause us to hear it as if it were the first time, and we had to struggle to comprehend. Likewise, particular occasions may call for a translation with a more elevated or sombre style. Whatever the translation, the quality of the actual reading in public and in the liturgy will still have a huge impact on how hearers apprehend and receive the text. For this reason careful and attentive preparation of competent readers is an essential element of liturgical preparation.

The 1986 Task Force appointed by the House of Bishops laid out a series of criteria for the exclusion of particular translations based on previous practice and the emerging issues with the growing number of versions and translations available:

- i. Paraphrases, e.g. The Living Bible, J.B. Phillips, Barclay, Cotton Patch.
- ii. Translations made for particular doctrinal purposes rather than rendering the original text, e.g. The Living Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses.
- iii. Translations which are translations of translations, e.g. The Living Bible, Jerusalem Bible (1966)
- iv. Translations which replace words through "computer search" rather than by examination of each text, e.g. NCC Inclusive translation.
- v. Translations from another culture, e.g. New English Bible, Cotton Patch.
- vi. Abridgements/harmonies, e.g. Reader's Digest.
- vii. Translations in colloquial rather than contemporary English, e.g. New English Bible

This was a period when many congregations were buying Bibles to place in their pews, and the Bishops suggested that local communities consider the following criteria when choosing a translation suitable for their needs and purposes:

- The nature of the local community, its cultural profile, education levels, etc.;
- The fidelity of the translations to the original text;
- No gratuitous use of exclusive language;
- Intelligible in terms of contemporary English use;
- Natural use of language;

- Coherence with the language of the liturgy itself;
- The help provided by the translation with the pronunciation of proper nouns.

The Bishops noted that *no one criterion is a sufficient basis for a community's choice.*

•List of Bible Versions Approved by the House of Bishops for use in Public Worship in the Anglican Church of Canada, on Recommendation from the Doctrine and Worship Committee

King James (Authorized Version) 1611

Its great strength is that it is the one translation made intentionally for public reading in a period when much of English culture was a spoken and public reading culture. Its great shortcoming is that since the late nineteenth century people for large numbers of people the English is obscure. Because it still has aural resonances in shared memory it is sometimes called upon for occasions such as funerals, and significant public events. Those who use the Canadian BCP should note that the Psalter of the BCP is Coverdale's translation revised by a group of Canadian scholars in the mid-1950s, not the King James version of the Psalter.

Revised Standard Version 1952 (and its revision as Common Bible in the 1970s)

This version sought to update earlier work in the *American Standard Version* as well as retain the character of the *King James (Authorized)* version. It is a committee translation that drew on the most recent scholarship (textual, archaeological etc) up to the late 1940s, so from that perspective, its revisions as the *Common Bible* and the *New Revised Standard Version* are more up-to-date. It was controversial at the time of its publication, though in the perspective of the flood of versions and paraphrases over the next three decades, it now seems quite traditional. The *RSV* retained the older forms 'Thee' and 'Thou'.

New Revised Standard Version 1989 (added 1991)

This is likely now the most used translation in Canadian Anglican churches, if only because it is the version chosen for the published lectionary books and inserts. Along with its precursor, the *Revised Standard Version* (1952), follows in the family descended from revisions of the *King James (Authorized)* version. It is an academically strong committee translation which sought to draw on the best textual scholarship. The committee included a wide range of mainline Protestant, as well as Eastern Orthodox and Jewish scholars. It sought to be as inclusive as possible for language relating to humans, while retaining the masculine pronouns of the ancient texts for God and Christ. It includes marginal notes identifying major textual variants. This results in awkwardness in some places. Another major shift, pretty much universal by the late 1980s was to drop the older forms of personal address and to use the contemporary universal 'You'.

Today's English Version (Good News Bible) 1976

The main strength of this version is its intentional work to make the language accessible to any individual capable of reading a daily paper, and this is one of its great strengths for use in public reading, especially where people are not accustomed to older forms of literary English. Because

in many cases it chooses dynamic equivalence in expressing meaning over word for word accuracy, some view it as approaching paraphrase. Others have noted a preference for gender hierarchy, and others that it replaces the realities of ancient Israelite social understandings (e.g. of relationships) with something more akin to North American middle class nuclear family understandings of emotions etc.. The attempt to use the most basic language has flattened the rhetorical impact of much of the poetry., and some of the vividness of biblical imagery.

New International Version 1978

This translation is the result of a large project begun in the 1960s as a result of widespread unhappiness among evangelicals with translations such as the *Revised Standard Version*. Prepared by a committee of international scholars, it sought to create a fresh translation that would be suitable for a range of ages, incorporate the best contemporary textual and historical scholarship, while at the same time maintaining aspects supporting traditional Christian interpretation such as a messianic reading of much Old Testament prophecy. It sought to format the text in ways consistent with contemporary printed materials (e.g the setting out of conversations and lists). In general it holds to the Masoretic Hebrew text for the Old Testament, and to the best assessments of the 1960s and 1970s regarding the most reliable Greek texts for the New Testament. It provides an extensive apparatus of footnotes. Those who use it report appreciating its strong and dynamic use of language, and suggest it is one of the best contemporary texts for the purpose of memorization. It is likely the most generally popular modern translation among evangelicals, though non-evangelicals have found it uncomfortably preoccupied with sustaining particular doctrinal preoccupations. The **New International Version in an inclusive language revision** was published in 1996, but online sources indicate that it was withdrawn soon thereafter and never released in North America. An updated revision of the *NIV* appeared in 2011 that incorporated some of the gender related revisions of the 1990s as well as other revisions. This revision too has been rejected in some evangelical circles.

New Jerusalem Bible 1985

The original *Jerusalem Bible* (1966) in English was the translation from French of a scholarly translation made by the Dominicans of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, This and its revisions are authorized for public reading in Roman Catholic churches which might be noted for ecumenical worship contexts. Because it was a translation of a translation, the original *JB* was not approved for public reading and the Anglican Church of Canada. Its 1985 revision based on the updated 1973 *JB*, known as the **New Jerusalem Bible** (1985) was approved for public use by the House of Bishops when it appeared, likely because it was the first major complete Bible to introduce some use of gender-neutral and inclusive language. It is based on more eclectic and reconstructed Hebrew and Greek texts than many other contemporary translations, typical of the scholarly approaches of its period. Its greatest eccentricity was the choice to use 'Yahweh' for the Hebrew Divine name, rather than using 'The Lord' so as to follow the longstanding convention for public reading in both Jewish and Christian traditions. Thus for interfaith gatherings much of the Hebrew Bible would be inappropriately offensive. As a version it sought to balance between literal accuracy and dynamic equivalence. The various versions of the *JB* included extensive introductions to the biblical books and considerable annotation, which has always made it valuable for study purposes.

Revised English Bible 1989 (added 1991)

The complete *New English Bible* appeared in 1970, the result of an extensive committee based translation project sponsored by most of the major Protestant churches of Great Britain. It was the culmination of nearly a quarter century of labour by leading scholars, and sought to work from the best textual and linguistic knowledge available to create an entirely new translation that reflected contemporary British English. They sought to render 'meaning for meaning' rather than a strict literal word for word rendering, and from the beginning one of the criticisms of the *NEB* was that it was overly colloquial. This first version of the *NEB* was not approved for public reading in the Anglican Church of Canada, but the later **Revised English Bible 1989** was approved for public use by the House of Bishops in 1991. This 1989 revision was the result of a fifteen year process through the 1970s and 1980s by a large group that now included representatives of the Salvation Army, the Moravian Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. The revision abandoned the use of 'Thee' and 'Thou' forms, and while still using masculine forms to refer to God, sought to offer gender-neutral terms where formerly 'man' had been used. The revision also abandoned some of the more eccentric renderings of Hebrew terms in the light of scholarly reconsideration over the previous thirty years. Some find the vocabulary too British in places, and because of the search for dynamic equivalence some still find it too colloquial.

New American Bible 1970

This Roman Catholic translation came about in part as a result of the papal encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 1943 which called for the use of the original texts (rather than the Vulgate) in the study and explanation of the Scriptures. The twenty-five year project which drew on the expertise of members of the Catholic Biblical Association, and in its later stages drew on the services of some non-Catholic scholars in a desire to work toward greater ecumenism. The *NAB* was the first complete Roman Catholic modern translation into English from the original Greek and Hebrew. In keeping with scholarship of the period it drew heavily on other sources than the Masoretic to reconstruct what seemed to be the most accurate original form of the Old Testament text. This has led to the reorganization of passages in some places based on manuscript divergences. It includes annotation and introductions to the various books. It sought to use forms of names more consistent with the Protestant renderings as opposed to those based on the Latin forms of the Vulgate. The translation aimed at accuracy rather than dynamic equivalence, and its vocabulary and style were judged at the time of its appearance to fall somewhere between that of the *Good News Bible* and the *New English Bible*.

A Few Useful Resources

Jack P. Lewis. *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation. Second edition with new chapters on the NKJV, REB, and NRSV.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. [Provides a detailed evaluation of thirteen major versions and widely used paraphrases beginning with the King James version. Each evaluation includes a history of the version, its makers and goals, and the source texts on which it is based. Lewis examines the way the translation draws on archaeology and contemporary linguistic studies, its style and quality of English usage, annotations, and how it handles elements like personal names, the Divine name, cultic and sexual terms, theological stance, and the relationship between literal rendering and dynamic equivalence.]

Lynne Long, *Translating the Bible: From the 7th to the 17th Century*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited. 2001. [A useful historical survey of the historical process by which the Bible was “Englished”. The focus on the broader social and literary context rather than standard post-reformation accounts is helpful.]

Adam Nicolson. *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*. New York: HarperCollins. 2003. [An informative and often entertaining account of the people and process that led to the 1611 King James Bible.]

Many major Bible versions have their own site on the web, each providing some history of the aims and goals underlying its preparation and publication. There are a variety of other web sources that provide evaluations of various Bible translations, though some assess from strong doctrinal or theological preferences. In general the Wikipedia web entries about various translations provide useful basic factual information, though they shy away from evaluative comment other than occasional quotes of early reviews.

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