

THE NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, IS THIS THE ANSWER?

by Armin J. Panning

In our day and age it is hardly headline news anymore when yet another translation of the Bible is released. We have almost come to expect that at regular intervals there will appear revisions of older versions and fresh, new translations, each claiming to be based on the latest in scholarship and vying with one another in an attempt to express the results of this scholarship in crisp, contemporary English. Instead of abating, the trend seems rather to be growing, but lest we think that Bible translation is only a current fad, it might be well to remind ourselves that our beloved King James Version was in itself a revision. Its immediate predecessor was the Bishops Bible of 1568, which was already the seventh complete Bible translation (or rather revision) since Wycliffe first put the entire Bible into the English language in the 1380s.

Though for over three and a half centuries the KJV has remained for most English-speaking peoples the “authorized version,” yet it has not gone unchallenged. It has been estimated that since the appearance of the KJV in 1611, there have been published in the English language no less than 30 versions of the entire Bible, 75-80 New Testaments, and upwards of 150 parts of Scripture, and that estimate does not take into account the numerous translations included in the growing list of commentaries that exist. We may well be inclined to ask, Why are there so many translations? Why can't we just pick one and stick with that? Let us look briefly at the:

Factors that Promote the Constant Succession of English Translations

1. Advance in text study

There is first of all the factor that the text of the Scriptures has been the subject of intensive study. Actually, that study goes back to the days of the early Church Fathers, but for purposes of answering our question as to why there is a constant stream of new translations, we may restrict ourselves to the advance in text study made since the rediscovery of the Biblical languages in the Renaissance and their use in the Reformation. Before the days of printing, all copies of Scripture had to be made by hand. As we well know, there will always be some inaccuracies that creep into hand-copies manuscripts.

After Gutenberg's invention of moveable type, printing made it possible to produce any number of copies, all of them exactly the same. The problem that Erasmus faced, however, when he was asked to prepare copy for a printed Greek New Testament was: Which of the hand-copied manuscripts, not one of which is exactly like any other, has the proper reading? He set about his work in the logical way of collecting as many manuscripts as he could and taking the majority reading. Thus in 1517 he produced the first printed Greek New Testament on the basis of 6 manuscripts, none of which were very ancient. The text of Erasmus, subsequently known as the *Textus Receptus*, was the text that Luther used, and it served also as the basis for the KJV. It is difficult to determine exactly what text the translators of the KJV used, but reportedly it was based on some 24 manuscripts.

Whatever the number was in 1611, since then there have been collected an immense number of additional manuscripts, many of them extremely old, thus closer to the originals, and theoretically at least, freer of copyists' inaccuracies. The *Journal of Biblical Literature* reported that as of the year 1967 there were catalogued 81 papyrus manuscripts, 267 uncial (or capital letter) manuscripts, and 2,764 minuscule (small letter) manuscripts containing all or parts of the New Testament. In addition there were 2,143 lectionaries or manuscripts containing pericope selections of the New Testament.¹

This same *Journal* in its June '72 issue carried the report of Gerhard Krodel, who in 1969-70 investigated various libraries of the world and microfilmed an additional 47 manuscripts that had not previously

¹ *Journal of Biblical Literature*, June 1968, p. 184

been catalogued. The highest number assigned to his minuscule entries was 2,792, while the highest number assigned to the new lectionaries was 2,192. We may conclude therefore that the number of witnesses to the New Testament text is in excess of 5,000.

If in 1611 they had about 25 manuscripts, does that mean that our text now is 200 times better than that of the KJV? By no means: That would be a totally unwarranted assumption. The fact is that the growing number of manuscripts tends to support one or the other of a relatively small number of variant readings. You simply get more witnesses for or against a previously-known reading. Admittedly the balance of evidence will shift on occasion and a new reading will seem to have the edge. This in turn should then be reflected in a slightly changed translation, but in no case will the resultant translation overturn an established doctrine nor will it bring in a new one.

Perhaps it might seem that we have too much to gain or lose to be objective in deciding this matter of doctrine. Hence it may be reassuring to hear the same evaluation from others, preferably those who would seem to be unbiased. In the translation it has itself produced and in the translations of others that it has advocated, it could fairly be said that the American Bible Society of late has not shown itself to be overly meticulous about points of doctrine. Yet in its publication, *Why So Many Bibles*, the Society states that variant readings comprise only about 1% of the original text. In speaking of this 1% it says: “There are differences of opinion concerning the remainder, but *no important matter of fact and no doctrines are affected by the results of text study of the New Testament.*” (Italics theirs)²

The same might be said of Old Testament text studies. The Dead Sea scrolls, e.g., have substantiated rather than changed the Old Testament text.

Advances in text study are a legitimate reason to re-evaluate and at times revise our translations, but we need not expect or fear that text changes will force radical translation changes upon us. The textual evidence simply doesn’t support that.

2. Advance in knowledge of the original languages

Another reason for re-examining our translations from time to time is the advance that is being made in the area of getting to know the Biblical languages better. As one studies history, he cannot help but marvel at God’s providence in preserving His Word against all vicissitudes. Not the least in a long line of preserving acts of God is His letting the Renaissance with its interest in languages sweep over Europe precisely when it did. It is difficult to imagine Luther discovering the Scriptural truth of salvation by grace through faith without the benefit of the original languages.

But skill in languages did not come overnight. It took work and time. To be sure, Greek studies received a tremendous boost when Greek-speaking peoples fled to Europe at the fall of Constantinople (1453), but for some time Hebrew studies lagged. One can readily understand Luther’s complaint about the difficulty of translating the Old Testament when Hebrew grammars and lexicons were virtually nonexistent. Throughout his life, Luther never ceased revising and reworking his translations, both Old Testament and New, as knowledge of the languages advanced.

Unquestionably the greatest advance in the study of Biblical language in recent times was the “discovery,” (if one may call it that) of koine Greek. Previously New Testament Greek had always been assumed to be the Greek of the classics. It remained for Adolf Deissmann (1866-1937) to discover that the language of the New Testament was not that of the classics, but rather the spoken language of the people who lived in the non-Greek lands conquered by Alexander. Deissmann found this “Greek-like” or Hellenistic language preserved in quantity in the papyrus scraps buried under the sands of Egypt.

Most of these papyrus scraps contain information about common, everyday things. They are letters, bills and receipts, legal papers, etc. In speaking of these ordinary subjects they often use words that occur also in New Testament vocabulary. The chance to see New Testament terms used in additional contexts added

² *Why So Many Bibles* (The Evangelical Foundation, Inc., 1968), p. 15

immeasurably to scholars' understanding of those terms. Words and expressions of Scripture that before had been dark and difficult could now often be translated with new insight.

Perhaps one example from the area of business life will suffice.

Three times St. Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit being given to the believers as an ἀῤῥαβῶν, translated in the KJV with the noun, "an earnest." A study of the term ἀῤῥαβῶν as it occurs in the papyri of the first century reveals that it is a commercial technical term meaning "first installment, deposit, or down payment, a pledge" that pays a part of the purchase price in advance and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid.³ When we have that concept for ἀῤῥαβῶν, then we know what St. Paul is speaking of when he tells us that already in this life God gives us His Spirit as an ἀῤῥαβῶν, a down payment, a pledge of even greater things to come. (2 Cor. 1:22)

Not only in the meaning of individual words, but also in grammar and syntax there has been considerable advance since the "discovery" of the koine. When the language of the N.T. was assumed to be the same as classical Greek, it was a logical assumption that the grammar and syntax of classical Greek should be applicable. But the realization that the New Testament language was Hellenistic rather than classical made grammarians rethink their position. E.g., whereas in classical Greek the conjunction ἵνα regularly introduces purpose clauses, it was soon discovered that in Hellenistic Greek it was much more fluid, frequently introducing what the context showed to be a result clause, or a causal clause, or even a substitute for an infinitive or an imperative.

Obviously such changes in grammar and syntax will have their effect on translation.. When, by testing it in a sufficient number of contexts and situations, a new rule of grammar or syntax has been established, then we too will want to take it into account when we evaluate older translations. It may well be that some changes will be in order.

3. Advances in the knowledge of Biblical times

No translator can ever know too much about the people whose language he is attempting to translate. Ideally, he should know their history, their religion, their culture and art, and a host of other things. As history fills out the annals of the people of whom the Scriptures speak, and as archeology restores for us some of the tangible things they have left behind, these too become legitimate checks on translation. In a wonderful way history and archeology have clarified many points of Scripture that previously had proved difficult to translate. The translator need not fear the disciplines of history and archeology. Rather, he does well to take these into account also as he does his work, whether that be producing a new translation or evaluating an older one.

4. Changes in the English language

We come now to a fourth factor that promotes the flow of new translations, and that is the changes that a language is constantly undergoing. No living language is static. It constantly acquires new expressions and discards old ones. The English language is no exception. Hence it will not surprise us that our "Authorized Version," made over 350 years ago, contains some words and expressions that we no longer use. The marvel is not that it has some obsolete expressions. The marvel is rather that we can understand it as well as we do after that length of time. Surely that speaks well of the work done by the translators of 1611 and it is eloquent testimony to the tremendous force the KJV has been in influencing and controlling the English language over the course of years.

But one must confess that there are some words and expressions that even the KJV has not been able to retain in our vocabulary. "Prevent" no longer means "get ahead of"; "conversation" to us does not mean "conduct, or way of life," but rather "talk." If we had some spoiled figs in a basket, we would hardly speak of

³ Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) , p. 109 sub ἀῤῥαβῶν

them as “naughty figs,” as the translators of the KJV have Jeremiah say (Jer. 24:2). There is likewise some doubt whether we would be ministering to the right people if we followed Paul’s injunction to the Thessalonians, “Comfort the feeble-minded.” “Encourage the faint-hearted” would be more in keeping with contemporary English.

So there are expressions that must be up-dated as the language changes. I would venture to guess that if you went to the average person interested in Bible translations and asked his reason for thinking that there should be a new translation, his first reason would be: difficulty in reading the “authorized version.” And there is a measure of truth in his observation, but I think it is fair to say that out-moded words and expressions are not the only thing that causes difficulty in reading the “authorized version.” There are other factors that contribute to the difficulty, not the least of which is a general lack of practice and diligence in reading the Scriptures. But the basic point still stands. There *are* obsolete words in the KJV. As the English language changes, the translation of the original Greek and Hebrew must conform to the English that the reader knows. Else the sacred message will be lost to him.

It might be noted in passing, however, that up-dating the obsolete words and out-moded expressions in a translation is one of the easier weaknesses to correct. Almost every contemporary English translation does a good job of removing those. It is in other areas that they in turn show weaknesses.

We have determined that there are legitimate reasons for bringing out new translations. We are also aware that there are any number of new translations available. The problem is not finding a new translation. The problem is finding a *good* one. What standard are we to use then in selecting a good translation?

Factors that Determine Whether a Translation is Acceptable

The “weasel word” in that question is the term “acceptable.” You could reasonably ask: Acceptable for what? There is a wide variety of uses to which a Scripture translation may properly be put. It will have to serve for public reading in the church service. But hopefully it will not be used just on Sunday. It should also serve for family devotion and private study. Then too it must serve in theological discussion and debate, as well as in the classroom where grade school children will be asked to memorize a considerable portion of it. Ideally a translation should be acceptable for all of those uses. Admittedly that is a large order and one that not many translations will be able to fill. One would have to agree that over the years the KJV has served admirably, and if indeed it has at last outlived its usefulness, we will have to look carefully to find a worthy successor.

There would seem to be a number of questions that we should ask ourselves in evaluating any new translation. Realizing that it is the original Hebrew and Greek that are inspired, and not the English translation, our first question might well be:

1. Is the translation based on an appropriate original text?

We have already spoken of the large number of manuscripts that attest to the Scriptures. The Bible is better-attested than any piece of literature that has come to us from ancient times. By comparison, the Greek and Latin classics have only the paltriest of manuscript support. But the sheer number of witnesses to the Scriptures sometimes becomes “an embarrassment of riches.” All the evidence must be weighed and evaluated. That is the work of the textual critic. It has aptly been said that his work is both a science and an art. In that 1% we previously spoke of where the evidence for and against a variant reading is fairly evenly divided, there an element of judgment is involved. The textual critic’s personal convictions, i.e., his faith or lack of it, will have a decided effect on the way in which he evaluates the textual evidence. Also here Christ’s observation applies. Whoever isn’t *with* Christ is *against* Him. One either gathers, or he scatters. There is no neutral ground. So then, the original text on which the translator bases his work is an important consideration in evaluating his translation.

2. Does the translation render the original text faithfully?

Assuming that the translator has an appropriate original text before him, our next question will be: What does he do with it? Does he render this original text faithfully?

If it can be said that textual criticism is, in a sense, an art, then the same may fairly be said of translating. It's not just a matter of taking all the words of one language and setting them over into the same words of the other language. That will often yield a totally wrong concept. The viewpoint of the speaker must be kept in mind. For example, if I want to tell you that to give my dog some exercise I occasionally let him run on the clothesline, I would say that I clip his leash *to* the clothesline. The Greek, in turn, says that he attaches the leash *from* the clothesline. He has a different viewpoint. To translate his expression properly I must take, not the bare word, but his *thought* and put that into the equivalent English.

Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this principle using Biblical material is to remind ourselves of the different point of view that existed among the ancients regarding the function of the various parts of the body. We think of the heart as being the seat of emotion. They thought of emotions as situated in the lower vital organs. Hence it is a perfectly literal translation, and fully in agreement with the original Greek word, when the KJV translates Paul's plea to Philemon: "Refresh my *bowels* in the Lord." One is hesitant to speculate what visions that translation may on occasion have conjured up for the casual reader. Paul is really saying: "Refresh my *heart*."

A somewhat parallel situation is the cryptic remark of the Psalmist (16:7): "My reins also instruct me in the night seasons." Assuming the reader knows that reins is an obsolete word meaning kidneys, yet even that does not remedy the situation. What is that to mean: "My kidneys instruct me at night"? Again the answer lies in understanding the speaker's psychology of the human body. David viewed the kidneys as the source of the will and the mind. "My mind instructs me in the night" makes good sense and is the proper translation. But the word *mind* is not in the original. It appears in the English because the translator has caught the thought of the speaker and interpreted properly.

But just there lies the translator's pitfall. If he does not catch the speaker's thought properly, he may interpret *incorrectly*. Hence, even if he has the appropriate original text before him and seeks to render that faithfully, there is the possibility of *misinterpreting*. In the translation of Scripture that is a serious matter, because that opens the possibility for the intrusion of false doctrine.

3. Is the translation doctrinally sound?

Because of the possibility of misinterpretation by the translator, we will want to check every translation of Scripture with extreme care in respect to its doctrine. We will ask ourselves: Does the translation of this passage agree with what God says about the subject in other passages? For us purity of doctrine must ever remain *the* essential test of a translation. To endorse a translation that features crisp, contemporary English and that "reads like a novel" but subtly blends in error or undercuts the reader's confidence in the reliability of God's Holy Word is to court disaster: It is infinitely better to retain a translation that may not be as easy reading, that may not include the latest in scholarship, but which accords to the Lord Jesus Christ His rightful place in God's plan of salvation. I take it for granted that we agree on this, and that it will not be necessary to belabor the point.

We come then to a fourth question in evaluating a translation:

4. Is the receptor language acceptable?

By "receptor language" we mean the language that *receives* the translation, i.e., the language into which the original Hebrew or Greek is put - English in our case.

You will have noticed that we are back to the term "acceptable." What is acceptable language for the theologian's use in discussion or debate may not be the teacher's first choice of language when he works with the Bible in the Christian Day School. Or an intimate tone of language that warms the reader's heart as he uses

his Bible translation for personal devotion may not serve at all for public reading from the lectern or pulpit. It is safe to say that there will never be a translation whose choice of language is such that it can perfectly serve all the uses to which the Bible is properly put. As everyone who has an acquaintance with more than one language knows, in translating from one language to the other there often are two ways of saying the same thing. We may not like one as well as the other, but if both properly reproduce the speaker's intent, they are acceptable translations. The point is, in the area of finding a suitable receptor language it is not so much a case of being right or wrong. It is, to a large extent, a matter of judgment and taste. Here we may well have to think in terms of a compromise among the various uses to which the translation will be put.

At the risk of being repetitious, let me emphasize that compromising on the style of language to be used in a translation is NOT the same as compromising on the content, on doctrine.

Also, it might be worthwhile to remind ourselves that the matter of agreeing on an acceptable style of language offers abundant opportunity for practicing that Christian virtue of deferring to the weaker brother.

To evaluate a translation we have then the set of four questions:

1. Is it based on an appropriate original text?
2. Does it render this original text faithfully?
3. Is it doctrinally sound?
4. Is the receptor language acceptable?

The question that was posed to your essayist was: The New American Standard Bible: Is This the Answer? Our procedure shall be to examine selected portions of this translation in order to see what answers it yields to the four test questions.

The New American Standard Bible

Perhaps an introduction to this relatively new translation is in order. If you do not know much about it, that would be understandable, because the announcements and advertisements for it have been refreshingly "low-key" – certainly a far cry from the elaborate observance staged for the release of the RSV, or the American Bible Society's constant drumming of the value of its TEV, also known as *Good News for Modern Man*.

The NASB is a product of the Lockman Foundation, which describes itself briefly as:

A Corporation Not for Profit
La Habra, Calif.
Producers of Amplified Translations.

While the Foundation may not be looking for popular recognition, it does want its principles understood. In bold type (and it devotes a whole page to the announcement) it declares:

IMPORTANT
THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION
SHOULD BE READ,⁴

and then on the next page it states the fourfold aim of the Lockman Foundation:

1. These publications shall be true to the original Hebrew and Greek.
2. They shall be grammatically correct.

⁴ *New American Standard Bible* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Creation Book House, Inc., 1971), p. IV

3. They shall be understandable to the masses.
4. They shall give the Lord Jesus Christ His proper place, the place which the Word gives Him; no work will ever be personalized.

While the first three are rather stock aims among translators, the fourth aim, that the Lord Jesus Christ is to have the center-stage spot and the translators recede into the background is not only gratifying but also somewhat surprising by today's pattern of citing doctors and scholars by name. "He must increase, but I must decrease" has never become a popular doctrine.

That the translators are not minded to personalize their work is indicated also on the flap of the dust jacket, which states:

This translation is not a solo but a symphony in which many had a part...It will be noted that we have not used any scholar's name for reference or recommendation because it is our belief God's Word should stand on its merits.

In another context (front flap of jacket) the translators are referred to simply as "fifty-eight consecrated and dedicated scholars."

While we do not know who the committee was, yet we are not left in doubt as to their motivation. The Preface to the New American Standard Bible states: "The producers of this translation were imbued with the conviction that interest in the American Standard Version of 1901 should be renewed and increased. They have labored with prayerful seriousness to this end."⁵ If one may interpret a bit, it would seem that members of the committee were dissatisfied with the RSV, which was intended to be the successor of the American Standard Version, and that theirs is now an attempt to retain the more conservative aspects of the ASV while up-dating its language to contemporary English. The Forward of the NASB would seem to agree with those conclusions, for it states: "The Editorial Board had a two-fold purpose in making this translation:

To adhere as closely as possible to the original languages of Holy Scripture,
To make the translation in fluent and readable style according to current English usage."⁶

Work was begun on the New Testament and several testaments were brought out in the 1960s. On July 31, 1970, after 9 years and 7 months, the Old and New Testament together were released as the New American Standard Bible, published by the Creation House, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois. Examination copies were sent to the Translation Review Committee at Mequon with the request for critical comment. The assurance was given that suggestions would be considered, and if alternate renderings seemed to be warranted, they could be included in the marginal notes of future editions.

How Well Does the NASB Meet the Suggested Four-Fold Standard for Acceptability?

1. Original Text

We have already noted the importance of having an appropriate original text if the resultant translation is to be accurate. With reference to the Old Testament text the Preface to the NASB says:

In the present translation the latest edition of Rudolph Kittel's BIBLIA HEBRAICA has been employed together with the most recent light from lexicography, cognate languages, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁷

⁵ Ibid., p. VI

⁶ Ibid., p. III

⁷ Ibid., p. VIII

Faithful adherence to the Masoretic text will, of course, rule out the “scissors-and-paste” kind of editing that has on occasion been performed on the Old Testament. Such editor-translators claim to see the work of various redactors in the text and hence they now feel free in their translation to rearrange the text to suit their own whims. Your essayist found no instance of such practice in the NASB.

A matter that may be of interest, however, is the question: To what extent did the Dead Sea Scrolls influence the NASB translators? As something of a check on that question a cursory examination of Isaiah was attempted. No claim is made for completeness, but in 13 places the marginal notes indicate that a Dead Sea Scroll reading was used in the translation in preference to the Masoretic text. It is worth noting that in the majority of these 13 cases, it was not the Dead Sea Scroll reading alone that supplanted the traditional text but the combination of a Dead Sea Scroll reading with that of a parallel passage of the Old Testament,⁸ or the combination of the Dead Sea Scroll reading with the ancient versions,⁹ notably the Septuagint. When the Dead Sea Scroll reading and other manuscripts agreed in a passage that was difficult in the Masoretic text, then the Dead Sea Scroll reading was adopted. Only 3 cases were found in Isaiah where the Dead Sea Scroll alone was cited as the reading that had supplanted the Masoretic text.¹⁰ In those cases the traditional text was translated in a marginal note. The marginal notes also called attention to 2 cases where the Masoretic text was retained and the Dead Sea Scroll reading was relegated to the margin.¹¹

Regarding the New Testament text, the Preface states:

In revising the ASV, consideration was given to the latest available manuscripts with a view to determining the best Greek text. In most cases the 23rd edition of the Nestle Greek New Testament was followed.¹²

To check exactly how closely the 23rd edition of Nestle was followed would be a rather time-consuming task. In an attempt to get some indication, however, the Gospel of John was chosen as a check. Again, no claim is made for completeness, but if you compare the Nestle Greek text with the United Bible Society Greek text, you will find in the Gospel of John some 19 places where there is a difference in the editors’ choice as to which Greek word is to be elevated to the text. It seemed logical that if the NASB were to depart from the Nestle text, it would be in some of these passages where the evidence is fairly evenly divided for and against a particular reading.

As an illustration, incidentally, of what we mentioned before, that variants do not radically change the sense, in 7 of these 19 variants it is virtually impossible to tell from the translation which Greek reading was used.¹³ These are cases of a different spelling for the same verb, or the use of verbs that are synonyms, e.g., οὐρανός and οὐρανοί, both of which mean “see.” Hence, 7 of these cases are not helpful for determining whether or not the Nestle text was used in translation, but in the remaining 12 where the translation does indicate a specific text, there Nestle was used consistently.¹⁴ The same could be said for 6 instances from the second half of the book of Acts. In all cases the translation agreed with the Nestle text.¹⁵

Unless one is going to throw the matter of text choice open to the “eclectic” method, that method in which each translator becomes his own text critic and decides for himself which reading he prefers, it would be hard to suggest anything better than the Nestle text which the NASB translators agreed upon.

2. Faithfulness of translation

⁸ Is. 37:20; 37:27

⁹ Is. 18:7; 40:26; 49:17; 49:24; 56:12; 64:7; 66:18; 66:19

¹⁰ Is. 23:1; 56:5; 56:10

¹¹ Is. 38:15; 40:12

¹² Op. cit., p. VII

¹³ John 1:26; 4:34; 6:2; 7:52; 9:6; 11:54; 15:8

¹⁴ John 7:9; 7:10; 7:46; 10:18; 10:40; 11:29; 11:57; 13:15; 13:24; 14:7; 14:17; 16:23

¹⁵ Acts 13:33; 18:3; 23:30; 28:13 Nestle text used; Acts 14:3; 15:16 Nestle or United Bible Society text

You will recall the Lockman Foundation's stated aim that their translations "shall be true to the original Hebrew and Greek" and that "they shall be grammatically correct." What steps have the translators taken to carry out that goal in the NASB?

One of the first things to strike the reader as he opens this translation, in contrast to most contemporary translations, is that a conscious attempt has been made to show which the original Hebrew and Greek words are. I refer to the use of italics. The EXPLANATION OF GENERAL FORMAT states:

ITALICS are used in the text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew or Greek but implied by it.¹⁶

Throughout the translators show great concern for the individual words of the text, as indicated by the multitude of entries in the margin giving the literal meaning of Hebrew and Greek words. If at all possible, however, the literal meaning is retained in the translation itself. At times that is done even though the resultant translation may be somewhat difficult. One is reminded of Luther's principle and his retention, e.g., of the word "seal."

An illustration of this principle of retaining a literal though difficult translation is the instance in 1 Thess. 4:4, where the KJV translates: "that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour." The word in question is *σκευον*, "vessel." We are aware that there are two schools of thought regarding the meaning of this passage. One maintains that the reference is to personal self-control; the other feels that the matter of taking a wife is under discussion. Virtually all contemporary translations choose one or the other, thus entering into interpretation. The NASB here refrains from interpreting. It leaves that to the exegete when it translates literally: "that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." Where the NASB does interpret, e.g., in passages that speak of the emotions and their seat in the organs of the body, there the literal meaning is given in the margin.

Another matter in which the NASB has tried to be meticulously accurate is in the translation of tenses. The aorist indicative is regularly translated with the English past tense, whereas a distinctive shading is attached to the imperfect, such as progressive, inceptive, etc. Then too there is its treatment of historical presents. Greek abounds in cases where the speaker uses the present tense as a vivid way of describing a past action or event. In the interest of English style, the translators have changed these presents into past tense verbs, but in each case the reader is informed by the placement of a n asterisk next to that verb.

Also in rendering questions the NASB has been at pains to reflect the original accurately: In Greek, questions often have an "indicator" which hints whether a yes or no answer is expected. The translators of the NASB have regularly included this hint for the benefit of their readers. One illustration will suffice. In the Upper Room after Christ has indicated that one of His disciples will betray Him, the KJV has the disciples ask, "Lord, is it I?" But the Greek indicates that the disciples all expected a no answer. The NASB reflects this in its translation when it has the disciples protest their innocence by saying, "Surely not I, Lord?"¹⁷

As one has come to expect of contemporary translations, the NASB uses quotation marks. It also retains the traditional numbered verses and verse divisions. This is a distinct help if one wishes to check how a particular word or phrase has been translated, but for general reading the format could perhaps be improved by joining verses into more readily discerned paragraphs.

All in all, the NASB both in its stated principles of translation and in the format of its book leaves the impression that it invites the Bible scholar to compare its translation with the original languages.

3. Doctrinal position

So far we have been speaking mostly of mechanics. The real test of a translation, however, is an examination of its content and message. Reaching the decision that a Bible translation is *unsatisfactory* can at

¹⁶ Op. Cit., p. X

¹⁷ Matt. 26:22

times be a relatively speedy process. As soon as one detects false doctrine or statements that becloud God's saving message, then such a translation may immediately be dropped from consideration.

But the process is not quite so quick and easy when one is considering adoption of a translation. Before one can endorse a translation, it is obvious that the whole of it must be studied thoroughly. Because of the limitations both of time and ability, your essayist can not claim thoroughly to have studied the whole NASB. Our procedure therefore shall be to select passages that treat of central doctrines, particularly such passages in which other translations have shown weaknesses. Thus we shall try to determine whether the NASB shows any of those same weaknesses.

a) Messianic prophecy

Regardless of what our attitude toward the RSV may be, one of the lasting effects of that translation is that whenever we examine any new translation of the Old Testament, instinctively we ask: What does it do with Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth of our Lord? To set your minds at ease let me inform you at once that the NASB renders the Hebrew word *ḥmḥ* (אִמָּה) with "virgin." Its translation of Isaiah 7:14 reads:

Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son and she will call His name Immanuel.

With regard to Messianic prophecy, it is safe to say that one of the most important decisions made by the translation committee was not in regard to the translation of any specific Messianic passage, but in arriving at an editorial decision, and that is the decision to capitalize references to Deity. That decision committed the translators to indicating in Old Testament passages whether they felt they were translating a reference to the coming Messiah or not. Hence, in the Isaiah passage cited above, "and she will call His name Immanuel," *His* is capitalized.

All who hold the Messianic prophecies dear will be gratified to find that capitals have been used in many passages to call the reader's attention to God's Old Testament promises of a Savior. Thus Micah prophesies (5:2):

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.

Note that *One* has been capitalized. Those of you who protested the RSV's translation of the last part of that verse, which the RSV rendered: "whose origin is from of old, from ancient days," will note that the NASB has retained the plural, "goings forth," as well as the reference to Christ's eternity. Malachi says of the Savior's coming (3:2):

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap.

Consistently *He* and *His* are capitalized because they refer to the Messiah. Job says (19:25):

I know that my Redeemer lives,
And at the last *He* will take *His* stand on the earth.

With its capitalization the NASB indicates that it is the suffering Savior Whom Zechariah prophetically sees when he says (13:7):

“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,
 And against the man, My Associate,”
 Declares the Lord of hosts.
 “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered;”

Thus cases could be multiplied where Messianic prophecy comes through clearly via the capitalization. But it is only fair to state also that one misses the capitals at points where he could reasonably expect them. In the first promise of a Savior, Gen. 3:15, there is no capitalization of the pronoun “him” when the NASB translates:

He shall bruise you on the head,
 And you shall bruise *him* on the heel.

In reviewing this verse, the Seminary Translation Review Committee has concluded that the omission is perhaps an editor’s oversight.¹⁸ Together with several other comments, this omission has been called to the translators’ notice. To date no reply has been received.

And there are other places where one misses capitalization. One wonders, e.g., why *prophet* and *him* are not capitalized when Moses says (Deut. 18:15):

The Lord your God will raise up for you a *prophet* like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to *him*.

Or in Balaam’s prophecy (Num..24:17):

A star shall come forth from Jacob,
 And a scepter shall rise from Israel,

there is no capitalization of *star* or *scepter*.

Also in Psalm 22, which has so many references to Christ’s passion, there is no capitalization of the pronouns to indicate reference to the Messiah. Here there may be another reason, however. Whenever the psalmist speaks in the first person, (and this is true in other Psalms also) the translators seem consistently to avoid capitalizing. Thus the reference is directed first of all to the speaker, the psalmist, even though there is the added dimension of reference to the Messiah also. That the translators are well aware of the Messianic implication of the Psalm is indicated by their diligent cross referencing to the Gospels which report the fulfillment of these very prophecies.

In general, one would have to say that there seems to be a distinct effort on the part of the translators to point out and call the reader’s attention to Messianic prophecies, but there does seem to be a bit of inconsistency in their capitalization. Perhaps these are editorial slips that can be corrected in future editions. It is no secret, of course, that the KJV is also somewhat inconsistent on the score of capitalization. Take the case of reference to the Messiah under the term “branch.” In Isaiah 4:2 there is no capitalization. In Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15 the B is capitalized. In Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12 it is printed with *all* capitals. So perhaps we have learned to live with a bit of inconsistency.

b) Deity of Christ

Just as the translation of Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth has become for us something of a touchstone to an Old Testament translation’s acceptability, so the treatment of the virgin birth in the New Testament will be of critical interest to us. The term in question is *παρθένη*, which it is maintained by many can mean “young woman” as well as “virgin.” The term occurs 14 times in the New Testament, not always

¹⁸ Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Vol. 69, p. 82

referring to Mary, the mother of our Lord,¹⁹ One becomes distinctly uncomfortable, however, because of the regularity with which most contemporary translators avoid the term “virgin” as their translation for *παρθένη*. NEB does that 6 times, RSV 8 times, Phillips 9 times and TEV 11 of the 14 times it occurs. One cannot help but wonder whether this is not in preparation for a translation such as that of the NEB:

The angel Gabriel was sent...with a message for a girl betrothed to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David; the girl’s name was Mary.

Granted that Mary was a “girl,” but when the point of Isaiah’s sign was that it was to be a *virgin* who would bear a son, then we must have that indicated for an acceptable translation of Luke 1:27.

The NASB translates all 14 instances of the word *παρθένη*, as “virgin,” with one exception. That is in Rev. 14:4 where the reference is to unmarried men. This it renders “celebrates,” with the marginal note: chaste men, lit., *virgins*.

Another word that has a critical bearing on the deity of Christ is the word “only begotten.” When one looks back at church history and sees what a hard-fought battle it was to retain the Scriptural truth that Jesus is the *only begotten* Son of God, and when one realizes the Nicene Creed’s emphasis on that concept, then we begin to see the folly of accepting a Bible translation that reduces the force of the distinctive Greek term *μονογενής*, *only-begotten*, to the less distinctive term *only*. And yet, that is what has regularly been done in contemporary translations. Hence we will be interested in knowing if the NASB has followed the lead of the RSV, NEB, TEV, and others.

The term *μονογενής* occurs 9 times in the New Testament. In the 5 passages that speak of Christ, the NASB consistently translates “only begotten.”²⁰ In cases of purely human generation (there are 3 of these), there the NASB does translate the word as “only.” Thus the widow at Nain has an *only* son; Jairus has an *only* daughter, and a father pleads for his *only* son who is an epileptic.²¹ But note the handling of the final instance, Hebrews 11:17, which speaks of Abraham offering up Isaac. Isaac was not just an ordinary son. He was a type and a foreshadowing of the only begotten Son of God. Hence the NASB here does not translate “only,” but it speaks of Abraham “offering up his *only begotten* son.” It would seem then that the NASB has reserved the translation “only begotten” as a technical term that it uses to describe the unique generation of the only begotten Son of God.

Another passage that indicates the translators’ attitude toward the Son of God is Matthew 27:54, which records the testimony of the Roman officer at the foot of Christ’s cross. Granted that the Roman may have been a pagan, and granted that there is here a grammatical point that has been debated (lack of definite article), yet the NASB has the captain say: “Truly this was *the* Son of God.”

We have already commented that the NASB translation of Micah 5:2 retains the reference to Christ’s eternity, and those who have been disturbed at the way in which TEV (*Good News for Modern Man*) has muddied the waters in the opening verse of John’s Gospel will be pleased with NASB’s retention of the familiar wording:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Despite this clear testimony to the deity of Christ, I would anticipate that a casual examination of the NASB might lead someone to feel that perhaps the miracles of Christ have been de-emphasized. Here an explanation of the translators’ pattern may prove helpful. There are two Greek words in the New Testament which the KJV has translated with the term “miracle.” One is *δύναμις*, which literally means “power.” In 8 or 9 contexts which show that a work of power is meant, the KJV has translated this word as “miracle.” The NASB agrees with that translation.

¹⁹ Matt. 1:23; 25:1,7,11; Luke 1:27 (two uses); Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 7:25, 28,34,36,37,38; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 14:4

²⁰ John 1:14; 1:18; 3:16; 3:18; 1 John 4:9

²¹ Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38

The difference comes in the handling of the other Greek word, *shmeiōn*, where the KJV has been inconsistent. 48 times it renders that word as “sign” and 22 times it translates it as “miracle.” The NASB, on the other hand, consistently translates it as “sign.” Consequently the translation “sign” occurs in some 22 instances where KJV has “miracle,” and most of those occur in the writings of John. Hence the reader of John’s Gospel may notice a singular dearth of “miracles,” but they have been replaced by “signs.” In each case, the marginal note calls the reader’s attention to the alternate translation, “attesting miracle.”

c) Vicarious atonement

To be truly acceptable, a translation must not only speak accurately of the deity of Christ, but it must also give a clear picture of His work. It must speak correctly of Christ’s suffering and death, His blood shed for us sinners who could do nothing to help ourselves before a just and holy God. Not all contemporary translations do that.

One thinks, for example, of the systematic elimination of the term “blood” that is such a noticeable feature of the TEV. An examination of the NASB, particularly of those passages in which TEV has paraphrased, indicates that the NASB consistently translates *aiēmā* as “blood.”²²

But there are subtler ways in which the atonement of Christ is undercut in the translations. There is, e.g., the liberty that is taken with the Greek word that means “propitiation.” Properly, “propitiation” means turning away wrath with an offering. Scripture speaks at length of God’s wrath against sin and the need to propitiate Him. But this thought is obscured in those translations which substitute the idea of *expiation* or an equivalent paraphrase. Expiation speaks of the cancellation of guilt, not the placating of a just and holy God. Thus in 1 John 2:2, the RSV says of Jesus, our Advocate with the Father, “he is the expiation for our sin.” The NEB translates: “He himself is the remedy for the defilement of our sins,” while TEV speaks of Him as the “means by which sins are forgiven.” In this passage, and in all others where the various forms of *i(asmōw* occur, the NASB retains the accurate translation “propitiation.”

Closely related is the term “reconciliation.” Again, one has misgivings about translations which reduce that concept to the idea of “making friends.” Hence in 2 Cor. 5:19 TEV describes the ministry of reconciliation as follows:

Our message is that God *was making friends* of all men through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins against them, and he has given us the message of how he *makes them his friends*. (Italics ours)

Much better is the NASB’s translation, which translates accurately:

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

There are 14 passages in the New Testament that the KJV has rendered with forms of the term “reconciliation.”²³ The NASB retains all of them except Hebrews 2:17. There, however, the verb used is not a form of *aiētw*, as in the other 13 cases, but *i(askesqai*, the word we previously treated under the discussion of propitiation. In this Hebrews passage the NASB again has been careful to reflect the original Greek and hence translates “to make *propitiation* for the sins of the people,” rather than KJV’s “to make *reconciliation*.”

Its accuracy in handling the Hebrews passage is another illustration that throughout its work the NASB has shown a concerted effort to provide a consistent translation when the same word or expression is used. It is an indication that they have taken seriously the value of each individual word.. This bespeaks the kind of

²² A partial listing would include: Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20; Hebr. 10:19; 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 1:5; 5:9

²³ Matt. 5:24; Rom. 5:10 (two uses); 11:15; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18 (two uses); 5:19 (two uses); 5:20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20; 1:21 (22 in Greek text and NASB); Hebr. 2:17

reverent treatment of the text that one expects to find in people who have become convinced of the verbal inspiration of the text before them. A formal statement of the committee's view on inspiration will follow after we examine several passages that treat of justification.

d) Justification

To get an indication of how the NASB treats the important matter of salvation *by faith*, let us hear a portion of their translation of the third chapter of the Letter to the Galatians:

Does He then who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith that are the sons of Abraham.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU."

So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

(v. 5-9,11)

Ephesians 2: 4-10 will serve as an illustration of how the committee has handled a passage that treats of salvation as the free gift of God.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

In all fairness one must also report that there are a few passages on justification where the NASB translation is not quite as clear and forceful as one would like. Natural man is always inclined to want to *earn* salvation, or at least to feel that he has in some measure contributed. Many contemporary translations have wordings which leave that thought open. Thus Phillips, e.g., has translated 2 Cor. 5:10:

For every one of us will have to stand without pretense before Christ our Judge, and *we shall be rewarded* for what we did when we lived in our bodies, whether it was good or bad. (Italics ours)

When one realizes that such ideas as "being rewarded" are all too prominent, then he wonders whether the NASB has hit upon a happy choice of words when it translates that passage, "that each one may be *recompensed* for his deed in the body." The Greek verb here is a form of *ktabmai*, "to get, to obtain." Seeing that the NASB is a revision of the ASV, one wishes they had stayed closer to the ASV's wording:

For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may *receive* the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (Italics ours)

Another place where one feels the NASB has not improved the ASV which it is revising is in Philippians 2:13. The ASV had:

For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.

This is very close to the KJV. In both translations it is unmistakably clear that God is doing both the willing and the working. While the NASB's rendering is not necessarily wrong or incapable of being understood properly, yet it seems to allow for misunderstanding. They translate:

For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

That could leave the impression that you do the willing and the working, with some help from God. This is dangerously close to "infused grace."

While no discussion of a translation's treatment of the doctrine of justification can be complete without examining some of the key passages in Romans, yet we will forego those here. The reason is that a discussion of the NASB's handling of Romans is available to the reader in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. The Seminary Review Committee, which has been working at a comparison of 7 translations, has studied in detail some 33 passages from Romans. An evaluation of 3 of these (Rom.3:25, 5:18, 9:5) appears in the July 1971 issue of the quarterly. We shall quote one paragraph from that article:

In all the passages to which consideration was given, the version which consistently proved itself most accurate was the New American Standard Bible. The few objections raised to it concerned themselves with points of style and clarity rather than with questions of fidelity to the Greek text.²⁴

e) Inspiration

An indication of the importance which the translators of the NASB attach to the doctrine of inspiration will become apparent as soon as one opens their translation. The first sentence of the first paragraph of the FOREWARD states:

The New American Standard Bible has been produced with the conviction that the *words of* Scripture as originally penned in the Hebrew and Greek *were inspired* by God. (Italics ours)²⁵

Their translation of 2 Tim 3:16 reads:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Their translation of 2 Peter 1:21 will no doubt sound a bit "off-center" at first reading. Instead of "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" we have in the NASB "but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." That translation is not the result of their taking undue liberties with the text but the result of

²⁴ Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Vol. 68, p. 194

²⁵ Op. cit., p. 111

their being consistent in using the 23rd edition of the Nestle text. That is a correct translation of the reading that Nestle has.

We are again in that “1% area” where the manuscript evidence is rather evenly divided between this reading and the traditional one. In commenting on this verse in the *Quarterly*, Prof. Blume states that if he were publishing a translation today, he would retain the traditional wording, but he concedes: “It would be extremely difficult to establish that the one is the apostolic text as opposed to the other.”²⁶

This passage, incidentally, may serve as a check on our statement that variants do not change doctrines in Scripture. The reading: “Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” says exactly what we have always believed about inspiration.

We have already commented on the meticulous care the NASB has taken in trying to do justice to the individual words of the original text. Though we appreciate their fine statement about inspiration in the FOREWARD, yet their reverence for the individual words of the original is an even more convincing indication that when they speak of inspiration, they mean *verbal* inspiration.

f) Creation

We shall be intentionally brief in discussing the NASB’s translation regarding creation because the Seminary Review Committee has worked through the various translations of Genesis. You are urged to read the April 1972 issue of the *Quarterly* which carries their comments with regard to the NASB’s translation of Genesis, together with some suggestions for improvement of the translation. To give you a general indication, however, of how the NASB fared in the Seminary review, we cite a portion of one of the closing paragraphs of the article:

In conclusion we are still favorably impressed with the NASB, at least more so than with any of the other versions. It is apparent that much editing remains to be done.²⁷

g) Sheol/Hades

One of the questions raised by the Seminary Review Committee in its study of Genesis goes considerably deeper than just a matter of editing. It involves the translation of the Hebrew word *Sheol* and its New Testament counter-part, *Hades*. A comparison of the various passages in which these terms are used shows that the NASB has simply transliterated the Hebrew or Greek words into English. The result is that the distinction between *death* and *hell* is lost. Hence one wonders precisely what the committee’s view of hell is. Our Seminary review Committee has forwarded its suggestions for improvement to the translators and is now awaiting a reply from their editorial board.

h) Resurrection of the body

Another question that merits careful study is the NASB viewpoint regarding the resurrection of the body. What raises the question is their translation of Job 19:26. We have already commented favorably on verse 25:

And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.

We regret that we cannot be so happy with the next verse.

Even after my skin is flayed,
Yet *without* my flesh I shall see God; (Italics ours)

²⁶ *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 68, p. 111

²⁷ *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 69, p. 85

The problem hinges on the Hebrew preposition מִן “from.” This preposition is coupled with the noun בָּשָׂר “flesh.” The question is: Is the preposition to be understood in the local sense, namely that I am in the flesh and looking out *from* it, or does it have the meaning of “separation from,” “outside of”?

In an article published in the *Quarterly* (July ‘70), Prof. Rudolph Hoesly of Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary argues in detail (and I think, convincingly) that the original sense of the preposition is the local idea, “in my flesh,” and that the separation idea, “without my flesh,” is a secondary and derived meaning. Obviously the NASB has chosen the second. Granted that the Hebrew of this verse poses some other vexing problems also, e.g. the meaning of the verb (flayed or surround), yet this is a passage that needs careful study. Perhaps some suggestion for revision can be made to the translators of the NASB.

One other place where we may not be pleased with the NASB rendering is in the angels’ song on Christmas eve. The NASB has them praising God and saying (Luke 2:14):

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.

I believe their translation “men with whom He (God) is pleased” is an attempt to get away from the rendering of some of the other translations, “men of good will,” which has the distinct possibility of being misunderstood as though there is some inherent goodness in men. Whether the NASB’s alternate translation succeeds is questionable, however.

The reason they have the difficulty is because of their consistency in following the 23rd edition of Nestle. We are again in that “1% area.” There is strong manuscript evidence for retaining the traditional reading, “peace on earth, good will toward men,” but the editors of the Nestle text have chosen the other reading. Perhaps our quarrel is more with Nestle than with the NASB.

4. Receptor Language

We have intentionally devoted the bulk of our time to the evaluating of the doctrinal aspects of the NASB because of our stated conviction that the content delivered by a translation determines its worth more than any other of its features. That does not mean to say that the language in which the message is brought is unimportant. There is, however, one notable difference. In the choice of language there is no inspired pattern or style that the translation must follow. This is an area of judgment and, to a large extent, personal taste.

In the area of judgment lies the question: Will all the people whom this translation should serve be able to use it? Will its wording serve the layman as well as the trained theologian, the grandmother as well as the school child, those with little education as well as those with college degrees? Surely this is an important area and one in which we will want to pray for sanctified, Christian judgment.

The matter of personal taste is, of course, much easier. It is simply a matter of asking ourselves the question: Do I like the translation both when I hear it read publicly and when I use it privately.

Hence, determining whether the receptor language is acceptable is not something that can be done independently by an essayist. That rests rather with the user of the translation as he arrives at his own answer to the questions:

- 1) Does the translation seem practical for all who will be using it?, and
- 2) Do I personally like its choice of words, its cadence and rhythm, and all the host of other intangibles that combine to make up “style”?

One of the areas where choice of words has always been extremely critical for the acceptance of a translation is in the matter of addressing God. In their EXPLANATION OF GENERAL FORMAT, the translators of the NASB state:

THOU, THY and THEE are changed to “you” except in the language of prayer when addressing Deity.²⁸

That seems to be a rather happy solution to the problems into which the RSV got itself. Their principle, you will recall, was to remove “thou” except in language addressed to God or in exalted poetic apostrophe. Thus in the RSV, all references to Deity should technically have been indicated by the use of “thou.” In address to the Father that was carried through consistently, but the problem came in cases of address to Christ. While tempting Him, would the devil really say: “If *thou* be the Son of God”? Or would Pilate concede deity by asking Christ: “Whence art *thou*?” The result was that the RSV changed not only those cases but virtually all cases of address to Christ to the pronoun “you,” even those of His disciples. Peter is made to say: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16). Thus they effectively cast doubt on the deity of Christ.

The NASB, on the other hand, has changed all second person pronouns to “you,” even in address to Deity. You will recall, however, that they capitalize pronouns that refer to God. Thus references to God are always indicated by the capital, not by the choice of pronoun. The only decision which the translators had to make in any specific passage was whether the address was one of *prayer* or not. If it was a prayer, then they used “Thou” and “Thee.” Otherwise it is “You.” Hence they can retain in the Lord’s Prayer: “Hallowed by *Thy* name; *Thy* kingdom come.”

As a final point regarding the choice of language in the NASB, we might note that cases of the tetragram, the “unspeakable” name of the covenant God, have regularly been translated as Lord. One misses the half dozen or so instances in which the KJV uses the distinctive name Jehovah, but given a choice, I would prefer to give up those cases rather than have the name Yahweh used.

CONCLUSION

We have looked very briefly at the language of the NASB: we have examined some of its doctrinal passages, its choice of original text, and the translators’ attempt to render that text faithfully, What then is our evaluation? Is this the answer?

That depends a great deal on precisely what your question is. If you ask: Is this the Bible that should immediately be used in our churches and homes, to the exclusion of the KJV?, then I will have to answer no.

If you ask: Does the NASB merit consideration and does it have a chance of becoming for conservative, Bible-loving Christians what the KJV has been for so many years, then I would have to say yes.

Changing to a new Bible translation has some marked parallels to launching a space shot. There may be bank upon bank of green lights, but as long as there is one red warning light, one cannot fairly say that “all systems are go.” Those trouble spots must be checked and rechecked, and every source must be applied to remedy the cause for alarm.

So too with the NASB. I think our examination, brief and sketchy as it necessarily had to be, has shown a preponderance of “green lights.” There are many things that one likes about this translation. As he works with it, one senses a growing confidence within himself that the next passage and the next one after that will also check out adequately because the translators are obviously conservative men, bent on “giving the Lord Jesus Christ His proper place in Scripture,” as they say.

But one must still examine carefully to see whether good intentions have been transformed into good translations at all points. There remain the questions regarding clarity in indicating some of the Messianic prophecies, their translation of the Sheol and Hades passages, as well as the question regarding the resurrection of the body as raised by their translation of the Job passage. And there may be others.

What this translation needs is not hasty adoption but careful study by every pastor, teacher, and concerned layman. One essayist, working alone, lacks perspective, but he can safely arrive at the conclusion that here is a translation that merits fuller investigation. So I would answer without reservation: Yes, the NASB

²⁸ Op. cit., p. X

is a Bible translation you should be looking at. I would urge it as a topic of discussion for private study groups, in circuit meetings, and in conference papers. I would suggest that the assignment you give yourselves be two-fold:

- 1) that you check the NASB carefully for any weaknesses and inaccuracies that it may have, and
- 2) that you make suggestions for remedying those weaknesses.

When the Seminary Review Committee received its examination copies of this translation together with the request for critical comment, the editors stated that suggestions could be included as marginal notes in future editions. However, in the letter acknowledging receipt of the Seminary's suggestions regarding Sheol and Hades, the editors indicated that if the editorial board overwhelmingly favors a change, they are willing not merely to include the suggestion in the margin, but even to alter their text. So then, suggestions for improvement of the NASB are not merely an academic exercise, but a way in which you can help to remove some of the "red lights" in the hope that all systems may eventually be go.

Though it still needs study and examination, yet there remains the distinct possibility that the NASB may indeed be the contemporary English translation for which we have been waiting.