

A PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSLATION AND *THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE*

ROBERT L. THOMAS, TH.D.

I. BACKGROUND

In the past year there has been much talk in the Christian world about the publication of *The New English Bible*. The question upon the lips of one and all seems to be "Is it a good translation?" The question is not so easily answered as some might suppose, because there is not unanimous agreement as to just what comprises a "good translation." For this reason, in answering this question concerning *The New English Bible* it is necessary to examine a number of matters which pertain to the background of this translation.

Prior to World War II there was a movement afoot in Great Britain to revise the English Revised Version of the Bible which was published originally in 1881 and 1885. The work of revision had already begun when the War interrupted proceedings, and the effort had to be discontinued. It is to be noted that a similar movement was underway in the United States and Canada, having begun in 1937, to revise the American Standard Version of the Bible which had the publication date of 1901 in the United States. This Version, of course, closely resembles the Revised Version of 1881 and 1885. The latter endeavor in contrast to the former was not discontinued during the period of the world conflict, and the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament was published in 1946. The same Version of the Old Testament had as its initial publication date 1952.

In May, 1946, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland resumed the revision project in Great Britain by making a recommendation that a translation of the Bible be made in the language of the present day. This decision represents a radical departure from the dominant tradition which has produced the major English translations since the time of Tyndale. The Authorized Version, the Revised Version, and the Revised Standard Version are merely the products of the revision of earlier translations. The reason for such a decision on the part of the Church of Scotland was the motive of "providing English readers, whether familiar with the Bible or not, with a faithful rendering of the best available Greek text into the current speech of our own time" (*The New English Bible*, p. vii). It was felt that the changes which would be required to accomplish such a purpose would make the revision of an earlier version impractical. Another reason may be suggested, though it has not been stated; that is the realization that if a revision were undertaken, there would be an overlapping with the work of the committee in America which had almost completed its revision of the American Standard Version.

Invitations were extended by the Church of Scotland for others to join in this undertaking. The invitations were accepted, and the response to such a suggestion was enthusiastic. The result of subsequent meetings of various groups is that the work published jointly by Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press is sponsored by the following denominations and organizations: The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, The Church of England, The Church of Scotland, The Congregational Union of England and Wales, The Council of Churches for Wales, The London Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends, The Methodist Church of Great Britain, The Presbyterian Church of England, The United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communions in Ireland, The British and Foreign Bible Society, and The National Bible Society of Scotland. The only major denomination which is not represented is the Roman Catholic.

Following the organizational stages of the movement, scholars were selected from various British universities to undertake the work of translation. They were selected apart from any consideration of denominational affiliation, and were appointed to

four panels. The four panels were to work in four areas: the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Apocrypha, and that of literary and stylistic considerations. The panel dealing with the New Testament in which there is particular interest at present was composed of seven scholars, all of whom are very well versed in the field of New Testament studies. Dr. C. H. Dodd was appointed convener of the New Testament panel; Dr. Dodd, who is Emeritus Professor of the University of Cambridge, has also been appointed General Director of the whole translation.

The next step in the process was to allot each book of the New Testament to a translator, who was a member of the panel. When the translator had completed his task, his first draft was sent to all members of the panel. At the next meeting of the panel the entire committee would work through the book, verse by verse and sentence by sentence. After the panel had made its alterations in the translations, the revision was submitted to the literary panel. The literary advisers had as their goal the correcting of any awkward or unintelligible constructions or words which might have escaped the notice of the New Testament panel. The overall purpose of the translation was to reproduce the meaning of the Biblical passages in the language utilized by the newspapers of Great Britain, that language which was familiar to everyone. To this end the literary advisers devoted themselves.

After receiving the suggestions of the literary panel, the New Testament panel convened to consider just how many of the suggestions could be received without departing from the sense of the original language. When the translation panel had completed their work, the result was submitted to the joint committee composed of representatives of the sponsoring denominations and organizations. The joint committee formally accepted the New Testament part of the translation near the end of March, 1960, and the same was published on March 14, 1961.

It is not the purpose of the present speaker to make an attempt to criticize the scholarship which went into the preparation of this translation; such an effort would be foolhardy. Neither is it his intent to resent an expert opinion upon the finished product; if the work of translation required the efforts of many scholars laboring for a period of more than ten years, it is obvious that one individual with far less background and experience cannot properly evaluate the work in detail in a period of one year. It seems much more worthwhile at this juncture to examine the philosophy of translation which stands behind this work which has so recently come to us. Three questions may be asked in this connection:

- (1) What is the philosophy of translation?
- (2) Has the purpose of the translation been attained?
- (3) Is the philosophy of the translation valid in all respects?

II. WHAT IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSLATION?

When one thinks of philosophy of translation, two extremes in viewpoint immediately come to mind.

(1) The first ideal in the matter of translation is that which is associated by tradition with the University of Cambridge in England. The Cambridge method aims at translating the words and phrases of the original as literally as possible provided that no violence is done to English usage. The primary consideration in this approach is faithfulness to the original. A suitable description of this philosophy has been set forth by Dr. Francis R. Steele: "A translation should convey as much of the original text in as few words as possible, yet preserve the original atmosphere and emphasis. The translator should strive for the nearest approximation in words, concepts, and cadence. He should scrupulously avoid adding words or ideas not demanded by the text. His job is not to expand or to explain, but to translate and pre-

serve the spirit and force of the original—even, if need be, at the expense of modern Colloquialisms—so long as the resultant translation is intelligible” (“Rules for Bible Translators,” *Christianity Today*, Sept. 26, 1960, p. 11).

(2) The opposite approach to translation is one which has been connected traditionally with the University of Oxford in England. The aim of this method is to convey the sense of the translated passage in free and idiomatic English without consideration for the exact wording of the original. The primary concern to those who approach translation from this viewpoint is readability. The end in view is the conveying of the thought of the original to the reader without regard for a word for word correspondence between the original and the translation. From the very nature of the case it is apparent that this latter philosophy involves a greater amount of interpretation on the part of the translator than does the former. To an advocate of this position the ideas, not the words themselves, are of utmost importance.

Somewhere between these two extremes there is what Nida calls a translation based upon closest equivalents (Eugene A. Nida, *Bible Translating*, p. 12). The principle of closest equivalents is designed to avoid awkward literalness on the one hand and unjustified interpretations on the other. Just where this happy medium is to be found is the matter over which there has not been unanimity of opinion.

The translators of the older versions, including the King James Version and the American Standard Version, adopted the first philosophy of translation. They felt that fidelity to the original demanded that they should reproduce insofar as was possible the characteristic features of the language in which the New Testament was written. This included the preservation of the syntactical order of words, the structure order of words, the structure and division of sentences, and a word for word correspondence wherever possible.

The translators of *The New English Bible*, however, were instructed to replace Greek constructions and idioms with those of contemporary English. This basic difference between the two approaches means that the modern translators have adopted the second philosophy of translation which has as its primary concern readability and smoothness. This practice in translation lays a heavier burden upon him who is appointed to translate, because his task is to understand the original as precisely as he is able and then to say again in his own native idiom what he believed the author to be saying in his.

Taken as a whole, therefore, *The New English Bible* claims to be a free translation rather than a literal one. Yet the translators deny the accusation that it is a paraphrase, defining a paraphrase as a work which introduces into a passage something which is not there. At the same time they admit to the use of paraphrase in a few places. To at least a limited degree, this version also partakes of the character of a commentary although the desire is expressed not to encroach upon the field of the commentator. The Introduction to *The New English Bible* calls the work a free translation, but admits that it partakes at least in part of the character of a paraphrase and of a commentary or an interpretation (*The New English Bible*, p. x).

III. HAS THE PURPOSE OF THE TRANSLATION BEEN ATTAINED?

In adopting a certain philosophy of translation one commits himself in his purpose to attain certain ends. In the case of the latest version the purpose in view was the production of a piece of literature which would be understandable to the ordinary reader, proper in its literary style, and faithful to the Greek original in its meaning. In the estimation of the speaker these goals have been attained in the major part of the New Testament translation. The accomplishment of these ends is not difficult to understand when one remembers the high caliber of scholarship which is represented on the panels. Here are seven men on the New Testament panel who have given their

lives to the study of the New Testament books; it is obvious that their interpretations are not based upon hastily drawn conclusions. Selected to serve on the literary panel are men who are experts in that field. How could the result fail to be anything but superior?

The merits of this translation could be illustrated abundantly. Perhaps the following selected passages will prove the high quality of the product:

(1) In the King James Version of Matthew 20:5 the householder is said to have gone out “about the sixth and ninth hour.” Realizing that these Hebrew time designations which represent a literal translation would mean little or nothing to the average English reader, the translators of the new version have rendered the same verse, “At noon he went out again, and at three in the afternoon”

(2) In Matthew 17:24 the American Standard Version renders the Greek term *didrachma* by its equivalent in Jewish coinage, the half-shilling. The new translation goes one step further, by way of interpretation, to render the term *temple-tax*. This policy is helpful to the reader of Matthew, because from the rendering of the earlier version, unless one refers to a commentary, it is not immediately obvious whether this is a religious tax or a political tax. Neither is it clear to him that the *didrachma* was the amount of the temple-tax.

(3) Matthew 27:62 finds the translators adopting the traditional viewpoint of the day of crucifixion of Christ. Whereas earlier versions left it to the discretion of the reader of the English text by the rendering *Preparation*, the latest effort interprets the Greek term *ten paraskeuen* by what is felt to be the corresponding day of the week, Friday: “Next day, the morning after that Friday, the chief priests and the Pharisees came in a body to Pilate.”

(4) The understandability and beauty of style of the translation is well seen in the rendering of the great love chapter: “I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I am without love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy, and know every hidden truth; I may have faith strong enough to move mountains; but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may dole out all I possess, or even give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I am none the better.

“Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs, does not gloat over other men’s sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance” (1 Cor. 13:1-7).

(5) The appeal which this version will have for young and old alike may be predicted on the basis of a number of passages which at first glance are shocking to the reader. After consideration, however, it is seen how these English idioms convey the intended meaning. Several instances will demonstrate this point:

(a) In Hebrews 5:12 the author’s meaning in the phrase *ta stoicheia tes arches* is conveyed in a quite startling way: “For indeed, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you *the ABC* of God’s oracles over again.” Though the expression *the ABC* would not stand up under a close exegetical examination, it can be seen how it sets forth the general meaning of the Greek equivalent.

(b) In Luke 3:15 John the Baptist’s hearers are described in the following manner: “The people were on the tiptoe of expectation, all wondering about John, whether perhaps he was the Messiah.” “The tiptoe of expectation” is typical of the liberty which the translator of Luke seems to delight to take. A further example might be sighted in Luke 8:34 where the literal rendering of *ephugon* is, “They fled”; for this word the translator gives “taking to their heels.”

(c) The same tendency may be observed in Acts 7:54. The King James Version

describes the effect of Stephen's words on the Sanhedrin as follows: "They were cut to the heart." *The New English Bible* gives this idiomatic equivalent: "This touched them on the raw." It must be admitted that this wording is very graphic.

(6) A passage which has proved a puzzle to the readers of the older versions is found in Luke 16:9. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The version of 1961 does an excellent job of clarifying just what the Lord meant: "Use your worldly wealth to win friends for yourselves, so that when money is a thing of the past you may be received into an eternal home."

(7) Concern of the translators for a proper understanding by the reading public cannot be demonstrated more effectively than by the instance of Mark 9:5. Peter's suggestion to the Lord at this transfiguration scene is that the disciples erect three tabernacles (Greek, *skenas*), one for the Lord Himself, one for Moses and one for Elias. Preliminary work done on the Gospel of Mark prior to World War II had changed the word *tabernacle*, because today it conveys the thought of a larger and more permanent structure. The new word suggested was *shelter*. Following the war when the work was taken up again, however, the word *shelter* also was found to be unsatisfactory, because the suggestion to the minds of the British people was that of a bomb shelter. The new translators departed from this word for a time, therefore, but later returned to it when the recollections of war experiences had faded away.

In considering the success of the translation one other matter which does not relate directly to the philosophy of translation should be introduced. This has to do with the meaning of the words which go together to make the Greek New Testament. Discoveries of many thousands of papyri documents in the last eighty years have greatly increased the understanding of the shades of meaning of words and of the Greek idiom. For example, in Matthew 25:15 there is recorded the parable of a man who went away on a journey and left one of his servants five talents, one two talents, and one one talent. The word *talent* (Greek, *talanta*) to an English person today speaks of something entirely different from what it did in that day; therefore this English rendering obscures the original concept. It has been discovered that a talent was a gold coin, and archeological discoveries have further shown that talents were carried in a bag. When the translators of *The New English Bible* came to this term, rather than leave the expression ambiguous or allow it to be misleading, they have rendered the expression *five talents by five bags of gold*. Thus, there is this added value to the work, that it incorporates the latest information in the meanings which are attached to Greek words.

IV. IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE TRANSLATION VALID IN ALL RESPECTS?

The value of a free translation such as has now been placed into the hands of the public is obvious. There is extended consideration for just what the reading public can comprehend, extensive effort to make the style pleasing, good scholarship, and the inclusion of the latest discoveries of archeology. It would be difficult for anyone to object to these advantages which are found in the new production.

It is the opinion of the speaker, however, that there are also some basic problems which are involved in the work as we have now received it. For the most part, these stem from the philosophy which forms the basis for the translation. It is a non-literal translation, and by virtue of this fact certain disadvantages are encountered.

(1) The first disadvantage might be termed a *theological* one. The reader of *The New English Bible* is at the mercy of the theological prejudices of the translators. The testimony of the translators is, "We have conceived our task to be that of understanding the original as precisely as we could . . . and then saying again in our own

native idiom what we believed the author to be saying in his. We found that in practice this frequently compelled us to make decisions where the older method of translation allowed a comfortable ambiguity.

In the end we accept the collective responsibility for the interpretation set forth in the text of our translation" (*The New English Bible*, pp. ix-x). The speaker is glad to state his own opinion that the great majority of the "Interpretations" are correct, but there remain those other instances where the reader may be misled.

One case in point lies in the field of soteriology. It is feared that the translators have obscured many of the doctrines which are held precious by Christians. An example is the doctrine of imputed righteousness. In Romans 1:17 the word which speaks of a righteousness of God imputed to believers, *dikaioisuve*, is greatly obscured; literally the phrase is, "For a righteousness of God is revealed in it," but the NEB renders, "Because here is revealed God's way of righting wrong." The same rendering is given the word in Romans 3:22, but in Romans 3:5, 21, 25, 26 the word is translated *justice*. When the translator moves into Romans 4, he finally renders the word by the more familiar English word *righteousness*. Of the remaining twenty-seven occurrences of the word in Romans, twenty-three are translated *righteousness*. This inconsistency will of necessity obscure to some extent the logical development of the book. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 the same Greek word speaking of the same doctrinal truth is rendered "one with the goodness of God himself." Thus the principle of free translation allows for a reduction in emphasis upon a truth which only several centuries ago was revived by the Reformation.

A weakness in the field of angelology is found in the translation of the Greek word *daimonion*. The word is consistently rendered by *devil* rather than by the more accurate *demon*. This practice fails to distinguish between the nouns *diabolos* and *daimonion*, between the devil and one of his demons. Perhaps this is an accommodation to the man on the street to whom the term *demon* might have a different connotation.

In the field of eschatology also this characteristic of a free translation can be seen. An illustration is in the parable of Luke 19:11-27. In this parable the Greek noun *basileia* occurs three times, and in each case is rendered so as to conform to the position of covenant theology as it is manifest in amillennialism and non-dispensational premillennialism. The word is rendered *reign* in v. 11, and paraphrased in vv. 12 and 15 so that one cannot discern that such a word is present. The same word is given a similar treatment in Acts 1:6 where the question of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is interpreted by the establishment of "the sovereignty of Israel." In Revelation 11:15 "the kingdom of the world" is the usual rendering of the Greek text, but in the NEB it is given as "the sovereignty of the world." The word in question is normally translated *kingdom* in the NEB, but the theological presuppositions of any non-dispensational approach require that its adherent exclude from the term any reference to a realm or a people who constitute a part of the kingdom. By this means he escapes any reference to a literal, earthly kingdom as was predicted by the Old Testament. In order to escape these implications it is convenient to render the word in the above passages in some way other than by the English word *kingdom*.

The theological disadvantage of such a free translation is also observable in the realm of ecclesiology. The system of covenant theology will be hard pressed on the basis of the new version's rendering of Ephesians 3:5 to refute the truth that the church composed of Jew and Gentile was not a subject of revelation in the Old Testament. The standard dispensational position that the church is unrevealed until New Testament times is staunchly upheld by the interpretation of the *hos* in this verse by the translators: "In former generations this was not disclosed to the human race; but now it has been revealed by inspiration to his dedicated apostles and prophets."

(2) A second disadvantage in this philosophy might be termed an exegetical one. A person who is interested in studying the Word of God and must do so on the basis of the English text will not want to center his attention upon this version.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 14 the new Bible obscures in an even greater way than did the King James Version, the Greek term *glossa*, meaning *tongue*. It will be recalled that most occurrences of the word in the chapter the older version are translated "*unknown tongues*," the word *unknown* not being a part of the original. In the new translation, however, a different rendering is given the word in almost every occurrence: "language of ecstasy," "ecstatic utterance," "tongues of ecstasy," "ecstatic speech," "ecstatic language," and "strange tongues of ecstasy." These are all translations of one Greek word within one chapter. Not only is this variety found in the work, but also a very possible and plausible interpretation of the nature of these tongues is obscured by the use of some form of the word *ecstasy*. By means of this word any relationship between the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians and the gift of tongues in Acts 2 is automatically excluded.

If the aim of translation should be the production of the same effect on the reader of the translation as the original wording produced in the reader of the original text, then there is much to be said for translating the same original word by the same English word in a given passage. Consider the statement of Richard III: "A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" It is the repetition of the word *horse* which gives force to this utterance (F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible*, p. 105). This is seen when one changes the second and third occurrences of the word: "A horse! a beast of burden! my kingdom for a stallion!" Yet it has been the purpose of the translators of the new version to use as many synonyms as possible in order to attain beauty of style. In fairness, however, it should be observed that this also was a practice followed by the translators of the Authorized Version of 1611.

The inadequacy of this approach is further illustrated by a passage in the second chapter of 1 John. In the section from verse 17 to verse 28 the Greek verb *meno* is found eight times, a feature which points to the obvious attempt on the part of the author to emphasize the thought of abiding. *The New English Bible* in four cases gives the meaning *dwell*; in two cases the meaning *stay* is found; in one case there is found the word *stand*; and in the remaining usage the translator gives *keep*. In the same passage of the American Standard Version seven of the eight occurrences are translated *abide*, and the remaining one *continue*. Admittedly, the beauty of translation of *The New English Bible* is greater than that of the American Standard Version, but the latter version is more faithful in maintaining the emphasis of the Greek original. In the most recent version one reads the style of the translator, not that of John.

(3) A third area of disadvantage might be described as a *textual* disadvantage. A looseness in this area seems to go hand in hand with the philosophy of free translation according to which an exact determination of the text is not an absolute necessity. One of the avowed purposes of the New Testament panel was to incorporate into the project the great advances which have been made in the field of textual criticism in the last eighty years. It is the fear of the speaker, however, that the NEB has not capitalized upon the advantages which are available to the translator of the present day. Two reasons for this opinion may be given:

(a) The first is the failure of the translators to follow a uniform method of textual criticism in the determination of the best text. According to the Introduction to the Bible, "the present translators . . . could do no other than consider variant readings on their merits, and, having weighed the evidence for themselves, select for translation in each passage the reading which to the best of their judgement

seemed most likely to represent what the author wrote" (*The New English Bible*, p. vii). The reason given for this procedure is the lack of agreement among New Testament scholars today as to what the correct critical text is. Nevertheless, it would seem that a uniform method which might stand in doubt would be preferable to no method at all. As the translation now stands, some readings are based upon the most ancient Greek texts, other readings are based upon Greek texts which are quite late, and still others which are cited seem to have their primary basis in several early versions or fathers. For this reason one cannot be sure whether he is reading a translation which has a sound textual basis or a translation based upon a text which is the product of the opinion of whoever happened to be the translator of that particular book.

For example, in Acts 11:12 the words *meden diakrivanta* are omitted principally on the basis of the probable reading of the Chester Beatty Papyri, Codex Bezae, two Old Latin mss. of the eighth and thirteenth centuries, and the Syriac Revision of Thomas of Harkel (616 A.D.). This seems to be a case where the opinion of the translator was the largest factor in selecting the reading.

Another passage which might be cited is Ephesians 6:1 where the evidence for omitting and the evidence for including the words *evkupioi* are about equal. The NEB omits any representation of the words in the body of the text; this omission might be justified, but when the version does not indicate the possible alternate reading in a footnote, one wonders what are the grounds for such a procedure.

A further illustration of the point is found in Matthew 26:16-17 where the name *Jesus* is inserted in the text while a footnote permits the omission of the name on the basis of some witnesses. An examination of Nestle's listing of evidence reveals that the only evidence for the insertion of the name comes from a Greek manuscript of the ninth century, a group of minuscules which would date from the same century or later, two Syriac translations, and the church father Origen. The evidence in favor of the reading is quite weak; nevertheless it is given a place in the body of the translation.

This lack of uniformity in the method of determining the correct text of the New Testament leaves the translators open to a criticism which could not be directed at the translators of the King James Version in 1611 and the Revised Version of 1881. There was a standard text used consistently by each of these earlier versions, and right or wrong, the critical text used was known, and the version could be evaluated on that basis.

(b) A second reason for the opinion of the speaker that the translators have failed to capitalize upon the advantages which are now available to the textual critic relates to the system of footnoting used in the new version. To be specific, in Mark 16 the reader of the English text is left to make his own choice between a number of possible endings for the Gospel:

1.) The first is to end the Gospel with the last word in verse 8.

2.) The second is to end the Gospel with two sentences which have hitherto appeared in the body of no major English translation. These two sentences are printed in the body of *The New English Bible* between Mark 16:8 and Mark 16:9, and a footnote pertaining to them records the following words: "Some witnesses add this paragraph, which in one of them is the conclusion of the book."

3.) Another alternative presented to the reader is to end the Book with the words of verses 9-20 instead of with the words which are printed as an unnumbered verse following verse 8.

4.) A fourth alternative is to end the Book with the words of verses 9-20 in addition to the newly inserted paragraph which is printed between verses 8 and 9.

This highly debatable procedure is that which is adopted in the body of *The New English Bible* itself.

5.) A fifth alternative is to add other matter, which is not cited, in addition to one of the above endings.

Such a procedure as this takes a problem which rightfully belongs to the highly-trained textual critic of the New Testament, and transfers it to the untrained reader of the English version. The English reader is then forced to make his own decision when in reality he has no basis upon which to make it. His decision, therefore, becomes a process of choosing which reading suits his own fancy.

Similar comments might be made in connection with John 7:53-8:11 and Romans 16:25-27.

(4) A fourth inadequacy of such a free translation might be termed an *idiomatic* disadvantage. The idiomatic English utilized in the translation was designed to be intelligible to the English-speaking people of Europe, not of America. As might be expected in the light of this stated purpose, quite a number of idioms which are unintelligible to the American ear will be encountered by the readers of this Bible. Specifically, very few Americans will know that the term *Whitsuntide* as it is found in 1 Corinthians 16:8 is an ecclesiastical term referring to the seventh Sunday after Easter and the week following. Probably the translation *Pentecost* which is found in the King James Version would be more effective in America.

In Matthew 13:57 it is recorded that the inhabitants of the Lord's own home town Nazareth "fell foul on him"; this expression is not the idiom of the English which is spoken in America. In Matthew 23:24 Christ addresses the Pharisees and scribes with these words: "Blind guides! You strain off a midge, yet gulp down a camel!" In this case it will be necessary for the American reader of the Bible to take his dictionary from the shelf, and look up the word midge in order to discover that it refers to "any very small nat or fly." The purpose of the translator to write in intelligible English idiom has thus been defeated.

Illustrations of this point could be multiplied. According to Mark 10:34, in order to quiet blind Bartimaeus "many of the people rounded on him . . ." What does it mean to "round on" a person? In Revelation 18:7 the harlot Babylon is portrayed as saying, "No mourning for me, no widow's weeds!" In America the term *weed* colloquially refers to tobacco which has been prepared for use in smoking, but in Britain it suggests the garments of mourning worn by someone, especially a widow.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 the version reads, ". . . we who are left alive . . . shall not *forestall* those who have died." The verb *forestall* will probably not be any great improvement over the *prevent* of the King James Version for most Americans.

From these examples it is obvious that there is a geographical problem which can only with greatest difficulty be eliminated in any endeavor to translate freely into one language from another.

(5) A fifth problem related to *The New English Bible*, one which is not so closely related to the philosophy of translation as those already given, has to do with the utilization of a different translator for each book or group of books of the New Testament. Yet it is a problem which might be eliminated if a more literal approach were followed. This point may be demonstrated by referring first to Matthew 19:12 where the noun *eunouches* and the verb *eunochizo* are found; in the King James Version this verse reads, "For there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchsh, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." Much time has been spent in Sunday School classes in explaining to the class the meaning of the English word *eunuch*, which bears a close etymological

relationship to the Greek words of which it is the translation in Matthew 19:12. In order to remove this barrier the translator of Matthew rendered the verse as follows: "For while some are incapable of marriage because they were born so, or were made so by men, there are others who have themselves renounced marriage for the sake of the sake of the kingdom of Heaven." This effort represents a great improvement from the standpoint of comprehensibility.

Turning to Galatians 5:12, however, the reader observes a strange inconsistency. In the NEB the words are, "as for these agitators, they had better go the whole way and make eunuchs of themselves!" In this verse in the Greek text there is found no trace of the Greek noun or verb from which the English word *eunuch* is derived. The translator of Galatians has introduced the word in order to portray vividly a particular interpretation of a passage which otherwise is somewhat difficult to understand. By this procedure the translator of Galatians has reinstated into the New Testament the obstacle which the translator of Matthew sought to remove. Examples of this type could be multiplied.

In this connection it would seem to be appropriate at this point to speak a general word concerning the relative quality of the different books of the New Testament. It is quite difficult to appraise the word in this respect, but it would appear that the most freedom in translation has been exercised by the translator of the Gospel of John. Ironically, the book where the least amount of freedom in translation has been observed in another of John's writings, the Apocalypse. This latter characteristic may be explained by noting that in order to make a free translation one must interpret the meaning of a passage first of all. The peculiar difficulties of interpretation in Revelation caused the translator of that book to lean toward a more literal translation.

Other matters which might be discussed are the method of capitalization adopted by the translators, the method of giving footnotes for passages where there is divergence of opinion among the translators, and the cultural disadvantages of a free translation. The bare mention of these areas will have to suffice, however.

V. CONCLUSION

The discussion of the weaknesses of a free translation is not intended to imply that such a production has no usefulness at all. Generally speaking, there are two legitimate uses to which such a version as the NEB may be put:

(1) Because of its high qualities as a literary production and its ability to communicate ideas, it will be of great value to the casual reader. One who might not otherwise pick up a Bible will find in this work something which is quite gripping. He will read and read with interest *The New English Bible*.

(2) The version may also be used for study in much the same way as a commentary. It presents possible interpretations of the New Testament by wellqualified scholars, and for this reason one should feel free to consult its pages along with the pages of any other work which seeks to explain the meaning of the Word of God. Caution should be exercised, however, by remembering that this is *an* interpretation, not necessarily *the* interpretation of the New Testament.

There are undoubtedly these areas of advantage associated with this publication. To just what extent they will offset the disadvantages associated with it, only time will tell.

Talbot Theological Seminary
La Mirada, California

FOOTNOTES

1. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. 3 vols, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909, p. 305.
2. W. Sanday (ed.), *Different Conceptions of Priesthood and Sacrifice*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900, p. 80.
3. Alfred Cave, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice and Atonement*. Revised ed. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890, p. 151.
4. Thomas J. Crawford, *The Doctrine of the Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement*. 4th ed. revised. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954, p. 249.
5. The Greek word is *paresis* meaning "passing by" and is used nowhere else in the New Testament. The term *aphesis* usually translated "remission" occurs seventeen times, but is not used here. Quite obviously the apostle would not have used a different word here, unless he intended to express a different sense. The Authorized Version is incorrect in rendering *paresis* here as "remission"; the ASV corrects this however.