

Revision Date -
Source - Bishops Office

BIBLE, AUTHORIZED VERSIONS

Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island

Bishop Berry presented the following report of the Doctrine and Worship Committee on Biblical translations recommended for public reading.

BIBLICAL TRANSLATIONS

"In drawing up a list of biblical translations recommended for public reading, the Task Force began by generating criteria by which a translation might be excluded from such a list. Translations excluded by these criteria were noted. The exclusion of a translation as not suitable for public reading in the Anglican Church of Canada does not mean that the translation is necessarily unsuitable for study purposes."

I Criteria for exclusion of a particular translation

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

II Recommendations

The Task Force recommends the following translations for public reading in the Anglican Church of Canada (by date of publication).

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

Selection

The Task Force suggests that local communities consider the following criteria when choosing a translation suitable for their needs and purposes.

The nature of the local community, its cultural profile, education levels, etc.

The fidelity of the translation to the original text.

No gratuitous use of exclusive language.

Intelligible in terms of contemporary English use.

Natural use of language.

Coherence with the language of the liturgy itself.

Does the translation give help with the pronunciation of proper nouns?

No one criterion is a sufficient basis for a community's choice."

APPENDIX

To: Faith, Worship, and Ministry Committee
 From: Alan Hayes
 Re: English translations of Scripture
 Date: September 20, 1996

1. This memorandum addresses the task "Evaluating New Translations of Scripture: to request a group of appropriate people to evaluate and make recommendations to the House of Bishops about new translations for use in public reading". This was Task # 30 in the memorandum "Tasks for Next Meeting" dated March 2, 1996. I agreed to act as "anchor person".
2. I consulted all the professorial staff in Bible at Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges. On September 18, 1996, I met with Ann Jervis, Andrew Lincoln, Glen Taylor, and Marion Taylor. Separately I spoke with Michael Knowles.
3. The following criteria emerged for evaluating translations of Scripture.
 - a. A translation produced by a group is generally better than a translation produced by an individual, since a group is less likely to miss errors and eccentricities in textual criticism and translation.
 - b. A translation produced ecumenically is generally better than a translation produced within a single denomination or theological tradition, since an ecumenical project is less likely to endorse decisions biased in a particular theological direction.
 - c. An accurate translation needs to be founded on a good reconstruction of the original text, through the sound textual criticism of the manuscript tradition.
 - d. A reliable translation needs to be loyal to the original meanings, avoiding theologically motivated translations. A too loose translation (such as Living Bible, the Message, and other paraphrases) can be inaccurate or theologically loaded.
 - e. The style should be accessible. A too literal translation (such as the Darbyite translation and the Revised Version, American Standard Version, and New American Standard Bible) is hard to understand.
 - f. Inclusive language for humanity should be expected.
4. On these criteria, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, ©1989 Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches) was unanimously acclaimed as the best general translation. The style of the translation is "as literal as possible, as free as necessary". It eliminates non-inclusive language "so far as this could be done without distorting passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture".
5. Other versions, while failing to meet all the criteria, have their own strengths and can be commended with some qualifications.

The Revised Standard Version (RSV, 1946-1952) meets all criteria except (f).

The New English Bible (NEB, 1961-1970, sponsored by the Church of Scotland) meets criteria (a), (b), (c), and (e). But it fails at (d), since many translations, especially in the Old Testament, are, according to my consultants, idiosyncratic. It also fails at (f). The Revised English Bible (REB, 1974-1989) incorporates some sophisticated philological criticism into its reconstruction of the original text and expunges some of the idiosyncratic translations of the NEB, but for the contemporary North American context it has not gone sufficiently far in its use of gender-inclusive language. The translators' rationale is that

they decided to use inclusive language only "where that was possible without compromising scholarly integrity of English style."

The New International Version (NIV, 1973-1978), a translation of one hundred conservative and evangelical scholars, meets (a), (b), (c), and (e), but not (d), since some translations were considered by the experts to be theologically motivated. It also does not meet criterion (f), although the NIV is currently being revised to incorporate inclusive language. The upcoming revision may therefore prove much more acceptable in this respect. Some find that in style the NIV emulates literary models, rather than the cadences of spoken English.

The King James Version or Authorized Version (KJV or AV, 1611) meets criterion (a) and possibly (d) and (e), but not the others. The New King James Version (NKJV) goes further towards meeting criterion (c) in the Old Testament, but not in the New Testament.

The Jerusalem Bible (1966) can be faulted in respect of criteria (b), (d), and (f), though it is of high quality.

For the Old Testament, some of my consultants were keen on the Tanakh version (Torah 1962, Prophets 1978, Writings 1982), translated by a committee drawn from Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed Judaism.

6. There are appearing translations which use gender-inclusive language for God, and translations which incorporate other forms of what may be called "political correctness", such as finding circumlocutions for phrases which are deemed potentially offensive to people of minority races, left-handed people, and others. From the point of view of Biblical scholarship, such translations fail criterion (d). Advocates of such translations would argue that in the choice of Bible translations, Biblical scholarship should not always be the decisive factor. Anglican opponents might respond that the Anglican tradition, as seen, for example, in the preface to the King James Version, has generally regarded considerations of Biblical scholarship as paramount in evaluating translations of Scripture. Advocates might then rejoin in turn that the Anglican tradition needs to change. As often happens, the debate then shifts to the question What is Anglicanism?, a problem in some ways even more complicated than the question of Bible translations.

7. While the NRSV may be the best general translation, not all congregations are "general". For congregations of young people and for congregations of persons for whom English is a second language, for example, the Good News Bible (Today's English Version, TEV, NT 1966, OT 1976) might be appropriate. In this project of the American Bible Society, the translators worked with the Biblical text in the original languages, but aimed their translation at about a grade seven reading level. For congregations of children, the New International children's Bible (no relation to the New International Version) was very warmly commended by two members of the consulting panel. This also is a translation from the Biblical languages, but is aimed at about a grade three reading level. This version, initially hard to find, is now being more widely marketed by Word Publishing.