

THE GOOD NEWS BIBLE

AN EVALUATION

The following is an assessment of the Good News Bible (also known as 'Today's English Version').

The remarks and conclusions arising also have relevance to other translations but I shall confine my analysis primarily to the particular translation under review.

I should like to make clear from the beginning that although I am a linguist by qualification, my first-hand knowledge of the original languages of the Bible is very limited. There are, however, principles involved in translation which apply equally to any language.

I would also point out that this assessment is far from complete. I would prefer to have conducted an exhaustive study of a large and varied selection of different chapters but the time for such an arduous task has not been available.

The following analysis is divided into four sections to assist a clear grasp of the topic.

1. Modernistic trends
2. Inaccurate translation
3. The original manuscripts used
4. Conclusion

For the sake of brevity I shall henceforth refer to the Good News Bible as the GNB.

1. MODERNISTIC TRENDS

In theory, no matter who is translating a passage from one language into another, the end product ought to be the same. In practice this is not the case, as anyone who has been seriously involved in translation work will be aware.

The attitude of the translator can all too easily colour and affect his rendering. The more a translator moves from a strict word-for-word rendering, the greater the scope for the influence of his own mind. As we shall see later, the GNB is not a literal translation, and therefore scope is provided for the theories and theological attitudes of the translators to colour their choice of words and modes of expression.

Such a state of affairs is dangerous enough when the translators are convinced evangelical fundamentalists. No scope should be provided for men's ideas - even those of good and well-intentioned Bible-believing men - when publishing a translation professing to render the

direct oracle of God in our own tongue. How much more dangerous if the translators' attitudes in any way betray a lack of commitment to the literal inspiration of the Word.

What, then, may we learn of the attitudes of the translators of the GNB?

The New Testament

According to the Preface of Good News for Modern Man, the initial New Testament edition of the GNB, "the basic text was translated by Dr. Robert C. Bratcher", The 22/2/68 issue of "The Baptist Courier" quotes Dr. Bratcher, thus "*The New Testament writers probably never intended their work to be the gospel record for the future - so there is no sterile order to the scriptures*". He obviously did not believe his own translation of 1 Corinthians 2:13: "*we do not speak in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit*".

So, the chief translator of the GNB New Testament obviously did not feel bound by the order in which the NT Scriptures were given to us. This will inevitably be reflected in his translation.

The Old Testament

Turning to the Old Testament, I wish to draw attention to the modernistic attitudes revealed in the introductory notes to the prophecies of Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah.

(a) Isaiah

The editors evidently hold the modernistic "three Isaiahs" theory since they claim:

- chapters 1-39 "*come from a time when Judah ... was threatened by Assyria*";
- ch 40-55 "*come from a time when many of the people of Judah were in exile in Babylon*"; and
- ch 56-66 "*are for the most part addressed to people who were back in Jerusalem*".

According to the editors, Isaiah is merely "named after a great prophet". But:

- Luke 3.4 states that chapter 40 was not merely named after Isaiah, but contained the actual words spoken by him.
- Matthew 4.14 says Isaiah was not a compiler; he was himself the inspired mouthpiece of the words in the book bearing his name.
- Romans 9.20-21 refers to Isaiah himself speaking words which the GNB says were spoken centuries after Isaiah's death.

(b) Daniel

The GNB introduction states this book "*was written during a time when the Jews were suffering greatly under the persecution and oppression of a pagan King*".

This strongly implies (without explicitly stating) the modernistic theory that Daniel was written to encourage the Jews at the time of the Maccabees, hundreds of years after the time of Daniel, when undergoing severe persecution at the hands of the evil Antiochus Epiphanes. The reason the modernists hold this view is that certain of Daniel's prophecies foretold so minutely the details of the wars between the kingdoms of Egypt and Syria and the rise of

Antiochus Epiphanes, that they could not accept it could have been predicted so far in advance. They evidently did not believe the words of Jesus, who spoke of, “*Daniel, the prophet*” (Matt 24.15).

A further indication of the attitude of the GNB to the reality of Daniel’s prophetic gift is found in the “Outline Chart of Bible History” provided as an appendix to the GNB. Here the approximate dates are given for each OT prophet’s ministry. Despite the explicit statements in the Biblical record concerning the date of Daniel’s ministry, and of his visions, there is no record at all on the Outline Chart of the date of Daniel’s ministry. Why not?

Conclusive evidence of the modernistic bias of the GNB is found in the translation of Ezekiel 14.14 & 20. Since Daniel is specifically mentioned in these verses by Ezekiel as a historical figure together with Noah and Job, there is certainly no scope for the modernistic view that Daniel did not prophesy until several hundred years after the exile and the time of Ezekiel. To get around this obvious difficulty, the GNB has in these two verses changed Daniel into “Danel”, who in a footnote is described as “*Probably an ancient hero of Canaanite literature, known for his righteous life, and not the hero of the Biblical book of Daniel*”. The existence of such a hero is probable only in the minds of those unable to accept the sacred oracle at its face value!

This is a good example of how the modernistic attitude of the GNB affects the actual translation itself. It is important to remember that a translator’s personal views will always in some way affect his translation. To state that Danel was probably an ancient hero is not a statement of literal fact. It is merely a supposition. It is more or less probable depending on the translator’s own personal attitude to the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. We shall examine other similar instances later.

(c) Zechariah

The GNB Introduction to this book states as a fact what is only a modernistic theory: that Zechariah was not himself the author of the last six chapters. Chapters 1-8 are said to be “*prophecies from the prophet Zechariah*”, and chapters 9-14 “*a collection of messages from later times*”.

Footnotes

In addition to modernistic trends already indicated other evidence is found in certain of the footnotes.

In a note on Exodus 13.18, for example, we are told that the term the Red Sea (in Hebrew literally “*Sea of Reeds*”) “*evidently referred to (1) a series of lakes and marshes between the head of the Gulf of Suez and the Mediterranean, the region **generally regarded** as the site of the events described in Exodus 13, and was also used to designate (2) the Gulf of Suez, (3) the Gulf of Aqaba, and (4) the Red Sea proper*”. (The Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba are the two branches of the northern end of the Red Sea).

The claim of a separately existing so-called “Sea of Reeds” distinct from the Red Sea is a modernistic creation to avoid the fact of the astonishing miracle of the Red Sea crossing. To claim that the term Red Sea *evidently* applies to such a place does not mean it is a geographical fact. It is *evident* only to, and *generally regarded* only by, those who have difficulty in embracing a supernatural God.

In other footnotes there seems an implication that the facts stated in the Word are not statements of truth, but merely the beliefs held in those days. For example:

- We are told that the “winged creatures” were “**thought of**” as guarding God’s throne” (Ezk 9.3). This is not, however, an opinion of Ezekiel’s but a divine fact.
- In footnotes on Acts 2.27, Phil 2,10 and Rev 1.18 we are told “**It was thought that the dead continued to exist in a dark world under the ground**”.

Such notes can convey an impression that the views held by Biblical writers were merely those current in their day, and may not necessarily be correct. References to “*legendary monsters*” and “*an ancient story*” in Job 9.13; 25.12; 40.15; Isa 27.1; 51.9 etc can likewise convey an impression that the contents of the Bible were influenced by various contemporary legendary and mythical tales.

Specific verses examined

I have spent much time seeking to prove the modernistic attitudes of the GNB for important reasons. As already mentioned, a translator’s personal views inevitably affect his work and choice of words. The freer the translation the greater the scope for this. The GNB is not a free paraphrase, such as the Living Bible, but neither is it a strictly literal one. So, there is considerable leeway for the modernistic attitudes described to find scope for expression.

Let us consider a few specific instances to show how modernism has affected the translation.

(a) Psalm 45.6

Despite this verse’s being quoted in Hebrew 1.8 as “*Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever*”, and the fact that the Hebrew text may also be translated likewise in Ps 45.6, the GNB has relegated this rendering to one among three alternatives in a footnote. Why, when the NT clearly reveals the intended meaning? Doubtless the distaste of modernism for the doctrine of the deity of Christ.

(b) Genesis 3.15

The literal translations, the A.V, RV and RSV all render the “Seed” referred to in this verse in the singular. This accords with the Hebrew, where a singular masculine verb is used. The GNB, however, uses a word normally associated with the plural: “*Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite their heel*”. So, what evangelicals consider a clear foreview of Christ is obscured.

In Gal 3.16 Paul lays great emphasis on whether “seed” is singular or plural (in another context), building a major doctrine upon it.

(c) Romans 9.5

A comparison of translations of this verse is a classic example of a translator’s personal attitude affecting his preference:

- The AV bears unmistakable testimony to the deity of Christ: “*Christ .. who is over all, God blessed for ever*”.

- The evangelical Amplified, NASV, Williams, Beck and NIV all support this rendering.
- The modernistic RSV and NEB, however, re-phrase it, (although giving the basic AV rendering as a footnote).

For the GNB, the **first** choice for the main body of the translation shows where its heart lies: *“Christ, as a human being, belongs to their race. May God, who rules over all, be praised for ever!”* Although it puts the alternative rendering in a footnote, its first choice would most influence the unwary reader.

(d) The Blood

In Ro 3,25; 5,9; Eph 1,7; 2,13; Col 1,20; Heb 10,19; 13,20; Rev 1,5; 5,9 the literal word “blood” has been paraphrased “death”. In only one of the above verses, by one translator, was this done in any of the dozen or so translations consulted for each of these verses.

In the light of the modernistic leanings of the GNB, it arouses suspicion as to whether there is some inherent dislike of the old fashioned evangelical associations of the Blood of Christ, Perhaps It was inspired by the same spirit which wished to delete all hymns referring to the Blood from the Anglican hymnal.

“Death” is not even a proper translation of “blood”. After all, death does not automatically imply the shedding of blood. In view of the vital theological importance of the Blood of Christ, any alternative translation is altogether unwarranted as well as unnecessary.

(e) Isaiah 7.14

The predictive element is wholly lost in the GNB rendering of this verse: *“A young woman who is pregnant will have a son”*. There is not even an indication in a footnote of the possibility of a *future* fulfillment. Thus we find confirmed two trends found earlier: a dislike of predictive prophecy; and an undermining of the glory of Christ.

Another instance of the latter is found in Luke 1,27 where the Greek word for “virgin” is translated “girl”.

(f) Acts 20.28

The AV renders this verse *“... feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”*. This translation is supported by the Amplified, Living Bible, NASV, Williams, Beck, NIV, RV, N.E.B. and Weymouth.

The GNB, however, robs this verse of its full power by *translating “which he made his own through the death of His Son”*. Apart from again exchanging “blood” for “death”, the GNB has robbed Christ of another testimony to His deity. The other translations imply that the Blood of Christ was in very fact the Blood of God Himself. The GNB, however, entirely deletes this implication. Only the modernistic RSV in any way supports the GNB, and even the RSV relegates the GNB rendering to a footnote.

2. INACCURATE TRANSLATIONS

The GNB professes to be an accurate translation. In the Fontana New Testament edition, for example, we are informed of the “*scrupulous scholarly accuracy*” said to characterise it. A (Jesuit) reviewer also commends it as “*accurate*”. The Old and New Testament edition claims to be “*accurate and reliable ... and is suitable both for general reading and for study purposes.*”

This claim is significantly qualified, however, by comments in the Preface: “*the translators have tried to avoid words and forms not in current or widespread use ... Consequently there has been no attempt to reproduce in English the parts of speech, sentence-structure, word-order, and grammatical devices of the original languages*”. In other words, although the GNB is not a paraphrase such as the Living Bible; neither is it a literal translation. The translators’ approach is described as firstly trying to ascertain as clearly as possible the meaning of the original texts, and then phrasing it in the way they felt best suited their overall purposes, rather than translating as literally as possible consistent with intelligible English.

It may be that some benefit can be gained from non-literal translations, but it can certainly never be said that they are suited for study purposes, as the GNB claims to be. Nor, in my opinion, may they be justifiably considered accurate. Once a translation removes from a literal rendering of the original, implications that accompanied the original form of words are lost for ever, and new implications may accompany the new form of words which were never intended by the Holy Ghost.

Not only does the GNB incline towards a looser form of translation, it also explicitly seeks to replace traditional vocabulary with words in current use, regardless of whether this change conveys a faithful representation of the original.

Let us consider some specific examples to illustrate cases of unfortunate abandoning of traditional vocabulary, and inaccurate translation.

Redemption

Every subject possesses technical words which carry a wide range of implications, much wider than the strict literal meaning of the individual words themselves. It is for this reason that the GNB alternative rendering of the “Blood” is so unfortunate. Likewise the word “redemption” implies far more than its strict etymological sense of “to buy back”.

By virtue of its OT usage, redemption came to signify the release of a bondservant from an oppressive debtor to whom he had sold himself, together with the full recovery of his lost title to his original inheritance. It is doubtless helpful for expositors to use alternative words in their attempts to show believers all that is involved in the word “redemption”. For a translation to permanently discard a technical “loaded” word of this nature, however, is very unwise and inevitably leads to some loss of the full implications and associations of the original.

The usual GNB rendering of this word is “set free” (cp Lk 24:21; Ro 3.24; 8.23; 1 Cor 1.30; Eph 1.7,14; 4.30). Although this conveys the fact of our being freed from an oppressive bondage, it fails to convey two other concepts equally included in the word “redemption”:

- The fact of our being set free by a Kinsman, &
- the restoration of the original inheritance once lost by man. To be set free does not automatically imply a recovery of all that has been lost.

In addition to draining away part of the meaning of the word “redemption”, a brief look at 2 verses will further illustrate the fallacy of the GNB claim to be suitable for study purposes.

- In Ro 8.23, the GNB reads “... *we also groan within ourselves, as we wait for God to set our whole being free*”. This obscures the Greek sense of “*the redemption of the body*”, that we might be adorned with a body like the body of His glory.
- In 1 Cor 1,30 the GNB reads “... *by Him (i.e. Christ) we are ... set free*”. The original does not say that Christ redeemed us, but that He was Himself the redemption. He did not just pay the redemption price; He was the price.

Spiritual Gifts

In the original NT edition of the GNB. “*to speak with tongues*” was translated “*strange sounds*” (eg 1 Cor 12.28,30; 14,2, etc). A sound is not necessarily a language. If I throw a chair, it will make a sound, but that does not mean that chairs have the ability to articulate.

Such an inaccurate translation can easily give the impression of some kind of incoherent babble instead of a supernaturally imparted ability to speak in a properly articulated language hitherto unknown.

When the complete GNB was printed this unfortunate rendering was amended to “*strange languages*”. But there is still no warrant in the original Greek for the word “*strange*”. We read of new tongues, other tongues, unknown tongues and diversities of tongues, but nowhere of strange tongues. In Mark 16.17, for example, the GNB reads “*Believers will ... speak in strange tongues*”, even though the Greek clearly says “*new tongues*”.

The GNB rendering is not therefore a translation with any Holy Spirit authority, but a reflection on the translators’ own understanding of the gift of tongues. No doubt such tongues are strange to them, but it still does not justify their mistranslation, nor give confidence in their translation ability.

When we come to praying and singing in the Spirit we find equally inaccurate renderings.

- “*Even if your prayer of thanks to God is quite good*” is not a true rendering of the Greek “*thou verily givest thanks well*” (1 Cor 14.17). To give thanks in the Spirit is not merely *quite* good, it is good.
- Further evidence of a lack of comprehension of Biblical realities is found in Ephesians 5.18-19 where the GNB translates “*Spiritual songs*” as “*sacred songs*”. There are multitudes of sacred songs, but not all are inspired by the Spirit. The songs referred to here are supernatural, whether in other tongues or in the vernacular. Furthermore, the teaching of the blessed gift of heaven—sent Spiritual music (as opposed to the words of a Spiritual song) is also lost in the GNB “*sing hymns and psalms to the Lord*” compared with the literal “*singing and making melody*”.

The most significant fact about these inaccurate and misleading renderings is the fact that they need not have happened. Even if the translators did not understand the supernatural

manifestations referred to, if they had simply translated what the original had said they could still have given an accurate translation. When men take upon themselves to put down what they think the original means, they move into the realm of interpretation, not translation, and leave themselves open to many dangers.

The words “*prophecy*” and “*prophet*” are usually unnecessarily paraphrased rather than translated in the GNB as: to be given, speak or proclaim God’s message; or, to be God’s messenger (eg Lk 1.67; Acts 2.17-18, 19.6; 1 Cor 12.10; 14.1-4, 29, 32, 37). Prophecy is also translated as inspired messages or preaching (1 Cor 13.2,9).

Such paraphrases can weaken the reader’s understanding (particularly if this is the only version used) of the wholly supernatural nature of prophecy. It is often loosely said that a preacher is “*bringing God’s message for the evening*”. This certainly does not automatically mean that he will then prophesy. Even GNB references to “*inspired*” preaching leave something to be desired since the word “*inspired*” in current usage certainly does not carry the automatic implication that accompanies the Biblical word “*prophecy*”.

When dealing with translators with modernistic tendencies, there is always a suspicion as to why the original words could not have just been left alone.

Miscellaneous

In concluding I wish to point out one or two other instances to further illustrate the poor quality of the GNB English translation.

(a) Matthew 16.18

Whereas the Greek merely says “*Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church*”, the GNB expands this to “*I tell you Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church*”.

Nor is the rest of the verse translated any more accurately: “*the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*” is rendered “*not even death will be able to overcome it*”. Death is not the same as “the gates of Hades”. The GNB version also gives the distinct impression of death attacking the Church, instead of the Church on the offensive against the gates of Hades. (Has anyone ever seen the gates of a besieged city on the offensive?).

(b) Matthew 26.39

“*Father let this cup pass from me*” is interpreted in the GNB “*this cup of suffering*”. There is no warrant for this in the Greek. There are two views of what our Lord was asking at this point:

- to be excused from the suffering of Calvary; and
- to be kept from dying there and then so as to be physically able to go to the Cross.

Whichever is correct, the GNB has preempted the issue by adding extra words not found in the original, and thus interpreting rather than translating the original.

(c) The Spirit of God

In several instances the GNB takes upon itself to translate verses referring to Spirit of God as

merely the power of God. This has no warrant in the original; the Hebrew word involved may also mean “wind”, but not “power”. There is thereby a diminished sense of the reality and personality of the Holy Spirit. For example:

- Genesis 1.2 is rendered “the power of God was moving over the water”.
- Exodus 31.3 and 35.31 in the GNB speak of Bezaleel merely being filled with God’s power.
- Those “*filled with the Spirit of wisdom*” in Exodus 28.3 are simply described as having been given “*ability*” by the GNB.
- Likewise, Joshua, “*a man in whom is the Spirit*” according to Numbers 27.18 is reduced to being merely “*a capable man*”.

The source of power and ability is completely deleted by these mistranslations.

I hope the few illustrations given serve as suitable indications of the poor quality of the English translation of the GNB, in addition to the dangers arising because of the modernistic tendencies of the editors.

3. THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS USED

We have now considered the modernistic leanings of those responsible for the GNB, and how these can affect the actual translation itself. We have also briefly examined the GNB tendency to depart from an accurate rendering as close to the original as is possible consistent with comprehensible English, thus leaving the way open for interpretations rather than faithful translations of the original. (Such interpretations will of course also be moulded by the modernistic inclinations mentioned).

Let us now consider the original Hebrew and Greek texts used as a starting point for the GNB translation.

It is not generally realised the scope which is available to Bible translators in deciding precisely what are the original words given by the Holy Ghost. Just as modernistic views may colour the selection of the English wording, there is also abundant opportunity for those views to select which words are to be chosen for translation.

Any adequate assessment of the worth of the English of the GNB must also consider the actual Greek and Hebrew chosen as the basis of that translation.

The Old Testament

The basic text used for the GNB Old Testament is the Massoretic Text, of which it may safely be said no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted.

The GNB translation procedure is as follows: “*Where no Hebrew source yields a satisfactory*

meaning in the context, the translation has either followed one or more of the ancient versions (i.e. translations of the original Hebrew) or has adopted a reconstructed text (technically referred to as a conjectural emendation) based on scholarly agreement". We are also informed that "In many cases the precise meaning of the original text is in dispute, and there are two or more different ways in which the text may be understood"; and also that "At times the original meaning cannot be precisely known, not only because the meaning of some words and phrases cannot be determined with a great degree of assurance . . .".

From the foregoing it is clear that abundant scope is available for the translators to exercise their own discretion in the choice of which original words they translate, as well as in selecting an English rendering for them. How safely may such a task be entrusted to those of modernistic tendencies?

Let us look more closely at three of the areas for freedom of choice indicated above.

(i) There are occasions when more than one English word or phrase may legitimately render the original. In such cases the correct choice requires not only linguistic ability, but also Spiritual discernment, a quality hardly likely to abound among those of modernistic inclinations. For example:

- In Daniel 7.13, *"one like the Son of Man"* is rendered *"what looked like a human being"*, despite the guidance available as to the proper sense from Matthew 24.30.
- Likewise the AV *"gall"* in Psalm 69.21 is rendered *"poison"* in the GNB, despite the fulfillment of this prophecy in Matthew 27.34 clearly saying *"gall"*. The GNB translation could be technically correct, but is Spiritually erroneous. The translators' theology colours their choice of words wherever there is room for an alternative. As already seen from their view of the book of Daniel, the GNB does not favour predictive prophecy.

It also seems that, whenever possible, predictions of Christ or verses exalting Him are watered down. For instance:

- In Micah 5.2, AV and RV *"whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"* is reduced to *"whose family line goes back to ancient times"*. Ancient is not eternal.
- Zechariah 6.13 *"and he shall be a priest"* is turned into *"A priest will stand by his throne"*. Thus the priest is made a separate person, removing the reference to the royal priesthood of Christ, combining the offices of both priest and King in Himself.
- Mention has been made earlier of how the GNB rendering of *"seed"* in Genesis 3.15 is a word normally implying the plural whereas in Hebrew a singular masculine verb is used. The GNB rendering of Genesis 21.12 reveals a further removal of any prophetic reference to Christ: *"through Isaac... you will have the descendants I have promised"*, even although Paul specifically emphasises the singular sense of the word *"seed"* in this verse in Galatians 3.16.
- In view of the treatment of Christ in these references, it is little surprise to see the GNB preferred translation of Psalm 45.6 referred to earlier, despite the explicit quotation of this verse in Hebrews 1.8.

(ii) Liberty is taken by the GNB translators, when they consider no *"satisfactory meaning"* is found in the Massoretic Hebrew text, to base their rendering on other ancient translations of the Hebrew.

It is illuminating to see what the G.N.B, does not consider a *"satisfactory"* meaning:

- In 1 Samuel 17.4 the height of Goliath is given as over 9 feet. A GNB footnote informs us, however, that one ancient Hebrew manuscript and one ancient translation render this “*about 2 metres*” (i.e. about 6 1/2 feet). It is fascinating to speculate why the basic text was considered unsatisfactory. After all, how can a man about 6 1/2 feet tall be properly considered a “*giant*” (1 Chr 20.8)? Perhaps it is to help our weak faith to better accept David’s supernaturally aided victory?
- Another example of what the GNB considers to be an unsatisfactory original text is found in Genesis 49.10, “*until Shiloh come*”. Even although this is what the Hebrew actually says, this Messianic reference is considered “*unclear*” by the GNB, and we are offered, “*Nations will bring him tribute*” as a (literally!) piece of guesswork as to what the original is supposed to have said before being corrupted by imagined copyists’ errors.

In view of the theological standpoint of the GNB no confidence can be placed in their judgement as to whether or not a particular word or passage in the original Hebrew is satisfactory or in need of amendment. Our confidence in the GNB Old Testament translation is further weakened when we realise there are over 330 changes from the original Massoretic text in favour of the wordings of ancient translations of the original.

The difficulty is not whether there are occasions when an alternative rendering is required to arrive at the correct meaning; it is the worry over what criteria prompt the GNB to conclude that the original Hebrew is unsatisfactory.

(iii) In the case of an alternative reading the translators’ freedom of choice is limited to the specific alternatives available. In some cases, however, the Hebrew text has been completely disregarded and the translator has adopted what the GNB calls “*a conjectural emendation based on scholarly agreement*”. In plain English this literally means a “*correction*” of the original *based on guesswork*.”

The claim of scholarly agreement holds little water when experience of earlier modernistic translations is considered. For instance, the New English Bible disagrees with the RSV in no less than 136 places out of the first 315 passages “*conjecturally emended*” by the RSV. So, although each of the 220 or so emendations adopted by the GNB is described as the “*probable text*”, the degree of probability depends to a very large degree on the personal opinions of the translators, not on objective facts.

Should there be any need for such emendations at all, no Bible-believer will want to go to those of modernistic tendencies to ascertain the true original reading. For example,

- In Psalm 2,11-12 we are informed the probable reading is “*Serve the Lord with fear .. bow down to him*”. Thus another Messianic allusion is lost.
- In Isaiah 53.8 “*fate*” has been substituted for “*generation*” (despite the quotation in Acts 8.33) apparently in accordance with a theory of Prof. G.R. Driver, a rank modernist. (In this instance the G.N.B, does not even give a footnote to indicate the fact. How many other unreported alterations to the original Hebrew are there?)
- The influence of modernistic theories concerning the presumed mass of copyists’ errors incorporated in our original Hebrew also seems to be reflected in the GNB footnote on Zechariah 4.10b-14. These verses are moved to another *location* “*in order to retain the natural order of the narrative*”. Who gave the GNB the authority to decide the natural order? Are we to conclude from this that the original order has somehow been lost? Remarks such as these only serve to cast the shadow of the spirit of doubt prevailing amongst modernistic theologians upon their handiwork, and to leave

uncertainty in the reader's mind as to the absolute final authority of the oracle of God.

The New Testament

Just as in the Old Testament, there is also scope in the New Testament for translators to select which particular words they prefer as the basis of their work.

In the GNB Preface we are informed that *“in a few instances the translation is based on a variant reading supported by one or more Greek manuscripts”*. Footnotes are also provided *“indicating some of the places where there are significant differences among the Greek manuscripts. These differences may consist of additions to the text (eg Mt 21.43), deletions (eg Mt 24.36), or substitutions (eg Mk 1.41)”*.

Our realisation of the extent of the translators' discretion is further enlarged when we are told *“In many places the precise meaning of the original text is in dispute, and there are two or more different ways in which the text may be understood”*. The reader is usually left completely at the mercy of the translators on such occasions as to which alternative they select, because it is only *“in some of the more important of such instances”* that we are specifically informed of this possibility, and of the alternative rendering.

In order to make abundantly clear the opportunity for personal theological opinions to influence the choice of the original Greek text, let me briefly outline how this text is formulated.

There are almost 5,000 surviving manuscripts of part or all of the New Testament and, whether accidentally or deliberately, there are frequent variations between them. For this reason any translator has first to formulate or select an agreed Greek text as his essential starting point, deciding which variations from his chosen standard he will accept depending upon his own particular viewpoints and theories. Consequently over the years several editions of what purports to be a basic Greek text have been published, each one varying according to the particular standpoints and suppositions of the editor.

It is important to appreciate that the correctness or otherwise of a particular Greek word or phrase is frequently not a matter of fact, but of opinion. Even in a literal translation, therefore, there is scope for the translator's personal theological views to be reflected in his choice of what actually constitutes the basic Greek text. Is it wise for such a choice to be entrusted to those of modernistic inclinations?

As an indication of what this may involve, let us consider the statement in the Fontana NT Preface that *“verses marked with brackets are not in the oldest and best manuscripts of the New Testament”*. The claim that the oldest manuscripts are also the best is certainly not a settled fact. It is based on certain 19th C theories of modernistic textual critics, the baneful influence of which is still with us. (It would take too long properly to explain this in the necessary detail).

Based on this

- the following (AV) verses are taught as being unreliable: Matt 6.13b; 18.11; 23.14; Mk 6.16; 9.44,46; 11.26; 15.28; 16.9-20; Lk 17.36; 23.17; Jn 5.3b-4; 8.1-11; Acts 8.37; 15.34; 24.6b-8a.; 28.29.
- doubt is cast on Lk 22.43-44 among others.

- In Jn 3.13, *“the Son of Man which is in heaven”* is omitted without even a footnote.
- In 1 Tim 3.16 *“God was manifest in the flesh”* becomes simply *“He appeared in human form”*, without any acknowledgement at all of the substantial evidence in favour of *“God”*. The deity of Christ is clearly not a favourite GNB doctrine!
- In Matthew 1.25 *“firstborn son”* becomes merely *“son”*.
- In Luke 2.33 *“Joseph”* becomes *“father”*, with implications for the doctrine of the virgin birth. In both this and the last case the (unacknowledged) reason for the choice is selection of alternative Greek readings.

4. CONCLUSION

I have emphasised throughout the scope for personal choice open to the editors of the GNB both in selecting or amending the actual original text that formed the basis of their translation, and also in their choice of English words. This is because the modernistic inclinations of the editors are inevitably bound to affect their choices.

So, if it is felt that a freer, non-literal translation has some benefit for believers, it is clearly far wiser to choose a version edited by those whose attitude to the Word would be shared by born-again believers. No confidence can be placed in a version such as the GNB, which cannot even be trusted to translate accurately even when the wording of the original text is not in dispute.

The Good News Bible is neither accurate, nor suitable for study purposes. It is not to be recommended.

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