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## The New English Bible

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# The New English Bible

By FREDERICK W. DANKER

THE appearance of *The New English Bible: New Testament (NEB)*<sup>1</sup> may mark one of the most significant English religious publications since the Holy Scriptures first went to press. This work is not a retouching of old masters but wears with proud distinction and integrity the title *new*. Because it communicates in timely idiom and yet with timeless phrase it merits classification with the choicest products of *English* literary art. The lavish scholarly resources that entered into its production are unparalleled in history. To enter into critical judgment with a work of such magnitude is no mean task. The best that we can hope to do is communicate something of the genius of this notable publication, to express appreciation, and to pinpoint areas for further consideration.

Since there is nothing quite like this publication in the history of the translation of the Sacred Scriptures into English, we are at a loss to find something to which we can "liken it." Any previous translation or revision will seem less brilliant by comparison. Yet some kind of comparative analysis is necessary to convey even a small appreciation of the critical excellencies and deficiencies of this new venture. Since the Revised Standard Version (RSV) will be the nearest competitor of this translation we shall in the course of this study make frequent reference to that version.<sup>2</sup> The reader must keep in mind, however, that

the committee responsible for RSV was carrying out instructions to retain as much as possible of the flavor of the King James Version and its descendants and did not enjoy the same freedom that the translators of NEB display. Certain excellencies therefore of the latter translation must be recognized without disparagement to those responsible for RSV. Ultimately it is the reading public who will decide which version is to be preferred for either private or public use. To help provide a portion of the data for the forming of sound judgment is the burden of this study.

## IDIOMATIC ENGLISH

The first test of a work which claims to be a new translation is whether it communicates in contemporary terms without erasing to the point of illegibility the historical gap. Felicitous expressions meet one everywhere in astounding prodigality. There is the rasp of desert sand in words like these, "No bullying; no blackmail; make do with your pay!" Luke 3:14. That captures the man who dared to take the path to greatness through the obscure way. The social game of petty character sniping comes to a halt at words like these:

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, with never a thought for the great plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, "My dear brother, let me take the speck out of your

<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful to the publishers of the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* for permission to incorporate material published under his name, March 19, 1961, p. 4 F.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise specified, reference is made to the edition of the complete Bible pub-

lished in 1952. For a critique of this version see my *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (St. Louis, 1960), pp. 180-184. The "Reference Edition with Concise Concordance" (New York, 1959) introduced significant alterations and corrections and is referred to in the footnotes as RSV<sup>3</sup>.



eye," when you are blind to the plank in your own? You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's.

RSV landlubbers caught none of the spray in Matt. 14:24. It takes a seafaring people to picture the disciples "battling with a head-wind and a rough sea." Another meteorological phenomenon is neatly documented in Luke 12:55, "And when the wind is from the south, you say, 'There will be a heat-wave; and there is.'" Of the conniving Pharisees it is said parenthetically that "(Their aim was to frame a charge against Him.)" Contrast this with RSV's less virile "so that they might accuse Him" (Matt. 12:10). Once Paul proudly trotted out the family album and held up his coat of arms, only to casually cancel out the glittering lineage of "a Hebrew born and bred" (Phil. 3:5), with the line "But all such assets I have written off because of Christ" (Phil. 3:7). To underscore his meaning he counts it "so much garbage" (Phil. 3:8). RSV perfumed the stench with a squeamish "I . . . count them as refuse." In Matt. 18:24 NEB spares us the use of a monetary slide rule; the unforgiving rascal's debt, we are told, "ran into millions." And in Phil. 2:20 Paul characterizes Timothy, "There is no one else who sees things as I do." These are but a few examples picked at random. Every page sparkles with the brilliance of idiomatic clarity. But does the translation purchase such gems of facile and contemporaneous expression at the expense of integrity and accuracy?

#### JOTS AND TITLES

The scholars responsible for this translation profess that they have endeavored to

avoid slipshod work. The results bear out the validity of their claim. In meticulous attention to the text NEB outshines RSV. Matt. 15:27 sets a tricky trap for the unwary interpreter. NEB does not fall into it. Several versions, including Moffatt, Phillips, and RSV (1952 and 1959) read "*master's* table." NEB renders, "yet the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their *masters'* table." The position of the apostrophe makes all the difference. NEB correctly observes that the point of the woman's reply is this: These little children are kind masters; they feed their dogs; just treat me as these little masters treat their canine friends.

#### LEXICOGRAPHY

In John 7:8 RSV overlooks the force of ταῦτην;<sup>3</sup> NEB correctly renders, "I am not going up to *this* festival." On the other hand, in Matt. 21:5, we find RSV more accurately reflecting Matthew's understanding of the prophecy from Zechariah. NEB fails to translate the second significant καί.

The precision of Paul's references to homosexual perversions in 1 Cor. 6:9 is not maintained by NEB's paraphrase "homosexual perversion," although this rendering is more accurate than RSV's paraphrase "homosexuals." It is the perverted act that Paul decries, not a physical or psychological condition. On the other hand, the original specifies males, specifically "catamites" and "sodomites," to which RSV makes allusion in a marginal note, "Two Greek words are rendered by this expression." NEB contains no note on the passage.

The phrase "vessels which were objects of retribution due for destruction" (NEB,

<sup>3</sup> Corrected in RSV<sup>3</sup>.



Rom. 9:22) stresses the historical perspective suggested by the context more than RSV's "made for destruction." "I have not come to invite virtuous people, but to call sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32) expresses precisely the point made in Luke's Gospel. Jesus recognizes valid legal attainments, but He wants Israel's religious elite to share the experience of God's love.

NEB manages to combine idiomatic grace with literal conversion of the metaphor in Jude 4, rendering, "the very men whom *Scripture* long ago *marked* down." Contrast this with RSV's "some who long ago were designated."

"Enforced justice" (RSV, Heb. 11:33) expresses an ambiguity not found in the original. NEB's "established justice" fits philological requirements. Similarly in Heb. 12:17 NEB exactly expresses Esau's tragic circumstance, "he found no way open for second thoughts." RSV ("found no chance to repent") prompts a sympathetic tear for Esau but suggests to the heedless reader a misrepresentation of the writer's thought.

NEB handles well the phrase *πρώτην πίστιν ἠθέτησαν*, (1 Tim. 5:12), condemned "for breaking their *troth* with Him." RSV renders "first pledge."

RSV claims to be able to classify with some precision Jonah's marvellous aquatic hotel, but NEB, as does the original, leaves the zoological slot undetermined and advisedly renders "sea monster" (Matt. 12:40). RSV's "weeds" (Matt. 13:25) might also be pulled out in favor of the more accurate "darnel" of NEB. What is the force of *ἀπό* in Heb. 13:24? NEB preserves what is now an ambiguity with the happy rendering, "Greetings to you from our Italian friends." RSV more confidently

"Those who come from Italy send you greetings."

Luke's entire prolog reads more fluently and precisely in NEB than in RSV. NEB's rendering "as one who has gone over the whole course of events in detail" (1:3) is preferable philologically as well as stylistically to RSV's "having followed all things closely for some time past." (See J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* [New York, 1953], ad loc., on the passage.)

There appears in James 2:4 a refractory *διεχρίθητε*. The British render, "do you not see that you are *inconsistent* and judge by false standards?" RSV offers the non-descript, "have you not made distinctions among yourselves. . . ?"

John 1:5 with its use of the word *καταλαμβάνω* drives translators to despair. RSV rendered, "the darkness has not *overcome* it" (i.e., the Light). NEB interprets, "has never *quenched* it." Neither version alerts the reader to the ambivalence, involving the thought both of hostility and mental apprehension. A problem passage like this (and it is but one of many) should of course remind the student that no translation, not even such masterful works as RSV and NEB, can relieve him of the necessity of learning Greek and maintaining its mastery. (For a similar problem see John 3:36, *ἀπειθέω*.)

#### SYNONYMS

The translators responsible for both RSV and NEB wisely refrained from attempting to render uniformly a Greek word with a single English equivalent. In this respect they emulated their predecessors responsible for the KJV who, in guileless accents of destiny, defended their use of synonyms on the ground that if they dealt unequally with a number of good



English words some of them might be banished forever. They are equally aware that synonyms in one language may be adequately expressed by a single word in another language. However, on some passages there may be legitimate debate, and it is the translator's obligation to provide his reader with the data, as long as he does not thereby obscure his author's intent. NEB encourages confidence in the reader by distinguishing carefully the two verbs, *κηρύσσω* and *εὐαγγελίζω* in 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6 respectively. Jesus "made his *proclamation* to the imprisoned spirits" (3:19), and the Gospel was "*preached* to those who are dead" (4:6). RSV closes the debate by rendering both terms with "preach." Similarly in Luke 1:42 and 45 NEB reveals that two different Greek words are used. RSV renders both with "blessed."

#### TAKE YOUR CHOICE

In many cases a word may be understood differently in the same passage. Thus NEB (like RSV) reads "elemental spirits of the universe" in Gal. 4:3 (see also v.9; Col. 2:8,20) with the note "*Or, the elements of the natural world, or elementary ideas belonging to this world.*" Again, in 1 Cor. 7:36 an alternative "virgin daughter" is noted in the margin. RSV also noted alternative renderings in passages containing ambiguities of this nature, but neither version follows a consistent pattern. Thus for the two passages just mentioned RSV includes no marginal notes. On the other hand the American version offers more data than NEB in a section like 1 Cor. 1—6 (see especially 4:17 and 5:11).

#### GRAMMATICAL PROBLEMS

The translator's precision will betray itself especially in the handling of a highly

inflected language. Although the Koine of the New Testament does not display the fine classical distinctions, yet tenses and voices are not used indiscriminately. Certainly RSV's grammatical sensitivity falters in the rendering, "all were baptized into Moses" (1 Cor. 10:2). The form is middle and the British reproduce it faithfully, "they all received baptism." Precision is important here because Paul's point is that the Israelites accepted Moses' leadership by getting themselves baptized, as it were, in the crossing of the Red Sea. NEB preserves an active voice in Eph. 5:27. RSV reads, "that the church might be presented before Him."<sup>4</sup> NEB drops the words *μηδὲν διακρίναντα* Acts 11:12, into the margin but offers a more accurate translation ("making no distinctions") than RSV, which treated the active as a middle, "without hesitation."<sup>5</sup>

RSV's rendering of Mark 9:38 would suggest that the disciples were proud of the fact that they had successfully restrained a nonunion exorcist, "we forbade him." NEB captures the true situation described in the imperfect *ἐκωλύομεν*, "we tried to stop him." The Gadarenes "took to their heels," says NEB (Matt. 8:33), translating the aorist *ἔφυγον*; RSV: "The herdsmen fled." In Matt. 21:38 the rebel tenants exclaim in RSV, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and *have* his inheritance." NEB again displays a superior grammatical awareness of the aorist *σχῶμεν*, "Let us kill him, and *get* his inheritance." Mark 1:36 reads in RSV, "And Simon and those who were with him *followed* Him." NEB notes the aorist, "But Simon and his companions *sought* Him out." That is translating!

<sup>4</sup> Corrected in RSV<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Corrected in RSV<sup>3</sup>.



Unlike RSV, NEB displays awareness of the perfect tense in John 11:27 and renders "I now believe." And in John 20:31 the present tense of πιστεύω is caught up in the wording, "Those here written have been recorded in order that you may hold the faith." Only occasionally does NEB miss the force of a verb, as in Mark 1:12, where RSV is to be preferred.

Inflected pronouns are occasionally too supple for a precise translation into a language of meager inflections. RSV is content with a note alerting to the change of *you* from plural to singular in the original of Luke 22:31, 32. NEB lives up to its claim not to be slipshod and deftly renders, "Simon, Simon, take heed: Satan has been given leave to sift all of you like wheat; but for you I have prayed that your faith may not fail." That is quality work. Nor is this an isolated occurrence. A parallel phenomenon occurs in John 1:50, 51. Here RSV does not even bother with a marginal note. NEB again comes through with a clear reproduction of pronominal distinctions in the original.

#### SEMITISM

RSV was apparently embarrassed by the Semitism in Heb. 6:14. The NEB has naturalized this alien tautology, "I vow that I will bless you abundantly and multiply your descendants." With similar grace NEB renders a pleonasm in Col. 2:1 with the phrase, "the Laodiceans and all who have never set eyes on me."

#### SYNTAX

Syntactical relations often require an especially sensitive comprehension, bred by long acquaintance with the language. Several logical interpretations may be offered for a series of words, but only one,

except when we are dealing with a slipshod writer, can ordinarily be correct.

John 20:19 and 20 contains a sample of the kind of see-saw material that can plague the interpreter. In this case NEB has unmistakably sensed the intimate connection between the peace announced by Jesus and the price our Lord paid for it. "'Peace be with you!' He said, and then showed them His hands and His side." RSV partially breaks the link.

Does ὁ ὢν in Rom. 9:5 go with θεός, which follows, or with ὁ Χριστός, which precedes? To charge either RSV or NEB with willful refusal to support the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ because they both interpret the latter half of the verse as an independent doxology would be indicative not only of uncharitable judgment but also of profound ignorance of the entire subject of Pauline theology, not to speak of such passages as Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, where the deity of Jesus Christ is strongly affirmed in contrast with the interpretation of the King James Version. Both versions include the minority reports of their committees, so that the reader has access to the data on essential points like this.

In some cases the Greekless reader can only recognize the existence of a syntactical problem by comparing the two versions. Thus RSV reads, "When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15, 16). NEB reads, "The Spirit you have received is . . . a Spirit that makes us sons, enabling us to cry 'Abba! Father!' In that cry the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children." In either case the meaning is clear, and it may be that Paul knew what he wanted to say, but on



reading it over also recognized the ambiguity. But he might have said to himself, "Either way. To have the Spirit is to be a son. To be a son means to cry Abba! Father!" Neither version includes a marginal note on the passage.

As a further reminder to the preacher that he cannot dispense with his Greek New Testament we call attention to NEB's and RSV's rendering of Acts 9:17. The original contains a bit of delicate syntax. Ananias does not simply say, "The Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me to you." Ananias lights a slow fuse. "Saul," he says, "the Lord has sent me here; (I mean) Jesus who appeared to you on your way here." It is easy for us to call Jesus Lord, but at this point Saul of Tarsus was still in theological preschool.

Occasionally NEB and RSV simply transmit the syntactical ambiguity of the text. We will probably never know what the subject of ἐποίησαν in John 12:16 really is. Is it the crowds or the disciples? The two versions cut the knot with a passive construction.

#### PARAPHRASE OR LITERAL TRANSLATION

In their introductory remarks the translators of NEB frankly acknowledge that they do not hesitate to resort to paraphrase when the intent of the original can be expressed adequately in no other way. They will be criticized for this by those who forget that KJV and RSV frequently do the same things. A notable instance of paraphrase in RSV is 1 Cor. 16:12, where God is made responsible for Apollos' failure to visit Corinth. The word θεός does not occur in the text. NEB makes Apollos responsible for the decision, with a marginal note acknowledging the alternative

adopted by RSV. The margin in RSV notes the paraphrase which NEB adopts in the text.

In Heb. 2:8 RSV utilizes interpretive paraphrase "in subjection to *man*."<sup>6</sup> This rendering brings out the point made by the author of Hebrews that the words of Ps. 8:5-7 LXX cannot really be understood apart from Jesus Christ. The psalm says all things have been subjected to man, but this is not really true, says the writer of Hebrews, if ordinary men only are kept in mind (Heb. 2:8). But there is a man to whom these words do apply, *Jesus*, who was made a little lower than angels, but now has all things under His control. NEB is more literal but not so helpful to the reader as on other occasions.

To avoid concatenations tedious to western ears, in place of RSV's literal "And he preached, saying," NEB renders, "His proclamation ran. . . ." (Mark 1:7)

The causal connection between forgiveness and love's response is securely caught in the story of the grateful sinner, "her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven" (NEB, Luke 7:47. RSV not so clearly).

1 Tim. 3:2 is a passage that not only tests the skill of the private interpreter but the integrity of a committee dedicated to an honest reproduction of the text. Once again the British toss it off with aplomb. Not only is the historical evolution of ecclesiastical offices recognized ("Our leader, therefore, or bishop," begins the verse) but the delicate matter of the "bishop's" marital conduct is tactfully disposed of in the phrase, "faithful to his one wife." Polygamy is hardly condemned here by the writer, otherwise polyandry must be

<sup>6</sup> RSV<sup>3</sup> reads "in subjection to him."



inferred in 5:9. "Married only once" (RSV, with a note to the effect that the Greek reads "the husband of one wife") is not an impossible rendering, but the context emphasizes present attitudes and skills.<sup>7</sup> Yet these minority reports are there in NEB's margin.

NEB sounds the explicit eschatological note in Matt. 5:6 with the words "How blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail." It is the Messianic hope for deliverance, the end-time display of God's "righteousness" or "deliverance," prophesied by Isaiah (46:13 LXX), which is described here. God's people need not wait any longer. In the person of Jesus "they shall be satisfied."

Did John the Baptist appear "dressed in silks and satins?" asks Jesus (NEB, Luke 7:25). Contrast this with RSV's moth-balled "raiment." What was the ship "Twin Brothers" (RSV, Acts 28:11)? NEB tells us, "the *Castor and Pollux*." And who will fail to feel the bite of "tooth and nail" in Gal. 5:15?

Readers with a background in the Old Testament will readily associate God with the "wrath" mentioned in Rom. 12:19, but for him who reads on the run NEB thoughtfully amplifies, "leave a place for divine retribution."

Contrast NEB's pungent expansion of κατὰστροφήν in Phil. 3:2, "Beware of those who insist on mutilation — 'circumcision' I will not call it," with RSV's pedestrian paraphrase "look out for those who mutilate the flesh." Paul is blunt, too blunt sometimes for modern ears. It is a display of the loftiest art to communicate his sense

without offense — NEB succeeds. And who can fail to understand Paul when he says in the same letter, "I have been very thoroughly initiated into the human lot with all its ups and downs"? (NEB, Phil. 4:12)

The grumbling of disappointment is expressed in no uncertain terms in John 6:60, "This is more than we can stomach! Why listen to such words?" (NEB) Contrast this with RSV's "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" More literal indeed, but will the rank and file digest it?

In Rom. 2:28,29 RSV added the word "real" or "true" several times. NEB follows this lead and expresses with an additional word what the Greek can express by word position. The original, one might say, is being "fortified" to protect the text against loss of meaning in translation. Luther did this in his notable, to some notorious, rendering of Rom. 3:28.

"Friend, do what you are here to do" is NEB's paraphrase of a difficult ellipse in Matt. 26:50. One can scarcely imagine a more precise rendering to contrast Jesus' regal bearing and Judas' cheap hypocrisy. Never mind the formalities, says Jesus. Take care of the business you're here for!

What is the meaning of 1 Cor. 9:24? From RSV one might infer that since only one can win the prize, the Christian must be sure to be the first one to break the tape. NEB more intelligibly suggests that Paul does not race dry his own metaphor: "Like them, run to win!" That is a real demonstration of the translator's art, not to speak of careful scholarship.

It is clear that both versions indulge in frequent paraphrase. The reader will be able to discover for himself that NEB's incidence is higher than RSV's. This is to be expected, since NEB aims at a completely

<sup>7</sup> RSV<sup>3</sup> reads "husband of one wife," 1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6, "wife of one husband," 1 Tim. 5:9.



new translation rather than a revision of previous versions. On the other hand we regret that NEB has not made a few more expansions of the text in the interests of clarity. Instead of imitating RSV's obscure "spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23)<sup>8</sup> NEB might have provided some hint that moral perfection is not the concern here but rather that these are people who now enjoy the fulfillment of their hopes.

### THEOLOGY

As far as we can observe, NEB grinds no theological axes. Scrupulous regard for the text is a prime consideration. Hence the unpauline theology in RSV's rendering of Rom. 3:30, "justify . . . the uncircumcised because of their faith" is not supported by NEB, which correctly renders, "*through* their faith."<sup>9</sup> The phrase "through his blood" is omitted by the British (as in RSV) in the translation of Col. 1:14, and for textual-critical reasons, but the same statement will be found in Eph. 1:7.

RSV's "destined," 1 Peter 2:8, suggests to the untrained reader a specific theological concept not implied in the Greek. The original is less technical, and NEB happily renders, "Such was their appointed lot." Again, in Titus 3:5 NEB properly accents the Holy Spirit as source of the renewal mentioned; RSV emphasizes the qualitative aspect, "renewal *in* the Holy Spirit."

NEB is less ambiguous than RSV in the translation of Rev. 20:4, 5. The meaning turns on the force of *ἐξήσαν* in both verses. NEB renders "came to life again" in v. 4, but the rendering "though the rest of the

dead did not come to life" in v. 5 clearly shows that the British committee does not wish its adverbial additive "again" to be understood in the sense of a double resurrection. RSV, which employs "again" in both cases, may offer undesigned comfort to distorters of Johannine eschatology.<sup>10</sup>

How does faith show itself? NEB offers for James 2:22 not only an idiomatically expressive rendering but also one that is philologically precise, "by these actions the integrity of his faith was fully proved." This is much superior to RSV's literal but equivocal "faith was completed by works."

According to RSV, Heb. 4:15 views our Lord's sinlessness quantitatively, with accent on the overt act; NEB renders literally, "without sin." C. H. Dodd's work on "realized eschatology" surfaces in the rendering of Mark 9:1.

NEB's treatment of *ἐκκλησία* will undoubtedly arouse much comment and therefore calls for more extensive discussion. Like KJV and RSV, the British translators do not hesitate to use different terms to express the meaning of this word. KJV, however, limited its deviation from the rendering "church" to Acts 19:32, 39, 41, which called for the less technical English expression, "assembly." RSV, in addition to the passages in Acts 19, introduces this rendering in Heb. 12:23, echoing its normal reproduction of *לְקָהָל* in the Old Testament. In Acts 7:38 and Heb. 2:12, RSV uses "congregation," in reference to the Israel of the Old Testament; the word "church" is reserved by RSV exclusively for definition of the *Christian* believers (74 times). The "studied avoidance of uniformity" in NEB's rendering of *ἐκκλησία* produces "church," "assembly,"

<sup>8</sup> NEB reads "spirits of good men made perfect."

<sup>9</sup> This is also the corrected reading of RSV<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> RSV<sup>3</sup> omits the word "again."



"congregation," "community," and "meeting," with certain discernible patterns. "Church" is the normal rendering when notice is taken simply of God's redeemed people, without reference to geography (Matt. 16:18; Acts 5:11; 8:3; 9:31; 1 Cor. 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Eph. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:15). Inconsistencies in this respect are references to the "church" in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22) and in the cities of Asia Minor (Rev. 1—3), whereas the Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26) and in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2) form a "congregation," the term ordinarily used by NEB to define a specific group of Christians in a given locality (see, e. g., Matt. 18:17; Acts 14:23; 20:18; Rom. 16:1). When the plural ἐκκλησίαι occurs, NEB, with the exception of Rev. 22:16, renders "congregations." Where mutual edification is implied with emphasis on the reciprocal sharing of the Spirit's gifts, NEB felicitously renders "community," (1 Cor. 12:28 and 14:4), the context clearly indicating the type of community that is meant; however, the use of "church" (14:12) in the same context comes as a surprise. NEB renders ἐκκλησία with "assembly" in Acts 19:32, 39, 41; Heb. 2:12; 12:23. The rendering "meeting" appears twice (1 Cor. 14:28, 34). Occasionally the original expression is paraphrased, as in Acts 7:38, "when they were assembled there in the desert"; in 2 Cor. 8:19 "they" refers back to the previous verse.

On the whole we are convinced that the doctrine of the church finds more expressive enunciation in NEB than in either KJV or RSV. The pattern of consistency traced by the translators in dealing with a term that refracts in so many hues suggests no low aim.

### TEXT

In the main NEB, like RSV, reflects the Westcott-Hort tradition and the student will note but few departures from the text in Nestle, although NEB, in line with recent trends in textual criticism, is inclined to be a little freer in these departures than RSV. One might, however, have anticipated that the British translators would have profited from the discomfiture of the sponsors of RSV, who were quick to change "some" and "many ancient authorities" (RSV, 1946) to simply "other ancient authorities" (1952). NEB's almost uniform "some witnesses" is something less than informative.

NEB's rendering of Matt. 27:16, 18 is an indication of the increased respect enjoyed by manuscripts other than Vaticanus and Sinaiticus and by the versions. The translators read "Jesus Bar-Abbas." This reading is to be preferred, not only because its absence in many manuscripts is quite probably an intentional scribal omission designed to maintain our Lord's dignity but also because it clarifies Pilate's description of Jesus as the one called Messiah. The governor has two men before him. Which one do they want? The marginal note "*Some witnesses omit Jesus*" might suggest that the preponderant manuscript evidence supports the translation, whereas Nestle records only Θῶς υἱοῦ τοῦ βασιλῆως Or in its apparatus. In contrast, at Luke 1:46 NEB observes that "*the majority of ancient witnesses*" read "Mary."

In John 19:29 NEB, on the authority of a single witness, 476 *prima manu*, reads "javelin" in place of RSV's hyssop. The reading ὑσσώπῳ is probably a very early corruption. Not only does it fail to make sense in the passage (the plant would



hardly be suitable for raising up a wet sponge) but it looks like a scribe's intentional conformation of the events with Ex. 12:22. (C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, New York, 1957, p. 460, defends the traditional reading.)

It is not clear what the British translators have done with Mark 1:41. They apparently prefer the reading ὀργισθεῖς but interpret our Lord's anger as "warm indignation," probably in the light of the context. On the other hand, we may have here a case of conflate mugwumping, despite the marginal notations, the mercy of the rejected reading combining with the anger of the preferred reading. Yet in view of the assurances in the introduction that the translators do not "remain on the fence," we must in charity conclude that we deal here with a genuine paraphrase. *Remis velisque!* once again we say to owners of a Greek Testament.

The only conjectural emendation of the text I have located to date in NEB is in Matt. 2:6, "Bethlehem in the land of Judah." The Greek reads καὶ σὺ βηθλέεμ, γῆ Ἰουδα. It may be, however, that the grammatical connections in the original are loose. NEB does not adopt RSV's conjectural omission of κύριος in Jude 5.

Most of the significant variations are noted by both versions in the margins, with considerable variation in treatment. But a future edition of NEB ought to strive for greater consistency. The washing of "beds" (Mark 7:4) is noted by RSV in the margin, but NEB fails to alert the reader to a reading which, though it is probably not original, nevertheless enjoys widespread support. Like RSV, NEB fails to note the fact that Matt. 9:13 has omitted the words "to repentance," read by the *Textus Receptus*.

### CRITICAL SENSIBILITIES

NEB, like RSV, displays the broad knowledge that only intimate acquaintance with the problems of Biblical research can promote, and it has tried to bridge the gap between the study and the pew. But the customary reluctance of British scholars as a whole to reflect the findings of Continental form historians reveals itself in passages where κύριος, when used as a vocative, is rendered "Sir!" thus obscuring the theological perspective from which the Gospels are written. In this respect RSV's readings are to be preferred, unless in a future edition the British note the alternate expression in the margin, or in the introduction alert the reader to their procedure in this and other matters. Moreover, as in the case of pronominal distinctions, NEB founders on the reefs of inconsistency. Are we to assume that the leper who says "Sir" (Matt. 8:6) displayed less appreciation of Jesus' person than the cowardly disciples who say "Lord" a few verses later (8:25; see also v. 21)? In Matt. 15:21-28 the whole point is lost in the "Sir" (vv. 22, 25, 27). The children, the "lords" of their dogs, take care of their charges; Jesus, the Lord, must do the same for His dependents. That was the dimension of the woman's faith, as Matthew relates it.

The 19th century quest for the historical Jesus is evident in both versions, "Truly this man was a son of God" (Mark 15:39; cf. Matt. 27:54),<sup>11</sup> and the omission in NEB of the second καὶ displays a failure to note Matthew's concern to show express fulfillment of Zech. 9:9.

<sup>11</sup> RSV<sup>3</sup> correctly reads: "Truly this man was the Son of God."



## PUNCTUATION

The careful Bible student must observe the telling use of punctuation marks in both versions. John 8:26 reads in NEB, "I have much to say about you—and in judgement." In a marginal note NEB observes that Jesus might well have asked the centurion, "Am I to come and cure" your son? (Matt. 8:7). RSV lacks this informative notation. Contrary to RSV's understanding of the passage, NEB cites John 3:16 as part of the conversation ascribed to Jesus, but like RSV views John 3:31-36 as the evangelist's editorial comment. In connection with both passages RSV notes alternative punctuation; NEB does not indicate the option. Both versions usually signal phrasing from the Old Testament and quotations from secular authors by the use of quotation marks as in Eph. 6:2 and 1 Cor. 15:33. In the absence of a specific rubric in the text, NEB is wont to add an informative phrase, "in the words of Scripture" (1 Cor. 10:20; Eph. 5:31), or "Scripture says" (1 Cor. 15:27). But neither version is consistent in the observance of quoted material. Paul's quotation of Deut. 19:15 in 2 Cor. 13:1, for example, is ignored by both RSV and NEB.

## DIVISIONS OF THE TEXT

NEB retains the verse divisions of 1551, but as marginal indicators, no effort being spared to clear all impediments from before the reader's eyes. We would suggest, however, since the Bible is a major book of reference, that a mark, something like the one used in Nestle (<sup>1</sup>) be placed in the text to mark the verse division when such division is not obviously marked by punctuation. On the other hand, commentators and producers of concordances must prepare to face the new day that is dawn-

ing in the translation of the Bible. Because of the trend toward idiomatic interpretation it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain an exact correspondence between the material contained in a single Greek verse and that of its English equivalent, and it may be necessary to cite the English Bible according to some new division of the text.

## CONSISTENCY

To avoid an inflexible consistency, and yet to elude the critic who insists on it—that is the translator's cliff-hanging peril. The British committee, like their American colleagues, and we might add, like their spiritual forbears of 1611, felt free to render the same Greek word by various equivalents. Nor did they feel bound to retain the word order or style of the original.

The translators of NEB must have known the hazard they were running when they retained a sprinkling of Elizabethan pronouns. Why, after displaying such judicious boldness in almost all other respects in producing a genuinely modern version, they hesitated here, this reader cannot imagine. The inevitable inconsistencies can only annoy even the most favorably impressed reader. Surely it must take a superior exegetical sensitivity to determine that "Thou" is to be read in Mark 1:11 and "You" in Matt. 25:37-45. Presumably Acts 9:5 is to suggest that Paul is still blind to theological facts. Ananias has been in training and is entitled to say "thou." (Cf. v. 13)

NEB almost consistently shies away from rendering ἰδοὺ, with some loss, however, to the reader who will not be able to appreciate the evident attempt, especially in Matthew and Luke, to recreate in the history of Jesus the atmosphere of God's redemptive activity documented in the Old



Testament. The word is highly significant in Luke 5:12 and 7:12, to mention but two examples. RSV does not hesitate to render "Behold" but is inconsistent in the retention. In one of the most familiar and dramatic passages, for no accountable reason, RSV resorts to a banal "Here is the man!" (John 19:5). On the other hand, "Behold" is used to render ἰδέ in v. 4. NEB more accurately expresses v. 4 with the words "Here he is," and renders v. 5 "Behold the Man!" In v. 14, on the other hand, both versions tersely announce, "Here is your King." (RSV punctuates the latter with an exclamation mark).

If NEB's treatment of ἰδοὺ is to be preferred to RSV's, so is its rendering of ὑποδήματα. RSV stumbled in modernizing Luke 15:22 and Acts 7:33 with "shoes" but retaining "sandals" in Luke 3:16; 10:4; 22:35; Acts 12:8; 13:25. NEB consistently renders "shoes" except in two passages where the context suggests an ingenious "barefoot" (Luke 10:4; 22:35). A sandal is a species of shoes, but not all shoes are sandals.

NEB's treatment of the word δοῦλος is far more consistent than RSV's, at least in the Gospel of Matthew. In this book NEB renders the word with "servant" in all cases except 20:27. In 2 Peter, on the other hand, NEB, following RSV, calls Peter a "servant" (1:1) but describes the libertines as "slaves of corruption" (2:19). The same word δοῦλος is used in both passages. In this case consistency seems demanded by the argument. The way to overcome undesirable moral slavery is to live as a slave of Jesus Christ. In any event a marginal note ought to acquaint the reader with the data, as RSV does in connection with Gal. 1:10 and Col. 4:12. In both of these passages NEB also reads

"servant" but without notation. Modernization and a desire to communicate are laudable goals, but there are stubborn historical facts and hoary antiques like kisses of peace, shields of faith, flaming arrows (not even Phillips dared to render this with "flamethrowers"), coats of mail, and the like, which simply must become a part of one's general knowledge if one is to appreciate ancient documents. A servant today is not a slave. Slaves were owned like cattle; they possessed no will or identity apart from their masters' objectives. That is exactly what the sacred writers want to acknowledge about their relationship to Jesus Christ, yet without the inhumaneness of the pagan world. A translation cannot make a good Bible dictionary superfluous.

We find that NEB consistently capitalizes the word "Law" when νόμος is associated with "the prophets," as in Matt. 5:17. The word "Law" also appears alone in the capitalized form in Luke 2:22; John 12:34; Rom. 2:12, but not in Matt. 15:6; Luke 2:23, 24; John 8:17; 10:34; 18:31; Rom. 2:17. Inconsistencies of this type should be carefully examined by the editors of a subsequent edition.

In NEB the phrase οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν (Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 2 Cor. 1:8) is rendered affirmatively, except in 1 Cor. 12:1. The latter looks like a clerical slip, in view of the obvious attempt at consistency, but Paul's vigorous style might just as well have been preserved in the other instances, *meiosis* being one of Paul's favorite devices. On the other hand, *de gustibus*, and the savant always can find healing balm for his offended philological sensibilities in the original.

NEB consistently transposes the pronoun "I," which in the New Testament



frequently appears first in a list of two or more personalities (see, e. g., 1 Cor. 9:6 and John 10:30). RSV had followed the same procedure, but inconsistently retained "I and the Father" in the Johannine passage.

Some readers of NEB may object that in addition to the name "Christ," the term "Messiah" is used to render the word *χριστός*. The variation is not itself reprehensible, since the word "Christ" has for us more of the force of a proper name than for the earliest readers of the Greek New Testament. However, the committee should have made up their minds about such passages as Acts 2:38 and 10:48.

We like the sound of "Whitsuntide" in 1 Cor. 16:8 but are suspicious of any claim on the part of a translator to be able to sense a distinction in Luke's reference to "Pentecost" (Acts 2:1). Does the Pauline usage document an early liturgical trend in Hellenistic communities?

As we look at the question of consistency we note that RSV frequently lapses into unmodernized expressions. NEB, generally speaking, avoids this pitfall, but should re-evaluate its approach to the archaic and especially reassess its treatment of words like *δοῦλος* and *ἰδού*.

The question of consistency in notation of divergent renderings and textual variants is of another order. We have observed that neither RSV nor NEB reveal in these areas consistent patterns. How much is to be included in a work designed primarily for lay consumption? It is conceivable that were scholars to be served, the margins would obliterate the text. It might be well to recall the words of Miles Smith. Why, he queried, "weary the unlearned, who need not so much, and trouble the learned, who know it already?" The editors of

both RSV and NEB have generally exercised a wise judgment in their use of the margins. Pastors and students always have recourse to the primary sources.

#### SUMMARY

It is indeed a privilege, accorded to no other age, that in a brief space of time we should enjoy two such permanently significant religious publications as RSV and NEB. Both versions come at a time when Biblical scholarship has found so much to share. Both versions earnestly endeavor to communicate in clear, idiomatic English, but in all honesty we must admit that the RSV translators were hampered by the directive to retain a reasonable facsimile of the KJV and its descendants. Again, this is not said in criticism of the illustrious scholars responsible for RSV but rather of the thinking that lay behind its production. The KJV is a venerable old lady and can stand on her own dignity. Periodic beauty treatments and layers of interpretive cosmetics can only dim her distinctive charm.

And that a refurbishing of the ancient luster has not satisfied the demands of our generation is evident from the fact that many who pay lipservice to RSV resort to modern speech versions of the New Testament, especially the rendering by J. B. Phillips. The British translators have taken a bold but necessary step, and in their translation all students of the New Testament, both lay and professional, pewman and pulpitman, have a rendering which meets all ordinary needs. The watchful eyes and sensitive ears of a special committee of experts in the English language have insured this version against the banal and pedestrian. Only a Homer could dare to put the Sirens' song in writing, and who would have thought that the Elizabethan



version of John 14—17 could have been matched if not surpassed in poignant words of English beauty? Many of its cadenced phrases will become a part of tomorrow's literary expression. "Do not feed your pearls to pigs" (Matt. 7:6). "The love of Christ leaves us no choice," (2 Cor. 5:14). "How blest are those whose hearts are pure!" (Matt. 5:8) "They were too good for this world" (Heb. 11:38). All one-syllable words, cleanly hewn. Here is modern speech, tomorrow's idiom and liturgical rhythm in rare combination.

Some there are who will object to a few British expressions that add distinctive flavor here and there. It is our impression that alleged intrusion of provincial patois is greatly exaggerated. The fact is that in most cases the British committee have used English diction precisely, and our own ears are not so sensitive to the precision. NEB's "incorporate" (as in Eph. 1:13) will offer the American expositor excellent imagery if only he will explore the possibilities. But what about "fortnight" (Gal. 1:18); "The people rounded on them" (Matt. 20:31); "meal-rub" (Mark 4:21); "fell foul" (Mark 6:3); "appear in the dock" (Phil. 1:7); "strolling" exorcists (Acts 19:13); "pounds" and "corn" (passim) and "farthing" (Mark 12:42)? No English translation will communicate across the board to all English-speaking nationals, and it is unfair to criticize a translation for not attempting the impossible, nor is the solution an entirely different translation for Americans. If the British translation is to be considered for public use in America then one of two courses seems desirable; either to render British dialectic peculiarities into corresponding idiomatic Americanese in an "authorized" American edition, or to note in the margin the

American equivalent of any expressions which might prove an obstacle to the American reader. The publishers, who have displayed such acumen in the promotion of their publication, should be able to take this hurdle in stride and come up with an appropriate solution. On the other hand, for those who long after the ink pots of Shakespeare and King James, these occasional expressions may come as a kind of solace.

This new translation, as we have repeatedly observed, will not make obsolete the study of N. T. Greek. Whether he uses this version, KJV, or RSV, the conscientious pastor must accept the responsibility to compare the version he uses with a critical edition of the Greek text. Despite the lavish care bestowed on even this latest venture, there is so much these ancient authors tried to say, so great the burden on the Spirit's heart, that much spills over the sides of even the most carefully designed interpretive vessel. Yet, we would repeat, this new translation inspires a greater degree of confidence than any of its predecessors in the English language.

We accept with gratitude this first installment of a noble treasure coming from a nation whose giants of the pen have made the Hall of Literary Fame a place of public meeting, and we hope, in the words of the Preface to the American edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*, that this translation may be "allowed such just and favourable construction as in common equity ought to be allowed to all human writings." In this the 350th anniversary year of the publication of the King James Version of Sacred Scripture we can pay our British cousins no higher tribute than to say: You have done it again!

St. Louis, Mo.