

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS BY MEMBERS OF DISCIPLES OF CHRIST, CHURCHES OF CHRIST, & CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

By William E. Paul

The work of translating the Bible, or portions of it, has been undertaken by preachers, writers and theologians, both men and women, from a number of different religious groups in America and Europe since the beginning of English Bible translation. In many instances the religious affiliation of the translator(s) of a particular Bible version is not disclosed in the work itself, so we are left to appeal to other sources for determining what church the translator belonged to.*

In this article we want to list and give a brief description of the work of translators related to what has been called the “Restoration Movement” of the 19th century. This movement, considered by church historians to be the largest religious body indigenous to the United States, has spawned three principle bodies: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Churches of Christ, and (Independent) Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Each of these three groups has well over 1 million members in the U.S. and together they have produced over a dozen translations of the Bible, or portions of it, with several of them also appearing in revised editions of the original work.

The first portion of the Bible translated was a New Testament, titled, *The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ* by Alexander Campbell (1826). Campbell’s work was actually based on previous translations of the Gospels by George Campbell (no relation), the Epistles by James Macknight and Acts/Revelation by Philip Doddridge. But Alexander Campbell revised these translations, adding “emendations” which virtually made his a new version. He later produced slightly revised editions and the New Testament eventually was titled *The Living Oracles* (1835). Simms says of the Campbell translation, “This was unquestionably the best New Testament in use at that time.” This fact no doubt accounts for its continued popularity with reprints appearing at least into the 1980’s.

The second translation by someone in this fellowship was *The Emphatic Diaglott* by Benjamin Wilson (1864-65). Wilson, originally a Baptist magazine and newspaper publisher, became affiliated with the Restoration Movement in England about 1840. Then, in a few years he migrated to America where he later left that fellowship over theological differences and affiliated with the Christadelphians. By the end of the century the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society had obtained the printing plates of this translation and began publishing it, perhaps because of its interlinear translation of “a god” in John 1:1 (However, Restoration Movement churches have never advocated this Arian viewpoint).

The next translation produced by this group was Henry T. Anderson’s *The New Testament Translated From the Original Greek* (1864), with a slightly “revised edition” coming out in 1866. Then after the Sinaitic MS was discovered by Tischendorf, Anderson, a scholar of some reputation from Harrodsburg, KY, produced *The New Testament Translated from the Sinaitic Manuscript Discovered by Constantine Tischendorf at Mt. Sinai*. (1917). Even though the Dictionary of American Biography of 1928 stated,

“The work is done with restraint and good taste, and has dignity as well as clarity” it never became very popular. (It is reported that much of the 1917 edition, still unbound, was sold by the publisher for scrap).

Perhaps the most popular translation from this movement was done by Joseph Bryant Rotherham, an Englishman who had first been a Methodist, then a Baptist preacher before affiliating with British Churches of Christ. His first work was titled, *The New Testament...Critically Emphasised* (1872), then revised in 1878, with the complete *Emphasised Bible* coming out in 1897. The unique feature of Rotherham’s translation is the graphic marks of emphasis surrounding various words. Being a literal translation, its popularity is evident from the fact that it is still in print today.

In 1943 Ervin Edward Stringfellow produced *The Gospels: A Translation, Harmony and Annotations*, in typescript, printed and bound in 8 ½” X 11” format. In 1945 he followed that with a second volume, *Acts and Epistles, A Translation and Annotations* (Revelation was never done). Stringfellow, a professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Drake University (IA), a Disciples of Christ school, produced his translation as a text-book, complete with copious notes, outlines and questions, for use in the Bible department of Drake.

A few years later George Swann, minister of the Edenside Christian Church in Louisville, KY for three decades, translated from the Greek text of Westcott and Hort, the *New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (1947). Four editions of this work were published in Robards, KY, all dated 1947, but containing slight changes between the first and fourth (See Paragraphs 1195, 1204, 1231, etc.). A unique feature of the translation is its system of numbering each paragraph, making the entire New Testament consist of 1782 paragraphs. These numbers are then tied to topics listed in the index at the close of the book.

Several decades passed before the next translation was produced by this group, *The Better Version Of the New Testament, Based On the Greek Text According to Eminent Scholars* by Chester Estes, a minister of the Church of Christ living in Muscle Shoals, AL (1973). This is a conservative translation, not departing very much from the KJV, and was reprinted in several editions over the following few years, but with no apparent textual changes.

From this time onward, the translations by people of this religious heritage become more difficult to identify. In 1978, The World Bible Translation Center, Inc., Arlington, TX, produced *The New Testament: English Version for the Deaf*, a limited vocabulary translation “designed to communicate to those who are deaf.” The entire Bible appeared, with slight changes in the New Testament, in 1987 and with additional minor changes during subsequent years. No names are attached to this version, the preface simply referring to “the translators and their advisors.” The same version was also published as *The New Testament: A New Easy-To-Read Version* (1978, revised edition, 1980). Also published anonymously, this version is said in the preface to be “a serious translation, based directly on the original Greek...not a paraphrase.” Some efforts to determine who the translators were has uncovered the following names: (First draft), Ervin Bishop, Benton Dibrell, with suggestions offered by Harvey Floyd, Everett

Ferguson and Richard Walker. These men are known to be affiliated with Churches of Christ. To further confuse the matter, an almost identical translation titled, *International Children's Version* (1978, 1981, 1983) is also copyrighted by the World Bible Translation Center. The "textual editor" for the New Testament of the ICV was Dr. Neil Lightfoot (Abilene Christian University). Members of the translation team for the Old Testament included Dr. William C. Gwaltney, Jr. (Milligan College) and Dr. John T. Willis (Abilene Christian University). Again, this translation is nearly identical to the previous two versions. Then, to top it off, *The Word, New Century Version New Testament* was published in 1984, claiming to have been previously published as *International Children's Version* (1983). In 1987 the complete Bible of *The New Century Version* began to be marketed as *The Everyday Bible*. So, it appears that the same translation, with slight changes, was produced under four different titles, (Deaf Version, Easy-To-Read Version, ICV, and NCV) from 1978 until the present.

The next translation produced by someone affiliated with churches of the Restoration Movement, was *The Simplified English Bible: New Testament*, produced by the Bible Translation Committee of the International Bible Translators, Inc. It carries copyright dates of 1978, 1980 and 1981 (it is not known if these are slightly revised versions or simply different editions). A personal letter to the author provides the added information that the "principal translator" was Stanley L. Morris, a writer among Churches of Christ. Its primary purpose was to teach English to the Chinese. (Morris also translated the entire Bible of the SEB into Chinese but it has apparently not yet been published). Reportedly, Morris has also completed both an English Old Testament and a revision of the original New Testament.

It is not known how many *portions* of Scripture have been translated by people of this heritage. Especially difficult to trace are the translations of various Bible books printed individually or accompanying the commentaries of the translator. Daniel A. Sommer, of the a capella Church of Christ produced a "simplified New Testament...authorized version...of hundreds of hard passages" (1923). See Chamberlin's *Catalogue of English Translations* (Greenwood Press, 1991, page 605). An unusual translation is that of Dr. C. Howard Matheny, a minister in the Disciples of Christ. Titled *Good News From God* (1984), it contains "the Gospel of John with Corresponding Scriptures from Matthew Through Revelation." This beautiful book includes red letters for Jesus' words and footnotes explaining various Greek words.

Much earlier a translation of the book of Romans was done by Moses Lard for his commentary on the book (originally done in 1875, but reprinted often since then). In more recent times Wilbur Fields, professor at Ozark Christian College, prepared a paraphrase for his commentaries in the Bible Study Textbook Series, by College Press: *Ephesians* (1960), *I and II Thessalonians* (1963) and *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon* (1969). A booklet titled *Six Lessons From Philippians* (1993) contains a translation of Philippians by Kenny Boles.

A very fine recent New Testament translation has been produced by Dr. Hugo McCord, retired professor of Bible and Biblical Languages at Oklahoma Christian College. It is titled, *McCord's New Testament Translation of the Everlasting Gospel*

(1988). McCord holds five earned academic degrees, including a doctorate in theology, as well as several other “awards and honors” from institutions related to Churches of Christ. McCord’s “superior linguistic ability and commitment to the truth” are said to assure a translation “that can be accepted with confidence.” (Quotes from dust jacket). It is reportedly going through a fourth edition, presumably with some minor revision.

Two additional New Testament translations, produced in recent years by scholars of the Churches of Christ, are *The New Covenant Scriptures*, (1994) by George P. Estes (no known relation to Chester Estes) and *The English Study Bible: New Testament Translation and Notes* (1994) by Harold Littrell. The copious footnotes of the latter book make it more of a study tool than most translations.

A recent New Testament version is that of the author, appearing in 1995 as *The New Testament: An Understandable Version*, prepared “to enhance the personal understanding and spiritual devotion of its publisher, his family members and those persons especially interested in Bible versions.” Its special feature is the use of notes, comments, and explanations in brackets, *within the text*, making it a study tool as well as a version (reminiscent of the Amplified Bible and Wuest’s Expanded Translation). It was published by the author in a hardback, limited edition of 295 copies.

The most recent translation produced is that of Dr. Donald A. Nash, longtime professor of Greek at Kentucky Christian College. Titled *A Literal and Consistent New Testament Version*, the work, though undated, was probably published in 1997.

In addition to the “one-man translations” mentioned above, there have been several others from this fellowship who have participated, in some capacity, in committee translations: Alexander Campbell contributed a translation of the book of Acts (different from his *Living Oracles* mentioned above) to the American Bible Union translation in 1858. H. Leo Boles, Stephen J. England, W. C. Morrow and Henry B. Robinson had a part in the 1952 *Revised Standard Version Bible*. Jack Lewis and Lewis Foster contributed to the 1973 *New International Version*. The 1979 *New King James Version* had Batsell B. Baxter on the American Overview Committee and Robert Hendren and Lewis Foster (book of Luke) on the Translation Committee. The 1989 *New Revised Standard Version* had J. M. Roberts and Walter Harrellson on the Translation Committee. *The New Living Translation* (1996) had Gerald Mattingly, of Johnson Bible College, on the translation team (Book of Numbers).

There have been a couple of men in this fellowship who have produced special editions of the *King James Version* with various helps (not as translators, of course). They are Cortes Jackson (1883) and Ashley S. Johnson (1900?).

Also, in 1910 a special study edition of the American Standard Version Bible, called *The Cross-Reference Bible* was produced by a panel of scholars, including (among others) Harold E. Monsor (Editor-in-Chief), and associate editors Charles Reign Scoville, D. R. Dungan, and J. W. Monsor, all prominent preachers and educators in the Disciples of Christ.

No doubt many others of the Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches and Churches of Christ have made and will make valuable contributions to Bible translation work. Being a people noted for “speaking where the Bible speaks,” this, after all, is only

to be expected.

* (The religious affiliation of the above named translators was determined by consulting personal letters, title pages of translations, their introductions, a dust jacket, advertising brochure or from biographical data on the translators found in various catalogs).