CHAPTER TEN

THE GOOD NEWS BIBLE—ITS BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND NATURE

The TEV was commissioned by the American Bible Society as a completely modern translation on a level of language that could be readily understood by any reader of English, regardless of his education. In 1966 the NT was published in paperback as Good News for Modern Man. OT portions appeared between 1970 and 1975. The complete Bible was ready for publication in 1976. Apart from its communicative language another important factor in its popularity has been the brilliant line drawing illustrations of the Swiss artist, Annie Vallotton. According to one of the seven OT translators, 'This was the first English translation to make consistent use of advances in general linguistics and in secular translation theory'.

Nida has described how the story of the TEV begins not in the USA but in the extraordinary success of two other Common Language translations, in Latin America and Liberia. In accordance with the principles expounded in William L. Wonderly's Bible Translation for Popular Use, a Spanish Version Popular was first prepared for ten million Indians from northern Mexico to southern Chile. But it was soon discovered that this translation was even more popular in cities such as Mexico City, Bogota and Buenos Aires than among the Indians for whom it was designed. The success of a similar venture in Liberian English, (i.e. the form of English used in West Africa) provided further stimulus to attempt a translation in a more broadly based form of modern English.

The major responsibility for the translation fell to Robert G. Bratcher, a professional translator, who prepared a draft for the whole NT which was subsequently reviewed by a panel of scholars. Bratcher also served as chairman of the committee of six who produced the OT translation. Prior to joining the Bible Society Translation Staff he had experience as a lecturer in Greek and had also served as a missionary in Brazil where he had been involved in the revision of the famous d'Almeida Portuguese version of the Bible.

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1. Common Language Version

Dr Bratcher himself has explained that the TEV is both a common language translation and a dynamic equivalence translation. Not all DE translations are common language translations but all common language translations must be DE translations. Canon Phillips' translation of the NT (1958) has been acknowledged as the first modern DE translation in English but the language was more of a literary character because it was aimed at British university students. The TEV on the other hand, follows a simple level of English because, in accordance with DE theory, it has been restructured to fit in with the readership ability of a very different target audience. It originally set out to meet the needs of one billion people who speak English as a second language. The preface to the fourth edition (1976) however, states that: 'This translation of the New Testament has been prepared by the United Bible Societies for people who speak English as their mother tongue or as an acquired language'. It is a Common Language Version and as such has a number of characteristics:

a. It deliberately avoids technical terms wherever possible
b. It is written, not spoken, English and so conforms to the written style of language
c. The vocabulary of the language is restricted but not artificially as in Basic English (which is not a living language)
d. Difficult polysyllabic words and complex sentence constructions are avoided
e. Slang, regionalisms and provincialisms are avoided in an attempt to give universal appeal. Bratcher actually suggests that this is a kind of Koine English
f. Idioms are avoided for the same reasons. Idioms are vivid and effective for native speakers but may be unintelligible or misleading for non-native speakers.

Common language has been defined as 'that part of the total resources of a given language common to the usage of both educated and uneducated'. It is interesting to compare the TEV with a good literary translation like the NEB. A quick glance at the Psalms in the NEB, for instance, reveals many words which are not part of everyday speech in all classes of society: for example, myriads (3:6), profligacy (12:8),

26 Basic English is the simple form of the language produced by C.K. Ogden of the Orthological Institute and consisting of only 850 words. A Basic English Version of the Bible was produced by Prof. S.H. Hooke in 1949.
acclaims (27:6), calumnies (73:8). All these disappear in a common language version such as the TEV.

Sometimes a literary translation may use groups of words which are all simple or well-known, but which used together have a special sense. For example in Ps 4:1, NEB translates, 'Thou didst set me at large'. The TEV has 'You came to my help'. Again a literary translation may use sentences which not only contain uncommon words, but which are long and complicated. Educated people may have no difficulty with them but others may. Compare, for example, the NEB and TEV translations of 2 Cor 8:3-5a:

**NEB**
Going to the limit of their resources, as I can testify, and even beyond that limit, they begged us most insistently, and on their own initiative, to be allowed to share in this generous service to their fellow Christians. And their giving surpassed our expectations; for they gave their very selves, offering them in the first instance to the Lord, but also under God, to us.

**TEV**
I assure you, they gave us as much as they could. Of their own free will they begged us and insisted on the privilege of having a part in helping God's people in Judea. It was more than we could have hoped for; first they gave themselves to the Lord; and then by God's will, they gave themselves to us as well.

Both translations are modern in their language and in the methods by which the translators have worked. But whereas the NEB is written at a more literary level of language, the TEV is intended for anyone who reads English. Ellingworth has spelled out three implications of common language Bible translation. First, a common language translation must use language which is up-to-date, that is, language spoken by people not more than about 35 years of age. It is intended for people who read English now, in this day and age. Hence the titles of DE translations read: Today's English Version, Bonnes Nouvelles d'Aujourd'hui, Kabar Baik Masa Kini, etc.

Secondly, a common language translation cannot use language which will be understood only by people who go to church. Non-churchgoers should be able to understand the message of the Bible even if they don't want to accept it. Common language translations avoid traditional, ecclesiastical language because they are intended for everyone.

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Thirdly, a common language translation must be written in language that is natural to those who speak and write it as their mother tongue. For instance, PC translations such as the KJV reproduce features of the ST which are unnatural in English. A good example is the consistent translation of Mark’s καὶ by `and’. In the KJV Mark 1 has thirty two sentences beginning with `And’. It was natural, apparently, for a Jewish writer like Mark to write this kind of Greek since it was normal to begin sentences with 1 in Hebrew. It was not common in classical Greek and it is very unnatural in English, some would say, incorrect. Hence the NEB has only five sentences (in translating this chapter) beginning with `And’; the TEV has only two.

2. A Dynamic Equivalence Version
The TEV follows a dynamic equivalence principle of translation not a formal equivalence principle. Bratcher cites Nida’s succinct (but controversial) definition: `To translate is to try to stimulate in the reader of the translation the same reaction to the text as the one the original author wished to stimulate in his first and immediate readers’. He reminds us, too, that the principle is not so novel as is sometimes thought. Luther, with customary vigour, claimed on translating the Pentateuch, `I endeavoured to make Moses so German that no-one would suspect he was a Jew’. Support is also sought from Mgr Ronald Knox. `A good translation is good in proportion as you can forget, while reading it, that it is a translation at all’.30 It is doubtful however, that the works of either of these translators exhibited the amount of cultural adaptation that their stated principles demand. Bratcher singles out three features that mark the TEV as a DE translation: contextual consistency, naturalness and explicitness. We shall look at each feature in turn.

a. Contextual Consistency: That the TEV is DE translation is reflected firstly in its emphasis on contextual consistency over verbal consistency.31 Bratcher’s own example is the translation of οἱ Ἰουδαίοι in the Gospel of John. He claims that to woodenly render it by `the Jews’ on every occasion is to misrepresent the meaning of the original. He analyzed out four different meanings of Ἰουδαίος, in John’s Gospel: `Jewish people’, `Judeans’, `people hostile to Jesus’, and `the Jerusalem authorities’.32 His analysis is probably correct but as a translator he fails to come to terms with the author’s own deliberate and absolute use of οἱ Ἰουδαίοι which implies a certain attitude and perhaps a certain relationship to Judaism that gets lost in any focus on the nuances rather than the link concept.

Nida and Bratcher acknowledge that the most controversial feature of the TEV has proved to be the decision not to translate Biblical terminology concordantly. In his popular introduction to the TEV Good News for Everyone, Nida devotes a whole chapter entitled 'Great Truths Made Clearer', to answering critics who attack the TEV's failure to reproduce such terminology. It is significant that Nida does not justify the TEV practice on the grounds that it is a common language translation but actually maintains the new renderings are superior. Terms such as 'expiation', 'justification', 'sanctification', 'predestination', are dismissed as not much more than Anglicized Latin! More plausibly he argues that words such as 'redemption', 'saints', 'propitiation', 'fear of God' and 'blood', are misleading to the modern reader.

The greatest number of criticisms have been directed against the translation of the Greek aμα 'blood' by 'death' or its equivalent in eleven passages where Christ's sacrificial death is referred to—Acts 20:28; Rom 3:25; 5:9; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20; Heb 10:19; 13:20; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 1:5; 5:9. In a detailed defence of his renderings Bratcher again maintains there are four differing senses of aμα. Firstly, the word is often used to signify violent death, as also was the Hebrew word for blood (QD) in the OT. He cites Matt 27:24,25 where Pilate washes his hands before the crowd and says, 'I am innocent of the aμα of this man' and the crowd responds, 'May his aμα be upon us and our children'. Bratcher goes on to make the extraoridnary claim:

In English, however, the word 'blood' does not mean death; it means only the liquid that flows in the veins and arteries of men and animals. Such compound expression in English as 'bloodthirsty', 'bloodguiltiness', 'spilling blood', 'blood letting' do mean death but the simple word 'blood' alone does not. In translating Matt 27:24, 25, then, it is only natural that a common language translation that tries to be simple and clear for all readers will use 'death' in Pilate's statement and the crowd's reply; 'I am not responsible for the death of this man! This is your doing...Let the punishment for his death fall on us and our children'. The same is true in Matt 23:25, which speaks of the murder of all innocent men...from the murder of innocent Abel to the murder of Zechariah... (see also Mat 23:30; 27:4; Luke 11:50, 51; 13:1; Acts 5:28; 22:20; Rom 3:15; Rev 6:10; 19:2).

Secondly, in two passages, aμα, he says, refers to spiritual death. Thus in Acts 18:6 Paul confronts the Jews in Corinth who are opposing him with words, 'Your aμα be upon your head; I am innocent' (cf. Acts 20:26). The TEV restructured this to, 'If you are lost, you yourselves must take the blame for it. I am not responsible'. Thirdly, where aμα refers literally to the blood of animals used in sacrifice, the appropriate translation is 'blood', as in Heb 9:7, 12, 13; 19:22, 25; 10:4; 13:11.

33 E.A. Nida, Good News for Everyone, How to Use the Good News Bible, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1977a)
34 R.G. Bratcher, 'The Nature and Purpose of the New Testament in Today's English Version', TBT, 22:97-107 (1971) 104. However we note that the recent revision of the GNB has reinstated 'blood' in a number of these passages.
Fourthly, there are contexts where αἵματα is used of Christ's sacrificial death and where the context makes clear the spiritual and symbolic nature of usage. In such passages as John 6:53-56, for instance, which speaks of drinking the blood of the Son of Man, or in others which speak of being cleansed by the blood of Christ, it is obvious from the context that 'blood' is not meant literally (cf. Heb 9:12, 14; 10:29; 13:12; 1 Jn 1:17; 5:6; Rev 7:14; 12:11; Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25, 27).

The whole question of 'Concordance' is a complex one and we shall return to it in chapter thirteen. But Bratcher, in following Nida here, adopts too narrow a view of context. It focuses attention on the sentence and loses sight of the broader context supplied by the author's writing and, in fact, that of the whole biblical corpus.

b. Naturalness in Language: Secondly, Bratcher points out that the TEV as a DE translation does not follow the word order or imitate the word classes of the Greek text, but seeks to express this meaning as naturally and as clearly as possible in English. Nida's classification of words into object, event, abstraction and relation enables the translator to better represent the meaning of the text. His example is Rom 1:17 which in FC translations reads: 'For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written 'He who through faith is righteous shall live'.' The TEV rendering is more natural and clear: 'For the Gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end. As the Scripture says, 'The person who is put right with God through faith shall live'.'

The DE emphasis on naturalness has implications for stylistic features of the translation. Bratcher mentions a number of Greek or Semitic forms that require restructuring in the interests of clear idiomatic English.\(^{35}\) Surprisingly, rhetorical questions have to be replaced by declarative statements lest the modern English reader assume that information is being sought. For example in Mark 8:37 instead of 'What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' (KJV) the TEV has the assertion 'There is nothing a person can give to regain his life'.

Naturalness in translation demands also that Semitisms be identified and translated in such a way that the right meaning will be carried. Bratcher singles out the idiom 'son of' and the use of the passive as the reverential way of avoiding name God as the subject of the actions. Certainly the NT writers' use of ὥτος (son) is 'Semitic rather than typically Greek'. In many cases 'son' expresses a quality or characteristic of a person mentioned. Thus 'sons of thunder' in Mark 3:7 is rendered 'men of thunder'

by the TEV while 'sons of disobedience' in Eph 2:2 are 'people who disobey God'.
These are clearly different from the usage in 'John, the son of Zechariah' (Luke 3:2) or 'Son of David' (Matt 15:22) where a physical relationship is signified.

It is assumed that these Semitisms did not represent a 'noise factor'\textsuperscript{36} to the original receptor (whether because of their own Hebraic linguistic heritage or because of familiarity with the 'translationese' of the LXX) whereas if translated literally for the contemporary English reader they are apt to cause psychological and semantic noise. This is also true of the noun-noun genitive constructions (which are given dynamic equivalents in the TEV) whose relationship can be clarified by a verb or verb phrase. Here Nida's neo-Chomskian approach to grammatical analysis is utilized in making explicit the nature of the relationship in the ST and applying it in the transformation of the noun-noun genitive construction. Some common examples that cry out for analysis are: the love of God (1 John 4:9), the God of love (2 Cor 13:11), the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), the fear of the Jews (John 7:13), the faith of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22), the God of peace (Phil 4:9), the peace of God (Phil 4:7), the knowledge of God (Col 1:10), the body of death (Rom 7:14) and the work of faith (1 Thess 1:3).

One scholar has pointed out that this Greek form of the genitive absolute construction is 'immensely versatile and hard-worked'\textsuperscript{37} and a translator is likely to encounter a genitive phrase of this kind about twice in every three verses of the NT! Analysis is complicated by the fact that as usually two nouns are involved in the construction, it is not uncommon to find that one or both of them is an abstract noun. This means that the translator must clarify not only the function of the genitival relationship but also the function of the abstract noun/s. Again a significant percentage of the genitive constructions found in the NT involve figures of speech—one of the nouns may be figurative, such as 'light' or 'bowels' or 'way' or one of the nouns may be involved in a figure in addition to its being part of the genitive construction—e.g. Acts 14:27 'he had opened the door of faith' where 'opened the door' is an idiom, but door is connected with faith (an abstract noun) by the genitive. The metaphor has to be considered first and then the significance of the genitive may be studied within the metaphorical setting. Another complication is that the same genitive construction may have opposite meanings in different contexts. Thus 'the love of God', to take the usual example, may mean 'you love God' or 'God loves you'. Again, a similar genitive construction may have different senses as in 'the gospel of Jesus Christ' (Mark 1:1),

\textsuperscript{36} 'Noise' in communication theory is any factor (including the receptor's lack of interest) which hinders effective understanding. In order to overcome noise DE practitioners introduce redundancy into the translation. See TAPOT 205-206.

'the gospel of God' (Rom 1:1) and 'the gospel of me' (Rom 2:16). The first probably means 'the gospel about Jesus Christ', the second 'the gospel which comes from God', and the third 'the gospel which I preach'. In each case the genitive signals different semantic relationships between the pairs of forms that are linked.

Another Semitism singled out for restructuring by Bratcher following Nida is the so-called 'passive of divine avoidance'. FC translations have preserved the form of the ST, e.g. 'Judge not that you be not judged' (Matt 7:1) and 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy' (Matt 5:7). In the TEV, on the other hand, God is explicitly shown to be the subject of the action—'Do not judge others so that God will not judge you' and 'Happy are those who are merciful to others: God will be merciful to them' (cf. Matt 4:24; Luke 6:37-38). Nida claims the passive may be misunderstood. But was that not equally possible in the case of the original Greek speakers for whom these Jews wrote? It is surely arguable that if the Jews were accustomed to avoid the name of God by using a passive form, then this reverential attitude should be preserved in translation. Of course the grammar of some languages might dictate the use of the active voice (with the subject made explicit) but English does not.

Since we do not share the Semitic culture of the NT writers, the figurative use of words poses a special problem. Bratcher suggests that the metaphors must often be changed to similes or the figurative language abandoned altogether in the interests of clarity. He cites Luke 16:22 as an example where a literal translation would elude the modern reader. The FC translations read 'The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom' (RSV). The TEV provides cultural conditioning to clarify the allusion—'The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side, at the feast in heaven.' The justification here is that 'a literal translation tells nothing to the reader who does not know the way in which people at that time reclined at feasts, and does not realise that in Jewish circles the hereafter for the righteous was sometimes portrayed as a great banquet in heaven with Abraham as the host of God's people'.

Other Semitic structures to be restructured in the TEV include 'son of perdition' (referring to Judas, John 17:12) which becomes 'the man who was bound to be lost'; 'to close up his bowels' (1 John 3:17 KJV) becomes 'closes his heart against his brother'; 'those who give suck' and 'breasts that never gave suck'; (Matt 24:19 and Luke 23:29 RSV) becomes 'mothers who have babies' and 'women who never bore babies, who never nursed them'.

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Often, the TEV's naturalness does not distort the message, and the style, though hardly distinguished, is superior for modern readers. The translation of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) in RSV and TEVis a case in point.

c. **Explicitness:** A third feature of the TEV which marks it out as a DE translation; according to Bratcher, is its explicitness and provision of 'redundant information' which was available to the original readers but which is not necessarily shared by the modern reader. As an example he gives 'myrrh' in Mark 15:23 which the TEV identifies for the modern reader as 'a drug called myrrh'; and 'Asia' in 1 Cor 16:19 which the TEV clarifies as 'the province of Asia'.\(^{40}\) By 'redundant information' then, is meant the provision of information which is implicit in the original message either because the writer and readers have certain shared knowledge or because the information may be understood from either the linguistic context or the non-linguistic context.

It has long been recognized in the history of translation, not only that there is implicit information in the original, but also that some of this implicit information has to be made explicit if the translation is to be understandable at all.\(^{41}\) Ellipses are a prime example.\(^{42}\) Thus the translators of the KJV found it necessary to clarify many ellipses though they used italics to show an English reader what was not overtly expressed in the original. E.g. 'and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit' (John 15:2); 'her that had been the wife of Urias' (Matt 1:6); 'who has not bowed the knee to the image of Baal' (Rom 11:4); and 'If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast' (1 Cor 10:27). Subsequently the (English) Revised Version abandoned the practice. Its Preface (1884) stated 'that all such words as are plainly implied in the Hebrew and necessary in the English, be printed in common type.' English often demands the addition of the verb 'to be' where it is omitted in the Greek clause. All English versions supply the necessary copula. However, in epistolary formulas where the KJV and other FC versions were content to retain the form of the original (e.g. Rom 1:7 'To all that be in Rome') the TEV supplies the verb 'to write'—'And so I write to all of you in Rome'. Similarly in the benediction formulas of the NT letters where the RSV preserves the Greek form 'Grace to you and peace from God...' the TEV renders it 'May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

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\(^{41}\) J Beekman and J. Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) Ch. 3.

give you grace and peace (e.g. in Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:2; 6:23; 2 Thess 1:2; 2 Tim 1:18; Rev 1:4).

The TEV makes some of its references more explicit by adding classifiers. The original readers of the NT writing realized that Bethphage, Antioch and Rhégium were cities and that Saul, Tertullian and Lysias were persons. However, the TEV and other DE translations employ classifiers to make clear the reference of many unfamiliar proper names: the river Jordan, a man called Fortunatus, the city of Rhégium, the town of Puteoli, cloth linen and sect Pharisees, etc. Such classifiers 'provide a convenient device for building meaningful redundancy into an overloaded text' and 'can be used whenever a borrowed words needs some semantic redundancy attached to it, so that the reader will be able to understand at least something of its form and/or function'. Due to the historical and/or geographical importance of the biblical names they are usually transliterated rather than translated. (See Nida for a good treatment of problems involved.)

Provision of such contextual conditioning can be very helpful to the reader when there are distinct differences between the cultural forms of functions of the Biblical referents and the corresponding receptor language parallels. Bratcher points out that cultural matters such as weights, measures and hours of the day should be given their modern equivalents. No one today knows how far 'a Sabbath Day's journey' was or what the weight of a talent, or the length of a cubit, was. On the other hand to substitute modern currency results in obvious anachronisms. Footnotes can supply the additional information that will make the meaning clear to the reader.

However the interpolation of supposedly implicit information can sometimes skew the text. Furthermore explicitness is an obsession of modern western culture as George Steiner has pointed out. We shall return later to the subject of explicitness in translation.

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47 G Steiner, On Difficulty and Other Essays (Oxford University Press, 1978) 106f.