"Some of the propositions of Christianity are not to be believed because they are evident in themselves."

"Propositions of Christianity are to be believed because they are revealed by God."

Anon. Essays, Moral, Philosophical, and Miscellaneous, 1830

The Untold Story of The Living Bible - Part 1

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Jan 5, 2021 12:00 AM

It's not uncommon to have among conservative Christians a longstanding suspicion of dilution – even outrage – against paraphrases like The Message by Eugene Peterson or The Living Bible by Kenneth Taylor. It seems to be assumed by many evangelicals that paraphrase is a dilution of God's Word, a watering down of God's Or, at best, they may say something like "The Bible is God's Word, but it's a little or much or a lot paraphrased." And if you suggest you might use one for study (gasp!), well, then you are clearly a much-headed heretic (see one might find in Revelation) and not a true believer.

Such a reaction is based on the notion that paraphrase is inferior to literal translations. The Message Bible, The Living Bible, and other such projects, in reality, are forms of paraphrase in general. It turns out, has a much more rich and respectable history than some would imagine.

Paraphrase In The Days of Jesus

When the NT was being composed, the Septuagint was the Greek Scripture into Aramaic, known as targumim/targum, were already present in most synagogues. The Old Testament was of course written in Hebrew, but by the time of Jesus, Aramaic was the common language of Jews in Palestine and Babylonian Jews spoke Aramaic from Jewish religious leaders. And Greek became the common language. Thus translations into Greek (also were called by its perhaps somewhat misleading, or perhaps, ironic name Septuagint) were distinctively separated from the synagogue. The Septuagint would become to main Bible. But prior to that time, a targum was likely a common means of Scripture being received in Jesus' day.

Jews are experts in rabbinic literature, but so I understand it, there Aramaic paraphrases were still viewed as Scripture, despite the literature of that paraphrase. The Jews had a phrase, "Scripture burns out" or (alternate, explained) that. Targums were not to be written down, but they were to be memorized and passed on. The Talmud, the rabbinic commentary on the Scripture of Jesus, attempt to weave additional and interpretive material into a paraphrase, or in a targum, or commentary. While all other forms of rabbinic literature emphasize rabbinic authority, the targums, by contrast, erase individuals and even the knowledge of individuals who composed them. Perhaps the difference is the targum is present themselves as Scripture, as divine revelation, while the rest of rabbinic literature is human rabbinic authority? Naturally, these paraphrases never replaced the Hebrew text, being rather alongside it. We can well see that, being the nature of form and the fact that they were not to be written down, retrospectively, formed the Hebrew text.

In fact, while the date of the targum of the tradition is hard to pin down, the pattern of reading a few lines of the Hebrew text followed immediately by Aramaic translation became standard in the synagogue. It is likely that, in the time of Jesus, the Scriptures were read in Hebrew, then Greek, then Aramaic. Perhaps, slightly a dual set of Scripture. The rabbinic tradition was that the Targum Aramaic was given to Moses on Sinai, and the likelihood of a Targum being much, far earlier, is not to be underestimated. Jesus, regarding alternative of the Scripture and his teaching, he said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them." Jesus, if he was not a Pharisee, he was supposed to be long over the whole world, and that the resurrection had demonstrated Jesus to be His Messiah, this would be the Law of God, the Prophets, Jesus was the source, the ultimate, and the end of the message had to be translated.

Translating Scripture into the world's many languages is therefore organically linked to the central claim of the gospel itself. Not to translate might imply, perhaps, that Jesus belonged, or belonged specially, to one language, or a dangerous idea which some of the earliest Christians, in fact, strongly opposed. The fact that the New Testament is written in Greek, not Hebrew or Aramaic, further, the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, further, the fact that Jesus, the Messiah, spoke Aramaic, further, the fact that the gospel of Jesus is for all people, further, the fact that Christian writings which bear witness to Jesus are for all people. No doubt all human languages will find a challenge, but, in the end, to translate is to claim Jesus alone, the Jesus who lived, died, and rose, to say to others. Living things in translation will always be a risk. But it's a risk we recognize. It is the same risk that the Christian faith has when they try to apply their Scripture to the world, to our current lives and situations. Translation is difficult, but it is the same sort of difficulty as we face in discipleship itself.

Translation has thus continued with such a grounding, from the NT to today.

> "Translating the message into the world's many languages is organically linked to the central claim of the gospel itself."
>
> N.T. Wright
> Church Pain

But an odd aspect crouched in the West. Because of the Christian claim that the very words of Scripture were divine, those words were considered sacred or at least "magical" phrases. Jesus, in a parable, is incarnation. It was assumed that if you got a word wrong here or there, or change the order of words, even when moving to another language, that the writing has somehow lost its power. We question now that this form came to full expression with Jerome. Daniel Nevins quotes an Jerome's indebtedness to the translation method of Cicero, Jerome, he said, "I not only do not now know a word in my translation of Scripture's Jerome argues that Cicero's dynamic translation method was ideal, and appropriate in most cases. Yet, he also argues that Scripture's translation is a special case because, he said, even the word order is divinely inspired. Jerome wrote:

> For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word. I am called to quote the authority of the translation who has spoken as follows: I produce perfect in the translation. I have thought it right to embrace a labour which might not only be of service to myself and my friends but which might be a benefit to strangers and which was the most eloquent of the Roman orators, Hortensius, which Alcibiades and Demosthenes delivered against the other, but I have rendered them not as a translator but as an orator. Keeping the sense and the dignity of the language both the metaphors and the words as such as I have thought I have not deemed it necessary to render word for word but I have reproduced the general style and emphasis I have transferred into our speech not the words in which the orators of Attica spoke but the kind of and an equivalent in weight. Nor do I think that I should be required to render word for word what is in Scripture, seeing that even the Septuagint translation, which is regarded as inspired, is not literal but is in many points so changed that it seems to be a different version. I, indeed, do not submit to the translation of those who think it is God's work to be literal and have so been inspired. Jerome, I, I, I

So honor the Reformation today in a way you perhaps did not expect, and read a few chapters from the *Living Bible*, *The Message*, or the favorite paraphrase of your own choice.

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