

LUTHER'S BIBLE TRANSLATION & THE WARTBURG PROJECT

Alle Schrift von Gott eingegeben



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Part One: Luther's translation principles and comments on Luther's Bible

There were 18 German versions of the Bible before Dr. Martin Luther began his work of translating.¹ These translations were apparently of very poor quality. Luther began translating the New Testament from the **Wartburg** Castle in the last few weeks of 1521. (This is what the *Wartburg Project* was named after.) He was finished by March of 1522. The speed and quality of the translation remains astonishing. While Luther completed the work of translating the New Testament from Greek into German very rapidly, his work on the Old Testament proceeded much more slowly. He began the Old Testament translation in 1522 and finished in 1534. He often commented that Hebrew did not want to become German. Luther made use of a committee of scholars who met in his home to discuss the translation. But Luther certainly remained firmly in charge of the translation project. There was no doubt it was Luther's translation.

Luther continued to revise his translation, seeking to improve it, until his death. But today it is important to clarify that these revisions were not aimed to make the translation more acceptable to various religious views. These revisions were not made for the sake of avoiding perceived offense by various advocacy groups. The revisions were simply aimed to make the translation more accurate and clear. Luther always carried with him the latest version of his translation. The last version of the German Bible that Luther himself worked on became the standard German translation for many years.² Unfortunately, some printers took liberties with the text. There were several versions of the "Luther" Bible after his death.³

Luther's methods and views of translation are widely regarded as the model for proper Bible translating. There are many claims about Luther's translation views. Some claim that Luther's translation method was essentially dynamic equivalence.⁴ Others have claimed that Luther translated literally.⁵ Actually, Luther doesn't fit either category, or he fits both. He almost defies categorization. Luther was often criticized for not always translating hyper-literally. So, much of his writing is his response to this charge. But in many places Luther did translate in an essentially literal way as he himself explained. He does not seem to have been faulted for this.

Luther tried to find just the right word in German to express the original meaning. Sometimes Luther went to the butcher to find just the right terms for body parts of sacrificial animals. In fact, "he had several rams slaughtered in his presence, so that a German butcher could tell him the proper name for each part of the sheep."⁶ Luther knew the Bible, and he knew how the common people talked. But the German language was not quite settled. Each territory had its own version of the language. There was no standard spelling for words. Professor Daniel Deutschlander mentions this and much more:

¹ There were 14 versions in High German and 4 versions in Low German. Heinz Bluhm, *Martin Luther: Creative Translator*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, ©1965. Pages 78, 97. E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and his times*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, ©1950. Page 853, note 187. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther 1521-1532: Shaping and Defining the Reformation* (Kindle Locations 834-835). Minneapolis: Fortress Press, © 1990.

² In fact, many scholars believe Luther's version was a major basis of the English versions of William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, to which versions the King James Version owes a debt. See, for example: Heinz Bluhm, *Luther Translator of Paul: Studies in Romans and Galatians*, New York: Peter Lang, ©1984. Especially pages 559ff.

³ For various editions of the Luther Bible, see: <http://www.bible-researcher.com/links10.html>

⁴ One example in our midst would be: <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/2159>.

⁵ E.g., "Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation," II: *From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Magne Saebø, ed. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008. Pp. 401-402. Also, James Price: <http://www.jamesdprice.com/translationtheory/completeequivalence.html>.

⁶ From a sermon on Luther's life by Mathesius, quoted in Schwiebert, p. 649.

One will find the simple word *und* spelled in four or five different ways—on the same page, with one and the same author! . . .

All of that makes Luther’s accomplishment in translating and in his other writings the more remarkable. It is not too much to say that Luther, especially with his translation of the Bible, and then with the two catechisms and his hymns began the process of standardizing the German language. . . .

While Luther used his own knowledge of Greek and Hebrew augmented considerably by the knowledge of some of his co-workers, it was perhaps in German usage that Luther made the greatest contribution. He came from common roots. And he didn’t despise those roots, as someone who had outgrown the peasant’s shoe or the cobbler’s apron. When he wanted to know which word best fit a part of meat mentioned in connection with an Old Testament sacrifice, he went to the Jewish butcher to see what German word he used. He listened to the man in the market place or in the field, to the mother speaking to her child. It was in these most common of words that Luther found that commonality which could be understood throughout the German lands and that would make his translation so quickly beloved.

More than that even his translation and then his catechisms and hymns could be used to teach children how to read and write. The Small Catechism and the hymns were the early primers at the birth of the Lutheran school system. And the whole of instruction had the aim that from their earliest years children should know the truths taught in the Bible and then be able to find there those truths for themselves. Indeed it was with exactly that goal and aim in mind that Luther used vocabulary and grammar that would be easily accessible to the otherwise uneducated and to the young. He did it without “dumbing down” either content or style. He did it in a way that makes the core of his translation durable to this day, even with all the revisions in spelling and the like made necessary by the evolution of the language from his day to ours. His translation is at one and the same time simple and elegant. It lends itself to public reading and to private devotion. It is at once common and memorable.¹

Luther’s principles of Bible translation involved sound judgment and understanding of the Bible text. His choice varied according to particular cases. Luther explained his translation method with these words: “We extolled the principle of at times retaining the words quite literally, and at times rendering only the meaning.”² In other words, Luther was not a strict literalist. He wrote:

What purpose does it serve unnecessarily to abide by the words so rigidly and strictly that people can get no sense out of them? Whoever would speak German must not use Hebrew idioms; but if he understands the Hebrew writer, he must see to it that he grasps his meaning and must think: Now let me see. How does a German speak in this case? When he has the German words that serve the purpose, then let him dismiss the Hebrew words and freely express the sense in the best German he is capable of using.³

Yet, Luther was not always so free in translating. He valued the very words of Holy Scripture.

On the other hand I have not just gone ahead anyway and disregarded altogether the exact wording of the original. Rather with my helpers I have been very careful to see that where everything turns on a single passage, I have kept to the original quite literally and have not lightly departed from it. For example, in John 6[:27] Christ says, “Him has God the Father sealed [*versiegelt*].” It would have been better German to say, “Him has God the Father signified [*gezeichnet*],” or, “He it is whom God the Father means [*meinet*].” But I preferred to do violence to

¹ *Luther and Translating*, pp. 2-4 (delivered to the WELS Michigan District Pastor-Teacher Conference, Jan., 2012).

² *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35:222-223. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

³ *What Luther Says* #319. Compiled by Ewald M. Plass. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, ©1959. Pages 105-106.

the German language rather than to depart from the word. Ah, translating is not every man's skill as the mad saints imagine. It requires a right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing, Christian, trained, informed, and experienced heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian or factious spirit can be a decent translator.¹

Sometimes Luther translated rather literally. Dr. Luther explained:

We have at times also translated quite literally—even though we could have rendered the meaning more clearly another way—because everything turns on these very words. For example, here in [Psalm 68] verse 18, “Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive,” it would have been good German to say, “Thou hast set the captives free.” But this is too weak, and does not convey the fine, rich meaning of the Hebrew, which says literally, “Thou hast led captivity captive.” This does not imply merely that Christ freed the captives, but also that he captured and led away the captivity itself, so that it never again could or would take us captive again; thus it is really an eternal redemption [Heb. 9:12]. St. Paul likes to speak in this way, as when he says, “I through the law died to the law” [Gal. 2:19]; again, “Through sin Christ condemned sin” [Rom. 8:3]; and again, “Death has been put to death by Christ.” These are the captivities that Christ has taken captive and done away: death can no longer hold us, sin can no longer incriminate us, the law can no longer accuse our conscience. On every hand St. Paul propagates such rich, glorious, and comforting doctrine. Therefore out of respect for such doctrine, and for the comforting of our conscience, we should keep such words, accustom ourselves to them, and so give place to the Hebrew language where it does a better job than our German.²

In summary, Luther's own explanation bears repeating: “We extolled the principle of at times retaining the words quite literally, and at times rendering only the meaning.”³ It requires excellent Christian judgment to make these tough calls of when to apply each principle. Prof. Deutschlander put it this way:

His overriding concern in following both of those principles was that Christ should be seen as the center of the whole Bible, Christ as Savior, as the God who comes to us in grace and through faith, comes to us in the lowliness of the manger, the horror of the cross and in the glory of the resurrection and the final judgment, comes to us in plain words in simple water, in lowly bread and common wine. That overriding concern was the determining factor when deciding whether to be literal or idiomatic in the translation of specific passages.⁴

Conrad Cordatus was a close companion of Luther's. He compiled Luther's “Table Talks.” Cordatus revealed Luther's translation principles:

“When we translated the Bible,” said D.M. Luther, “I gave those who helped me these rules: First: the Holy Scripture speaks of divine works and matters. Secondly: when a verse or interpretation agrees with the New Testament, one should accept the same. Thirdly: one should pay attention to the grammar.”

¹ *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:194.

² *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:216.

³ *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:222-223.

⁴ Luther and Translating, p. 5.

“In translation I always hold to this rule that one should not do violence to the grammar. And whoever understands this [i.e., the grammar] correctly, that one will recognize that the letter gives [the correct sense], not the spirit.”¹

From that quotation we may draw three of Luther’s principles for translating the Bible:

- 1. Always remember that this is Holy Scripture, God’s inspired Word.**
- 2. Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament.**
- 3. Pay attention to the grammar. It matters!**

That is not a complete list, however. Luther indicated that a translator’s faith and “theological competence” matter too, as we will see. It is commonly said today that any good translation must be the combined effort of translators from all sorts of different faiths. Occasionally, proponents of this opinion might draw a line at a “high view of Scripture” (whatever that means). Luther did not approach his own translation that way. Yes, he did occasionally consult Jews for Hebrew language questions, but they were certainly not members of his translation committee. He did not even need to consult Roman Catholic scholars. He did not include anyone of a different faith on his committee. I’ve never come across sharp criticism of this fact: all of the translators and committee members of the Luther German Bible were of the same faith and fellowship. Today, we would call every single one of them “confessional Lutherans,” though they were not called by that term back then. And yet, their translation was not some sectarian version that was hidden in a corner. It became the standard German Bible for centuries, even though there were 18 other German Bibles around before it. Luther valued “theological competence” in translation work. He wrote:

Very simply, the task of the translator is not that of reproducing in one language words exactly equivalent to the words of another language, but of reproducing in vigorous vernacular idiom the meaning originally expressed in the foreign tongue. To do this properly, philological skill is indispensable—**only, however, as the handmaiden of an even greater theological competence.** Ultimately the sense itself in the original must determine whether the rendering in translation will be literal or relatively free. Hence the Jews themselves are our best instructors in the Hebrew language but Christians alone can truly translate the Bible.²

It certainly does matter what a translator’s theological position might be. Luther’s comment bears repeating:

Ah, translating is not every man’s skill as the mad saints imagine. It requires a right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing, Christian, trained, informed, and experienced heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian or factious spirit can be a decent translator.³

Over the years, many German-speaking people, especially confessional Lutherans, have agreed that Luther showed excellent Christian judgment in his Bible translation. Luther’s translation set the standard of a sound Bible translation for many years. One of the reasons that Luther’s translation excelled was his God-given faith. A person’s beliefs influence and affect the character of a Bible

¹ *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämtliche Schriften*, herausgegeben von Joh. Georg Walch, CPH, St. Louis, 1887, Bd. 22, S. 1545, 1902 respectively. The translation is by Daniel Deuschlander.

² *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35:207. (Emphasis mine.)

³ *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35:194.

translation. Some claim that “all translation involves interpretation.”¹ This is one reason why Luther excelled as a translator. He excelled as an interpreter of God’s holy Word. Many otherwise gifted linguists falter in this aspect.

If there were female pastors on a translation oversight committee, might that have a little impact on how they might translate something like 1 Timothy 2:11-12? **“A woman should learn in a quiet manner with full submission. ¹²And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” (WP)** It might be in the realm of possibility that a female pastor might give that a little tweak. Perhaps there might be other tweaks desired in other places. Can you imagine how this could possibly happen?

If there were translators on a committee who did not see any direct prophecies of the Messiah in the Psalms, might that impact how they translate certain Psalms that used to be seen as clearly foretelling the coming of the Savior?

If there were translators on a committee who were convinced that Baptism is merely a symbol or representation, might that impact how they translate certain passages related to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism?

If there were translators on a committee who did not believe that the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the Old Testament, might that impact how they translate Genesis 1:2? **“The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.”** Could it play a role in how they render Psalm 51:11? **“Do not cast me from your presence. Do not take your Holy Spirit from me.”**

If there were translators on a committee who all happened to be confessional Lutherans, is it possible that they could translate in a way that is fair and legitimate? Is it possible that, instead of always receiving translations from other denominations, confessional Lutherans could offer a gift to the church that would be intended for all people, including members of other denominations, and not just for a certain type of confessional Lutheran in a certain part of this one country? That’s what Luther’s translation accomplished. And yet, every single member of his translation committee was of the same faith and fellowship. It was a blessing for many people. It still is! We still refer to it regularly in our translation work. German-speaking people still treasure it.

Perhaps the quality of Luther’s translation may be seen in the fact that Jerome Emser, one of Luther’s sharpest critics, actually plagiarized much of Luther’s version. In the days before copyright laws, it was possible to get away with this sort of fraud. Luther responded with some choice words.

Now they sit in judgment on my whole work! Fine fellows! That is the way it was with St. Jerome too when he translated the Bible. Everybody was his master. He was the only one who was totally incompetent. And people who were not worthy to clean his shoes criticized the good man’s work.² It takes a great deal of patience to do a good thing publicly, for the world always wants to be Master Know-it-all.³ It must always be putting the bit under the horse’s tail,⁴ criticizing everything but doing nothing itself. That is its nature; it cannot get away from it.

¹ E.g., Fee, Gordon D.; Strauss, Mark L. (2009-05-19). *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (chapter four; Kindle Location 1090). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

² In about the year 382 Jerome was commissioned by Damasus, the bishop of Rome (d. 384), to prepare an authoritative revision of the Latin Bible. In accepting the task Jerome spoke of the harsh criticism he anticipated both of himself and of his work. His expectations were fulfilled. Jerome’s Vulgate version drew criticism even from Augustine, Rufinus, and others, criticism which had ceased, however, by the time of his death in 420. Jackson (ed.), *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, II, 123–124; Hauck (ed.), *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, III, 36–40.

³ *Meister Klüglin* is a favorite expression of Luther for someone who always knows everything better than the next fellow.

⁴ Cf. Wander (ed.), *Sprichwörter-Lexikon*, III, 579, “*Meister*,” No. 8; “The real Master Know-it-all is the one who can bridle the horse at the rear and ride it backward.”

I should like to see a papist who would come forward and translate even a single epistle of St. Paul or one of the prophets without making use of Luther's German translation. Then we should see a fine, beautiful, praiseworthy German translation! We have seen the Dresden scribbler¹ who played the master to my New Testament. I shall not mention his name² again in my books as he has his Judge now,³ and is already well known anyway. He admits that my German is sweet and good.⁴ He saw that he could not improve on it. But eager to discredit it, he went to work and took my New Testament almost word for word as I had written it. He removed my introductions and explanations, inserted his own, and thus sold my New Testament under his name. Oh my, dear children, how it hurt me when his prince,⁵ in a nasty preface, condemned Luther's New Testament and forbade the reading of it; yet commanded at the same time that the scribbler's New Testament be read, even though it was the very same one that Luther had produced!

That no one may think I am lying, just take the two Testaments, Luther's and the scribbler's, and compare them; you will see who is the translator in both of them. He has patched and altered it in a few places. And though not all of it pleases me, still I can let it go; it does me no particular harm, so far as the text is concerned. For this reason I never intended to write against it either. But I did have to laugh at the great wisdom that so terribly slandered, condemned, and forbade my New Testament, when it was published under my name, but made it required reading when it was published under the name of another. What kind of virtue that is, to heap slander and shame on somebody else's book, then to steal it and publish it under one's own name—thus seeking personal praise and reputation through the slandered work of somebody else—I leave that for his Judge to discover. Meanwhile I am satisfied and glad that my work (as St. Paul also boasts [Phil. 1:18]) must be furthered even by enemies; and that Luther's book, without Luther's name but under that of his enemies, must be read. How could I avenge myself better?⁶

Luther found translating work to be quite humbling. That was good for him, as he mentioned.

I have also undertaken to translate the Bible into German. That was necessary for me; otherwise I might have died someday imagining that I was a learned man. Those who think themselves scholars should try to do this work.⁷

Have you ever wondered how much money Luther made for all of this work?

Just as for all his other writings, Luther asked for no honorarium for the translation, and he received none. The printers and publishers did a good business with the Bible translation. Luther, to his irritation, did not even receive enough free copies.⁸

¹ *Sudler* was a choice bit of invective. Derived from the term to “dirty” or “deal in dirt” and “handle dirty things,” it had come to be used of any craftsman—even an author—whose work was poor, clumsy, unreliable, and superficial.

Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, X, 972.

² Jerome Emser...

³ Jerome Emser had died November 8, 1527, after nearly a decade of literary hostility against Luther which called forth little response from Luther subsequent to his bitter polemical treatises of 1521.

⁴ Emser had admitted that Luther's translation “was nicer and sounded better” than the old version, but added, “This is why the common folk prefer to read it, and amid the sweet words they swallow the hook before they know it.” Arnold E. Berger, *Luthers Werke* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut [no date]), III, 172, n. 2.

⁵ Duke George, “The Bearded,” of Saxony (1471–1539), had affixed his name to the 1527 Preface to Emser's New Testament (see the text in *St. L.* 19, 494–501). However, Luther suspected that Emser was its real author; cf. his letter to Justus Jonas of December 10, 1527, in Smith and Jacobs, *Luther's Correspondence*, II, 426–427.

⁶ *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:183–185.

⁷ *Luther's Works*, vol. 43:70.

⁸ Martin Brecht. *Martin Luther 1521–1532: Shaping and Defining the Reformation* (Kindle Locations 857–859).

Luther did receive considerable criticism. He addressed his critics at some length. Here are some of Luther's comments.

Now because we extolled the principle of at times retaining the words quite literally, and at times rendering only the meaning, these critics will undoubtedly try out their skill also at this point. First and foremost they will criticize and contend that we have not applied this principle rightly, or at the right time—although they never knew anything about such a principle before. Yet they are the type who, the moment they hear about something, immediately know it better than anyone else. If they are so tremendously learned and want to display their skill, I wish they would take that single and very common word, *chen* [?!],¹ and give me a good translation of it. I will give fifty gulden to him who translates this word appropriately and accurately throughout the entire Scriptures. Let all the experts and know-it-alls pool their skill, in order at least to see that actually doing the translation is a wholly different art and task from that of simply criticizing and finding fault with someone else's translation. Whoever does not like our translation can just leave it alone. By it we are serving our own, and those who do like it.²

I figured from the very beginning that I would find ten thousand to criticize my work before I found one who would accomplish one-twentieth of what I have done. I, too, would like to be very learned and give brilliant proof of what I know by criticizing St. Jerome's Latin Bible; but he in turn could also defy me to do what he has done. Now if anyone is so much more learned than I, let him undertake to translate the whole Bible into German, and then tell me what he can do.³

You may say that I translated the New Testament conscientiously and to the best of my ability. I have compelled no one to read it, but have left that open, doing the work only as a service to those who could not do it better. No one is forbidden to do a better piece of work. If anyone does not want to read it, he can let it alone. I neither ask anybody to read it nor praise anyone who does so. It is my Testament and my translation, and it shall continue to be mine. If I have made some mistakes in it—though I am not conscious of any and would certainly be most unwilling to give a single letter a wrong translation intentionally—I will not allow the papists [to act] as judges. For their ears are still too long, and their hee-haws too weak, for them to criticize my translating. I know very well—and they know it even less than the miller's beast—how much skill, energy, sense, and brains are required in a good translator. For they have never tried it. There is a saying, "He who builds along the road has many masters." That is the way it is with me too.⁴

This I can testify with a good conscience—I gave it my utmost in care and effort, and I never had any ulterior motives. I have neither taken nor sought a single penny for it, nor made one by it. Neither have I sought my own honor by it; God, my Lord, knows this. Rather I have done it as a service to the dear Christians and to the honor of One who sitteth above, who blesses me so much every hour of my life that if I had translated a thousand times as much or as diligently, I should not for a single hour have deserved to live or to have a sound eye. All that I am and have is of his grace and mercy, indeed, of his precious blood and bitter sweat. Therefore, God willing, all of it shall also serve to his honor, joyfully and sincerely.⁵

¹ It is sometimes translated "Favor, grace," etc.

² *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:222-223.

³ *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:249-250.

⁴ *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:183.

⁵ *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:193.

Part Two: Wartburg Project Translation Principles

Some Principles and Guidelines

(A work in progress)

Compare these to Luther's translation principles above.

1. Although any skilled linguist who is fluent in the source language and the receiving language can do an acceptable job of rendering the literal sense of the words of Scripture, the most important qualities for a Bible translator to possess are a thorough knowledge of the whole message of Scripture, connected with the **aptitude to let Scripture interpret Scripture**, and a **humble willingness to submit to everything which Scripture says**. It was this aptitude, more than the depth of his knowledge of the original languages that made Luther such a great translator.
2. Translators will strive for a **balance** between preserving the original meaning and producing English which sounds natural, but the **preservation of meaning** takes priority.
3. When a choice must be made, **accuracy in conveying the divinely intended meaning of the text** takes priority over literary beauty or rendering the text into common, contemporary English.
4. The translation **must be free of doctrinal errors** whether inadvertent or deliberate. It must not falsify the Word of God. It must not subtract from its meaning. This is reflected in two principles:
 - We expect that a translation will understand itself as a “direct quotation” of an ancient document, rather than merely supplying the “gist” of the original's meaning in a contemporizing paraphrase.
 - We expect, with Luther, that when theologically necessary a translation will adhere closely to the wording of the original.
5. The translator should not be too locked in to any one theory of translation whether so-called “dynamic equivalence” or “literal translation” because:
 - a. Literal (that is, **literalistic or hyper-literal**) translations sometimes give the wrong meaning or they do not communicate clearly in the receiving language.
 - For example, Job 29:4 is translated very literally “as I was in the **autumn** of my days” or “as I was in my **autumn** days” (RSV). Most English readers would think that **autumn** means that the days are drawing to a close and the person is nearing the end of his life, but a Hebrew reader would be thinking of harvest time. More accurate translations focus on the fruitfulness, productiveness, and harvest of the autumn. Here are a couple examples:
 - 1) “just as I was in my **most productive** time” (NET)
 - 2) “As I was in the **prime** of my days” (NASB)
 - b. Dynamic equivalence, though a worthy goal, is **not fully possible**. We would be happy with any translation that was dynamic and equivalent, but too often translations labeled “dynamic equivalent” are either not equivalent or not dynamic. We would like every translation to be both “meaning equivalent” and “emotional equivalent.”

- c. The translator will have to weigh whether a more dynamic or more literal approach best conveys the divinely intended meaning on a case-by-case basis. That's what Luther did.
6. It is necessary for a translation to have a set of **rules and rubrics**¹ to guide the translators, but the relationship between two languages is so complex, that it is hard to imagine a rule or rubric which can be applied without exception.
 7. The translator should adhere to the principle that **Scripture interprets Scripture**. This is especially true in regard to doctrinal statements. One passage of Scripture cannot be set against another. **New Testament interpretations of the meaning of Old Testament passages should be accepted.**
 8. The translator should not specify one level of language and usage to be used uniformly throughout the Bible because the level of language in the Bible itself varies greatly from book to book and from passage to passage. The goal is that **the level of difficulty of the translation should be similar to the level of difficulty of the original**. In many Bible passages the original language was neither “common” nor “contemporary.”² If the word in Scripture is uncommon or archaic, the translation should try to reflect that.
 9. The translator should **not drain the color and variety of expressions** from passages and level the language by downgrading the imagery. If Scripture uses five different words for a concept, the translation should reflect that diversity.
 10. **Poetry should look and sound like poetry**. Unusual and emphatic word order may be retained to some degree as it is in our hymns. In translation of poetry pay attention to rhythm and to balance of the length of lines.
 11. The goal of a translator is not so much to make Judeans sound like 21st century Americans but to make them sound like Judeans who speak English. Consider the example of the Gospels, which maintain a Hebrew tone.
 12. Though “one Hebrew word = one English word” is not a viable standard for a translator to apply consistently, the translator should strive to **be consistent rather than casual** in his renderings of specific words and word groups.
 13. The translator will try to **be euphemistic where the original is euphemistic** and blunt or coarse where the text is blunt.
 14. Capitalization of nouns and pronouns that refer to God is **not a feature of the original text**, and therefore it falls into the category of **interpretation** rather than translation. The practice is best avoided. English style, however, requires **titles and proper names be capitalized** regardless of whether or not they are a reference to deity. (See the rubrics for specific guidelines.)
 15. Good translation should preserve the authors’ coordination and subordination of thought units.
 16. Translators should be wary of importing their own stylistic preferences into the text against the preference of the author, unless such changes are necessary for clear communication.

¹ Here “rule” means a general guideline such as those we are listing here. A “rubric” is a more specific guideline such as “we will translate the Tetragrammaton LORD.”

² This principle does not militate against producing secondary versions such as a simplified version or children’ Bible, but that is not the goal of our base translation.

17. Where possible, when the text, on the basis of Scripture, is open to two equally valid understandings, the translator should attempt to preserve both options. When this is not possible, one of the options can be preserved in a footnote.
18. In using **“gender-accurate language”** the translator will strive to be inclusive where the original is inclusive and exclusive where the original is exclusive.
19. The translator will recognize and **preserve direct prophecy** where the immediate context or other testimony of Scripture indicates direct prophecy. (Ditto for typical prophecy.)
20. Sometimes there is no definitive solution in sight as to how to translate a given text, so the translator has to take his best shot and move on. For example, a precise identification of each gemstone in the high priest’s breastplate is beyond our reach.
21. A key decision by a translator is which text he is going to translate. A translation project will need to choose a base text and a set of principles to guide translators in evaluating variants from that text. If in doubt, keep the longer reading in the text, and add a note that it is not in all manuscripts. (See the rubrics for specific guidelines.)
22. The translator should remember he is a translator not an editor. He has no calling to try to “improve” the message the Spirit has given.
23. For more information see the FAQs and rubrics at: wartburgproject.org

Then the Fun Begins

Though the points discussed above are the most important aspects of producing a Bible translation, they are not necessarily the most difficult. The most difficult task (and potentially most divisive) is resolving the many issues of translation philosophy, which are at least in part a matter of preference and style. Examples of such issues are:

1. Do we prefer translations that **preserve familiar terms**, or do we prefer fresh, new renderings?
2. Do we prefer dignified, formal language or a more colloquial informal style?
3. How do we handle the sensitive issue of blunt sexual language or other coarse language in the Bible? In all cases, **our practice is balanced**.

Familiar or Fresh?

Here we take a **balanced approach**. We try to **preserve common biblical expressions** like “the flesh,” “walk with God,” “in God’s eyes,” “set one’s face against,” etc. Our goal is not so much to preserve Hebrew grammatical idioms as it is to **preserve important biblical imagery**. We have a general preference for **preserving familiar expressions** in well-known passages, but if the traditional reading or term is not very precise, we give priority to reflecting the original meaning more clearly. We **preserve heritage terms** like sanctify, justify, angels, and saints, and we also use “declare righteous” when it is more clear than “justify.” We make a special effort to **retain familiar key terms that appear in the creeds, Catechism, and hymnal**.

In some cases the traditional translations may not be the best, but they have become firmly established by long usage. The Old Testament name of God was probably pronounced Yahweh, but for thousands of years both Jews and Christians have followed the tradition of pronouncing it as LORD. Though a good linguistic argument could be made for Yahweh, we retain the time-honored tradition of LORD.

“Angels” is not a very good translation for the name of God’s special servants. In fact, it is not a translation at all. It is a transliteration of the Greek *angelos*. Since the word “angel,” which was once a new invention in English, has been established by centuries of use, we retain it. None of the alternatives, “messenger,” “envoy,” etc., offer significant improvement.

“Box of the Agreement” is more contemporary and accurate than “**Ark of the Covenant**,” but we will stick with the latter.

In some cases, terms that are allegedly out-of-date are really not out of date. Some people say “**manger**” is out-of-date, and “feeding trough” is contemporary. We were almost persuaded that this was true until I asked a farmer. He answered my question with the confidence of someone who knows. “We call them mangers,” he said. He was not even a little doubtful. I asked more farmers. They all agreed. We checked agriculture catalogs. All confirmed that this was true. By the way, the term “**swaddling**” is making a comeback in infant clothing (check Amazon).

In some instances a fresh translation more clearly brings out the theological intent of the text. In the case of the **cover** over the Ark of the Covenant, there are two competing traditions. The recent one is “atonement cover.” The traditional “mercy seat” is based on Luther’s *Gnadenstuhl*. “throne of grace.” Luther’s translation was theologically brilliant, because it recognized that this object was more than a lid or cover—God was enthroned above it, and atonement was being presented there at the foot of his throne. But “mercy” is not a very precise rendering of the Hebrew *keopher*. “Atonement” is better. “Cover” on the other hand misses an important point. The atoning blood was being presented to the LORD at his throne. “Atonement footstool” might be most precise, but “**atonement seat**” sounds better. Combining the best of the old and new into “atonement seat” most clearly brings out the meaning of the text.

Formal or Colloquial?

Our basic approach is to retain more formal language in decrees, prophecies, doctrinal statements, prayers, etc. We allow more colloquial language in conversational speech.

- In general we avoid contractions, except in informal speech.
- We do keep distinctions between “who” and “whom,” etc., but try to avoid uses that sound stilted or pedantic in contemporary English. “Who are you looking for?” sounds like normal conversation. “For whom are you looking?” does not sound normal in English casual conversation. (There is an FAQ article about this on our website.)
- As the previous example shows, we do the same for the rule “no prepositions last.” In Germanic languages “prepositions” (which often are actually detachable particles that are part of the verb) sound very natural at the end of a sentence. The “no prepositions last” rule is based on Latin grammar not Germanic usage.
- The principal parts of irregular verbs are tending to lose some to their old forms. For example, the verb was “stink, stank, stunk.” “Stank” is receding. “It stunk to high heaven” sounds normal to many people. Which sounds more natural: “The light shone in the darkness” or “the light shined in the darkness”? We do have English stylists and experts to consider these matters with us. Sometimes, not everyone agrees on what might be and remain the best possible English usage.
- Perhaps the most common request we receive¹ is to **capitalize the pronouns that refer to God**. The popularity of this request is probably due to the adoption of this practice in recent editions of the King James and to the belief that removing the capitalization is a sign of less respect for God. Our practice, however, is that we do not capitalize these pronouns unless they start a sentence. Our

¹ Other than requests for a red letter Bible—which is a formatting issue, not a translation issue.

reasons for this are due both to translation philosophy and historical precedent. Capitalization of these pronouns was not a feature of the Hebrew or Greek texts. It was not a feature of the original King James Version or Luther's German Bible. **This practice seems to have begun in the 20th century.** Although there was a capitalized formal version of the German pronoun for "you," Luther did not use this pronoun to refer to God. He instead used the less formal, uncapitalized *du* as his pronoun of choice to refer to God. One of our most basic principles of translation is that we try to avoid introducing our own interpretations into the translation. Since capitalization of nouns and pronouns that refer to God is not a feature of the original text, it falls into the category of interpretation rather than translation. It is therefore best not to adopt this as a translation principle. English style, however, does require that **titles and proper names be capitalized**, so we **capitalize all titles of God**, with special attention to **Messianic titles and proper names** that occur in prophecies. Capitalization does not distinguish deity from non-deity or a Messianic from a non-messianic reference. Capitalization is used to distinguish a title or a proper name from a common noun: the Antichrist or an antichrist (1 Jo 2:18); the Evil One or an evil one, or evil (Lord's Prayer). Capitalization does not indicate deity or reverence. Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Great Pumpkin, and I are all capitalized.

When our project goes about establishing our rubrics, we ask: **what best reflects the original text and is clear in English?** Next we consider **the long tradition of Bible translation.** In last place come our preferences and likings. We hope that everyone who is following the progress of the project will follow the same procedure. Many of us like capitalization of divine pronouns, but here our question is not what do we like, but what is the most accurate translation of the text? Incidentally, Northwestern Publishing House has not been capitalizing the pronouns referring to God for many years. If a passage refers to both Solomon and the Messiah, what should you do? 2 Samuel 7:13-14 may serve as one example: **"He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men."** The first fulfillment was Solomon who built the temple (1 Kgs 5:5; 8:20; 1 Chr 22:9-10). The complete fulfillment was when Jesus Christ, David's greater Son, built his church (Mt 16:18; Lk 1:32-33; Heb 1:5; 5:5). Someone can disagree with the decision to not capitalize pronouns, but this decision was certainly not made out of disrespect for God or God's Word. In fact, it was made as an attempt to communicate what is in the original language of the Bible.

When you encounter something in the translation that strikes you as new or strange, please take time to consider the issue more thoroughly. Whenever you do this, the main question must always be "what best conveys the theological, literary, and emotional intent of the text?" Our rubrics and FAQs on our web site are there to explain many of the choices we have made.

Euphemistic or Harsh?

Some parts of the Bible contain sexual language or other coarse language that is quite explicit. The prophecy of Ezekiel is most notable for this tendency. Many English translations try to hide or soften this language (euphemism). Our translation principle is to **be euphemistic when the text is euphemistic and blunt when the text is blunt**, but to also take care to avoid offending readers who may not understand that biblical language is sometimes quite blunt. One of Ezekiel's favorite terms for *idol* is the Hebrew word *gillul*. *Gillul* comes from the root for "round." Some old dictionaries say these idols were called *gillul* because they were round like logs, but *gillul* is the round thing that comes out of the east end of a west-bound horse. I leave it to you to suggest what the most contemporary English translation for this would be. The *Concordia Commentary* tries to reflect the intent of the text with "fecal deities." This is medically correct, but who speaks that way? Many

contemporary translations go with the colorless term “idols,” hiding the crude term that the inspired prophet Ezekiel actually used. In WP we were considering “dung ball deities.” This rendering is very accurate but perhaps too eccentric, so we may go with “filthy idols,” which honors the crude intent of the author but which is not too startling. We will follow a similar balanced approach with other sensitive terms.

A Danger

It is said that congregations often experience greater difficulty because of small things that do not really matter than they do over important doctrinal issues. When I was a vicar, someone quit the church over the color of the new carpeting. (The member really, really wanted orange. For some reason the majority disagreed.) People let themselves become divided over little things, rather than focusing on the things that are of greater importance.

A similar **danger** faces Bible translations. For that reason, I let Luther speak a little more (above) about all the complaining and criticizing that he received. It can get wearisome. People can become completely caught up in their personal likes and dislikes of individual passages and lose sight of **the big issues of translation**: preservation of biblical imagery, clear reflections of prophecy, and clear communication of the theological, literary, and emotional intent of the text.

At the Wartburg Project our motto has always been “**purely positive.**” We do welcome differences of opinion and discussion concerning any point of translation, but only with a spirit that is based on careful study of the evidence, a spirit of cooperation and compromise on issues that are merely a matter of English style and individual preferences, and that makes **upholding the integrity of the text the highest priority**. Let’s never forget Luther’s first principle: **Always remember that this is Holy Scripture, God’s inspired Word.**

Different Tools and Technology

Luther’s work of translating was much more difficult than our work with the Wartburg Project. Today, we have many blessings that Martin Luther did not have. We have translation tools on our computers that make our work much easier. We have better dictionaries to consider the meanings of words. We have tools that can immediately tell us how many times a word is used in the Bible. We can instantly compare many other translations on one verse. On our website, we have a picture of Luther’s study in the Wartburg Castle. I imagine him with an open Greek New Testament, a piece of paper, an inkwell, and a quill pen.

A story was told that Luther sat at the Wartburg translating the Bible. The Devil did not like this and wanted to disturb the sacred work. When the Devil tried to tempt him, Luther picked up the inkwell and threw it at the Devil.

I’m convinced that the Devil would like to disturb our work of translating, but do not picture our work that way. We have so many available resources and helps that we have it much easier. Luther would have been glad to receive these tools, but he had to do it the hard way. That’s why I’m constantly impressed with Luther’s translation.

In addition, Luther had to communicate by writing letters and meeting his committee members in person. We have the blessing of the internet, email, telephones, and other technology. We can

communicate constantly without ever leaving our primary calling. We can share thoughts, texts, and translations without moving from our offices.

Almost every single one of our participants is a full-time pastor or professor. Recently, our General Editor retired from being a full-time seminary professor and is able to dedicate most of his time to translation work. This summer, thanks to some generous donations, I was able to take a little “sabbatical time” here and there to do some more focused work as New Testament Editor. For translation work, it would be nice to have the situation of sitting in a secluded castle without interruption. I did not have that luxury, but for most of Luther’s life, he did not have that situation either. After he left the Wartburg Castle, Luther would spend maybe two hours a day working on the Bible translation. For most of us, that’s how it works. Some of us do this instead of golfing or fishing or bowling.

Using technology, we can all look at the text at the same time. We can mark it up with colors and notes and remove those later. We can search for phrases or words. Some of us have occasionally paused to realize how many blessings God has given us to do this work now. I don’t think it has ever been any easier to produce a new translation of the Bible. I don’t wish to downplay the difficulty of Bible translation, but God has made it much easier for us. We are grateful.

Is there anyone saying “it’s impossible” anymore? Please don’t misunderstand. I just never thought it was “impossible.” I always thought that we would have it much easier than Luther did when he translated the Bible. He had to do it the hard way. Thanks to God, we have the training, the tools, and the technology we need to do this work. Any failure would be our own. I never believed this work would be “impossible.” But, even if it was “impossible,” our Savior said, “**with God all things are possible**” (Mt 19:26). Yes, early on, I realized that we could be wrong about what we were saying about doing this translation. But now I know by experience: this can be done, with God’s help and blessing. We praise God for blessing our plans and efforts.

I continue to be in awe of Luther’s accomplishment. From 1521 until he died, Luther spent himself on this work. It was never far from his mind. He regarded it as that important. I believe it’s a real blessing that a few of us can spend our time on this same work. (Sure, I’m even willing to give up golf and bowling.)¹

¹ Do not think that’s some big sacrifice. I wouldn’t golf or bowl anyway.

Part Three: Wartburg Project Information and Updates

The best place to obtain information and updates about the Wartburg Project is to visit: wartburgproject.org. **The Wartburg Project** is a group of pastors and professors who are working together to produce a new translation of the Bible. Dr. John Brug, Professor-emeritus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (Systematic Theology and Old Testament), serves as the General Editor and Old Testament Editor. Rev. Brian Keller, Pastor at St. Stephen Evangelical Lutheran Church, Adrian, MI serves as the New Testament Editor. We have a good number of faithful translators who are working together to produce translation drafts of the Old Testament.

The translation of the New Testament is already finished. Every book has been finalized and sent to our publisher, except Revelation. We are essentially done with Revelation too. We were blessed to be able to begin with the translation of Revelation produced by Dr. Siegbert Becker. We are blessed with gifted technical reviewers, who review and examine our translations for accuracy on the basis of the original Hebrew and Greek languages. One example is Professor-emeritus David Kuske, who taught at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He has served ably as a translator/reviewer and helped us determine the best New Testament manuscript evidence. We are pleased to be working with more than 100 participants from all around the world. They come from the ELS and all 12 districts of the WELS.

The Wartburg Project translation is based on the Hebrew and Greek texts. We have made use of English template translations as a starting point in the translation process. This approach builds on the tradition of English and Lutheran Bible translation. We are standing on the shoulders of giants, making use of the *World English Bible* (WEB), which is a descendant of the *King James Version* (KJV) and the *American Standard Version* (ASV). We are also grateful to Concordia Publishing House (CPH) and Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) for the help we have received through the Lutheran translations that appear in their commentaries.

Privilege

What a privilege it is to work with God's Word in the original languages and grapple with the best ways to translate that into language our own members will read and hear! How many people have had this great privilege?

First, we read and study God's inspired, inerrant Word in the Hebrew and Greek texts. Then, we aim to translate that into English. Yet, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. We almost always have a literal English base translation to use. I cannot describe to you what a privilege it is to do this work. Our participants regularly say the same thing.

Granted, there are some fine translations available. I've spent my life learning from those translations too. We owe a great debt to **the long tradition of English Bible translation**. I like to say that we are "**standing on the shoulders of giants**." Because so many have done so much good work before us, we can climb up on the combined shoulders of all of them and stand much taller than we otherwise would stand. It's quite a privilege. We do owe a debt to many who have worked before us. I would like to mention William Tyndale in particular. His translation was very important! But, in October of 1536, Tyndale was essentially burned at the stake for translating the Bible into English. It's fascinating to read about the histories of Bible translations and to learn how much opposition key translators faced. We've received so much from their labor! We appreciate it. Perhaps, by God's grace, we might be able to make a contribution in translating the Bible.

Some people seem absolutely convinced that no Lutheran should bother to translate the Bible. Such people give me the impression that we can only **receive** the English Bible from others. But, isn't it possible that we could actually contribute something? Maybe, after standing on the shoulders of giants, using our training and tools, we could **offer a translation that others might use too**. Maybe, just maybe, we could try to offer a translation of God's Word to people we love. Most people think we are only doing this for this small group of confessional Lutherans, but we are aiming much higher. We aim to offer this translation far beyond our little group.

It's a privilege to be able to give a gift to others. As we prepare to give this gift of a new Bible translation, we are pleased that God has enabled us to do this without asking for funding from synods or sending out fundraising letters. There were quite a few generous donors who asked for the privilege of giving to support our work. They clearly volunteered and viewed it as a privilege to donate. Their donations have helped significantly. Every aspect of this WP work is a privilege. It's a privilege to study God's Word, translate it, edit the English text, proofread manuscripts, and give offerings to support the work. We praise God for giving us the opportunity and privilege.

Purely Positive

The Wartburg Project is only two years old. In all of that long history, our motto has been "Purely Positive." After all of the difficult discussions and debates about Bible translations, we set out purposefully to avoid debates and controversies. We set out to translate the Bible without being sidetracked into all sorts of other issues. We set out to work quietly and respectfully. It's been so refreshing to be a part of this. WP participants joyfully, cheerfully, humbly, and lovingly work together in harmony.

Technology has helped us avoid debates. You might wonder how we can possibly entertain differences of opinion without arguing and having hard feelings. Technology has enabled us to have discussions in ways that participants' names are removed. We focus on the questions, the issues, and the input, but not the personalities of the participants. We have many participants, but we never reveal their identities without their permission.

Plans

Lord willing, we plan to publish a special edition **New Testament and Psalms** translation in 2017. This will be in time for the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. We plan to have our translation on paper, Logos, Kindle, etc. We plan to aim much higher than just marketing to our little corner of Lutheranism. We plan to market widely. We have interest from all over the world. People in Australia, England, Estonia, Russia, and Sweden are among those who are aware of our project and have written to us. We won't make any predictions, but we have made some plans. If there are people who say, "No one besides WELS people will buy their translation," please pause to consider if these might be the same individuals who claimed that this work was "impossible." We'll leave it in God's hands and keep working. (Progress chart is at the end of this presentation.)



Some Sample Verses

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 11:23-27 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴Martha replied, “I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the Last Day.”

²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies. ²⁶And whoever lives and believes in me will never perish. ¹ Do you believe this?”

²⁷“Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I believe ² that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

John 14:1-6 “Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house are many mansions. ³ If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. ⁴ ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am. ⁴You know where I am going, and you know the way.”

⁵“Lord, we don’t know where you are going,” Thomas replied, “so how can we know the way?”

⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.

Romans 3:28 For we conclude that a person is justified by faith without the works of the law.

Ephesians 2:8-9 Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and call his name Immanuel.

Luke 1:34-35 Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵The angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and gather disciples from all nations by baptizing them in ⁵ the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and by teaching them to keep all the instructions I have given you. And surely I am with you always until the end of the age.”



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Is the Wartburg Project sectarian? Will the Bible it produces be sectarian?

The first problem is the meaning of the word “sectarian.” Sectarian is perceived as a very negative word. A search *sectarian thesaurus* includes synonyms like *fanatic*, *bigoted*, and *schismatic*. The word is so loaded that it would be good to avoid the word when speaking of one another. But even if “sectarian” is used in its mildest sense “belonging to a particular denomination,” it would be untrue to say that the translation of our project will be sectarian.

The main reason that our translation will not be sectarian is that our translators are not sectarians. They are confessional Lutherans. They understand that while it might be sectarian to *translate* the Bible, “Jesus said this is my *true* body,” it is not sectarian to *confess*, “This is the true body

¹²⁶ Literally not die into eternity

²⁷ Or have believed

³² Or *dwelling places*, referring to permanent residences

⁴² Some witnesses to the text read If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you?

⁵¹⁹ Or *into*

and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The translators understand the difference between presenting a Lutheran understanding of Scripture in a confessional statement and importing that interpretation into the words of a translation.

What if we translate 1 Corinthians 10:16: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a *communion* of the blood of Christ?” Though this translation beautifully reflects the biblical Lutheran understanding of Communion, it would not be a sectarian translation. It would accurately produce the meaning of the Greek text. It would be the translation of the King James Version that the whole English-speaking Protestant church used for 400 years. Our translation is not a “go it alone” project. It rests on the foundation of centuries of Bible translation including the work of Luther, Tyndale, the King James Version, and recent Bible scholarship of Lutherans and non-Lutherans. In the Old Testament it often utilizes the best Jewish scholarship on the Hebrew text.

What determines whether or not a translation is sectarian is not how many people produced it or how many people use it or how theologically diverse its translators are or how many reviews it has, but how faithful it is to the divinely intended meaning of Scripture. The Vulgate, which was used by millions of people for many centuries and which was the Bible that nourished Luther, was sectarian when it translated the first gospel promise, “She [Mary] will crush the serpent’s head.” When Luther revised the Vulgate and translated, “He [Christ] will crush the serpent’s head,” his one-man translation was not sectarian but truly catholic (“catholic” means holding to the doctrine Christ entrusted to the whole church). The Formula of Concord is not sectarian. It is catholic (universal) and ecumenical because it **promotes the unity of the church** by faithfully confessing the content of Scripture. The same would be true of a translation made by confessional Lutherans. A translation made by confessional Lutherans would not be “a Lutheran translation” which introduced a Lutheran bias into the text. It would be a translation by Lutherans that honestly set forth the meaning of the text. We are not intending that our translation will be labeled as a Lutheran translation or that it will appeal only to Lutherans. [See the FAQ on this point, which contains the paper: “A ‘Lutheran’ Translation?? Pitfalls and Potential.”]

Are you going to make a red letter edition of the gospels, which highlights and honors Jesus’ words by putting them in red?

Christians have often made special decorated editions of the Bible, so we would have no objection to a red letter edition of our translation if there is a demand for it. Also if someone wants to volunteer to start converting the text into a version with metric measurements for readers outside the United States, that would be a good idea too. We assume there will be some who will want audio versions of our translation. There may be many other ideas for special versions.

But all of these are publication and formatting questions for the future. Right now our job is completing a translation that people will want to use in multiple formats.

Why does Jesus say, “Amen, Amen I say to you”?

In most recent translations of the gospels Jesus frequently says, “Truly I say to you” or “I tell you the truth.” This conveys a clear meaning, but the problem is that in the Greek text Jesus in the great majority of cases does not use the Greek word for “truly” or “truth.” Even though his conversation is being reported in Greek, Jesus consistently is quoted as using the Hebrew word *Amen*. Jesus is coining a new word for the use of the church. If the evangelists regularly report Jesus saying “Amen I say to you,” is there a good reason why we should not?

We are not aware of any other contemporary English translation that uses this rendering. After we started translating it this way, we did discover that the Latin Vulgate translated with “*Amen dico tibi?*” and “*Amen dico vobis?*” (Amen I say to you). And, after our translation was already finalized, I received the latest volume of Luther’s Works (*American Edition, CPH*). Volume 67 (*Luther’s Annotations on St. Matthew 1-18*) uses these words in Matthew 8:10: “Amen, I tell you” (page 41). I quickly checked other uses and found that it is quite inconsistent. “Truly, I say to you” is used in Matthew 6:2,5. “Amen” is used in chapter 10. “Truly” is used in chapter 11. I found it interesting that at least some of the time, Concordia Publishing House uses “Amen” for this term. (Luther consistently used “Wahrlich,” truly). After considerable thought, study, and discussion, we opted for “Amen” because it best honors the literary intent and perhaps even the theological intent of the text. Here is some of the data that supports this conclusion.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *Amen* occurs 30 times. NIV 84 translates it *Amen* every time except twice. Two times it is translated *truth*. In these two cases Isaiah calls the LORD *the God of Amen* (Isa 65:16). Is there any reason here to change the God of *Amen* to the God of Truth?

In the New Testament *Amen* occurs about 123 times. NIV 84 translates it as *Amen* only 30 times. The strange thing that one immediately notices is that NIV 84 like many other translations keeps the *Amens* in the epistles and in Revelation but removes the *Amens* from the gospels. It seems strange to keep the *Amens* in the Old Testament and in the epistles and in Revelation and to remove the *Amens* from the gospels, since it is Jesus’ use of *Amen* in the gospels that connects the Old Testament use to the New Testament use and establishes the church’s use of *Amen* which is reflected in the epistles and Revelation.

If we take the *Amens* out of the gospels, we break the link from the Old Testament to the New Testament to the worldwide church. In Isaiah the LORD is called the God of *Amen* (Isa 65:16). In Revelation Jesus is called the *Amen* (Rev 3:14). It is through Christ that we say “Amen” to the glory of God (2 Cor 1:20). Without Jesus’ *Amens* in the gospels the links are interrupted. This seems to be a good reason to restore Jesus’s *Amens* in the gospels.

There are other good reasons to restore Jesus’ *Amens*. One of our translation principles is that we try to follow not only the theological intent of the text but also the literary intent. That is why one of our rubrics says, “Hebrew/Aramaic words used in Greek text should remain Hebrew: *Amen, halleluia, abba, maranatha, raca, talitha qum*, etc.” This seems to be a sound principle, so should we make Jesus’ *Amens* the exception to the rule?

Another good reason not to translate *Amen* as *truth* is that Hebrew and Greek have other common words for truth (*emet, aleth*—). If we translate *Amen* as *truth*, it creates confusion and blurs distinctions when *Amen* and *emet* or *aleth* occur in proximity.

Another reason for trying to be as consistent as possible is that a Bible translation is like a sweater. When you start pulling on a loose string, you can unravel a lot of things that are connected. The same principles that apply to the *Amen* issue apply to a lot of other terms the move from one language to another language like *satan/Satan, selah/interlude, diabolos/devil*. Though maintaining complete consistency of terms is impossible, we want to maintain consistency across the translation unless there are compelling reasons to do otherwise. There does not seem to be a compelling reason to take the *Amens* out of the gospels.

So all this produces a need to balance two concerns. Though there are very good literary and theological reasons to restore Jesus’ *Amens*, which have been missing from many recent translations, some readers may, at least at first, be uncomfortable with Jesus’ *Amens*. How do we bridge this gap?

Perhaps the discomfort is due to unfamiliarity. *Amen* is a familiar word. Jesus says *Amen* so often in the gospels that it is the most notable trademark of his speech. Anyone reading the gospels in their entirety will soon recognize that this is one of Jesus' benchmarks, and the pattern will become familiar.

Jesus is unique in his ability to say *Amen* to a statement even before it is said. "*Amen, Amen*, I tell you." Isn't that a theological point worth preserving? Is Jesus with his initial *Amens* simply saying, "I am going to tell you the truth"? or is he saying more, "I am guaranteeing this will happen"? This may be another good reason not to take away Jesus' *Amens*.

Why do you capitalize the Devil? Isn't that honoring the devil?

No, it simply recognizes that the Devil has become a title of Satan. All titles are capitalized even if they are evil figures like Satan, the Devil, Belial, Lucifer, Antichrist, etc.

The Devil comes from the Greek word *diabolos*, which means "slanderer" when it is used as a common noun. It is already used in the Greek Old Testament as the translation for *satan*, a Hebrew word that means "the enemy or accuser. *Satan* or *the Satan* is a Hebrew name for the leader of the evil angels. *Diabolos*, *the Devil* is a Greek name for the leader of the evil angels.

The evil angels who follow Satan, the Devil, are not called *satans* or *devils*. They are called demons or unclean spirits. The Devil is a special title of their leader. If Satan, his Hebrew name, is capitalized, his Greek name should also be capitalized.

The Devil is capitalized because it is a Greek version of the Satan. Both started as common nouns. Both are now titles.

In the gospels I noticed that your translation sometimes has more words and occasionally even more verses than other recent translations of the New Testament. Why is that?

There are hundreds of handwritten manuscripts of the New Testament. There are many small differences between these hand-written copies. Most of these variants fall into the category of "typos" which do not affect the meaning of the text, but occasionally some manuscripts have words or even verses that are missing from other copies of the New Testament.

Recent English translations fall into two general camps in their approach to the text of the New Testament. Some translations closely follow the so-called *Textus Receptus* (TR, Received Text) which was the basis of the King James Version. The so-called *Majority Text* (MT) is not identical to the *Textus Receptus*, but both reconstructions of the text rely heavily on late medieval manuscripts and are sometimes also called the Byzantine text type. Closely following this tradition results in a longer text of the New Testament.

The second major approach follows a critically reconstructed text which relies much more heavily on older Greek manuscripts with an emphasis on texts from Egypt, where there are more old texts that have survived because of the dry climate. This text type is sometimes called the Alexandian text. This tradition is summarized in the critical editions of the New Testament known as the UBS/Nestle editions. Overall, it is this tradition that results in a shorter text of the New Testament.

In this brief FAQ we cannot go into the intricacies of the ongoing battles between these two schools other than to note that proponents of the Textus Receptus/Majority Text end of the spectrum argue that the Byzantine text type is the most carefully preserved text in the main line of

transmission of the text throughout the church, and that the Egyptian type texts have significant corruptions and omissions. Proponents of the UBS/Nestle tradition argue that the Byzantine type texts have been amplified by scribal additions over the centuries.

The NIV, ESV, and HCSB are all translations in the UBS/Nestle tradition. These translations may occasionally follow a Greek text different from the text given preference in the UBS/Nestle text.

The KJV and NKJV are examples of translations in the Textus Receptus tradition.

Our approach to the text of the New Testament is to avoid a bias toward any one textual tradition or group of manuscripts. **An objective approach considers all the witnesses to the text** (Greek manuscripts, lectionaries, translations, and quotations in the church fathers) without showing favoritism for one or the other, since each of these has its own strengths and weaknesses as a witness to the text. In the New Testament, a fuller text than that of the UBS/Nestle should be weighed on a case by case basis because UBS/Nestle tends to lean too heavily toward the theory that the shorter text is the better reading. In general, as we examine significant variants, the reading in a set of variants that has **the earliest and widest support in the witnesses** is the one included in the text. The other readings in a set of variants are dealt with in one of three ways:

- A reading that has very little early or widespread support in the witnesses is not footnoted in order to avoid an overabundance of textual notes.
- A reading with significant early and/or widespread support but not as much early or widespread evidence as the other reading is reflected in a footnote that says, “**Some** witnesses to the text read/omit:”
- A familiar or notable reading from the King James tradition (e.g. the addition or omission of a whole verse) whose support is not nearly as early or widespread as the other reading can be reflected in a footnote that says, “A **few** witnesses to the text read/omit:”

In short, readings and verses that are omitted from UBS/Nestle-based versions of the New Testament, which have textual support that is ancient and widespread are included in our translation. If there are readings where the evidence is not clear-cut, our “bias,” if it can be called that, is to include the reading with a note that not all manuscripts have it. The result is that our New Testament is slightly longer than many recent translations of the New Testament.

Reading Level

Sometimes we are asked what reading level we are aiming for. Actually, we aren’t aiming for a specific reading level across the board. We are trying to match our translation to the reading level of the Hebrew or Greek text. God inspired the writers to write the original text. Some books are easier to read than others. John is one example of a book that is easier to read in Greek. Our translation matches that. Paul’s epistles are sometimes more difficult. Our translation matches that.

Perhaps just a note of caution is in order: the Flesch-Kincaid test does not cover every aspect of reading difficulty (or ease). I used the tool in Microsoft Word (for Mac 2011) to come up with the results for each New Testament book in our translation. The one translation that is not yet final is Revelation, but it is nearly final.

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Levels

Matthew	5.4
Mark	5.1
Luke	5.6
John	4.7
Acts	6.9
Romans	6.6
1 Corinthians	6.0
2 Corinthians	6.8
Galatians	6.7
Ephesians	8.2

Philippians	7.8
Colossians	7.1
1 Thessalonians	7.8
2 Thessalonians	8.8
1 Timothy	9.1
2 Timothy	7.6
Titus	8.9
Philemon	6.0
Hebrews	7.3
James	5.6

1 Peter	7.2
2 Peter	7.7
1 John	5.6
2 John	5.7
3 John	4.6
Jude	7.7
Revelation	5.5

Not everyone agrees on these reading levels. The following reading grade level values were taken from the Christian Book Distributors' website.

KJV	12
RSV	12
NRSV	11
NASB	11
ESV	10

HCSB	7-8
NIV	7-8
NKJV	7
NLT	6
GW	6

General Editor's Comments on Continuing Education

Although there are not immediate financial paybacks for all the participants, it is exciting to see how much payback there is to the participants in terms of learning that will enrich their ministries. On a difficult Old Testament book like Leviticus or Ezekiel it can be a difficult task to combine the translation and three technical reviews into one composite document that can be used to create a final translation, yet it is very rewarding and even exciting. The more thorough and comprehensive the review, the more difficult it is to assimilate it all and incorporate its insights and suggestions, but it is easy to see that large amount of studying and learning that has gone into each review. In a single book, if one adds up all the growth in biblical knowledge and understanding that has been gained by the translator, the editors, and the reactors, and then adds in all the additional work of popular reviewers and readers, the amount of Bible study and knowledge that accrues to the long-term benefit of the church is enormous. The project is already paying big dividends for the church in all the in-depth Bible study it is producing. In thirty-plus years of seminary teaching I have never had a class that was more beneficial to the teacher and the students than the "classes" that make up the work of the project. The benefits to the participants will trickle down to their congregations and conferences. This benefit alone is worth all the time and effort that participants are sinking into the project.

Participants are regularly reminded not to let their work for the project interfere with their primary callings or families. Prof. Brug recently reminded the participants to keep focused on the joy and satisfaction of working together harmoniously on this great opportunity the Lord has given us, whatever the role may be, whether it is translating, reviewing, editing, or "holding up the prophets' hands."

**October 31, 2015
PROGRESS CHART**

Key:
 ✓ = submitted to NPH for publishing
 × = Tech review complete
 Bold = completed initial draft
 Blue underlined = recently completed
 *Asterisk = assigned or in progress
 Red Italic strikethrough = not yet assigned

OLD TESTAMENT

Pentateuch	Historical I	Historical II	Poetical	Major Prophets	Minor Prophets
Genesis × Exodus × Leviticus × Numbers × Deuteronomy	× Joshua * Judges * Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel * 1 Kings (ch 6-7) * 2 Kings <u>1 Chronicles</u> 2 Chronicles (ch 3-4)	Ezra Nehemiah × Esther	* Job Psalms × Proverbs Ecclesiastes × Song of Songs	Isaiah 1-12 Isaiah 13-39 Isaiah 40-66 <u>Jeremiah</u> *Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel	Hosea Joel * Amos × Obadiah * Jonah * Micah × Nahum × Habakkuk × Zephaniah × Haggai * Zechariah × Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT

Gospels – Acts	Epistles I	Epistles II & Prophetic
✓ Matthew ✓ Mark ✓ Luke ✓ John ✓ Acts ✓ Passion History	✓ Romans ✓ 1 Corinthians ✓ 2 Corinthians ✓ Galatians ✓ Ephesians ✓ Philippians ✓ Colossians ✓ 1 Thessalonians ✓ 2 Thessalonians ✓ 1 Timothy ✓ 2 Timothy ✓ Titus ✓ Philemon	✓ Hebrews ✓ James ✓ 1 Peter ✓ 2 Peter ✓ 1 John ✓ 2 John ✓ 3 John ✓ Jude × Revelation

Completed Initial Drafts are in various phases of review and editing. The Wartburg Project process is rigorous and will take time. Some books are being carefully checked by “technical reviewers.” Other books are being read by “popular reviewers.” After all of this input, we seek to produce the most accurate and clear translation we can.

We are on track to publish a New Testament and Psalms special edition in 2017.