



The Wartburg Project

Dear friend,

Over the last few years there has been considerable discussion of the feasibility and desirability of producing a WELS or Lutheran translation of the Bible. Last summer the synod convention decided not to test the feasibility of such an undertaking as a synodical project. A number of individuals have expressed an interest in participating in a thorough test of such a project. You are being invited to participate on a trial basis as an [Old Testament/New Testament translator/reviewer](#) in this project, which for the present will be called the Wartburg Project. To get a test of the project under way John Brug is acting as the General Editor and Old Testament Editor and Brian Keller as the New Testament editor. We are seeking five to eight New Testament translators and eight to ten Old Testament translators. These men could also serve as reviewers and on the editorial board which will be organized in about one year. Additional people could later volunteer or be invited to serve as reviewers and in other capacities.

Your initial participation in the project would involve producing a draft translation of a short biblical book (a minor prophet or one of the shorter epistles). Our methods and organization are still flexible. They will be shaped by the initial translation efforts. To help you in your initial efforts, the methodology and organization for the project as they have been developed so far follow as a postscript to this letter.

Receiving this invitation is similar to receiving an invitation to serve the church through some board or committee or perhaps to deciding to work on a book or a Bible class which you hope will be published for the use of the church. In considering this invitation you must balance the opportunity to serve the church in this way with your other responsibilities including your family. A big plus that will come from participating in this project, regardless of its ultimate outcome, is that your translation work will make a big contribution to your continuing education as a teacher and preacher of the Word. If, after reading the following information, you are uncertain about whether you should participate, consider attempting a translation of a single short book as test of both the burdens and the blessings of participating in the project. If you have further questions contact either of the testament editors.

John Brug

Brian Keller

The Process

The product to be produced by the Wartburg Project could best be called a translation/revision. Our product will not exactly be a “translation” because it will not be totally from scratch, but it will not exactly be a “revision” because it will not be based on any single template. Although our translation will be based on the Hebrew and Greek texts, we will use templates as a starting point in the translation process. In this way we can build on the tradition of English and Lutheran Bible translation. The primary resources, of course, are the Hebrew and Greek texts and the tools needed to translate them, but we are not envisioning a process in which translators sit in front of their computer screen with a Hebrew Bible and perhaps a lexicon and attempt to translate the text from scratch.

A better option is offered by electronic versions of public domain translations that can be used as a translation template at no cost. A web-based translation, the *World English Bible (WEB)*, is not copyrighted and in fact welcomes translators to use it to produce other translations. The only requirement is that the name of the translation must be changed if any revisions are made to it. This translation is a modernization of the American Standard Version (ASV) which is in turn a modernization of the King James. The sample translation of Matthew which is attached to this mailing was made using the *World English Bible (WEB)* as a template. The WEB is used as a template only in a very loose sense of the word. The sample translations that have been completed so far are more dynamic and more modern than WEB and follow different rubrics. Often these rubrics can be implemented with the touch of a button. For example, all the *Yahwehs* in a book can be turned to LORD with one click.

An additional side-benefit to having a public domain template like WEB in front of the translator while he translates is that this tends to distance the translator from the NIV and other copyrighted translations. Most translators, when they translate from scratch, would inevitably be influenced by the language of NIV 84, which is engrained in their minds, and they would to a degree be making a revision of NIV whether or not they intended to do so. Starting from a different template is a check on that tendency.

The second major resource for translators is the Concordia translation. Each volume of the *Concordia Commentary* produces its own original translation of the text. These translations are more literal than a translation suitable for general use, but they form a good base for a more “dynamic” translation. In addition, the *CC* provides detailed exegetical studies of all the major issues and options which a translator would face. Concordia Publishing House has offered to provide our translators with electronic files of the translations from the *CC* for our use. Beginning after Christmas a test translation of Proverbs based on the *CC* will be one of our first assignments. The *CT* is probably most useful for difficult Old Testament books.

The list of additional resources that translators could consult is endless. Those that would appear to be the most helpful are the tools that are part of *Libronix/Logos* and the *NET Bible*. The *NET Bible* is a free online resource that provides a line-by-line comparison of ten English Bibles, the Hebrew and Greek texts, extensive translators’ notes (that must be used very critically), and an array of topical articles (*NET* can be used inside of some versions of *Logos/Libronix*). Having an online thesaurus open during the translation process is also useful for wrestling with a choice of synonyms. The *People’s Bible* also provides a simple treatment of the underlying issues. After that the sky is the limit.

Translators thus have three main options: 1) working from scratch from the Hebrew and Greek, 2) using WEB and/or NET as a template, 3) using the Concordia translation as a template and *CC* as a help.

Translators will need to know when “enough is enough,” especially for the first draft of a book. We would generally not expect translators to spend weeks or even days, researching the precise modern identification of the twelve stones in the breastplate of the high priest. Generally, in researching such issues, after about 20-30 *minutes*, the translator knows what the chief issues are and what the chief alternative translations are. Generally, after researching such issues for 20-30 *hours or days*, the translator would know what the chief issues are and what the chief alternative translations are. We would be kidding ourselves if we think we can resolve many of the cruxes that have baffled translators for centuries. (If we do, and if we generate some worthy scholarly articles on notable cruxes, “great!” But that would be a fringe benefit not a prerequisite for the project). Perfectionism is not an asset for a translator. Zeal to improve the translation is. When Luther had a first stage translation done, he rolled the presses. He never stopped in efforts to improve that translation.

In many respects, we will be “standing on the shoulders of giants,” by utilizing the work of many individuals who have gone before us. The project will make heavy use of previous scholarship. The translators should be more concerned about quality and clarity than in plowing new ground and making new discoveries.

A special issue with using WEB as a template for NT books is that the WEB follows the Majority Text (also called Robinson-Pierpont (RP) in some resources). This is a fuller Greek text than the Nestle-Aland versions, which are reflected in the NIV and many other recent translations. Our rubric in the Wartburg Project is that in the NT we are following the “earliest and most widespread” reading. Because it would be a lot of work to determine which reading that is for each variant, it is suggested that you consult what was done in *God’s Word to the Nations* (1988 or 1992) as far as NT variants are concerned. The footnotes in GWN are a model for the type of footnotes that would be included in this translation. In a difficult case, you may ask a question of Professor-emeritus David Kuske at kusked@juno.com or consult the NT editor (pastorkeller@gmail.com) for help.

Tentative Process and Staff

- A translation committee or subcommittee develops a set of translation principles and rubrics to be used by each translator and the translators study these documents . (These rubrics as they have been developed so far are attached to this mailing.)
- There will be one lead translator for each book. Each translator has two consultants who give him advice and feedback.
- The translator of a book makes a first draft of the translation of a book. The translator can confer with his consultants, with his testament editor, and with the rubrics and the electronic files of the books already translated to check consistency with other books.
- The first draft is reviewed by a committee consisting of the translator and two other translators or consultants (ideally, men who are translating similar books). They suggest improvements and check for consistency with other books and prepare the second draft. On disputed issues they make changes by a majority vote, but both opinions are included in the notes of the second draft which is forwarded to the testament editor and the general editor.
- A larger group of technical reviewers (a group of about 6-8 pastors and professors, who have a knowledge of the original language) review the draft and make suggestions.
- The committee of three and the testament editor considers these suggestions and produce the third draft.
- The third draft is reviewed by a larger group of consultants or readers who forward comments and suggestions to the translation committee/editorial board. These groups can include pastors, teachers, and lay people.

- The editorial board would consist of 6-10 (perhaps 4-6 OT and 2-4 NT). They could at some stages function separately as OT and NT boards or as subcommittees. The board will consist largely of men who have served as translators.
- The editor in chief and the editorial board in consultation with the translator make final changes to the translation of the book. This is done when most of the books have been completed, to check for consistency throughout. (There can of course be opportunities to get feedback from the constituency along the way.)

Support

In the initial stages the project would be carried out by unpaid volunteers. If translators and editors donate their time, they would receive royalties proportionate to their contribution if a marketable product results from the project. We do not have a commitment to any publishing house and no publishing house has a commitment to the project, but there is tentative interest from a publishing house. The advent of electronic and on-demand publishing gives us many more options on how to market the product.

Some Pros of the Wartburg Project

- It would be cheap.
- It would put less pressure on the ministerial education faculties.
- It would involve more pastors, as the *People's Bible* and the hymnal project did.
- The involvement of pastors would strengthen our corps of Hebrew and Greek scholars. In a full summer quarter of three weeks a pastor takes 75 hours of class and does another 75 to 150 hours of study. What could a pastor do with 225 hours of Bible translation work? Would a congregation support their pastor devoting some time to a translation as part of his continuing education? It would be cheaper than the other options.
- Involvement of teachers and laypeople in the evaluation phases would put the project closer to the grass roots.
- The translators' notes could provide the base for a Lutheran study Bible.
- This translation would have as its primary goal service to the people of the Lutheran church. It would not be particularly concerned about academic prestige or universal acceptance.
- It would provide a translation which people could use with confidence since it did not have the doctrinal errors or unclarities which occur in other translations and in their translators' notes. This would be true regardless of whether it became our main translation or was used as a supplemental study version.

Some Possible Cons

- Is it feasible? The two-year test would answer this question.
- Will people be interested in using it? Field testing will tell. Online distribution of samples through Amazon would put out a feeler for interest.
- The most serious concern is whether the Old Testament can be handled. Can such "elephants in the room" as Job and Ezekiel and, hardest of all, Proverbs be tamed? The offer from Concordia and the pilot projects using CC will address this issue. [Note: We plan on inviting only WELS and ELS pastors and professors. If at some point authors of CC volumes, ask to make their own revisions of their translations, we would cross that bridge when we come to it.]

Is it feasible?

The test project outlined above will aim in its first year to complete first editions of at least two of the Synoptic Gospels, Psalms and another major Old Testament book, as well as drafts of as many other books as possible. A set of principles and rubrics will be developed. These, of course, will always be “in progress” throughout the project. At the end of the second year, the group will assess the progress that has been made, estimate the time needed to complete the project and determine the direction the project will take from there.

Added Materials

Attachments to the email

[This Letter](#)

[The Principles and Rubrics for the Translation](#)

[Sample Translation Matthew](#)

[Sample Translation Psalms 1](#)

[Essays at WLS Online Essay File](#)

[Principles and Practices of Bible Translation](#)

[Principles of Bible Translation —Applied to Prophecy](#)