

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION
FOR GENERAL SYNOD COALDALE 1977

The Mandate

Synod Toronto (1974) decided (Acts, Article 182, D):

to continue the Committee on the R.S.V. with the mandate:

- a. to continue the work of checking the R.S.V. and to pass on their criticism to the R.S.V. Bible Committee;
- b. to inform the Churches from time to time about the results of their investigations;
- c. to send a copy of this decision to the R.S.V. Bible Committee.

ad a. The Committee met nine times during the past three years and came up with some recommendations for consideration by the Standard Bible Committee. These recommendations are taken seriously and are appreciated. This work is therefore of some importance.

ad b. The instruction to inform the Churches from time to time was not implemented. The reason is that hardly any results of the investigations could be reported until a considerable amount of checking was done and a summary of the accomplished work could be presented. We, therefore, felt that it would be better to wait until we were ready to submit a report.

ad c. A copy of Synod Toronto's decision re: the report of the previous Committee on the R.S.V. was sent to the Standard Bible Committee on March 20, 1975.

Translation and Presupposition

As has just been noted, Synod Toronto, among other things, charged this Committee with the mandate "to continue the work of checking the R.S.V." Synod New Westminster gave a similar mandate: "to continue with their work of checking the Revised Standard Version" (Article 33), while the Synod Orangeville (1968) made clear what the first point of this checking, which was to be continued through all these years, is. It is "to study the Revised Standard Version as to faithfulness to the original text and 'Schriftgelovig karakter'" (Acts, Article 46, IV).

In view of this mandate, this Committee also sought to evaluate the R.S.V. with a view to the theological presuppositions that may have entered into the translation work as seen in the final product. For, it is clear, that theological presuppositions cannot be divorced from the task of translating.

In view of the importance of the theological presuppositions, it is a legitimate question to ask about the background and sponsorship of a translation, also of the R.S.V. In 1937, the International Council of Religious Education voted to proceed with a revision of the American Standard Version of 1901. When the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC) was formed in 1950, "that body voted its approval of the R.S.V. project, and through its Division of Christian Education (DCE) became the sponsor of the new translation."¹ The Acts of Synod Carman (1954) describes the NCCC as "modernistic" (Acts, Article 71). To our knowledge, the premise that the NCCC is for the greater part identified with liberal Protestantism has never been challenged.

The question must therefore be, does the R.S.V. in any way give evidence of its sponsorship by a modernistic body? Is there any indication of an unscriptural influence?

Attempts have been made to find such indications by trying to prove that the R.S.V. consistently denies certain orthodox Christian doctrines.¹ It has, however, been amply proven that all orthodox doctrines can be accurately formulated on the basis of the R.S.V.³ Unfortunately, the attempt to find a consistent denial of some doctrine (like the doctrine of the virgin or the resurrection) or to construct a theory of a theological bias which tries to promote or prove a certain erroneous doctrine throughout the translation, has long muddied the waters of this discussion.

All this does not, however, mean that a translation from which all doctrine can be derived is by that fact automatically free from all possibility of unscriptural influence. It is possible that all doctrines can be deduced from a translation and that, nonetheless, there

may be clear instances of mistranslation which can detract from the true doctrine. Such mistranslations may even be technically defensible, but in the context of the Scriptures and its doctrine must be called a wrong translation. As such, such wrong translations could reveal the background of a version and would prevent one from giving it unconditional approval. On the basis of the following, we are afraid this is the case with the R.S.V.

a. Indications of unscriptural influence concerning the translation of texts dealing with the Holy Spirit.

Romans 5:5 could technically be translated: "the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (R.S.V.); but, since the clear teaching of the Scripture is that the Holy Spirit is a person, this is a wrong translation. Correct is: "The Holy Spirit who has been given to us," or "whom he has given to us," in agreement with the correct translation of Romans 8:16, 26. (The same mistranslation occurs in Romans 8:11; I Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 1:14; I John 3:2-4.) Now to conclude that there is a mistranslation originating from an unscriptural influence here is not the same as saying that the R.S.V. is trying to introduce a false doctrine, re: the Holy Spirit, here.

A letter on this point was sent (November 29, 1976) to the Standard Bible Committee. No definite answer to our letter was as yet received from them. However, as is clear from the archives of our Committee, the R.S.V. Study Committee of the Christian Reformed Church in 1968 sent the following recommendation (to the Standard Bible Committee) on this point: "Substitute in the text 'who' for 'which' as in the RSV-CE." This would be consistent with the R.S.V.'s "the Spirit himself" in Romans 8:16, 26." The archive material makes it clear that this recommendation was not adopted, although other recommendations dealing with Pauline writings were adopted and later appeared in the new 1971 edition of the R.S.V. New Testament.

b. Indications of the influence of modern critical scholarship in the Old Testament.

Joshua 10:12. See Recommendation re: this passage in Appendix A. The need for clarity on this point becomes all the more important when we recognize that pagan contemporaries did worship the sun, (cf. Joshua 15:7, 10 where reference is made to En-Shemesh — spring of the sun — and Beth-Shemesh — house of the sun), and the moon (cf. Deuteronomy 4:19). Any suggestion that Joshua recognized the sun and moon as deities proceeds not from Scripture, but from critical theories as to the development and state of Israel's religion at this time.

Genesis 11:1. The R.S.V. translates "Now the whole earth had one language and few words." Although the translation "few words" may be technically possible, this translation is very unlikely and makes little sense in the context (cf. Gispén, Genesis, I [COT] ad loc). It should be translated "one speech." The point of the passage is that the earth had one language and thus all used the same words before the confusion of tongues. The present R.S.V. translation is difficult to imagine without the influence of unscriptural evolutionary thinking, which maintains that the language in those days was not yet developed and only had a very limited vocabulary.

Psalms 51:18b (51:20 in the Hebrew). The R.S.V. translates "rebuild the walls of Jerusalem." This should be "build the walls of Jerusalem." The R.S.V. translation intimates that the Psalm is post-exilic (i.e. composed after the Babylonian exile), and therefore sees the necessity to make reference to the rebuilding of the walls. However, neither the Hebrew nor the Psalm's context as indicated by the heading (and there is no objective reason to deny the value of the headings of the Psalms) suggests this. To translate "build" instead of "rebuild" makes perfectly good sense (cf., e.g., Calvin ad loc). The R.S.V. translation appears to be influenced by modern unscriptural theories which place Psalm 51 (along with the great majority of the Psalms) after the exile because of (among other reasons) their evolutionistic understanding of Israel's faith. Verses 5, 16, and 17, for example, are considered too advanced theologically for such an early date as David.

c. Indications of unnecessary contradictions.

The R.S.V. sometimes introduces unnecessary contradictions into the text which can be very confusing in the mind of the average Bible student and raise questions as to the consistency and trustworthiness of Scripture. For example, Genesis 9:20 is translated by the R.S.V. as: "Noah was the first tiller of the soil." This translation, however, contradicts Genesis 4:2 and 5:29. Genesis 9:20 can be translated differently and therefore

should be translated differently in view of what other passages say. Correct is something like: "Noah began to till the soil."

On a larger scale, the unity of the Old and New Testament should be maintained wherever the original clearly calls for it. As the United Bible Societies' booklet, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament*, (p. vii) puts it: "the present check list should help the translator to make the Old and New Testament materials agree in translation wherever they are truly parallel in their respective originals." The R.S.V. does not always do that. For example, the R.S.V. translation of Psalm 45:6 (verse 7 in the Hebrew) makes it needlessly difficult for one who reads Hebrews 1:8 (where this passage is quoted) to find here a reference to Psalm 45:6. The R.S.V. should read: "Thy throne O God," instead of: "your divine throne." There is no reason in the Hebrew original or the ancient versions to tone that down. Hebrews 1:8 confirms that. In view of God's Messianic promises to David and in view of Christ's being the fulfillment of David's royal line, this makes Psalm 45:6 full of meaning, only fully realized in the New Testament. Another example of needlessly different translations of an Old Testament passage and its being quoted in the New Testament is Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29.

In view of the considerations above, the Committee arrives at the statement that it is afraid that the R.S.V. shows evidence of unscriptural influence.

Does this mean that we should no longer avail ourselves of this translation? The Committee does not think so. As pointed out, all doctrines can be deduced from it and also of the R.S.V. translation it may be said: This is the Bible. Indeed, in the flood of the many translations and paraphrases of today, it would be fair to say that in the wide perspective of all these different renditions, the R.S.V. numbers among the more conservative in its basic attempt to translate what is there as precisely as possible. For, in its study of the last three years, the Committee found that in spite of its deficiencies, the R.S.V. does not add to nor take away from the words of the Bible books in its translation. That means that, although with care, the R.S.V. can be used. We must also realize that at the moment no other modern translation has been tested for use in our Churches. Furthermore, serious objections, be they of a different nature, can also be brought to bear against the exclusive use of the King James Version in our midst.

This Committee therefore recommends that the Churches be left the freedom to use the R.S.V. with discretion and care.

TO SUMMARIZE:

We recommend:

1. that the Churches be left the freedom to use the R.S.V. with discretion and care (for the grounds, see above).
2. that Synod not appoint a new Committee for the checking of the R.S.V. Ground: the Committee feels that this matter has had sufficient attention.

Postscript:

The recommendation to terminate the existence of a Committee for the checking of the R.S.V. does not exclude the possibility to maintain a study Committee on the R.S.V. which continues to make recommendations for changes to the R.S.V. Bible Committee and keeps the Churches posted as to the developments in new editions of the R.S.V., which strengthen the recommendation of Synod or make it imperative to reconsider this recommendation.

Since the opinion of deputies was not asked on this point, no recommendation is given by them in this respect.

Respectfully submitted by the Committee on the
R.S.V., appointed by Synod Toronto 1974.

L. Selles, convener
H.M. Ohmann
C. Van Dam, secretary

¹ Herbert G. May, "The Revised Standard Version after Twenty Years," *McCormick Quarterly* XIX, 4 (May 1966), p. 301.

² Cf. e.g., the brief survey in G.A. Larue, "Another Chapter in the History of Bible

Translation," **The Journal of Bible and Religion** XXXI, 4 (1963) pp. 301-310.

³ E.g., the dissertation of R.L. Goddard, **An Objective Evaluation of the Accuracy of the R.S.V. in the Translation of the New Testament** (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1955).

⁴ RSV-CE = RSV Catholic Edition (1966).