

WHAT VERSION SHOULD WE USE?

Baptist Times 16 March 2006

Years ago it was so simple. There was only one version of the Bible: the *Authorised Version*, or – as our American cousins call it – the King James Bible. As a result we all used the same Bible. Today, however, there is a plethora of translations. Which one is the best? Which one should we encourage people to use? Which one should we buy for the pews?

At the risk of courting controversy, let me be open with you. The Bible in which I have least confidence is the *New International Version*. For it is a Bible produced by evangelical scholars for evangelical Christians, as if only evangelical Christians can be trusted to produce a faithful translation of the Bible. In fact, the opposite is the case, for there are times when the translation is deliberately ‘skewed’ to produce a version acceptable to an evangelical constituency. To take just one example, because many evangelicals in the USA do not agree with the idea of women in ministry, in Rom 16.7 the NIV goes for the least well-attested Greek reading and speaks of Junias (a man) being an apostle, as distinct from Junia (a woman). I find this reprehensible.

By contrast the *Jerusalem Bible* lacks such a confessional bias. True, the notes in some of the study editions of the *Jerusalem Bible* reflect its Catholic origin. For instance, the doctrine of purgatory is said to be present in 1 Cor 3.16. Yet the translation itself is unbiased and is often exceedingly fresh. My chief objection is its preference for the term ‘Yahweh’ over against ‘the Lord’: for although technically the former is correct, it does not seem to me to read as well.

My personal preference is for the *New Revised Standard Version*. Although it retains some of the cadences of the *Authorised Version*, it is the most accurate modern English version, and as such is the best study Bible. Certainly this is the view of the theological faculties of our universities, for whom it is the set text (unless, of course, one is able to read Hebrew and Greek!).

And yet I don’t use the NRSV in church. For the trouble with the NRSV, as with almost all English versions of the Bible, is that its vocabulary and style are too elitist for most people. For that reason I use the GNB. Strange as it may seem, the GNB was initially produced with the needs of people for whom English was not their mother-tongue. It is therefore much easier to understand. Some Christians do not like the GNB because it does not always offer a word-for-word translation, but rather adopts the translation technique of ‘dynamic equivalence’. However, unlike the *Living Bible* or the *Message*, it is not a paraphrase – it is a proper translation. I therefore am happy to use the GNB. For as a minister, I am in the business of communication – and if the GNB is the most intelligible to the average person, then this surely is the version to be preferred.