ALL THE TRANSLATIONS? GIVE ME STRENGTH!

Posted on February 12, 2015 by Eddie

Meanwhile, as writers about English language Bible score cheap points off each other, there are something like 180 million people who don't have a single word of Scripture available to them. This is the real scandal of our age; not the supposed emasculation of some translations in one language among the world's 6,000 languages.
Category: English Bibles

Every now and then, I find myself being dragged kicking and screaming back to the subject of English translations of the Bible. It's not something I want to blog about much, butÂ from time to time I come across something that just cries out for comment.

Today's offering is a profoundly silly blog post by Stephen Altrogge called "If all the Translations Had a Dinner Party".Â I don't think I'd recommend that you read it, but the link is there if you want to do so. That being said, if you don't read it,Â my comments may not make much sense.

The first thing to say is that I suspect that the article is meant to be funny, but the humour is rather clumsy.Â However, that isn't the article's greatest failing.

It's Wrong About English Translations

The title of the piece is just silly. It saysÂ *All* the translations and then goes on to mention five English language versions of the Bible; only three of which are arguably translations. There is no mention of theÂ RSV, the NLT, the TEV or a host of other three letter acronyms. That's only thinking about one language; the Bible is available in around 530 languages.

Now it it could be that theÂ *All* in the title is just a lazy way of writing. I can forgive that, I make the same sort of silly mistake myself often enough. Or it could be that the author doesn't consider all of the other translation in English to be worthy of comment; which would be an even sillier mistake.

It's Wrong About Translation

At first glance, it's hard to know what the point of this piece is. ItÂ includes too few versions to be a good satyrical piece on the proliferation of translations in English (something, I might heartily applaud). However, on a second reading at least one major theme becomes obvious. Consider these remarks that are made about the NIV.

> *NIV, in the last ten years thou hast gotten plastic surgery and thou hast begun dressing like a metrosexual. Thou hast lost thy manhood!*
>
> *At least I didnâ€™t have a vasectomy!*

So, the NIV has had plastic surgery, begun dressing like a metrosexual, lost it's manhood and had a vasectomy. Before getting onto the actual issue, I have to say that I am surprised to find this sort of pseudo-macho, teenage humour on a blog by respected Christian leaders.

Obviously, the issue is that Mr Altrogge doesn't like the fact that the NIV is using what is called by some 'inclusive language' to translate some passages. This is a contentious issue and there are people with strong views on both sides of the argument. However, reducing a complex issue of how we best convey the message of Scripture to childish jokes does not help. I've blogged about this issue a few times in the past, and I'd refer you to this post which contains an excellent quote from

D.A. Carson:

> *"â€¦Would it not be good to recognize that there are people of good will on both sides of this debate? Both sides are trying to be true to Scripture, and to make their understandings known; and both make money in the process." (read more)*

Another problem is that the author is highlighting what he sees as a failing in the NIV, when actually it is something which occurs inÂ **all**Â translations of the Bible into English. **Yes, all!**

I reckon that David Brunn's superb bookÂ One Bible, Many Versions: Are All Translations Created Equal?Â should be required reading for anyone who blogs about English language Bible translations. In his conclusion, he makes a series of points about English translations a few of which I highlighted here. Note the one I've emphasised below:

> - *Every version translates thought for thought rather than word for word in many contexts.*
> - *Every version gives priority to meaning over form.*
> - *Every version translates some Hebrew or Greek words many different ways.*
> - *Every version paraphrases in some contexts.*
> - *Every version uses interpretation when translating ambiguities.*
> - ***Every version replaces some masculine forms with gender-neutral forms.***

In other word, all translations haveÂ lost their manhood and had a vasectomy.

It's Wrong About What The World Needs

In a world where people are openly dismissive and hostile to the message of the Bible, the last thing we need are Christian leaders denigratingÂ different translations. These sort of public Bible wars aren't funny; they play into the hands of those who want to deny the Bible or who want to say that its message has been corrupted through translation.

The truth is that there are strengths and weaknesses in all English Translations; butÂ we are fortunate to have a proliferation of versions that we can compare and learn from. Sadly this privilege is all too often used as a cause for division in the Church at a time when that is the last thing we need.

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