

EDITORIAL – What Bible shall we use?

Paul Beasley-Murray

Over the last 50 years a revolution has taken place in the British churches. Fifty years ago the vast majority of churches used the *Authorised Version* of the Bible (better known in other parts of the world as the ‘King James Bible’) in their worship. Today you can still hear the *Authorised Version* in Oxbridge chapels and cathedrals, but almost without exception, local churches have opted instead for modern translations.

Of the range of modern translations available, most Protestants have gone for American translations of the Bible. The *New English Bible* given to me at my ordination - and now, in its updated form, known as the *Revised English Bible* - never proved popular, not least because you need an ‘A’ level in English to understand some of its language. What for instance, does the phrase ‘the effulgence of his glory’ (Hebs 1.3) mean to the ordinary worshipper? As a result, the majority of British churches have adopted either the *New Revised Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, the *Good News Bible*, or *The Message* - all American in origin (although the first three are available in ‘Anglicized’ editions).

The *New Revised Standard Version* is the most accurate in translation and is used in British universities. I like it, not least because it retains the cadences of the *Authorised Version*, and I use it for personal study. But not only is it a little wooden, it is also full of terminology and phraseology which would not be readily understood by most churchgoers.

The *New International Version* is a favourite amongst evangelicals because it was translated by evangelicals - as if non-evangelicals could not be trusted with Bible translation! In fact it succumbs to some of the prejudices of North American evangelicals. For example, in Rom 16.7, the NIV refuses to accept that ‘Junia’, a woman, was an apostle, and instead goes for the less well attested reading of ‘Junias’. In all kinds of ways is a good deal less accurate than the NRSV, and, what is more, no more accessible to the general public.

The version I like best is the *Good News Bible*. This was the brain-child of an American Baptist missionary, who wanted to produce an English Bible for people whose first language is not English.

Adopting the linguistic principle of ‘dynamic equivalence’, it uses standard, everyday English. Looked down upon by scholars, it is the most intelligible of all English Bibles for general use. For that reason it is the version that my church uses in public worship.

The latest best-selling Bible is *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, an American Presbyterian from an evangelical tradition. More of a paraphrase than a literal translation, it presents problems to some British evangelical leaders whose views on biblical inspiration mean they would prefer a more literal version. I confess that my own initial response was less than welcoming, but people in the pews love the freshness. As a result, I have put away my academic prejudices, and take a broader view. For what’s the point of a Bible translation if it doesn’t communicate?

At a time when increasing numbers of people are unaware of the claims of the Christian faith, church leaders should concentrate on making the ‘good news’ accessible to people today - and if this means going ‘down-market’ in the scholarship stakes, so what? Going ‘down-market’ is surely what the incarnation is all about!

WE WANT IT ALL, & WE WANT IT NOW?

Paul Goodliff

Head of Ministry at the Baptist Union of Great Britain

For activist pastors the idea of waiting, of finding ourselves disempowered or helpless is difficult. We want news of how to be successful, how to be present and empowered for ministry. We do not like waiting, we want it now. But any spirituality that is adequate for ministry must embrace this element of human experience, or it will not match the reality of life.

This activism and obsession with success owes more to the impatience of the have-it-all-now society than to genuine and realistic Christian faith and ministry. The Christian faith was forged in a culture where the limitations of human effort were only too obvious: a fever would carry off a child, a farm accident could kill a previously fit man, and the predations of infection meant that few lived to an age that we would now consider normal. We have lost any sense of our fragility as a culture, with talk of