

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I would like to comment on Stephen Neill's article "Translating the Word of God" in your issue of October-December 1976. He uses the word 'paraphrase' in two or possibly three different senses in one paragraph. "*Good News for Modern Man* is a *paraphrase*, at many points a good one" (1) "The Living Bible reads like a *paraphrase* (2) of a *paraphrase* (?3) at times brilliant, at others so free as to conceal rather than reveal the original". If a *paraphrase* (1? 2? or 3??) is used as the basis of a translation, . . . He then ends this confused paragraph with a quite unworthy sideswipe in which he calls 'the dynamic equivalent' 'a polite term for free translation'.

I have heard the Bishop say frequently that you cannot be both a writer and a reader and that he is a writer. I wonder if in this instance he may not have read the relevant books especially "The Theory and Practice of Translation" by Nida and Taber where the meanings of 'translation' and 'paraphrase' are discussed. In that Dr. Nida agrees that *Good News for Modern Man* is a paraphrase if by that you mean that it is based on 'back transformation', a technical term from linguistics and related disciplines characterised by three specific features.

(1) It is intralingual rather than interlingual i.e., it is 'another way of saying the same thing' in the same language;

(2) It is rigorous, in that there are no changes in the semantic components; no additions, no deletions, no skewing of relationships, only a different marking of the same relations between the same elements;

(3) Specifically as it relates to back-transformation, it is aimed at restatement at a particular level, that of the kernels.

It is all very technical. The trouble with the Bishop's article is that it gives the misleading impression that it is not technical. Nonetheless the aim

of the Bishop is one we share — to judge between good and bad translations. Nida and Taber have two helpful paragraphs on this which I reproduce here. I hope it will attract your readers to read their book.

THE ULTIMATE BASIS FOR JUDGING A TRANSLATION

What is a good translation? Perhaps we can answer this question by contrasting a good translation with bad translations of two kinds

I hope it will attract your readers to read their book:

<i>Bad</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Bad</i>
<i>Formal correspondence: the form (syn-tax and classes of words) is preserved; the meaning is lost or distorted.</i>	<i>Dynamic equivalence: the form is restructured (different syn-tax and lexicon) to preserve the same meaning.</i>	<i>Paraphrase by addition, deletion, or skewing of the message.</i>

On the one hand, it is possible to make a bad translation, as in column 1, by preserving the form at the expense of the content. On the other hand, it is possible to make a bad translation, as in column 3, by paraphrasing loosely and distorting the message to conform to alien cultural patterns (see pp. 110, 134). This is the bad sense of the word "paraphrase." But, as in column 2, a good translation focuses on the meaning or content as such and aims to preserve that intact; and in the process it may quite radically restructure the form: this is paraphrase in the proper sense.

The ultimate test of translation must be based upon three major factors: (1) the correctness with which the receptors understand the message of the original (that is to say, its "faithfulness to the original" as determined by the extent to which people really comprehend the meaning, (2) the ease of comprehension, and (3) the involvement a person experiences as the result of the adequacy of the form of the translation. Perhaps no better compliment could come to a translator than to have someone say, "I never knew before that God spoke my language."

Yours sincerely,
Tom Houston
Communication Director,
British and Foreign Bible Society.