

In my last post I began to talk about my involvement with the translation committee for the New Revised Standard Version. My Doktorvater, Bruce Metzger, was the chair of the committee and he asked me, during my graduate studies, to be one of the scribes for the Old Testament subcommittee. In that capacity I recorded all the votes that were taken by the translators for revisions of the text of the Revised Standard Version, in whichever subsection of the committee I was assigned to. Normally the subsection would have, maybe, five scholars on it. They would debate how to modify the text of the RSV, verse by verse, word by word; they would then take a vote by show of hands; and I would record their decision.

This was an eye-opening experience for me. Bible translation (or the translation of any foreign-language work, for that matter) is an inordinately complicated procedure. It is impossible to replicate the exact meaning of one language in another, since the nuances of words vary from one language to another. Let me give an example from the Greek of the New Testament. In English we have different terms that mean something like “love” - for example, “adoration,” “passion,” “lust,” “like,” and, lots of others. Each has its own connotations. Greek too has a variety of words, and they all, in principle, could be translated with the word love.

One Greek word used in the New Testament, PHILIA, typically refers to ...

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