

I often indicate that when citing the New Testament in English, I'm giving my own translation, and that understandably has led some people to think I've actually citing a completed translation that I've made but not published. A reader of the blog recently asked me how he could get access to the translation. But I've never written a translation of the NT; when I say that a quotation is in "my" translation I simply mean that I'm reading the Greek with my eyes, translating it in my brain, and typing it with my fingers. That's a typical procedure for NT scholars.

The reader then asked an interesting and important corollary question: how do I know what Greek to be translating? Here's the question and my response.

QUESTION:

How do you or any professional translator choose and get the right Greek version of the NT? I understand there were many manuscripts discovered and they are different in terms of content and time of writing. Many of them incomplete and none of them original. Is there any "official" Greek version which is used by translators or modern bible creators for translation into modern languages?

RESPONSE:

Ah right! I probably should be more clear about that. I was just now preparing to spend a half hour typing up an answer, when I realized I may have said something about it on the blog before, and lo and behold, a couple of years ago I did! Here's the full scoop.

When translators today produce a version of the Bible in English (or any other modern language) what is it that they are translating? One of the manuscripts? Several of the manuscripts? Something else?

The answer, in virtually every instance, is the same. They are translating an edition of the Greek New Testament published since 1965 (with revisions since then) produced by a small but international team of textual scholars assembled and commissioned by the United Bible Societies (various countries have a Bible Society - an organization devoted to the distribution of Bibles and the promotion of knowledge about the Bible: there is one in America, one in Britain, one in Germany, one in the Netherlands, etc; the "United" Bible Societies is the overarching organization with representatives of each country).

The team was assembled in 1955 in order to produce a standard edition of the Greek New Testament, based on an intense study of the available Greek manuscripts, early versions (i.e. ancient translations of the NT into Latin, Syriac, and Coptic, etc.), and quotations of the NT in the writings of the church fathers (from figures such as Irenaeus, Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, and so on). The purpose of the edition was to...

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