

LANGUAGE TRAINING PAYS DIVIDENDS:

WELS INFLUENCES  
MAJOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

by

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SENIOR CHURCH HISTORY PAPER

PROF. BRENNER

March 17, 1994

"So why doesn't the WELS put out its own Bible translation?" This is a follow-up question that I have heard quite often when speaking with people about the language training that WELS pastors receive in their pre-ministerial courses. I often hear this question because I like to point out how necessary it is that a man who desires to be a shepherd over a portion of God's people must be able to check the original languages of Scripture to be sure of its meaning. He must be able to get the full meaning that the Holy Spirit through the original writers intended. If he is going to stand before a congregation and say "God says," he should be able to make sure that God has said. Inevitably I also point out that not all translations of the Bible are correct. Every translation will have some sort of interpretation put into it by the translator. Pastors, therefore, must have the skills to check for themselves if a translation is faithfully conveying God's message to God's people. That's when the question usually comes, "So why doesn't the WELS put out its own Bible translation?"

The WELS has in fact considered putting out its own Bible translation but for good reasons has decided against it. The Bible translating skills of our men have not been wasted though. The extensive language training WELS men go through to become pastors has certainly paid great dividends. The gifts the Lord has given to some men in our Synod have been used to help in 2 major Bible

translation projects outside of our Synod. This paper is an exploration of the role WELS men have played in two major English language Bible translations. The paper then will follow this outline:

I. A WELS Translation?

II. WELS Men and the NIV

III. WELS Men and the NET

First then, why doesn't the WELS put out its own translation of the Bible? In fact our Synod at one time did begin work on producing a translation of its own. Already in the 1950's there was a feeling amongst our people and some pastors that there was a growing need for a contemporary translation to replace the King James Version. Professor Frederic Blume who played a major role in the NIV translation project writes in the Quartalschrift,

"...this writer has become increasingly convinced that no answer to our people's inquiries (about a contemporary translation) will be completely satisfactory to them or to us until we have given them a version of the New Testament that will do for our generation what Luther's New Testament of 1522 did for the Germans of his day."<sup>1</sup>

The reasons for replacing the KJV were basically two. The most important reason was that the language of the KJV had become so outdated that it was becoming hard to understand. (This is even more true today. One of my classmates, who vicared in a congregation that insists on using the KJV, related to me the difficulty he had in teaching catechism class. He found that he spent most of his time trying to explain what the various words

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<sup>1</sup>Frederic Blume, "The New Testament in the Revised Standard Version--An Evaluation," Quartalschrift, 1953, vol. 50, p.15.

meant in the passages he was using for his lesson. Because of that he hardly had time to teach the Scriptural truths which were the point of his lesson.) The second reason was that the KJV showed the Calvinistic influence of the translators who worked on it.<sup>2</sup>

Others in our Synod also recognized the need for a contemporary and faithful translation. In the 1953 Synod convention held at Northwestern College, the motion was passed authorizing work to begin on producing a WELS translation of the Bible. As the New Testament would be produced first, Galatians was selected as the first book to be translated. This trial translation was to be circulated for comment and critique. Beginning in 1955 various portions of the trial translation of Galatians were printed in the Quartalschrift.

The trial translation was apparently not very well received. In my interview with Professor Jeske, he recalled that there was widespread criticism of this translation. Because of some legitimate exegetical questions many pastors were not comfortable with an "official" translation. Also the Synod became embroiled in the controversy over fellowship with the Missouri Synod so that there was not time to pursue the idea of a WELS translation of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of a WELS translation did not die however. In 1971 the idea sprang up again. At that time the Commission on Christian

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<sup>2</sup> Quartalschrift, 1954, vol. 51 p.63.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview with Prof. John C. Jeske, December 23, 1993.

Literature brought a request to the Conference of Presidents. The Commission on Christian Literature had as its function the oversight of the production of Christian literature (Sunday School material, devotional books, tracts etc.) to be used in our churches and schools. They were seeking a contemporary translation to use in their publications which would still be useable many years down the road. They were leery of many of the translations which were being printed at the time. Joel Gerlach reports in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly:

"It was with this concern in mind that the Commission on Christian Literature addressed an overture to the Conference of Presidents requesting an opinion on the subject of Bible translations. Specifically, the Commission requested an opinion regarding an attempt to produce a translation of our own as well as a critique of existing translations which might prove helpful to our people. The Conference of Presidents considered the Commission's request and answered as follows:

Subject: BIBLE TRANSLATION

The Commission on Christian Literature has addressed a letter to the COP requesting advice on initiating a study of various Bible translations with a view to pin-pointing the weaknesses and the strengths of each and with the hope of retaining uniform use of the best available translation throughout our Synod. The Commission further asks, "Are we able and is it advisable to produce our own translation?" Your Committee (COP committee on the matter?) deems it impractical for our Synod to produce its own translation because of the high cost involved and because of the limited field of distribution.<sup>4</sup>

Besides being impractical from a financial standpoint Professor Jeske also pointed out that it would be inadvisable for

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<sup>4</sup>Joel Gerlach, "Bible Translations--Progress Report," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1971, vol. 68, pp.189-190.

the WELS to produce its own translation from the standpoint that our translation might be considered to be suspect by evangelism prospects in much the same way as the Jehovah's Witness Bible translation is suspect. He also pointed out that the Galatians experiment of the 1950's had received widespread criticism.<sup>5</sup> The end result of all this is that the WELS never produced its own Bible translation and undoubtedly never will.

The need for a contemporary translation remained in the 1970's. This led to the WELS involvement in what has become the most popular translation of the Bible today, the New International Version.

While the WELS in the mid 1950's was looking into the feasibility of producing its own Bible translation, at the same time a group of Evangelicals and Reformed Bible scholars was looking for a replacement for the King James Version of the Bible in their circles.<sup>6</sup> By 1965 this group had set up a committee to attempt to make their desire into reality.<sup>7</sup> In 1966 a conference on Bible translation was held at Moody Memorial Church in Chicago.<sup>8</sup> It was at this meeting that the WELS first became involved with the NIV. Apparently Prof. Frederic Blume and President C.J. Lawrenz of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary attended this

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<sup>5</sup>Personal interview with Prof. John C. Jeske, December 23, 1993.

<sup>6</sup>The Holy Bible, New International Version: The Version for Our Time, (pamphlet). New York International Bible Society.

<sup>7</sup>ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

meeting as Prof. Jeske recalls Prof. Blume's participation in the NIV project as dating back to 1966.<sup>9</sup>

In 1968 the NIV translation project was given the tentative name, "A Contemporary Translation." Bible scholars from numerous seminaries were invited to participate in the translation process of the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> Prof. Blume and President Lawrenz were invited to participate as well. Prof. Blume took up the offer and served as a reviewer of the translations done by four-man translation teams. Prof. Blume described his work as a "translation consultant" in an article in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly:

"Under the guidance of an executive secretary the several books of the New Testament were assigned each to a team of about four men geographically not too far removed from each other. The teams commonly consisted of two translators, a language stylist, and a translation consultant.

As a rule one of the translators, who was also the chairman of the group, would make his first draft of a translation and submit that for review to the other translators. The second draft was then given to the language stylist and the translation consultant. The stylist was to take care that a certain uniformity of language was maintained in accordance with an elaborately developed manual of style put out by the executive secretary. The translation consultant was to watch over matters like the basic Greek text being translated, the proper rendering of individual words, adequate treatment of the idioms of New Testament syntactic usage, and other such technical matters.

When the stylist and translation consultant had each done their work, their comments were incorporated into a further draft, which was then submitted for criticism and comment to all the members of the original team...Guiding

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<sup>9</sup>John C. Jeske, "New International Version Completed," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. 1978, vol. 75, p.292.

<sup>10</sup>The Holy Bible, New International Version: The Version for Our Time, (pamphlet). New York International Bible Society.

and making final decisions on all the details of this work was the Committee on Bible Translation under the leadership of its executive secretary.

Once all the work of translating, language polishing, and textual and grammatical criticism had been completed and all comments were in, the large Committee on Bible Translation went through the entire work to put it into shape for publication. Word has it that the Committee spent last summer somewhere in the Black Forest of Germany concentrating on this final revision.<sup>11</sup>

As a "translation consultant" Prof. Blume was able to influence the translations of New Testament books that crossed his desk.

The WELS was not done with its influence on the New Testament of the NIV. Although the desire for a translation more modern than the KJV had arisen already back in the 1950's no suitable alternative had been found as late as the early 1970's. To find a solution to this problem a seminar on Bible translations was held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on January 2-4, 1974. This seminar focused its attention on the various translations that had been published or were in the process of being published as replacements for the KJV. The New testament of the NIV had only been available for a few months at this time. The result of the seminar was a consensus that there was no complete translation that was acceptable. However the men felt that the NIV looked promising. Here is part of the closing resolutions of the Seminar on Bible translations:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT

1. We request that the Seminary faculty proceed with an intensive study of the New International Version

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<sup>11</sup>Frederic Blume, "The New International Version," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. 1973 Vol. 70, p.209.



of the New Testament with a view to its possible use in the publications and corporate worship of our Synod; and communicate its findings to the CCL for consideration by the Districts in the summer of 1974; and be it further resolved that

2. We offer the services of our Old Testament scholars to the translators of the New International Version;<sup>12</sup>

After completing a thorough study of the New Testament NIV the Seminary faculty reported:

"On the basis of the best critical texts available, the rendering of this new version was studied in its entirety with regard to a proper understanding of the apostolic Word and an adequate translation of that understanding into the language of our time. The considered judgment of the Seminary's faculty is that the NIV-NT surpasses by far any other published rendering as an adequate contemporary translation."<sup>13</sup>

The Seminary faculty then sent their evaluation of the NIV-NT to Edwin H. Palmer, the Executive Secretary of the Committee on Bible Translation for the New York Bible Society, the group who was sponsoring the NIV. This was reported in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly:

"A copy of the Seminary faculty's review of the New International Version--New Testament was, as planned, sent to Dr. Edwin H. Palmer of Wayne, New Jersey, Executive Secretary of the Committee on Bible Translation for the New York Bible Society. He was also informed that the Synod's Commission on Christian Literature had acted favorably on the faculty's suggestion that members of the Mequon faculty be asked to present in person our suggestions for changes in the translation and the reasons for them.

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<sup>12</sup>Closing Resolutions of the Seminar on Bible Translations, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, January 4, 1974.

<sup>13</sup>John C. Jeske, "New International Version Completed," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1978, vol. 75, p.304.

Dr. Palmer's answer reads in part:

As to meeting with members of your faculty to hear in person their reasons for the suggested changes, I would find that helpful and profitable. I do not want to mislead you into thinking that the top committee would accept all these suggestions, but they would seriously consider them, and they welcome them."<sup>14</sup>

So far the WELS had impacted the NIV by having Prof. Blume as a "translation consultant" and by submitting numerous suggested translation changes to the editorial committee. There was more to come for the Old Testament.

Early in 1974 Prof. John C. Jeske, acting on behalf of the Seminary faculty, wrote to Dr. Edwin H. Palmer, the Executive Secretary for Bible Translation. Dr. Palmer had oversight of all the translating done for the NIV. Prof. Jeske requested copies of any Old Testament translation manuscripts that had been completed to that date so that the Seminary faculty could review them in the same way as they had done the New Testament translation. This request was complied with and Prof. Jeske became the chairman of the Old Testament committee for studying the NIV-OT.<sup>15</sup>

Interested by their preliminary study of the NIV-NT the Seminary faculty had requested a personal meeting with Dr. Palmer. The purpose of that request was so that they could more forcefully present their arguments for suggested changes in the New Testament work that had already been done. Although initially three Seminary

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<sup>14</sup>Frederic Blume, "The NIV-NT: An Update," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1974 Vol. 71, p.225.

<sup>15</sup>Personal interview with Prof. John C. Jeske, December 23, 1993.

men, Prof. Blume, Prof. Becker and Prof. Hoenecke, had planned on flying East to meet with Dr. Palmer, he in turn proposed meeting with them at Mequon. Prof. Jeske, who became close friends with Dr. Palmer, speculated that Palmer's intentions in coming to the Seminary was to check out this unheard of Seminary that seemed so interested in Bible translation.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Palmer and another NIV translator, Dr. Ralph Earle, were welcomed to Mequon and given a tour of the Seminary and Northwestern College. They professed amazement at the language requirements in the WELS pastoral education system as well as joy that the original languages were taken so seriously by the WELS.<sup>17</sup>

Later the men shared a meal at the Alpine Village. Along with the three New Testament men who were part of the initial meeting group, President Lawrenz and Prof. Jeske were also in attendance. Prof. Jeske recalls the seating arrangement being in such a way "that Dr. Palmer really had no one besides me (Prof. Jeske) to speak with during the entire meal." He suspected that Prof. Blume had arranged that intentionally.<sup>18</sup>

That arrangement bore fruit as far as getting WELS influence on the NIV-OT. In fall of 1974 Prof. Jeske received a letter from Dr. Palmer asking if he could join the NIV-OT translation team the following summer for an extensive Old Testament translation

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

project.<sup>19</sup> Prof. Jeske was interested but realized that he was not his own man. First he talked with his fellow faculty members. They were supportive and encouraged him to go. They reminded him of the resolutions made by the Seminar on Bible Translations which had said,

"THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT

2. We offer the services of our Old Testament scholars to the translators of the New International Version;"<sup>20</sup>

After obtaining permission from both the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Board of Control and the Synod's Board for Worker Training (now the Board for Ministerial Education) Prof. Jeske could give further consideration to Dr. Palmer's request.<sup>21</sup>

Aside from the official considerations in accepting the invitation to work on the translation of the NIV-OT Prof. Jeske also had a number of personal ones. Prof. Jeske had the personal conviction that the KJV was no longer serving the spiritual needs of God's English speaking people. He believed that the WELS had and still has a distinct contribution to make towards the proper understanding of Scripture. He felt that a good Bible translation was something Christians ought to be willing to work for. His only

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<sup>19</sup>For an explanation of the NIV translation procedure see the pamphlet "The Holy Bible: New International Version, The Version for Our Times" located in the Addendum.

<sup>20</sup>Closing Resolutions of the Seminar on Bible Translations, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, January 4, 1974.

<sup>21</sup>Personal interview with Prof. John C. Jeske, December 23, 1993.

concern going into the project was the danger of giving the impression that he was fellowshipping with this interdenominational translation team. After receiving assurances that this would not be the case, he accepted the invitation to join the translation team.

Here a brief overview of the translation process for the NIV is in order. The NIV was a committee translation which worked on a tier structure. The first tier committee was the Initial Translation Team consisting of 2-3 men. They did the rough draft translation from the original languages. Their work was then forwarded to an Intermediate Editorial Committee consisting of 5-6 men. They in turn on the basis of the original languages would check the work done and make corrections or changes. Their work was forwarded to the General Editorial Committee consisting again of 5-6 men. This group would take the previous groups work and try to improve the flow of the language while maintaining faithfulness to the original. Finally the work was forwarded to the Committee on Bible Translation which was made up of 15 men and chaired by Dr. Palmer. This group included an English language specialist whose suggested improvements were returned one more time to the General Editorial Committee for them to work with. The Committee on Bible Translation then had the final say in the translation process. The ground rules for all the committees was that the translation be 1. faithful to the original, 2. beautiful, 3. idiomatic and 4. clear.<sup>22</sup>

By accepting the invitation to join the translation team Prof. Jeske had committed himself to some busy summers. He spent the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

summer of 1975 in Athens, Greece, where he and 27 other Hebrew scholars worked over 8 hours a day in committee plus personal preparation work at night. This lasted for ten weeks straight. Prof. Jeske worked that summer on a General Editorial Committee which averaged about 7 verses an hour.<sup>23</sup>

In the summer of 1976 Prof. Jeske was again abroad working on translating. This time he spent the summer in Salamanca, Spain. He worked that summer on the Intermediate Editorial Committee. Again this meant long hours and slow progress. All told Prof. Jeske worked extensively on the Old Testament books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Obadiah and Zephaniah.<sup>24</sup>

Prof. Jeske felt that his WELS training helped him to influence the NIV in a number of ways. First and foremost the language training he had received as he studied to become a WELS pastor paid dividends in that he was asked to be a translator in the first place. His committee consistently argued against a Calvinistic flavor in the translation work. He was also able to bring in the "toledoth" structure to Genesis. Martin Luther also gave Prof. Jeske some help in that he would often have Luther's German translation open at that translating table. Often he would gain insight into an idiomatic yet faithful translation from Luther's German.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

But the WELS was still not done influencing the NIV. The Seminary faculty constantly reviewed the preliminary manuscripts that were produced the NIV translators. They in turn suggested changes to the translations. In private correspondence with Prof. Jeske, Dr. Palmer stated that he had seen a high percentage of the Seminary faculty's suggestions adopted by the Committee on Bible Translation. In a speech made to the entire assembly of translators at Salamanca, Spain Dr. Palmer said, "We have received more constructive criticism from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod than from any other church."<sup>26</sup> In a copy of a letter (from Prof. Jeske's files) that Dr. Palmer addressed to Pastor Rolfe Westendorf, Palmer wrote, "We have certainly profited a great deal from Prof. John Jeske's direct participation in several editorial sessions, two of which lasted ten weeks. And just this past week we revised some of our supposedly finished translations on the basis of the suggestions submitted by your Theological faculty at Mequon."<sup>27</sup> Prof. Jeske has also been asked to serve as a reviewer for proposed revisions to the current NIV text as the NIV publishers wish to avoid the problem of the language used in the NIV becoming outdated. Certainly the WELS has had great influence on the most popular Bible translation today--The New International Version.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Correspondence between Dr. Edwin H. Palmer and Rev. R.F. Westendorf from the files of Prof. John C. Jeske, March 28, 1977.

The WELS has also had quite an influence on what may become a popular translation in future years--The New Evangelical Translation or NET. This translation has a storied background and has had a few different names. It originally started out as a one-man translation project. Dr. William Beck of the LC-MS began a single-handed translation project of the Bible in 1936. He hoped to make a translation that was more readable and easier to understand than the KJV while at the same time having a Lutheran, that is orthodox, interpretation. When he finished the New Testament it was published by Concordia Publishing House in 1963 and was known to many as "the Beck Bible." In 1976 the entire Bible translation project was printed under the title The Holy Bible: An American Translation.<sup>28</sup> When the New Testament revision of AAT was later completed, it was published under the title God's Word to the Nations. Subsequently it has been renamed the New Evangelical Translation.

After Dr. Beck's death the translation was considered to have a great deal of promise. As can be expected in one-man translation, however, there were a number of rough spots. Prof. Becker, who was a professor at WLS from 1969-1984, reports, "Two years of experience with the translation have shown that some revision of Beck's work is called for. Earlier this year a revision committee was appointed. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was asked to appoint one or more members of its faculty to assist in the revision work.

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<sup>28</sup>David P. Kuske, "Revision of the Beck Bible (ATT)" Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1986, Vol.83 pp.65.



Prof. John Jeske, who has been involved in the translation of the Old Testament for the NIV, and the undersigned were appointed by the faculty in response to this request."<sup>29</sup> This committee did quite a bit of work but realized that much more needed to be done.

In 1982 revision work began on a formal basis. The family of Dr. Beck worked out an agreement on the way the revision would proceed. A LC-MS pastor, Phillip Giessler, headed the project. Dr. Becker of our Seminary was asked to head the New Testament revision along with Dr. Robert Hoerber of the LC-MS. Once again the valuable translation skills of WELS men were recognized.

Dr. Becker faithfully headed the NT revision project of AAT. He had been acquainted with Dr. Beck and his work earlier when both had been in the Missouri Synod and took somewhat of a personal interest in the revision/translation project. For while the project really started as a revision, it required returning to the original languages for accuracy. Prof. Becker asked his fellow professors at the Seminary to "make notes" during their translation work for class as an aid to arriving at a good translation.<sup>30</sup> One of those professors was Prof. David P. Kuske who had been called to the Seminary in 1973 to teach in the areas of New Testament and Education. This was to prove important for the future of the NET as it provided for a transition in leadership when the Lord took Dr.

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<sup>29</sup>Siegbert W. Becker, "AAT Revision" Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1978, Vol.75, pp.309-310.

<sup>30</sup>Personal interview with Prof. David P. Kuske, December 21, 1993.

Becker to heaven in September of 1984. After Dr. Becker's death Prof. Kuske was asked to take over supervision of the New Testament revision.

At this point one might be wondering why WELS professors were contributing so much time to this contemporary translation when the NIV was just coming out and receiving a fairly warm welcome. There were a number of reasons. Prof. Kuske reports in the WLQ, "The WELS professors who have worked on the Beck NT did so because they felt that this revision could be a valuable study aid to pastors, teachers and lay people. A translation such as this which reflects Lutheran theology more closely than most contemporary translations can serve this purpose well."<sup>31</sup>

Prof. Kuske expanded on that in an interview which I had with him. He said that there was never any intention (on WELS professors' part) to replace the NIV. Rather it was basically done with the recognition that there were a number of areas in which the NIV was weak. His own personal goal was to develop a translation which was geared to the Bible student. He wanted a translation which could be laid alongside the Greek as kind of an "exegetical translation," a translation that reflected Lutheran theology especially in the area of sanctification.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>David P. Kuske, "Revision of the Beck Bible (ATT)" Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1986, Vol.83 pp.66.

<sup>32</sup>Personal interview with Prof. David P. Kuske, December 21, 1993.

With that goal in mind Prof. Kuske took over the AAT New Testament reins in the early 1980's. Most of his work was in the area of editorial review. His main concern in entering the project in a somewhat official capacity was that he might give the impression to the LC-MS men especially that he was fellowshiping with them. As things turned out there were a number of instances in which he was able to give witness to the truth and point out error when the LC-MS men were careless in fellowship areas.<sup>33</sup>

The AAT project was carried out much differently from the NIV project. First it did not have the financial resources that the NIV project did. Nor did it have the broad-based transdenominational support or input. As stated before, the goal of the AAT was basically to develop a translation that reflected Lutheran theology. Consequently most of the contributors (both financially and scholastically) were Lutherans. There were relatively few from ELCA, with the majority coming from LC-MS, WELS and ELS. The method of translation then was also quite different. There <sup>were</sup> not a large amount of financial resources available to hire men or to bring them together for translation sessions. Basically scholars from the above mentioned synods (including many WELS pastors) would send in their suggestions for improvements on the Beck Bible. These suggestions were collated so that they could be more easily compared. Prof. Kuske and Dr. Hoerber would confer on the suggestions and pick the best one. Rarely did they disagree as to

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

what would go into the final text.<sup>34</sup> Once again the WELS was having an enormous effect on a major Bible translation.

In 1988 this thorough revision of the New Testament of AAT was published under the name God's Word to the Nations. (GWN) From my observations it seemed to be accepted fairly well in the WELS. I myself, as well as numerous other Seminary students, enjoyed using it to check our own translations done for exegesis classes at the Seminary. It seemed that Prof. Kuske's goal was being realized.

Plans then proceeded for an Old Testament revision of the Beck Bible. This time the method for translation work was a little different. Enough funds had been gathered and the financial backing of a publisher procured so that five Hebrew scholars were hired to do full time translating work. These men's translations were then circulated to the faculties at the seminaries of the LC-MS, WELS, and ELS. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Profs. Brug, Nitz and Westendorf did review work on the sample translations that the five men had prepared. Other pastors from the various synods were encouraged to read and react as they had time. A final committee of three men will look at the manuscripts and suggested revisions in order to make a final decision on what will be published. The tentative goal was to have the entire Bible published by 1995.<sup>35</sup>

As of this date, (March 1994) there have only been a few sample NET translations of Old Testament books produced. It would

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>David P. Kuske, "God's Word to the Nations," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1990, Vol. 87, p.236.

seem to me that the work is taking longer than expected so that no one seems to know exactly when the final work will be published.

There is one note of caution though as we await the final product. As in so many other areas of church work it seems that the almighty dollar may be dictating areas where we would hope and pray they never do. In the case of the NET it seems that the publishers of the NET project are hoping for a broader market than just Lutherans or serious Bible students. In an effort to make the translation more marketable many of the translations that accurately reflected Lutheran theology on justification are tentatively being removed. Prof. Kuske has seen many of these changes and has sent in his protest to them. He noted that if the changes are pushed through he may be forced to disassociate his name from the project.<sup>36</sup> When the final project is completed interested parties can check on these possibly troubling changes by reading through the translation of Romans to see how "nomos" and "dikaio" are translated.

As a sidelight to the contributions WELS men have made in the area of major English Bible translations it should also be noted that the skill WELS men have in the area of Biblical languages is also paying off in the area of commentaries. Since 1985 Northwestern Publishing House has been publishing a commentary series called The People's Bible. The commentary is intended for use by lay people but is done very thoroughly. Eventually the

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<sup>36</sup>Personal interview with Prof. David P. Kuske, December 21, 1993.

commentaries written by WELS pastors will cover all the books of the Bible. Prof. Jeske is serving as the Old Testament editor for the series. He pointed out that the WELS authors chosen were men who could faithfully handle the original languages. This would enable them to point out translation improvements from the NIV which is used as the base text for the commentary series.<sup>37</sup> In my readings through the completed commentaries I have noted a number of times where the author has stated, "A better translation could be..." or another such phrase. In a way it could be said that the WELS is getting its own translation!

Concordia Publishing House is also planning on producing an exegetical commentary series aimed at pastors. CPH officials have contacted the WELS about "borrowing" WELS men especially for Old Testament books.<sup>38</sup>

It can easily be seen from the examples above that language training in the Biblical languages has paid great dividends for the WELS and Christ's Church as it has influenced especially 2 English language major Bible translations. In recent years more and more seminaries are dropping Biblical languages as requirements for graduation. Christian churches which have lost their love for the original languages seem to have lost their emphasis on the Christ-centered Gospel as well. Perhaps Martin Luther foresaw this when he wrote,

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<sup>37</sup>Personal interview with Prof. John C. Jeske, December 23, 1993.

<sup>38</sup>Class lecture for Old Testament Isagaogics with Prof. John C. Jeske, Fall 1993.

"Let us, then foster the languages as zealously as we love the Gospel. For it is not meaningless that God caused His Scripture to be written in these two languages only: the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek. The languages, therefore, which God did not despise but chose above all others for His Word we, too, ought to honor above all others...

Let us ever bear this in mind: We shall have a hard time preserving the Gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained. They are the case in which we carry this jewel. They are the vessel in which we hold the wine. They are the larder in which this food is stored."<sup>39</sup>

Our forefathers have handed down a great gift and trust to us current WELS members by putting so much emphasis on Biblical languages in our pre-ministerial training. Our language training has paid dividends in the past and God-willing it will continue to pay dividends in the future. God <sup>great</sup> will that we never lose that gift!

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<sup>39</sup>Ewald M. Plass, What Luther Says. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959, p.731.

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\*I owe a great debt to the Senior Church History paper of Tom Jeske (graduated 1984) for the direction I received from it for my segment on the NIV. The paper is entitled "The New International Version Earns Admirers in the WELS, 1964-1984." This paper can be found in the Seminary Church History paper files.