

The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation. By Leland Ryken. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002, 336 pp., \$16.99 paper.

Leland Ryken, Professor of English, who teaches at Wheaton College authored *The Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* and has edited a number of other works, also served as literary stylist with the translation committee for the English Standard Version.

In this book, Ryken offers an adamant defense of literal translations. He argues that a literal translation of the Bible from the original languages is the best method for conveying what the author wrote (18). In the Introduction, Ryken positions himself in the current debate concerning literal and dynamic equivalence translation theories. He then develops his case for literal translation in seventeen chapters subdivided into five parts. In the three chapters comprising Part One, Ryken surveys literary and discourse principles and translation history to show how literal translation dominated until the mid-twentieth century. Part two, chapters four through six, form the theoretical foundation of his argument. Here he dispels misconceptions concerning the Bible, translation methods, and issues related to the readers of the text and their relationship to translation. In chapters seven and eight, Part Three of the book, Ryken presents a theological basis for his preference of literal translation. The first three parts set the stage for Part Four, which is his critique of dynamic equivalence translations. Following the critique of contemporary translations, Ryken offers a corrective in the form of a set of criteria for measuring excellence in English translation.

The book is marked by a sharp polarization between literal and dynamic equivalence translation theories, which leads Ryken to overlook significant issues even when his argument highlights some important considerations. In his discussion of lessons from “ordinary discourse” and from the “history of translation,” Ryken has overlooked three important issues, the text underlying a translation, Greek and English grammar and syntax, and the function of a translation. Ryken lauds the work of textual critics but fails to discuss the textual basis underlying the translations. Instead, he groups the KJV and NASB together overlooking the differences in the Greek text (i.e. *Textus Receptus* and United Bible Society's edition) as the basis for some differences in translation, especially a literal translation.

Ryken calls his reader's attention to the need to preserve the exact wording of Scripture. While this may be possible in “ordinary discourse,” translation is a different story. Rarely can a translator preserve the exact wording of the source language, as Ryken assumes. The differences in grammar, syntax, and word order prevent an exact correlation in the languages. Thus, the translator must not only choose words (i.e. make linguistic and interpretive decisions) that accurately convey meaning, but also adopt a literary style that does not detract from that meaning, while preserving what the author wrote. In his appeal for literary excellence in English translation, Ryken appears to argue for a literal translation methodology overlooking the differences in Hebrew, Greek, and English grammar and syntax.

Ryken's single-minded interest in the superiority of the literal translation method overlooks the function of a translation. For example, Eugene A. Nida and the translation department of the American Bible Society sought to produce a Bible that could be read easily by people who spoke English as a second language. The result of their efforts was a new English translation, *The Good*

News Bible. Barclay Newman spearheaded a team of English language specialist and biblical scholars to produce a translation of the Bible for children, the Contemporary English Version. The point is that people whose command of the English language is in its formative stages are no more ready for the high literary style that Ryken advocates than a first year math student is ready for calculus. These issues demonstrate Ryken's preference for evidence that supports his claim. Interaction with opposing viewpoints would have brought a much-needed sense of balance to his argument.

Ryken's constant reminders of the need for accuracy and faithfulness to the original text in translation do not go unnoticed. Accuracy and faithfulness to the text takes into account fidelity to the meaning of the original words, clarity of style, and readability while attempting to preserve them wherever possible within parameters of the English language. These are important considerations regardless of the translation theory. Another important consideration is the call to guard carefully the word of God, a call involving the translator, interpreter, and reader of the sacred text.

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