The Wartburg Project
A Report to the
Conference of Presidents
1/13/2014

One of the delegates at the 2013 Synod Convention who did not favor a synodically sponsored translation of the Bible also spoke these encouraging words: "*I also say to any brothers who'd like to take their hand at translating the Bible: God bless you. Have at it. I mean that in all sincerity. You will learn a tremendous amount. You will grow…your people will grow. This will really be a great thing. I can certainly think of worse ways for a person to spend his time.*"

Working under the title, "The Wartburg Project," a number of pastors and professors have now undertaken a pilot project to test the feasibility of producing a new translation of the Bible. The name Wartburg reflects the rather informal, unofficial nature of the project and the commitment of the project to Luther's philosophy of translation.

The Plan

To get a test of the project under way, Professor John Brug is serving as the general editor and Old Testament editor and Pastor Brian Keller is serving as the New Testament editor. A goal is to have five to eight New Testament translators and eight to ten Old Testament translators. These men could also serve as reviewers and on the editorial board which will be organized in about one year. Additional people could later volunteer or be invited to serve as reviewers and in other capacities.

Initial participation in the project will include the option for translators to produce a draft translation of a short biblical book (a minor prophet or one of the shorter epistles). Some translators are beginning with more substantial projects. Men recognized as having gifts for translation work have already been contacted and have agreed to serve. The methods and organization have been developed, but they are still flexible. They will be shaped by the initial translation efforts.

Work on this project is similar to serving the church through some board or committee or perhaps to deciding to work on a book or a Bible class which might be published for the use of the church. A big plus that will come from participating in this project, regardless of its ultimate outcome, is that participants' translation work will make a big contribution to their continuing education as teachers and preachers of the Word.

The Process

The product to be produced by the Wartburg Project could best be called a translation/revision. It will not exactly be a "translation" because it will not be totally from scratch, but it will not exactly be a "revision" because it will not be based on any single template. Although our translation will be based on the Hebrew and Greek texts, templates are being used as a starting point in the translation process. This will build on the tradition of English and Lutheran Bible translation. The primary resources, of course, are the Hebrew and Greek texts and the tools needed to translate them, but it's not a process in which translators sit in

front of their computer screen with a Hebrew Bible and perhaps a lexicon and attempt to translate the text from scratch.

A better option is offered by electronic versions of public domain translations that can be used as a translation template at no cost. A web-based translation, the *World English Bible* (WEB), is not copyrighted and in fact welcomes translators to use it to produce other translations. The only requirement is that the name of the translation must be changed if any revisions are made to it. This translation is a modernization of the American Standard Version (ASV) which is in turn a modernization of the King James. The WEB is used as a template only in a very loose sense of the word. The sample translations that have been completed so far are more dynamic and more modern than WEB and follow different rubrics. Often these rubrics can be implemented with the touch of a button. For example, all the *Yahweh*s in a book can be turned to LORD with one click.

An additional side-benefit to having a public domain template like WEB in front of the translator while he translates is that this tends to distance the translator from the NIV and other copyrighted translations. Most translators, when they translate from scratch, would inevitably be influenced by the language of NIV 84, which is engrained in their minds, and they would to a degree be making a revision of NIV whether or not they intended to do so. Starting from a different template is a check on that tendency.

The second major resource for translators is the Concordia Translation (CT). Each volume of the *Concordia Commentary (CC)* produces its own original translation of the text. These translations are more literal than a translation suitable for general use, but they form a good base for a more "dynamic" translation. In addition, the *CC* provides detailed exegetical studies of all the major issues and options which a translator would face. Concordia Publishing House has provided our project with electronic files of the translations from the *CC* for our use. The first draft of a translation of Proverbs using the CT is near completion. The CT is probably most useful for difficult Old Testament books.

Translators thus have three main options:

> 1) working from scratch from the Hebrew and Greek
> 2) using WEB and/or NET as a template
> 3) using the Concordia translation as a template and *CC* as a help.

Translators will need to know when "enough is enough," especially for the first draft of a book. We would generally not expect translators to spend weeks or even days, researching the precise modern identification of the twelve stones in the breastplate of the high priest. Generally, in researching such issues, after about 20-30 minutes, the translator knows what the chief issues are and what the chief alternative translations are. Generally, after researching such issues for 20-30 hours or days, the translator would know what the chief issues are and what the chief alternative translations are. We would be kidding ourselves if we think we can resolve many of the cruxes that have baffled translators for centuries. (If we do resolve some (and if we generate some worthy scholarly articles on notable cruxes) that would be great! But that would be a fringe benefit not a prerequisite for the project). Perfectionism is not an asset for a translator. Zeal to improve the translation is. When Luther had a first stage translation done, he rolled the presses. He never stopped in efforts to improve that translation.

In many respects, we will be "standing on the shoulders of giants," by utilizing the work of many individuals who have gone before us. The project will make heavy use of previous scholarship. The translators should be more concerned about quality and clarity than in plowing new ground and making new discoveries.

The Wartburg project will be following a fuller Greek text of the New Testament than the UBS or Nestle-Aland versions, which are reflected in the NIV and many other recent translations. Our rubric in the Wartburg Project is that in the NT we are following the "earliest and most widespread" reading. The most significant and best supported variants will be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Tentative Process and Staff

All of the following information about procedures is tentative and subject to change.

- A translation committee or subcommittee develops a set of translation principles and rubrics to be used by each translator. (A set of rubrics has, in fact, been developed and is being used at this time. It will always be in the process of modification.)
- There will be one lead translator for each book. Each translator has two consultants who give him advice and feedback and evaluate his draft.
- The translator of a book makes a first draft of the translation of a book. The translator can confer with his consultants, with his testament editor, and with the rubrics and the electronic files of the books already translated to check consistency with other books.
- The first draft is reviewed by the translator and his consultants. They suggest improvements and check for consistency with other books. In consultation with the editors, they prepare a second draft suitable for wider review.
- A larger group of technical reviewers (a group of about 6-8 pastors and professors, who have a knowledge of the original language) review the draft and make suggestions.
- The translator, his consultants, and the testament editor consider these suggestions and produce the third draft.
- The third draft is reviewed by a larger group of consultants or readers who forward comments and suggestions to the translation committee/editorial board. These review groups can include pastors, teachers, and lay people. They focus especially on clarity and readability.
- The editorial board would consist of 6-10 (perhaps 4-6 OT and 2-4 NT). They could at some stages function separately as OT and NT boards or as subcommittees. The board will consist largely of men who have served as translators. There could also be an administrative board.
- The editors and the editorial board in consultation with the translator make final changes to the translation of the book. This is done when most of the books have been completed, to check for consistency throughout. (There can of course be other opportunities to get feedback from the constituency along the way.)

Support

In the initial stages the project will be carried out by unpaid volunteers. If translators and editors donate their time, they would receive royalties proportionate to their contribution if a marketable product results from the project. The advent of electronic and on-demand publishing gives us many options on how to market the product.

Some Pros of the Wartburg Project

- It would be inexpensive.
- It would not put pressure on the ministerial education faculties.
- It would involve more pastors, as the *People's Bible* and the hymnal project did.
- The involvement of pastors would strengthen our corps of Hebrew and Greek scholars. In a full summer quarter of three weeks a pastor takes 75 hours of class and does another 75 to 150 hours of study. What could a pastor do with 225 hours of Bible translation work? Would a congregation support their pastor devoting some time to a translation as part of his continuing education?
- Involvement of teachers and laypeople in the evaluation phases would put the project closer to the grass roots.
- The translators' notes could provide the base for a Lutheran study Bible.
- This translation would have as its primary goal service to the people of the Lutheran church. It would not be particularly concerned about academic prestige or universal acceptance.
- It would provide a translation which people could use with confidence since it did not have the doctrinal errors which occur in other translations and in their translators' notes. This would be

true regardless of whether it became our main translation or was used as a supplemental study version.

Some Possible Cons of the Wartburg Project

- Is it feasible? The two-year test would answer this question.
- Will people be interested in using it? Field testing will tell. Online distribution of samples through Amazon would put out a feeler for interest.
- The most serious concern is whether the Old Testament can be handled. Can such "elephants in the room" as Job and Ezekiel and, hardest of all, Proverbs be tamed? The offer from Concordia and the pilot projects using CC will address this issue.

Is it feasible?

The test project outlined above will aim in its first year to complete first drafts of a significant number of biblical books including a number of the heavy weights. After the initial test projects, the group will assess the progress that has been made, estimate the time needed to complete the project and determine the direction the project will take from there.

Books with completed initial drafts: Matthew, Mark, Psalms, Joshua, Deuteronomy. A preview edition of Matthew will be made available more widely to the public in January and Psalms in late spring. "Drafts" does not mean the final product. It is likely that it will take less time to produce the drafts than many have thought, but more time than expected for the editing and publication process.

Books already in progress: Luke, Proverbs.

Books expected to be in progress or completed in 2014: John, Acts, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude, Revelation, Song of Songs, Ezekiel, Ruth, Jonah, Amos, and perhaps others.

Dangers and Joys

We hope that participants will find two main joys: being part of a project that can be a blessing to the church, and the joy of growing in knowledge of the Scriptures in a way that will be a blessing to them and their ministry.

There are two main "dangers" in a volunteer project like this. One is that assignments will get bogged down and remain unfinished for a long time. The other is that translation, like the internet, can become addicting. When a translator gets on a roll, there can be the temptation to keep going in a way that gobbles up too much time from other things. For groups as dedicated and hard-working as this group of translators, the second danger may be as great as or greater than the first. Being a translator or working on a bigger writing project of any sort takes two kinds of discipline, discipline to keep plugging away and disciple to avoid getting carried away. We don't want callings or families to get short changed or anyone to create too much pressure on himself.

Translating and writing also takes another kind of patience. Every writer likes to see the fruits of his labor and to see others benefitting from it, but publishing is a process that takes time. Producing a fairly developed draft of the translation, especially the NT, is going to take less time than many have thought, but getting everything pulled together and working through the publication phase will be more time consuming than we expect, though by that point, when we have a supply of manuscripts, we may be able to have one or more people devoting full-time to the project.

Translator's Prayer

Help me hand on your timeless Word in a timely way to our time and place. Bless my study and deepen my understanding of your Word. Bless my efforts so that my work may be a blessing to me and to others.

Respectfully submitted
John C. Seifert, reporter