The Wartburg Project
July News 2015

As we near the end of the first two years of the project, we can say we are entering Phase 2. During Phase 1 we gathered a team of translators, reviewers, and supporters. We set up the basic governing and financial structure of the organization. A draft of the whole New Testament has been completed. Book-by-book this is being prepared for the publication of the promotional version of the New Testament and Psalms, which we hope to bring out in Fall 2017 for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

During the next two years, in Phase 2, we hope with God's blessing 1) to complete the preparation of the New Testament for the initial publication, 2) to complete the draft of most or perhaps all of the Old Testament, 3) to welcome new translators and reviewers to the project, 4) to increase the speed of the project with an editor who can serve more or less full-time, 5) to provide more release time for parish pastors who are involved in the editorial process, 6) to enjoy further growth in knowledge and understanding through the work of the project, and 7) to experience the joy of working harmoniously with the brothers and sisters who help and support the project. All of this depends, of course, on God's blessings, and we ask for your continued prayers. We expect that in the next two years, God will answer our prayers through you, the participants and supporters of the project.

God willing, the kick-off for Phrase 2 will have two parts. This July letter will focus on the theoretical foundation—a review of our translation philosophy and goals. The August letter will provide practical updates of new assignments, progress updates, and expanded rubrics.

For the theoretical review of our goals and methods we will provide an expanded FAQ on the question:

 Is the Wartburg translation of the Bible a literal translation?

The answer to your question is "no" "yes" or "sometimes" depending on what you mean by the word "literal." There is a lot of confusion about the meaning of the word "literal" as it applies to Bible translations. There are two extreme views in regard to literal Bible translation. Some people claim that a literal translation is the only right way to go in a Bible translation. At the other extreme some people ridicule the term "literal translation" as meaningless and impossible. Both of these mistakes are due to a simplistic understanding of the term "literal," which fails to do justice to the complexity of the term "literal" and to the complexity of the art of translation.

In reality, the meaning of the term "literal" is not that complicated. Most people understand the two main senses of the term "literal" quite well, including the application of the term to understanding and translating the Bible.

The first dictionary meaning of "literal" is "following the primary or strict meaning of the word or words; the meaning that is not figurative or metaphorical." In this definition the words "primary or strict meaning" are not very helpful because they are too vague to be useful, but the phase "the meaning which is not figurative or metaphorical" gets right to the heart of the matter. Everyone understands that the literal meaning of the word "heart" is the organ that pumps blood in the body." "Heart" also has many metaphorical meanings, including courage and generosity. Metaphorically, a "big heart" is a good trait. Literally, a "big, enlarged heart" is a bad medical condition.

The ability to distinguish literal uses of words from metaphorical uses is one of the key skills to understanding any language. But in most cases fluent speakers of a language do it quite easily. Readers understand that the statement, "the performance of the play was so dramatic that the eyes of the audience were glued to the stage," is metaphorical. They would laugh at the not uncommon blunder, "the performance of the play was so dramatic that the eyes of the audience were literally glued to the stage." The first situation, a metaphorical experience, would be fun. The second, a literal experience, would be painful.

Readers of the Bible distinguish between literal and figurative uses of words all the time. When Jesus calls Herod a fox, readers easily recognize that the expression "fox" is a metaphorical reference to the character of a man, not a literal reference to an animal. This skill of distinguishing the metaphorical from the literal is necessary for understanding any form of communication. Though this skill is essential for a Bible reader, most of the time it is not particularly useful to a translator, because the statement "Herod is a fox" would be translated the same regardless of whether the use of the word "fox" is literal or metaphorical.

It is the second meaning of the word "literal" that is a challenge for the translator. The dictionary says that a literal translation "follows the words of the original language very closely and exactly as in 'a literal translation of Goethe.'" Once again the dictionary definition is partly right and partly wrong. We can start by crossing out the word "exactly" from the definition. It is impossible for an English Bible translation to follow the original language word-for-word, because the structures of the two languages are too different. For example, Hebrew does not normally express the verb "to be." An English translation that followed the Hebrew word-for-word would seldom include the words "is" and "are," which often are essential in English. Some languages have no definite or indefinite articles; others require them. It is impossible for a translation to follow another language exactly word-for-word. In Genesis 1:3, for example, the Hebrew says, "God saw the light that good." The King James correctly adds, ""God saw the light that *it was* good." Reading any chapter of the King James and noting the italics will show how often this is necessary. Hebrew has no indefinite articles (*a, an*); English often requires them. In Genesis 2:7, the Hebrew says "and became the man to soul living." The King James says "man became a living soul."

A translation cannot follow the source language *exactly* except for very short clumps of words, but it can and should follow the original language *closely*. But what does it mean to follow the text closely? Answering that question requires skill and good judgment on the part of the translator. It is perhaps easier to say what a literal translation is not, than to define exactly what it is.

We have already seen that a so-called "literal translation" does not always try to follow the original text word-for-word, but thought-for-thought. Even the King James Version which tried for a high degree of literal translation recognized that it is impossible to translate word-for-word. They frequently had to add words to their translation, but they demonstrated their regret for this fact by putting the added words in italics.

Nevertheless, a word-for-word translation is very often possible and should be followed if there is no reason to depart from a word-for-word translation. In the verse "Jesus wept" there is no reason not to follow a word-for-word translation. This is true for very many Bible statements, maybe even a majority of them. "Son of Man" and "a baptism of repentance" are two cases where a literal translation is the best option.

There is no reason to belittle the idea of literal or word-for-word translation as some people do. Literal translation is the starting point of a good translation. But it does not work all the time. A translator has to depart from word-for-word translation or literal translation when such a translation would be unclear or clumsy, but a good translator follows a very literal translation very often.

Sometimes good translators even translate letter-for-letter. This is called "transliteration." A number of common biblical words are transliterated from Hebrew, words like *amen and halleluia.* The writers of the New Testament also used transliterations from the Hebrew. The writers of the Old Testament used transliterations from other languages including Sumerian (for example, the Hebrew *hekal* (temple) is apparently a transliteration from the Sumerian *e gal* (big house). Transliteration from other languages is a part of every living language. Modern Hebrew transliterates the English word *pizza* which is itself a transliteration from Italian.

The English theological vocabulary is filled with transliterations, some of them from Hebrew (*amen*), some from Greek (*angel*), some of them from Latin (*justification*, *sanctification*). Where transliterations are an established part of theological English we are inclined to keep them in our translation because of our respect for the theological traditions of past generations of translators. We see no need to change all the *angels* to *envoys* or all occurrences of *justifies* to *declares righteous.* We seek to preserve heritage terms like *sanctify, justify, angels,* and *saints*, but not to the exclusion of "make holy" and "declare righteous," etc. We make an effort to retain key terms that appear in the creeds, catechism, and hymnal.

Another place in which transliteration has been the rule in biblical English is in personal names and geographical names. Biblical names usually have a literal meaning, but it is customary to transliterate them rather than to give a literal translation of them. The Wartburg Project retains the traditional *Bethlehem*. We do not freshen it up to "House of Bread" or "Breadbasket." If necessary, footnotes can indicate the literal meaning of the name. In doing this, we translate not simply word by word but letter by letter.

To some degree, a translation has to be shaped by contemporary English, but a good translation also tries to reshape the meaning of English words to fit biblical content. In some rare cases, this means inventing new English words like *at-one-ment.* Words in biblical English derive their meaning not just from contemporary English usage, but from the context of Scripture which shapes the meaning of the word. The Bible pours new and fuller meaning into English words. The words derive their meaning not just from contemporary usage but from centuries of use in the context of the Bible. We can look at just two examples: saints and priests.

Saints is a much changed transliteration of the Latin *sancti* "holy ones." If we let contemporary English rule, we might conclude that we have to get rid of *saints* because casual readers might think of Catholic saints, who are deemed to be or are declared to be especially holy people on the basis of their lives. But faithful readers of the Bible will soon understand that *the saints* include every believer who has been declared holy because of Christ's death. The proper understanding of *saints* is worth saving.

An even more complicated example is provided by the word *priest*. *Priest* is a much changed transliteration of the Greek word *presbyter,* which means *elder* and refers to men who held an office very similar to pastor. The English word *priest,* therefore, is not at all derived from the Hebrew (*cohen*) and Greek (*hiereus*), words that are commonly translated *priest.* To gain a good understanding of what *priest* means readers of the Bible must do two things. To understand what an Old Testament Levitical priest was, a Bible student must read everything the Bible says about Old Testament priests. To understand what a New Testament priest is, a Bible student must read everything that the New Testament says about the priesthood of all believers. In short, we must base our concept of what a priest is, not on contemporary Catholic usage or on analogies from heathenism, but on everything the Bible says about priests. Translators have to assume that their readers have the ability and desire to learn new words and to deepen their understanding of important biblical words. Translators should not be condescending or patronizing to their readers, but should be dedicated to helping them grow. Translations should not be "dumbed down."

Many, perhaps even most, words have a primary, literal meaning. Nevertheless, it is usually not possible to translate one common Hebrew or Greek word with one English word. This is because if a Hebrew word has meanings *a, b, c,* and *d*, meanings *a* and *b* may match up with one English word, but meanings *c* and *d* match up with a different English word. Nevertheless, translators should try to be consistent in the way they render terms. There is no reason to translate the Hebrew *kinnor* as lyre one time and as harp another time. Translations should not wander all over the map. Though "one Hebrew/Greek word = one English word" is not a viable standard for a translator to apply consistently, the translator should strive to be consistent rather than casual in his renderings of specific words and word groups. Our translation strives to be consistent in the rendering of terms.

So how many of the goals of the Wartburg Project do we think we will achieve? Probably none of them entirely, because they are high goals. There is not much point to setting goals that we can easily achieve. In every area of life our goals should exceed the expectations others have of us and even the expectations we have for ourselves.

In every area of life, achievement is measured by three standards: our duty, our goals, and our accomplishments. The highest standard is our duty. In sanctification our duty is perfection. In sanctification our goal is perfection. In sanctification our accomplishment on earth will be considerably less than perfection. But that does not mean that our duty is any less than what God has set for us, or that are goals should be any lower than the target God sets for us.

Two years ago when we started the Wartburg Project we stated our duty and our goals in this way:
> Thesis 1: The duty of a translator is to convey all the meaning (or the openness to more than one meaning), all the beauty (or the ugliness), all the style (high or low), and all the emotional impact of the original text into the translation.
> Thesis 2: Thesis 1 is impossible.
> Thesis 3: Thesis 2 is not entirely correct.

Thesis 4: In small bits and pieces a translator can come close achieving the aims of thesis 1.

      Tetelestai > It is finished. The only major thing wrong with this translation is that it has too many words. Were it not for the weight of tradition, we could probably improve the translation by reducing it to a single word, "Finished!"

We also stated our methodology:

The translator should not be too locked in to any one theory of translation whether so-called "dynamic equivalence" or "literal translation" because:

a. Literal (that is, literalistic) translations sometimes give the wrong meaning or they do not communicate clearly in the receiving language.

b. Dynamic equivalence, though a worthy goal, is not fully possible. We would be happy with any translation that was dynamic and equivalent, but too often translations labeled "dynamic equivalent" are either not equivalent or not dynamic. We would like every translation to be both "meaning equivalent" and "emotional equivalent".

c. The translator will have to weigh whether a more dynamic or more literal approach best conveys the divinely intended meaning on a case-by-case basis.

It is necessary for a translation to have a set of rules and rubrics to guide the translators, but the relationship between two languages is so complex that it is hard to image a rule or rubric which can be applied without exception. We now have over 240 rubrics, and so far I do not think we have found one that we can follow as a rigid rule. Translation is more of an art than a science.

Though we are always adding rubrics and tweaking our old rubrics, our duty, our goals, and our methodology remain the same. Our duty is to convey all the meaning (or the openness to more than one meaning), all the beauty (or the ugliness), all the style (high or low), and all the emotional impact of the original text into the translation. Our goal is to strive toward these results with the talents, time, and support which the Lord has given us. Where this all ends up of course depends on the Lord's blessing. For the time being we are content with the spiritual growth we are experiencing through the work of the project and the harmonious spirit with which the participants are working together. We don't know what the end results will be, but we do know what the end results will be if we do nothing. The only sure thing in any venture is that no effort always results in no results. In basketball the lowest percentage shot is not the long-range three-pointer, but the shot that you do not take. The scoring percentage on such shots is always 0%. If we leave all the work of translating to others, we know what our results will be—nothing produced for the church. If we faithfully invest the talents the Lord has given us, we know what the results will be—something. Whether the return of investment is ten-fold, or a hundred-fold, or a thousand-fold is in the Lord's hands. And so we will keep pressing toward the goal, not being distracted from the work of producing something purely positive for the church.