

## On the Synodal Translation of the New Testament into Serbian

The Commission of the Holy Synod of Bishops for the revision of the translation of the New Testament done by Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic (1<sup>st</sup> edition in 1847, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in 1856, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition in 1864) was founded in 1962, and worked slowly until 1968 when it intensified its work. It was composed of former Bishop of Rasika-Prizren Pavle (later Patriarch of the Serbian Church, 1990-2009), Bishop Dr. Vasilije of Zicha, Vicar Bishop Dr. Daniel Krstic, and of professors of the Orthodox Theological Faculty: Dr. Milos Erdeljan (Old Testament, expert in Hebrew), Dr. Emilijan Carnic (New Testament, expert in NT Greek), Dr. Stojan Gosevic (Dogmatic Theology, expert in NT Greek), Prof. Bogoljub Cirkovic (expert in Church-Slavonic), and myself as Secretary. The Commission functioned until 1984 when the Holy Synod of the Serbian Church approved the translation as a Church authorized translation.

Dr. Milos Erdeljan was a reviewer (*Rezensent*) of the translation, and he preferred to participate in the work of the Commission in person which proved to be of great significance because he is a learned professor and an expert in OT problematics and biblicistics, and as such contributed a lot. On the other hand, Prof. Carnic participated in the Commission actively in the very beginning of its undertaking, but later on, due to the fact that he had published his own translation of the NT into Serbian in 1973 as an edition of the Bible Society, he ceased to be a member of the Commission.

In the mid-70's of the last century, the Synodal Commission co-opted three younger lecturers of the theological faculty who had finished their post-graduate studies in Athens, Greece: Dr. Atanasije Jevtic (later Bishop of Banat and then of Zaholm-Hercegovina), Dr. Amfilohije Radovic (later Bishop of Banat and now Metropolitan of Montenegro), and Dr. Irinej Bulovic (now Bishop of Backa). These experts brought a new dynamic to the Commission and, together with its former members, concluded the translation.

The Commission used to meet in the Patriarchate, i.e., the headquarters of the Serbian Church, once a week, mainly in the afternoon. It was presupposed that the translators would examine one chapter of a NT book beforehand so that the work could be facilitated.

It is known that during their German confinement in the monasteries of Ljubostinja and Vojlovica, Bishop Nicholas Velimirovic and the then Hieromonk

Vasilije Kostic (former Bishop of Zicha) worked on the improvement of Vuk Karadzic's translation of the NT, and were able to accomplish much due to the circumstances of their life – confinement. For this reason, Archpriest-Stavrophor Aleksa Todorovic, Serbian parish priest in Munich, Germany, requested that the Commission be provided with the typed-out suggestions of these two biblical scholars. The Archpriest, already of an older age, accepted the plea wholeheartedly and forwarded all the NT books in which the two scholars had made any inserts, corrections, or suggestions to the address of the Commission. Every book was then photocopied into several copies and handed out to the Translation Committee as a sample for further work, i.e., for new suggestions. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the Commission was not able to have full insight into the extent of the undertaking of Bishop Nicholas; we could not easily nor precisely establish what had been corrected by him in the monasteries during his confinement. It seems that he limited his work to the most important matters. Consequently, his contributions had to wait for a team of biblical scholars who were, at that time, at the disposal of the Serbian Church.

The Commission was originally called the *Commission of the Holy Synod of Bishops for the Revision of Vuk's Translation of the New Testament*, but in time its name was changed to the *Commission of the Holy Synod of Bishops for the Revision (translation) of the New Testament*. However, it must be pointed out that though the Commission created an original final product, it nevertheless preserved the literary beauty of Vuk's translation, and even some verses, or portions were kept untouched. The new version provided theological and linguistic wording (and some obsolete personal names were replaced with newer names: *Zaharija* instead of *Zarija*, *Simeon* instead of *Simon*, *Timotej* instead of *Timotije*, *Solomon* instead of *Solomon*, *Jelisej* instead of *Jelisije*, etc.).

Vuk translated some words or phrases in a colloquial way. In Matthew 28:9 – the scene when the risen Christ meets myrrh-bearing women in the garden of Gethsemane – he greets them with “Hairete!”, and Vuk translated it as “Zdravo!” (Synodal translation: “Radujte se!”). In Matthew 26:49, when Judas greets Jesus in order to identify him, he addresses him, according to Vuk, in a typical Serbian way: “Good morning!”, even though it was dark (Synodal translation: “Zdravo, Ucitelju!”). Another example is in John 19:3 when the Roman soldiers greet him in Vuk's translation as “Pomoz' Bog, care judejski!” which translates, “God bless, King of Jews” (1847 edition) or in the second edition (1856): “How are you, King of Jews?”

The reader needs to keep in mind that Vuk Karadzic preserved some 40 Turkish expressions, and no translation of the Holy Scriptures tolerates foreign words except for some Hebrew or Greek terms that are not to be translated such as *Amen*, *Halleluiah*, *Zebbaoth*, *Psalm*, *Evangelion*, *evangelic*, *Episkopos*, *apostle*,

*angel, devil, Messiah, Christ, Liturgy, apokalypsis, etc.* or Aramaic words like *ili, ili savahtani, akeldama, Tabita kumi, Maran ata* – Our Lord, come; *efaga, abba*. There is also the fact that Vuk Karadzic did not have a feeling for subtle theological and philosophical idioms and terms, nor for the compound words built according to Greek morphological principles (he did not use active nor especially passive participles), neither for denoting some simple concepts, and hence he used some clumsy descriptions instead of single words like *glavni svestenik* instead of *prvosvestenik* (in English - chief priest and high priest); *oni koji mir grade* instead of *mirotvorci*; and not to mention such abstract and philosophical terms as *celomudrije, smirenomudrije* (Greek: *tapinosofrini*), etc. Only when the reader keeps these issues in mind is it clear how enormous a task the Commission had to perform! In addition, we have to bear in mind that the NT Greek reflects many Semitisms which are not used today, and that also made the task of the Commission even more complicated and complex.

I quote herewith some of the Turkisms: *kmet* – delitelj - divider (Luke 12:14), *harach* – porez - tax (Matthew 17:25; Mk 12:14; Lk 20:22), *chalma* – ubrus – handkerchief (Acts 19:12), *hazna* – hramovna blagajna – treasury (Mk 12:43). Here are some other Turkisms: *azdaha* (dragon), *amajlije* (phylacteria), *adzuvan* (pedophil), *badava* (in vain, gratis), *basamak, dolama, zanat, kavgadzija, kavga, kesa, kula, lenger, mana, neimar, oka, pazar, sahat, soba, sundjer, torba, hajduk, carsija*.

Vuk's translation contains 49 Slavonic words that are no longer used in modern language, but which could nevertheless be understood. Since today's readers of the NT even today would be able to understand them, the Synodal Commission did not use other terms. Here are some of them: *gonitelj, revnitelj* (zealot), *spasitelj* (Savior), *tjesitelj, utjesitelj* (Comforter), *djevstvenik, zakonik* (lawyer), *zastupnik* (solicitor), *prestupnik, propovjednik* (preacher), *srebrnik* (silver coin), *cetvorovlasnik* (tetrarch), *hulnik* (man of blasphemy), *prorocica* (prophetess), *licemjer* (hypocrite), *preljuba* (adultery), *zrtva* (sacrifice, offering), *dobrodjetelj* (virtue), *iskustvo* (experience), *prvorodstvo* (first-born), *bliznji* (fellow-man), *hulja* (blasphemy), *grjehovni* (sinful), *duhovni* (spiritual), *jedinomisleni* (one-minded), *jedinorodni* (only-begotten), *malovjerni* (of small belief), *rukotvoreni* (hand-made), *nerukotvoreni* (not handmade), *zivotni* (living), *smrtonosni* (deadly, death-bearing), *velicati* (glorify), *izobilovati* (be abundant), *zrtvovati* (to sacrifice), *oblagodatiti* (make one full of grace), etc.

The Translation Committee observed that some Serbian words and terms did not best reflect the original meaning in Greek, and so they decided to use Greek words instead. The best examples are the following terms: John 1:1: "In beginning was *the Logos* (the Word), and the Logos (the Word) was with God, and the Logos (the Word) was God." The same procedure was employed in 1 John 1:1 and

in Revelation 19:13. We reintroduced the term *synagogue* (Lk 4:20; Acts 13:15; 22:19; Mk 13:9; 2 Cor 11:24) instead of *zbornica* as found in Vuk, because in today's Serbian, *zbornica* is primarily understood to be a teachers' meeting room. In addition, instead of *starjesine* (elders) we returned the Greek term *prezviteri* (Acts 14:23; 15:2,4,6,22,23; 21:18, but not in Revelation 4:4,10 because there they denote the chiefs, the elders of the 12 Jewish tribes, and have no ecclesial meaning). It was the same for the Hebrew term Sanhedrin, Greek *synedrion*, which we reintroduced into the modern Serbian translation; Vuk translated it as *vijecnica*. Where possible, the Translation Committee used the term *episkop* (bishop) – it is rare – because we were aware of the fact that in the early church the degrees (deacons, presbyters, bishops) in the hierarchy were not as developed as in later centuries. Instead of Vuk's *potrkaliste*, the Commission employed the Greek term *stadion* - 185 m (Mt 14:24; Lk 24:13; Jn 6:19,11:18; Rev 14:20, 21:16). And last but not least, instead of *denarion*, Vuk occasionally used the Turkish word *grosh* (Mt 18:28: instead of "a hundred denarii" we have "sto grosha" or *asarij* (Mt 10:29: a penny in RSV) or used other terms such as *novac* (Mt 22:19).

In 1962, the Synodal Commission had already revised Vuk's translation of the canonical Gospels, and observing the guidelines of the Holy Synod, the Commission had to prepare the Four-Gospel-Book for publication in its new composition in the *ijekavica* dialect, but without using the ending – *ijeh* for 2<sup>nd</sup> case plural pronouns or adjectives, and using instead a more simple form: - *ih*, i.e., *Djela svetih* apostola, and not *svetijeh*, or *lepih* devojaka, instead of *lijepijeh*, etc. We did not use the negative *nijesam*, *nijesi*, but *nisam*, *nisi*; not *njezin*, but *njen*.

The Gospel text has been divided into the so-called *zachala*, readings, portions, *perikope*, and *lectia*, and so was ready to be used in liturgical services. Even today, whenever a church is without the proper Gospel-Book for liturgical use published by the Church in 2000, the celebrant can use this Four-Gospel-Book, and even the Divine Liturgy is celebrated on working days and read from it. The division into readings, *lectia*, has been preserved in later editions of the complete New Testament (in the Orthodox Church, the whole of the NT is read from in liturgical services with the exception of the Revelation of John).

In 1967, the Commission, composed of new members, started with the revision of Vuk's translation of the Catholic (Universal) epistles, all seven of them, and then proceeded with the revision of the epistles of St. Paul, and finally with the Acts of the Apostles, the four Gospels (again!) and the Revelation of John. It must be emphasized that the Commission again and again worked repeatedly on the revision of the already performed work, even after the first Synodal translation of the NT in 1984 which was an important year – the first publication of the revised NT. Why again? It was because, in the meantime, after the publication of the NT, the Commission received many justified observations and remarks from the re-

aders themselves (it did not have a Revision Committee as is the case with other translations in the West, nor a Broader Committee composed of people of letters, linguists, philologists, etc.).

There were, naturally, written suggestions made by readers that were not justified, or that reflected ignorance of problematic wording, or even ignorance of the NT text as such. For example, the doxology in the Epistle to the Romans which is at the end of chapter 14, verses 24-26 in the Synodal translation, is found at the end of the epistle itself, 16:25-27, in Emilijan Carnic's translation. The same relates to some other texts known in NT science as interpolations, such as in 1 John 5:7, the so-called comma Johannem, or the end of the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the Kingdom and power and glory for ages. Amen" (Matthew 6:13). This is the edition we have preserved in our Serbian translation (as well as by Vuk Karadzic), but in the form of a new line. One could search further for such verses, such as in Mark 16:9-20, say, that have not been testified to in all of the NT manuscripts, but are part of the Orthodox Church biblical-liturgical tradition (in the sense that they are read in liturgical services, and hence are to be found in lectionaries that are, in a way, a reliable source of information on the original biblical text).

### **Sample Translations in Serbian and in Foreign Languages which the Translation Committee Used**

In this context, we could observe that members of the Synodal Commission had at their disposal the Greek text of the NT, the so-called *textus receptus* of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, prepared by biblical experts of this Patriarchate and published in 1908. This Greek NT enjoyed a great scientific reputation in the Orthodox Church due to the fact that it has been verified by its liturgical usage. The Church-Slavonic text of the NT has enjoyed nearly the same reputation throughout the centuries, verified by spiritual life based upon it as a sacred translation of the living Orthodox Church of Christ. This version – Church-Slavonic – was in the hands of the Translation Committee. We also consulted the Vulgate translation as one of the most reliable old translations.

It goes without saying that the Commission had at its disposal various other translations, both in Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Russian and Bulgarian. By Serbian translations, it is meant Dimitrije Stefanovic's translation published by the Bible Society in Belgrade in 1933, and Emilijan Carnic's translation which was also published by the Bible Society in Belgrade in 1973, as well as the translation of the whole Bible done by lexicographer Lujo Bakotic in Belgrade in 1933.

Regarding translations in western languages, we should mention Luther's Bible – its revised translation from 1956, then the so-called Zürcher Bibel, and

some other German translations, as well as some NT translations into English, such as the Authorized Version of King James from 1611, and especially the Revised Standard Version from 1946. Those Committee members who were good at other foreign languages had in front of them NT translations into French and Italian – for the sake of acquiring a better insight into the meaning of the texts. (As secretary of the Synodal Commission from 1967 to 1984, I consulted the so-called *Einheitsübersetzung*; Good News for Modern Men, *Gute Nachricht*.)

While working on the new translation, we used a study found in Vuk's translation of the NT written by academician Vladimir Mosin to a large extent: *Vukov Novi zavjet*, published by Prosveta as a supplement to the very text of the NT done by Vuk (Belgrade, 1974, pp. 489-712). This expert first exposes the history of translations before Vuk Karadzic, then the history of his translation itself, the critical approaches to his translation by the then experts – be it in Serbian or in theology, and considers the evolution of Vuk's translation from its first edition in 1847 until 1863, and exposes a detailed critical apparatus and a study concerning some historical realities and dogmatic teachings of the Church. Mind you, it is a Russian expert who writes scientifically about the first Serbian translation into the literary language, which is the language of today. He is a man who knows the Church-Slavonic wording of the NT text perfectly well along with his mother tongue of Russian, and was consequently not distracted much from the original Slavonic language.

With the aforementioned tenth volume of Vuk's complete works from 1974 together with the text of the NT, Dr. Dimitrije Bogdanovic published *Critical Apparatus*, from verse to verse, which is the first such expert undertaking. Bogdanovic entitled his enormous work modestly: *Napomene i objasnjenja (Notes and Clarifications)*, although it comprises 400 pages, pp. 713-1102. In addition, two pages (1193-94) are used to indicate all the misprints in Vuk's first edition from 1847. His wife, Sonja Bogdanovic, produced *an index of words and register of personal and geographic names*. Bogdanovic gave all the different readings, *lesia variabila*, according to various manuscripts as well as suggestions for a possible translation of the disputable places. As an expert in the NT text and in biblical science, this scholar contributed a great deal to Serbian biblical science, a field that had not yet been dealt with in detail. The modern editions of the NT intended for scientific aims, primarily under the editorship of such biblical experts such as Eberhard Nestle, Kurt Aland and Matthew Metzger, contain such a critical apparatus – naturally, much more detailed). As a matter of fact, they published such an *apparatum criticum*, with abundant variable readings and suggestions based on manuscripts accompanying nearly every NT book, explicitly for use by translators and other experts, and professors of New Testament and Greek language. In the last edition of the New Testament, the so-called *Novum Testamentum*

*Graece*, (26. neu bearbeitete Auflage gemeinsam herausgegeben von Kurt Alan, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, Allen Wikgren (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft), Stuttgart, 1993), the name of a Greek biblical scholar and professor at the Thessalonica University, Karavidopoulos, was indicated.

## Qualities of the Synodal Translation

The expert public knows very well that the Synodal translation of the NT is an *expert translation*, and not a popular one like Vuk's translation. As a matter of fact, Vuk did not translate for the purpose of liturgical use, but, one may say, for missionary aims: in order to give the Word of God into the hands of ordinary readers. So, he did not write the translation in order for the sacred book to be read in church services, but explicitly for lay people. Therefore, in a small way, Vuk may even be called a *missionary*.

However, by decision of the Holy Assembly of Bishops in 1984, the Commission's translation (the 1<sup>st</sup> edition) was promulgated as an authentic translation, meaning that one could read from it at all Church services and at various liturgical rites. As mentioned, it contains divisions into *zacala*, readings, and *lectia*, just as they are indicated in official Church-Slavonic Church books, the Gospel-Book and the Apostle-Book, and so at the beginning of every *lectio*, one can find its number in brackets printed in bold (the Bible Society of Serbia does not publish these liturgical divisions, as it also publishes the NT for non-Orthodox readers). An attentive reader will notice that concerning the Apostle-Book, these readings, *lectia*, go from the Acts of the Apostles on through the Catholic Epistles starting with the Epistle of James, so that from the end of the Epistle of Jude, they continue with the Epistle to the Romans. Just this fact indicates that the order of the NT books was not the same in the West and East; in the Greek and Church-Slavonic Bibles, the epistles (letters) of St. Paul come after the Catholic Epistles.

## Publications of the NT

In 1984, the Holy Synod of Bishops published the first edition of the NT in the *ijekavski* dialect (we have not yet produced a NT in the *ekavski* dialect!). The book was printed in Ljubljana. Professor of the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade, Dr. Atanasije Jevtic, later Bishop, supplied every chapter with its contents. These contents were improved or enriched in later editions. (We would very much like that all the Bible editions contained the contents of each chapter at the beginning, not throughout the text of the corresponding chapter).

The second edition was printed with the cooperation of the then Yugoslav Bi-

ble Society in Sarajevo in 1990, while the third edition experienced some amendments and improvements, and the fourth edition (printed in Belgrade) was the basis for editing the solemn liturgical edition of the Four-Gospel-Book which contains the synaxaria with indications of all the readings throughout the liturgical year following the sample of the Church-Slavonic Gospel-Book.

In the meantime, in cooperation with the Bible Society of Serbia, for the first time in history, it was in 1998 that the complete Holy Scriptures was published including the OT translated by Dj. Danicic and the NT in the Synodal translation, meaning that the earlier combination of Djura Danicic's OT and Vuk Karadzic's NT which had always been published together got separated after so many years). The Bible Society still publishes Danicic-Vuk as it has done for some 150 years because some people and church communities nevertheless prefer Vuk's NT because of the beauty of his language.

Due to the fact that the Synodal translation is theologically correct, much better than all the previous translations, the Serbian Church insists that her professors and students of theological schools quote the NT according to the new translation. This is a recommendation, and not forced on scholars, because they may quote from various translations in order to find the best meaning of a text.

Archdeacon Radomir Rakic  
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