

THE METAPHORICAL WORLD OF THE SACRED WORD IN THE PREFACES OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

TRANSLATIONS FROM TYNDALE TO THE KING JAMES BIBLE

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*Ama scripturas, et amabit te sapientia.
Love the Scriptures, and wisdom will love thee.
"Translators to the Reader" (KJB 1611)*

THE IDEA OF THE "PREFACE" AND THE REFORMATION PREFACES TO BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Since the time of St. Jerome (331–420), Bible translators have been keen to add prefaces to their translations. This was especially significant in the time of the Reformation. Over thirty years ago, Heinrich Bornkamm collected and edited Martin Luther's prefaces to the books of the Old and the New Testament (see BORNKAMM). These prefaces are goldmines for scholars interested in 16th-century hermeneutics. William Tyndale's first, though anonymous book: the Cologne fragment of 1525 (TYNDALE 1926) (published as *The Pathway into the Holy Scripture* in 1531) and *A commendious introduction / prologue or preface unto the pistle off paul to the Romayns* (1526) were, in fact, loose English translations of Luther's German prefaces. In 2008, a young Hungarian scholar, András Mikesy published a comparative study of Luther's Preface to the Romans and its English version by Tyndale and convincingly argued that Tyndale's text is more than a simple translation (see MIKESY). I shall return to these texts in due course.

As far as Hungary is concerned, there were fragmented Bible translations in the early 16th century, and the first complete translation in 1590 was the work of the team of the Reformed pastor Gáspár Károli (1530–1591). The first complete Catholic Bible translation came out in 1626 by the Jesuit György Káldi (1573–1634). I mention this because an excellent selection of the prefaces to the 16th–17th century Hungarian Bible translations was published in Budapest (see ZVARA). The hermeneutical basis of religious controversies is well documented

by such an edition. This Hungarian "book of biblical prefaces" is, to my knowledge, unparalleled.

Alasdair Gray's magisterial collection *The Book of Prefaces: A Short History of Literate Thought in Words by Great Writers from Four Nations from the 7th to the 20th Century* richly demonstrates that writing a preface is an art in itself. A preface should be written properly so that the addressee be taught the art of reading. If so, the preface has achieved its goal. The last paragraph of the celebrated preface to the 1611 edition of the King James Version (KJV) begins with this sentence: "Many other things we might give thee warning of, gentle reader, if we had not exceeded the measure of a preface already." (DANIELL 2003: 775) Now, here ends my preface.

THE SUBJECT OF THE PREFACES: THE BIBLICAL WORD AS SPEECH ACT. ITS ROLE IN THE EXHORTATION TO BIBLE READING

The purpose of these prefaces was not only the "praise of the Holy Scripture" but the exhortation of the audience to read Scripture by illustrating how the word of God is at work. The word of God, as the translators of the 1611 version put it in their dedication, is "sacred" word. What historians have labelled as Reformation marks a unique and unprecedented period in the eruption of the sacred word in human history. Whoever translated and edited the Bible in the vernacular was wholeheartedly committed to show the dramatic event of how the letter or the word was becoming Gospel while reading it. Both Luther and Tyndale were keen on demonstrating that the "good word" of the Gospel is *promissio* or promise. With this revolutionary insight they were indeed forerunners of modern speech act theory. Luther emphasized the performative nature of biblical statements such as "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). The German theologian Oswald Bayer notes that Luther discovered the performative word in baptism, in the Lord's supper, in the Christmas story, in the Easter story as well as in several other biblical passages. In statements like "Ego Te absolvo" ("I absolve you!") Luther recognized the speech act, "the accomplishing word," as he called it; the *Verbum efficax*, which frees, establishes communication, and gives confidence all at the same time (BAYER 50–58). According to Bayer Luther's great hermeneutical discovery was that the philosophical sign was the mark of something absent while the theological sign was the mark of something present (ibid. 52).

Anthony C. Thisleton recognized the same attitude in Tyndale's *Pathway into the Holy Scripture*:

[he] saw much of the importance and authority of Scripture to lie in its capacity to perform valid and effective linguistic activities... Indeed within a dozen pages, Tyndale specifies no less than eighteen distinct speech acts as linguistic activities which Scripture performs: it promises, names, appoints, declares, gives, condemns, curses, binds, kills, drives to despair, delivers, forbids, ministers to life, wounds, blesses, heals, cures, and wakes." (THISLETON 117–118)

Reformers were aware that the nature of the biblical word is neither "objective" (as for modern fundamentalists) nor subjective (as for modern liberals) but ultimately dramatic as it performs the divine scenario of redemption. Moreover, the "script" (Scripture) also waits to be fulfilled or performed by the believers. Only most recently, the so-called "theological interpretation of Scripture" (K. Vanhoozer, F. Watson, R. Hays et al.) recognized the "theodramatic" nature of the word at its interpretation which considers hermeneutics as the art of discerning the divine discourse at work. "Scripture not only depicts God's speech and action, but is itself a result of these same divine communicative initiatives. Scripture serves the theodrama by taking on the servant form of human language and literature." (Vanhoozer 2006: 74. See also VANHOOZER 2005).

METAPHORS OF THE WORD AND SCRIPTURE

Metaphor is a statement of identity. A new, cognitive linguistic view of metaphor was proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) which was summarized by the Hungarian cognitive linguist Zoltán Kövecses as follows:

metaphor is property of concepts, and not of words; (2) the function of metaphor is to better understand certain concepts, and not just artistic or esthetic purpose; (3) metaphor is often *not* based on similarity; (4) metaphor is effortlessly used in everyday life by ordinary people, not just by special talented people; and (5) metaphor, far from being a superfluous though pleasing linguistic ornament, is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning." (KÖVECSES x)

