

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 1 B. THE SCRIPTURES

A guide for the use of the Bible versions: The RSV, The New International Version and The Good News Bible

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The Revised Standard Version (RSV) is generally accurate. However, in many cases in the Old Testament, 'Cn' footnotes indicates that the translators have placed emendations and conjectures into the text (often on the basis of ancient versions in Greek and Syriac, and so on) and have put what the Hebrew has into a footnote. Some more recent translations like the New International Version (NIV), relying on newly discovered more ancient manuscripts, advances in text criticism and better philological data, keep more closely to the Hebrew even when a passage presents difficulties.

The chief disadvantages of the RSV are a sometimes archaic language, a semi-literal manner of translation which keeps strictly to the forms and idioms of the original languages, and a range of vocabulary which goes beyond common usage.

The Good News Bible (GNB) translates some key theological passages in an incorrect or misleading way (see John 1:1; 3:6; 1 Cor 11:29; Phil 2:5,6). In certain important passages the relationship of concepts to each other has been misconstrued from misinterpretation or theological bias (see Mark 1:4; Gal 3:26; Titus 3:4-7).

The GNB translates the meaning of the original in modern equivalent forms and idioms. Its language is simple, immediate, and intelligible. Sentences are shorter. However, the search for simplicity has led at times to loss of imagery, loss of rhythm and emphasis, and occasionally, to the dropping of important connectives and key-words from the translation. Occasionally by its explicitness it excludes wider ranges of reference and deeper levels of meaning (see Gen 12:7 compared with Gal. 3:16; 1 John 5:6).

The NIV occupies the middle ground. Generally, it is a theologically reliable translation and is considered more intelligible than the RSV. However, of it, too, remains closely tied to idioms and forms of the original and for that reason becomes awkward in its rhythms. Its sentences are frequently longer than they need to be, and its range of vocabulary often goes beyond common usage.

1. LECTINARY

We are not able to recommend any of the above versions as entirely satisfactory for lectionary use. If the GNB is used, the published assessment of preferred versions for pericopes in the three year series should be noted, in order to avoid inaccuracies of translation which give voice to doctrinal aberrations. When other series of pericopes are used, among the versions examined it is recommended that the NIV serve as a check on accuracy and as a substitute where the other version is unsatisfactory.

2. BIBLE STUDY

Since the GNB communicates more readily than most other versions, it may be used for home study and in groups for Bible study. Since, however, it has to be corrected at certain points, some of doctrinal importance, it is recommended that among the versions examined the NIV be used for Bible study, especially where there is need to give attention to important words and concepts, or to follow the original closely.

3. EDUCATION

When passages are memorised in classes of instruction, students should use one version consistently. Where the GNB is accurate it may be used. Here too, however, among the versions examined, it is recommended that the NIV serve as a reference for the accuracy of the GNB.