

SCHOLAR'S CORNER

How many times has the Bible been translated? Can we trust the Bible if it's been translated so many times?

The Bible is not like the game of telephone, where one person whispers in the ear of another, then passes it along, until it arrives at the end of the chain garbled and confused.

It's a misconception that the Bible has been translated many times and therefore is very different from its original wording. In fact, modern Bibles make use of the latest scholarship and are translated directly from the original Hebrew Old Testament and the original Greek New Testament. This means that modern Bibles bring the reader closer to the original words of the Bible and their intended meanings than any earlier translations did.

The misconception likely has its roots in the early history of Christianity, when the movement spread from Palestine, where people could read the Old Testament in its original language (Hebrew) to other countries where non-Jews (and even many Jews) could not read Hebrew and therefore used a Greek translation. When Greek-speaking Christians brought Christianity to other ethnic groups, they translated their Greek Bible into those people's native languages. As you can imagine, each translation opened the door for mistakes and misunderstandings.

But in the Protestant Reformation (conventionally dated to 1517

when Martin Luther nailed his "95 Theses" to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg), reformers like Luther believed it was important to translate directly from the original Hebrew (for the Old Testament) and the original Greek (for the New Testament) into the language of the people. Ever since then, Protestant Bibles have been translations of the original Hebrew and Greek, and in the Twentieth Century, Roman Catholic Bibles followed suit.

Still, on some level the discussion of translations is moot because no doctrine central to Christianity is based on a particular word in the Bible or its exact nuances in the

original Hebrew or Greek. No one's salvation hangs in the balance over some nuance of the text that can only be appreciated in the original.

The important ideas in Christianity – that God exists, God is loving and God sent His Son to die on the cross for the sins of the world - all translate very well into any language.

The Rev. William G. Gartig, an Episcopal priest with a doctorate in Bible from Hebrew Union College, will answer your questions about the Bible, Episcopal life and other religious subjects. Send questions to 2146 Cameron Ave. Apt. 5, Cincinnati, OH 45212-3631 or at gartigwg@episcopal-dso.zzn.com.