

Biblical Scholarship at YDS: A Bicentennial Retrospective – part 3

From an exhibit at the Yale Divinity Library, March–June 2023

Italicized text is from [*“This Grand Errand”: A Bicentennial History of Yale Divinity School*](#) (YDS, 2022) by Ray Waddle.

This page continues from [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

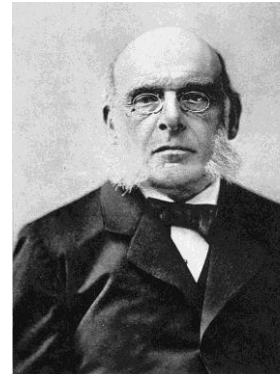
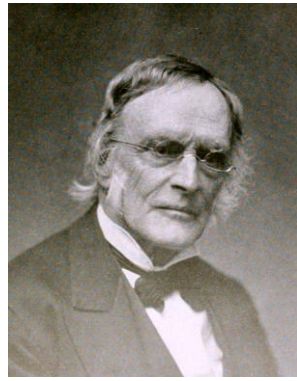
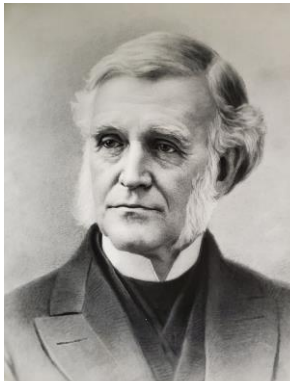
Bible Translation and Revision Activities at Yale Divinity School



The Old Testament section of the RSV Committee meeting at YDS in September 1952. From left to right: George Dahl, James Muilenberg, Julius Brewer, J. Philip Hyatt, Fleming James, Luther Weigle, Millar Burrows, Harry Orlinsky, Herbert May, and William Irvin.

Starting in 1937, thirty-two North American scholars regularly gathered at YDS to revise the translation of one of civilization’s founding documents: the Bible. The Revised Standard Version Bible Committee of the National Council of Churches, chaired by YDS Dean Weigle, worked through thousands of decisions that went into a new revision of the American Standard Version (ASV), which had been in circulation since the turn of the century.

Epoch-making as the RSV revision was, it was not Yale’s first acquaintance with far-reaching Bible translation. Yale graduate Noah Webster (1778 BA) published his own revised translation in 1833. In the 1870s and ’80s, YDS Professor George Day, as well as two Yale presidents, Theodore Woolsey and Timothy Dwight the younger, assisted in the translation work of the American Revision Committee on the Bible, which published the ASV in 1901.



George Edward Day, Theodore Dwight Woolsey, and Timothy Dwight the younger were Yale representatives on the American Revision Committee.

Below, the first entry in a record book kept by the American Revision Committee. From the Divinity Library's Special Collections ([Record Group 34](#)):

New York, Dec. 4. 1891.

At a meeting of gentlemen invited by Rev. Philip Schaff, D.D. to meet this day at his Study, No 240 Fifth Avenue, New York, for the purpose of forming an organization to coöperate with the British Committee in the revision of the Authorized English Version of the Scriptures, the following gentlemen were present, —

Prof. Henry C. Smith, D.D. New York, Prof. Wm Henry Green, D.D. Princeton, N. J. Prof. George E. Hale, D.D. Philadelphia, Pa. Prof. Philip Schaff D.D. New York, Prof. Charles P. Krantz, D.D. Philadelphia, Pa. Prof. Thomas J. Conant, D.D. Brooklyn, N.Y. Prof. George E. Day, D.D. New Haven Conn. Ezra Abbot D.D. Cambridge, Mass. & Rev. Edward A. Washburn, D.D. New York.

The Rev. Dr. Horsdon, Dean of Chester, was also present by special invitation & took part in the deliberations.

Ex-President Woolsey, Prof. Hackett, Prof. ^{Stone} Strong & others were prevented from attending, but expressed their hearty interest in the proposed work & their readiness to co-operate.

Dean Weigle and the RSV

Luther Allan Weigle, Dean of the Divinity School from 1928 to 1949, was also at the center of a major undertaking in twentieth-century religious history, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible translation. The RSV committee's work, which he oversaw for some three decades, routinely took place at YDS. When the complete RSV was released in 1952 (the New Testament in 1946), it was an instant bestseller, and Weigle became the public face of the new translation in newscasts and celebrations nationwide.



In the RSV office on the Quad, Weigle labored over a prodigious array of Bible texts, assisted after 1954 by secretary Anne Temple. Weigle was not technically a translator but a low-key, highly organized taskmaster who kept the effort on schedule. Bringing his ecumenical vision to the work, he hoped the RSV would be the universal translation acceptable to postwar Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox believers.

RSV committee members considered recent discoveries in philology and manuscript evidence (including the Dead Sea Scrolls after 1947) in an effort to improve the translation, but they did not want to depart drastically from the ASV or the King James Version. The full RSV Bible was released in 1952 with endorsements from various major denominations, the acclaim of ecumenical leaders—and the condemnation of traditionalists who rejected changes to favorite passages and who mistrusted the translation's sponsoring agency, the National Council. Charred pages from a new RSV copy, burned in protest by conservative pastors, were sent as a pointed message to Dean Weigle, the public voice of the RSV.

In his article "Revision of the American Standard Version" in the *Journal of Bible and Religion*, May 1941, YDS professor George Dahl explained the process that the Revision Committee went through for every passage:

So far as actual methods of work are concerned, the translation committee is divided into an Old Testament section and a New. At the meetings of these sections each member is assigned a passage for translation. On sheets whereon the Scripture passage has already been pasted, he makes his corrections of the American Standard text. These alterations are based on careful study of the ancient versions, commentaries, and all other available helps. The resultant rendering is next copied, and sent to the other members of the section for comment. At gatherings held at least twice a year, the entire material is gone over verse by verse. Eventually the combined Old and New Testament committee must pass as a whole on the final form. In the meantime, the suggestions of the Advisory Board are carefully weighed and acted upon. Quite evidently all this involves a tremendous amount of exacting labor...

Below, a portion of the "Agenda" prepared by George Dahl in 1946 for discussion of a passage in Isaiah, from the Divinity Library Special Collections ([Record Group 70](#)):

Isaiah

Dahl - AGENDA - p. 807

Dahl

Memoranda:

1. I believe we ought to make greater use of the significant contributions made during recent decades, both in commentaries and translations, by scholars like G. A. Smith (revised edit.), C. C. Torrey, Kent, Moffatt, Kissane, Amer. Translation, Zürich Bible, Jewish Translation, Levy, etc. Otherwise we lag far behind.
2. In Second Isaiah and Psalms we make frequent use of terms like joy, gladness, singing, shouts, rejoicing. Someone with access to the master copy may well check up on these so as to avoid possible embarrassing inconsistencies. (I realize, of course, that judgment must be used.) But such a verse as Is. 35.10, originally differing in our version, should read exactly like its duplicate Is. 51.11. Other passages in both Is. and Pss. may well be checked for consistency along these lines, even when they are not exact duplicates.

50.1 ~~your mother was/was your mother (To relieve the awkward accumulation of your. SRV reads here more smoothly.)~~

50.2 ~~read: Why, when I came, was there no man?~~

When I called, was there no one to answer?

(Much more dramatic, less prosy than unhappy rendering of our Committee. Cf. KJ, SRV, G.A. Smith, A.T., C.C. Torrey Jew., etc.)

shortened, that it cannot redeem?/too short to redeem? ~~+~~ (So GAS, Zürich, AT, etc. This to my mind more accurately and truly renders the Heb.)

rivers/the rivers ~~+~~ In preceding line we supplied the art. before "sea". Cp. KJ, GAS, Jew.)

○ stink/are in distress (In Aram. section of BDB the root ba'esh is defined "to be in evil case, cp. Heb. Eccles. 3.26. Cp. AT, CCT, GAS, et al. Read with Gk. "parched for want of water". Stink doesn't fit the context. Either "be in distress" or "be parched" emphatically do fit.)

50.4 ○ the tongue of those that are taught/a tongue for teaching (The noun is an abstract meaning either teaching or

Over a forty-year period, YDS had steady representation on the committee, including Old Testament Professor George Dahl (1908 BA, 1913 PhD) and biblical theologian Millar Burrows (1925 PhD). Serving on the later New Revised Standard Version committee, which published its Bible translation in 1989, were Marvin Hoyle Pope (1949 PhD) and Paul Sevier Minear (1932 PhD).



Marvin Pope was the Louis M. Rabinowitz Professor of Semitic Languages and Literatures and professor of Near Eastern languages and civilizations at Yale. He also taught at the Divinity School and in the Religious Studies department. His scholarly specialties were the study of Ugaritic poetry and Biblical translation and commentary. He was author of *El in the Ugaritic Texts* and wrote two commentaries in the Anchor Bible Series: *Job* and *Song of Songs*, for which he won the National Religious Book Award.

More than twenty years service on the RSV Old Testament Committee has provided me some perspectives and concerns that I may air on this occasion. The first concern is my^{own} lack of time to prepare for consideration of the Committee arguments for hundreds of cases needing reexamination and rectification. Even when I get around to choosing some 20 or 30 items in Job, e.g., and submit an agenda of only those cases where I think there is a chance of convincing a majority of the Committee that something is wrong and that remedy is possible, it has been 3 years and may be many more before the Committee will get around to considering the items. We are so far behind because there we are discovering more and more that needs attention and one or two weeks a year is not sufficient time to deal with the plethora of problem passages.

An excerpt from Pope's reflections on his work with the RSV Committee, from his papers in the Divinity Library Special Collections ([Record Group 135](#))

With the RSV, the School was associated with a cultural phenomenon—a Bible translation trusted by millions and used in congregations and ecumenical settings in ways that no other Bible edition has been since.

Shown below are samples from the records of the Committee that prepared the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, from the Divinity Library's Special Collections ([Record Group 70](#)).

Notes for discussion of the Psalms show the iterative process of decision-making (before word-processing software!):

Psalms

136²³ It shouldn't be capitalized if last vers⁽²²⁾ ends with colon. :/.⁺

137⁷ If Yow is to be capitalized comma must be removed after Jerusalem.^{no cap}

139¹⁸ awkward. Sorry, but there seems to be nothing we can do about it.

140⁴ presume should be capitalized. no cap wicked !/wicked; ⁺ feet !/feet.⁺

141⁷ As follows a ; and should not be capitalized or change ; to a period.⁺

142^{5b} shouldn't this be in quotes? No, because the whole psalm is a prayer

146^{9b} semi-colon should be changed to period if But is to be capitalized ^{but +} _{indent 9c} ✓

147¹⁸⁻¹⁹ comma after flow must be removed or He shouldn't be capitalized. :/.⁺

148⁷⁻⁸ remove comma after deeps or capital from Fire. no cap ✓

148¹³⁻¹⁴ remove comma after heaven or capital from He. Period after heaven ✓

150^{1b} Praise should not be capitalized. no cap ✓

" 2b " " " " " " ✓

" 3b " " " " " " ✓

" 4b " " " " " " ✓

" 5b " " " " " " ✓

90^{2b} ok this line - it follows ASV - do you want even in it? O.K.

591 112.6(1) I have done, but the last sentence must be ended with a period. Yes - Period ✓

592 ~~119.36 no semi colon in this case.~~

595 133.2 (2) - if change on ms. O.K.

606 102.4 (3) requires that a semi-colon be placed at end of preceding line ^{yes +} ✓

609 106.35. write -ie - I assume this means also to remove the comma after nations + have so done! O.K.

588 104.12 - ~~see change on ms. line b~~ I have entered this ^{unse} in M.C. - change P.C. ✓

595 36. not done - I have no Chicago Bible here

There is an inconsistency in the heading as to the capitalization of the word Psalm.

Weigle - AGENDA - p. 572

Psalm
25.12 ~~Him he shows/Him will he show~~ /MS5
○25.13 ~~delete: himself (We need nothing more than the simple-
He)~~
○25.14 ~~for/with~~
○25.17 ~~distresses/distress (I do not care that KJ, ASV have-
plural)~~
+25.20 put me not to shame/let me not be put to shame
+26.12 shall yet stand/stands
+27.1 Whom/whom
+27.3 be afraid/fear (KJ, ASV - stronger Eng.) will I/I will +
27.4 ~~have I/I have will I/I will W withdraws~~
+loveliness/beauty (KJ, ASV - what is gained by change?)
+27.5 +shelter,/shelter
+27.6cd read: and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy
(The ineptitude of separating offer sacrifices is some-
what alleviated by separating the words farther)
+27.8 my/My
○27.9 ~~forsake me not/do not forsake me-~~
○27.10 read: ~~Though my father and my mother forsake me,-
the LORD will take me up.-~~
+27.13 read: I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
(Sept., Vulg., Briggs, Kirkpatrick, Boylan, Westminster,
Chicago. This seems to me to be less violent than the
devices followed by our draft and KJ, ASV and suggested
by Driver.)
+27.14 thy/your 28.1 I agree with May on this verse
+28.2 shrine/sanctuary
+28.5 pay no heed to/do not regard or to/or
+28.6 Put: for he has heard, in second line
○28.7 ~~give thanks to/thank (Westminster)~~
29.1 +might/strength +29.3 delete note 29.6 delete hyphen +
29.9 ~~○makes the oaks to whirl/twists the oaks (I got this
suggestion from the new RC Latin translation)~~
○29.11 May the LORD/The LORD will (twice) (I am unwilling to
displace the confident expression of faith which has
hitherto been characteristic of our Eng. translation of
the Psalms by the expression of a pious wish. We are
turning will into may too often; we should not displace
the will unless there is an ineluctable reason for it.
In this particular verse all translations that I have
consulted use future or present, except Oesterly and
Zurich) see 618, 508
I lost my battle here,
but I am not convinced;
and I seem maintain
the position. What we
are doing is utterly wrong
unless the Heb. requires
it; and that the Heb.
does not do.
30.2 didst heal/hast healed (KJ, ASV - to fit with 1 and 3) +
30.3 Sheel,/Sheel;
○read: thou hast restored me to life, that I should not-
go down to the Pit.
○30.4 praises/praise-
+30.5 but his favor endures/and his favor is
○30.8 read: ~~I cried to thee, O Lord;~~
+supplication;/supplication:
30.9 pit/Pit+ Can/Shall (twice) 3+ Will
30.10 read: O LORD, be thou my helper!" +
30.11 didst turn/hast turned+ didst loose/hast loosed +
sackcloth,/sackcloth+ gird/girded +
30.12 +forever/for ever
31.5 wilt redeem/hast redeemed +

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~~Read: thou hast restored me to life, that I should not
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30.4 ~~praises/praise~~

2-30.5 but his favor endures/and his favor is

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✓ +supplication; /supplication:

30.9 pit/Pit + Can/Should (twice) 3 + - Will

30.10 read: O LORD, be thou my helper." +

30.11 didst turn/hast turned $\frac{1}{2}$ didst loose/hast loosed $\frac{1}{2}$

sackcloth, /sackcloth+ ✓ gird/girded+ ✓

30.12 4 forever/for ever

n.d.

**"Whose Unclean Fingers Have Been
Tampering With The Holy Bible,
God's Pure, Infallible, Verbally
Inspired Word?"**

A discussion of the FACTS concerning the new Revised Standard Version of the Bible, edited and copyrighted by the National (Federal) Council of Churches.

(Copies of this pamphlet may be secured by writing the Book Table, Wealthy Street Baptist Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. No charge for as many as you can prayerfully use. We would appreciate any contribution to pay for the printing for as wide a distribution as possible.)

12th Printing
(Total copies printed — 94,350)

by David Otis Fuller, D.D., Pastor

FACT NO. 1. Every informed and intelligent person knows that our government is crawling with communists, or those who sanction and encourage communism. And every informed and intelligent person in Christian circles knows — or can very easily find out — that the Protestant church in its leadership is crawling with those who aid and abet and encourage communism. This is especially true within the National (Federal) Council of Churches. There is so much evidence to prove this statement — evidence we have presented again and again — that it is impossible to adduce it here. We shall gladly furnish it on request.

The conclusion logically follows: If we are concerned as patriotic Americans about this terrible menace of communism within our government, how much more should we as born again, blood-bought Christians (if the reader is such) be concerned about this monstrous menace within our churches.

FACT NO. 2. This National (Federal) Council of Churches has edited and copyrighted the HOLY BIBLE, which they have termed "the Revised Standard Version." In the main it contains intact the great doctrines of the Bible and the original meaning of the words. God saw to that; He didn't let them do otherwise. But their unclean fingers have tampered with this blessed Book; subtly, and with all the cleverness of the adversary which makes it imperative we sound this warning. This Revised Standard Version will doubtless do some good and we believe God will use it for His glory and the salvation of souls, as He always uses His

THE NEW BIBLE

Why Christians Should Not Accept It

BY CARL McINTIRE

The Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., was presented with much ado to the public on September 30, 1952. Three thousand, four hundred rallies were held under the auspices of the National Council and its local councils of churches. These celebrations occurred before people had on opportunity to examine the Bible.

With the book now in hand it is evident that such fundamental changes have been made that it would be nothing short of a calamity of infinite proportions if the book should be accepted by the English-speaking world, and replace the King James Version. The New Testament section had previously been issued, but the Old Testament was not available until September 30. Here are basic objections to the version.

I

ISAIAH 7:14

The prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ is eliminated from the Old Testament. Isaiah 7:14, the beloved passage used particularly at Christmas time, has been changed. The word "virgin" in reference to the coming Messiah has been removed, and the words "a young woman" have been substituted. Yet, Matthew 1:22 specifically declares that this prophecy was given by the Lord—"spoken of the Lord by the prophet," and had been fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ of the virgin Mary.

The King James Version of Isaiah 7:14 reads:

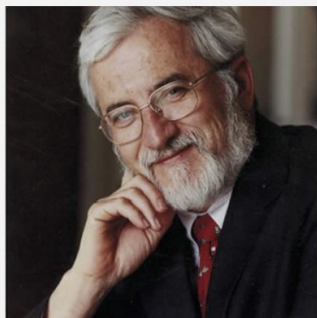
"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel."

The new National Council Bible reads:

"Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

The Yale Bible Study

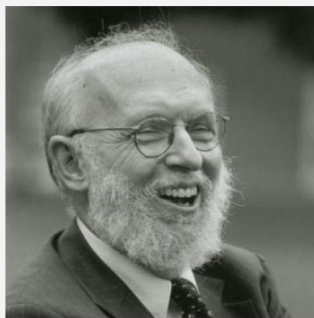
Since 2007 YDS has contributed to Biblical scholarship through the Yale Bible Study - <https://yalebiblestudy.org/>. YDS presenters have included:



Dr. Harold W. Attridge



Dr. Joel S. Baden



Rev. Dr. David L. Bartlett



Dr. John J. Collins



Dr. Yii-Jan Lin



Rev. Dr. Andrew McGowan



Dr. Jacqueline Vayntrub



Dr. Robert R. Wilson



Dr. Michal Beth Dinkler



Dr. Bruce Gordon

For more exhibits highlighting aspects of Yale Divinity School's history, see: <https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/exhibitions>.

Exhibit curated by Martha Lund Smalley,
with assistance from Ray Waddle and
Dean Emeritus Harold Attridge.