

The Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures – Part 2

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Scholars' Comments on the *New World Translation*

Dr. Robert Countess' published doctoral thesis, *The Jehovah's Witness New Testament: A Critical Analysis of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed 1982), is perhaps the most thorough and devastating critique of the New World Translation [NWT]. His overall conclusions are that the NWT:

...has been sharply unsuccessful in keeping doctrinal considerations from influencing the actual translation...the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures must be viewed as a radically biased piece of work. At some points it is actually dishonest. At others it is neither modern or scholarly. And interwoven throughout its fabric is inconsistent application of its own principles enunciated in the Foreword and Appendix.¹

Professor Edmond Gruss, author of a standard historical and theological work, *Apostles of Denial*, writes:

A sound interpretation of any passage requires a careful grammatical exegesis. Watchtower publications repeatedly present doctrines and interpretations of the Scriptures which completely misunderstand or ignore grammar. Before the Society entered into the field of translation, there were many verses which gave them trouble because of their direct contradiction of the Witnesses' doctrines. With the appearance of the *New World Translation* the difficult passages in many cases were weakened or eliminated by a translation that violated or ignored the rules of grammar.²

Dr. Anthony Hoekema, author of *The Four Major Cults* points out that:

... the Jehovah's Witnesses actually impose their own theological system upon Scripture and force it to comply with their beliefs.... their New World Translation of the Bible is by no means an objective rendering of the sacred text into modern English, but is a biased translation in which

many of their peculiar teachings of the Watchtower Society are smuggled into the text of the Bible itself.³

The late Dr. Walter Martin, author of *Jehovah of the Watchtower*, and a respected authority on cults, observes that of the anonymous seven-member translation committee at least five had no training in Greek:

These books possess a veneer of scholarship unrivaled for its daring and boldness in a field that all informed scholars know Jehovah's Witnesses are almost totally unprepared to venture into. As a matter of fact, the authors have been able to uncover partially a carefully guarded Watchtower secret: the names of five of the members of the New World Translation committee. Not one of these five people has any training in Greek...[or Hebrew].⁴

Dr. Bruce Metzger, professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary and author of *The Text of the New Testament* states: "...the Jehovah's Witnesses have incorporated in their translation of the New Testament several quite erroneous renderings of the Greek."⁵

Dr. Julius Mantey was one of the leading Greek scholars in the world and co-author of *The Dana-Mantey Greek Grammar* and *A Hellenistic Greek Reader*. He declares:

I have never read any New Testament so badly translated as *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*. In fact, it is not their translation at all. Rather, it is a distortion of the New Testament. The translators used what J. B. Rotherham had translated in 1893, in modern speech, and changed the readings in scores of passages to state what Jehovah's Witnesses believe and teach. That is *distortion*, not translation.⁶

In light of the above testimony, we must conclude that the scholarly Christian community has rendered its verdict on the NWT: such a translation must not be trusted to accurately convey God's Word because of its unrelenting biases in translation. Nor can Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to an alleged "trinitarian bias" on the part of these scholars for the issue is not personal theology but accuracy in translation. Even non-Christian scholars of New Testament Greek would agree that the NWT is not an accurate one, for rules of languages, grammar, and translation are true regardless of personal theological belief. We will now proceed to document several examples of mistranslation in the NWT, as confirmation of the above testimony and our thesis in general.

Examples of Mistranslation

The Watchtower Society tells us that "Jehovah is against such clergy prophets whom he did not send forth from his intimate group and who 'steal' words from his Bible in order to make a wrong application of them...he will rid himself of this 'burden' by abandoning Christendom to calamity.... To such self-opinionated religionists, the Jeremiah class [Jehovah's Witnesses] say: 'You have changed

the words of the living God...”⁷ The Witnesses also declare, “God does not deal with persons who ignore his Word and go according to their own independent ideas.”⁸

But who is it that really “steals” or “ignores” God’s words in order to bolster their own independent ideas?

In the following section we have utilized the Watchtower Society’s *New World Translation* and *Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (1969). It gives the Greek text, a word for word English translation below the Greek text, and has a column containing the *New World Translation* to the right.

In the following examples we have provided the *New World Translation* and the *New American Standard* translation so the reader may make a quick comparison prior to a brief discussion. The NWT mistranslation is supplied in capital letters for emphasis.

1. Matthew 25:46 [“Punishment” is translated “cutting off” to support their theology of annihilation of the wicked (or conditional immortality)].

“And these will depart into everlasting CUTTING-OFF but the righteous ones into everlasting life.” NWT

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” NAS

The Greek *kolasin* is translated “cutting-off” in order to escape the text’s teaching of eternal punishment. How do standard Greek lexicons define *kolasin*?

- J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan in *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980, p. 352) give an illustration of the meaning of *kolasin* as “punishment and much torment.”

- H. K. Moulton in *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978, p. 235) defines it as “chastisement, punishment.”

- *New Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon* (Wilmington, DE: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1974, 1977, p. 353) defines it as “correction, punishment, penalty.”

- The *Arndt and Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967, p. 441) states “1. punishment... 2. of divine retribution... go away into eternal punishment, Matt. 25:45.”

- Gerhard Kittle (ed) in the *Theological Dictionary of New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978, Vol. 3, p. 816) defines it as “punishment.”

Over hundreds of years, words may evolve in meaning, hence *kolasin* at one time could be translated “cutting-off,” meaning the removal of that which is evil. It could also have the meaning of punishment for the purposes of correction.⁹ However, that this was *not* its intended meaning in biblical times is evident from the two quotations by Greek scholars, Mantey and Trench, given below (Greek words are transliterated by this author):

In Jehovah's Witnesses' *New World Translation and Kingdom Interlinear Translation* (Matt. 25:46), the Greek word *kolasin*, which is regularly defined as "punishment" in Greek lexicons, is translated "cutting-off," in spite of the fact that there isn't a shred of lexical evidence anywhere for such a translation. We have found this word in first-century Greek writings in 107 different contexts and in every one of them, it has the meaning of "punishment," and never "cutting-off." But since their premise is that there can be no eternal punishment, they have translated the Scripture to make it somewhat compatible with their theology.... *Kolasin* is also mistranslated "restraint" in 1 John 4:18.¹⁰

[[quote]] The *kolasis aionios* of Matt. xxv.46, as it is plain, is not merely corrective, and therefore temporary, discipline;...for in proof that *kolasis* with *kolazesthai* had acquired in Hellenistic Greek this severer sense, and was used simply as "punishment" or "torment," with no necessary underthought of the bettering through it of him who endured it, we have only to refer to such passages as the following: Josephus, Antt.xv. 2.2; Phil, De Agric. 9; Mart. Polycarp. 2; 2 Macc iv 38; Wisd. xix.4; and indeed the words of St. Peter himself (2 Ep. II.9).¹¹

("Mistranslations" will be continued in Part 2)

Notes

¹ Robert Countess, *The Jehovah's Witness New Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1983), pp. 91, 93.

² Edmond Gruss, *Apostles of Denial* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), pp. 236-37.

³ Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 238-39.

⁴ Walter Martin, *Jehovah of the Watchtower* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1974), pp. 129, 175-78, cf., Gruss, p. 198.

⁵ Bruce Metzger, "The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ," rpt. of April 1953, *Theology Today* (Princeton, NJ: Theological Book Agency, 1953), p. 74.

⁶ Julius Mantey, *Depth Exploration in the New Testament* (NY: Vantage Press, 1980), pp. 136-37.

⁷ "The Royal Shepherd of Bible Prophecy," *The Watchtower*, Vol. 100, no. 17, Sept. 1, 1979 (Brooklyn, NY: WBTS), p. 30.

⁸ *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1972, p. 189.

⁹ Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), Vol. 3, "Punishment"; R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ Mantey, *Depth Exploration*, p. 142.

¹¹ Trench, pp. 25-26.