

# Report

## Deputies Bible translation



### **Mandate received from Synod**

The deputies received the following mandate from Synod 2017:

- 1.1 To monitor and be involved with new developments, regarding the new translation of the Bible into Afrikaans (Bybel Direkte Vertaling – BDV).
- 1.2 To take part in the proceedings of the KA (Kerklike Advieskomitee), and if necessary with reference to our confession regarding the written Word of God and the distinction between canonical and apocryphal books.
- 1.3 To inform the churches of progress and developments with the Afrikaans translation and to request feedback.
- 1.4 To appoint readers to work with deputies.

- 1.5 To keep the appointed readers up to date with the progress of the Afrikaans translation, and involve them as needed.
- 1.6 To propose an English Bible translation for use in the FRCSA.
- 1.7 To approve a budget of R6000.
- 1.8 To submit an interim report for discussion during an Indaba to be held more or less halfway between Synod 2017 and Synod 2020.
- 1.9 To report to the next synod and formulate recommendations according to the Rules of Synod as adopted by Synod 2017.

Synod appointed the following deputies: Rev. C van Wyk, br. Henk Schuring and Rev. J van der Linden (convenor). Rev. C van Wyk asked to be excused from his task as deputy.

## **Evaluating the *Bybel Direkte Vertaling***

*The issues surrounding Bible translation and the underlying text of the Bible (textual criticism) can be very technical. We have tried to stay away from technical discussions and written this report also with an eye on our church members, as they will DV also be part of the evaluation of the new Bybel Direkte Vertaling 2020 (BDV).*

When evaluating a Bible translation, there are different aspects to keep in mind. There is the underlying Hebrew and Greek text used for the translation, the translation theory, the evaluation of the translation itself and the evaluation of the introductory material written on each Bible book etc.

As the final version of the *Bybel Direkte Vertaling 2020* (BDV 2020) only became available late in 2020, there was consequently not enough time to evaluate the translation itself, moreover this is not something that should be done hastily. There are multiple parties involved in the process of evaluation: deputies Bible translation, ministers in their sermon preparation, and church members in their reading of God's Word. Communication and evaluation between these parties takes time. An important decision such as which official Bible translation we use from the pulpit should not be rushed.

### **A decision on the underlying Greek Text of the BDV 2020**

Very recently an aspect of the evaluation of the BDV 2020 did come up in the discussion between deputies. It concerns the underlying Greek text of the BDV 2020 (in other words, the Greek text on which the translation of the BDV 2020 was based). Deputies differed substantially on the evaluation of this aspect of BDV 2020, and therefor we saw no other way than to submit two reports to synod. This is not ideal, and we do regret this, but we have come to two totally different conclusions. We therefor state our case, and we leave it to synod to decide. This is an aspect of the translation that we do feel can be evaluated now by synod (and later on in the report we will also try to explain why we feel it is important that synod makes a decision on this).

The BDV 2020 is based on a certain Greek text, the so-called Critical Text (more on this later). The main question which requires synods decision is: *Can a translation based on the Critical Text be a faithful Bible translation for official use in the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa?*

This question is fundamental before one can proceed with evaluation of all the other aspects of the BDV. If the answer of synod is “yes”, then we can continue evaluating all the other aspects of the BDV 2020. If the answer is “no”, then we do not see a great need for continuing the evaluation of the BDV 2020, as it will not be a translation that we recommend to our church members.

Before providing a framework for answering the above question, we would like to give a short introduction on three different Greek Texts used in Bible translations.

## Greek texts used in Bible Translations

*What follows is a very short and simplistic explanation of the issues involved in choosing the textual basis for a Bible translation, but we hope it gives some insight of the challenges involved.*

We do not have the original copy of the New Testament anymore. The various parts of the original New Testament text were copied by hand multiple times, and then later copies were made of the copies. Although there were many checks and balances in the process of copying the text of the New Testament (the church took this task very seriously!), some errors occurred in the process. A word may have been changed mistakenly, a sentence copied incompletely, or an explanatory note was inadvertently added to the text. The greater one’s insight into this process of copying, the more one can see how certain mistakes could have crept in – both in adding to and removing from the original text.

Today the church has thousands of manuscripts, found in many parts of the world, that are largely exactly the same. This in itself is a miracle and the work of our Lord! God has preserved his Word for us, and the differences between manuscripts have no bearing on our faith, and most of these differences have no bearing on our understanding of a passage.

When translating the Bible, however, one has to decide which version of the manuscripts to follow. Where manuscripts differ on a verse, does one select the oldest manuscript or the manuscripts which have the most in common? Do you follow the reading from one specific (important?) area, or the reading as found in most areas? Do you follow the reading as found in more complete codices of the New Testament, or as it is found in most of the smaller manuscripts?

Today there are basically three schools of thought, which become visible in three different New Testament texts typically proposed and used for Bible translation. These three New Testament texts are: the Textus Receptus, the Majority Text and the Critical Text.

### *The Textus Receptus*

This Greek text started with the printing of the first Greek New Testament (1516), compiled by Desiderius Erasmus. This New Testament text was changed through the years, as access to other manuscripts became possible. It was later basically standardized, and used as basis for most Bible translations from 1600’s to early 1900’s.

Erasmus had access to a limited number of manuscripts (especially compared to today), and almost all scholars today are critical of the Textus Receptus. For example, Erasmus added words to his Greek text without real evidence from Greek manuscripts, and changed the Greek text in places so that it coincided better with the Vulgate (Latin translation of the Bible, official Bible translation of the Roman Catholic Church).

The few who still consider this text as the most faithful Greek text even feel that there are a few (often not a small number) corrections to be made.

Our *Ou Afrikaanse Vertaling 1933/53* is based on this Greek text<sup>1</sup>.

### The Majority Text

This Greek New Testament text is based on the largest number of surviving manuscripts. These are generally not the earliest manuscripts, but were generally found in the same area. Therefore, this text basically represents the “majority” of manuscripts that we have, and is not the oldest nor from the widest range of places.

The Majority Text is close to the Textus Receptus (although there are more differences than often realised)<sup>2</sup>, but also a good corrective to some of the questionable changes and additions that Erasmus made in the Textus Receptus.

The Majority Text is the New Testament text used by the Eastern Orthodox church. No modern English Bible translations are based on this New Testament text (as far as we could research).

### The Critical Text

Although this text will research all manuscripts, it will often give priority to the readings found in the earliest manuscripts. The text-type of the manuscripts will also play less of a role than with the Majority Text. In this text scholars give high priority to try and understand how the different readings in the text could have occurred, and which manuscripts are most likely to have the original and correct reading. This is why it is also called the “Critical Text”.

As more and more research is done on the thousands of manuscripts, the Critical Text makes certain changes, and as a result there are new editions of this Greek New Testament text being published every few years (The so-called *Nestle-Aland* and *United Bible Society* editions).

Almost all the modern English (and other languages) Bible translations are based on this text or a previous version of this text.

The BDV 2020 is also based on this Greek text.

### Preserved but also study

Again, it is important in our discussion of the correct Greek text that we realize that we are talking about a limited number of variant readings, of which many do not really influence our understanding of the text or have no influence on our faith. Looking at it from the other side: The church today has thousands of manuscripts, all testifying to the same truth and faith! There are minimal differences, far fewer than expected considering the copying process of those days. Still, as we are talking about the Word of God, it is of course important that we study this field and understand the choices we make. As the report of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia mentioned: “*God has wonderfully and sovereignly preserved thousands of manuscripts of the New Testament for the sake of his church.*”

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<sup>1</sup> GJC Jordaan asserts that during the early years of the *Ou Afrikaanse Vertaling of 1933* the translators were conscious of better manuscripts than those used for the *Textus Receptus* to base their Bible translation on. The translators however made a decision to stay close to the *Statenvertaling* in their translation into Afrikaans in order that the newness of an Afrikaans translation will be more acceptable to the people. In order to stay close to the *Statenvertaling* in their translation, the translators also had to choose for the *Textus Receptus* (as the *Statenvertaling* is based on the *Textus Receptus*). See GJC Jordaan, *Die bronne waaruit die Nuwe Testament van die Afrikaanse Bybel vertaal is*, n.d.

<sup>2</sup> See Daniel Wallace, “Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text”, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July–September (1989).

*At the same time God demands that man studies those manuscripts carefully so that the exact words of God may be determined”<sup>3</sup>.*

It is important that we realize that our *Ou Afrikaanse Vertaling 1933/53* is not based on the most faithful Greek text edition available today. There is a high level of clarity and agreement on this issue in the Reformed world (On this, both deputies agree). So, in trying to find a modern faithful Afrikaans translation, it is not enough to compare the BDV 2020 to the OAV 1933/53, only to see if it is a modernization of what we already have.

The issue of a Bible translation based on the Critical Text is a new issue for us as churches. Considering that we did not accept the *Nuwe Afrikaanse Bybelvertaling 1983*, our churches will not be used to the concept of a Bible translation based on a different Greek text.

We want to again emphasize that it is important that synods lead the churches by acknowledging clear weaknesses in our current translation (OAV 1933/53), make decisions on the question of whether we can accept a translation based on the Critical Text (BDV 2020) and that we find good ways to communicate these decisions to the churches.

### Should we as churches commit exclusively to one Greek text?

*We propose that synod does not make a choice between one of the Greek texts (the Majority Text or the Critical Text), and does not choose one of the texts as the only, or even as the more faithful Greek text.*

The reasons for our proposal are the following:

- a. The issue is very complicated

The study of textual criticism (“which variant reading is the correct reading”) is very complicated, as is determining which Greek text is the most faithful. There are many aspects to take into consideration, and we don’t always (yet?) have a lot of information on the various manuscripts and codices. When researching which Greek text (the Majority Text or the Critical Text) is the most faithful Greek text, there are some solid arguments on both sides of the issue.

There is a much smaller group of orthodox scholars who hold to the Majority Text. The orthodox scholars holding to the Critical Text are more numerous. Our intent is not to play a numbers game (we don’t do that in faith!) but to provide perspective: we should not, because many of us might be proponents of the Majority Text, make a hasty decision regarding the Critical Text.

It is definitely not a case of orthodox scholars holding on to one view, and liberals holding on to another view. To quote from the report of our sister churches in Australia: *“We should not think that the one side defends the faith and integrity of the Scriptures, while the other side is out to discredit the same. Although this caricature is sometimes made, it is erroneous. While there are textual critics (as there are translators) who do not adhere to the infallibility of the Bible, one cannot divide the camps into conservatives and liberals”<sup>4</sup>.* As an example, the *Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary* works with the assumption that the Critical Text is the most reliable New Testament text.

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<sup>3</sup> Report on Bible Translation 1989, Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The report can be found here: <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/report-bible-translation>

<sup>4</sup> Report on Bible Translation 1989, Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The report can be found here: <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/report-bible-translation>

Most ministers in our churches will have a certain conviction on this issue, and so does this author. Taking a decision as synod is not about personal conviction, but about what can be proven, and to what we can bind one another as churches. I believe that this issue is far from clear enough to bind one another on it. This is the sad reality regarding an important issue but I think all who have studied this subject will understand this as our current reality. Therefore, we as synod should not make a decision for either one or other Greek text, but accept both Greek texts, and then from the pulpit, guide the churches on specific textual issues.

b. (Almost) No other church federation has bound themselves to a specific Greek Text

Due to the complicated nature of this issue (see above) there are (as far as our research extends) no church federations that have bound themselves to either the Majority Text or the Critical Text. There are a few smaller church federations who have bound themselves to the King James Version, and so indirectly perhaps to the Textus Receptus. But in reality this is not binding to a specific Greek Text, as these churches do not accept other translations based on that same Greek text.

Other church federations have not followed the path of binding one another to a Greek text, and we believe that we should take this into account and be very careful. Making decisions as a synod on the trustworthiness of Bible translations is quite different to binding one another to a specific Greek Text.

c. Our sister churches have all accepted Bible translations based on the Critical Text

To help us form a framework for making a decision on this point, we believe that it is helpful to look at what our sister churches have decided regarding Bible translation, and what this means for their view on the underlying Greek text.

*Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt (GKV)* – The GKV before the 1950's used the Statenvertaling. This Bible translation was also based on the Textus Receptus. In 1951 a new Bible translation became available, and after a time of evaluation, was accepted by our sister churches. This 1951 bible translation was based on the Critical Text (they also accepted the new Bible Translation of 2004, based on the Critical Text). It is interesting to note that the specific mandate of deputies Bible translation was to see if the new translation, 1951, does justice to Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. Many well-known pastors of the first generation were part of this deputyship (Joh Francke, J Faber, Prof. JP Lettinga, Prof. HJ Schilder, I de Wolff, Prof. HJ Jager, JR Wiskerke etc) and the deputyship reported that this was indeed so.

So, the church of our reformed roots, the GKV of the 1950's could accept a Bible translation based on the Critical text "as the inspired Word of God", while they already had a Bible translation based on the Textus Receptus (which of course is closer to the Majority Text), the Statenvertaling. People like Prof K. Schilder and Prof B. Holwerda were also thankful for the new translation.

Even before the appearance of the new 1951 Bible translation the well-known GKV New Testament scholar, Prof. Seakle Greijdanus, in his commentaries, made certain textual choices against the Majority Text and for the Critical text. Our reformed fathers understood the difficulty of this issue, and also did not commit exclusively to one specific Greek text.

*Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)* – In the early years of the CanRC they had two officially accepted Bible translations, the KJV and the RSV. These two translations are based on two different Greek Texts: The KJV on the Textus Receptus, and the RSV on the Critical Text. From the start our Canadian brothers and sisters did not bind one another on this, and the RSV actually turned out to be the one most used in the first few decades of the church federation. At the moment they have

four officially accepted Bible translations, the ESV, the NIV (1984), NASB, and the NKJV. The first three are based on the Critical Text, and the last one on the Textus Receptus. This last translation is a fairly modern translation of a Greek Text similar to the Majority Text, and our brothers did not choose exclusively for that translation. In practise, the ESV is most used by the churches (and is based on the Critical Text).

*Free Reformed Churches of Australia* – These sister churches have officially adopted the ESV, the NIV and the NKJV as their Bible translations. Again, the first two are based on the Critical Text, the last one on the Textus Receptus. It looks like they are giving priority to the ESV (this translation is based on the Critical Text), as this is the translation that they will use in the revision of their Book of Praise (hymnal).

- d. Proponents of the Majority Text have also worked on Bible translations based on the Critical Text

Somebody that has had some influence in our churches with regards to our view on the Greek Text is Prof. Jakob van Bruggen. He is a strong proponent of the Majority Text, and has also written on this (*The Ancient Text of the New Testament*<sup>5</sup>). He is an excellent scholar and we as churches are very thankful for him, a gift to the church of the Lord, also in South Africa.

It is however necessary to understand that him being a strong proponent of the Majority Text did not prevent him from being part of a new translation based on the Critical Text (the NBV 2004), and also did not stop him from mentioning that he feels a translation based on the Critical Text is a weakness but still acceptable, also for use in the churches<sup>6</sup>.

- e. As churches we have indirectly already accepted this reality

Although this is not the strongest argument for the decision that we have to make, it would be good to look at our own history regarding the Critical Text and Bible translation.

Looking back at previous reports on Bible translation, we see comments on the textual basis for a Bible translation in the reports of 1987. It is clear that the deputies are proponents of the Majority Text in their short discussion of the Greek text used for the *Nuwe Afrikaanse Bybel 1983*. Their conclusion (on the textual issue) is more cautious than to only endorse the Majority Text:

“Het die GNT (Greek New Testament, based on the Critical Text) nie te maklik die Bisantynse tekstradisie opsy geskuif nie? Is dit verantwoord om die teksuitgawe vir ‘n vertaling te volg? Veral waar dit sulke ingrypende gevolge het (sien 4.1), is ‘n meer versigtige opstelling dalk verantwoord.

Die GNT kan as uitgangspunt geneem word. Maar as ‘n sekere lesing deur die meerderheid van die handskrifte gesteun word en as die lesing ook geografies wyd verspreid is, moet van die GNT-tekst afgewyk kan word.”<sup>7</sup>

In a certain sense their conclusion is a proposal of a new path in textual criticism, one to which neither the Majority Text or the Critical Text fully adhere. Later the deputies would however come to the conclusion that some of the differences between the two translations (OAV 1933/53 and NAB 1983) were not acceptable to them (especially where the Critical Text is shorter than the Majority

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<sup>5</sup> This booklet can be found here: <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/ancient-text-new-testament>

<sup>6</sup> See Jakob van Bruggen, “De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling: Kerkbijbel in wording?”, in *Naar een nieuwe kerkbijbel* (ed. H. Room & W. Rose: Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2001), 30.

<sup>7</sup> Handeling van die sinode van die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke 1987 en 1988: 142.

Text)<sup>8</sup>. Synod itself does not make a decision on these things, although they do acknowledge the report with thankfulness.

We appreciate that the Bible translation deputies of 1987 discussed the issue of the underlying Greek Text. They give a short overview of the issue, and again, we are thankful that they saw the importance of the underlying Greek Text in evaluating a Bible Translation. We also want to humbly and cautiously mention, however, that this overview was not a thorough investigation into the issue<sup>9</sup> and as such does not provide a basis for any lasting decision. We also appreciate that these deputies were willing to make some compromises in their choice of the Greek text, but in the end they were proposing a path of textual criticism (“finding the correct reading/variant for a verse”) that neither the Majority Text nor the Critical Text fully adhere to. We also need to remember that when working on a bible translation, the translators do not do textual criticism (“finding the correct reading/variant for a verse”) for all the verses that have variants. They mostly decide on an edition of a specific Greek text and translate that Greek text<sup>10</sup>.

We do believe that it is important that we keep this in mind when making a decision on which Greek text(s) are acceptable to us as FRCSA for a Bible translation. Bible translators need to choose which Greek text edition they will use for their translation. They also make choices according to what they truly believe is the Word of God. Typically this is going to be a choice between one of three Greek text editions (Textus Receptus, Majority Text or Critical Text). It will not be possible for us (or others) to, once they have made a decision of the Greek text edition they will follow, change their minds on many variant readings, so that it is more in line with the Majority Text. Although the BDV 2020 has added some of the longer text versions from the Majority Text as footnotes, the reality is that Bible translations will be based on either one of the Greek texts, and not a mixture. We need to take this into account.

We hope we do not make the wrong deduction when we state that in a certain sense we as churches have already made certain decisions with regards to the Critical Text as a basis for an acceptable Bible translation for our churches. We deduce this from the path that we have already walked with regards to the BDV 2020.

This issue of the underlying Greek text of the BDV (the Critical Text) is not new to us. Deputies Bible Translation 2008 reported that the translation would be based on the newest edition of Nestle-Aland (an edition of the Critical Text). In this report there was hope that the BDV 2020 would still also look positively at some of the variant readings of the Majority Text. (Mention is also made that BDV 2020 hopes to give alternate translations or sometimes even alternate textual readings, which has in fact been done and can be seen in the footnotes of BDV 2020). During a meeting of deputies Bible Translation later in 2008, the issue of the Majority Text was discussed (with church readers) and still later, discussed again at an official meeting of the BDV. The translators of the BDV were not positive about the Majority Text. In 2014 this is also mentioned in the report of Deputies Bible Translation, and this was also mentioned during the (interim) Indaba meetings of our churches. In all this time (from 2008 till now) we as churches continued to appoint our delegates to the *Kerklike Advieskomitee* (of the BDV 2020) and asked that deputies Bible Translation monitor and be involved

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<sup>8</sup> Handeling van die sinode van die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke 1987 en 1988: 148.

<sup>9</sup> We acknowledge that it was most probably also not intended as a thorough discussion of the issue. If one takes away their introduction and conclusion, their report on this aspect of the underlying Greek text is one page.

<sup>10</sup> This was also true of the BDV 2020. See G. J. C. Jordaan, “Die bronteks vir die 2020-vertaling van die Nuwe Testament”, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, Jaargang 60 (2020) No. 4-1: 945-958.



in this project, by also making translation suggestions. From this we deduce that we as churches are indeed open to an official Bible translation based on the Critical Text. This was however done “in silence”, and it would be good to clearly state this.

In conclusion, we have tried to show that the churches should not exclusively commit to one Greek text, and that it would not be edifying or possible to bind one another in this way. Synod should state that they can also accept a Bible translation based on the Critical Text. If synod agrees with this, it opens the door to begin evaluation of the BDV 2020.

### It is important that synod makes a decision on acceptable Greek texts as basis for translations

We hope synod understands that this is not only an issue to acknowledge, but that a decision needs to be made. We feel this is important because:

1. There is a division in deputies on this issue
2. Our churches have already indicated their inclination / belief in the Majority Text in the past
3. Failure to do so will leave new deputies without a foundation from which to do their work

1. There is a division in deputies on this issue

We don't need to say much on this topic, as it is evident from the two reports synod received on this matter.

2. Our churches have already indicated their inclination / belief in the Majority Text in the past

The *Nuwe Afrikaanse Bybel 1983* was not accepted in our churches. Deputies Bible Translation 1987 have identified the Greek text as problematic (the NAB 1983 used the Critical Text). They identified other issues as well, so we are not exactly sure how heavily this matter weighed in their decision, but from their conclusion (under “Voorlopige konklusie”) it looks like no small matter. So, it certainly looks like our churches have shown a certain inclination towards or belief in the Majority Text in the past.

I don't believe we have to revise or judge a previous decision, as synod itself did not make a formal decision on it. They did however instruct new deputies to continue their work in the same vein. We believe that this situation does require our churches to be clear on where we stand regarding acceptable Greek texts for Bible translation.

3. Failure to do so will leave new deputies without a foundation from which to do their work

If synod decides that the underlying Greek Text of the BDV 2020 is acceptable, then new deputies will have to guide the churches in the evaluation of the translation. We all understand that the churches will mostly compare the BDV 2020 to the “known”, the OAV 1933/53. This can never be an accurate and honest comparison unless you keep in mind that the BDV 2020 is based on a different Greek text. You cannot evaluate a textual difference as a translation difference. In practise this will remain a difficult situation, but at least synod would give the new deputies a clear foundation from which they can lead the churches in this evaluation.

*An example for clarification:*

The churches read the BDV 2020 and they have questions/criticism on BDV's version of a specific verse as compared to the OAV 1933/53. The difference is a textual difference (a difference because there is a different underlying Greek text to the BDV), and not a translation difference.

*If synod has made a decision that the underlying Greek Text of the BDV 2020 can be accepted*, then deputies can mention to the churches that we are unfortunately not sure what the original text was in this instance, and that we may leave it to the ministers to guide us in their preaching. Deputies can show that this is a sad but inevitable reality and that Bible translations need to make decisions in these things, but that this in essence cannot play a role in our evaluation of the BDV 2020.

*If synod decides not to make a decision on the underlying Greek text of the BDV*, the underlying Greek text of the OAV 1933/53 will automatically be seen as "the Bible", and all textual differences will then also automatically be seen in the light of "adding and removing from the Word of God". We know that deputies are not able to "prove" that a textual variant is correct or that a specific textual tradition is correct. They also do not have an authoritative decision to which they can point in the discussion. The discussion and evaluation will revolve around textual differences and will not even reach the stage of talking about the translation itself. The textual differences will automatically be seen as the big issues ("removing from the Word of God"). We believe that for deputies to do their task, they need an answer from synod regarding the textual basis of the BDV. Then deputies can educate the people on the textual basis of the Bible in an orderly and peaceful manner (without promoting their own opinions), and focus on their task of evaluating the translation itself.

(If synod cannot accept the underlying text of the BDV, then it will not be necessary or a good use of manpower to appoint deputies to evaluate the translation of the BDV).

The possibility remains for someone in future to prove that either one of the textual traditions is correct (Majority text or Critical Text). How wonderful it would be should this happen! Synod can then of course revise its decision. But as long as this has not occurred, especially as the issue remains difficult and complicated, we ask that synod acknowledges this. Further, that it decides not to choose between the two Greek textual traditions, but to (in principle) accept Bible translations on both textual traditions.

We again emphasise that this decision on the underlying text of the BDV will not mean that the BDV is accepted in our churches. For that we still need to evaluate the translation of the BDV. But it will open the door to continue the process of evaluating the BDV.

# Report on other aspects of our mandate

In our interim report for the last Indaba we mentioned that lately we have had little to do. The time for our reaction and comments on the proposed translation was over. The BDV 2020 was in stage 5, which means the last stage, where the translation was receiving its final check and standardised.

This translation has been published in its final form, at the end of 2020. As we have mentioned before, there are two versions of the BDV: the normal one, and the so-called “capitalized” one. This last edition is where the references to Jesus Christ in the Old Testament are indicated by a capital letter. Through the years we were also part of the discussion of this edition of the BDV 2020.

The BDV 2020 has short introductions to the Bible books before the official Bible text starts. In the past we have asked that this should not be included in the “capitalized” edition of the BDV, as we have seen that there are some liberal viewpoints in these introductions. This is something that must still be fully evaluated, but we have seen that the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* have recently stated that they want to ask the Bible Society to print Bibles without these introductions. In the past we have also had discussions with the *Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerke* about this issue. We believe that if we as three church federations can agree and unite on this point, the stronger the appeal to the Bible Society.

As we have a special relationship with some of the *Gereformeerde Kerke* in Bellville and Pretoria, it could be useful to include them in our evaluation of the BDV 2020.

It has been difficult to inform the churches about the BDV 2020. An edition of the BDV was printed in 2014, but it was not the final version of the BDV as some important stages of the translation were incomplete (we have already seen some differences between this version and the 2020 final version). The final version of BDV 2020 only became available at the end of 2020. Deputies have differences of opinion regarding BDV 2020. We need clarity on this issue of the underlying Greek Text in order to communicate well with the churches.

## A proposal for an English translation

Synod also asked us to propose an English Bible translation for use in the FRCSA. Synod will understand that this task is also dependent on what they decide on acceptable Greek Texts for a Bible translation.

We have looked at some of the reports of our sister churches in Canada and Australia, and think it would be wise to learn from them, as they have dealt with this issue, and have worked with various Bible translations.

*If synod accepts the Critical Text as a textual basis for a Bible translation in the FRCSA, then we would propose the ESV and the NIV as Bible translations for our churches. The ESV has a certain preference in our sister churches, but we wish to propose the NIV as well. This translation is accepted in our sister churches, and has a higher readability score. In other words, it uses less difficult English words, and would therefore be more suitable in a mission context.*

*If synod does not want to accept a Bible translation based on the Critical Text, then we would propose the *New King James Version*. This translation is based on the Textus Receptus and therefore closer to the Majority Text. (As we have mentioned, there are (as far as we could see) no standard*

English translations based on the Majority Text). The *New King James Version* is basically the only good option to choose from in this regard.

### Recommendations for next Synod

As deputies differ on the evaluation of the underlying text of the BDV 2020, this will reflect in the recommendations. We therefore have two possible “sets of recommendations”:

If synod *cannot* accept the underlying Greek text of the BDV 2020:

- Then synod should decide whether to continue with the evaluation of the BDV 2020. This decision would mean that this Bible translation is not acceptable to us. We should then consider whether it is a good use of our very limited human resources to continue with the evaluation of other aspects of this translation.
- Then synod should give new deputies the mandate of educating the churches on this. Deputies could also play a role in the discussions with our neighbouring *Gereformeerde Kerke* on the BDV 2020.

If synod *can* accept the underlying Greek text of the BDV 2020:

- Then synod should give deputies the mandate to evaluate the other aspects of the BDV 2020. Deputies should also involve the Afrikaans speaking ministers in our church federation, especially in their sermon preparation. The church members should also be involved.
- Then synod should give deputies the mandate to educate the churches on the BDV 2020, with a focus on the underlying Greek Text and the two versions of the BDV 2020 (the “normal” and “capitalized” one). Deputies could also play a role in the discussions with our neighbouring *Gereformeerde Kerke* on the BDV 2020.
- Then synod should give deputies the mandate to correspond with the deputies of the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* and the *Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerke* to work together on a BDV edition without the introductory material that was added to each Bible book.
- Then synod should give deputies the mandate to thank the Bible Society for this wonderful contribution to Afrikaans Bible translation. (Even if we decide not to adopt the BDV 2020 as our official translation, it will still be an important reference work. Deputies have repeatedly reported that they see much to be thankful for in the BDV 2020.)

Synod should also give new deputies the mandate to determine the state and the reader-value of the Sotho Bible translation. Synod itself must decide if this translation should be evaluated fully, but at the very least we do need to be informed about the Bible translation being used in our mission context.

May our Lord guide you through his reliable and eternal Word and Spirit.

Rev J van der Linden