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The Concordant Principle of Translation
and the New German Book of Mormon

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In the announcement of the new translation of the Book of Mormon in the Stern (September 1980), we find the following statement of the translation department:

The translator has tried very hard to render theological and doctrinal expressions consistently (konsequent), for example, not using Buße tun, bereuen and bekehren more or less arbitrarily when English in each instance has the word repent. In section 43 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the word appoint appears five times in six verses (2-7). The translation currently in use--certainly in adherence to the literary requirements of our century--has five different and therefore confusing words (berufen, verordnen, betrauen, bestimmen and auserkiesen), even though the first translation of 1876 has the word berufen in all five instances.

I construe this to be a declaration of adherence to what has been called elsewhere the "concordant" principle of translation. I would first like to explore this notion briefly and then exemplify it with examples from the 1980 translation of the Book of Mormon into German. The advent of concordances of the Bible (at first by hand and nowadays by computer) has permitted the location of all the occurrences of a given word in the biblical text and thus the careful study of its meaning in various contexts. The advantages of such concordances are of course considerably enhanced if they are exhaustive, reliable and readable. Translators of the Bible also find them a very useful tool for insuring the consistency of a translation.

The concordant method of Bible translation was pioneered over a period of fifty years by A. E. Knoch and resulted in the publication of the Concordant Literal New Testament (1944). He and his adherents also produced a German version entitled Konkordantes Neues Testament (n.d.), which includes a very useful Stichwort-Konkordanz arranged according to the "standard, exclusive" rendering in German with its Greek counterpart and it includes a notation at the end of the entry showing how often Luther used a given word to translate the Greek word. For example: Greek κώμη is translated by Luther 16 times as Markt and 11 times as Flecken, but it is concordantly translated by the word Dorf in the German Concordant New Testament. May we note in passing that the King James translation has village 17 times and town 11 times. It is evident from the material cited that neither Luther nor the translators of the King James version felt constrained to follow the concordant principle of translation.

Knoch and his group expanded the notion of concord between the source

language and the target language to include elements of Greek grammar and vocabulary derivation. It is clear that such a method would produce a consistent, uniform, literal translation, but at the same time, formulations in the target language might be difficult to understand. Wilhelm Michaelis in his Übersetzungen, Konkordanzen und konkordante Übersetzung des Neuen Testaments (Basel 1948) discusses the concordant rendering of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek by Aquila. Michaelis admits that it might be a useful tool for someone who was able to compare it with the Hebrew original but that in many instances it was incomprehensible to the Greek reader (p. 199). Literal translations have also been made, for example, Piscator (1679) and Junckherrott (1732). Michaelis feels that no subsequent translation has quite had the same degree of literalness as Aquila's. We must conclude, however, that a concordant translation jeopardizes intelligibility. Michaelis also puts his finger on the faulty underlying assumption of the concordant method, namely, that every word in the source language can and must have only one counterpart in the target language. Unsophisticated computer translation programs are, of course, based on this principle. Even the most linguistically naive must admit that every language has many words that have multiple meanings. In the extreme case, of course, this is true for every word in every language. In an ideal concordant translation, every meaning of every word in the source language would correspond consistently to a separate, distinct word in the target language, a circumstance which rarely if ever exists, even among speakers of the same language. Stated a little differently: Words for "the same thing" in two languages are not "equal to each other" unless basic meanings and connotations both correspond --and they hardly ever do.

Let us now turn to an example from the German translation of the Book of Mormon in order to see how well the meanings of English and German match up. A footnote in the publication announcement presents a justification for using Umkehr in place of the more traditional Buße as a translation for the English repentance.

In contradistinction to Luther's time, the word Buße nowadays means primarily 'an imposed burden or penalty, a type of punishment.' This meaning is not at all present in English repentance which rather signifies 'a turning away from (Abkehr) one's present evil way of life and a return (Rückkehr) to a better one.' In the case of the word Umkehr, we do not think of the penance imposed by a priest or minister for sins committed nor of a financial penalty or a catalog of fines for punishable offences, but we do think of the necessary change of attitude which is consonant with the second principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

An examination of the meanings of repentance in English dictionaries and our own intuition tell us that one part of the explanation is incorrect. English repentance does imply a turning away from sin out of penitence for past wrongdoings or an abandoning of sinful purposes. It does not imply a return to a better way of life but rather the amending of one's life.

For the meaning of the German words Buße and Umkehr, let us turn to some modern German lexical works. Of seven recent German dictionaries, only one (Mackensen, Deutsches Wörterbuch, 1977) lists the penance-or fine-definition first: Strafe 'punishment, penalty, fine,' Schadenersatz 'compensation.' Pekrun (Das deutsche Wort, 1966) lists the following sequence of definitions: Besserung 'amendment, reformation,' Strafe 'punishment,' Vergeltung 'repayment,' sittliche Bekehrung 'moral conversion.' The other five list the religious meaning first - although not always entirely separate from the meaning of penance - and the meaning of punishment or penalty is listed last, sometimes with the notation that this meaning occurs in Swiss legal German. The word Umkehr (from umkehren) does not have the moral religious meaning listed at all in three of the six dictionaries (Pekrun, Schüler-Duden 1970, Der Sprach-Brockhaus 1972). For instance, Der Sprach-Brockhaus lists: die Umkehr 'Wendung zurück' (a turning back), 'Beginn des Rückwegs' (the beginning of the way back). Even though recent dictionaries are sometimes not as up-to-date and accurate as one would like, the examination of these dictionaries, at the very least, shows that the basic meaning of Buße is 'repentance' with a somewhat archaic religious connotation and not 'penalty or fine' as suggested in the footnote of the announcement. I believe that the word repentance also has an archaic, religious flavor about it and matches up favorably with the meaning of Buße. Our examination has also shown that the basic meaning of Umkehr is 'a turning back, a return' and not a 'moral conversion.'

Another piece of evidence concerning the basic meaning of these two words can be gleaned from the number of compound words formed with each portion of the meaning. I found 18 compounds of Buße associated with the meaning 'repentance' (bußfertig 'penitent', unbußfertig 'impenitent,' etc.) but only six associated with the meaning of 'penalty or fine' (Bußgeld 'executory damages,' bußfällig 'punishable (offence),' etc.). On the other hand, the word Umkehr has 20 compounds associated with 'reversal, inverting, inverse' (Umkehrfilm 'reversal film,' Umkehrfunktion 'inverse function,' etc.) and not a single one associated with the meaning 'repentance.'

Let us now turn to another source of information about the rendering of religious concepts in German. In order to understand the validity of this source, we must look briefly at the language of the English Book of Mormon. It is very much indebted to the style of the King James Bible, not only because it contains several chapters of Isaiah and Matthew as well as numerous other scriptural passages, but because its entire fabric is woven from expressions and images reminiscent of the authorized version: mine everlasting covenant, lifted up at the last day, save it be that... in the gall of bitterness, cry unto the Lord, a broken heart and a contrite spirit, in sackcloth and ashes, cut off from the presence of the Lord, a great stumbling block, the only Begotten of the Father, the land of promise, a chosen people, etc. These stylistic similarities provide us with a source of comparable expressions from biblical German that could be used in a German translation of the Book of Mormon, that is, the renderings of biblical phrases in German translations of the Bible can provide authentic traditional formulations of phrases and images for inclusion in the German Book of Mormon. We turn now to an examination of German translations of the Greek μετανοήσατε in recent translations of the New Testament in Acts 2:38. They are listed

in order of frequency with a very literal translation opposite.

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|--|---|
| 1. tut Buße | 1. do, make improvement, betterment |
| 2. bekehrt euch | 2. return yourselves |
| 3. kehrt um | 3. turn back, turn around |
| 4. ändert euch | 4. change, alter yourselves |
| 5. bereut | 5. rue, regret |
| 6. stellt euch um | 6. change yourselves around |
| 7. ändert euren Sinn | 7. change your thinking |
| 8. ihr müßt anders werden | 8. you must become different |
| 9. sinnet um | 9. think through (it) |
| 10. stellt euch innerlich um | 10. rearrange yourselves inwardly |
| 11. ihr müßt völlig neu anfangen | 11. you must begin completely anew |
| 12. ihr müßt notwendig euren
vorigen Grundsätzen und
Sitten Abschied geben | 12. you must necessarily say goodbye
to your previous principles and
morals |

In my opinion, the only translation which sounds a little strange is sinnet um, which seems quite obviously an attempt to imitate the formation of the Greek μετά 'with, after, behind' plus νοέω 'perceive, understand, consider, think, imagine.' It is used only in the German Concordant New Testament where it has a literal gloss in parantheses (nachher,-denken) in the concordance. I was unable to find the verb umsinnen in any modern dictionary, including Grimm's. It did appear in two older works; however, Adelung (1801) notes that it is used only as a regional variant of herumsinnen and Campe (1811) gives the following definition and example: umhersinnen, hin und her sinnem, um das Rechte oder etwas Befriedegendes zu ersinnen, auszusinnen: Ich habe recht lange umgesonnen, jedoch vergeblich. None of this is part of what is necessary for the meaning in Acts 2:38. It seems to have been newly coined for use in the concordant translation with a meaning something like 'think differently, or change your thinking.' The English concordant translation, by the way, has repent and not one of the more modern colloquial equivalents such as change your views, turn from sin, amend your lives, let your hearts be changed.

The two translations of the New Testament which I believe are the model for the use of Umkehr and umkehren in the German translation of the Book of Mormon show some inconsistency and uneasiness about using them in other types of constructions, for instance in Matthew 11:21 they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. The Einheitsübersetzung uses Bußetun (man hätte dort in Sack und Asche Buße getan) even though it has umkehren in Acts 2:38. Wilckens translation has sich bekehren (längst hätten sie sich in Sack und Asche bekehrt)

even though it too uses umkehren in other verses. Eight other verses in these two translations which would likely have resulted in a present perfect tense in German were also examined. Only one verse in Wilckens (Matthew 12:41) has umkehren: denn sie sind auf die Predigt des Jona hin umgekehrt (King James because they repented at the preaching of Jonah). In the other fifteen instances, they used Buße tun, sich bekehren, bereuen, abwenden, ablassen, etc. In other words, even translators who felt that umkehren should be used to render μετανοέω in the command form repent, had some misgivings about using it in the perfect with the auxiliary sein. I believe there is a grammatical explanation for this reluctance. The basic meaning of umkehren is 'to set off in the opposite direction, to turn back, to go back.' Along with other intransitive verbs of motion in German, it takes sein as its auxiliary in the present perfect tense and this auxiliary always reinforces the notion of movement. In a construction like sie sind umgekehrt, the basic meaning 'they turned back' predominates. Unless there is something else in the construction to influence the reader in the direction of the secondary meaning of 'repent,' he will assume the basic meaning 'turn back.' With this as an introduction, let us look at some examples from the new translation of the Book of Mormon.

The compound adjectives bußfertig and unbußfertig are retained in the new translation because there are no acceptable alternatives with umkehr-. The word Buße is used in one verse where the word repentance can be construed to have the additional meaning of 'penance or punishment': Mosiah 23:9 dies verursachte mir schwere Buße (English: which caused me sore repentance, older German translation: was ich sehr bereuen mußte). However, another verse with the phrase sore repentance was translated unconcordantly in Alma 27:23 weil ihnen ihre Umkehr schwer zu schaffen machte (English: because of their sore repentance, older German translation wegen ihrer aufrichtigen Buße). The verb abkehren is used to translate repent in 3 Nephi 11:23 and Ether 15:3, probably as the result of an oversight after the decision had been made to use umkehren plus von, even though other translations of the New Testament sacrificed consistency and used less confusing constructions with abkehren or sich bekehren. The problematical construction in the perfect tense with the auxiliary sein is used in 3 Nephi 7:25 (daß sie umgekehrt waren), relying on the context to reinforce the meaning 'they had repented' instead of the more likely reading 'that they turned back.' These minor deviations from a concordant translation (retention of bußfertig and unbußfertig, the substitution of abkehren, use of a problematical construction (umgekehrt waren) are really of little consequence compared to the innovation resorted to when the basic meaning of umkehren 'return, turn back' collides with the secondary meaning 'repent' as in 3 Nephi 18:32 but what they will return and repent (and come unto me). The older translation of the Book of Mormon has vielleicht werden sie umkehren, Buße tun (...und sich zu mir wenden). The new translation could not use umkehren for both (+ob sie nicht umkehren und umkehren), which would not make any sense at all, neither could it merely substitute something else for the basic meaning (+ob sie nicht zurückkommen und umkehren) which could be understood to mean 'they will come back and return.' In place of these unacceptable translations, it uses the following innovation: ob sie nicht zurückkommen und Umkehr üben (und... zu mir kommen). So far, I have not been able to locate this substitute for umkehren 'repent' in any dictionary, but I believe I can show some additional reasons for its creation besides the necessity to avoid the basic meaning of umkehren and reinforce the weaker

meaning 'repent.' In my opinion, it is based on the following: 1) similar constructions already present in German (Geduld, Barmherzigkeit üben 'exhibit, show or practice patience, mercy/Rache üben 'take revenge'), 2) combinations of a noun plus an auxiliary almost void of lexical meaning (Opfer bringen 'to sacrifice,' Hilfe leisten 'to help' as well as the rejected Buße tun 'to repent'), 3) the word for 'penance, penitential good works' (Buß-übung(en)), 4) the insight gained from translating verses such as Alma 26:22 he that repenteth and exerciseth faith. If one can exercise faith, then of course one ought to be able to exercise or show repentance. The innovation (Umkehr üben) is used at least a dozen times. In Helaman 13:33, likewise, it is used to avoid o daß ich nur umgekehrt wäre, which leans heavily toward 'if I had only turned back' instead of the intended 'o that I had repented' (o daß ich Umkehr geübt...hätte).

A second type of problem for the concordant translation of the Book of Mormon arises from the fact that expressions in the King James Bible were not translated concordantly from Greek into English. The Greek adjective αἰώνιος is translated as eternal (life) 29 times and as everlasting (life) 13 times: John 3:15 eternal life, John 3:16 everlasting life (both from the Greek ζωὴν αἰώνιον), Luther and most other German translators use ewig in both of these verses and elsewhere. The translator of the Book of Mormon is now faced with the decision of following the English and choosing a standard exclusive equivalent for everlasting and eternal or of following the traditional German biblical rendering of ewig for both. The concordant rendering of English everlasting as German immerwährend and English eternal as German ewig is the result. This decision ignores virtually all German biblical tradition. Its ramifications are far reaching. For English everlasting Father, everlasting covenant, everlasting life, everlasting joy, everlasting inheritance, everlasting gospel, everlasting hills, everlasting punishment, and everlasting destruction we now have immerwährender Vater, immerwährender Bund, immerwährendes Leben, immerwährende Freude, immerwährendes Erbe, immerwährendes Evangelium, immerwährende Hügel, immerwährende Strafe, and immerwährendes Verderben, even though the vast majority of German bible translators have ewig in each of these expressions. We were spared the impossible von immerwährend zu immerwährend as a translation of from everlasting to everlasting. Instead, the unconcordant translation von Unendlichkeit zu Unendlichkeit 'from infinity to infinity' was substituted (Moroni 7:22). Though some bible translators did occasionally translate untraditionally (Glück, das nie endet for ewige Freude and die auf unabsehbare Zeit dauernden Hügel for die ewigen Hügel), not one used the adjective immerwährend. I do not believe that we should require German readers of the Book of Mormon to abandon 500 years of biblical tradition for the sake of a concordant translation based on English, especially since references in the Book of Mormon will refer them to verses in a Bible which will have these traditional formulations: Immerwährender Vater (2 Nephi 19:6)/Vater in Ewigkeit, Ewigvater (Isaiah 9:5), meinen immerwährenden Bund (D & C 1:15)/ meinen ewigen Bund (Isaiah 24:5), immerwährende Freude (2 Nephi 8:11)/ewige Freude (Isaiah 35:10), als immerwährendes Erbteil (D & C 57:5)/das...ewige Erbe (Hab 9:15), mein immerwährendes Evangelium (D & C 27:5)/ein ewiges Evangelium (Rev 14:6).

I have tried to show the following:

- 1) that the Luther and King James versions of the Bible are not translated concordantly,
- 2) that the basic meaning of German Buße is 'repentance' and not 'penalty or fine,'
- 3) that the meanings of German Buße, Buße tun match the meanings of English repent, repentance better than German Umkehr, umkehren,
- 4) that there is not a standard exclusive equivalent for 'repent' in the German translation of the Book of Mormon,
- 5) that the concordant principle forces the creation of awkward and difficult constructions (Umkehr üben),
- 6) that the concordant principle inevitably encounters problems and cannot be adhered to strictly without impairing intelligibility,
- 7) that the recent translation of the Book of Mormon into German suffers to the extent that it ignores German biblical tradition and relies on a concordant translation from the English.