

The First Estonian Bible After World War Two

By Peeter Roosimaa

Dr. Peeter Roosimaa is lecturer of New Testament Studies at the Tartu University in Estonia and was an active participant in the work of the Estonian Bible Society as member of the editorial board.

Introduction

“Estonian Bible Society Presents New Bible in Estonian,” read the front-page *Eesti Kirik* [Estonian Church] newspaper on December 17, 1997, referring to the first edition of the Estonian Bible after World War Two. The edition was based on a thorough revision of the Old Testament translation published in 1968¹ and the second revision of the New Testament translation published in 1989.² The Bible contained appendices of pages outlining the history and culture of the Bible lands and color maps.³

Initially, only a few dozen fortunate people were able to own and delve into a copy of that Bible.⁴ However, the following February it was made available to many more. The following were some first impressions by readers: “People have started to read the new edition of the Bible with interest. They compare it with the earlier versions, primarily with the 1968 edition, which is perhaps the one they have grown most accustomed to. Many people have expressed their thanks for the work done. Great appreciation has been shown of the linguistic aspect of the new text. It is more understandable, fluent and readable now. At the same time, however, comparison with earlier translations would reveal various issues that are divergent or even questionable.”⁵

¹*Piibel. Vana ja Uus Testament* [“*The Bible. The Old and the New Testament*”], London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968.

²*Uus Testament ja Psalmid ehk Vana Testamendi laulud* [“*The New Testament and Psalms, or Old Testaments Songs**”], Tallinn: EELK Konsistoorium [The EELC [Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church] Consistory], 1989. The New Testament was translated by Toomas Paul.

³“*Eesti Kink*” (the newspaper of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church), December 17, 1997.

⁴*Piibel. Vanaja Uus Testament* [“*The Bible. The Old and the New Testament*”], Tallinn: Eesti Piibliselts [The Estonian Bible Society], 1997.

⁵P.Roosimaa, “Uue Piibli toimetamisest” [“Of the Editing of the New Bible”], *Eesti Kirik* May 27, 1998, inset of the Estonian Council of Churches [FCC], p. 8.

The advent of this new Bible was significant not only for Estonian Christians; it also had a general cultural and, I dare say, even a political significance. Let me explain. After the Soviet Union annexed Estonia in 1940, it resorted to many ideological measures to consolidate its power. A great amount of national and cultural literature was destroyed, and school programs and class syllabuses were adapted to the new regime. And, of course, pressure was brought to bear on Christians because they were considered to be active proponents of an ideology alien to the communist way of thinking. The activities of churches and congregations were drastically restricted. Sunday schools were banned and the publication of Christian literature was practically eliminated. The atheistic worldview was propagated everywhere. The program of any higher educational establishment featured a mandatory course of so-called 'scientific atheism'. The authorities tried very hard to drive a wedge between different denominations and congregations. It must be admitted that fifty years of Soviet rule left a deep imprint on the minds of Estonian citizens.

Considering the above, the publication of a new edition of the Bible in the homeland was a mark signaling the end of a most distasteful era and the beginning of a new and more hopeful era.

History

How was it possible for the latest edition of the Estonian Bible to be accomplished?⁶ Estonia's occupation by the Soviet Union had a profound effect on the printing of Christian literature. Previously, the publishing of the Bible, or parts of it, in Estonian was customary; now it was cut off altogether. It was a great exception to the rule when the New Testament, translated by Lutheran Pastor Toomas Paul, was permitted to be printed.

In order to satisfy the need for Bibles, the community of exiled Estonians decided to publish the Estonian-language Bible in exile. The extensive years-long effort came to fruition in 1968 as a publication of the British and Foreign Bible Society. It later yielded several reprints. The Old Testament part of that edition (excluding the Psalter) was translated by the exiled

⁶The tradition of printing Bibles in the Estonian language goes back to the 17th century. In 1686, *Wastne Testament* [*The New Testament*]* was printed in the South-Estonian dialect, followed in 1715 by *Uus Testament* [*The New Testament*]* in North-Estonian dialect and in 1739 by the entire Bible [in the North-Estonian dialect].

Lutheran Pastor Endel Krpp. The text of the Psalms and the New Testament was based on Lutheran Provost Harald Põld's translation dating from the 1930s, which was subjected to semantic and linguistic editing.⁷

The materials available at the Estonian Bible Society reveal that on October 3, 1991, a meeting of representatives of Christian congregations of the Republic of Estonia was held at the EELC Consistory. The meeting stated the following:

Seventy five per cent of the Old Testament of the Estonian Bible has been translated by [Lutheran] Pastor Kalle Kasemaa; Toomas Paul's translation of the New Testament is being revised by Randar Tasmuth. We need support from different denominations for revising the Bible translation.⁸

Initially, the EELC Consistory had decided to publish the new Estonian Bible itself. Based on that decision, a Bible text revision team was set up on March 26, 1991. It included Professors Kalle Kasemaa, Toomas Paul and [Lutheran] Pastor Randar Tasmuth. Funds for the work also came from the EELC.⁹ When assessing the theological and financial resources available in Estonia, it was understood that it would be impossible to find translators who would be able to commit themselves full-time to rendering a new Estonian version of the entire Old Testament. Thus, it was decided to base the new Bible text on the Old Testament translation of the Bible published in 1968 (with thorough revisions), and on Toomas Paul's translation of the New Testament published in 1989, editing it where necessary.¹⁰ The assumption seems to have been

⁷T. Paul, *Eesti piiblitõlke ajalugu. Esimestest katsetest kuni 1999. aastani* ["The History of Estonian Bible Translation. From the First Attempts to the Year 1999*"], proceedings of the Mother-Tongue Society of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, Tallinn, 1999, 72, p. 738. *Matteus-Markus-Luukas Evangeeliumid* ["The Gospels of Matthew-Mark-Luke"], the advance copy of the Estonian Bible Society, Tallinn, 1995, p. 6.

⁸Minutes of the meeting of representatives of Christian congregations of the Republic of Estonia held at the EELC Consistory, October 3, 1991, Item 3. Actually, the statement refers to amendment proposals rather than the new translation.

⁹U. Tankler, *Peasekretäri aruanne Eesti Piibliseltsi iddkogule* ["The General Secretary's Annual Report to the General Assembly of the Estonian Bible Society*"], November 14, 1992, Item I. See also T. Paul, *Eesti piiblitõlke ...*, p. 796.

¹⁰J. Bärenson, "Ühise töö tulemus" ["The Result of Joint Work"], *Eesti Kirik*, May 27, 1998, inset of the ECC.

that the older edition, that is, the Old Testament, would involve more work whereas Professor Paul's translation would need no particular changes.

A major stage in the publication of the Bible was the reopening of the Estonian Bible Society in December 1991. As an interdenominational organization pursuing the widest distribution of the Scriptures without doctrinal bias,¹¹ it was only natural for the Bible Society to also assume responsibility for the awesome task of publishing the new Bible.

The board meeting of the Estonian Bible Society was held on September 17, 1992. It was decided to solicit proposals concerning changes in the new Bible from churches and individuals. The proposals were expected to arrive within a month, by November 1.¹² The report of the General Secretary of the Bible Society (November 14, 1992), showed that the editing of the New Testament was close to completion and the proposals for the editing of the Old Testament were expected to be finalized by February 1993.¹³ It was the hope of all that the completion of the preparations for the publishing the new Bible would be imminent.

The deadlines offered were undoubtedly short. It was apparently assumed that the people had already made their observations for changes and now they only needed to formulate them and send them off. It may also be assumed that the respective notices had never reached quite a few interested people. All of this reflected the hope that the new Bible would be published fairly quickly and without particular editing difficulties. In his article "Vttras tuttav Piibel" ["The Strange Familiar Bible"] appended to the Estonian Bible Society's bulletin of December 1993, R. Tasmuth states:

Due to the relatively small scope of and the great interest in NT textual amendment proposals, they were photocopied in order for all the member denominations of the ECC¹⁴ to receive a copy for making their proposals. The largest number of

¹¹Ü.Tankler, Peasekretäri ...

¹²Minutes of the board meeting of the Estonian Bible Society, September 17, 1992, Item 2.

¹³U. Tankler, Peasekretäri ...

¹⁴The ECC stands for the Estonian Council of Churches. This organization was established in 1989 and was made up of representatives from the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Union of Estonian Evangelical Christian and Baptist Congregations, the Estonian Methodist Church and the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church; additionally, it included as observers

proposals, including written ones from individuals, was submitted by members of EELC congregations, followed by those of Adventist congregations. By now, however, we have reached the point in time where proposals coming in cannot be taken into consideration for technical reasons. Of individuals, a colossal amount of work has been done by literary scholar Valeeria Villandi, who sent to the Bible text editing team a sizable package of primarily linguistic proposals. Many of the proposals will find their way into the text.¹⁵

Unfortunately, I have no data concerning how many amendment proposals were submitted and by how many people. With regard to the New Testament, I managed to find at the Estonian Bible Society only a few persons' proposals concerning the period under study. Perhaps these were all there were. Until the sample copies of the gospels were published in 1996, more writers added their amendment proposals. Thus, the circle of people submitting proposals to the Bible editorial board was not particularly wide. In the long run, Olav Maran proved to be most systematic in studying the Scriptures, as he sent in the largest number of amendment proposals along with various suggestions for revisions. Regarding the New Testament, for instance, he made proposals for amending approximately 5,000 verses.¹⁶

One of the issues to be tackled was copyright. The copyright of the New Testament under revision was owned by the EELC Consistory.¹⁷ Copyright on the 1968 Bible translation, however, was held by the British and Foreign Bible Society.¹⁸ The ensuing official procedure resulted in a letter from the British and Foreign Bible Society in late 1992 notifying of a two-stage transfer of the copyright of the 1968 Estonian Bible translation to the Estonian Bible Society. In the first stage, the administrative rights of the Bible translation was transferred,

representatives from the Estonian Roman Catholic Church and the Estonian Seventh Day Adventists* Church.

¹⁵R.Tasmuth, *Võrras tuttav Piibel* [“*The Strange Familiar Bible*”], The Estonian Bible Society, Bulletin No. 3, December 1993, appendix.

¹⁶P.Roosimaa, *Loetelu UT osas piiblitoimetusele loekunud ettepanekutest Eesti Piibliseltsis säilitatud materjalide alusel* [“*A List of Proposals regarding the NT Submitted to the Bible Editorial Board Drawn up on the Basis of Materials Stored at the Estonian Bible Society*], October 1998.

¹⁷Minutes of the board meeting of the Estonian Bible Society, September 17, 1992, Item 2.

¹⁸Ibid., Item 3; Ü. Tankler, Peasekretäri ...

meaning that the Estonian Bible Society was now entitled to pass decisions on all publishing issues related to that Bible translation. The second and final stage in copyright transfer was to be made after the Estonian Bible Society would have been granted full membership of the United Bible Societies. As well, the EELC Consistory announced its decision in principle to transfer to the Estonian Bible Society the copyright on T. Paul's New Testament translation. The Bible Society paid a respective sum for the revision of the Bible accomplished thus far.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the question arose whether to issue a new reprint of the 1968 Bible, since the Estonian Bibles had practically run out of stock. It was discussed at the Estonian Bible Society board meeting of May 1, 1993. A proposal of printing 20,000 pocket-sized Bibles was put forward. However, the decision was that the new Bible should be issued as quickly as possible, and in three formats: the pocket Bible, the desktop Bible and the altar Bible.²⁰ Later, at the Estonian Bible Society general meeting (October 15, 1994), it was found that the larger sizes of the new Bible should be supplemented with the Apocrypha. As the basis for the latter's revision, Endel Krpp's translation of 1982²¹ was recommended. That was accomplished later.

At the Estonian Bible Society general meeting of November 20, 1993, the hope was expressed that the first impression of the new Bible would be issued by late 1994. The Estonian Bible Society employed Tarmo Lilleoja to direct the work. Even before that, the data processing of the revised Bible text had begun. Preparations were to be launched for selecting the printing office and paper and resolving other issues. The decision was also made to establish a Bible fund.²² However, in his article of December 1993, R. Tasmuth already mentioned another deadline. He writes,

¹⁹Minutes of the board meeting of the Estonian Bible Society, May 1, 1993, Item 1, which also contain references to the letter of December 15, 1992, from the British and Foreign Bible Society and that of December 22, 1992, from the EELC Consistory.

²⁰Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting May 1, 1993, Item 4.

²¹Endel Krpp, *Vana Testamendi apokrüüfilised raamatud* [“*The Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament*”], translation from Greek, 1982. Printed in Sweden 250 years after the publishing of the first Estonian-language Bible; copyright by Johann Krpp'u nimeline Eesti Kapital [Estonian Capital of the Name of Johann Krpp], Stockholm, 1989.

²²Ü. Tankler, *Peasekretäri aruanne Eesti Piibliseltsi üldkogu koosolekul Haapsalus* [“*The General Secretary's Report at the General Assembly of the Estonian Bible Society in Haapsalu*”], November 20, 1993.

At present, the proposals submitted by late 1992 await extensive and accurate secretarial work. The amount of amendments throughout the Bible is so great as to require the rewriting of the entire text of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Therefore--being convinced that the time is short (1Cor 7:29)--we must exert ourselves if we want to bring the publishing process, which would take a couple of years, to an end by 1995 at the latest.²³

What and how quick was the Bible publishing process in reality? A reference to R. Tasmuth's article states:

...the new Bible will be based on the thoroughly revised Old Testament (OT) issued in 1968 and the rerevised new translation of the New Testament (NT) from the year 1989. The undersigned have examined the package of OT text amendment proposals submitted by Prof. K. Kasemaa and reached a consensus with Prof. T. Paul regarding the introduction of a series of changes to the NT text.²⁴

At the board meeting of the Estonian Bible Society on February 1, 1994, it was reported that the computer input and the proofreading of the Bible text would cost 61,000 EEK.²⁵ Everything seemed to proceed as planned. However, two months later at the board meeting of April 9, it was stated that the preparations for Bible publishing involved a series of problems that needed to be resolved on a daily basis. A decision was made to establish a Bible editorial board to resolve all issues related to the content and language, etc. It was also decided to turn to the Estonian Council of Churches for support.^{26, 27}

The fact that the decision to form a Bible editorial board was made at a time close to the Bible's scheduled publishing date shows that the planners of the Bible publishing had had no clear idea thus far of the actual complexity and magnitude of the work. As a result of negotiations, the Estonian Council of Churches approved the Bible editorial board on May 25, 1994 with the following officers:

Chairman: Kuno Pajula, Archbishop, EELC;

²³R. Tasmuth, Vτtras ...

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting, February 1, 1994, Item 6.3.

²⁶Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting, April 9, 1994, Item 5.7.

²⁷Letter from the Estonian Bible Society to the Estonian Council of Churches, May 6, 1994.

Director: Jaan Bärenson, General Secretary, EBS;
Secretary: Tarmo Lilleoja;
Members: Arne Hiob, Ermo Jürma, Peeter Roosimaa, Randar Tasmuth, Velne Pihel and Eha Kõrge.²⁸

A. Hiob resigned, as it was impossible for him to participate in the editorial board's work. Theological issues were mainly left with F Jürma, P. Roosimaa and R. Tasmuth, whereas V. Pihel and F. Kõrge were responsible for proofreading. E. Kõrge also participated in editorial board sessions as a linguistic editor.

By June 1994, the Bible text had been entirely entered into the computer, and the editing had begun.²⁹ Representatives from different denominations were provided with hard copy Bible texts for examination. Several people made their proposals for both textual amendments and the editorial board's work in general. Pastor Emeritus Johannes Kähr, for instance, was productive with regard to the New Testament, submitting proposals for about 500 verses.³⁰ I must also mention Emeritus Professor of Theology V. Salo here. In March 1996, the Estonian Bible Society asked him to write headings to Old Testament paragraphs and to revise the Psalter. Professor V. Salo handed his proposals to the Bible Society on November 6 that same year.³¹

All the proposals, including those presented previously, numbered in the thousands. They needed to be examined by the editorial board members as well as, in many instances, checked against the original text, compared with other translations (English, German, Finnish) and given the final rendering. Though the editorial board members originally did not add their own proposals, as the work progressed, their ideas and proposals emerged in significant numbers. A glimpse of the work of the Bible editorial board is presented in Part 3 of this article.

The Bible editorial board met for the first time on August 29, 1994. The work was organized in such a way as to require the editorial board members to examine all the issues and comments in advance. Editorial board meetings were to formulate the final decisions. It was

²⁸Minutes of the Estonian Council of Churches, 4/49, May 25, 1994, Item 6.

²⁹Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting, September 15, 1994, Item 2.

³⁰P. Roosimaa, *Loetelu ...*

³¹Letter from General Secretary of the Estonian Bible Society to P. Roosimaa, November 24, 1998.

anticipated that the work would be very extensive; nevertheless, the Bible Society board hoped it would have been completed by the end of that year.³² Unfortunately, this could not be accomplished.

At the Estonian Bible Society board meeting of February 11, 1995, it was stated that the Old Testament manuscript was ready and work was under way with the New Testament. Six more Bible editorial board meetings were planned before spring; each of them was anticipated to make a long and labor-intensive working day. In reality, some working meetings spilled over into several days. I agree with a statement made at one of the board meetings that, “while the work is very intensive the cooperation at the Bible editorial board is very good.” It was also decided that the Bible text needs to be approved by the member churches of the Estonian Council of Churches and that the text of Our Lord’s Prayer must be coordinated with the Council.³³ In addition, solutions needed to be found for issues concerning the new Bible’s layout, reference system, supplementary materials, maps and tables.³⁴

To obtain feedback from readers, the Estonian Bible Society board meeting (May 11, 1995) decided to distribute to congregations the sample copies of the synoptic gospels by the fall of that year. The joint meeting of the Bible Society and the Estonian Council of Churches (June 21, 1995) decided, among other things, that the sample copies would be published in the fall of 1995, the pocket-size Bibles in 1996, and the medium and large Bibles in 1997.³⁵ The draft run of the gospels was printed in lots of 1,000.³⁶ Readers were asked to send their proposals to the Bible editorial board by February 1, 1996.³⁷

At the Estonian Bible Society January 25, 1996 board meeting, Tarmo Lilleoja gave an overview of the Bible editorial board’s work and the responses to the draft run of the gospels. By

³²Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting, September 15, 1994, Item 3.

³³Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting, February 11, 1995, Item 5.

³⁴Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting, May 11, 1995, Item 3.

³⁵Ibid. Minutes of the meeting of the Estonian Council of Churches, 6/60, June 21, 1995, Item 5.

³⁶J.Bärenson, *Eesti Piibliselts 1995* [*The Estonian Bible Society 1995*]. General Secretary’s activities report at the Estonian Bible Society annual meeting on March 16, 1996.

³⁷*Matteus, Markus, Luukas - Evangeeliumid* [*The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke*], trial impression of the Estonian Bible Society, Tallinn, 1995, p. 7.

that time, few proposals had arrived. The most active contributors had been O. Maran (proposals for about 1,000 verses) and E. Öpik (for about 160 scriptures).³⁸ From the materials stored at the Society's office, I discovered 18 individual and two collective proposals regarding the first draft.³⁹ Also at that meeting, the members were acquainted with the suggestion made by Karl Pajusalu involving a stylist in the Bible editorial board's work. Further, the Board agreed to postpone the final publishing date due to increased workload.⁴⁰ There were still hopes that "by the end of 1996 the new Bible will perhaps be ready to go to press."⁴¹ On issues concerning style, agreements were reached with writer Jaan Kross, who made amendment proposals regarding the Old Testament, and linguist Karl Pajusalu, who examined the New Testament. The well-known writer said about his work, "I am not editing the Bible translation but just making suggestions towards a consistent style."⁴² The same was true of K. Pajusalu. Thus, the Bible editorial board additionally needed to re-check all amendment proposals concerning style. It is perhaps appropriate here to cite Karl Pajusalu's article "Piiblikeele piirid" ["The Boundaries of Bible language"]:

Particularly complicated is the work with the translated text for the linguistic editor. While honoring the uniqueness of the translation, it is necessary to preserve close resemblance to the original. Moreover, when it comes to a religious text translated several times over a long period of time, which imposes special requirements on the style, then any solution would at any rate be a compromise, a deal involving certain flaws and trade-offs. A deal with the tradition. Deliberate rejection of tradition would mean relationship with the past through negation and would foremost amount to discontinuation of spirituality. /.../ The main objective of the linguistic editing of the new Bible edition has been consistent observance of the norms of the currently accepted COMMON Estonian language so that the language would be as small a problem as possible for the very different readers of the Bible. At the same time, the pursuit has been towards a language that would

³⁸Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting, January 25, 1996, Item 2.

³⁹P. Roosimaa, Loetelu ...

⁴⁰Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting, January 25, 1996, Item 2.

⁴¹J. Bärenson, Eesti...

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B. Simmermann, "Kirjaniku töölaual on Piibli tõlke käsikiri" ["On the Writer's Desk is the Bible Translation Manuscript"], an interview with Jaan Kross, *Eesti Kirik*, January 29, 1997.

be a facilitator rather than an obstacle for the Estonians of today that have little foreknowledge--and little linguistic knowledge.⁴³

The Ecumenical Perspective of the Bible Translation

The new Estonian Bible was issued in 1997 and has a number of distinctive features. One of these is its ecumenical character. As mentioned earlier, the first New Testament (Wastne Testament) in Estonian was issued in 1686 in the South Estonian dialect, followed by the first New Testament (Uus Testament) in the North Estonian dialect in 1715 and the first entire Bible in 1739 (North Estonian dialect). Over time, these versions were reprinted with modifications a number of times. New translations were also made. For all of this, we are indebted to the Lutheran Church for its initiative and volunteer workers. It is perhaps appropriate to note here that the above-mentioned first translations were made by pastors who were native Germans.

The leading role of the Lutheran Church was not endangered by the fact that the third impression in 1822 of the Bible was issued in St. Petersburg at the expense of the Bible Congregation (Piiblikogodusse kulloga). The fourth print (1839) involved contribution from the Tartu Bible Society. After 1896, reprints were also issued by the British and Foreign Bible Society. It is appropriate to mention here that the Estonian Bible Society was established in Tallinn on July 4, 1813. The statutes of the Bible Society stipulated that the Society could be joined by persons of either sex from all Christian denominations and all states. As is known, members of free churches, which arrived in the late 19th century, immediately became actively involved in the work of Bible societies.⁴⁴

Of those who faithfully made considerable contributions to the translation of the Estonian Bible, I would mention: Jaan Bergmann, Harald Põld, Uku Masing and Endel Krupp. All of these great men belonged to the Lutheran Church.

During the so-called “Khrushchev thaw,”⁴⁵ of the Soviet era, the plenary assembly of the EELC Consistory decided to set up an 11-member Bible translation committee. In the early

⁴³K. Pajusalu, “Piiblikeele piirid” [“The boundaries of Bible language”], *Eesti Kirik*, May 27, 1998, insert of the Estonian Council of Churches.

⁴⁴T. Paul, *Eesti ...*, pp. 844-845, 495, 500.

⁴⁵Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeyeovich--First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR from 1953 to 1964.

1960's, a new committee was established. The committee consisted of the leadership of the Lutheran Church at that time. However, invitation to its meetings was extended to Master of Theology Osvald Tärk, one of the pastors of Tallinn Oleviste Church, representing the congregations of Evangelical Christians and Baptists. As far as I remember, the work was also participated in to a certain extent by Oskar Olvik, another pastor of the Oleviste Church and a graduate from the Faculty of Theology of the University of Tartu. Was this a kind of ecumenical collaboration? The work of the committee yielded no tangible fruit.⁴⁶

True ecumenical Bible publishing, or rather ecumenical Bible revision, may be asserted in preparation of the last Estonian translation of the Bible, however. As mentioned earlier, it was initially to be published by the EELC Consistory. To secure greater response to the work under way, however, representatives from other denominations were also involved. I am of the opinion that the basis for this decision had also been prepared by the experience of ecumenical collaboration at the Estonian Council of Churches as well as by the plans to re-establish the Estonian Bible Society as an interdenominational organization.

The transfer of copyright to the Estonian Bible Society provided better opportunities for ecumenical editing of the Bible. When the makeup of the Bible editorial board was approved on May 25, 1994, it included representatives from Lutheran, Methodist and Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches. In the persons of Professor Emeritus Vello Salo and Olav Maran, the author of many meaningful amendment proposals, the Bible revision work also involved Roman Catholics and Pentecostals. There were also proposals from a number of other people representing the Adventists, for instance. Finally, we may never be able to ascertain the denominational backgrounds of all the contributors.

That the theologians' way of thinking is influenced by the doctrinal positions of their respective denominations or schools is perhaps inevitable. However, the Bible editorial board pursued solutions that were acceptable to as many parties as possible. Relatively few issues were resolved by voting. In most cases, unanimous decisions were reached, sometimes after very long discussions. The author is delighted to note that even though highly interdenominational, the team was capable of good and productive collaboration.⁴⁷

⁴⁶T. Paul, *Eesti ...*, pp. 767-769.

⁴⁷Minutes of the Estonian Bible Society board meeting of February 11, 1995, Item 5.

The Editing of the New Translation of the Bible.

When years ago the decision was made to publish a new print of the Bible, the intention was to make only changes that were absolutely necessary. As mentioned above, the Old Testament texts were to be based on the 1968 Bible version and the New Testament ones on Toomas Paul*s translation published in 1989. Both books had already won the recognition of the general public. However, the thousands of amendment proposals sent to the Bible editorial board demonstrated that the need for revision was much greater. It must be admitted that over the last decades alone the language in common use had gone through certain changes. Some words had dropped from common usage and others had replaced them. Also, a number of expressions had changed.

It appears from the materials stored at the Bible Society’s office⁴⁸ that the amendment proposals for the new Estonian Bible related to orthography, punctuation, morphology and syntax. In addition, there were a fairly large number of proposals related to the semantic aspects of the translation. With regard to orthography, the problems primarily pertained to the spelling of proper names.

Example 1. The different spelling of some proper names.⁴⁹

	P 1968	UT 1989	P 1997
Mt 1:7	Rehabeam	Rehhabam	Rehabeam
Mt 1:8	Joosafat	Joosapat	Joosafat
Mt 1:9	Ahas	Aahas	Aahas
Mt 1:12	Serubbaabel	Serubabel	Serubbaabel

⁴⁸These are the amendment proposals in manuscript sent to the Bible editorial board and stored at the Estonian Bible Society. All the amendment proposals sent to the Bible editorial board that are mentioned below are part of these and will not be referred to separately.

⁴⁹“P 1968” stands for *Piibel. Vana ja Uus Testament* [“The Bible. The Old and the New Testament”], London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968, “UT 1989” for *Uus Testament ja Psalmid ehk Vana Testamendi laulud* [“The New Testament and Psalms, or Old Testaments Songs”], Tallinn: EELK Konsistoorium, 1989, and “P 1997” for *Piibel. Vana ja Uus Testament* [“The Bible. The Old and the New Testament”], Tallinn: Eesti Piibliselts, 1997.

Mt 10:3	Jakoobus	Jaakobus	Jaakobus
	Taddeus	Tadeus	Taddeus

A fundamental decision was made on the name of God. In P 1968, the Tetragrammaton designating the person of God had been spelled as “Jehovah.” In P 1997, the name “Jehovah” had been replaced by the title “Lord.” The only exceptions are two verses where preserving the name of God was inevitable, namely Ex 3:15 and 6:3. At the same time, the earlier “Jehovah” was replaced with “Jahveh.”

A problem in itself was the punctuation of the text. As is known, the first manuscripts of the New Testament, for instance, were written in capital letters without any spaces between words or punctuation marks. It was only much later that small letters came into use in the copying of manuscripts, as well as spaces between words and punctuation marks with the exception of quotation marks. Thus, the position of punctuation marks is not always indisputably clear. Further, the Biblical passages written in Hebrew and Aramaic pose problems of their own. The examples below are confined to the New Testament and the Greek language.

Of the proposals concerning punctuation that reached the Bible editorial board, many argued for a reduction in the use of exclamation marks and quotation marks.

Example 2. In John 1:3-4, the problem is whether to place a full stop before or after the word *hogeonen*, which means *has emerged*. This difference is represented in Estonian New Testament versions. In the 1968 Bible it was formulated as follows:

Everything has emerged through him, and without him nothing has emerged that has emerged. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

The 1997 version, however, reads as follows:

Everything has emerged through him, and without him nothing has emerged. What has emerged through him was life and that life was the light of men.

The most recent studies of old manuscripts, including the above scripture, support the latter version. The committee adopted the same view.

Example 3. I chose one of Jesus* sayings in John 3 to illustrate the problem of using quotes. Both P 1968 and UT 1989 present Jesus* words as ranging from Verse 10 through 21. P 1997, however, presents His words as from Verse 10 through 12, with the remaining text of John 3:13-21 regarded as the Church's statement of faith.

The morphological amendments were mainly motivated by the development of the Estonian language. As all languages, the Estonian language continues to develop. However, the development has differed in the homeland when compared to the language used by those in exile. Many amendment proposals concerning morphology have been prompted by the very language development itself. As expected, most of them were made with regard to the Old Testament.

For smoother reading and clearer meaning, stressed personal pronouns have been replaced in a number of places with unstressed pronouns or vice versa. In Estonian, unstressed personal pronouns are one-syllable words (*ma, sa, ta, me, le, nad*) while their stressed counterparts are two-syllable ones (*mina, sina, tema, meie, teie, nemad*). In addition, many of the syntactic changes were made for the same reasons.

The hitherto mentioned amendment proposals were for the most part easily understood and decisions on them were passed relatively easily by the Bible editorial board. Finding a suitable semantic equivalent, however, was not always as easy. Here we had to give consideration to the fact that the semantic reach of words in the original biblical languages versus the fairly young Estonian language could occasionally be widely divergent. This led to the problem of how to find a word or expression that would best mirror the semantic reach of an original expression in a given context. Another problem was whether to translate a word with one and the same term throughout the Bible or not. The following examples hopefully will illustrate this point.

Example 4. How should we translate the word ἠγαλλίασθε in Luke 10:21 (to exult, to jubilate, to cheer)?⁵⁰ In P 1968, it has been translated as follows:

*At the very hour, he was **gladdened** in the Holy Spirit and said...*

In UT 1989, it reads:

⁵⁰M. Lepajõe, *Kreeka-Eesti Uue Testamendi õppesõnastik [The Greek-Estonian New Testament Wordbook for Students]*, Tartu: Akadeemiline Teoloogia Selts [Academic Society for Theology], 2000.

*At that very hour, Jesus **cheered** in the Holy Spirit ...*

While the expression *to be gladdened* expresses rejoicing without showing the intensity and mode of joy, *to cheer* means “to express one*s feelings, one*s joy aloud”.

The editorial board accepted the following proposal:

*At the very hour Jesus **was exceedingly glad** in the Holy Spirit and said ...*

The phrase *to be exceedingly glad* shows the intensity of joy; yet again it does not reflect its mode. The editorial board, having also referred to translations into other languages, decided in favor of the word *jubilate*. This simultaneously conveys both great joy and active expression of it.

Thus, the P 1997 translation came to read:

*At the very hour, Jesus **jubilated** in the Holy Spirit and said ...*

Example 5. Let Phil. 2:21 illustrate the need to choose between different translation variants. In UT 1989, it reads:

Now everyone attends to his own matters not to those of Christ Jesus.

The Bible committee received the following amendment proposal:

Now everyone seeks something for himself, not for Christ Jesus.

This proposal was supplemented with other variants, including the following:

Now everyone pursues his own matters, not those of Christ Jesus;

and:

For they all seek what is theirs, not what is Christ Jesus, as was also rendered in the Bible issued in 1968.*

For the new Bible, the following wording was chosen:

Now everyone pursues what is theirs, not what is Christ Jesus.*

Example 6. According to UT 1989, Acts 4:13 states the following:

When the rulers and elders beheld the bravery of Peter and John and learned that they were illiterate people and laymen, they were astonished at that.

The 1968 Bible reads:

However, when they saw the courage of Peter and John and learned that they were unlettered and unlearned men.

The editorial board received the following proposal:

... elders saw the courage of Peter and John and learned that they were laymen who cannot read, they were astonished at that.

The final wording came to be:

Seeing the fearlessness of Peter and John and learning that they were unlearned and simple men, they were astonished at that.

Example 7. How should we translate the saying of Jesus in Verse 10 of the parable of Luke 17:7-10, *@L8@4 "DPg4@4 gF:g<? In P 1968, it has been rendered as:

*We are **depraved** servants ...*

In UT 1989, it reads:

*we are **useless** slaves ...*

The editorial board received the following proposal:

*... we are **undignified** slaves ...*

The proposal was accompanied by a well-grounded argument that the word *useless*, which T. Paul used as the equivalent of "DPg4@4, was not good because *useless* means that which is not needed, which is of no use, whereas a slave undoubtedly had a value in use in the society of that time. What a slave lacked, however, was *dignity*; he was not considered equal to others. It was his social position that denied him the hope of his master inviting him to dine with himself.

The editorial board, however, chose the following variant:

*We are **insignificant** servants ...*

The abandonment of the word *useless* in the translation was undoubtedly justified, as was the rejection of the previous variant *depraved*. The word *depraved* means *indecent, shameless, improper*, which reflect a person's moral decline. The parable under study, however, does not imply such kind of perversity on the part of the servant. The word *undignified* is undoubtedly better than the former yet also contains a certain negative moral undertone.

The variant preferred by the editorial board, *We are **insignificant** servants ...*, seems to best convey the essence of the explanation made by the submitter of the proposal. This

expression does not contain any moral judgment; instead, it implies a person who is not equal to others, who is deprived of social status.

Example 8. How should we translate the word B"D"6"8gT? This is a word that has a wide semantic reach and may consequently have rather different meanings in different settings. Should we stick to one and the same word as much as possible throughout the translation or not?

In the New Testament, the word B"D"6"8gT occurs more than 110 times. In UT 1989, it has been translated through 9 different expressions, including *ask* (35.5%), *encourage* (30.5%), *exhort* (12.5%) and *persuade* (10%). In P 1997, the number of translation variants was increased to eleven: *ask*, *encourage*, *exhort*, *appeal*, *comfort*, *persuade*, *speak kindly*, *counsel*, *inspire*, *incite and stimulate*. The most frequent of these were *ask* (35%), *encourage* (32%), *exhort* (12.5%) and *appeal* (8%).

Example 9. A similar situation developed with the word F6"<*"84HT. Dictionaries give a number of diverse equivalents. In the New Testament, the word occurs approximately 30 times. In UT 1989, 5 different expressions have been used, including *seduce* (35.5%), *disturb* or *let oneself be disturbed* (32%) and *despise* (21.5%).

As with the previous example, the number of translation variants in P 1997 was increased, this time to ten: *cause to sin* or *tempt into sin* (28.5%), *offend*, *take offence*, *be offended* (18%), *back out* (14%), *tempt*, *lead into temptation*, *mislead*, *stumble*, *be a stumbling block*, *be a snare*, *irritate*, *despise* and *give up*.

Such a decision by the Bible editorial board allowed the various meanings of the word in question to be brought out. At the same time, the editorial board decided to discard the expressions *seduce* and *disturb* or *let oneself be disturbed*.

At this point I add some concrete examples of the use of different translation variants of this word:

Mt 5:29: *If however, your right eye causes you to sin*

Mt 18:6: *However, anyone that is a snare to whomever of these little ones that believe in me*

Mk 9:42: *And anyone that misleads whomever of these little ones that believe in me ...*

1 Cor 8:13: *Therefore, if a food leads my brother into temptation I will never eat meat again, so that I will not lead my brother into temptation.*

Example 10. Finding an appropriate form of wording proved particularly complicated in places where the original text itself was complicated. Heb 6:20-7:2 may serve as a good example at this point. In UT 1989, it reads as follows:

... where Jesus, our forerunner, has entered for our benefit, becoming a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Now this same Melchizedek was king of Salem, priest of God Most High. He came to meet Abraham upon the latter returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him; to him also Abraham gave a tenth of everything. First, his name is translated as “king of righteousness” ; then, however, he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace,...

After analyzing the text and considering the possible variants, the final wording came to be as follows:

...where Jesus, our forerunner, has entered for our benefit, becoming, after the order of Melchizedek, a high priest forever. Now this same Melehizedek was king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who came to meet Abraham upon the latter returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth of everything, and who is, as his name is first translated, “king of righteousness”, yet then also king of Salem, that is, “King of Peace”...

One set of problems had to do with different grammatical structures of different languages. For instance, there is a tradition in Greek to use, in place of subordinate clauses, special word combinations (*genitivus absolutus, a.c.i.*), which have no direct equivalents in Estonian. Quite often, the meaning of a phrase needs to be paraphrased instead of direct translation. In addition, languages have differences in both mood and voice. Further, there is no strict equivalence between the grammatical tenses of different languages. Unlike Estonian tenses, the Greek ones tend to express the character of the activity rather than the actual time. Unfortunately, such particularities often fail to be reflected in the translated text.

Example 11. I use Jude 3 as an illustration:

!(("BOJ@4, B"F"< FB@L*0< B@4@L:g<@FH (D"Nq4< L:4< BgD4 JOH
6@4<0H 0:T< F TJ0D4"H "<(60< gFP@< (D"N"4 L:4< B"D"6"8T<
gB"(T<4.gF2"4 J0 "B"> B" D"*@2g4F0 J@4H "(4@4H B4FJg4.

In the UT 1989 edition, it reads:

Beloved, being in every way quick to write you about our common salvation, it became inevitable to write you to stimulate you to fight for the faith that once was already given for the saints to possess.

The new edition, however, says:

Beloved, I have in every way tried to write you about our common salvation, and now it indeed became inevitable to write you to stimulate you to fight for the faith that was once given to the saints.

Example 12. In conclusion, I present an interesting illustration of the editing process, which represents a concentration of several problems. In the 1989 New Testament, Matthew 16:23 reads as follows:

He, however, turned around and said to Peter: Get out of my sight, satan! You are my disturber since you think about men's ways rather than God's ways.

The committee received a proposal to use the wording of the 1968 Bible:

But he turned and said to Peter: "Retreat from me, satan You are an annoyance to me, since you think what is pleasing to men rather than to God "

By way of explanation, let me say that a more accurate translation of the phrase *retreat from me* is *get behind me*, that is, go away from here and take your proper place in the line of disciples behind me. The word *satan* may also be translated; it means *resister*. The meaning of the above-analyzed F6" <*"84HT is: *you are a disturber* or *you are an annoyance*.

After thorough consideration, the editorial board decided to translate the verse as follows:

He, however, turned and said to Peter: "Retreat, resister You are a temptation to me, since you think in the manner of men, not of God."

Conclusion

Thinking back once more to the presentation of the new Estonian Bible at the domed hall of the National Library in Tallinn on December 18, 1997, it may be said that this was the birth of the first post-World War Two Bible edition prepared for publication in Estonia. It represented tangible fruit of the period of freedom following the Soviet occupation. At the same time it was a wonderful experience of ecumenical cooperation in the domain of Bible publishing. Of course, the picture would have been even more blessed if the Bible editing process had also been participated in by representatives of the Orthodox Church. Hopefully, they will join the Bible editorial board in the future, because new generations need new editions of the Bible.

Examining the initial deadlines for the work of the Bible editorial board, one realizes that the original intention was to only make those changes in the new Bible which were obviously necessary. During the editing process, however, it became clear that the need for revision was much greater.

If it had been possible from the start to more accurately assess the finances and time allocated to the Bible editorial board, the board would undoubtedly have been in a position to better organize its work. In the initial rush, however, they were only able to superficially examine the amendment proposals submitted with regard to the Old Testament. Concerning the New Testament a number of issues would have required a more detailed analysis. As a member of the editorial board, I can say that considering our resources, the editorial board indeed tried its best, often so much as to go beyond its strength, and the result is remarkable. However, it must be admitted that no human undertaking is perfect, not even this edition of the Bible. For that reason, the Estonian Bible Society has already launched a new effort at translating the Old Testament. A new round of ecumenical editing of the Estonian Bible has begun.