Abstract: Among dozens of new translations of the New Testament published in the last fifty years, there are several versions by Jewish scholars which have yet to receive enough attention. This article offers an analysis of the most characteristic features of these translations, such as criticism of the existing versions outlined in the introductory sections, as well as actual techniques by which the Jewish origin and character of the text is emphasised in three spheres: superficial, cultural and religious, and theological. Each of these is illustrated with numerous examples, juxtaposed with traditional versions. It is argued that, regardless of the ideological motivation underlying the origin of the Jewish translations of the New Testament, they offer valuable and otherwise unavailable insights into the original message of the ancient Christian writings.

Keywords: New Testament, Jewish translation, ideology, original meaning, restoration

Introduction

None of the surviving texts of Antiquity can surpass the Bible in terms of translation: the sheer number of existing versions, their diversity, and the rate at which new ones are produced are all unparalleled. This is particularly visible in English-speaking circles, where published Bible translations come literally in the hundreds, the exact numbers being hard to determine; many of those translations come from the last few decades.\(^1\) It would also be difficult to find another text whose translations represent so wide an array of methodological approaches, ranging from strict literalness to almost

total freedom, with countless variants in between. The reasons behind this profusion of Bible translations have yet to be sufficiently accounted for. Generally speaking, “the multiplicity of translations seems to result from the perceived inadequacy of existing versions” (Szezepinska 2005: 7). However, it seems unlikely that dozens of new Bible translations would appear in the lifespan of just one or two generations because of purely (or even mainly) linguistic objections. Rather, the existing versions are often perceived as inadequate from an ideological standpoint. Among the ideological stimuli for a number of contemporary translations of the New Testament (hereafter: “NT”), especially in the North American context, is the broad and internally diversified movement of political correctness, which has produced various “gender-neutral,” “gender-inclusive” and feminist versions (Blumcynski 2006b). This, of course, does not account for all the new translations. This paper will focus on another, less researched, but no less interesting group of ideologically-driven NT translations: those recently produced in Jewish circles.

Let us start by clarifying the notion of “Jewish translations.” It can refer to both (1) translations authored by Jewish scholars and (2) aimed at a Jewish audience; typically (but not always) these two criteria overlap. Christian translations (that is, *per analogiam*, those prepared by and predominantly for Christians) obviously fall outside this category, though it must be noted that many of them currently try to revert the negative portrayal of Jews in the New Testament, resulting from translating the Greek *Ioudaioi* as “Jews.” In John’s Gospel this term refers to the opponents of Christ and therefore has a strong negative connotation. Since etymologically the word *Ioudaios* is connected with Judea, it is better to translate it as “Judean,” emphasising the geographical and ethnic rather than the religious aspect. This solution is advocated by Michal Wojciechowski, who points out that “using the term ‘Jews’ overemphasises (…) the metaphorical sense at the expense of the historical one, directs the polemic towards Jews in general and encourages negative stereotyping” (1993: 81). We shall return to this later, but note that the pro-Jewish emphasis (or – depending on one’s point of view – the effort to eliminate an anti-Jewish bias) is becoming increas-

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2 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from non-English sources are translated by Paulina Drewniak.

3 Throughout this paper “ideology” is to be understood in a non-evaluative manner, as “a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture” (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ideology).