Charles Thomson and the First American New Testament

J. Ramsey Michaels
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Charles Thomson (1729–1824) is best known as the first translator of the Septuagint, or Greek Old Testament, into English—or for that matter into any modern language. He is less well known as the first American translator of the New Testament, for his four volumes included the New Testament as well as the Old.[1] His achievements are remarkable, for he was no professional scholar but a layman—early American patriot, Secretary to the Continental Congress, and friend of Thomas Jefferson—who taught himself Greek in order to carry out the task. Born in Ireland in 1729, he arrived in America as an orphan at the age of ten, learned Latin, went into business, and became an activist in resisting the repressive measures of the British government, particularly the Stamp Act.

When his political career ended in 1789, he devoted the rest of his life to the study of Scripture in Greek. He is said to have translated from the Septuagint because he came across a volume of the 1665 edition of the Septuagint published in Cambridge by John Field and edited by John Pearson.[2] This edition is known as a Puritan Septuagint because it had been conformed to the shorter Protestant canon by the omission of the books of the Apocrypha and the additions to Esther and Daniel, as well as by following the order of the books in the KJV.[3] Yet Thomson's

[1] *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Covenant, commonly called the Old and New Testament: Translated from the Greek* (Philadelphia: Jane Aitken, 1808). The work appeared in four volumes—three Old Testament volumes and a New Testament.

[2] See David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003) 644. .

[3] It did, however, include Psalm 151, which is not in the Hebrew canon, and Thomson followed suit, without numbering it, and with the following note: "*N.B. There is in the Septuagint another Psalm, with this title:—This Psalm on David was written by himself in prose, when he fought in single combat with Goliath*" (throughout this paper all quoted material maintains original italics).

HTR 104:3 (2011) 349–65

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

choice of the Septuagint was probably not the result of pure chance.[4] He knew that when the New Testament writers quoted Scripture they followed the Greek Old Testament more often than the Hebrew and was surprised to learn that it had never been translated into English. There is no hard evidence that he intended his translation to replace the King James Version. He seems only to have wanted the Greek to have a fair hearing. His four volumes, printed by Jane Aitken, whose father had printed the first English Bible in America, were a splendid set, printed not in double columns like virtually all English Bibles up to that time but across the page and in paragraph form, like most other books.[5]

Thomson's translation, however, was never widely used and quickly passed into obscurity. Only a thousand copies were printed and most of those were never sold but eventually destroyed. Only two other English translations of the Septuagint exist: one by Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton in 1844[6] and one as recently as 2007 by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright.[7] While Brenton's version is still in print, Thomson's Septuagint is more difficult to find. The most accessible reprint is that of C. A. Muses in 1954, although with extensive "improvements" of Thomson's original effort.[8] Improvements they may be (some of them at least), but their very existence is more than enough to disqualify Muses's version as "pure" Charles Thomson.

[4] As John Reumann points out, "the Greek Old Testament was not an unknown book in America in Thomson's day" *The Romance of Bible Scripts and Scholars* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1965) 126. Moreover, as one who knew Latin he would have found Greek far more accessible than Hebrew.

[5] See Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 645.

[6] *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament according to the Vatican Text* (London: Samuel Bagster, 1844). Brenton wrote of Thomson (rather backhandedly) in his preface: "In the notes also, though very rarely, there appears the name of Thomson, the American translator. The writer has himself never seen that work, but some alterations and improvements were made from it by a friend (Mr. Charles Pridham) who had the opportunity of comparing the two, and to whom he is otherwise indebted for the correction of many errors. While thus acknowledging our obligations to Thomson, we are of course not likely to speak slightingly of the work. If there are faults, they are probably those of a vigorous and independent mind, better fitted to engage in original attempts than to submit to the drudgery of translation" (xi).

[7] *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[8] *The Septuagint Bible: The Oldest Text of the Old Testament in the Translation of Charles Thomson . . . as edited, revised and enlarged by C. A. Muses* (2d ed.; Indian Hills, Colo.: Falcon's Wing Press, 1960). Muses was quite candid about the extent of his revisions. For example: "We have confined ourselves to changing Thomson's work only where the facts of the text required it, or where another translation was called for preferentially by the oldest manuscript tradition" (xii); "Since Thomson omitted additional material in the Book of Esther found in the Septuagint Bible, we have restored it to his proper place in the text" (xiii); "It was necessary to repunctuate and paragraph practically the entire Old Testament, as well as to remove inconsistent spelling, all in all amounting to thousands of improvements" (xiv). Admittedly, he also incorporated a number of changes that Thomson himself had made by hand after the publication of his translation in 1808 (xv).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For that we must look to an earlier and much less accessible reprint of Thomson's Old Testament, that of S. F. Pells in 1904,[9] now almost as scarce (though by no means as costly!) as Thomson's original. In contrast to Muses, Pells published an actual facsimile, reproducing Thomson's title page and then Thomson's three Old Testament volumes in a two-volume set. Pells, more than Thomson himself, and more even than Muses, was a Septuagint enthusiast. He wrote a book entitled *Hades*[10] and seems to have been attracted to Thomson's version because of its rendering of "Hades" as the "mansion of the dead."[11] Pells believed that the Septuagint translation, not the Hebrew original, was the true Christian Bible and said so at considerable length in his Preface. But what is printed on the cover tells it all, and more concisely:

THE SEPTUAGINT

THE BIBLE USED BY OUR SAVIOUR

AND THE APOSTLES

USED IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

FOR A THOUSAND YEARS

. . . . . .

FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Twenty-five years went by before Pells, in 1929 (at the age of 89), finally turned his attention to Thomson's fourth and last volume, the New Testament, or as he called it, the New Covenant. The title on the cover of Pells's facsimile edition was:

THE NEW COVENANT

OR

THE NEW TESTAMENT

TRANSLATED FROM

CODEX VATICANUS[12]

[9] This work is entitled on the spine *Thomson's Septuagint* (see above, n. 2), but on the title page *The Old Covenant commonly called the Old Testament translated from the Septuagint by Charles Thomson, in two volumes* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1904; repr., Hove, U.K.: S. F. Pells, 1907)..

[10] Pells, *Hades* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1904).

[11] Avoiding all mention of hell, Thomson uses "Hades" in Matt 16:18 and in Luke 10:15, but "the mansion of the dead" consistently throughout the rest of the New Testament; see Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev 1:18, 6:8, 20:13-14). A note at Matt 16:18 explains: "*Hades*, the place, mansion or habitation of departed spirits." Thomson frequently renders "Hades" as "mansion of the dead" in his Septuagint as well.

[12] The full title on the title page was *The New Covenant commonly called the New Testament translated from John Field's Cambridge Edition, 1665, A Greek Text, first published at Amstelodami,*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This was a major error.[13] Thomson's New Testament was emphatically not translated from Codex Vaticanus, nor did Thomson ever claim that it was.[14] That great uncial manuscript had no appreciable impact on English translations until the era of Westcott and Hort and the English Revised Version of 1881. Pells was misled by the fact that Thomson's Septuagint was indeed translated largely from Vaticanus, or B (that manuscript having been the principal basis of the 1665 Cambridge Septuagint published by John Field, from which Thomson had worked). It is also true that Field published in the same year an edition of the Greek New Testament,[15] and it is a fair guess that Thomson's New Testament may have been drawn from that edition. But in contrast to Field's Septuagint, his early edition of the Greek New Testament was by no means based on Codex Vaticanus. Rather, it was a typical representative of the so-called *textus receptus*, the same sort of Greek text that had been the basis of the King James version.[16]

Whether Thomson used Field's 1665 Greek New Testament or some other, it is clear that he followed, as Kendrick Grobel noted in 1943, "some uncritical copy of the 'textus receptus' with some meager indication of variants." Grobel's article in the *Journal of Bible and Religion*[17] is worthy of attention, for it appears to have been the only serious evaluation of Thomson's New Testament in the two centuries since it first appeared. Surprisingly, Grobel seems to have worked directly from the rare 1808 original, knowing nothing of Pells' later facsimile reprints. At least two later writers who were heavily indebted to Grobel (John Reumann in 1965 and Bruce Metzger in 2001) show some knowledge of the 1904 Septuagint reprint but still no awareness of the 1929 New Testament facsimile that falsely

1639, of Codex Vaticanus, by Charles Thomson (Hove, U.K.: S.F. Pells, 1929). Muses seems to have taken this claim at face value (*The Septuagint Bible*, xxiii).

[13] Oddly enough, there is clear evidence that Pells himself knew better. In his book *The Church's Ancient Bible* (Hove, U.K.: S. F. Pells, n.d.), published after his edition of Thomson's Septuagint but well before that of the New Testament, he wrote, "Charles Thomson also translated the New Testament, but not from Codex Vaticanus, but from the text known as the Textus Receptus" (78 n. 1). The mistake must therefore be attributed either to carelessness or to irresponsible marketing.

[14] Inside, Pells printed a facsimile of Thomson's original title page, presenting itself more modestly as *The New Covenant commonly called the New Testament translated from the Greek* (Philadelphia: Jane Aitken, 1808). That Thomson's version was not based on Codex Vaticanus is evident at once from its retention of such passages as John 7:53–8:11 and Mark 16:9–20 without so much as a footnote.

[15] See Isaac H. Hall, "List of Printed Editions of the Greek New Testament," in Philip Schaff, *A Companion to the Greek New Testament and the English Version* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883) 504 (#195).

[16] According to Daniell, "His New Testament basis was a version of the *Textus Receptus* as printed by Field, who was reprinting Thomas Buck's edition of 1632, which reproduced the first Elzevir edition from Leiden in 1624, which itself reprinted Beza's of 1565" *The Bible in English*, 645.

[17] Grobel, "Charles Thomson, First American N.T. Translator—An Appraisal," *JBR* 11 (1943) 145–51. Grobel adds that "He consulted Karl Gottfried Woide's edition of Codex Alexandrinus (London, 1786) or quoted it at second hand" (147).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

claimed to be "translated from Codex Vaticanus."[18] That volume in fact has gone almost unnoticed,[19] and because it has, Thomson's New Testament (minus Pells's extravagant claims!) urgently needs and deserves to be reprinted. The present article is in fact based on that very hard-to-find 1929 facsimile.[20]

Thomson's Greek Text

Grobel's assessment provides at least a starting point for an assessment of Thomson's Greek text. Grobel noticed four places where Thomson departed from the *textus receptus*, each time with a note to that effect: Acts 9:20, Acts 11:20, 1 Cor 9:22, and 1 John 5:6–8.[21] To Grobel's list additional passages (with similar notes) can be added: Matt 6:13, where Thomson retains the doxology to the Lord's Prayer, but in brackets; Eph 5:9; 1 Pet 4:3; and Rev 18:17.[22] At other points no note signals Thomson's departure from the *textus receptus*: in Rom 16:7 Thomson reads the male name "Junias" in place of "Junia" (a woman according to the KJV and the *textus receptus*), referring to a person said to be "of note among the apostles,"[23] and

[18] See Reumann, 122–44, and Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 83–90.

[19] According to Margaret T. Hills, "Thomson's OT was printed in London in 2 vols by S. F. Pells. It was followed by the NT in 1929." *The English Bible in America* (New York: American Bible Society, 1962) 27. A. S. Herbert lists the 1904 Septuagint and notes that it was republished in 1907 but makes no mention at all of the 1929 New Testament *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible 1525–1961* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968) 452. David Daniell, drawing his information from those two sources, says only that Thomson's "New Testament was apparently reprinted in London in 1929" (it was actually reprinted in Hove, U.K.) *The Bible in English*, 646. The Harvard library online catalogue lists the 1904 Septuagint but not the 1929 New Testament; COPAC online lists one copy of the latter at Oxford.

[20] With the help of a friend I was able to obtain a copy from a British bookseller who advertised simply *Thomson's Septuagint* by Pells in three volumes. Only by inquiry did I ascertain that in fact it included the New Testament.

[21] While Thomson's rendering of Acts 9:20 ("Jesus" instead of "Christ") agrees with the better manuscripts, the choice of "Greeks" over "Hellenists" in Acts 11:20 remains an open question even today, and Thomson's preference for "all" rather than "some" in 1 Cor 9:22 (on the basis of "the Syriac and Vulgate translations") is almost certainly wrong. By far his longest note, running to almost a full page, is on 1 John 5:6–8, where he acknowledges the precedent of Luther, Zwingli, Erasmus, and Bullinger in omitting the famous *Comma Johanneum*.

[22] In Matt 6:13, later editors followed Thomson's precedent or else omitted the doxology altogether. He prefers "fruit of this light" over "fruit of the Spirit" in Eph 5:9, not only on the basis of ancient witnesses but "because by continuing the use of the same metaphor it seems most agreeable to the context." In 1 Pet 4:3 he omits "us," noting that "some copies have us and some you, and some neither." In Rev 18:17, instead of "And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships"(KJV), his translation is "And everyone sailing to the place, both mariners and traffickers by sea," with an accompanying note that "I here follow the Alexandrian and other ancient manusripts." In Jude 4 he follows the *textus receptus* but acknowledges an Alexandrian variant in a footnote.

[23] While this reading anticipated later Greek texts (including the Nestle text from 1927 to 1993) and later English versions (from the English Revised Version of 1881 through the RSV, NEB, and NIV), it is almost certainly incorrect. See Eldon J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005). Epp finds no English versions prior to Rodolphus Dickinson (1833) that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in Matt 1:23 he favors "thou shalt call" over "they shall call his name Emmanuel" (with Codex D, but perhaps simply in conformity with 1:21, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS"). Still another example is 1 Pet 3:15, where Thomson opts for a shorter reading, "the Lord" (attested nowhere in the manuscript tradition!), over both "the Lord God" of the *textus receptus* and the KJV and "the Lord Christ" of the more ancient manuscripts and modern English versions. Here he seems to have chosen simply to split the difference and keep "the Lord" ambiguous, as in the immediate Petrine context (see 3:12). As for other classic disputed passages in the New Testament (such as Mark 16:9–20, Luke 22:43–44, 23:34, John 5:3–4, 7:53–8:11), Thomson retains the *textus receptus* without bracket or comment.

Thomson's Translation

Thomson arguably improves on the KJV at a number of points. David Daniell praises him for Matt 6:34, "Sufficient for every day is its own trouble."[24] Another example is Matt 2:2, "For we have seen his star at its rise" (instead of "in the east"; compare the NRSV, "For we observed his star at its rising"). In Mark 14:41, "It is over" is at least as good as the KJV's "It is enough." Only in 1 Tim 1:11, 6:15, and Titus 2:13, where the Greek μακάριος refers to God, does Thomson render it as "blessed"; as Grobel points out, in New Testament beatitudes this adjective is "nearly always *happy*; *blessed* only with attributes of the Trinity."[25] Grobel also notices that the words translated "preach" (κηρύσσω) or "preach the gospel" (εὐαγγελίζω) in the KJV consistently appear in Thomson's New Testament as "proclaim," "make proclamation," or "publish." The two exceptions (which Grobel does not note) are the reminder in Acts 15:21 that "Moses hath in every city them who *preach* him" and the implied charge against Paul in Gal 5:11 that "I still *preach* circumcision"—both having to do with "proclamation" presumed (by Thomson at least) to be legalistic in nature. "Kingdom" (βασιλεία) according to Grobel "remains *kingdom* two-thirds of the time, especially when governed by a spatial preposition, but Thomson's preference seems to be for *reign*."[26] Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in John 3, where Jesus says, "unless a man be born again, he cannot discern the reign of God" (v. 3), and almost in the same breath "unless a man be born of water and

read the masculine (66), but he has overlooked at least two in addition to Thomson's: John Wesley's (London: William Bowyer, 1755), and Thomas Belsham's so-called "Improved Version" (Boston: Thomas B. Wait, 1809).

[24] Daniell, pointing to Tyndale, "for the daye present hath ever ynough of his awne trouble," and wondering "Did he in some way have access to a Tyndale New Testament? Or was it a case of great minds thinking alike, when they were translating the Greek text and not copying the Latin?" (*The Bible in English*, 645).

[25] Grobel, "Charles Thomson," 148. For this distinction, Thomson had ample precedent in John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (London: William Bowyer, 1755). "Woe," in Thomson, becomes "Alas" (see, e.g., the Lukan "woes" in 6:24–26, Jesus' denunciations of the Pharisees in Luke 11 and Matt 23, and Rev 8:13).

[26] Grobel, "Charles Thomson," 147–48.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (v. 5). John 1:11 is awkward but accurate: "He came to his own peculiar territories, and his own peculiar people did not receive him"; in the next verse, the KJV's "power to become sons of God" is changed (for the better) into "the privilege of becoming children of God" (v. 12); in the next, the phrase "not of bloods" is accurate even if not altogether clear (v. 13); and the next verse is both accurate and clear: "Now the *Word* became incarnate, and dwelt as in a tent among us" (v. 14; Thomson adds a note: "Literally *flesh*"). In John 9:36, 38 the man born blind addresses Jesus first as "Sir," not knowing who he is (v. 36) and then, when he recognizes him, as "Lord" (v. 38). The good shepherd "exposeth his life" for the sheep (John 10:12) but in the end will "lay down" his life (vv. 15, 17–18). And there will be "one flock," not "one fold," as in the KJV (v. 16). In John 12:24, 32, the phrases "on the ground" and "from the ground" respectively help the reader identify Jesus as "the grain of wheat" in his own parable. And in John 20:17, Jesus tells Mary Magdalene, "Cling not to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father."

At the same time, and not surprisingly, Thomson's translation contains certain expressions which, if not archaic, are at least far less common today than in the early nineteenth century. One obvious one is "mansion" in the phrase "mansion of the dead," not as "manor house" but as "lodging" or "abiding place" (compare John 14:2, both in Thomson and the KJV).[27] And at the feeding of the five thousand, after the miracle "there were carried away twelve panniers full of the fragments" (Mark 6:43; Matt 14:20).[28] In Luke 17:21, when Jesus is asked "when the reign of God would commence," he replies, "The reign of God doth not commence with parade,[29] nor shall they say, Lo here! or Lo there!" Phoebe in Rom 16:1 is neither "minister," "deacon," "deaconess," nor "servant," (διάκονος in Greek) but "an almoner of the congregation at Cenchrea"—that is, someone in charge of giving out alms to the poor.[30] Yet in keeping with Paul's terminology, Thomson's "almoners" in 1 Timothy are presumed to be male:

> Almoners in like manner should be grave, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not attached to sordid gain, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience; and let even such be first tried, then, if found blameless, let them exercise the office of almoners. Women in like manner should be grave, not addicted to slander, sober, faithful in all things. Let almoners be the husband of one wife, presiding well over their children and their own households. (1 Tim 3:8–12)

[27] See the *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary* (ed. Lesley Brown; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

[28] This can plausibly be attributed to a desire to do justice to two different Greek words for a basket or hamper. When both occur Thomson alternates between "pannier" and "basket" (e.g., Mark 8:10–21).

[29] That is, according to Brown, *New Shorter Oxford*, with "ostentatious display."

[30] According to Brown, *New Shorter Oxford,* "An official distributor of alms on behalf of an individual, as a monarch, or an institution, as a religious house." Thomson renders the same Greek word as "deacons" in Phil 1:2 and as "minister" or "attendant" elsewhere.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In John 14:16 Jesus promises "another monitor,"[31] not "another Comforter," as in the KJV (which is of course just as outdated), and refers to the Spirit thereafter as "the Monitor" (14:26, capitalized only there) or "the monitor" (15:26, 16:7). In 1 John 2:1, however, the same Greek word (παράκλητος) is translated as "advocate," with the KJV and most modern versions. Among the many other archaic or uncommon translations listed by Grobel are "bridemen" (Matt 9:15), "fainty" (Matt 9:36), "obtested" (Acts 2:40), and "at a loose" (Rom 6:20). He also lists "leaving the sex" (Rom 1:27), for the KJV's "leaving the natural use of the woman,"[32] but in this instance Thomson sounds almost modern by comparison.

In other passages, Thomson's efforts provoke thought and debate. In Heb 9:15–22, he maintains the translation "covenant" throughout the passage (even as the KJV maintains the translation "testament" throughout) instead of switching abruptly to "testament" or "will" at verse 16 as most modern translations have done.[33] The object of lust in Thomson's Matt 5:28 is "a married woman," presumably because the Greek word for "woman" also means "wife" and because it is a matter of "adultery."[34] "Repent" (μετανοέω) and "repentance" (μετάνοια) often become "reform" and "reformation," respectively. Hence Matt 3:2, 4:17: "Reform; for the reign of the heavens is at hand"; and Mark 1:15: "The time is accomplished, and the reign of God is at hand. Reform and confide in this good news." Yet Acts 2:38 appears as "Repent and let every one of you be baptized to the remission of sins for the name of Jesus Christ," and Acts 3:19 as "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be blotted out, that seasons of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord."[35] In Mark 1:15, the verb "confide" instead of "believe" (for πιστεύω) is jarring to modern ears and is atypical of Thomson's translation.[36] Almost everywhere else he uses "believe," in agreement with most other versions.[37] "Faith" (πίστις) is retained for the most part in the Gospels, but in the doctrinal portions of Paul's letters Thomson often prefers "belief" or "believing."[38] Sometimes this

[31] According to Brown, *New Shorter Oxford English*, "A person who . . . admonishes someone or gives advice or a warning as to conduct."

[32] Grobel, "Charles Thomson," 150.

[33] He defends his translation in a note: "This alludes to the custom then in use among both Jews and Gentiles, of ratifying treaties, leagues or covenants, by killing a victim." For a more sophisticated argument offering a different rationale for the same kind of translation, see Scott Hahn, "A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15–22," *CBQ* 66 (2004) 416–36.

[34] Here Grobel comments, "perhaps only by good luck—or did he know that adultery in Israel was legally the infringement of another man's property rights, and that therefore a husband's lechery with an unmarried woman was not adultery?" ("Charles Thomson," 148).

[35] See also Matt 11:21, 12:41; Luke 10:13, 11:32, 17:3–4, and Acts 8:22, where "repent" is similarly retained. Μετάνοια is rendered as "repentance" in Acts 5:31, 11:18 and as "the turning of the mind" in Acts 20:21. In Heb 12:17, the KJV's "no place of repentance" becomes "no way to change his father's mind." Everywhere else, Thomson translates the noun as "reformation."

[36] Quite possibly it can be explained by Mark's rather atypical use of the preposition ἐν instead of εἰς after the verb ordinarily translated as "believe" (πιστεύω).

[37] In John 14:1, however, he has "Trust in God: trust also in me."

[38] See Grobel, "Charles Thomson," 147.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

leads to paraphrase, as in Rom 1:17, where "from faith to faith" becomes "because of belief, that we may believe," and "the righteousness of God" expands into "a justification of God's appointment" (so too in 3:21). In Rom 1:18, "The just shall live by faith" becomes "But the just shall live because of belief" (so too in Gal 3:11). Yet in Hebrews the same quotation from Hab 2:4 appears as "the just shall live because of faith" (Heb 10:38"),[39] and "faith" is then consistently deployed throughout Hebrews 11. This is in keeping with Thomson's own rendering of Hab 2:4 ("But the just shall live by faith in me") and with the understanding of faith as faithfulness in Hebrews, yet most students of Paul today would acknowledge that faithfulness is a meaning close to the surface in Paul as well. But Thomson places the emphasis on intellectual assent, particularly when faith is linked to justification—as it is in Paul but not explicitly in Hebrews. Consequently, in Thomson's version of James the contrast is between justification by "belief" and works (see Jas 2:14–26), rather than "faith" and works (as in the KJV).

Thomson as Translator: The Believing Rationalist

What conclusions can be drawn from the translation about the translator? Thomson shows himself throughout to be a rationalist, yet not at all in the mold of his friend Thomas Jefferson, whose rationalism led him to attempt to reduce the New Testament to a set of morals, stripping it of every trace of the supernatural.[40] Rather, Thomson seems to have been a representative of what E. Brooks Holifield calls "the Baconian style of theology . . . a style calling for empirical, inductive and nonspeculative modes of thought."[41] It was the style dominant in Thomson's day, fine-tuned by the Scottish Common Sense Realism of the eighteenth century and common to Deists and orthodox Christians alike.[42] Among the latter it took the form of what Holifield calls "evidential Christianity," based on the assumption "that Christian theology was rational and that its rationality would commend it to the educated public."[43] Speaking for himself, Thomson said, "Attached to no system nor peculiar tenets of any sect or party, I have sought the truth with the utmost ingenuity, and endeavored to give a just and true representation of the sense and

[39] This is closer to Thomson's own rendering of Hab 2:4, "But the just shall live by faith in me."

[40] See *Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[41] E. B. Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003) 159. Mark Noll defines it as "The belief that the empirical, inductive procedures promoted by Francis Bacon (1561–1626) for use in physical sciences provided also the best methods for organizing ethics, epistemology, theology, and study of the Scriptures." *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 563–64.

[42] See Holifield, *Theology in America*, 174–80.

[43] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 195. "Before the mid-1830s," he adds, "the evidential arguments and the confidence in natural theology commanded almost universal assent among theologians in America."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

meaning of the Sacred Scriptures."[44] Thomson's translation situates him, like most of his contemporaries, somewhere within this movement, for he seems to have viewed the Christian revelation, including its miraculous or supernatural elements, as clear, concrete, and fully intelligible to the rational mind.[45] His preference for "belief" over "faith" in passages related to justification quite possibly reflects this tendency. It is worth noting that the movement known as Sandemanianism was alive and well in America in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Andrew Fuller, writing against this movement, describes it as defining "justifying faith" as "*the bare belief of the bare truth*; by which definition [Robert Sandeman] intends, as it would seem, to exclude from it every thing pertaining to the will and the affections, except as effects produced by it."[46] While there is no evidence that Charles Thomson had any connection at all to the Sandemanians, the movement seems to have become popular because it appealed to the same kind of common sense rationalism that influenced him. A similar tendency to define faith as simple belief in a testimony is evident as well in Alexander Campbell and the Restorationist movement.[47]

Thomson's rationalism often led him in the direction of concreteness, as in Luke 6:12, where Jesus spends the night not simply in prayer but more concretely "in a place set apart for prayer" (as in Acts 16:13, "an established place of prayer"). In 1 Tim 4:5, instead of meat "sanctified by the word of God and prayer," Thomson has it "sanctified by the permission of God and prayer," with a note explaining, "Literally, *word*, alluding I presume, to the liberty granted to Noe and his offspring to eat flesh [Gen 9:3]." In Heb 6:1, instead of "leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ" (KJV), he has "dropping the discourse of the government of Christ," with a note citing Isa 9:6, 7 (recalling the words "whose government is on his own shoulders" and "His government shall be great" in his translation of the Old

[44] Letter to the Reverend Samuel Miller, 6 January 1801, as quoted in Reumann, *Romance of Bible Scripts*, 130

[45] Compare Reumann: "That Thomson regarded himself as a seeker after truth, emancipated from denominationalism, is quite in harmony with the rationalistic spirit of the times." *Romance of Bible Scripts*, 130.

[46] *Strictures on Sandemanianism in Twelve Letters to a Freind* [*sic*] (New York: Richard Scott, 1812), 18. Fuller goes on to add, "When Mr. Pike became his disciple, and wished to think that by a 'bare belief' he meant a *hearty persuasion*, and not a mere notional belief, Mr. S. rejected his construction, and insisted that the latter was his true meaning" (1819). At least one American translator of the nineteenth century, Julia E. Smith, the only woman to translate the whole Bible into English, was a Sandemanian, but the theology of that movement seems to have had no particular influence on her extremely literal translation.

[47] According to Holifield (*Theology in America*, 299), "The restorationists incorporated this evidential tradition into their understanding of faith. Smith taught that to believe was merely to 'give credit to the report of another.' Both Stone and Campbell taught that faith was assent to testimony that was confirmed by evidence. 'Faith,' Campbell said, 'is neither more nor less than belief of some testimony.' For him, as for John Locke, faith meant assent to the testimony of the apostles that Jesus was the Messiah who rose from the dead." Not surprisingly, Alexander Campbell, whose translation of the New Testament is said to have been influenced by Thomson, was accused by some of being a Sandemanian, a charge he rejected.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Testament). The same love for concreteness may be at work also in his rendering of *ekklēsia* as "church" only in Matt 16:18 but everywhere else as "congregation" (except once as "assembly," in Acts 19:38). This becomes somewhat jarring—though less so than one might expect—in Colossians and Ephesians, where the church universal is commonly believed to be in view (e.g., Col 1:17: "and he is the head of the body, namely of the congregation"; Eph 5:23: "the husband is the head of the wife, even as the Christ is the head of the congregation"). Yet in other instances, Thomson pointedly avoids the concrete—translating "Mammon" not as money but more generally as "a worldly temper" (Matt 6:25) or "worldly prudence"—(Luke 16:13), and theorizes in a note on "the god of this world" (1 Cor 4:4) that "This may be he who is called, Mammon." In two other instances, he goes out of his way to underscore—even exaggerate—the negative view of the "world" in the Gospel of John and 1 John. At the end of the Gospel we read, "There are indeed many other things which Jesus did. With respect to them, if they were all committed to writing, one by one, even then I do not think the world would cordially receive the books written. Amen" (John 21:25). And in 1 John 5:19: "We know that we are of God and that the whole world is laid prostrate by the wicked one."

Occasionally Thomson will use a distinctive translation to offer a reasonable explanation of something he fears others might view as irrational. In Luke 14:26, for example, Jesus' disciples are called not to "hate" their parents, wives, brothers and children but to "slight" them (see also Rom 9:13, "Jacob I have loved and Esau I have slighted"; see also John 12:25). This is surely legitimate, but in Mark 3:21 he goes to tortuous lengths to avoid any implication that Jesus was thought to be out of his mind, least of all by his own friends or family (*hoi par' autou*). Those in question are rather "they who were just from it"—that is (as he explains in a note), those who "had just come in from the crowd at the gate"—who "heard and were going out to restrain it" (that is evidently the crowd, not Jesus!).[48] In Mark 9:29 it is not a certain kind of demon but "This kind [of power]" that "can go forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting." Both renderings are highly unlikely.[49] In Matthew 11:3, John the Baptist does not betray his ignorance by asking, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (as in the KJV) but instead acknowledges, "Thou art *the one coming*,"[50] before adding "May we expect another?" In John 6:70, Jesus refers to Judas Iscariot not as "a devil" but merely as "a spy," who had "thought of delivering him up" (v. 71)—this apparently on the basis of the meaning of *diabolos* as "slanderer" and by inference "informer." Sometimes

[48] Thomson is on somewhat firmer ground, however, in attributing the notion that Jesus was "distracted" rather to an indefinite "some," bracketed along with the charge made by the scribes from Jerusalem that he was "possessed by Beelzebub" (Mark 3:22).

[49] In Mark 9:29 he comments in a note, "I have added the words [*of power*] for the sake of perspicuity." But "power" has not been mentioned and moreover, "this kind" (*touto to genos*) is neuter, referring back to "it" in the preceding verse and to the neuter "dumb spirit" in the preceding narrative (Mark 9:17, 25).

[50] In a note Thomson defines *the one coming* as "a phrase used to denote the Messiah."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Thomson resolves a problem by adding something in brackets, as in Mark 9:29, or (at greater length) in John 4:43: "Now after the two days he departed thence, and went to Galilee, [but not directly to Nazareth] for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet is not honoured in his native place."[51] In 1 Pet 3:19, according to Thomson Jesus "went, and to the spirits which are [now] in prison made proclamation at the time they were disobedient—when the long suffering of God was waiting once for all in the days of Noe"—reviving an interpretation as old as Augustine. In Luke 23:54, instead of the KJV's "the sabbath drew on," Thomson has "the sabbath was clearing up," with a note, "That is, as I apprehend, the darkness was removed, and the sun, before setting, shone out."[52]

There are also some odd narrative transitions, as in John 5:47, where Thomson borrows the words, "After these things Jesus went away," from 6:1 to bring closure to Jesus' discourse in chapter 5 and set the stage for an abrupt change of scene in chapter 6. He reads John 12:42–44 as a single sentence (with v. 43 as a parenthesis) in order to make Jesus' words in vv. 44–50 a direct response to those who "believed in him, but on account of the Pharisees did not acknowledge it" (v. 42). And in an attempt to blunt the admittedly strange transition from Romans 7 to Romans 8, he draws Rom 7:25–8:1 together into one sentence, "I thank God that through Jesus Christ our Lord . . . there is then no condemnation now to them who are in Christ Jesus and who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit" (again with a parenthesis in the middle: "do I then myself with the mind serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin?").

Apologetic concerns become explicit at certain points, as we might expect of a rationalist interested in Christian evidences. In Luke 2:2, for example, a long note distinguishes between two enrollments, "the first merely for the purpose of numbering the inhabitants and the second for assessing them." In Matt 27:9, where the Gospel writer attributes Zechariah's words (Zech 11:13) to Jeremiah, Thomson ingeniously refers the reader to the "note on Zach. 9.1 at the close of the preceding volume." Sure enough, the reader who then goes to the end of Thomson's Septuagint will find a long note ascribing Zechariah 9–14 in its entirety to Jeremiah![53] In the

[51] He explains in a note that "Something seems to be wanting. From what follows, it appears that the words '*but not directly to Nazareth*,' have been omitted in transcribing; I have, therefore, inserted them in brackets." Here he is in remarkable agreement with John Wesley, who in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (1755) left the text pretty much intact but added in a note, "*He went into Galilee*—that is, into the Country of *Galilee*; but not to *Nazareth*. It was at that town only that he *had no Honour*. Therefore he went to other towns" (234).

[52] An ingenious, if not altogether convincing, solution to the difficulty that the Sabbath is said to be "dawning" (*epephōsken*) just as it gets later (and darker) on Friday evening. Where most translations take "dawning" metaphorically, Thomson takes it literally, in relation to the preceding "darkness over the whole land" (Luke 23:44).

[53] The note is worth quoting in full: "Zacharias IX.I, *A Burden*.] This, and the five following chapters, though added to what Zacharias wrote, appear evidently, from the style and subjects, to be the work of another. The Evangelist Matthew, in his quotation, (Chap. II. [*sic*]) ascribes them to Jeremias. And it must be allowed that the contents of these chapters agree well with the time of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

epistles, Thomson reads 1 Cor 12:31a as indicative rather than imperative: "But you are ambitious of those gifts which are of superior excellence" (instead of "But covet earnestly the best gifts" in the KJV), with a note citing 14:12 and calling attention to Paul's immediate answer, "Well, I am going to point out to you a way still more excellent" (v. 31b). In Romans 8:29, Thomson comments in a note "that the apostle here alludes to the first creation, and particularly to Gen 1.26," and translates accordingly: "For those whom he foreknew, even these he marked out beforehand to be of a form the same as that of the image of his son."

Even more labored is his exegesis of Rom 9:3a, which he takes to be parenthetical: "(for I even I myself wished the followers of Christ to be devoted to destruction)." Here, possibly offended by the notion that Paul was willing to be damned for the glory of God, Thomson dissolves the Apostle's remarkable willingness to be "accursed from Christ" (KJV) so that his fellow Israelites might be saved in favor of a simple allusion to Paul's persecution of Christians as Saul of Tarsus before his conversion (see Acts 8:3, 9:1–2). Thomson justifies his bizarre translation in a long note in which he argues for a partitive use of the preposition "from" (*apo*) with *anathema*, "a person or thing devoted to destruction . . . denoting that the person or thing may be from among men or beasts, or part of one's possessions. So the apostle says that he himself wished some from the Christ, that is, some of the followers of the Christ to be an anathema, that is, devoted to destruction, and therefore he persecuted them."[54] This is clearly wrong, for *apo tou Christou* has to mean "from Christ" (as in the KJV), not "from among those who are Christ's." Paul's desire, in the tradition of Moses (see Exod 32:32), to put his own salvation at risk for the sake of his people Israel is not so easily dismissed.

Thomson as Translator: The Rhetorician

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Thomson's translation is his fondness for setting up New Testament passages, especially in Paul's letters, in the form of dialogues between Paul and those he imagines rhetorically as his interlocutors. These he clearly intends as helps to the reader. His background in politics seems to have given him a sensitivity to the rhetorical give and take of lively discussion and debate. Kendrick Grobel noticed this and commented on it favorably: "It is a striking testimony to Thomson's good stylistic feeling that he almost always

Jeremias, but by no means with that of Zacharias. And the same may be said with respect to the style, which corresponds with that of Jeremias, but not in the least with that of Zacharias. From the words of the Evangelist it would appear, that in his time, they were considered as being written by Jeremias:—and it is to be observed that in some ancient manuscripts, there is a large vacant space between the end of Chap. VIII. and IX. to distinguish what precedes, from that which follows."

[54] Thomson cited Leviticus 27:28 LXX, which reads in his translation, "But with respect to every Anathema which a man may devote to the Lord from all that he hath, whether from [*apo*] man or beast, or from [*apo*] field of his possession, it shall not be sold or redeemed." He reads the "from" (*apo*) in Romans 9:3 the same way, as a partitive construction referring to some "from" among those who are Christ's as the ones accursed or "devoted to destruction."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

coincides with Bultmann's analysis of the diatribe-form in Paul, conspicuous in which was the assumption of a fictitious opponent for an apparent debate."[55] It is a technique already used extensively in Thomson's Old Testament. In the prophets, for example, he frequently uses letters to distinguish between lines assigned to Jehovah (J) and the prophet (p) or between an objection (a) and an answer (b). Occasionally there will come into play a "chorus" (c), "Sion" or Jerusalem (s), the "sententious speeches of the false prophets" (f), the Messiah (M), and in one instance (Isa 27) "the city" (c) and "the vineyard" (v). Such dialogues extend through much of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations, are less frequent in Ezekiel, and are absent in Daniel but occur in all of the minor prophets except Obadiah, Jonah, Haggai, and (surprisingly) Zechariah. I found only three examples in the Wisdom literature (Job 5:7–8, Eccles 3:24–26, and Psalm 75).

In the New Testament, Thomson inserts (J) and (A) into his text five times in Romans, with a note that the former represents "A Jew's objection" and the latter "The apostle's answer." The first four instances (Rom 3:1–18, 7:7–13, 9:14–16, and 30–33) are fully convincing, definite helps to the reader, anticipating not only Rudolf Bultmann's classic analysis of the diatribe but the conclusions of most commentators on Romans since then. But the last and longest example (Rom 10:14–11:18) is rather less so.[56] It is marred by Thomson's dubious rendering of 10:18 as a question rather than a statement, a question attributed not to Paul but to his Jewish interlocutor: "What! Is their sound then gone forth to every land; and their doctrines to the end of the limits of the world?" Nor does it make sense to assign the words, "I say then, Hath God utterly rejected his people?" (11:1) to the interlocutor and not to Paul. There is little reason, in fact, to continue the dialogue form past 10:21. If Paul is interacting with anyone in chapter 11, it is with a Gentile, not a Jew (see for example 11:17, "and thou, being a wild olive ingraffed among them").

Thomson adopts a similar strategy in Galatians 3, this time distinguishing "An objection" (a) from "The answer" (b), without explicitly identifying the intelocutor as Jewish. When Paul argues that the Abrahamic promise trumps the law (3:15–18), someone asks, "*To what purpose then was the law*?" (v. 19a). Paul replies that "On account of transgressions it was superadded until the seed should come to whom the promise was made, and it was introduced through angels by the hand of a mediator; but this mediator was not of one party" (vv. 19b–20a), and a serious debate is under way. Thomson then ingeniously divides the notorious verse 20 in two, as the interlocutor abruptly objects, "*But God is one party; is then the law against the promises of God*?" (vv. 20b–21a)—prompting Paul's "No, by no means," and a lengthy reply (vv. 21–29). Thomson has worked hard here to resolve

[55] Grobel, "Charles Thomson," 148, referring to Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Der ganzen Reihe 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910).

[56] See, e.g., Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 595–96, who acknowledges 10:14–21 as a diatribe but divides it quite differently from Thomson.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

some well-known difficulties of a notoriously difficult text, and his efforts, while far from compelling, deserve consideration.

In 1 Corinthians, he is on firm ground in 6:12–13 and 10:23–24 (anticipating most modern commentators) in distinguishing certain "Arguments used by the Corinthians to justify their conduct" (a) from "The apostle's answer" (b).[57] Not so clearcut is 10:29b–30, which he also characterizes as "Arguments used by the Corinthians" (a), for it is by no means self-evident that verse 31 ("Whether then you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God") is, as he proposes, "The apostle's answer" (b) to what precedes. More likely, it is merely a summary of the whole preceding discussion, and verse 29b–30 are Paul's own thoughts, not those of the Corinthians. In these instances he uses both italics and the (a) and (b) notations to make his point, but elsewhere in 1 Corinthians he uses only italics to set off what he calls "the boasts of those who set themselves up against Paul" (1 Cor 4:8a and 10) from Paul's own words. This time his helps to the reader are no help at all, for the words in question (e.g., *"You are now full! You are now rich!"* and *"We are fools on the account of Christ; but you are prudent in Christ"*) are manifestly Paul's own words and spoken from his viewpoint, not words put in the mouths of his opponents.

Another example is 1 Cor 8:1–6, where the words in italics (*"we know that we all have knowledge,"* v. 1, and then vv. 4–6 in their entirety[58]) are read as "the reasoning of those who set themselves in opposition to the apostle" and "the apology made by some Corinthian teacher for eating things offered to idols," respectively. This has the extraordinary effect of attributing 1 Cor 8:6, one of the great early Christian confessions of faith,[59] to Paul's opponents! While Thomson's reconstruction is understandable, it overlooks the very considerable common ground which Paul and his opponents—at least these opponents—both shared. Most confusing of all is 1 Cor 15:27b–32, which Thomson reads as "a repetition of the scoffs and reasonings of the aforementioned Sadducees who deny the resurrection." This has the (possibly desired) effect of getting rid of "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die" (v. 32) as a pronouncement of Paul, as well as the reference (v. 29) to baptism for the dead (attributing them instead to his opponents), but it overlooks the fact that the practice of baptizing for the dead is used here as an argument for, not against, the resurrection. A long explanatory note only multiplies the confusion.[60]

[57] Interestingly, he makes no such move in connection with 1 Cor 14:34–35, where Helen Barrett Montgomery in 1924 famously translated, "In your congregation [you write,] as in all the churches of saints, let the women keep silence," adding in a note that "Paul is probably quoting a sentence from the Judaizers." *The New Testament in Modern English* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1954) 465.

[58] In Thomson's translation, "*yet to us there is but one God, the father of all, of whom are all things and we for him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by him*."

[59] See the discussion in Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007) 89–94.

[60] I can only quote from the note, without pretending to understand it: "that it is not the language of the apostle appears evident—1. From the form of common swearing therein contained, which

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Thomson proceeds differently in 2 Corinthians, where he does not attempt to set up a formal dialogue or diatribe but merely uses italics to call attention to "reflections cast upon the apostle by his opposers" (2 Cor 3:1, 10:1, and implicitly 5:12, 11:21, 12:16). More informative but also more controversial are the italics calling attention to what his note calls "a specimen of his preaching to the unconverted, Jews or Gentiles" (2 Cor 5:20–6:2). Nor is Thomson very consistent in the notations he uses to identify his rhetorical dialogues. In Heb 2:8, for example, the words "But now we do not yet see all things in subjection to him" (without italics) are labeled as an objection (o) answered (a) in vv. 9–10—not by the more common (a) and (b) labels. Here too the use of the dialogue form is plausible but of little consequence so far as the reader is concerned. And in Jas 2:18–19, where some kind of rhetorical dialogue clearly is going on, Thomson leaves readers to fend for themselves.

The dialogue or diatribe form is not well suited to narrative. I have found no example of it in Thomson's Old Testament, and he attempts it only once in the Gospels, in John 5:31–39. To the Jews who "sought the more to kill him" (5:18), Jesus says "*If I testify of myself, my testimony is not true!*" (v. 31), and Thomson reads these words as "repetitions of objections made by some of the audience, to which our Lord makes the following replies." By his use of italics in the next several verses, he gives the impression that the same is true of 5:37b, "*You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen a visible appearance of him*," and 39a, "*You search the scriptures because you think you have by means of them everlasting life!*" But this is impossible, for the latter two are clearly Jesus' own words directed against his adversaries, not theirs against him, nor even his representation of their charges against him. Possibly Thomson was misled by the inconsistency between "*If I testify of myself, my testimony is not true!*" (v. 31) and a later pronouncement where Jesus claims, "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true" (8:14, KJV; as it is, he weakens that pronouncement in his own translation: "Though I testify concerning myself, my testimony is to be regarded"). Here again Thomson's notes and italics raise more questions in the reader's mind than they answer. While his recognition of the diatribe form in a number of places is a significant contribution and one that places him far ahead of his time, he has without question overstated his case.

---

the apostle explains in a parenthesis; 2. From the severe reprehension in his answer, charging it with profaneness; and, 3. From his quoting another objection of, (I apprehend), the same scoffer." Evidently the second point is referring to v. 33, "Be not led astray; 'good morals are debauched by talk profane,' " and the third to v. 35, "But a certain person will say . . ." What is unclear is his first objection, which apparently refers to his v. 30: "I swear by that boasting of yours (meaning that which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord)." Earlier in the note Thomson says that he regards "all but the parenthesis" as the words of Paul's opponents. He seems to read "I swear by that boasting of yours" as their words to Paul, to which he interjects in parenthesis: "(meaning that which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord)." On such a reading the "I" who "dies daily" and who "fought with beasts at Ephesus" appears to be an unidentified opponent of Paul, and the "boasting of yours" (*humeteran*, plural!) is assumed to be the boasting of Paul! It is impossible to make sense of the text on such a reading.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For all the flaws and limitations of his enterprise, Thomson succeeded uncommonly well in what he set out to do. Perhaps significantly, where the traditional text warned that "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Pet 1:20, KJV), Thomson translated, "no prophecy of the scripture explaineth itself." Interpretation was needed, but he believed that one man's interpretation, even that of a layman who taught himself Greek, was by no means necessarily inferior to that of a committee with the authority of centuries behind it. This, of course, was on the condition (as he put it) that he "give a just and true representation of the sense and meaning of the Sacred Scriptures; and in doing this, I have further endeavored to convey into the translation, as far as I could, the spirit and manner of the authors, and thereby give it the quality of an original."[61] The Thomson translation, like Thomson the man, qualifies as nothing less than an American original. It is the first, and classic, example of the traditional text of Scripture encountering early American democracy, individualism, and rational ingenuity.

[61] See Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States 1777–1880* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999) 94, citing Lewis R. Harley, *The Life of Charles Thomson: Secretary of the Continental Congress and Translator of the Bible from the Greek* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1900) 163.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816011000253 Published online by Cambridge University Press