



2006

"Monkeying with the Bible": Edgar J. Goodspeed's American Translation

R. Bryan Bademan
Sacred Heart University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Other American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bademan, R. Bryan, "'Monkeying with the Bible': Edgar J. Goodspeed's American Translation" (2006). *History Faculty Publications*. Paper 12.
http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History Department at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact ferribyp@sacredheart.edu.

“Monkeying with the Bible”: Edgar J. Goodspeed’s *American Translation*

R. Bryan Bademan

It would throw the Christian world into inextricable confusion; it would destroy the universality of much of our existing literature . . . ; it would annihilate the common dialect of the English and American Christian world, to substitute a new for our beloved old version of the Scriptures. We may confidently hope that the Providence of God will never permit such a measure to be carried out.

—“English Translations of the Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1858)

I

“From every angle,” announced Philadelphia’s bibliophile Alfred Edward Newton in 1923, the Bible is “the Greatest Book in the World: so great that if a man can be found in a civilized country who has never heard of the Bible, it nevertheless influences his life, and influences it for good.” Haverford College’s Elihu Grant agreed, suggesting that “the germ and the logic of an incalculable improvement are of the very genius of the Bible,” such that the inner dynamic of the Bible itself both paralleled and promoted growth in civilization. Like so many Americans in the early twentieth century, Newton and Grant took the civilizing qualities of the Christian Bible for granted.¹

Americans were not agreed, however, on what it was about the Bible that promoted civilization so effectively. While some emphasized aspects of its divine (or at least enduring) message or its progressive spirit, others opined that the Bible had a more direct and material relationship to culture. They held that the actual language of the Bible was cause for its enormous and important influence. Unlike today, when Protestants referred to the Bible in the English-speaking world around the turn of the twentieth century, they usually had a particular text in mind. The Bible for them was the King James Version (KJV) or, at least, bibles made to read like it such as the Revised Version (RV) of 1881.² According to contemporaries, the KJV

Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation, Vol. 16, Issue 1, pp. 55–93, ISSN: 1052-1151; electronic ISSN 1533-8568. © 2006 by The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm>.

towered as "one of the monuments and masterpieces of the English language," a literary cornerstone stabilizing the mammoth edifice of Western and American civilization.³ Especially important for white Protestants, this Bible boasted an esteemed genealogy, one running through the English Reformation and the dramatic advance of Anglo-Saxon civilization in its wake. For many early-twentieth-century Americans, devotion to the Bible was as much a complex *cultural* commitment as it was, obviously, a narrowly religious one; it bound readers to early modern England even as it spoke of ancient Israel and the early church.⁴

Given such veneration for the KJV, when University of Chicago biblical scholar Edgar J. Goodspeed (1871–1962) produced the first self-styled "American" translation of the New Testament in 1923, a public reaction was, perhaps, inevitable.⁵ His idiomatic translation, offering the New Testament in simple, *American* English, provoked a strong reaction from Americans unwilling to have their Bible subjected to the crass commerciality of the 1920s.⁶ Goodspeed neither appreciated nor anticipated this mainstream Protestant attachment to the traditional KJV Bible, an attachment, this essay shows, that did not stem principally from fundamentalist conservatism. Though he was as committed as they were to the idea and ideals of a biblical civilization, he ironically and, it seems, unwittingly undermined that civilization by translating the biblical text into contemporary, upbeat, and easy-to-understand prose. That some thought Goodspeed's title an implicit attack on the KJV makes the response to Goodspeed crucial for understanding America's complex relationship to the Bible at that time.⁷

The publication of Goodspeed's *The New Testament: An American Translation* with the University of Chicago Press was a small sensation. A month prior to its release, the *Literary Digest*, reviewing prerelease portions of the work, was already remarking that modern-language translations have "so stirred the press as to make the Bible the most-talked-of book of the day."⁸ Primarily as a result of Goodspeed's little book, American newspapers, journals, and magazines witnessed a veritable explosion of interest in the Bible and its language, and Christian ministers across the nation began gratifyingly reporting that Americans seemed fascinated with any news regarding the Holy Scriptures. An editor for the *Christian Century* noted that the "publicity value" that attended the new translation "is sufficient to show that the Bible is far and away the best of the 'best-sellers,' and that any new disclosure of its form and meaning has first rank popular interest."⁹ Herbert L. Willett, secretary of the Federal Council of Churches, was equally hopeful about the broader cultural significance

of this attention. "The results of such an event upon the general biblical intelligence of the nation will be incalculable," he predicted. For him, the public space given Goodspeed's Bible signaled the dawn of a new era of biblical allegiance in America.¹⁰ Not for more than forty years, since the Revised Version of 1881, had a Bible translation stimulated such popular excitement.¹¹

While praising the public's enthusiasm for the Bible, most newspaper editors were less than sanguine about Goodspeed's particular project. Over the course of the following year, editors and their readers began publicizing and publishing their concerns about the new translation.¹² Hearing of its impending release, an editor for the *Chicago Tribune* ran a scathing article simply titled "Monkeying with the Bible." While unfortunately not elaborating on the anti-Darwinism of the title, this Chicago journalist did wax profusely on the literary and spiritual merits of traditional translations. Comparing the "needless utilitarianism" of modern-language translations to the "needed beauty" of the King James Version (what some editors tellingly misnamed the "St. James Version"¹³), the author suggested that American democracy should "cherish its heritage of beauty" and reject such crude attempts to mass-market religion. To profane the aesthetic legacy of the Bible by translating the Bible into contemporary idiom was, accordingly, akin to tearing down temples to build warehouses or to forcing Shakespeare into the language of the street. Other newspaper editors, sharing these sentiments, dubbed Goodspeed's work the "Slang Bible" or "The Bible a la Chicago" and represented it as an attempt to put the New Testament into a commercial "Americanese." An editor for the *Pittsburgh Press* claimed that the University of Chicago was "as daring in its disregard of tradition and precedent as the flappers of Chicago are of what respectable elderly ladies call good morals and decency." And the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* sarcastically wondered if Goodspeed intended to put pants on the apostles.¹⁴ According to such critics, Goodspeed's little translation undermined American moral culture, cheapening a historic repository of sacred associations. As one midwestern review put it, "Revising the King James version strikes many as almost a sacrilege."¹⁵

Goodspeed was not slow to defend his work, and his ready rebuttal won him the admiration of several liberal-minded ministers across the nation. Often such supporters drafted letters to their local papers with critiques of the prejudiced and reactionary coverage. The mix of criticism and praise that surrounded Goodspeed gave his little book record sales and prompted the University of Chicago Press within two months to ask Goodspeed to coordinate a modern-language Old Testament to accompany it. At about the same time, the *Chicago*

Evening Post's radio station (KYW) began broadcasting daily readings from Goodspeed's translation. Originally setting the program for a four-week trial period, the station, overwhelmed by public interest, extended it indefinitely. In fact, the *American Translation* generated so much attention in its first months that more than a dozen major American and Canadian newspapers printed Goodspeed's New Testament in its entirety, with many more publishing sizeable portions. (Often these were spaced out over several weeks.)¹⁶

Why such widespread alarm and interest? Since the work was an *American* translation, designed specifically for American reading preferences, one might expect the translation to have received a modest but courteous welcome from the American reading public. Or, given hostility to the project, one might anticipate it from conservative Protestants, beginning in these years to bear the label "fundamentalist" for their manner of adhering to what they saw as the fundamentals of orthodox Christianity. Goodspeed was a self-proclaimed theological modernist, with a prestigious position at one of the intellectual centers of that movement, and no sympathizer to fundamentalism.¹⁷ Yet, Goodspeed's project, while occasionally rubbing a fundamentalist the wrong way, did much more to rile moderate or mainstream Protestants, those who did not take a strong stance in the emerging fundamentalist-modernist debates.¹⁸ Hence, it is worth asking: What made this translation such a point of contention for mainstream Protestants? And why was Goodspeed's work singled out, since the fifty years prior to the *American Translation* witnessed an average of one English-language translation every two years?¹⁹

This article will attempt to answer these questions, first, by looking at Goodspeed the biblical scholar and the nature of his project; second, by analyzing the character of the reaction that followed (in rough chronological order); and third, by briefly assessing the importance of Goodspeed's project in our understanding of American religion and culture in his time. We will see how religious people, cultural aesthetes, newspaper editors, and even the intelligentsia proclaimed—more or less overtly—that traditional biblical *language*, especially that of the King James Version, protected and abetted the growth of American biblical civilization, especially with regard to its democratic political culture. In other words, in the view of America's Protestant majority, American identity and progress were bound up with its reverence for and preservation of the traditional biblical text. This conviction, in turn, regularly (though not necessarily) corresponded with a belief that the Bible's language, though in translation, was sacred—and, therefore, not to be changed. While, with time, these convictions would be shaken—and, indeed, Goodspeed devoted

himself to such a task—their presence suggests that, at least until the 1920s, American national identity was conceptualized by mainstream Protestants as stemming directly from fidelity to a more or less static biblical text. Many held that the Bible's message *and language* contained the raw materials for sustaining liberal democracies. The ultimate success of Goodspeed and other translators in relaxing American attachment to traditional biblical language suggests one way that subsequent social and political life in America became more "secular," even as that so-called secularization ironically paved the way for a virtual explosion in demand for new translations of the Bible. Though the public outrage over Goodspeed's translation dissipated as the months passed, interest in the worth of modern-language translations did not. That Americans in the 1920s were, by and large, unwilling to relinquish their preference for the King James Version (or, for some, more formal-sounding versions like the RV) reflects a broad commitment to the Bible and traditional biblical language which, in the 1920s, transcended denomination, class, region, and even the seemingly impassable divide between fundamentalists and modernists.

II

Goodspeed's minister father, Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed (1842–1927), was one of the University of Chicago's first trustees, ensuring that young Edgar felt right at home in the scholarly Baptist milieu characteristic of the early university. He had been tutored in Latin at the age of ten by his father's students at Baptist Union Theological Seminary in Morgan Park, Illinois. As a boy, he grew acquainted with the University of Chicago's first president, Old Testament professor William Rainey Harper—the man "who created the unescapable impression . . . that I was going to study Hebrew with him and become a professor."²⁰ Harper's influence on Goodspeed's life and career was inestimable. By the time Goodspeed was twenty-one, he had taken a degree at Denison University, completed a year of graduate study at Yale (with Harper), and returned to Chicago to finish graduate work (again, under Harper) when the University of Chicago opened its doors in 1892. After earning his Ph.D. and studying two years in Germany under Adolf von Harnack and Fritz Krebs, Harper took him on the faculty as full professor. In the field of biblical studies, Goodspeed earned his claim to fame early on as the first American to collect, decipher, and publish Greek papyri. Later, in 1919, he served as the president of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis and, from 1920 to 1924, as secretary to the president of the University of Chicago. From 1930 onward, Goodspeed served on the American Standard

Bible Committee, thus providing critical leadership in the production of the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament of 1946. During these years, he unfolded his influential Ephesians hypothesis, which shed light on the origin and authenticity of the book as well as, more generally, the formation of the New Testament in early Christianity. In 1937, he left Chicago to retire in California but ended up teaching at UCLA for more than a decade. In 1950, the editor of the *Christian Century*, Harold E. Fey, described him in unequivocal terms as “America’s greatest New Testament scholar.”²¹

Goodspeed’s participation in the latest New Testament Greek scholarship made him ever aware of the inadequacies of existent New Testament translations, particularly the King James Version. Criticisms of the Authorized Version (the KJV) had been accumulating for more than a century, leading to the aforementioned revision attempts—the Revised Version (1881) and the American Standard Version (1901). Scholars pointed out that the KJV was based on too recent and sometimes faulty manuscripts, that its seventeenth-century language was highly misleading in particular passages, and that it contained significant translation errors. Manuscript analysis, especially, had accelerated in the nineteenth century, culminating in the acclaimed Greek text of B. F. Westcott and Fenton J. A. Hort (1881), making it relatively simple for new translations to surpass old ones in accuracy.²² “In our age,” Goodspeed liked to say, “we actually know more exactly what Paul and the Evangelists wrote than has been possible in any century since the fourth.”²³ Even more important to Goodspeed’s project, discoveries of Greek papyri and subsequent grammatical research led biblical scholars to reject the assumption that the New Testament had been written in a polished, high-cultured prose.²⁴ Around the turn of the century, scholars like Goodspeed discovered that the message of the Christian gospel had been written to ordinary men and women in the “common language of everyday life.”²⁵ This revelation alone, according to Goodspeed, made the 1881 Revised Version obsolete.²⁶ So when Chicago colleague Shirley Jackson Case suggested to Goodspeed, in February 1920, that he commence a translation of the New Testament for publication by the University of Chicago Press, Goodspeed eagerly complied. In the context of Goodspeed’s career, the opportunity to translate the New Testament would provide a wide public forum for his ideas about the Bible as well as serve to boost an already impressive career in New Testament studies.

Goodspeed’s desire to translate the New Testament stemmed from another important intellectual context. James Wind has shown that the University of Chicago was unique among turn-of-the-century universities because of the “biblical millennialism” of its founder, Wil-

liam Rainey Harper. Wind showed how Harper and his early colleagues deemed "constructive biblical scholarship, scientifically done, unfettered by the weight of tradition," to be the sure path to remaking America into a "modern version of the biblical world."²⁷ Biblical scholars at Chicago argued that such a regimen would preserve Christianity by identifying it with the best of twentieth-century culture. Shailer Mathews, dean of the University of Chicago's Divinity School from 1908 to 1933 and close friend of Goodspeed, wrote of his early years at the university with such ideas in mind: "We felt ourselves to be something more than observers or critics of conventional church life. We had a Cause, the extension of correct, as we believed, inspiring views of the Bible. We could not be cloistered scholars: we were to serve a religious movement."²⁸ Goodspeed's explicit desire to "make the Bible better known in America" must be seen as part of this larger institutional religious and cultural vision.²⁹

This faith in a correctly interpreted Bible, however, contained a central irony for biblical scholars of Goodspeed's generation. Like a growing number of intellectuals, Goodspeed was an avid proponent of cultural progress and believed that faith in this progress was an essential component of what made Americans a special people.³⁰ In fact, he viewed his work as a translator as stemming directly from a commitment to progress. Part of the project of "progress" at the University of Chicago, of course, was to take a critical stance toward the Bible. This included, among other things, viewing the Bible as a product of human hands, thus opening it to scholarly critique. Yet, scholars like Goodspeed also believed that society needed the wisdom and principles that the Bible afforded. The Bible itself, therefore, according to the leading modernist minister Harry Emerson Fosdick, became an enigma: the average pastor "knows that the people need its message in full power and clearness, and cannot bear to think that it is losing influence with them. Yet he is not entirely free to use it. Criticism has altered the book for his use."³¹ For many, including Goodspeed, the way out of this distressing situation was to affirm that the Bible possessed vital religious sentiments, while denying that they could be uncritically followed. Shrouded in an antiquated diction, however, such sentiments were not easily discerned. Therefore, Goodspeed employed the finest historical, biblical, literary, and archeological research to produce what he felt was the best, clearest, and most refined Bible ever to grace an American readership. He offered his New Testament in the hope that it would be precisely what American religion needed to stay apace with the times.

Goodspeed worked diligently to incorporate some of these broader cultural goals into the *American Translation*, producing a New

Testament that would differ in significant ways from the conventional KJV. Perhaps most important, he wanted it to be a pleasure to read, like a good novel or personal letter. Since “translation English is mostly no English at all,” Goodspeed strove to “cultivate [his] English feeling.”³² He shied away from literal, word-for-word renderings, favoring those that translated idea for idea. His task was first to grasp what the New Testament writers meant to say and then put that thought in simple, clear, even plain English, all the while attempting to instill his version with “something of the force and freshness that reside in the original Greek.”³³ Goodspeed’s translation was hardly distinctive when compared to analogous British modern-language translations. Yet, compared to either the KJV or the RV, the versions most critics claimed he was challenging, Goodspeed’s translation stands out for its simplicity (or, as some would have it, simplification). Though a few appreciated his interpretive clarifications—for example, in 1 Corinthians 13:2, he substitutes “inspired to preach” for “gift of prophecy”—many felt he transgressed his duty as translator in making overt interpretations of the text. Additionally, this aim for clarity meant that Goodspeed would change peculiarly British renderings to their American equivalents, such as “wheat” for “corn,” renderings that often led to misunderstandings of the text. Following this principle assiduously, Goodspeed was not hesitant to speak of “dollars” (Matthew 25:14) or “cars” (Acts 8:27–29). His *American Translation* also lacked many of the conventions of an ordinary Bible. It was shorn of chapter and verse numbers, though they appeared on the bottom of the page and, in some editions, in the margins. It had modern paragraphing, of the sort one would find in a contemporary novel. And it lacked footnotes, comments, and all scholarly apparatus (see Figure 1).

If the material aspects and production of the translation reflected the goals of Goodspeed’s scholarship, so too did the distribution and marketing. Donald Bean, manager of the University of Chicago Press, not only advertised in every major religious periodical and in many metropolitan newspapers, but he also advertised on billboards and on the sides of delivery wagons.³⁴ And he worked with a multilevel pricing scheme, offering the *American Translation* for \$3.00 in a regular edition, \$2.50 in a pocket edition, and, in March 1924, \$1.50 in a “popular-priced edition.”³⁵ It was a Bible fashioned for a wide, largely middle-class readership, and Goodspeed and Bean hoped that it would bring the best of the university to the American people.

Yet, the public reaction that followed the announcement of the *American Translation* suggests that many American consumers did not share Goodspeed’s or Bean’s broader goal of making religion relevant

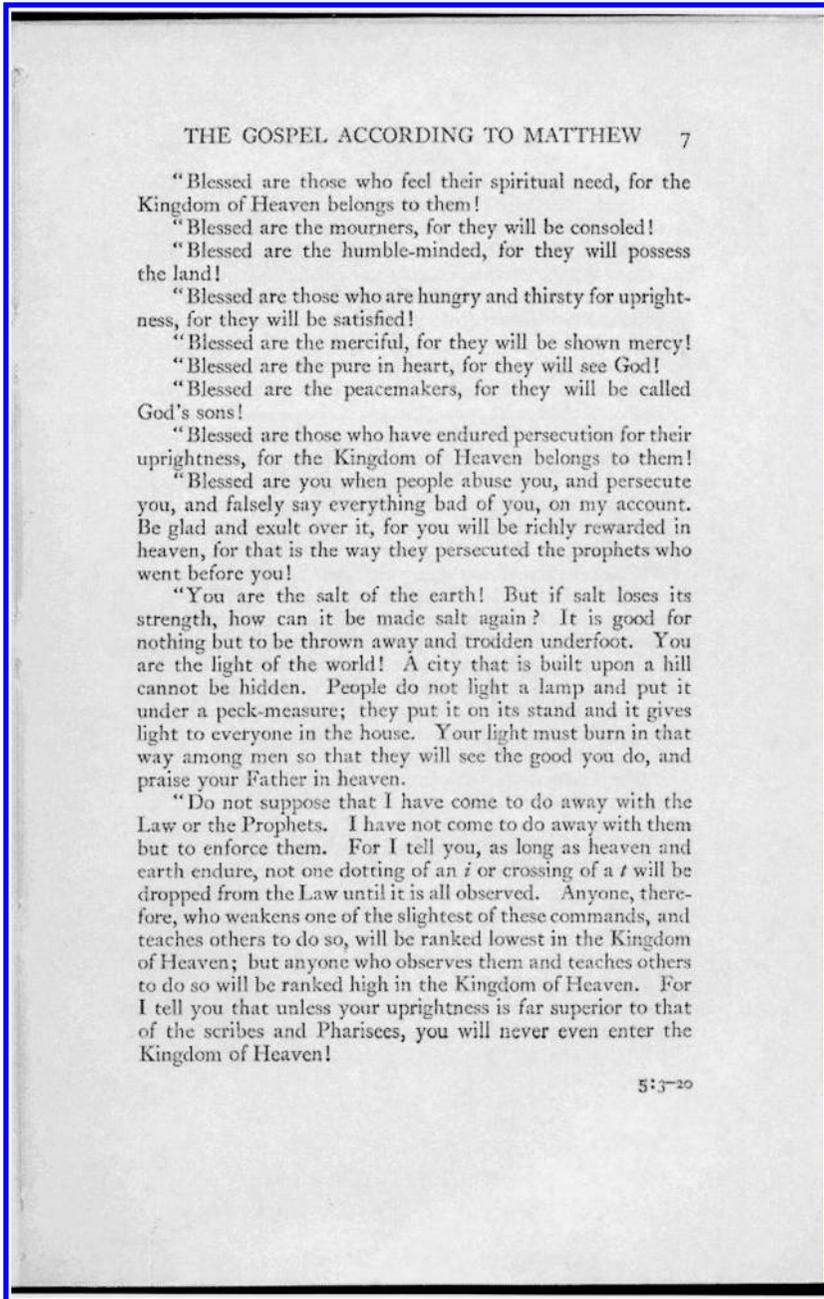


Figure 1. The "Regular Edition."

to middle-class tastes and sensibilities, at least not initially. Their responses reveal four distinct attitudes toward the Scriptures: (1) a mostly impetuous KJV bibliolatry among devotees of traditional biblical language, (2) a notion that the KJV was a work of cultural genius, (3) a related notion that the Bible was the greatest piece of literature of any kind, and finally (4) a suspicion—among fundamentalists and secularists—that Bible translators would obscure the real truth of the Scriptures. These attitudes illumine not only the cultural tensions inherent in American society in the 1920s, but, more important, they also shed light on the privileged position that the Christian Scriptures held in American culture at that time.

III

The initial journalistic reaction to Goodspeed's translation exceeded that for any other English Bible translation in America's history to date.³⁶ When news of the translation broke on Friday, August 24, 1923, two months prior to its release date, the *Philadelphia Bulletin* and *Boston Transcript* rushed to interview local clergy. Each paper grimly told of unanimous disapproval for the idea of modern-language translation and predicted failure for the *American Translation*. These and other articles were syndicated across the nation.³⁷ Everywhere it was the same: *Why bother to improve on a classic?* As if such pessimism were not enough, an unfortunate misunderstanding also attended Goodspeed's work. The United Press, having received an advance typescript of Goodspeed's translation of Luke 11, released an article accusing the translator of shortening the Lord's Prayer. Thinking that this passage was the source of the liturgical form (instead of Matthew 6), the journalist charged Goodspeed with taking his own mortal hands to the Word of God. As such rumors circulated, editors across America offered expected opinions of Goodspeed's work.³⁸ "New Lord's Prayer Version Offered," ran the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, including local Presbyterian minister Edward Bowman's cryptic remark that "the prayer is short enough, amplification seems more desirable."³⁹ Another editor in Indianapolis was not so composed: "Nothing stops his devastating pen. He has even abbreviated the Lord's Prayer." Adding credulity to antagonism, this reporter complained that the Lord's Prayer "is a petition that in its present wording has been held sacred for nearly 2,000 years, for the King James translators are said to have made no changes."⁴⁰ In the ensuing months, newspaper editors across the country indicted Goodspeed for editing major portions of the biblical text, for whimsically changing biblical language, and for acting with overt irreverence for the Bible.

The inaccurate handling of details by American and British presses was surely a major reason for the initial outcry, but it was not the only one.⁴¹ The overwhelming majority of critics simply believed that the new translation was categorically inferior to the Authorized Version and that, as such, it was blight on the biblical landscape. William Carwardine, a Methodist Episcopal pastor in Chicago, asked rhetorically, "Who wants to read about 'policemen' in the Bible?" Keen Ryan, a Chicago Presbyterian minister agreed: "Nobody asked him to mutilate the New Testament . . . and there is apparently no demand for it." Summarily dismissing the effort, he (falsely) predicted that "Christian people will pay no attention to his book."⁴² Even Floyd E. Barnard of All Saints Episcopal Church in Chicago's Ravenswood neighborhood, once a student of Goodspeed, remarked that "any attempt at popularizing religion usually meets with failure and I am afraid that this will meet the same fate."⁴³ Most agreed that Goodspeed's influence would be restricted to the few intellectuals who shared his idiosyncratic cultural assumptions.⁴⁴

Other critics responding at this time, not so opposed in principle to modern-language translation, felt that Goodspeed's work did not improve the King James Version except in clarifying a few obscure passages. Most of these reviewers insisted that Goodspeed harmed the Scriptures by his free-flowing translations of widely used texts, such as 1 Corinthians 13, and his modernization of pronouns ("thee" and "thou" to the more familiar "you"). The few who were aware of recent manuscript discoveries generally believed that the Revised Version (1881) or the American Standard Version (1901) offered better strategies for bringing the Bible up to date. Even those who otherwise were sympathetic to Goodspeed's motivations for translation often did not deem the final product an improvement. For clarity and effect, editor after editor, and reader after reader, opted for the Authorized Version.

One of the most widely cited reasons for critics preferring the KJV was that its traditional language was thought to carry vital religious associations. The *Madison Journal*, for example, found any attempt to retranslate the Bible using modern language foolish, depriving it of its "flavor of holiness." The style of the KJV, this editor argued, was "inevitably associated with The Word in the minds of every reader of the Scripture." But this Madisonian took his defense further. King James's commission possessed an "unerring accuracy" in fitting "the sound and weight of the word to the spirit and idea of the original Greek." As such, the KJV, unlike modern translations, could put forth the "fundamentals of Christian belief in organ-tones."⁴⁵ A paper published just south of Madison, the *Janesville Gazette*, expressed this

notion more firmly: "Take away the Orientalism from the bible, the metaphor and the imagery, and . . . it will not be the bible." Responding in particular to Goodspeed's acceptance of American city-style English, most newspaper editors agreed (ironically) that no ordinary modern scholar could achieve an adequate translation of the Bible.⁴⁶

Unusually skilled in public relations, Goodspeed was quick to defend his case against this first wave of criticism. Only a few days after the reports began, Goodspeed entered the fray with an interview in the *Chicago Daily News*. He tailored his argument specifically to disarm the conservative opposition, expressing amazement that American Christians viewed the KJV, not the original Greek, as the "inspired word of God." If people wanted to know what the New Testament really meant, then they should rely less on seventeenth-century translators than the Greek manuscripts themselves. Given Goodspeed's credentials in the study of the Greek language, the article argued, no one deserved more public trust. For a discouraging two months, this situation reproduced itself in most major American cities; Goodspeed wrote countless letters to editors decrying their thoughtless reporting and groundless assertions about his base motivations, his lack of scholarly credentials, and, especially, his poor taste.⁴⁷

Goodspeed's well-styled letters to newspaper editors soon earned him published apologies and, it seems, cautious respect, bringing some closure to the initial reaction. As a consequence of the editorial disputation over Goodspeed's Bible, however, an increasing number of Americans took the opportunity to broadcast their ideas about the Bible itself and its civic role in America. Most hinged on the centrality of the KJV to American cultural formation. For the American Protestant majority, the King James Version was *the* Bible, "the Bible of the people," as the *Indianapolis Star* insisted.⁴⁸ While the KJV's few critics argued that it contained errors and obscure language, its many proponents believed that the translation was a work of genius, providentially provided for the English-speaking world at a perfect moment in history. They proffered pseudoromantic arguments about the importance of sacred language for the preservation of the vitality of the Bible's message and even of culture more generally. In this view, historian Kenneth Cmiel explains, the responsibility of translators was to "translate not only words but the whole cultural milieu."⁴⁹ Early-seventeenth-century English culture was thought to possess an ideal balance of cultural maturity and freedom from vulgarity to produce a nearly perfect translation. By the nineteenth century, critics maintained, language itself had become too specific and "Latinized" to effect a linguistic correspondence with the simple and authentic diction of the Scriptures.⁵⁰ *Harper's Monthly* put it this way, in 1859: the "Anglo-

Saxon English" of the Bible was "pre-eminently the language of the people, refined by the advance of learning, and not yet made scholastic by writers whose only world was the student's closet."⁵¹ No contemporary translation effort was up to this task.

Critics of Goodspeed in the early twentieth century made similar claims. The KJV was executed at a time when the English language itself was more "rugged, vigorous," "virile, artistic, and picturesque." In comparison, English in the 1920s was "sloppy," "jazzy," or, at least, devoid of literary merit. Bruno Lessing, a writer for a paper in Bloomington, Illinois, caricatured Goodspeed as driven by the desire to make money, thereby mixing his capitalist with his artistic sensibilities. The unhappy result was a translation that was "cheap," and one that could not "carry conviction."⁵² One of the earliest critiques of Goodspeed's translation was a piece in the *New York World*, which lamented the loss of the Authorized Version's poetry. In the seventeenth century, "language was younger and more vital than it is now. . . . A word in those days was a thing of savor and delight." Living in "a time just following Shakespeare, just preceding 'Lycidas' and 'Paradise Lost,' . . . the translators who Englished the New Testament under King James had the advantage of living in a community rich in talk, daring in metaphor, untrammled by too many rules." The editor continued to deride the sorry state of literature in the "cities of the United States," claiming his age knew as much about good literary taste as Sir Philip Sidney knew of the valves of a gasoline engine.⁵³ Goodspeed simply did not measure up to the likes of Shakespeare; Chicago could not compete with the high culture of early modern England.

Such ideas had a surprisingly wide currency in the early twentieth century. For the KJV's tercentenary, in 1911, British author William Muir wrote a history of the translation that expressed formally what the Authorized Version meant to the English-speaking world. Though the Revised Version claimed to have made significant corrections and improvements to the KJV, Muir insisted that even the former was a poor substitution for "our grand old Bible." He had no intention of claiming finality for the KJV, thereby rejecting the insights that scholars such as Westcott and Hort provided, but he did believe that the KJV alone among translations would endure, literally, to the end of the age. Only the KJV (and, he allowed, the Luther Bible for German-speaking peoples) possessed this quality: "It is rather a re-writing than a mere translation; a transfusing of the original into a new language rather than a mere version of the letter."⁵⁴ Albert Cook, Professor of English and English Literature at Yale, believed the KJV's unique history qualified it for distinction. In an essay written for the

Cambridge History of English Literature, Cook considered and celebrated “the successive stages by which what we call the Bible grew into being, and . . . the successive stages by which the English of our Bible was gradually selected, imbued with the proper meanings and associations, and ordered into a fit medium for the conveyance of the high thoughts and noble emotions in which the original abounds.”⁵⁵ For Muir, as for Cook, the KJV was nearly, if not actually, God’s incarnate Word to the English-speaking world.

Most of Goodspeed’s critics lacked the historical perception of Muir and Cook, even while holding the same regard for the KJV. The *Chicago Daily Tribune’s* much-syndicated article “Monkeying with the Bible” perhaps represented the height of the apotheosis of the King James translation. This editor criticized all deviations from the Authorized Version’s language. “It is a perfect version,” the editor insisted, “and tampering with it not only spoils the beauty but creates confusion in [the] text.”⁵⁶ Another Chicago editor was convinced that the Bible needed a dignified, time-honored medium to accurately convey its truths:

Men [are not to] discuss . . . the great truths of life in the words of the vaudeville stage. The eternal verities, the highest aspirations, the supreme visions of men require a frame and form of expression that reveal at once their nature and their dignity. . . . The professor who translated the Bible into the language of the Loop [Chicago’s business district] seems to have no vision of these familiar truths. . . . His work is disfigured by his deficiency in English. In English he lacks sense of dignity, of rhythm, of form, of everything that in literature may be designated as good taste. In music, a gentleman of such limitations would jazz a Beethoven sonata; in poetry he would sing of “Paradise Lost” in limericks.⁵⁷

Goodspeed’s lack of good taste and English language deficiency left his translation in aesthetic tension with the concepts and ideas he purported to translate. Critical editors implicitly suggested that such dissonance boded ill for American cultural distinctiveness. Goodspeed’s desire to have an accessible and readable copy of the New Testament for American moral development, thus, initially met with powerful moral resistance.⁵⁸

Of course, Goodspeed had no problem viewing the King James Version of the Bible as a text with important cultural associations. But, as a translator of the Bible into modern English, he was not interested in literature *per se*. He was, rather, “interested in the religious aspect,” as he put it to an audience in Louisville in 1924.⁵⁹ Consistent with his Baptist roots, Goodspeed wanted Americans to

confront head-on the uplifting message of the Bible. Yet, at every turn, he ran up against nostalgic fidelity to the KJV. By November 1923, therefore, he committed himself to exposing the myth of the KJV's superiority. In January, he published an essay for the *Atlantic Monthly* comically recounting his own frustrations in trying to hunt down the "Ghost of King James." Highlighting the "very rapid progress" that characterized modern society, Goodspeed noted the increasing rapidity of news media, the stunning advancements in automobile technology from year to year, and the easy dissemination of fashion designs, motion pictures, and advertising. Such social changes, he argued, were based on a "genuine faith in human progress." When it came to Bible translation, however, Americans were profoundly traditional.⁶⁰ Goodspeed considered this situation a tragic inconsistency, since the antiquated language of the Bible was barring Americans from hearing progressive aspects of its message. Goodspeed's point was that, if Americans could shed their fideistic attachment to "King James," they would finally be in a position to benefit from the Bible. He even attempted, unsuccessfully, to persuade the Gideons International to publish the original 1611 preface to the KJV in their Bibles, a preface that put the translation in its historical context. Goodspeed was concerned that Americans naively believed that the KJV was the original English version and the basis of all subsequent English versions or that the translation itself had been divinely authorized (i.e., inspired). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Gideons refused Goodspeed's request, believing that the preface was too academic, controversial, and confusing.

Esteem for the KJV as a work of cultural genius was not the only basis upon which Goodspeed received criticism. The *American Translation's* intention to gain broad popular appeal also generated disparaging commentary. Again, Goodspeed's ideal that the Bible's message serve as a civilizing force in American culture was challenged by others who held that modern American language compromised the message itself—and its readers. At stake was the critical question of the Bible's cultural location in American society. Was it a book to be appreciated by a cultural elite and held out as an incentive for social improvement? Or was it a popular book with a popular (though morally uplifting) message for common people, even those who laid no claim to Anglo-Saxon status? High-minded critics took pleasure in noting that the spirited revivalist Billy Sunday preferred modern-language translations.⁶¹ Suggesting that Goodspeed's translation would only appeal to those without education or taste, one annoyed editor for the *Hartford Times* likened Goodspeed's work in translation to Sunday putting "parts of

the New Testament into the language of the prize ring."⁶² Journals and newspapers that called his work "slang," "corrupted English," "Americanese," or "jazzing the Bible" all joined in with this overtly racist critique of Goodspeed's project.⁶³ A Chicago reviewer even compared it to H. L. Mencken's familiar rewriting of the Declaration of Independence:

When things get so balled up that the people of a country have to cut loose from some other country, and go it on their own hook, without asking no permission from nobody, excepting maybe God Almighty, then they ought to let everybody know why they done it, so that everybody can see they are on the level, and not trying to put nothing over nobody.⁶⁴

Although Mencken had actually championed the new *American Language* (1919) in a book from which Goodspeed likely took his title, critics offered quotations like these as self-evident criticisms of American linguistic inventiveness. Since Goodspeed, in principle, had no objection to fitting the biblical message to new linguistic conventions, his translation was singled out as a specimen of cultural degeneration.

Goodspeed, however, had commenced the *American Translation* with the conviction that ordinary, rank-and-file Americans ought to have the Bible in language they could readily understand, and so he advocated strongly for idiomatic translations. His favorite letter to recite to audiences and newspaper editors—written in grammatical English (he typically noted)—was from a "negro living in a basement in New York City," thanking him for a New Testament accessible to ordinary folk. "Your book will be refused by the rich and well-educated, but the poor and meagrely [*sic*] educated will receive it with great thanks and praise."⁶⁵ Such instances assured Goodspeed that his New Testament was performing its intended civilizing role. Commissioner William Peart of the Salvation Army even believed that the *American Translation* would help in the "Christianization of ignorant foreign-born citizens."⁶⁶ Goodspeed and his admirers held out hope that the translation would have a key role to play in integrating, preserving, and extending American Protestant culture.⁶⁷

Since he took the civilizing qualities of his Bible so seriously, Goodspeed was particularly ruffled by the disapproving judgments of literary critics and other early twentieth-century custodians of culture. Helene Buhler Bullock, lecturer in English at Bryn Mawr College, believed that familiarity with the Authorized Version's phraseology and cadences was *the* prerequisite for good writing. Echoing the arguments made by nineteenth-century Romantics, Bullock believed that the superb literary quality of the KJV, "with its unparalleled suc-

cess in conveying the vividness and the rhythmical majesty of the originals," would be admitted by all. Along with the plays of Shakespeare, she considered the KJV a work of literary genius and a guardian of culture. The "noblest monument of English prose" deserved to be read and studied in America's schools and kept as a central text in the Western canon.⁶⁸ The *Chicago Journal of Commerce* claimed that "a man who knows the [KJV] Bible and Shakespeare will never be deficient in appreciation of the beauties and elastic qualities of the language, or of its dignity and soundness."⁶⁹ This editor remained critical of modern-language translations after an unnamed "distinguished scholar," very probably Goodspeed, called him to task with a rebuttal.⁷⁰ Even writers who acknowledged the superior precision in translation of Goodspeed's work felt that its "verbose and flat phraseology" fell pathetically short of the great seventeenth-century English "masterpiece."⁷¹

According to Goodspeed, however, the most discouraging review came from Gene Stratton-Porter, an author of light romance novels, avid naturalist, and frequent contributor to *McCall's Magazine*.⁷² A literate woman from a family of clergy, Stratton-Porter was precisely the kind of American Goodspeed hoped to reach with his New Testament. She also wrote the kind of middlebrow literature that Goodspeed had tried to imitate in his own translation. Yet, Stratton-Porter roundly denounced it and catalogued dozens of Goodspeed's apparent infelicities of style and syntax. She resented his "cheapening" and "commonizing" of the language of the KJV, and she opposed his blatant anachronisms, like Jesus addressing people as "gentlemen." Further, while not theologically orthodox herself, she even advanced subtle theological arguments that challenged some of Goodspeed's renderings. For instance, he had translated John the Baptist's messianic prophecy as "the Kingdom of Heaven is 'coming'" rather than the traditional "at hand." Stratton-Porter argued that "coming" implied a promise for the future, whereas the traditional "at hand" suggested that the Kingdom had arrived with the advent of Jesus himself. If it were appropriate to fill the Bible with slang expressions, "double and triple prepositions," and chains of conjunctions, then every classic in the libraries of the world ought to be rewritten in the "loose, careless forms used in this Goodspeed version . . . under the claim that such writing is 'American.'" Stratton-Porter was not opposed to revision in theory, but, in keeping with the dictums of progress, it must be a revision upward, consistent with the "rules for the best use of English." Goodspeed's work did not measure up to the dignified, grammatically correct standard she thought fitting for a translation of the Bible.⁷³

Stratton-Porter's criticisms of the *American Translation* appeared in the May issue of *McCall's*, about a month before Goodspeed was scheduled to lecture at the University of Southern California, near Stratton-Porter's residence. Evidently, Goodspeed adapted his standard speech to accommodate Stratton-Porter's remarks, for journalists reported that his delivery was defensive. The next day's *Los Angeles Times* included this summary:

One of Dr. Goodspeed's severest critics has been Gene Stratton Porter, whose familiarity with the standard New Testaments is wide and deep. . . . Mrs. Porter said, in a letter declining an invitation to hear Dr. Goodspeed speak on the subject, that: "I do not care why Prof. Goodspeed did the thing he has attempted to do to the Bible, but I do care intensely that cultured people should join in an attempt to tear down a monumental piece of work in literature, in art or in music. To the depths of my soul I hate to have modern American slang put into the mouth of Jesus Christ . . . and I am sorry that any educational institution in Los Angeles or anywhere else is allowing any man to stand up and attempt to make excuses or justification for the lowering of literary standards and the misinterpretation of meaning which Prof. Goodspeed has put into the New Testament. I can see no reason why I should subject myself to the annoyance of hearing him talk about it. I am sufficiently annoyed that there is any man or woman living who will agree with him in such an attempt as this to desecrate religion and lower literary standards." Dr. Goodspeed retorts, "There is no slang in my translation. It is familiar and colloquial. . . . As a matter of fact, it is much more difficult so to write."

While the newspaper duly exploited this local religious squabble, it did not miss the broader significance: "In the meantime, both Mrs. Porter and the many who think with her on this subject and Dr. Goodspeed and the army of students who appreciate his American translation are at least one in affirming the precious teaching of the New Testament."⁷⁴

Despite the relatively heavy flow of disapproval, or perhaps because of it, Goodspeed received enough commendation to keep his hopes up about the good work of Bible translation. While these pieces rarely did more than echo Goodspeed's own convictions about translation work, their presence spread the compelling rationale for modern-language translation into arenas where Goodspeed could not always go. The review by Philip Littell, editor for the *New Republic*, especially pleased Goodspeed. Neither pious nor uneducated, Littell had assumed that he would have scant appreciation for a modern-language version of the New Testament and that such an effort would deprive

the Bible of its only merit, its majestic prose. He was impressed, however, by how much Goodspeed's work was an achievement of "present-day English which is not only clear and simple, but which is so clear and so simple that it deserves to take its place as a standard of English prose as we speak it today." Littell thought that Goodspeed had succeeded in his aim to bring first-century Palestine to twentieth-century America. While the majesty of the KJV was lost, admittedly, a down-to-earth unpredictability was gained:

The old parts had a music or a splendor or a heavenly beauty which are gone, which we miss, but against this loss we must set a sharpening of our attention, a rejuvenating of our curiosity. In the Authorized Version I have been used to hear the noblest English spoken by a composite of many somewhat anglican voices, somewhat mannered. In Professor Goodspeed's I hear the voices of fishermen, Romans, Pharisees, tax-collectors, angels, a physician, a tent-maker.⁷⁵

Littell argued that if readers only compared the *American Translation* to the Authorized Version, they would miss entirely the point of the translation, which was to present the biblical texts in the clearest English possible. Littell could not have paid Goodspeed a higher compliment.

All told, Goodspeed was shocked at the overall negativity of the response, and, perhaps, one of the main reasons for his surprise was that significant opposition failed to emerge among fundamentalists, where he was perhaps most braced to expect it. There were, to be sure, reviewers who contended that Goodspeed's translation was ideologically biased, and a few suggested that the work stemmed from a modernist agenda. A Guelph, Ontario, reader surmised that Goodspeed and his colleagues were motivated by a desire to evade "divine commands." Contrary to the translator's expressed purpose, this Canadian felt that the *American Translation* sought to make the Bible "just another group of religio-philosophical literature, its vitality emasculated, its authority questioned, its appeal deadened, its inspiration denied."⁷⁶ The reviewer highlighted the Bible's institutional source, "Chicago University," as an explanation. Another labeled Goodspeed's translation a "camouflaged commentary."⁷⁷ Despite Goodspeed's veneration for the nineteenth-century objective of presenting a text "without bias or prejudice," he knew better than to suppose that his translation was purely objective.⁷⁸ Ever aware of the impossibility of achieving a value-free translation, Goodspeed once averred, "I should be ashamed to put forth a translation which was not an interpretation. What is a translation to be if it is not to be an interpretation? If you cannot trust me to interpret the New Testament, you can-

not trust me to translate it."⁷⁹ True to more than a century of historical precedent, most Americans would not tolerate a Bible translation that admitted any interpretive angle.

Tellingly, it was an out-of-towner that alerted students and faculty of the Chicago's Moody Bible Institute to the alleged dangers of Goodspeed's work. In February 1924, the institute hosted Princeton Seminary's New Testament professor J. Gresham Machen for its annual Founders' Week Conference. Machen, it seems, took advantage of proximity to voice his criticisms of Goodspeed's translation within a broader denunciation of theological modernism. According to Machen, Goodspeed's translation was a product of the theological trend that deprived traditional doctrine of its historic meaning. For example, Goodspeed had translated the Greek word meaning *to justify* as *to make upright*, thereby increasing the difficulty of deriving the Reformation doctrine of "justification by faith" from the New Testament. "No doubt the modern translator is not interested in how a sinful man becomes right with God," Machen explained, "but every historian knows that Paul was interested, and if the translator is to be true to his sacred trust, he must place the emphasis not where he would wish it placed, but where it actually was placed by the writer he is translating."⁸⁰ Machen and a few other conservatives were afraid that modernist Christians were substituting their own agendas for the agendas of the New Testament authors, and they considered the University of Chicago a key institution in the enterprise. Thus, not only did Machen feel that Goodspeed's translation entailed "religious retrogression" but also that it violated the "historical method in exegesis"—one of the fundamentals of orthodox hermeneutics.⁸¹ The *Presbyterian*, a Philadelphia-based publication for conservatives in the northern branch of that tradition, agreed heartily. Modern-language translations, especially those undertaken by individuals, tended to display the "whims of peculiar individual minds." Such translators attempt to reduce the very sacred to the most banal and ordinary. Unlike previous Bible translators, they "begin with a low secular conception of the Scriptures" and their immediate aim is popularization. At issue here was the nature of the Scriptures themselves. For the editors of the *Presbyterian*, the Scriptures were "clean and reverential, and free from all frivolity and trifling."⁸² Any popularizing attempt, as such, remained out of the question.

There is little doubt that many theological conservatives shared these sentiments; however, as the response in the popular press indicates, the theologically conservative response (among which the fundamentalist response is an important subset)⁸³ was by no means the most strident. Criticisms that pointed to Goodspeed's theological

agenda were relatively scarce, suggesting that the majority of his opponents did not feel much antipathy toward the University of Chicago or understand that institution's contest with fundamentalist Protestantism or, far more likely, that his opponents were not primarily fundamentalists. Rather, it seems, they were composed of moderate members of the broad Protestant mainstream, individuals with strong loyalties to traditional religious practices and texts. In fact, it appears that Goodspeed's ability to conciliate the conservative viewpoint with arguments about "original languages" saved him the wrath of many a suspicious conservative.⁸⁴ After all, fundamentalists and other conservative evangelicals were the Protestants with the most interest in remaining faithful to the original biblical languages *and* conveying that biblical message to new generations.

While a handful of fundamentalists worried that Goodspeed was using the Bible as a Trojan horse for theological modernism, others championed this alleged religious subversiveness of Goodspeed's work. The religious skeptic and former Presbyterian minister Mangasar Magurditch Mangasarian of the Cordon Club, a "truth-seeking," "rationalist" association, praised Goodspeed for treating the "Holy Bible" as he would any other book. For him, Goodspeed's work "fully succeeded in destroying [the Bible] as the 'Word of God.'" Mangasarian fundamentally agreed with much of Machen's analysis. But rather than denouncing Goodspeed for his mishandling of the Word of God, Mangasarian celebrated him as a latter-day Thomas Jefferson, the president who famously excised supernatural occurrences from the gospel accounts. He suggested that the reaction to the *American Translation* occurred because Goodspeed "had in a number of instances destroyed . . . certain cherished dogmas founded on texts which have now disappeared. . . . If every new translation is going to trim the Christian creed, what certainty is there left for believers?"⁸⁵ Only enough, he proposed, for them to become truth-seeking members of the Cordon Club.

A later review by Mencken, in 1926, further explicated the corrosiveness of Goodspeed's work for popular religious devotion. Having rewritten the Declaration of Independence in American slang and formally praised American English for its vigor and originality, Mencken's tongue-in-cheek denunciation of Goodspeed's attempt to Americanize the Bible was, of course, highly ironic. In his editorial "Holy Writ," he rebuked Goodspeed and his translator peers, warning them that they would suffer hell for their pious efforts. Mencken criticized his rendering of the Lord's Prayer and his excision of part of John 8 (which contained the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman caught in adultery, omitted because of its absence in the earliest manu-

scripts) in light of the loss of poetic phraseology. To Mencken's lights, modern language translators had no "religious feeling." By seeking to articulate religious meaning rationally, they were left, in the end, with nothing: "Religion is most potent to sway the mind, indeed, when the evidences of its objective truth are most vague and unconvincing—when it is apprehended, not as fact at all, but as sheer poetry, the very negation of fact." Christianity, according to Mencken, owed all its modern successes to the poetic quality of its sacred canon. Since poetry does not convince but, rather, gains its appeal by depriving people of the wish to be convinced, it alone could support religion in the modern era. Inasmuch as modern-language translators tried to objectivize and de-poeticize the Scriptures, they were undermining Christianity in ways comparable to fundamentalists.⁸⁶ If Mencken disliked Goodspeed's translation (and it's unclear how far we should take his review), the aversion likely stemmed more from his opposition to the liberal Protestant establishment's increasing cultural authority than Goodspeed's bad literary style.⁸⁷ Yet, his well-known antipathy for fundamentalism—expressed here as well—kept him equally at odds with conservatives. In his characteristic form, therefore, Mencken composed a critique that would offend as many readers as possible.

IV

The initial hostility and lingering uneasiness surrounding Goodspeed's New Testament suggest that few people in the 1920s shared the full range of his cultural and intellectual assumptions. Scholars who shared his theory of language did not always agree that modern English was good for America. Conservatives who admired his attempt to get back to the original Greek often worried that his theological views were working their way into the text. Clergy who might otherwise have favored the translation for readability found themselves defending the traditional biblical associations of the KJV in the interests of the laity. And, yet, nearly all parties involved in the debate shared a broad commitment to the growth and development of American biblical civilization.

Goodspeed intended his translation to advance biblical civilization by providing a modern religious vernacular closely correlated both with the original biblical languages and contemporary English usage. He rooted this conviction in his understanding of the particular linguistic situation in which the Greek texts had been composed; the New Testament texts were written in the Greek of the commoner, not the intellectual. This approach, Goodspeed believed, would be refreshingly novel for contemporary readers who might assume that

the Bible was an old-fashioned book having little to do with the details of everyday life. He thus argued for the *relevance* of the Bible and employed a characteristically evangelical tactic in advancing his theologically modernist assumptions. His critics, however, emphasized the positive aspects of the distinction between religious language and the language of everyday life. The KJV's English, they maintained, elevated religious language—and thus religion itself—above the crass, market-driven commercialism of the 1920s. The debate thus centered on the proper location and character of religiously authoritative texts in a stable democracy. Goodspeed saw the biblical texts taking modern form for the sake of uplift and progress, while his critics believed that such texts needed to be partitioned off or separated from ordinary life for the sake of a vital continuity in religious culture.

And, in fact, Goodspeed saw the debate in these terms. In a speech titled "Why Translate the Bible?" given to eager, mostly Protestant audiences across the country, the Chicago professor argued that "the great danger in democracy is vulgarity; in art, in literature, in drama, in speech, in social customs, even in religion." Goodspeed almost defensively insisted that he was no cultural leveler, no friend of "Bolshevism." What protected a democracy was cultural achievement, or "Humanism," "the sense of taste, restraint, good will, elevation, poise, fairness, understanding, socialibility [*sic*]."88 In his view, the Bible and religious language, in order to have any beneficial cultural influence, must become part of the best of the cultural vernacular *as it is*. And such a state of affairs could only be achieved when the best of science, in this case contemporary biblical criticism, was applied to the Bible. Only in this way could the Bible's message be truly decipherable and thus applicable to human circumstances.

Conservatives, too, had culture's preservation in mind. But they believed that American culture needed religion and religious language to perform its work from without. The magnificence and otherworldliness of the KJV, in their view, stabilized a culture that might suffer from internal collapse. The 1920s, after all, brought the "Red Scare," a severely restricted policy on immigration, the era of the prohibition amendment, and violent race riots in the American heartland. Critics who attacked Goodspeed's project for its affinities with slang, the vaudeville stage, commercialism, jazz, populist religion, and the prize ring were articulating deep cultural insecurities. Religion, for them, was a force that acted upon culture, not a current within it.

Again, given Goodspeed's firm reputation as a theological modernist and the "conservative" quality of the reaction, one might be tempted to view this debate as just another episode in the contest between fundamentalist and modernist forms of American Protes-

tantism. But, in fact, the debate over the *American Translation* obscures the clear line that scholars have often drawn between these parties. Conservatives on the question of religious language could be found on both sides of the fundamentalist-modernist divide, as could progressives. For instance, Henry Sloan Coffin, a leading modernist minister, wrote Goodspeed expressing general approbation for the theological agenda that inspired the work but then concluded with this reservation: "I am still old fashioned enough not to want to see new translations used in the pulpit, as I think the old so magnificent and so rich both in language and association."⁸⁹ Yet, many theologically conservative Protestants appreciated Goodspeed's attempt to capture the original Greek in the most accurate way possible, despite the fact that a few of them worried that his ideological commitments were affecting his translation. Such boundary blurring baffled religious editors from the outset of the controversy. The liberal-leaning *Congregationalist*, for example, had a difficult time coming to terms with the stance of the *Chicago Tribune* in its "Monkeying" editorial: "The dear old *Tribune* strikes back at the doctor [Goodspeed] with an editorial that almost makes us believe that the rightful place of the *Tribune* is in the camp of the Fundamentalists. This hardly agrees, however, with the attacks the paper has been making on W. J. B." The author was, of course, referring to William Jennings Bryan, one-time presidential hopeful, a vocal fundamentalist, and, later, a prosecuting attorney in the Scopes "Monkey" Trial.⁹⁰ Tellingly, very few fundamentalists or modernists spoke as such in their commentary on the translation's merits or demerits, even when it was common knowledge that it was a product of the modernist-affiliated University of Chicago Press.

If the silence of the fundamentalists tells us something of the religious climate of the time, the very vocal presence of a cohort of intellectuals and journalists, men and women who had less invested in the question of religious authority than in expressing the Bible's special influence on Western and American civilization, is even more telling. Even though these pundits were highly dismissive of fundamentalist views of culture and the Bible, they did not hold any special place in their outlook for theological modernists, whose views of culture they deemed equally bankrupt. Such writers, many of them nominally Protestant, held that the otherworldly majesty of the King James Version was a cultural inheritance warranting preservation. They, therefore, advanced a notion of the KJV's *cultural* inspiration, stressing its privileged genealogy and formative role in shaping Western institutions.⁹¹ That these thinkers were among Goodspeed's most vocal and influential critics suggests that scholars need to move beyond the strictly theological in comprehending the early-twentieth-century

Protestant mainstream. Again, the debate that Goodspeed sparked when he released the *American Translation* demonstrates that Americans were not simply divided on how to translate the Bible but that they also held varied and often contradictory understandings of the nature and cultural function of religion.

Goodspeed's New Testament went through a number of editions and press runs by 1927, when his colleague, J. M. Powis Smith, released the complementary Old Testament version of the *American Translation*. A few years later, both testaments were released together in *The Bible: An American Translation* (1931).⁹² By the middle of the century, Goodspeed's work had sold more than a million copies in its various incarnations, making it the University of Chicago Press's all-time bestseller.⁹³ Yet, despite this impressive sales record, most remained convinced that the translation was unfit for steady public consumption, quite contrary to Goodspeed's wishes. In 1941, when the University of Chicago Press pursued relations with the Gideons International in hopes that they might disburse the Goodspeed New Testament, the Gideons refused the offer due to what they termed the "old-fashioned" nature of their operation. The organization sided with Goodspeed's conservative critics, arguing that "the Bible is a different book from all editions; we do not believe in modernizing it to the extent that it will look just like another book."⁹⁴

Around mid-century, however, the tide turned. When Goodspeed set out to write his memoir *As I Remember* in 1953, "the international verdict had gone so sweepingly in my favor," he said, that he felt obligated to apologize for revisiting the controversy.⁹⁵ The challenge to the predominance of KJV that occupied so much of Goodspeed's life was finally taking root. Since then modern-language translations and translations appealing to special interest groups have continued to proliferate, especially among evangelicals, suggesting a complex genealogy for Goodspeed's unique configuration of cultural and theological commitments—indeed, one that calls into question the alleged conservatism of contemporary Protestant evangelicalism.

Notes

I am grateful to Mark Noll for stimulating my interest in the cultural history of the Bible in America. I am also indebted to Thomas Kidd, George Marsden, John McGreevy, Tisa Wenger, Francisco Benzoni, Peter Thuesen, Paul Gutjahr, and Timothy Gloege for their helpful criticisms of earlier drafts. Colleagues at Princeton's Center for the Study of Religion as well as the reviews of several anonymous readers for this journal were tremendously helpful as I made final revisions.

1. A. Edward Newton, *The Greatest Book in the World and Other Papers* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1925); and Elihu Grant, "What Shall We Think of the Bible?" in *Religious Foundations*, ed. Rufus M. Jones (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 89.

2. So great was affection for the "Common Version" that, when the Revised Version of the New Testament was published—in what was the biggest publishing event of the American nineteenth century—Philip Schaff exulted that "whole chapters may be read without perceiving the difference" between the new and old translations. On the advent of the Revised Version, see Philip Schaff, ed., *Anglo-American Bible Revision, by Members of the American Revision Committee* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1879); Peter J. Thuesen, "Some Scripture Is Inspired by God: Late-Nineteenth-Century Protestants and the Demise of a Common Bible," *Church History* 65 (December 1996): 609–23; Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: William Morrow, 1990, repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chap. 7.

3. "The Bible up to Date," *New York Times*, February 11, 1905. Another *Times* correspondent made a similar point in 1902: There is "no doubt that a falling off in the habit of reading the Bible would be, from a literary point of view alone, a National calamity." This writer also favorably reported John Henry Cardinal Newman's judgment that the King James Version of the Bible was one of the reasons the British were so forcefully anti-Catholic during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. "And equally of Americans," the correspondent added. See "'Read the Bible,'" *New York Times*, August 23, 1902.

4. Grant Wacker argues that the 1920s and 1930s witnessed the demise of "biblical civilization" in America, though earlier for the well educated. He suggests that the rise of historicism was the main ingredient in bringing down the walls. As American Christians increasingly saw the Bible as a product of human history, it gradually lost its ability to command divine authority. See Grant Wacker, "The Demise of Biblical Civilization," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 123–38. Despite this important collection of essays, the cultural history of the Bible in America has suffered from considerable neglect largely because it demands a robust interdisciplinary approach. Students of literary culture, for instance, are familiar with modern conservative arguments about language and, therefore, can recognize the significance of an attachment to a particular biblical translation or text. Religious historians know well the twentieth-century threats to Protestant cultural hegemony and can appreciate the ways in which many Protestants sought to come to terms with their diminished public roles. Biblical scholars understand the rapidly changing textual foundations upon which translators and

critics relied as they worked to bring the Bible to early-twentieth-century audiences. And cultural and intellectual historians are skilled in dissecting complex ideologies like that of "civilization" and can offer nuanced explorations of its cultural function. To appreciate the role of the Bible in American culture in the early twentieth century, we need at least these perspectives and quite possibly more. For outstanding recent attention to the cultural history of the English Bible, 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); Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Mark A. Noll, "The Bible, Minority Faiths, and the American Protestant Mainstream," in *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 193–99; David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); and Alister E. McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

5. Already, in 1910, a *New York Times* correspondent had cast aspersions on attempts, as he put it, to "rewrite" the Bible "in 'United States.'" See "Revivifying the Ancients," *New York Times*, August 14, 1910. The early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a self-consciously "American" variant of English. Songwriters like Irving Berlin and pundits like H. L. Mencken began to pay closer attention to the way Americans spoke. Slang, especially, expressed this linguistic self-identity. Indeed, some English writers even crossed the Atlantic to learn "American" in its native land. See H. L. Mencken, *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States*, 2d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1921); Mary Helen Dohan, *Our Own Words* (New York: Knopf, 1974); and, especially, Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 357ff. The American Standard Version (1901) merely changed Americanized spelling and the more conspicuously British renderings.

6. While several other modern Bible translations offered comparable features, these were either British or widely understood as "sectarian" translations (produced by Unitarians, Mormons, Roman Catholics, "immersionist" Baptists, or others); such translations had no pretensions to serve the American Protestant mainstream. For Bible publishing activity prior to Goodspeed, see especially Gutjahr, *An American Bible*. The failure of Americans before Goodspeed to generate lasting modern-language translations has prompted Harold P. Scanlin to credit him with stimulating the activity that eventually led to the late-twentieth-century proliferation of translations, such as Kenneth Taylor's *Living Bible* (1962–71) or J. B. Phillip's influential 1958 translation. See Harold P. Scanlin, "Bible Translation

by American Individuals," in *The Bible and Bibles in America*, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 43–82. It is also important to note that the KJV did not impress all Americans. Mark Noll has shown how immigrant communities, women, blacks, Roman Catholics, Jews, and Mormons dissented in sometimes subtle but substantial ways from the Protestant mainstream's use of the KJV. See his "The Bible, Minority Faiths, and the American Protestant Mainstream," 222n1; as well as Gutjahr, *An American Bible*, preface.

7. Among many examples, see *Daily Palo Alto Times*, May 27, 1924, Edgar Johnson Goodspeed Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago, Box 44, Folder 2 (hereafter listed as EGC 44:2).

8. Goodspeed's *American Translation* was frequently compared to previous modern-language efforts by British scholars. These other translations, though quite significant in the history of English-language Bible translation, did not generate much of an American reaction. Indeed, it was Goodspeed's translation that prompted journals and newspapers to notice other translations. The *Literary Digest* put Goodspeed's translation of the Beatitudes alongside the KJV, the American Standard, and the Moffatt translation. "The New Testament in 'American,'" *Literary Digest* (September 22, 1923): 34–36. From 1900 to 1937, an average of one modern speech translation was released per year in England or America. Most scholars attribute this wave of modern-language translation to manuscript discovery. For historical background on many of these versions, see especially F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of Translations from the Earliest English Versions to the New English Bible* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961).

9. "Bible, Ancient and Modern," *Christian Century* (September 6, 1923): 1126–28.

10. *Christian Century* (October 11, 1923), EGC 42:3.

11. The Revised Version created such interest that one million American orders were awaiting its publication and three million copies in twenty-six editions were issued during the first year. Margaret Hills, *The English Bible in America: A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible and the New Testament Published in America, 1777–1957* (New York: American Bible Society, 1961), 295–96.

12. As historians of the 1920s have shown, journalism during Goodspeed's day was undergoing rapid change. Part of this change was a numerical increase in tabloid-style newspapers and a rise in sensationalistic and exaggerated reporting in more established papers (the *Chicago Tribune* being one well-documented example). Thus, a good deal of the early reporting on

Goodspeed's Bible likely reflects the conventions of the day, which were to create controversy whenever possible for the sake of sales. However, I argue that the abiding presence of the concerns raised—especially in forums not commanded by journalists—suggests that such sensationalistic reporting was partly rooted in popular views of the Bible at the time. For a contemporary account of the moral crisis facing journalism in this time, see Bruce Bleven, "Our Changing Journalism," *Atlantic Monthly* 132 (1923): 743–50; and, on the history of journalism generally, see Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690–1960*, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

13. *Butte Post* [Mont.], September 5, 1923, EGC 42:3; *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 1924, EGC 43:5.

14. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 27, 1923, EGC 42:3; *Pittsburgh Press*, August 25, 1923, EGC 42:1; *Boise News*, August 24, 1923, EGC 42:2; *South Bend Times*, August 24, 1923, EGC 42:2; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, October 13, 1923; and *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 27, 1923, in order quoted. For Goodspeed's own account of the last week of August 1923, see Edgar J. Goodspeed, *As I Remember* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 169.

15. *Fond du Lac Comm.* [Wisc.], August 29, 1923, EGC 42:3.

16. These papers included the *Chicago Evening Post*, *Halifax Herald* [Nova Scotia], *Rocky Mountain News* [Denver], *Birmingham News* [Ala.], *Toronto World*, *Galesburg Register Gazette* [Ill.], *Port Arthur News* [Tex.], *Pasadena Post* [Calif.], *Seattle Union Record*, *Cleveland Press*, *Omaha World-Herald*, *Buffalo Evening News*, *Moline Dispatch* [Ill.], *Columbus Dispatch*, the *Democrat*, the *Long Beach Telegram* [Calif.], *Gloversville Leader Republican* [N.Y.], the *Glendale Daily Press* [Calif.], the *Olean Times* [N.Y.], the *Warren Tribune* [Pa.], the *Hornell Tribune Times* [N.Y.], and the *Trenton Evening Times* [N.J.]. Another two dozen papers made inquiries to the University of Chicago Press about obtaining syndication on the translation. Newspapers that published miscellaneous syndicated articles on or fragments of the translation are too numerous to list. See EGC 9:14 for Goodspeed's list of newspapers that actively followed his translation. The portion of the Goodspeed Collection that pertains to his *American Translation* consists largely of newspaper clippings that Goodspeed either collected himself or that his friends and colleagues sent to him.

17. On fundamentalism, see especially George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); and, on theological modernism (or the movement among liberal Protestants to adapt Christianity to the modern era), see William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

18. For a challenge to the two-party historiography of twentieth-century Protestantism, see Douglas Jacobsen and William Vance Trollinger, eds., *Re-Forming the Center: American Protestantism, 1900 to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

19. Readers familiar with the later controversy over the Revised Standard Version will know that quarrels over Bible translation have been a persistent theme in twentieth-century American religious culture. The controversy surrounding Goodspeed is distinct, however, in that it did not principally reflect or contribute to a liberal/conservative divide in American Protestantism. Rather, I argue that it was a controversy over aesthetics and the developing character of American culture, waged principally *within* a broad Protestant establishment. To be sure, some tried to denigrate Goodspeed's work as modernist (Goodspeed was a modernist), but their success in so doing was mixed, since part of his project was to make the Scriptures as clear as possible for modern readers. Fundamentalists, in theory, supported such efforts at clarification.

20. Goodspeed, *As I Remember*, 42.

21. *Saturday Review of Literature* 23 (December 23, 1950): 9, as quoted in James I. Cook, *Edgar Johnson Goodspeed, Articulate Scholar* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), x. Throughout his long career, Goodspeed also worked assiduously to bring expensive manuscripts to America for scholarly research. The collection of patristic manuscripts at the University of Chicago, which bears his name, is second in the nation only to that of the University of Michigan.

22. Goodspeed followed the Hort-Westcott text except in six instances: John 19:29; Acts 6:9, 19:28, 34; James 1:17; and Revelation 13:1.

23. Edgar J. Goodspeed, "The Ghost of King James," *Atlantic Monthly* 133 (1924): 71–76.

24. Edgar J. Goodspeed's own work with papyri (including letters, petitions, wills, etc.) was extensive. See his *Greek Papyri from the Cairo Museum, together with Papyri of Roman Egypt from American Collections* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902); with B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Tebtunis Papyri* (London: Oxford University Press, 1907); *Chicago Literary Papyri* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912); and, with David Meuli, *Untersuchungen über einige Papyrusfragmente einer griechischen Dichtung* (Zürich, 1920). Adolph Deissmann was the first to recognize the grammatical similarity between New Testament Greek and the various Greek papyri.

25. Edgar J. Goodspeed, "Preface," in *The New Testament: An American Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923), v.

26. Acutely aware of philological developments in New Testament scholarship, Goodspeed was never likely to be satisfied for long with any translation: "Not a year passes," he wrote in 1937, "that items of New Testament language do not receive new illumination from our advancing knowledge of papyrus materials." See Edgar J. Goodspeed, *New Chapters in New Testament Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 99.

27. James P. Wind, *The Bible and the University: The Messianic Vision of William Rainey Harper* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 48. Wind demonstrates that "modernism" at the University of Chicago was not just "adaptation, progress, and immanentism" (the view put forth by William Hutchison in his edited volume, *American Protestant Thought: The Liberal Era* [New York: Harper and Row, 1968], 88); more important, at Chicago, it was a correctly understood and interpreted Bible. See William Rainey Harper, "Bible Study and the Religious Life," in *Religion and the Higher Life: Talks to Students* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904). For background, see also Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900–1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

28. Shailer Mathews, *New Faith for Old* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 72.

29. Goodspeed, *As I Remember*, 42. For this culture, see Wind, *The Bible and the University*; William J. Hynes, *Shirley Jackson Case and the Chicago School: The Socio-Historical Method* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981); and George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

30. "We really believe," Goodspeed explained in his 1923 William Vaughn Moody Lecture, "that by improvements in machinery [and] advances in science, new comforts, conveniences, and joys are being added to life, and I venture to suggest that it is precisely the grip that faith has upon us that most distinguishes us as a people." Goodspeed went from this preliminary discussion of progress to a defense of his *American Translation*. Moody Lecture, "Why Translate the Bible?" EGC 39:1.

31. Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 2.

32. Goodspeed, *As I Remember*, 161. Much of the ideological agenda of Goodspeed's project parallels the broader aims of what scholars are calling "middlebrow" culture, which emerged in this period. See Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), esp. part II;

Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); and Richard M. Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996). Radway suggests that opposition to the Book-of-the-Month Club came as a result of a rejection of the emerging concept of middlebrow literature, a literature in which a new (antiacademic) definition of culture merged with a certain market-driven production and distribution apparatus.

33. Goodspeed, *As I Remember*, 162.

34. W. E. Garrison in *The University of Chicago Magazine* (Fall 1923), EGC 43:3. The Rev. Dr. J. A. MacCullum of Philadelphia stated, in no uncertain terms, that "it is given to few books to come into existence with so much antecedent publicity as that which has attended this new translation of the New Testament." *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, n.d., EGC 43:4. I have found advertisements for the *American Translation* primarily in religious periodicals, including the *Christian Advocate*, *Augsburg Sunday School Teacher*, *Baptist Leader*, *Advance*, *Christian Evangelist*, *Christian Register*, *Church Management*, *Forth*, *Social Progress*, *Union Signal*, the *Christian Century*, and *Living Church*. For a contemporary account of the phenomenal growth of advertising during this period, see Edward W. Bok, "The Day of the Advertisement," *Atlantic Monthly* 132 (1923): 533–36.

35. See advertisements in the *New York Times*, October 7, 1923; October 17, 1923; and March 16, 1924.

36. The possible exception was the publication of the highly anticipated and demanded Revised Version in 1881. Yet, the RV did not generate the level of newspaper coverage reached by the Goodspeed translation, largely because of advances in media-related technology and the increase of advertising. For the advent of the RV, see Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 216–19; Thuesen, "Some Scripture Is Inspired by God," 609–10; and Hills, *The English Bible*, 295. Judge Frederick A. Henry surmised that Goodspeed's greater popularity over Frank Schell Ballentine's *Riverside New Testament* owed to advertising. See "Professor Goodspeed and Alexander Campbell," *Scroll* (January 1924): 117–21, EGC 43:5.

37. Judging from Goodspeed's personal collection of newspaper clippings (surely not comprehensive), the dozens of syndicated articles likely appeared in many more than fifty papers across the country, with a majority from the Midwest.

38. News of the "shortened" Lord's Prayer even reached Cape Town, South Africa, and other syndicated articles made their way to London and Paris. See Goodspeed, *As I Remember*, 166ff.

39. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, August 30, 1923, EGC, 42:3. News of the "Abbreviated Prayer" made its way into *Time* (September 3, 1923).

40. *Indianapolis Star*, September 2, 1923, EGC 42:3.

41. The decade of the 1920s witnessed a dramatic increase in sensationalistic journalism. For a contemporary account of the changing morality of the industry, see Bliven, "Our Changing Journalism."

42. Keen Ryan continued to warn Goodspeed that God will judge him who lays "his calloused hands upon the holy of holies, the sacred and inspired word of God." See *Chicago American*, August 24, 1923, EGC 42:3.

43. *Chicago Daily Journal*, August 25, 1923, EGC 42:2.

44. This was the view of the editor of the *Greenville News*, August 26, 1923, EGC 42:3.

45. *Madison Journal*, August 29, 1923, EGC 42:3. The editor of the [Boston?] *Transcript* critiqued Goodspeed's use of the familiar "you" as opposed to "thee," believing it appropriate that Scripture employed the old pronouns, for "in so doing we have enriched the language, and prevented the virtue of democracy from degenerating into the vice of vulgar familiarity with the Divine" (November 3, 1923, EGC 43:3).

46. *Janesville Gazette*, August 29, 1923, EGC 42:2; and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 9, 1923, EGC 43:5.

47. "Goodspeed Defends Bible Translation," *Chicago Daily News*, August 25, 1923, EGC 42:1.

48. *Indianapolis Star*, September 2, 1923, EGC 42:3. Between 1860 and 1925, American publishers produced more than 448 editions of the King James, Revised, or American Standard versions of the Bible. See Noll, "The Bible, Minority Faiths, and the American Protestant Mainstream," 196. Noll argues that the KJV's dominance was strictly limited to English-lineage Protestants and not immigrant communities or other minorities. The KJV was, in this sense, bound up with the cultural hegemony of the white Protestant "middling sorts." Mainstream Protestant devotion to the King James Version in American Christianity is still a largely unexplored phenomenon, though recent work by Peter J. Thuesen and Paul C. Gutjahr is helping to sketch the outlines.

49. Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 103.

50. See Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 103ff., and see especially his reference to "English Translations of the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 15 (April 1858): 287.

51. "Editor's Table," *Harper's Monthly* 18 (February 1859): 406.

52. Bruno Lessing, "Jazzing the Bible," *Los Angeles Hearst Organ* (December 1924), EGC 44:2. This editorial originally appeared in a Bloomington, Ill., paper.

53. *New York World*, August 25, 1923, EGC 42:1. This article was one of the more frequently syndicated and reprinted in American papers. Three months later, small local papers were still using excerpts.

54. William Muir, *Our Grand Old Bible*, 2d ed. (London: Morgan and Scott, 1911), 5, 7. With this conviction driving the narrative, Muir provided a 238-page history of the English bibles that contributed to the KJV, the making of the KJV itself, and its subsequent three hundred years of influence. For other celebrations of the cultural influence of the Bible, see Samuel McComb, *The Making of the English Bible, with an Introductory Essay on the Influence of the English Bible on English Literature* (New York: Moffat, Yard, and Co., 1909); John Brown, *The History of the English Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911); Cleland Boyd McAfee, *The Greatest English Classic: A Study of the King James Version of the Bible and Its Influence on Life and Literature* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1912); Ernst von Dobschütz, *The Influence of the Bible on Civilisation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914); William Canton, *The Bible and the Anglo-Saxon People* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1914); William Lyon Phelps, *Reading the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1919); Josiah Penniman, *A Book about the English Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1919); John W. Lea, *The Book of Books and Its Wonderful Story: A Popular Handbook for Colleges, Bible Classes, Sunday Schools, and Private Students* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1922); Frank E. Gaebelein, *Down through the Ages: The Story of the King James Bible* (New York: Publication Office of "Our Hope," 1924); James Baikie, *The English Bible and Its Story: Its Growth, Its Translators, and Their Adventures* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1928); P. Marion Simms, *The Bible from the Beginning* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); Laura H. Wild, *The Romance of the English Bible: A History of the Translation of the Bible into English from Wyclif to the Present Day* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929); James G. K. McClure, *The Supreme Book of Mankind: The Origin and Influence of the English Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930); and, for a Jewish viewpoint, Max L. Margolis, *The Story of Bible Translations* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917).

55. Albert S. Cook, *The Authorized Version of the Bible and Its Influence* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 2–3. See also Albert S. Cook, ed., *The Bible and English Prose Style: Selections and Comments* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1892).

56. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 27, 1923, EGC, 42:3.

57. *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, August 25, 1923, EGC 42:3.

58. See G. W. Butterworth, "The Translation of the New Testament," *Church Quarterly Review* 98 (July 1924): 247–65.

59. *Louisville Post*, April 28, 1924, EGC 44:1.

60. For Goodspeed's twenty-year effort to demythologize the KJV, see his "The Ghost of King James," 71–76; *The Making of the English New Testa-*

ment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 41–51; *The Translators to the Reader: Preface to the King James Version, 1611*, ed. E. J. Goodspeed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935); and "The Misprint that Made Good," *Religion in Life* 12 (1943): 205–10.

61. See *Hartford Times*, August 25, 1923, EGC, 42:2; *Fond du Lac Comm.*, August 29, 1923, EGC 42:3; *Columbus Dispatch*, August 30, 1923, EGC 42:3; *Chicago Evening Post*, April 19, 1924, EGC 44:1; and Henry, "Professor Goodspeed and Alexander Campbell," 119, EGC 43:5.

62. *Hartford Times*, August 25, 1923, EGC, 42:2

63. W. G. Sibley, "Modernizing the Bible," *Chicago Journal of Commerce* (December 8, 1924), EGC 44:2; Lessing, "Jazzing the Bible," EGC 44:2; and *Bloomington Pantagraph*, September 1, 1923, EGC 42:3.

64. *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, August 25, 1923, EGC 42:2; and Mencken, *The American Language*, 388. Mencken's work was a statement of American linguistic independence from Britain. See Raymond Nelson, "Babylonian Frolics: H. L. Mencken and *The American Language*," *American Literary History* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 668–98.

65. Goodspeed, "The Ghost of King James," 72.

66. Peart, however, strongly held that the new translation would not replace the KJV. See the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, August 26, 1923, EGC 42:3.

67. Other critics performed a reversal on this logic by suggesting that his attempt to colloquialize the New Testament was part of an effort to dumb down the masses. One reader denounced Goodspeed's effort to make the New Testament easy reading: "The 'antique diction' of which the good Doctor complains does not worry the plowboy, and the plowboy's mother, as much as it worries the intelligentsia." For this writer, the cultural authority of the KJV was a means by which the "plowboy" could reject the patronizing initiatives of liberal ministers and still identify himself with the Protestant mainstream. Traditional versions of the Scriptures were defended by plowboys and pundits alike. *Louisville Times*, n.d. [though obviously a response to two articles in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* of April 6 and 28, 1924], EGC 44:1. The *Minneapolis Tribune* (as quoted in the *Literary Digest*, September 22, 1923) argued that "millions of English readers . . . have loved the [KJV] Bible without any knowledge of literary criticism, without any conscious appreciation of its literary eminence. It came to the poor and lowly as the Word of God in the Voice of God, and it went to their hearts unchecked by anachronisms or quaintnesses [*sic*] of construction." Another writer urged that Goodspeed's translation was an "impudent presumption upon the intelligence of the reading public." *The Freeman*, December 1923, EGC 43:3.

68. Helene Buhlert Bullock, "The Bible and Young America: A Constructive Suggestion," *Churchman* (January 26, 1924): 15–16. See also Muir, *Our Grand Old Bible*, 187ff.; and *Memphis Comm'l Appeal*, March 26, 1924, EGC 43:6.

69. W. G. Sibley, "Modernizing the Bible," *Chicago Journal of Commerce* (December 8, 1924), EGC 44:2.

70. W. G. Sibley, "Along the Highway," *Chicago Journal of Commerce* (December 29, 1924), EGC 44:2.

71. *New York Times*, August 27, 1923, EGC 42:2. Indeed, even John F. Lyons of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago (one of the schools endorsing the Goodspeed translation) reported that he liked the translation but still thought the KJV superior in language. See the *Chicago Herald Examiner*, August 25, 1923, EGC 39:2.

72. Gene Stratton-Porter authored *Laddie: A True Blue Story* (1913) and *Freckles* (1904). For background, see Judith Reich Long, *Gene Stratton-Porter: Novelist and Naturalist* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1990).

73. Gene Stratton-Porter, "A Word about the Bible," *McCall's Magazine* (May 1924): 1–2, 40, 71, 109.

74. *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1924, EGC 43:5. Several years later, Goodspeed, having sent a copy of his work to former president Theodore Roosevelt, received this equally discouraging, albeit considerably more polite, correspondence: "Many thanks for your letter and for your recent translation of the New Testament, which I have read with the greatest of interest. I do think it is a good idea to translate the New Testament into colloquial English, but I am afraid I am too old and crabbed to wish to see it take the place of the authorized version. In addition, of course, there is the problem involved in picturing truly [*sic*] oriental reactions and scenes from the standpoint of Twentieth century America. I am afraid I know too much of the East to be able to entirely separate from my mind the scenes as I know they must have occurred." Theodore Roosevelt to Edgar Goodspeed, April 19, 1927, EGC 8:2. Perhaps Goodspeed sent the translation to Roosevelt because he knew of the ex-president's interest in the Bible's relationship to nations. See Roosevelt, "The Bible and the Life of the People," in *Realizable Ideals* (San Francisco: Whitaker and Ray-Wiggin Co., 1912).

75. P. L. [Philip Littell], *New Republic* (November 28, 1923): 21, EGC 43:4. Others expressing this viewpoint were Frank Eakin of Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh ("New Translations of the New Testament," *Journal of Religion* 4 [1924]: 133–46) and Wilbur Larremore Caswell ("Will the King James Version Do? Lest One Good Translation Should Corrupt the Church," *The Churchman* [October 2, 1926]: 10–12).

76. *Guelph Daily Mercury*, December 20, 1923, EGC 43:3. See also the *Mormon Deseret News*, August 31, 1923, EGC 42:3.

77. *Living Church* (November 10, 1923), EGC 43:3.

78. Goodspeed, *The New Testament: An American Translation*, vi; and Goodspeed, William Vaughn Moody Lecture, EGC 39:1.

79. *Ibid.*

80. "Goodspeed Bible Is Belabored by Princeton Man," *Chicago Evening Post*, February 5, 1924, EGC 43:6. Machen accused Goodspeed of returning Christendom to the theological "bondage of the middle ages."

81. J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1925), 24–25.

82. *Presbyterian* (December 25, 1924), EGC 44:2. D. A. Hayes also elaborated on the failure of most translation efforts undertaken by individuals. See "An American Translation," *Garrett Forum* (November 1923), 3-5, EGC 43:3.

83. *Baptist Beacon* (May 1924), EGC 44:2, contains the vitriolic reaction of a Minneapolis fundamentalist to Goodspeed's visit to a Unitarian congregation and is one of the few truly alarmist *fundamentalist* reactions to the translation I have found.

84. For example, one fundamentalist end-times enthusiast wrote an editorial in the *Chicago Evening Post* (October 19, 1923, EGC 43:1) praising Goodspeed's translation for its rendering of Matthew's "end of the world" (KJV) as "the close of the age." He suggests that the prophecy contained in Matthew 24 and 25 had been fulfilled in the past decade. Goodspeed was skillful in preempting the conservative reaction. In his lecture on Bible translations, given to thousands of church people in 1923 and 1924, he carefully argued that every significant revival of religion was accompanied by an increase in translation activity, thus identifying his work with revivalistic evangelicalism.

85. Mangasar Magurditch Mangasarian, "A New New Testament," *Truth Seeker* (December 13, 1924), EGC 44:2.

86. "Holy Writ," reprinted from the *Baltimore Evening Sun* in the *Chicago Tribune*, July 18, 1926, EGC 42:3. In a 1931 review of the complete *American Translation* (both testaments), Mencken later admitted the *American Translation's* obvious superiority in certain respects, such as clarity and accuracy. However, even while conceding these matters, Mencken remained convinced that the Authorized Version was superior—*because of its poetry*. Goodspeed's efforts may be appreciated by theologians, but "the rest of us are bound to

feel as we would feel if the glowing dithyrambs of the Gettysburg Address were reduced to the shabby English of Lord Hoover." Seemingly, no measure of hyperbole was spared on the work of Edgar Goodspeed: "As a work of art [the *American Translation*] is to the Authorized Version as a college yell is to Bach's B minor mass." See H. L. Mencken, "New Translation of the Bible," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, December 5, 1931.

87. D. G. Hart has suggested that Mencken's dislike for the Protestant establishment partly explains his peculiar fondness for Gresham Machen. See *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 1–5.

88. Edgar J. Goodspeed, "Why Translate the Bible?" EGC 28:13.

89. Henry Sloane Coffin to Edgar J. Goodspeed, December 8, 1931, EGC 2:9

90. R. W. G., *Congregationalist* (September 13, 1923).

91. Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (1929; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1960).

92. In the 1930s, Goodspeed translated the Apocrypha, and, with it, the *Complete Bible: An American Translation* was published in 1939. Goodspeed's translation of the Apocrypha remains popular (still in print by Vineyard Press) long after his New Testament translation has been superseded.

93. Goodspeed, *As I Remember*, 190. Exact sales figures are no longer available from the University of Chicago Press. For comparison, Goodspeed's *American Translation* rivaled in sales C. I. Scofield's influential and best-selling dispensationalist study Bible. Scofield's work, released in 1909 and published by Oxford University Press, sold a million copies by 1930. A copy of Goodspeed's "Short Bible" even made its way into the hands of Chiang Kai Shek via Sherwood Eddy. See EGC 3:10.

94. Gideons to the University of Chicago Press, September 8, 1941, EGC 4:2.

95. Goodspeed, *As I Remember*, 155. As Goodspeed noted, the literary and linguistic arguments for modern-language translations prevailed. Both the Catholic revised New Testament of 1941 and the Revised Standard Version (NT, 1946) extensively used the principles of modern-language translation. Goodspeed, along with James Moffatt, W. R. Bowie, M. Burrows, H. J. Cadbury, C. T. Craig, F. C. Grant, and A. R. Wentz, served on the committee of New Testament revisers for the RSV. Allen Paul Wikgren notes that "the influence of the Goodspeed and Moffatt versions are (happily) apparent in the

revision and may be clearly seen in the use of unusual vocabulary and phraseology, especially where complete verses or sentences represent a rather free rendering of the Greek." Wikgren discerns this influence especially in Luke 19:48, John 8:44, Romans 2:11, 2 Corinthians 1:14ff. and 4:2, 2 Thessalonians 3:11, and Hebrews 9:16. See Allen Paul Wikgren "A Critique of the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament," in *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow*, ed. Harold R. Willoughby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 383–400.

ABSTRACT Devotion to the Bible remains an underappreciated aspect of American religious life partly because it fails to generate controversy. This essay opens a window onto America's relationship with the Bible by exploring a controversial moment in the history of the Bible in America: the public reception of University of Chicago professor Edgar J. Goodspeed's *American Translation* (1923). Initially, at least, most Americans flatly rejected Goodspeed's impeccably credentialed attempt to cast the language of the Bible in contemporary "American" English. Accusations of the professor's irreligion, bad taste, vulgarity, and crass modernity emerged from nearly every quarter of the Protestant establishment (with the exception of some card-carrying theological modernists), testifying to a widespread but unexplored attachment to the notion of a traditional Bible in the early twentieth century. By examining this barrage of reaction, "Monkeying with the Bible" argues that Protestants, along with some others in 1920s America, believed that traditional biblical language was among the forces that helped stabilize the development of American civilization.

