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June 2014

# **The Concordant Literal New Testament**

meaningless and reduces God from being eternal and beyond time to something much less.

In the Old Testament Knoch translates the Hebrew word *olam* as *eon* or *eonian* without a shred of evidence for so doing, apart from the fact that it is used in similar ways to  $\alpha\omega\nu$  and  $\alpha\omega\nu\iota\omicron\varsigma$  in the LXX and NT. He translates Psalm 41:13 as “**Blessed be Yahweh Elohim of Israel from the eon and unto the eon**”. Again this is close to nonsense and a definite reduction from “**Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting.**” This is not perfect sense in English, but does accurately convey the meaning of the Hebrew.

Knoch’s “consistent” translation of  $\alpha\omega\nu$ ,  $\alpha\omega\nu\iota\omicron\varsigma$  and *olam* has two effects. The first is to produce much that is close to nonsense. The second and more damaging is to reduce things that are essentially eternal to a much more limited duration.

Knoch has written books on the subject of eons, and of course his handling of the words  $\alpha\omega\nu$  and  $\alpha\omega\nu\iota\omicron\varsigma$  totally supports his view. Many other people, including myself, have very different views. I have written two articles, [Aion and Olam](#) and [The Hidden Aeonian Realm](#) which clarify what I have written above and give a completely different interpretation of the words  $\alpha\omega\nu$ ,  $\alpha\omega\nu\iota\omicron\varsigma$  and *olam*.

Like Knoch I totally believe in Universal Reconciliation, but not based on translating  $\alpha\omega\nu$  as an *eon* and  $\alpha\omega\nu\iota\omicron\varsigma$  as *eonian*.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated.

## Αἰών, Αἰώνιος and Olam

The CLNT has been called the Universalists' Bible. This is because the traditional translations of εἰς αἰῶνα (for ever) and αἰώνιος (eternal) which imply unending punishment for unbelievers, are replaced by *for the eon* and *eonian*, which allow for Universal Reconciliation.

Can αἰών be translated *eon* and αἰώνιος be translated *eonian* in all contexts? In the following verses it is blatantly obvious that they can't:

John 13:8: **“Under no circumstances shouldst Thou be washing my feet for the eon!”** The correct meaning is totally obvious: **“You will never wash my feet”**.

Mark 11:14: (the barren fig tree) **“By no means may anyone still be eating fruit of you for the eon”**. Perhaps that fig tree will start bearing fruit again when the eon finishes! Obviously the correct translation is something like: **“May no one ever eat fruit from you again!”**

Heb 11:3: All other translators agree that in this context αἰονες should be translated *worlds* or *universe*. The HSBC says, **“By faith we understand that the universe was created by God's command”**. Knoch puts, **“By faith we are apprehending the eons to adjust to a declaration of God”**. Creation is reduced from the creation of the universe, which totally fits the context (a walk through the book of Genesis), to creation of eons, which is totally irrelevant to the context.

John 17:3: **“This is αἰώνιος life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent — Jesus Christ.”** The meaning, as I understand it, is a spiritual life that we receive when we put our faith in Jesus, and has an eternal and unending quality. Knoch translates this *eonian life*, by which he understands life throughout some future eon. This is a huge reduction of the real meaning.

John 6: 51: **“If anyone should be eating of this Bread, he shall be living for the eon.”** Jesus was offering immediate spiritual life, not physical life at some unknown future time.

Romans 16: 26 speaks of the “αἰώνιος God”. Knoch translates this *eonian* God. The word *eonian* is utterly irrelevant to the context, almost

## Introduction

The Concordant Literal New Testament (CLNT) is the work of a man named A. E. Knoch. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri in America in 1874 and died in 1965. The first edition of the CLNT was in 1926. He held a strong belief in the universal reconciliation of mankind and wrote extensively on this and other subjects. The doctrine of universal reconciliation depends more than any other teaching on the translation of key Greek words and phrases. Should “eis aionas ton aionon” be translated “for ever and ever” or “for ages of ages” or “for eons of eons” or in some other way? Probably it was this problem primarily that caused Knoch to turn his attention to Bible translation.

Knoch was a sincere and dedicated scholar, with an excellent grasp of Greek, and he gave many years of his life to the production of the CLNT.

With the large increase in recent years in the number of people who believe in universal reconciliation, the CLNT has become increasingly popular, and that is why I am attempting this short review. Comments and suggestions are welcome from anyone interested in the subject.

## The Problem

Knoch was aware of many errors in the Bible translations of his day. He believed that a major source of error was inconsistency of translation. Frequently translators translate one Greek or Hebrew word by several different words in English or one Greek or Hebrew verb tense by several different tenses in English.

For example the KJV translates the Greek word *aion* by *world*, *age* and *ever* according to its context, and one might add the opinions, traditions and biases of the translators.

Consciously or unconsciously translators can chose different ways of translating individual Greek words in accordance with their own doctrinal or theological views.

Knoch wanted to produce a translation of the scriptures that would as much as possible be accurate and free from personal bias, including his own.

Did Knoch succeed in these aims?

## **Knoch's Method**

In order to achieve the aims of accuracy and freedom from bias Knoch devised the concordant method of translation.

Knoch believed that God specially designed the Hebrew and Greek languages to be the vehicles of revelation. Each word of scripture was especially chosen by God to be the vehicle of divine truth.

The first thing Knoch did was to go through the whole vocabulary of the Greek New Testament aiming to find the best English equivalent for each Greek word. He built up a concordance of these words, which is published together with the CLNT.

This process was long and difficult and must have required years of careful and painstaking study.

In addition, for each Greek verb tense he chose the English tense which he felt best corresponded to it.

When he had completed this formidable task, the translation of the New Testament became a largely mechanical operation. He just needed to put the English words and tenses he had chosen that corresponded to the Greek words and tenses in the original.

In addition to this he devised a large number of signs and symbols which he inserted into the text to clarify further anything which was not a directly literal translation from the Greek according to his rules.

We must now address the two questions: did this method result in accurate translation? And did it remove all its translator's bias?

to be more accurate than other translations. His very careful choice of English words will sometimes provide insights into the meaning of the original Greek which are less clear in other translations.

The CLNT in some ways brings you as close as or closer to the Greek than any other translation. His various signs and symbols provide a lot of further information about the original Greek, which would otherwise only be available to people who have actually studied Greek.

## **Summary**

A. E. Knoch, I believe, was an honest and sincere lover of Scripture and seeker after truth. He was also a gifted linguist and scholar.

He saw some of the limitations of his approach to translation, but not sufficiently clearly. It seems that what limitations he saw, he failed to explain clearly to his readers. The CLNT is not the one and only unbiased, reliable version of the Scriptures in English that some of its advocates think it to be.

Much of its English is so unnatural and obscure that it can only be understood by people who are already familiar with the Bible in more normal English.

However used as a Bible study aid, and work of reference alongside other translations of the scriptures, the CLNT can make a very valuable contribution to Bible study, especially for the majority of people who cannot read Greek. It incorporates the fruits of years of research by a very painstaking, able and honest scholar. It is a very useful reference work, particularly for those who wrestle to understand the meanings of difficult and sometimes controversial passages of the New Testament.

immersion and would prefer **in**, while others believe in baptism by sprinkling or pouring and would prefer **with**. The Greek here is ambiguous and both translations are equally valid.

Inevitably again, rather than having the one correct unbiased translation, we have Knoch's opinion in favour of **in** water. Some other Bible translations actually put both **in** and **with**, and allow the reader to make up his own mind. That is clearly a true unbiased approach.

## Knoch's Hope

Somewhere in his writings Knoch expresses the hope, that, just as the KJV influenced the whole English language, the CLNT would do the same for future generations. The English words that he chose to represent the Greek words in scripture would begin to take on new meanings in line with their Greek counterparts. This would certainly bring about a greater understanding of the original text.

It would indeed be a happy day if every speaker of the English language spent sufficient time reading the CLNT to change our use of the English language. Would God that our English speaking people gave that amount of time to reading any version of the Scripture!

80 years on now from the first edition of the CLNT, few people would believe that Knoch's dream could ever come true.

## Strengths of the CLNT

I have dwelt at some length on negative aspects of the CLNT, mainly because the CLNT and its advocates do not do this themselves and for the large part seem to be unaware of them. However I definitely believe the CLNT also has a very positive side.

Although, as I have said, inevitably some translator's bias remains in the CLNT, undoubtedly a large amount has been removed, and that can only be good.

Knoch laboured intensively to find English words that most accurately translated the Greek originals, and in many cases he is likely

## Is the CLNT an Accurate Translation?

We must take a closer look at the concordant method. At first sight it sounds good and right that all Greek (or Hebrew) words should be translated consistently into English, but in fact this concept is deeply flawed. The idea that any given Greek word should always where possible be translated by the same English word sounds good, but it runs totally contrary to the way languages actually work.

Individual words in any language represent areas of meaning rather than pin-points. The area of meaning covered by a word in any given language hardly ever corresponds exactly to the area covered by a similar word in another language. You only have to look in any foreign language dictionary to get this point. Any French dictionary will give several French words for one English word and conversely several English words for one French word. The most accurate translation of any given word will vary according to its context. The same thing of course is true with English and Greek (or Hebrew).

Knoch of course knew this and frequently had to use two or more different English words for a single Greek word.

*Logos* in Greek is most commonly equivalent to the English word **word**. But its meaning is much wider. The lexicon gives *reason, discourse, doctrine, instruction* and several other words, any of which might be the best translation of *logos* in a given context. To insist it must be translated by the same English word every time it occurs results in inaccurate and bad translation. In fact Knoch uses four different English words - *word, expression, account and matter* - to translate *logos*, demonstrating the impossibility of using one English word for each Greek word, but still not accurately conveying the full range of the meaning of *logos* in English.

The same is true of tenses of verbs. The Greek present tense sometimes correspond to the simple English present, I walk, and sometimes to the continuous, I am walking. To translate always by the continuous, I am walking, even though it may remove translators' bias, is inaccurate translation.

All this has two consequences. One is that Knoch frequently has to break his basic rule. The other is he frequently uses English words which are less accurate translations of Greek words than those he would use if he were not trying to stick to his rules. The result is that the CLNT has minor inaccuracies in almost every sentence.

Viewing the problem in another way, we can say that the CLNT looks like the work of a foreign speaker of English. A foreigner often thinks in his own language and translates word for word and tense for tense into English. (English speakers speaking foreign languages usually do even worse!) This is in fact almost exactly what Knoch has done. He is effectively thinking in Greek and translating word for word into English.

Foreigners who speak English in this way are not good speakers of English. Most of the time we can understand what they are saying, but they are not accurate and they are often unclear.

If you doubt what I am saying, just read one sentence of the CLNT and see! We are not talking about serious errors such as may be found in some other translations. Rather it is minor errors of accuracy and clarity that occur in almost every sentence.

## Is the CLNT free from Bias?

Knoch's other aim was to make a translation that was free from any bias, including of course his own. Excellent though his intentions were, there are at least three areas where the CLNT reflects Knoch's personal opinions and is therefore not free from bias.

**Area 1: Choice of the best English word to translate a given Greek word.**

Knoch himself decides what is the best English word for a given Greek word. This sounds like a very obvious statement, but it is easy simply to miss the implications. 90% of the time another translator might agree with him, but certainly not 100%.

An obvious example is the Greek word *aion*. Knoch has decided that *eon* is the best English word to translate it. Other translators would

not agree. They might chose *age* or *ever* as the best translation of *aion*. Or they might say it needed several different English equivalents according to its context.

I am not saying that Knoch was right or wrong to choose the word *eon*. What I am saying is that the choice of the English word *eon* was Knoch's personal opinion, rather than being the one correct translation.

**Area 2: Choice of whether one English word is sufficient to translate a given Greek word.**

Knoch accepts that some Greek words need more than one English word to translate them according to their context. John 3: 8 is a clear example. The Greek word *pneuma* occurs twice in this verse. The CLNT translates it: "The **blast** (*pneuma*) is blowing where it wills, and the sound of it you are hearing, but you are not aware whence it is coming and where it is going. Thus is everyone who is begotten by the water and the **spirit** (*pneuma*)."

However in the case of *aion* Knoch decided that *aion* could always be translated by the one English word *eon*. Other translators believe that it must be translated by *ever* or *age* or *world* according to its context.

The whole subject of the translation of  $\alpha\iota\omega\nu$  and  $\alpha\iota\omega\nu\iota\omicron\varsigma$  is so critical that I have added a specific section " $\text{Αἰών and αἰωνιός}$ " at the end of this writing.

**Area 3: When Knoch decides that more than one English word is needed for a given Greek word, he decides which English word to use in each case.**

For example Knoch agrees with everyone else that the Greek preposition  $\epsilon\nu$  (*en*) must sometimes be translated as *in*, and sometimes as *with*. He translates Matthew 9: 10 as "*in* ( $\epsilon\nu$ ) the house" and Luke 22: 49 as "smiting *with* ( $\epsilon\nu$ ) a sword". Obviously he is correct to do so. The problem comes with Mark 1: 8. The CLNT has "I indeed baptize you *in* ( $\epsilon\nu$ ) water". The KJV has: "I indeed have baptized you *with* ( $\epsilon\nu$ ) water." Both of these are valid translations. Of other translators, some agree with Knoch and have "*in* water", and some agree with the KJV and have "*with* water". Obviously some people believe in baptism by