Adventist Involvement with European Bible Societies

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Adventist Bible scholars and administrators have repeatedly been invited to participate in Bible translation, revision,
Introduction

Bible Societies are nondenominational bodies that promote the use of the Bible, act as platforms for revising older versions, and for translating or retranslating the Old and New Testaments into many languages of the world. Instances of Adventist collaboration with Bible societies in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Switzerland are particularly noteworthy. There has certainly been other Adventist involvement with Bible societies in Europe and in other world regions; this article is, therefore, merely a partial attempt to describe and evaluate an exemplary part of the larger story.

Origins: Adventist Involvement in the French Bible Society on the Administrative Level

The French Bible Society is organized in two different entities: the Alliance Biblique Française (ABF), which is a nonprofit association preparing various projects to make the Bible available and understandable to the French-speaking public and is financed by gifts; and the Société Biblique Française (SBF), which is a commercial society selling the products prepared by the ABF and financed by its commercial activities. Both entities are members of the United Bible Societies (in French, Alliance Biblique Universelle). Before 2012, when the Alliance Biblique Universelle was completely reorganized, the ABF/SBF was the leader of a taskforce called Francosec to coordinate the projects of the French-speaking Bible societies, including those of Belgium, Switzerland, Québec, and several African and Asian countries. This explains why the good relations between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the ABF/SBF had a positive influence on the other French-speaking Bible societies. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has had a representative on the board of the ABF/SBF since the 1980s. Their commitment was always well received, and the denomination has been a regular and welcome partner of the ABF/SBF.

Emile Sauvagnat, the publication director of the Franco-Belgian Union (FBU), already had friendly relations with Jean Barral, the general secretary of the ABF, when Marc Boegner was chairman of the ABF/ SBF board in the 1950s. Maurice Verfaillie (general secretary, FBU, 1988–1995) was invited by Jacques Stewart, then president of the Fédération Protestante de France, to become a member of the board of the ABF/ SBF. Jean-Pierre Boyer, as general secretary of the ABF/ SNF, was happy to welcome an Adventist representative on that board. When Verfaillie was called to serve as Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director of the then Euro-Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventist in 1995, the FBU proposed that Bernard Sauvagnat take his place on the board of the ABF/ SBF. Sauvagnat stayed on that board from 1995 to 2012 and became vice-president of the ABF (2010–2012). At that time, Sauvagnat served as Sabbath-School and Personal Ministries director at the FBU. Jean-Jack Chafo grack (Northern France Conference president) succeeded on the board from 2012 to 2018 and became president of the ABF (2015–2018). Since May 17, 2018, Matthieu Fury, the Education director of the North France Conference, is the Adventist representative on the board of the ABF.

The Nouvelle Bible Segond—édition d’étude

In 1988, Maurice Zehnacker, FBU president, asked Jean-Claude Verrecchia, at that time the director of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Correspondence School in France, to offer his collaboration to the ABF for adding introductions to the last revision of the Louis Segond Bible, called “à la colombe,” published in 1978. At that time, this Bible was the most used French version among evangelicals. Verrecchia was selected to become one of the four members of the editorial committee, together with Jean-Claude Dubus (Reformed), Mario Echter (Pentecostal) and Henri Blocher (Evangelical). Thus, Verrecchia became the first Adventist member of an academic ABF committee. While working on this project, the team noticed that the translation needed a thorough revision. It was decided, therefore, to prepare what is called now La Nouvelle Bible Segond edition d’étude—a study Bible version.

The work for this version took nearly 14 years. Verrecchia wrote the introductions to the books of Daniel, Revelation, Hebrews, Colossians, and Philippians as well as many entries in the glossary. Knowing the French-speaking Adventist scholars, Verrecchia suggested that the committee ask for their contribution. Richard Lehmann, then president of Salève Adventist University, read and corrected the translation and notes of Paul’s epistle to the Colossians. Roland Meyer, then lecturer of Systematic Theology at the Faculté Adventiste de Théologie, having worked before for the Adventist publishing house in France, spent almost 500 hours in proofreading from June 2000 to January 2002, when the text was already in the printing process. She worked closely with Didier Fougeras, who was the editorial secretary of the ABF, and corrected most of the text except the books of Ruth, Job, and Psalms, which were given to other proofreaders, among whom was an Adventist
A special vocabulary of 90 words or phrases was created. Several meetings of the French and Swiss teams took place on the Seventh-day Adventist Campus of Collonges. The video recording took place during winter 2009–2010, and three DVDs were published in May 2010.

Beyond these Bible versions for contemporary readers, the ABF had promoted the Bible for several decades through classic itinerant exposition made of several boards. When it needed renewal, it was decided to create a new interactive and dynamic exposition: La Bible, patrimoine de l’humanité (The Bible, heritage of humanity). Once more Verrecchia was called to participate in this project. He wrote several boards—amongst others, one on Bible manuscripts, another on materials on which the Bible has been or is available, and one on the Bible translations.

### The Bible in French Sign Language; Revision of the Bible en Français courant

In December 2007, the ABF editorial committee decided to publish a book of the Bible for the French-speaking deaf and hearing impaired. One of the secretaries employed in the office of the South France Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Valérie Lefebvre, was already committed to serving this group of people; therefore, she was invited to participate in this project. In turn, she invited a young Adventist woman, Marjorie Chanzy, who was learning sign language, to work for this project as a volunteer. The gospel of Luke was chosen and divided into nine sections of two or three chapters each. Each section was translated by one of the nine teams in four countries (France, Switzerland, Belgium, and Congo Brazzaville). Fifteen Bible scholars worked with these teams to check the accuracy of the translations compared to the Greek text of the gospel. A special vocabulary of 90 words or phrases was created. Several meetings of the French and Swiss teams took place on the Seventh-day Adventist Campus of Collonges. The video recording took place during winter 2009–2010, and three DVDs were published in May 2010.

First published in 1982, the Bible en Français courant, a dynamic translation of the Bible, is among the most appreciated products of the ABF. It was revised in 1997. When the first edition appeared, Bernard Sauvagnat was editor of the Signes des temps magazine; after reading it, Sauvagnat wrote to the ABF asking for a revision of Daniel 8:14 on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—because it said “1150 days and 1150 nights.” The 1997 edition took account of our request, and the text now says, “2300 nights and mornings.”

In 2016, the editorial committee of the ABF decided it was time to do a complete revision of this translation. Dr Valérie Duval-Poujol, a Baptist scholar, who teaches the Septuagint at the Catholic University of Paris, was asked to lead in this revision project. She called for the collaboration of several Adventist scholars: Richard Lehmann for Philemon, Roland Meyer for 1 Corinthians, Bernard Sauvagnat for 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jean-Claude Verrecchia for 1 and 2 Timothy and Colossians. Each reviser works on the text, the notes, and the introduction of the books; they follow the 28th edition of Nestle–Aland and a detailed guide that reflects the philosophy of this particular translation. This work is still in process.
Belgium and the Netherlands

In Belgium and the Netherlands there are three Bible Societies: two in Belgium, one French-speaking (French Belgium Bible Society, FrBBS) and one Flemish-speaking (Flemish Belgium Bible Society, FIBBS), and one in the Netherlands (NLBS) that is Dutch-speaking, a language very close to Flemish, also spoken in Surinam. In 2003 Rudy van Moere, a Seventh-day Adventist minister and then professor of Old Testament at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Brussels University, who speaks the three languages, became a member of the board of the FIBBS and was elected vice-president, a function he filled until 2006. In 2004 he was invited to be a guest member of the board of the NLBS because he was one of the supervisors of the Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling, a high quality interconfessional Bible. From 2006 to 2011, he was a member of the FrBBS. From 2004 to 2016, he served as NLBS board member and as advisor of the FIBBS board. In 2016 he wrote commentaries for the Bijbel in Gewone Taal, a Bible in fundamental Dutch using idiomatic expressions typically Dutch and not Flemish.

The French-speaking Belgian Bible society closely cooperates with its French counterpart and promotes and sells its Bible editions. But it also has its own publishing projects, which are promoted in other French-speaking countries as well. It produced, for instance, the Luc Magazine and the Marc Magazine, which present the Gospels according to Luke and to Mark as modern magazines. In 2004 two Seventh-day Adventist ministers were members of the Constituency of the FrBBS: Rudy Van Moere and Jacques Rase. In 2008 Jacques Rase was elected board member and vice-president. Another Seventh-day Adventist pastor, Michel Mayeur, who had been editor of the Adventist magazine Signes des temps, also served as copy editor for publications of the FrBBS in several instances. Several other Adventist representatives continue serving the FIBBS, NLBS, and FrBBS.

The Swiss Bible Society

Eleven local or cantonal Bible Societies, one of them created in 1804, formed the Alliance Biblique Suisse in 1947. This Alliance became the Swiss Bible Society in 1955. The Seventh-day Adventist Swiss Union was accepted as member of the Swiss Bible Society in 1994 with a right to vote in its constituency meetings. By the end of 2002, a letter was sent by the Swiss Bible Society looking for new board members because there were only three members left, but its policy required seven. The Swiss Union proposed Reto Mayer as candidate, and the constituency voted his name in 2003. He became the first Seventh-day Adventist member of this board. In 2005, he was elected vice-president; then, in 2013, when the former president resigned, he was appointed president. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is eager to support Swiss Bible Society projects, and the other partners—mainly Protestant denominations—developed a positive view of Adventists.

The German-speaking churches of Switzerland wished to have a Bible exposition adapted from the French one: La Bible, patrimoine de l’humanité. The Seventh-day Adventist Church provided crucial financial support to this project. The exposition was presented for the first time at the assembly of the German-speaking churches in Zurich in 2017. As most of the members of the Swiss Bible Society are from the mainline Protestant churches, Reto Mayer notes, “One of my aims was, as far as possible, to present the Bible as God’s Word rather than just a product, a book to sell. This challenge has been met through meditations introduced in each board and constituency meeting.”

The Portuguese Bible Society

Teofilo Ferreira, an Adventist pastor from Portugal, former missionary to Israel, professor of Old Testament at the Adventist Faculty at Collonges until 1994, and associate director of the Ellen White Estate in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A., was one of the Old Testament translators of the Bíblia para Todos (The Bible for everyone), an interdenominational edition. The translation was done directly from Hebrew and Greek and not from other languages as sometimes happens. The Portuguese Bible Society knew Ferreira’s expertise on biblical Hebrew and in 1975 invited him to join the small translation team. This relationship continued during all the years he worked in Jerusalem, France, and the U.S.A.

This translation was to be a team effort. The team was composed of three Protestant and three Catholic translators. Ferreira translated seven books of the Old Testament and revised the translation of seven other books from 1973 to 1993. When the entire Old Testament text had been finished and was to be reviewed, he was invited with another translator to read it completely for corrections.

His collaboration with the Portuguese Bible Society continued on other projects from 1999 to 2009, mainly as a reviser. Recently, Ferreira participated in a special Bible project sponsored by the Portuguese Bible Society that focused on putting the book of Psalms to music for young people; the British Bible Society participated as well.

Lessons

These instances of cooperation demonstrate the interest of European Adventists in the Bible. Adventist contributions were possible because of the high quality of training of ministers and scholars in biblical languages. Moreover, the general atmosphere of brotherhood in Christian universities and churches in Europe facilitated the inclusion of Adventist scholars among the scientific teams of the Bible societies.
SOURCES

Alliance Biblique Française, *Dossier de presse LFS* (PDF format), Paris, April 2010.


NOTES

1. On March 31, 2018, I heard a colleague from Romania saying that some Adventists worked with Orthodox scholars on Bible translation in Romania. After the presentation of this paper in Friedensau on April 24, 2018, a colleague from Iceland mentioned that there was also Adventist involvement with the Iceland Bible Society. For an account from Norway, see Tor Tjeransen, “Adventists and Cooperation with Other Denominations in the Bible Societies,” in *Faith in Search of Depth and Relevancy: Festschrift in Honour of Dr. Bertil Wiklander*, ed. Reinder Bruinsma (N.p.: Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 2014), 497–506.

2. Personal memories of B. Sauvagnat, son of E. Sauvagnat (died in 1985).


4. This revision of the Louis Segond Bible 1910 was published in 1978 by the Société Biblique Française with a dove as logo. This is why it is usually called “à la colombe” in French (colombe in French means “dove”).

5. Jean-Claude Verrecchia, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2018.


7. Roland Meyer, unpublished text sent attached to an e-mail message to author, February 27, 2018.

8. C. Egasse, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2018.


10. Verrecchia, e-mail message to author, March 6, 2018.

11. Verrecchia, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2018.

12. P. Rodet, e-mail message to author, March 6, 2018.

13. Ph. Anquetil, e-mail message to author, March 6, 3018.

14. P. Franco, e-mail message to author, March 6, 2018.

15. Verrecchia, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2018.

16. V. Lefebvre, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2018.


18. Lehmann, e-mail message to author, September 26, 2017.

19. Meyer, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2018.

20. Verrecchia, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2018.


22. R. Van Moere is still a member of the board of the FIBBS and NLBS and member of the consultative committee of the FIBBS. Jacques Rase, as vice-president, is now working on the strategic plan of the FIBBS for 2020. Tom de Bruin, a Dutch Seventh-day Adventist minister is also a member of the constituency of the NLBS. Johan Delameillieure, a Belgian Seventh-day Adventist minister, is a member of the consultative committee of the FIBBS. See J. Rase, e-mail message to author, March 1, 2018.

23. R. Mayer, unpublished text attached in e-mail message to author, March 1, 2018.

25. Ferreira, e-mail message to author, March 6, 2018.