

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, edition, or education projects of several national Bible societies in Western Europe over the past 40 years.

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 Europe¹ 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.² 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.³ 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 Chafograck (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,”⁴ published in 1978. At that time, this Bible was the most used French version among evangelicals. Verrecchia⁵ was selected to become one of the four members of the editorial committee, together with Jean-Claude Dubs (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 édition 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.⁶ Roland Meyer, then lecturer of Systematic Theology at the Faculté Adventiste de Théologie in Collonges-sous-Salève, worked on the text and notes of the two epistles to the Corinthians.⁷ Bernard Sauvagnat, then pastor of the campus church in Collonges, wrote the introductions to the gospel according to Luke and to the Acts of the Apostles and revised the translation and notes of Acts. For the translation, the writers and translators were required both to follow the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland and to stay

faithful to the classic translation style adopted by Louis Segond at the end of the 19th century.

When the translators' and revisers' work was finished, Françoise Thaeber, a retired copy editor at the Adventist French publishing house, was asked to read the texts for correction. Finally, Corinne Egasse, then secretary of 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,⁸ except the books of Ruth, Job, and Psalms, which were given to other proofreaders, among whom was an Adventist retiree, Hélène Pfenniger,⁹ who had worked both for the FBU offices and for the Adventist French publishing house. All the Adventist contributors to this large project evidently worked to the satisfaction of the FBU leadership; this project thus facilitated future joint projects with the ABF!¹⁰

"La Bible expliquée"; "Ze Bible"; Bible Exposition

The *Bible expliquée* project aimed at adding to the margins of the Bible en Français courant (a dynamic translation of the Bible comparable to the New English Bible) short explanatory comments to help readers unfamiliar with the Bible to understand it better. Each comment was to be written by two persons of different Christian confessions—a Bible scholar and a non-scholar. Verrecchia was asked by Christian Bonnet, then general secretary of the ABF, to work with Bettina Cottin, a female minister, to comment on the epistle to the Hebrews.¹¹

Ze Bible, a Bible for young people, was one of the largest projects of the ABF so far. Eleven Christian organizations working for young people became partners. Among them was the Youth department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in France. The project included a printed Bible using the text of the Bible en Français courant, with many helps and tools, but also a special website and pages on social networks (YouTube and Facebook), aiming to develop a community of young readers of the Bible. A series of videos was produced to nurture these web pages, and songs were composed to stimulate interest in the Bible and its life-changing message.

Seven years (2004–2011) of teamwork were necessary to complete the project. The two successive Adventist youth leaders of the FBU, Paul-Louis Ferrandez (2004–2008) and Pascal Rodet (2008–2011), were members of the managing and editorial committees. The responsibility of those two committees was to lead the project and validate the different texts written to help Bible readers. Pascal Rodet is still on the managing committee because the digital part of the project is continuing.¹²

Two other Adventist youth leaders, Philippe Anquetil (South France Conference) and Gabriel Samperio (South France Conference), as well as three Adventist scholars, Richard Lehmann (Faculté Adventiste de Théologie), Pierre Franco (South France Conference, and representing the Adventist Church in the Bible committee of the Fédération Protestante de France), and Jean-Claude Verrecchia (Faculté Adventiste de Théologie) were among the writers of comments, notes, portraits, and other tools for young readers. Anquetil and Samperio wrote the

comments on 2 Samuel.¹³ Franco wrote the comments on Galatians together with a Roman Catholic.¹⁴ Lehmann wrote the comments on the Pastoral Epistles; Verrecchia¹⁵ wrote several articles of the Tools. One of them, the Canon, was very sensitive because the committee had decided to include the deuterocanonical books, a resolution that upset the Evangelicals. Beyond the scholarly work and the contributions toward applicability, the Adventist input is evident in a note about present Sabbath observance, which mentions not only the Jews but also the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Beyond these Bible versions for contemporary readers, the ABF had promoted the Bible for several decades through a 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.¹⁶ 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 2010.¹⁷

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 Lehmann¹⁸ for Philemon, Roland Meyer¹⁹ for 1 Corinthians, Bernard Sauvagnat for 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jean-Claude Verrecchia²⁰ 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,²¹ 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.²²

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."²³

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 Biblia 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 Testament²⁴ and revised the translation of seven other books from 1973 to 1993.²⁵ 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.²⁶

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.

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

Tjeransen, Tor. "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.

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).
3. M. Verfaillie, telephone conversation with B. Sauvagnat, March 12, 2018.
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.
6. Richard Lehmann, e-mail message to author, September 26, 2017.
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.
9. C. Egasse, e-mail message to author, March 8, 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, 2018.
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.
17. Alliance Biblique Française, *Dossier de presse* LFS (PDF format), Paris, April 2010.
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.
21. R. Van Moere, e-mail message to author, March 19, 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 FrBBS 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.
24. T. Ferreira, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2018.
25. Ferreira, e-mail message to author, March 6, 2018.

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