

Words Poorly Used #41 — Interpretation

Interpretation is not the same as translation, although some will confuse the terms, by design or otherwise. I am in the midst of listening to Dan Carlin's podcast, Hardcore History, Show 48 — Prophets of Doom. It is a recounting of the European period often called the Reformation, a time most characterized by a dramatic turmoil in the power structure of the Christian religion. Although Martin Luther incurred wrath for his 95 Theses, he probably roiled the waters more deeply with his translation of the Bible, not from the Latin touted by the Vatican, but from the Greek and into middle-class German. Until that time Rome had controlled both access to the literal "bible," as purportedly hand-transcribed by clerics, and all interpretation of "The Bible" in the fashion approved among the priesthood. Now if you wanted to have power over people, for good or bad, which would you rather control, the literal word, or the interpretation of the word? The Roman Catholic church controlled both the language and delivered a rigorous interpretation thereof prior to the Reformation. So Martin Luther wrested the control of the black-and-white, and put it in the hands of the great unwashed. But beyond that, he encouraged them to interpret this new scripture in their own ways. An interpretation is light years from a translation. Let's just look for a moment at the definition of "translation" in math and physics — it means to move an entire construct in a straight line without rotation or reshaping. Fundamentalists today tell us that the Bible is literal, yet very few of us have seen a "Bible" that was not the product of many layers of reinterpretation, with much rotation and much reshaping.

Kilgore