

STEPS TO CHRIST, ADAPTED
STEPS TO JESUS/KNOWING HIM BETTER

Several years ago it was proposed to our office that the book Steps to Christ has so many beautiful gems that need to be read and understood by people around the world that it might be helpful to plan for an adaptation, with shorter sentences and less complicated vocabulary. This was specifically suggested for those whose second or third language is English and whose English vocabulary is limited. The idiomatic expressions that are rather common in our language would have to be eliminated and the sentences shortened in order that some readers could grasp Steps to Christ in English. So we began preparation of such a book.

As the work progressed it was subjected to careful study by many people. This included not only missionaries, but those who were to benefit from the finished work. People of such areas of the world as the South Pacific, Africa, and the islands for example. After study over a period of several years, including careful work by theologians, the book that we have today is the result.

In the meantime, there was strong urging that such a book would be helpful in this country, where there are many people who have limited reading skills and would struggle with the vocabulary sometimes found in Steps to Christ. Children and youth were suggested as another reading group. As a result, this book was published first under the title of Steps to Jesus, and now under this new title, Knowing Him Better. From the beginning it was clearly indicated that the book is an adaptation rather than something that would take the place of Steps to Christ. It is never intended that this will supplant Steps to Christ, but will be used for a special purpose, as I have indicated.

Steps to Christ has now been translated in 117 languages. This raises an interesting thought: Whenever a book is translated, you have to paraphrase and choose a vocabulary that will get the message across in that language. Frequently, some words are not possible to translate precisely. I believe this is one reason why the Bible is not by verbal inspiration. The Lord gave prophets thoughts that could be translated into many languages. Otherwise, all of us would have to know the original Greek or Hebrew in order to understand the words of Scripture.

In a way, this adaptation should be looked at as another translation for a certain audience that might not fully understand all of the expressions that Ellen White used. On the other hand, as I said before, Steps to Christ will always be a standard publication and this will not take its place.

Let me say something else about the background of this project. We are not establishing a new precedent by this work. When Ellen White was alive, she sensed that there would be a need for this type of publication. Her son Edson was working in the South, among the blacks who had less education than the average. He talked with her about the possibility of preparing an adapted book on the life of Christ. At that time she was writing The Desire of Ages, and there was other material she had written on the life of Christ in articles for the Review and elsewhere. Ellen White gave Edson authorization to prepare an adaptation from this material, and as a result a book was published. In the beginning it was titled, Christ Our Saviour, and in more recent years it has been called, The Story of Jesus. This book represents an effort to simplify the language, and it is still in print. Ellen White approved of her son doing such a work and encouraged him in this endeavor. All printings of this book are clearly identified as adapted.

Now, with all of this said, of course we need to be aware that there are possibilities of changed and varied meanings as a result of translation or adaptation. These are some of the risks that are taken. However, we are fortunate that we do have the original material. For those who can best use it--which will be the great majority--the original Steps to Christ will always be a standard work and will be a great blessing, as it has been throughout the world.

Again, we must remember that inspiration is not verbal. Ellen White chose her own words, and as her material was prepared for print, secretaries helped her in putting this into a final form. This all had her approval. Others helped her to correct grammar and spelling, and in some cases, sentence construction. With her limited education she was not always able to do this work without some help. In the beginning it was her husband who helped her, and in later years she had secretaries who worked very closely with her. The final product, of course, is Ellen White's. But in its preparation there was careful work by others who served with her. This is a reminder again that inspiration is thought inspira-

tion and not verbal, although often Ellen White carefully considered the exact words that should be used.

At the White Estate we are always concerned that we will not interpose our ideas and thoughts between the prophet and the people. On the other hand, we also recognize that the message, imperfect though it may be, needs to get to the world, and it may take the form of translation into other languages, and can possibly serve even another segment through adaptation. This may include children; it may include those who have a limited understanding of vocabulary and words; it may also include those who would not understand the idiomatic expressions that are so common to the English language--and to other languages, for that matter. In preparing this adaptation we are trying to reach a wider audience with the heart of the message that Ellen White intended should be sent.

Our concern is that always the message of the prophet will come through clearly. Obviously, we cannot be perfect, but an effort has been made to do the best we can to meet a need that we felt was important.

Paul Gordon, Chairman
Simplification Committee
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