

# THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

PERIODICAL FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BIBLE TRANSLATORS

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## Editorial Comment

The second assembly of the World Council of Churches is to meet at Evanston in August of next year and has adopted as its general theme, 'Jesus Christ our Lord, the only Hope of the Church and the World'. In October 1952 a commission appointed to do advisory and preparatory work on this theme produced a report which all engaged in Bible translation should study. In the opening passage dealing with problems of language and communication, the following occurs: "We are met at the outset by difficulties concerning the use of words. An obvious difficulty is that of translating the Bible into languages rooted in religions which have no hope. In such languages no adequate word for hope exists". The report then refers to the whole series of terms associated with the Christian concept of hope, some Biblical and some not, yet all key words in the theological vocabulary of the English language and some "non-translatable into other languages".

There can be little doubt that we have here a matter of the utmost importance and interest to all our readers. Impossible though it would be to bring even a fraction of the total evidence to light before Evanston, we have thought it worth-while to publish in this number four studies by scholars, each having a wide experience of different types of non-Christian background and the particular problem of appropriating from non-Christian cultures terms adaptable to Biblical use. The three most important and obvious cultures of this kind are represented by Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The Rev. J. S. M. Hooper deals with the concept of hope in the main languages of India, illustrating the Christian dependence upon the Sanskrit term *asha* and its derivatives. The Rev. Eric Bishop deals in the same way with the Arabic terms, many of which have been adapted to a wide range of related and non-related languages in India, Africa and elsewhere. Both these studies are, in the main, factual and do not profess to show whether in the course of time these borrowed words have proved capable of expressing the full content of the basic words they represent. Perhaps the time for a pronouncement on this subject is not yet, but Evanston challenges us all to a new type of research along these lines.

Some valuable exploratory work has already been done in some areas. For instance, the Rev. J. S. M. Hooper has just completed a study of the treatment of some one hundred and twenty key words of the Greek

New Testament in sixteen major Indian languages. When available this book will be an indispensable *vade mecum* for those who are now committed to the tremendous task of revising the major Bibles of North India. Of a somewhat different *genre*, but bearing directly on the same subject, is Dr. Edwin Smith's symposium, *African Ideas of God*, which throws much light on one of the most difficult of all translational problems, the right choice of terms for the Divine Names in a variety of African tongues. Helpful though these books are in their respective fields, there is a sense, however, in which the revisers of every major version need to do their own specialised research along the lines indicated by the Evanston commission. It ought never to be too late to root out words which have failed to do justice to the central ideas of the Christian faith and it is the duty of translators and revisers not only to be sensitive to the quality and significance of the great key words of the Bible, but to be tireless in their quest for adequate terms to express them.

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## The New Testament Translation of *elpis* in Languages of India

J. S. M. Hooper

It is well that at last the consideration of *elpis* should be coming into the foreground of Christian thought, with the prominence that the Assembly of the World Council of Churches will give it; there may thus come a clearer recognition of the nature of the problems the word presents to the translator of the Bible. Compared with the vast literature on Faith and Love, Hope has received scant attention. Though the noun *elpis* does not occur in the Gospels, the idea of Hope is implicit in the whole teaching and life of Jesus Christ, and the frequent use of the word in the Epistles is an entirely natural and legitimate formulation of what is already in the Gospels. One reason for the comparative neglect of the study of *elpis* may be the close relation between Faith and Hope, so that Hope has been regarded as one element in full Faith; but in the New Testament the two are constantly treated as separable in thought.

It needs to be remembered that in pre-Christian thought in the West—as well as in non-Christian thought in the East—'hope' is a quality of ambiguous status. This is illustrated in the Greek and Roman mythology by the story of Pandora, the first created woman. Her insatiable curiosity drove her to open a forbidden chest, so that all its contents, whether evil or good, were let loose on the world, and only Hope remained. But whether Hope was the one consolation left to man, or was man's chief deluder... this was the subject of dispute; the story was susceptible of diverse interpretations. On the whole the dominant view seems to incline to the cynical interpretation of Hope as an illusion—a parable of the disillusionment that follows the hopefulness of youth, and reflecting the