

## Readers' Corner

From W. C. Somerville:

"Peter" or "St. Peter," which should we use in Bibles? The point was raised while I was in Brazil recently. It will be of interest to those engaged in preparing editions of the New Testament for the press. The older Portuguese version uses a full form of title for the various New Testament books, e.g. 'The First Epistle of Saint Peter the Apostle'. The new version for Brazil uses a short form, simply 'The First Epistle of Peter'. My friend Mr. Roderick Davies, who has long experience of selling Scriptures in Brazil, tells me that nowadays he occasionally meets Roman Catholics who decline to buy the new version because they claim that the Peter whose name appears above the letter is *not* St. Peter the Apostle at all, but some other Peter of unknown origin and credentials. It is difficult to convince them otherwise, and the resulting argument is not conducive to sales. The same applies, of course, to the other books of the New Testament. Mr. Davies is rather afraid that this attitude may be encouraged by some priests as a lever to dissuade purchases and that he may meet it more frequently as time goes on.

There seems to be a point here worth keeping in mind. I would venture to suggest that in the case of New Testaments in languages used in Roman Catholic countries it would be advisable to retain or to introduce the longer title. No harm can be done, and in some cases good may result.

From Marion M. Cowan, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Mexico:

In an attempt to translate Luke 1:59 into Tzotzil, the problem arose as to what to use for the word *circumcision*. Three solutions came to mind: (1) use a literal translation of the act of circumcision, (2) use a term meaning only 'act of cutting', or (3) use the Spanish loan word *circoncision*. Each one seemed to present difficulties. The first held the danger of being vulgar, the second left a question in the mind "a cutting of what?" and the third gave the people a term which they did not understand, not only because of the language barrier but also because circumcision is not practiced in this Indian society nor in neighboring ones.

An experience with some believers in another area shed more light on this subject. They came asking for help in understanding certain verses in Paul's writings (e.g. Galatians) where the Spanish loan *circoncision* had been used. On being asked if they knew the meaning of the word, they replied, "We think we do, but we are not sure." After a brief description to them of the practice of circumcision in the Jewish culture, the subsequent explanation of the spiritual truth contained in these verses resulted in an increased understanding on their part. How can anyone understand the spiritual truth of many passages throughout the epistles without knowing the basic metaphor of circumcision which is there used? It does not seem satisfactory for

the meaning of this word to pass only by word of mouth with the great probability of its being distorted in one way or another.

As a result of this experience with these believers, I have the following suggestions for the translation of this term:

1. In the first occurrence of this word in the New Testament, i.e. in Luke 1:59, use a literal translation for the act of circumcision of the baby John. Probably, since it is a baby that is involved, this would not seem vulgar to the people but be comparable to the baptizing of their infants when they are given their names.
2. As part of the text immediately following, give some short parenthetical explanation, such as "(This act of cutting is called 'circumcision')," here introducing the Spanish loan. The reason for suggesting that the parenthetical explanation be a part of the text is for the information of the reader who has not learned to read footnotes and perhaps may never have anyone to teach him how to apply them to the text.
3. In all other passages in the New Testament where this word occurs, use the loan *circuncision* with a footnote reference "See Luke 1:59."

This form of procedure will give the reader the basic knowledge he needs, to which may be added the spiritual applications found farther along in the epistles.

I would like to have opinions on this suggested method of translating this term.

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## "A Spade is a Spade"

In the Malay translation of the New Testament that came from the press a few years before the war, the word for 'leprosy' was shunned, on the ground that in all likelihood such a malady was not meant by the writer. Instead of 'leprosy' a transliteration of the Hebrew word was used: 'the zara'at illness'. The advisory committee for the present revision, however, decided to go back to the traditional rendering and to use a word meaning leprosy. The proposal to do so was "carried with acclamation." Afterwards one of the pastors on the committee said, with a happy sigh of relief: "Now I have no longer to explain the word every time we come across it in my congregation."

"How did you explain it?" I asked.

"Well, I always said: The translators seem not to know what this word means, but it must have been something very much like leprosy."

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