

The 'proof of the pudding is in the eating' and the proof of this 'pudding' has been 'eaten' in Indonesia. The old Malay versions rendered *tsara'ath* by *kusta* = leprosy. The 1939 version changed over to transliteration. But even pastors trained by that version's translator have not accepted the change. They preferred *kusta* which did have a meaning to "tsaraath disease" which had none, and which they therefore had to explain again and again, usually by equating it with . . . *kusta*.<sup>12</sup> So the means defeated the end!

(4) The three considerations mentioned above are of a general character. Another is more specific, being typical for present day Bible translating. I mean the great influence of older and modern versions in western languages on the versions made and used by the younger churches. For the time being there is still a shortage in the younger churches of Christians with a real and thorough knowledge of Hebrew and Greek; even many translators have to work without that knowledge, and nearly all the national Christians whose task it is to criticise, correct and improve the translation. If they want to check a translation many of them will use a version in a modern western language which they know. Therefore, even in the (rare) cases where the conditions for a change in the rendering of *tsara'ath* in a non-western language seem to be exceedingly favourable, the chances may be spoiled by a western version still retaining the rendering "leprosy" or its equivalents. This leads to the conclusion that the problem could only be tackled effectively with the widest possible international consultation.

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## The Translation of 'Leprosy'

*A brief contribution to the discussion by E. A. Nida:*

The translation of the term *leprosy* constitutes a real problem in any language in which really serious consideration is given to the difficulties involved. For the most part, of course, translators either borrow a term from a national or colonial language or merely equate *leprosy* in the Bible with the indigenous equivalent of Hansen's disease. It is quite evident that even though the Hebrew and Greek terms *may* have included what is now known as Hansen's disease (this is, however, quite doubtful), they certainly do include a great deal more than is implied in Hansen's disease and specify types of skin diseases with very different pathological forms. Of course, the problem is made even more acute by the fact that as far as the Bible is concerned the significance of *leprosy* is not in its pathological damage to the individual but in the fact that it renders such a person ceremonially "unclean" and hence unfit for participation in the social life of Israel. Treatment is thus primarily ostracism until the individual can be declared "clean".

<sup>12</sup> The Bible Translator IX (1958), p. 91.

For all Western languages of which I have any knowledge the Greek and Hebrew terms are translated by an expression which is equated with Hansen's disease, and to which has been attached an almost morbid fear. The varieties of ways in which *leprosy* has been treated may be generally classified as follows:

1. Use of a term which is presumed to be historically related to the Biblical disease, but which in fact designates Hansen's disease, e.g. *lepra*, in one form or another, in the various Romance languages.
2. The rendering of *leprosy* by an indigenous expression, in places where Hansen's disease is known and under circumstances in which the missionaries or other Westerners have made the identification, e.g. "disease of animals" the idiomatic phrase employed in Shilluk (a Nilotic language, spoken in the Sudan) and "devil sore" the indigenous expression used by the Huave people of southern Mexico.
3. Employment of a borrowed term (usually from the national or colonial language) but with certain classifying attributives so as to render the term more meaningful, e.g. *lepra* plus 'Lazaro sickness' (a common designation of leprosy in colloquial Spanish) as an aid to intelligibility in Shipibo (a language of Eastern Peru); and *lepra* plus 'disease' in Trique, a language of southern Mexico.
4. The use of descriptive terms or phrases in areas where leprosy is not known, e.g. 'decaying sores' (Barrow Eskimo), 'bad ulcer' (Zoque, spoken in southern Mexico), 'rotting sickness' (Bolivian Quechua), and 'skin-rotting disease' (Cakchikel, spoken in Guatemala). In some instances translators have used a word which means little more than the 'itch', but this expression has usually been abandoned as not being of sufficient importance as to warrant the Biblical condemnation.

A problem almost equally complex with a designation of *leprosy* is an expression for translating *cleansing*, used in connection with *leprosy* in the Bible. In many languages the literal equivalent of to *cleanse* is merely 'to give a bath to' or 'to pour water over' or 'to wash'. As a designation of the process of curing a skin disease or of declaring someone ceremonially clean, such expressions are quite meaningless. Accordingly, in many languages it is necessary to render *cleanse* by such words or phrases as 'to heal', 'to make well again', and 'to cure'. Otherwise the ministry of Jesus in cleansing lepers would mean little more than 'washing out an ulcer' or 'pouring water over rotting skin'.

Except for a couple of brief notes earlier in *The Bible Translator* and the article in the January issue, I know of no discussion of this translation problem in missionary or linguistic literature.

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