QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

PSALMS 101—150

The following questions and answers have been selected from the files of the British and Foreign Bible Society and of the Netherlands Bible Society. In the former case the answers have mostly been provided by Rev. H. K. Moulton of the Translations Department, and in the latter case by the Translators' Advice Committee which consists of Old Testament scholars. In order to present this material in the most useful form we have freely adapted the wording, and refer to versions not mentioned in the original questions if these illustrate the point better for English-speaking readers. The following abbreviations have been used:

Am Tr: An American Translation (Psalms by J. M. Powis Smith)
ASV: American Standard Version
AV: Authorized (King James) Version
comm: the Dutch version in the *Korte Verklaring* commentary
LXX: The Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament
Malay: Bode's version of the Psalms, 1947
Mft: Translation by James Moffatt
OTTP: *Old Testament Translation Problems,* ed. A. R. Hulst
PBV: Prayer Book Version
RSV: Revised Standard Version
RV: Revised Version; mg: RV margin

Psalm 102:12 (13)

Q. RV: "thy memorial"; RSV: "thy name". May this be rendered 'the thought of Thee'?

A. Yes. Both here and in Ps. 135:13 the Heb. word means 'thought, remembrance'.

Psalm 103:5

Q. RV: "Who satisfieth thy mouth"; ASV: "thy desire"; RSV: "who satisfies you... as long as you live." What is the explanation for all these renderings, and what is the best?

A. The Heb. word means 'ornament'. Some interpret this in various ways, e.g. 'soul', 'desire', 'strength'; others, as the RSV, seek a solution in emendation. The rendering 'mouth' is dropped by most modern versions; the context seems to support the idea of 'strength, vitality'.

Psalm 104:3a

Q. RSV: "who hast laid the beams of thy chambers on the waters." This is not easy to translate; can you explain a little?

A. The waters here referred to are those "above the firmament", cf. Gen. 1:7, 7:11, Amos 9:6. The 'beams' form the foundation of the structure. Mft. renders 'buildest thy chambers on the waters', which is a possible solution if one cannot follow the text more closely, though it is less poetic.

Psalm 104:3b

Q. "Wings of the wind". This figure is not known in Bari. Should I risk a literal translation, or use a phrase meaning 'a great dust storm'?

A. It is a pity the wind has no wings in Bari! I do not think 'dust storm' would be good here. You could use the phrase 'swift wind', but try to find out if the literal rendering conveys any meaning and would be acceptable, even if strange at first.

Psalm 104:26

Q. Must we transliterate "leviathan", or can we have "that great animal"?

A. Most modern versions transliterate, but if this presents too great a difficulty to your readers, some such phrase as 'sea-monster' is suitable.

Psalm 105:4

Q. We have two words for 'seek', one for a child looking for his mother, the other for seeking something lost. Can we use both, one in each part of the verse?

A. Both verbs really mean 'resort to', from resorting to the place where God may be found. If both your words can

bear this meaning your solution is good; otherwise you can repeat your first word.

Psalm 105:28

Q. RV: "they rebelled not"; RSV: "they rebelled". Which should it be?

A. The Heb. certainly has the negative, in which case the statement must refer to Moses and Aaron. However, if this is confusing in your version, it is better to follow the RSV.

Psalm 106:28

Q. "Offered sacrifices to the dead". Can we use the term for spirit worship here?

A. It is not certain whether the reference is to the spirits of the dead, or to the deadness of idols. Perhaps the best rendering is, "Ate sacrifices for dead (or lifeless) gods."

Psalm 109:10

Q. RV: "let them seek their bread out of their desolate places." RSV: "may they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit." Which is better?

A. This is a difficult passage. You may follow the RSV.

Psalm 109:21

Q. How shall I make the distinction here? Shall I put "Jehovah my Lord" or "GOD my Lord"?

A. This is always a difficulty. If you do not use the transliteration of Jehovah elsewhere, it is better not to introduce it here. Your second suggestion is therefore perhaps the best solution. One should certainly not put "God my Jehovah" as in one version.

Psalm 110:5

Q. "He will shatter kings". We have used a word meaning to break the power of the kings, not meaning to wound them.

A. Yes, your rendering is correct.

Psalm 112:4

Q. Is "the upright" here singular or plural? Do the words "gracious, merciful and righteous" refer to "the upright"?

A. 'Upright' is plural here and in v. 2 (also in Ps. 33:1, 49:14, 107:42, 111:1 and 140:13). The words 'gracious' etc. are singular, so that they refer probably to "the light". The RSV inserts "the Lord", but this is lacking in the Heb.

Psalm 118:12

Q. RV: "quenched"; RSV: "blazed". Which should I follow?

A. Most modern versions seem to choose for the latter, although it rests upon a conjecture.

Psalm 118:27

Q. RV: "sacrifice"; RSV: "festal procession". Which is better here?

A. There is some uncertainty here, but it is safest to follow the RV.

Psalm 119

Q. What are the exact distinctions between law, statutes, commandments, testimonies, ways, precepts and judgments? We have *saret* for the law of the land, *tokoresi* for bearing witness, and *liliesi* for a chief's rulings.

A. *Law:* a word meaning 'the law of the land' is suitable here.
Statutes: these are inscribed decrees.
Commandments: 'commands' would be a better English word.
Testimonies: this means something more like 'teaching (of the law)'.
Way: 'manner of life, life, conduct'.
Precepts: 'a thing appointed, a charge'.
Judgments: this is the ordinance promulgated by the 'judge'; your word for a chief's rulings seems to be good.

Psalm 119:49

Q. RV: "Because thou hast..."; RSV: "in which thou hast...". Which is better?

A. Modern versions are fairly evenly divided. The RSV rendering may be slightly preferable.

Psalm 119:56

Q. RV: "This I have had because..."; RSV: "This blessing has fallen to me that...". Which should I take?

A. The RSV supplies the word 'blessing' which is lacking in the Heb. This seems to give the general meaning.

Psalm 119:109

Q. RSV: "I hold my life in my hand." Is it all right to render: "I do not know when my life will be taken from me"?

A. The idea is of hazarding one's life. Instead of keeping it safe inside one, one holds it dangerously in one's hand. Cf. Ju. 12:3, 1 Sam. 19:5, 28:21, Job 13:14. Your phrase does not seem quite adequate; rather something like "my life is always in danger".

Psalm 119:119

Q. "Dross". There does not seem to be a word for this which refers only to metal. We have a phrase for 'siftings of gold'; will that do, or should it be another metal?

A. The word primarily refers to dross of silver, but is here indefinite. If you cannot say 'dross of metal' in general, then 'siftings of silver' would be best. You might alternatively use the word for 'scum'.

Psalm 119:130

Q. "The simple". This has been translated by a word meaning 'humble, meek, submissive', but we have a word meaning 'weak, unformed' which I think is better. What do you think?

A. The Heb. means 'open-minded', but may carry the connotation 'too open, too easily led astray'. Your word for 'unformed' seems good provided it does not convey exclusively the latter meaning.

Psalm 119:139

Q. Here "consume" seems to mean 'cut off, bring to an end'. Can we use a word meaning 'pierce, stab to death'?

A. The Heb. means here 'to destroy', i.e., 'it has put an end to me' (because it is so intense). Your word rather changes the metaphor.

Psalm 119:140

Q. RV: "very pure"; RSV: "well tried". What does the Heb. mean exactly?

A. It is a metaphor from refining metal.

Psalm 119:147-8

Q. RV: "prevented the dawning... prevented the night watches". May one render freely as follows: "woke before dawn... before the night-watches"?

A. Yes, the word means 'anticipate, forestall'. The psalmist can hardly wait for the opportunity to meditate on the words of God, both early in the morning and in the evening.

Psalm 120 title

Q. RSV: Song of Ascents"; Mft: "A pilgrim song". As we have no word for pilgrim, may we render 'Song of travellers to Jerusalem'?

A. Your suggestion is rather long. Could you follow the more literal RSV rendering, with the explanation in a footnote?

Psalm 120:4

Q. RV: "coals of juniper"; RSV: "coals of the broom tree". We have used the name of a wood used for smelting.

A. Yes, that is a wise choice. The Heb. *rothem* refers to a shrub related to broom but which has thick woody roots which were, and still are in the peninsula of Sinai, used for charcoal.

Psalm 124:8

Q. In our language it is difficult to render "help is *in* the name of". May we render "depends on"? Also possible is: "Our help has its ground in..."

A. There seems no objection to either alternative. If this phrase is already used in church liturgy, you will want the Bible translation to agree if possible.

Psalm 129:6

Q. Here we have had to use the word for 'corn' instead of 'grass'.

A. The reference is to odd bits of grass which grow in cracks in the roof, and are no use for harvesting as hay: 'Corn' hardly seems a good solution here.

Psalm 135:3

Q. RV: "Sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant"; RSV: "sing to his name; for he is gracious". Is it "singing praises" which is pleasant, or "his name", or should we follow the RSV?

A. Authorities are divided, but the reference is probably to "his name".

Psalm 136:10

Q. RV: "that smote Egypt in their firstborn". We render: "that smote Egypt, that killed all his firstborn".

A. The meaning is "smote Egypt by killing the firstborn".

Psalm 137:2

Q. "Willows". We have put 'fig tree' as it is the commonest tree found by rivers here. We have nothing corresponding to the willow.

A. Authorities differ as to the tree intended. Certainly use a local tree, but preferably not the fig, since this so often occurs in a different connection in the Bible.

Psalm 137:7

Q. "Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem." We render: "Avenge, O Lord, the day of Jerusalem on the Edomites." Also possible is: "Exact the guilt concerning..."

A. Either alternative is suitable provided it does not imply that the Edomites actually destroyed Jerusalem, which they never did.

Psalm 139:6

Q. In Toradja you cannot speak of knowledge being too 'high'; you must say it is too deep!

A. The meaning is that it is out of reach of man. If that is what your idiom means it is correct.

Psalm 139:14

Q. RV: "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made"; RSV: "for thou art fearful and wonderful". Which is better?

A. See OTTP on this problem. The Heb. is certainly first person, not second, and it may be better to follow the RV even though it is the more difficult.

Psalm 145:2

Q. "Bless... praise". We do not have a word for bless. What is the distinction between 'praise' and 'bless'?

A. "Bless" always causes difficulty. There are three kinds of blessing: 1. God blessing man. 2. Man blessing man. 3. Man blessing God. Here it really means 'praise', but as this already occurs you will need a synonym for praise.

Psalm 146:10

Q. "Thy God, O Zion, unto all generations". We cannot render the second half of the verse without a verb. Shall we say "Thy God shall reign or reigns unto all generations"?

A. The future is probably best. You might be able to find a synonym for 'reign', such as 'rule, be king' for the second occurrence.

Psalm 148:7

Q. RV: "dragons"; RSV: "sea monsters". We have translated 'great fish'. In Revelation we have 'great python'. Daniele says that pythons are regarded as water animals as well as land creatures.

A. The reference throughout is probably to a great primeval monster or sea serpent. If the python is regarded only as a water animal then it would be very suitable here and in Psalm 74:13 and 91:13. This would also tie up with Revelation. But if it is more commonly regarded as a land animal, the chance of misunderstanding is here too great.