THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

PERIODICAL FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BIBLE TRANSLATORS

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VOL 4, No. 3, JULY 1953.

Some Aspects of Bible Translation concerning the Old Testament

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The first aspect to which I should like to point is—at first view it may seem somewhat queer—that Bible translating is really translating. What I mean can be illustrated from different angles.

First of all the Bible translator, and in particular the translator of the Old Testament, has to bear in mind that Bible translating is not practising textual criticism. Of course, the translator has to occupy himself in more than one case with questions concerning the text, but he has to realize that it is not his first and foremost task to inquire into the correctness of this text; his first and foremost task is to translate the text which is lying before him. In this respect I recall to memory what J. Philip Hyatt wrote in a review in the *Journal of Biblical Literature of 1950* (p. 186): "The first duty of the modern translator should be to give a faithful rendering of the Massoretic text, whenever that can be made to yield good sense; if not, he may then resort to emendation on the basis of the ancient versions. Conjectural emendation should be a last resort, and is seldom necessary". Careful consideration of these fundamental principles of Bible translating makes sufficiently clear what the difference is between translating and practising textual criticism. The translator has not to trouble himself with questioning whether there are solid grounds to regard the Massoretic text as the nearest approach to the original text; he has to look for a rendering of the Massoretic text which according to lexicon and grammar can be called faithful and yields sufficiently good sense, and if he succeeds, his task as translator is accomplished. Personally he may be convinced that in a certain case the Massoretic text is a deviation from the original, but he must not suffer himself to be led by this conviction; he has to produce a faithful and sense-making translation, and then his task is finished.

It may be of interest to demonstrate what has been argued by producing an example. I therefore point to Ezekiel 3 : 12. Here the Authorized English Version has, "Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, (saying), Blessed be the

glory of the Lord from his place". The word "saying" is not found in the Hebrew text, and is therefore printed in italics or, as here, between brackets. Now there is good reason to doubt whether the Massoretic text is right. In the next verse again the voice (or the noise) of a great rushing is mentioned, and we are impressed by the idea that this "great rushing" is the noise of the wings of the living creatures and of the wheels that accompany them. According to a conjecture proposed independently by two scholars, Luzzatto and Hitzig, nearly all modern commentators think that the Hebrew word *baruk* ("blessed") has to be replaced by *berum* ("in rising"). Then the sense would be "I heard behind me a noise of great rushing when the glory of the Lord rose from its place". There is, however, no external evidence for this reading, it is a mere conjecture; and the Old Testament Translation Committee appointed by the Dutch Bible Society, following the principles set forth above, has presented this translation: "Then the spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the noise of a great rushing—blessed be the glory of the Lord in his place—: the noise of the wings of the living creatures, etc.". The words "blessed be the glory of the Lord in his place", which cause difficulty in connection with the context, but cannot faithfully be rendered otherwise and in themselves yield good sense, are now put between dashes as a parenthetical clause (such as are found sometimes more in Hebrew, e.g. Ob. 5 "how art thou cut off"), and by the colon at the end of the verse the noise of great rushing is indicated as the noise of the wings of the living creatures, which doubtless is the meaning.

To throw light upon our thesis that Bible translating is really translating, we have likewise always to keep in mind that the business of the translator is not that of the interpreter. Again it would be entirely out of place to argue that the translator has nothing to do with interpretation. On the contrary, as has been stressed on more than one occasion, translation may be called condensed interpretation. But we have not to forget that translating is not the same as interpreting. Just to point to a paramount trait: it is the duty of the interpreter to present what in his opinion is the exact exegesis of a certain text, but if a text according to language and grammar allows of two quite different interpretations, it is the task of the translator, if possible, to present a translation which likewise allows of these two different interpretations. We add "if possible", for it is not always possible, but the ideal and most faithful translation is one which is capable of the various interpretations opened up by the text to be rendered. This immediately brings before us the limitations which the translator has to observe. If the text to be rendered shows a certain ambiguity, the translation must not eliminate this ambiguity; and if the text to be rendered leaves us with some uncertainty, the same must be the case in our translation. For instance, when Esther 1 : 22 informs us that the letters of the king to all his provinces prescribe that "every man should bear rule in his own house", the Hebrew goes on to say that "he should speak according to the language of his people". The meaning of this latter phrase remains doubtful, to say the least. And as it is not the task of the translator to give a definite interpretation, it has to be left precisely as uncertain as in the Hebrew

text. Therefore we cannot approve of the Authorized English Version which inserts "it" and thereby makes the clause refer to the royal decree, mentioned in verse 20, telling us that "it should be published according to the language of every people"; neither can we approve of the Revised Version which tries to make us believe that every man himself "should publish it according to the language of his people".

As it is the first and foremost duty of the translator to present a faithful rendering and not a more or less elaborate interpretation of the text, he has carefully to refrain from making additions to the original text. This does not mean that he is not allowed to use in his translation more words than are found in the original text. Of course he has to render the Hebrew or Aramaic in such words of the language in which he is translating as are necessary to express as exactly as possible the meaning of the Biblical text. And if this purpose can only be served by using more words than this text has in the original language, he is fully justified in doing so. I do not refer to abbreviated relative clauses or the absence of the copula; this goes without saying. What I have in mind is that it is not justifiable to make additions which are not only not found in the original language, but which the text does not intend to express. Just to give an example. Psalm 27 : 13 in Hebrew presents us with an incomplete sentence; it is a conditional clause, not followed by an apodosis. Now it is the right translation policy to render merely the conditional protasis, and the addition of some words in order to complete the sentence is not justified, as e.g. the English Version (both Authorized and Revised), which has "(I had fainted), unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living"—the addition in italics or between brackets. The faithful translation is, as is presented by the New Translation of the Dutch Bible Society: "Oh, if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!" It is a passionate exclamation which leaves it to the reader what to think about a possible supplement. And the very idea of this text is suppressed by the American Revised Standard Version which has "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living", (eliminating the expressive conditional particle). Another example is derived from the Aramaic part of Daniel. In Daniel 3 : 15 the infuriated king Nebuchadnezzar thus addresses Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego: "Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, cither, lute, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image which I have made..." The sentence is not completed, in his rage the king hastens to his terrible threat, "but if you do not worship you shall immediately be cast into the burning fiery furnace, and who is the god that could deliver you out of my hand?" This must be exactly so rendered, and the translator has to refrain from any endeavour to complete the incomplete sentence by supplying some words like "well" (English A.V. and R.V.) or "well and good" (American Revised Standard Version).

If such a policy is followed, it will be hardly necessary to use italics or brackets. As far as words are inserted lacking in the original but absolutely necessary in another language to give the faithful rendering,

it would be indeed wrong to indicate such insertions. Actually they are not insertions, but simply a rendering of the original. Only a very few cases might require the use of italics or brackets. For example, when the original presents us with an alternation of persons, constantly employing simply the third person of the verb, which may, incidentally, cause some confusion to the reader; in such a case it may be commendable to use a name instead of the pronoun of the third person, and then it is advisable to put such a name between brackets in order that the reader may understand that the name is not found in the original. And there may be some few instances of other character. So in Nehemiah 10 : 31 (in the English Version and also in the Dutch Version 10 : 30) we meet with a verbal form in the plural of the first person, whilst in the preceding verse participles are used connected with a number of categories mentioned before. This causes some difficulty in translating, because our idiom opposes the continuing from the third in the first person. In practice we cannot say: "they entered into a curse and into an oath, to walk in God's law... and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord, our Lord... and that *we* would not give our daughters unto the people(s) of the land", as the English Version (both A.V. and R.V.) has. Therefore the Committee on Old Testament, appointed by the Dutch Bible Society, has had recourse to the insertion of a new commencement: "Furthermore we incurred an obligation not to give our daughters unto the peoples of the land", putting the words "we incurred an obligation" as being not found in the original between brackets. On the contrary, in Genesis 6 : 16 where the Hebrew, in repeating the divine directions as to the construction of the ark, informs us that the ark had to be made with various stories but speaks merely of "lowers, seconds and thirds", omitting any word for "stories", the Committee has inserted the word "stories", just like the English Version, but does not employ brackets, as doubtless stories are meant.

Another aspect of Bible translating which deserves our particular attention is that the translation must not in the least obscure the fact that the Old Testament is a book of Eastern character. Certainly, the translator has to render the Old Testament in such a manner that people reading it in their own language can clearly understand it, but this does not imply that a Western reader might receive the impression that the Old Testament by translation has been transformed into a Western book. Now it is necessary to realize what the preservation of the Eastern character really means. It does not mean that all immaterial features of the Hebrew and Aramaic idiom must be rendered in the same way. The Hebrew is accustomed to repeat, for instance, the preposition "between". It says: "I will establish my covenant between me and between thee and between thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17 : 7), but it is not advisable to repeat the preposition in English, and rightly therefore the Authorized Version has: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee". This is better than the old Dutch Version which has preserved the repetition of the word "between". On the other hand, the typical Hebrew expression "yesterday and before yesterday" ought to be preserved. This is not merely a linguistic pe-

culiarity, but a symptom of the vivid and graphic manner of description which is a natural feature of the Eastern character. Only in passages of the more legal style the expression might be changed for the simple "before". In this connection it is also important to call attention to the frequent use of the interjection "lo" or "behold". This is exceedingly characteristic of the vivid Eastern manner of description. It tries to picture the things which are happening, and repeatedly appeals to us: "look, look!"

A final aspect of Bible translation to which I wish to point is the absolute impossibility of producing a so-called concordant version, by which is meant that the same Hebrew word is always rendered by the same word in a certain translation. This would lead to translation "ad absurdum". It is not necessary to illustrate this by examples. But merely to enable our readers to judge for themselves I mention the Hebrew word *nefesh,* which is generally rendered by "soul", but is also employed to indicate "perfume" (Isaiah 3 : 20) or "greediness" (Proverbs 23 : 2) and in a great many shades of signification besides. How could it be possible to find a word in any language which could include such diverging signification? Of course there is some truth in the idea underlying the demand for a concordant translation. The translator must steer clear of arbitrariness. As far as there are marked expressions which are constantly used with a similar tendency it is important to use always the same rendering. Technical terms, in particular appertaining to the cult, must always be translated in the same way. The Hebrew language has various words for "gold" and in order to remain true to the text we have to use different circumlocutions to render these various words: fine gold, pure gold, etc., but then we have to be careful that we constantly employ the same expression for the same word. It is, however, impossible to apply the same rule to every Hebrew word. This would not lead to a faithful rendering, but in many cases would actually obscure the sense of Scripture. The translator has to study carefully the context and from this he has to derive the precise shade of meaning of a particular word in a particular case. Perhaps I may refer to what I wrote some years ago in the Swiss periodical *Theologische Zeitschrift* (1948) on the signification of the Hebrew verb *jaṣa'*. This is a verb of rather simple character, and there is no doubt that it means "to go out". But, as Koehler had demonstrated in the same periodical a year before (1947), it is not true that we can always reach the best results in rendering it thus. In some cases it rather has the sense "to make one's appearance", "to proceed". To the samples which had been given by Koehler I added some others, from which I particularly wish to call attention to II Samuel 20 : 8, the somewhat obscure passage on the meeting of Joab and Amasa. Here we are informed that Joab had a sword hanging in its sheath on his loins, and "as he *proceeded,* it fell down". In discerning this particular sense of the verb *jaṣa'* in this particular case, we are released from every difficulty and from the necessity of following the Septuagint in taking the verb as referring to the sword, which implies textual alterations. Another example may be the substantive *ṣedaqah,* which generally has the sense of "righteousness", "justice", but in some cases must be understood as "salvation". Obvious instances of this last signification are to

be found in Psalm 98 : 2 where the word is parallel to *jeshu'a*, and in Psalm 103 : 17, where it is parallel to *chesed*.

It is manifest that the Bible translator, in particular the translator of the Old Testament, is not faced with an easy task. The fulfilment of this task requires the most careful scrutiny and cautious prudence. But it is a privilege, never to be sufficiently appraised, to be entrusted with this responsible task.

On the Use of the Name 'Isa

A third and final contribution by Wilfred J. Bradnock

The arguments for and against the use of *'Isa* have now been set forth with compelling advocacy by D. A. Chowdhury and L. Bevan Jones and one is led to the conclusion that those who must make a decision on the basis of theory alone deserve all our sympathy! It remains to ask whether there is any additional factor which has not so far been adduced. This article is written in the belief that there is, but it is a factor which will demand the most careful analysis and evaluation. In the last resort the decision for the use of *'Isa* in preference to some form of transliteration of *Iesous* must remain to some degree subjective and call for the courage of the translator's conviction.

The factor so far not discussed is that of actual usage. In the many scores of versions of the Christian Scriptures produced in areas where Muslim influence is either predominant or very strong, how have translators in the past actually dealt with the problem and has time any verdict to pass upon their decisions? The study which follows is based upon some 70 different versions in use in Muslim areas and though it is to some degree representative, it is far from exhaustive.

The most interesting results derive from a study of the history of Arabic versions. These show a remarkable consistency. Beginning with the *editio princeps* of the Arabic New Testament edited by T. Erpenius and published at Leyden in 1616, and continuing through the outstanding versions of the 17th century including the great London and Paris polyglots, right up to modern times, the usage has been *Yesu Almasih* or some approximate transliteration. *'Isa* is nowhere found. This goes also for the great standard version of Van Dyck which is in current use.

The history of the Persian version is rather different. Beginning with the early 19th century, we find that Henry Martyn decided on the use of *'Isa* in his edition of 1815. Possibly because Henry Martyn's version was of such outstanding quality, it remained for many years the standard Bible and though subsequent editions underwent correction, the use of *'Isa* has never been challenged. A different story, however, is to be told about Henry Martyn's even greater translation of the New Testament into Urdu. As might have been expected, he used *'Isa* also in this version, but by the year 1829 for reasons which can now be the subject of conjecture only, *'Isa* gave way to the transliteration *Yesu Masih*. Is it legitimate to suppose that whereas in an entirely Islamic