Translation of Biblical Terms: An Illustration

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(The author is now preparing for the press a study of 120 key words of the Greek New Testament as they have been translated in some sixteen major Indian languages. This is a pioneer effort to produce an essential tool for the many translators and revisers now engaged in producing new versions in several of the most important N. Indian languages. The following article illustrates the method adopted.)

In the first meeting of the Central Council of the Bible Society of India and Ceylon, in November 1944, among many other subjects of far-reaching importance that were discussed was that of translation; and within that vast field one particular part was singled out for special investigation by a small committee. Its task is to prepare a list of important Biblical words with the various translations that have been given for them in the major Indian languages.

One example of this, on a world-wide scale though in very summary form, is provided by an index in the British and Foreign Bible Society publication, "The Gospel in Many Tongues", where the words used for 'God' in the 710 languages in which the Society had published Scriptures up to the year 1937 are given. Some aspects of the same question are discussed, with particular reference to the Greek word *aletheia* and the Sanskrit *satya,* in a scholarly and valuable article by Robert M. Clark of the United Church of Canada Mission, on 'A Study of Theological Categories in the Indian Church' in the International Review of Missions for January, 1943.

The humbler purpose of the present article is to encourage study on these lines by giving one small illustration of the kind of problems that will repay investigation, if existing translations in English and some other languages are any criterion of difficulty. The apparatus required is as many translations of the New Testament as possible; a concordance; dictionaries; and such books of reference as may be available. The debts in this brief article will be obvious to all students.

I take a word which occurs only three times in the Greek New Testament. In its noun form it is *philotimia,* and it is translated as follows in the Authorised Version: In Rom. 15 : 20 'So have I *strived* to preach the Gospel', in 2 Cor. 5 : 9 'We *labour* that we may be accepted of Him', in 1 Thess. 4 : 11 '*Study* to be quiet'. On the surface there is thus little indication that these are all attempts at translation of the same word.

The word is not a very pleasing word as one traces its meaning in a lexicon. Grimm-Thayer translates the verb quite literally, 'to be fond of honour' and so 'to be actuated by love of honour; from a love of honour to strive (to bring something to pass)' and so 'to be ambitious to...' Thus in later Greek, from its innocent beginning the word has come to have a predominantly bad sense. So Liddell & Scott give the meaning of the noun as 'jealous love of honour or distinction, ambition

—mostly in a bad sense'; and the further references confirm this undesirable connotation. St. Paul's use of it is evidently an instance of his taking a dangerous word and harnessing it to good ends; another familiar illustration is in 1 Cor. 9 : 27, where he takes a prize-fighting word and brings it into the vocabulary of the disciplined Christian life. But his choice of *philotimia* has involved his translators in a serious difficulty, which the A.V. translators merely evaded. Whether or not such evasion is wise or the best possible way of dealing with such a difficulty is precisely the type of problem that the translator is constantly called upon to face.

The English Revised Version makes a gallant effort, but the revisers are evidently conscious of incomplete success. In Romans and Corinthians they say 'making it my aim', 'making it our aim' and in Thessalonians they preserve the A.V. rendering 'study'; but in all three places they give as a marginal note '*Greek,* ambitious'. The marginal reading thus confronts the reader, as does the original, with the problem of the place of ambition in ethics. If one may say so, this is as it ought to be. When in the original there is a colourful word describing a quality that has been well known among men from very early days, a quality with warp and woof of good and evil inextricably intermingled, is it not well to use a word for its translation that preserves the colour and leaves the difficulty to be grappled with by the readers? Presumably St. Paul's first readers must have felt it and he himself must have known what he was doing when he ventured to try to redeem a word of doubtful repute for the service of his Master.

Ambitio, the Latin word behind 'ambition', is a definitely less pleasing word than the Greek original, which at least makes a noble start. Ambition is a 'going round' of candidates for office in republican Rome, the soliciting of individual citizens for their vote, a canvassing, asking for office. The picture is of so familiar a process that even though *ambitio* is a word originally without suggestion of criticism (a kindred word *ambitus* being used when there is suspicion of the use of bribery or threats to win support), it is difficult to be enthusiastic about it. Before long by a natural transition the word comes to mean 'a striving for one's favour or goodwill, an excessive desire to please, flattery, adulation'. And then the idea of the purpose or end becomes predominant, and the word means 'a desire for honour, popularity, power, display etc.'. So Lewis and Short's testimony corroborates that of Liddell & Scott.

It is interesting to recall that Plato in the Republic viii. 4 says that the first step in the declension of the Ideal State is marked by the appearance of a 'ruffling and ambitious spirit'; his word is *philotimia.* Shakespeare seems to agree with him, when in Henry VIII, III. 2, he puts into Wolsey's mouth the words, '...fling away ambition; by that sin fell the angels'. It does not seem possible to reconcile 'ambition' with the poverty of spirit that is enjoined in the Beatitudes or with St. Paul's injunction in Rom. 12 : 16, 'Set not your mind on high things'. It might indeed be said that not Christianity alone but almost all the great religions denounce self-aggrandisement and self-seeking. And yet it would not be true to regard 'ambition' as wholly bad; in itself it is non-moral.

There is what Aristotle (Ethics II. 7) calls 'a due and proper desire for distinction'; it is because this desire so often betrays people into the use of unworthy means, or because it passes the bounds of what is 'due and proper', that the word has come to have its bad reputation. The absence of 'ambition', or at least of 'aspiration' is a mark of apathy and indifference and anything that will quicken dormant energy and rouse latent ability, with whatever risks it may be accompanied, is to be preferred to the merely vegetable type of existence; hardly without it can man be called man, for his progress upward has been governed largely by his possession of this particular kind of desire. So young people must still be exhorted to be 'ambitious'; the abuse of a quality must not be allowed to forbid its use, and, in what Mrs. Meynell calls 'this ambiguous earth', we must go on using ambiguous terms. But this means that the way of the translator, as well as that of the transgressor, is hard.

The various modern English versions illustrate this. In Rom. 15 : 20 A.S. Way, Twentieth Century New Testament, Weymouth, Moffatt, Goodspeed, the R.T.S. (The Book of Books) all use 'ambition'. The Basic English translation, with its limited vocabulary, here and in Corinthians 'making it my purpose'. The Latin Vulgate frankly evades it, with *sic autem hoc praedicavi*. The French is ingenious: *je me suis attaché à annoncer*. German, in Romans and Corinthians, gives *fleissig*, "diligent", and in Thessalonians, *ringen*, meaning "struggle" or "strive"; Italian, in Romans uses 'ambition', and in Corinthians and Thessalonians, 'study'; it is interesting to note where the line of division comes in the two languages. Esperanto, a language of which I am innocent, gives *ambiciante* in Romans.

In 2 Cor. 5 : 9 Weymouth and Goodspeed have 'ambition' and Way and the Twentieth Century translation have it also, but more emphatically —'our one ambition'. Moffatt gives 'am eager' and the R.T.S. 'we make it our aim'. The Vulgate has *contendimus* and the French *nous nous efforçons de lui être agréables*.

It is in 1 Thess. 4 : 11 that the greatest diversity occurs. Moffatt is content with 'endeavour' and the Twentieth Century version with 'make it your ambition'. But the Basic version says 'take pride in being quiet'; Weymouth with a slightly different emphasis has 'vie with one another in eagerness for peace'. Goodspeed ventures on 'surpass yourselves in striving to live quietly and mind your own affairs'; and A.S. Way is very suggestive with 'make it a point of honour to avoid religious excitement'. The French is not far from the English A.V. *...de vous étudier à vivre paisiblement;* and the Vulgate is vigorous with *operam detis ut quieti sitis*.

What of Indian translations? I have four Tamil translations at hand; unfortunately none of them is earlier than the Union Version. They reflect the same kind of uncertainty as has beset the translations in the other languages we have glanced at. The Union Version in all three places uses the same word *nādu* giving the sense of eager and persistent pursuit.

The Rev. N. Gnanapprakasam's version of 1922, the result of thirty years study, has *muyandruvanthirukka* in Romans, giving the sense of

continued effort. The 'Larsen' version uses the word *mēnmai,* and in Thessalonians puts *menmaiyaka āsikka* "to desire, as a dignity or excellence, to be quiet". The 1941 Revision uses the word *pērāval* in all three places, with the sense of strong desire.

I am discouraged from essaying the path in unknown tongues, by the fact that the word used in Hindi seems to convey no impression whatever to my Hindi-speaking servants on whom I tried it; but it may be noted that in Urdu the word used in Romans and Corinthians is the word for ambition, while the word for desire is used in Thessalonians.

I have refrained from the temptation to try to assess the relative merits of the courageous efforts that have been made, whether in English or in other languages, to bring out the full force of the word that St. Paul chose to use. But I hope that I have shown that such study, even if it has no other value, may be of fascinating interest to the student himself, and that not seldom it brings new meaning out of familiar words.

The Old Testament in Greek

F. F. Bruce

(This is the first of a series descriptive of the great versions of the Early Church designed to illustrate their importance in establishing the text of the originals and, by implication, their bearing on the work of translators today. It is reproduced by permission of the author and his publishers, Pickering & Inglis, from The Books and the Parchments *(1952).)*

Part I.

The writer remembers being present once at a conference of theologians, where one of the subjects debated was the nature of true theology. One eminent speaker declared on the first day of the conference: 'A man can be a good theologian even if he knows nothing but the Authorized Version of the Bible'. Another speaker, who arrived later and so did not hear this dictum, read a paper on the second day in the course of which he said: 'I would not call a man a theologian unless he could translate from the Septuagint back into Hebrew'. As someone else would have said had he been present: 'It all depends on what you mean by a theologian'. This is not what we are going to consider now, but perhaps this article will suggest to the reader some of the reasons which led the second speaker to attach such high value to the Septuagint.

What, then, is the Septuagint? The term itself comes from the Latin word for 'seventy', *septuaginta,* and it is frequently indicated by the Roman numeral sign LXX. The origin of the name is to be found in an ancient document known as the Letter of Aristeas. This document belongs to the years around 100 B.C., but it purports to have been written over a century and a half earlier by Aristeas, an official at the court of King Ptolemy Philadelphus, of Egypt (285-246 B.C.), to his brother, Philocrates. Ptolemy was renowned as a patron of literature and it was under him that the great library at Alexandria, one