

New Testament in sixteen major Indian languages. When available this book will be an indispensable *vade mecum* for those who are now committed to the tremendous task of revising the major Bibles of North India. Of a somewhat different *genre*, but bearing directly on the same subject, is Dr. Edwin Smith's symposium, *African Ideas of God*, which throws much light on one of the most difficult of all translational problems, the right choice of terms for the Divine Names in a variety of African tongues. Helpful though these books are in their respective fields, there is a sense, however, in which the revisers of every major version need to do their own specialised research along the lines indicated by the Evanston commission. It ought never to be too late to root out words which have failed to do justice to the central ideas of the Christian faith and it is the duty of translators and revisers not only to be sensitive to the quality and significance of the great key words of the Bible, but to be tireless in their quest for adequate terms to express them.

The New Testament Translation of *elpis* in Languages of India

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It is well that at last the consideration of *elpis* should be coming into the foreground of Christian thought, with the prominence that the Assembly of the World Council of Churches will give it; there may thus come a clearer recognition of the nature of the problems the word presents to the translator of the Bible. Compared with the vast literature on Faith and Love, Hope has received scant attention. Though the noun *elpis* does not occur in the Gospels, the idea of Hope is implicit in the whole teaching and life of Jesus Christ, and the frequent use of the word in the Epistles is an entirely natural and legitimate formulation of what is already in the Gospels. One reason for the comparative neglect of the study of *elpis* may be the close relation between Faith and Hope, so that Hope has been regarded as one element in full Faith; but in the New Testament the two are constantly treated as separable in thought.

It needs to be remembered that in pre-Christian thought in the West—as well as in non-Christian thought in the East—'hope' is a quality of ambiguous status. This is illustrated in the Greek and Roman mythology by the story of Pandora, the first created woman. Her insatiable curiosity drove her to open a forbidden chest, so that all its contents, whether evil or good, were let loose on the world, and only Hope remained. But whether Hope was the one consolation left to man, or was man's chief deluder... this was the subject of dispute; the story was susceptible of diverse interpretations. On the whole the dominant view seems to incline to the cynical interpretation of Hope as an illusion—a parable of the disillusionment that follows the hopefulness of youth, and reflecting the

loss of buoyancy that age so often brings. It hardly needs the poet to tell us that hopes very often are dupes, and even without Fitzgerald and Omar Khayyam we know:

“The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes; or it prospers—and anon
Like snow upon the desert’s dusty face
Lighting a little hour or two, is gone”.

In considering the place of *elpis*, therefore, it is hardly too much to say that a revolution of thought was necessary before the word could be intelligibly used to describe the Christian, theological, virtue that stands beside Faith and Love. In the case of Love, as has so often been remarked, the obscure word *agape* had to be brought into currency because other available words were too deeply dyed with other shades of meaning to be anything but misleading. So drastic a course was not followed with Hope; the common word *elpis* was taken over and Christianised; in its pre-Christian connotation it could not be adequate to express a new thing, brought into the world by the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we turn to India, with its characteristically different emphasis, in the ancient Sanskrit poets ‘hope’ is unmistakably one of the evils which the true sage must renounce, in order that he may secure perfect tranquillity of mind. Nor does the all-pervading doctrine of Karma encourage hope; cessation of desire affords the one prospect of ultimate release from the long round of existence, and desire is part of hope.

It is thus not surprising that the words available in the ancient languages of India are inadequate to express the Christian hope. In ordinary use ‘hope’ is a disturbing blend of desire, expectation and uncertainty—the ratio of expectation to desire, and to uncertainty, depending largely on temperamental differences. The words used in New Testament translation in different languages reflect this varying emphasis. They are naturally most frequently of Sanskrit origin. In Marathi, for instance, the word mainly used is *asha*, with ‘desire’ as its predominant emphasis. This is the word used in the literature of Bhakti-Marga, in which ‘hope’ is to be found, in such expressions as, “Hope is eternal”, or “The world is full of sorrow and man lives by hope”. But this is not to say that the word is adequate for Christian *elpis*. Another word is *apeksha*, which is properly used for a temporary hope; its root is *iksha*, ‘to see’. But “hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopeth for that which he seeth?” (Romans 8 : 24). *Apeksha* is also found in the Telugu version.

It is interesting that in most languages the translation of *elpis* has apparently not raised misgivings; at any rate the renderings seem to be unchanged in successive revisions. A notable exception is Tamil; the word most frequently used in all the early translations is *nambikkai*, with its emphasis on ‘expectation’ rather than ‘desire’—expectation that can even include an undesired future event, though in general use desire is part of the expectation. But in the Larsen revision of twenty-five years ago, confirmed by the further Monahan revision, the word is deliberately modified, and strengthened, by the addition of *nal*, ‘good’, making the compound *nannambikkai*, which excludes future evil, or nescience, from the expectation. This seems to be a most interesting pointer to what

may perhaps be of service in other languages, confronted with similar problems.

But it remains true that no word, outside the Christian context, can possibly fully represent all that is now contained in *elpis* for the Christian. The differentia of Christian hope is surely not in the strength of its desire for future good. It may be found partly in the nature of the good that is desired, unmistakably spiritual in its content and unlimited in its scope in that it depends on eternal fellowship with God. But it is above all in its assurance of fulfilment, based on the Lord Jesus Christ and His decisive revelation, in life and death and resurrection, of the faithfulness of God, His Father, and our Father. The Christian's hope for the ultimate future does not depend on his interpretation of current events, nor is it any form of 'wishful thinking'. It is what it is because it accepts Jesus Christ's revelation of God as sufficient for time and for eternity. As someone has said, "We trust Him for to-morrow because we are obeying Him to-day, and find Him completely reliable".

Thus the translation of the word *elpis* cannot be achieved by the exercise of mere linguistic skill; there must be understanding of the content of the Christian conception of *elpis* as found, often without the word, in the New Testament, and in living Christian experience. The blend of desire and confident expectation which is Christian hope depends on the Christian faith in Jesus Christ, Author and Finisher of hope no less than of faith—and any words used in translation will need that Christian context to give them their fulness of meaning.

Interpretations of 'Hope' in Arabic

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The religious environment of the Arabic language makes the interpretation of some theological terms rather involved. Today Arabic is the mother-tongue of some two million Christians, most of whom are members of the surviving Coptic Church of Egypt. Fair-sized communities are to be found scattered across the countries of the Near East (including 'Iraq) and to a less extent North Africa. The stark fact that these groups now include refugees from what was Palestine increases the provenance of Christian Arabic. These people have been driven by force of circumstances they never controlled to the verge of *despair* instead of *hope*. This psychological experience should be taken into account in considering the use of the term in ordinary life amongst the all too many Christians in dispersion; for we remember it was to Christians in dispersion in the first century that much of the New Testament was addressed.

Arabic is spoken by twenty-five times as many Muslims as Christians. The Jews who use(d) it belong mostly to 'Iraq, Egypt and Yemen. On the other hand the Arabic-speakers of the world of Islam are but a sixth of the total of Muhammad's followers.

Other factors present themselves. These fifty million Arabic-speaking Muslims use religious terminology held in common with Christians, but