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## Notes on the Translation of the New Testament in Bolivian Quechua

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In the process of translating the New Testament into the Quechua dialect of Bolivia the committee engaged in this task encountered the typical problems which are met in any such translation into an aboriginal language. The peculiar linguistic structure of Quechua, with its long words and very precise markers of various aspects, persons, tenses, and voices in the verbs and verbal derivatives, required us to rethink and reconstruct many of the Greek phrases and sentences which do not fit the Quechua manner of expression either in the idiom or the grammatical formations. Many of these problems are entirely too technical for popular presentation, but some of the following have appeared to be of sufficient general interest to warrant their consideration in terms of difficulties involved and the solutions found.

### **Literal Renderings**

At first we as a committee often tended to employ literal renderings when we should have used idiomatic equivalents. In Acts 3 : 7 we first translated "ankle bones received strength" by the Quechua phrase "his ankle bones took hold of strength". The verb "to take hold of" is the Quechua equivalent of "to receive", but the phrase "to take hold of strength" is not satisfactory Quechua. The natural and normal way of expressing this idea is "the ankle bones were strengthened". Accordingly, we changed our earlier rendering in order to express the idea in the proper Quechua manner.

A similar problem occurred in Acts 28 : 3 in the phrase "laid them on the fire", speaking of the bundle of sticks which Paul had gathered for the fire. At first we translated more or less automatically "put them on the fire". But then we realized that no Quechua would speak that way. He would say *enkhashajtin* meaning "to feed the fire". This idiomatic rendering made the translation more intelligible and more acceptable, for it carried the reader along in his natural environment.

### **Equivalents for Time**

The Bolivian Quechuas know nothing about clocks or time counted by hours. If we were to make sense we had to employ their system of reckoning time by certain characteristic activities or the position of the sun. In Mat. 20 : 6 we found that the equivalent of the "eleventh hour"

is "the time for loosening the oxen", i.e. the time when the oxen were loosened from the yoke when the day's ploughing had been finished. Similarly, in Acts 2 : 15 we translated "the third hour" as "the oxen-yoking time".

### **Borrowings**

The Bolivian Quechuas have borrowed a great number of Spanish words. They very frequently take some Spanish word and then use this as a root and add the various suffixes so as to adapt it thoroughly to the Quechua grammatical structure. When we found it necessary to employ certain descriptive names for unfamiliar or unknown matters, we could sometimes use these Spanish borrowings. One such phrase became the solution to a complicated difficulty involving the translation of "parable". The Indians had not borrowed the Spanish *parábola* "parable"; such a term would be of very rare usage. However, they had borrowed the Spanish words *comparar* "to compare" and *cuento* "story". Hence, we formed the phrase *comparana cuento* "a comparison story", or more literally, "a to-be-compared story".

### **Quechua Metaphors**

We tried to be on the lookout for Quechua metaphors, which are very expressive and speak so directly to the hearts of the people. In trying to translate "peace" we found an excellent phrase in *tiasqa sonqota* "a seated heart", meaning of course "a calm heart".

In translating the phrase "drawn away of his own lust and enticed" (James 1 : 14), we encountered considerable trouble in rendering the word "enticed". There are several different ways of translating "enticed", but they did not seem to fit this type of context. At last, however, we found just the right phrase, "when he lets his heart be stolen".

### **Religious Terms**

In 1 John 2 : 2 the expression "he is the propitiation for our sins" is difficult because of the very specialized word "propitiation". The Quechuas have no equivalent term in their own religious vocabulary. We had to develop some expression which would adequately represent the idea of propitiation, but we did not wish to use a technical definition since any complicated abstract terms would be as unintelligible as "propitiation" itself. Finally, we worked out an expression which seemed to denote accurately the idea of propitiation and yet was completely within the lexical framework of the average Quechua speaker. Our translation of this first clause of 1 John 2 : 2 was "he put out wrath on account of our sins". The verb "to put out" means "to extinguish" in the sense of "extinguishing a fire".

The word "Comforter" was translated as "the heartener", that is, "one who makes one have a heart".

The word "Sabbath" has been translated as "resting day". We could not use the Spanish *sábado*, which is the common term for "Saturday", for the people would not be able to understand why Jesus was condemned for working on Saturday.

## The Discovery of Quechua Idioms

It frequently happened that we were sure that some more idiomatic way existed for rendering some word or phrase, but at times we could not remember the precise term. In translating Mark 4 : 39 the phrase "the wind ceased" could have been translated as "the wind stopped", or "quieted", or "went down", or "stood still". But none of these translations seemed to be just right. Several inquiries were made of Quechua speakers, but without too much success. Finally, we asked a Quechua-speaking storekeeper how he would say it. He thought for a little while and then turned to some of the Quechua women customers standing in his store. He asked them, "What would you say when the wind heals?" The women burst out laughing and replied, "Why, that is just what we would say—the wind heals". There was the right idiom, which the storekeeper had given unconsciously when he had asked the question. One key to finding the right expressions is to approach the problems in the proper linguistic and cultural setting.

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## Problems of New Testament Translation

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*(The following article, consisting of extracts from Dr. Goodspeed's book Problems of New Testament Translation, will introduce the reader to some of the very helpful features of this valuable analysis of the translator's difficulties. The material is reproduced by permission of the publishers, the University of Chicago Press. — Ed.)*

Matthew 21 : 9 *Hosanna to the Son of David, . . . Hosanna in the highest* (King James) <sup>1</sup>  
*Hôsanna tô huiô Daveid . . . Hôsanna en tois hupsistois*

"Hosanna" is really a Hebrew word, found in Ps. 118 : 25, and meaning "Save!" or "Save, pray!" though Canon Cheyne sought to show that the Hebrew is no guide to its meaning in the gospels. <sup>2</sup> It naturally found its way into liturgy, and this reacted upon its interpretation in the text, in which, in fact, it has come to seem almost liturgical.

Wyclif (1382) translated it "Osanna (that is I preye save)". Tyndale (1525) and Coverdale (1535) read "hosianna". Rogers (1537), Taverner (1539), and the Great Bible (1539) read "Hosanna". But the Geneva omitted "to" and read "Hosanna the sonne of David", remarking in the margin, "which is to say, Save I pray thee". Further on, it read "Hosanna thou which art in the hiest heavens". The Bishops' (1568) agreed with the earlier versions, "Hosanna to" and "Hosanna in the highest". In this (with changes in spelling) it was followed by the Rheims (1582), the King James (1611), the English Revised (1881), and the American Standard (1901).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 21 : 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, s.v.