THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

PUBLISHED BY THE UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES

Editor
Eugene A. Nida

Associate Editor
William A. Smalley

Editorial Board
Wilfred J. Bradnock
A. Holter
J. L. Swellengrebel

VOL. 10, No. 3, JULY 1959

The Colloquial Japanese Bible of 1955 [1]

With a Short History of Bible Translation in Japan

Masashi Takahashi

When the first Protestant missionaries, J. Liggins, C. M. Williams, G. F. Verbeck, J. C. Hepburn, S. R. Brown, and D. B. Simons, came to this land of the Rising Sun in 1859 (in the 6th year of Ansei—14th year of Emperor Kômei), they found that no attempt had been made to translate the Bible into the Japanese language among the Catholic believers during the 310 years since the first Jesuit missionary to Japan, Francis Xavier, appeared in Kagoshima in 1549 (the 18th year of Temmon, the 24th year of Emperor Gonara). Those Catholics, generally called *Kirishitan* in Japanese, had some passages of the Holy Scriptures rendered into Japanese, among which we may mention the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer.

The first Japanese translation was made in 1837 by Dr. K. F. A. Gützlaff (1803-1851), a German missionary sent to the Far East by the Netherlands Missionary Society. He adopted the Chinese surnames of "Lover of the Chinese" and "Admirer of Virtue." At that time no foreigner was allowed to come to this hermit nation, except a handful of Dutch traders who had no intention of bringing the Gospel to the Japanese, and who accordingly enjoyed the privilege of living in the small concession called *Dejima* in the port city of Nagasaki. B. J. Bethelheim, M. Forcade, M. Leturda and others were among those missionaries who had to abandon their hope of bringing the Gospel to the main islands of Japan.

So Gützlaff published his Gospel of John in Japanese *kata-kana* (simplified characters denoting syllabic signs) from the press of the American Mission in Singapore in 1837 (the 8th year of Tempô, 22nd year of Emperor Ninkô). About the time when Gützlaff was engaged in his translation, Dr. S. W. Williams (1812-1884) was also translating

[1] This article is reprinted by permission from the July, 1958, number of *Studies in the Christian Religion,* published by Doshisha University.

the Gospels of John and Matthew and the Book of Genesis, and later he sent his manuscripts to Drs. J. C. Hepburn and S. R. Brown, in 1860 (or 1861). None of these translations was of practical value, mainly because their Japanese expressions were rather crude, and sometimes peculiar, to such an extent that it was very hard for ordinary Japanese to understand them. Besides, the formal prohibition of Christianity was not removed till as late as 1873 (the 6th year of Meiji). Christianity was still *religio illicita* in this country. Only five original copies of Gützlaff's translation are known to be in the possession of individuals and of university libraries in Japan, although no copy of his translation of the Epistles of John has ever been found in this country. On August 18, 1938, a copy was presented to Doshisha University by Dr. Goodsel, at that time vice-president of the American Board.

When the first missionaries began their evangelistic work, they soon could confirm the fact that ordinary educated Japanese could read the Chinese Bible written in the classical style. So they ordered a number of copies of the Chinese Bible from the Bible Societies in China, and thus they managed to make use of the Chinese Bible in their evangelistic work during the first years of the Meiji era. In the Chinese translations, "God" was represented by such words (pronounced in Japanese way) as *tenshu* ('heavenly lord'), *ten* ('heaven'), *tentei* ('heavenly emperor'), *shin* ('god'), and among these the first word *tenshu,* was preferred by the Catholics in China as well as in Japan. In Japanese, *kami* is the god of the Shinto religion, and *kami-gami* (repetition of the word *kami*) means god in the plural. So whether "God" should be translated *kami* or not was hotly discussed among the first translators. Hence the Catholic faith or Christianity in general was called by the name of *tenshu kyo* (Teaching or Religion of the Heavenly Lord) during the Tokugawa period and in the early years of the Meiji era.

In fact, in the translation of Gützlaff, God was called *goku-raku* 'paradise', a popular Buddhist term, and the Holy Spirit was *kami* 'god' (fully rendered *arigatai kamisama* 'gracious God'), and the Bible was described as *kyomon* or *kyomon-no-hon* 'Buddhist scriptures' or 'Book of Sutra'! Finally the Shinto term *kami* prevailed as the recognized term for "God" among Japanese Protestant churches, as we can see in the later Japanese translations by B. J. Bettelheim (1855) and J. Goble (1871).

All these are individual translations of different portions of the Bible. But the first committee translation of the whole Bible was made in 1887, the NT having been published in 1879 (a revised edition was published in 1884). The initial committee members were Drs. S. R. Brown (Dutch Reformed), J. C. Hepburn (Presbyterian), and D. C. Greene (Congregational), and later R. S. Maclay, N. Brown, J. Piper, and Nicholai Kasatkin of the Russian Church Mission were asked to join the committee. G. F. Verbeck and P. K. Fyson offered their help while the OT was translated, together with such Japanese leaders as Matsuyama Takayoshi, Uemura Masahisa, Ibuka Kajinosuke and Takahashi Goro. It should be noted that in this version almost all the titles of the books in the Bible were taken over from the Chinese Bible, proper nouns

being written by the same Chinese characters. Moreover, personal names were accompanied with single lines, and geographical names with double lines, so that the readers might distinguish between personal and place names at first sight. The literary quality of this translation soon commended itself to the general public, and passages from the Psalms are still now recited at the responsive reading of our church services. The concordance of the NT which forms a part of this Bible was compiled by Mr. Manabe Teizo in 1890 (the 23rd year of Meiji), at the suggestion of Dr. D. W. Learned of Doshisha University.

The second committee translation of the NT began in 1910 and the Revised NT was published in 1917, 38 years after the publication of the first committee translation. Dr. D. C. Greene (Congregational), Bishop H. J. Foss (Anglican), Rev. C. S. Davison (Methodist), and Dr. J. H. Dunlop (Presbyterian) participated in this translation, and the Japanese members were Matsuyama Takayoshi (then Anglican), Bessho Umenosuke (Methodist), Rev. Kawazoe Masuye (Presbyterian), and Prof. Fujii Toraichi (Congregational). Later Dr. C. K. Harrington (Baptist), and Dr. D. W. Learned (Congregational) of Doshisha University were asked to fill the vacancy caused by the withdrawal of Messrs. Dunlop and Fujii. In this second committee translation the revision of the OT did not follow on the heels of the NT. So, from 1917 until 1955, the Japanese churches made use of the Bible which consists of the Revised NT and the OT in the old style. This revision of the NT is characterized by the remarkable improvement in its diction and in its method of translation. The old way of putting single and double lines side by side with the proper names was entirely discarded, and simplified *kana* (*katakana*) was used for the personal names in the titles of the NT books. Certain improvements were made in the transliteration of personal names; for instance, *Mako* 'Mark' became *Maruko, Maria* 'Mary', *Mariya* (easier to pronounce for us), *Sumuruna* 'Smyrna', *Sumiruna,* etc. All the *hentai-gana* (old-style *kana* letters), such as *ne* used in *Yohane* 'John', were replaced by normal *kana* letters.

Before and during the Second World War, a revision committee for the OT, including the present writer, was appointed, and the work of revising the OT was soon taken up, and was continued even during the terrible Pacific War. After the end of the War, the national policy of simplifying Japanese characters was warmly welcomed by the general public, except for a few old-timers and literary writers. And even the august, classical style of the Imperial message was reduced to a simple style of everyday use, and the new Constitution of Japan was written in *kogotai* 'colloquial' style. Thus in 1951 a full-time committee of six, including the present writer, but this time without any missionary members, was asked to translate the entire Bible into colloquial Japanese within three years. Accordingly, the NT was completed in March 1954 (the 29th year of Showa), but the OT was not ready until March of the following year. This translation is called the Revision of 1955, but as a matter of fact it is a new translation, the first colloquial Japanese Bible produced by a committee. The OT members of this committee were Dr. Tsuru Senji (President of Meiji Gakuin University), Prof. Tezuka Giichiro (Tokyo Union Seminary), and Prof. Endo Toshio

(Episcopal Seminary, Tokyo). The NT members were Dr. Matsumoto Takuo (Aoyama Gakuin University), Dr. Yamaya Seigo (Tokyo Union Seminary), and the present writer (Doshisha University, Kyoto). A concordance of this colloquial version and an edition of this version with references are now in process of publication. Previously, in 1952, the NT in the colloquial Japanese was published by the Christ Weekly (*Kirisuto Shimbun-Sha*), thanks to the efforts of Messrs. S. Watase and T. Muto. Also, in the following year (1953), a Catholic press issued another NT in colloquial Japanese for the benefit of the Catholic churches, and in the same year Mr. Tsukamoto of the *Mukyokai* group (non-church movement), published his private translation of the Gospel according to Mark. But these and other new translations are confined to either the NT or portions of it. So the committee translation of the entire Bible in 1955 should be regarded as the first one in colloquial Japanese. In this translation Dr. Nestle's Greek NT was always in hand as the basic text from which the translation was to be made. This was in accordance with the policy of the leading Bible Societies adopted in 1904.

Any Bible translator must always be faithful to the original, yet at the same time he must produce a Bible the language of which is both idiomatic and readable, expressed in flowing sentences of high literary quality. These two musts defy every effort to fuse them together. The result is a poor compromise, if not a conglutination, or, as in many cases, one or the other of the two principles is sacrificed. In poetic passages it was thought desirable to retain the old literary expressions as much as possible.

Another grave problem we faced is the question whether we really have a standard colloquial Japanese. Any language is not a static entity but a dynamic flow of human thought, and the present colloquial Japanese is no exception. It is subject to constant change and fluctuation. To make the matter worse, sometimes the colloquial language sounds vulgar and repulsive to those who have been accustomed to hear and read the Bible in the classical literary Japanese. So we took pains not to offend the sensitivity of the reading public, regarding the choice of suitable expressions. Thus, in many instances, we mingled literary expressions advisedly, when we translated divine commands, apostolic exhortations, or poetic passages. Such exclamatory words as 'oh!' 'behold!' or 'woe!' are not always congruous to ordinary Japanese expressions. So, the present translation is in reality a mixture of both literary and colloquial styles.

Although we have striven to render faithfully the original Greek sentences, there are, of necessity, some inevitable departures or alterations. For instance, almost all of the Greek versions retain the *δύο* (two) in Acts 10:19, but all the modern translations, so far as I know, render it 'three' instead of 'two', because the context necessitates this obvious emendation. Some MSS of minor importance attest this *(τρεῖς)*. Take more familiar examples of different spelling of proper names. It is well known among the specialists that there are two different Greek forms for Nazareth *(Ναζαρά, Ναζαρέτ,)* Jerusalem *('Ιεροσόλυμα, 'Ιερουσαλήμ)*, Mary *(Μαρία, Μαριάμ)*, Jacob *('Ιακώβ, 'Ιάκωβος)*, Simon

(*Σίμων, Συμεών*), etc. As late as 1956, in the 22nd edition of Dr. Nestle's Greek NT, the breathing of *Ἱεροσόλυμα* was changed into *Ἰεροσόλυμα*, in accordance with the Greek usage. From the exegetical point of view, these variations (and different breathings) of proper names in the NT are of considerable importance as well as of special interest. But in ordinary modern translations these facts are entirely disregarded, although many translators retain the name Symeon (the Hebrew form of Simon) in Acts 15:14, but not always in 2 Pet. 1:1. In the colloquial Japanese version, Symeon is preferred in both of these verses, after Dr. Nestle's Greek text. The variant forms of Beelzebul (Beelzebub) and Bethesda (Bethzatha) were also retained, as they were in former translations. In spite of the reading of modern translations, including those by Drs. Moffatt and Goodspeed and RSV, we rendered the *Ἰησοῦς* of Lk. 3:29 'Joshua', following the examples of Acts 7:45 and Heb. 4:8, also judging from the fact that this Jesus is the son of a certain Eliezer. The difficult passage in Lk. 11:41, "But give for alms those things which are within" (RSV), was rendered as follows: 'But cleanse those things which are within', after the analogy of Mat. 23:25, and also taking note of Dr. C. C. Torrey's emendation after Wellhausen ("make right what is within") based on the supposed Aramaic original. Dr. Moffatt also translated this passage as follows: "Better cleanse what is within."

In the first sentence of the Gospel of Mark we retained, in accordance with many modern translators, the title "the Son of God," after "Jesus Christ," although this appellation is relegated to the margin by Dr. Nestle as well as by Westcott and Hort. In Mark 1:29, the plural form is given to the subject of the story in ordinary Greek versions: *ἐξελθόντες ἦλθον* (Nestle); *ἦλθαν* (Westcott and Hort); *ἐξελθόντες, ἦλθον* (Souter). But we have adopted the reading *ἐξελθὼν ἦλθεν* 'he entered', after many modern translators and commentators, including Drs. H. B. Swete and V. Taylor. The *ἤδη* 'already' at the beginning of John 4:36 was construed as the last word of verse 35, the last clause of which was translated as follows: "The fields are *already* white for harvest" (RSV), instead of "The reaper is *already* getting his wages" (Moffatt), or "The reaper is *already* being paid" (Goodspeed).

A faithful translation of *τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς* in 2 Cor. 5:19 would be "the message of reconciliation" (Moffatt, Goodspeed, RSV), but in our translation the marginal reading (*τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς κ.* 'the gospel of reconciliation') was adopted. The difficult passage in James 2:18 (*σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω* "You have faith, and I have works" RSV) is capable of several different interpretations. Some scholars assume that the quoted protestation or question which begins with the above sentence continues down to the end of the next verse (e.g. Weymouth). Others, like Moffatt and Stage, take only the first short sentence with a question mark attached (And you claim to have faith? *Hast du (überhaupt) Glaube?*). The first and second committee translations in Japanese regarded the whole 18th verse as the original extent of the direct quotation, following the lead of the Authorized and Revised English Versions. At this point, we should take note that in some MSS an ingenious conjecture is made of the transposition of

"faith" and "works." In the present colloquial translation the supposed original quotation is confined to the first two sentences: "You have faith and I have works," as in RSV and Dr. Goodspeed's translation. But we have left out the two pronouns and adopted the following rendering: "Some have faith (only), and others works (only)," which expresses the alleged truth that faith can exist apart from works and vice versa. A similar example concerning the original extent of a quotation is to be seen in Rev. 11:1-11.

We agreed that the passage in James 4:2, "So you kill *(φονεύετε)*" is to be taken up with the preceding statement, as it is with the RSV. Thus *φονεύετε* should be understood as accompanied with a full stop (.) instead of a comma (,). Lastly, instead of the difficult word *εὑρεθήσεται* 'will be discovered' in 2 Pet. 3:10, we preferred the marginal reading, *καταϰαήσεται* 'will be burnt up', also after the manner of the RSV. In Dr. Nestle's text, the Pericope de Adultera (John 7:53-8:11) is placed in the margin, but we have put it in the text using brackets, in accordance with other modern translations. There are other examples of similar sort, as in Luke 24:36, 40, 51, 52.

The above-mentioned are some of the most conspicuous examples of our departures from Dr. Nestle's Greek text. Our translation of James 2:18 may be regarded as an unique emendation of our own, but the other departures have more or less similar parallels in ordinary modern translations. In this connection I cannot refrain from mentioning the apparent inconsistency in translating the same words in the dative case *τῷ θεῷ* found in Acts 7:20 and in 2 Cor. 10:4, among modern commentators and translators. Most of them regard *τῷ θεῷ* in Acts 7:20 as denoting the superlative degree, but usually they do not take the same view with regard to the *τῷ θεῷ* in 2 Cor. 10:4. This, I think, should also be translated in the superlative degree, something like the RSV ("but have *divine* power to destroy strongholds") or like Drs. Moffatt and Goodspeed ("divinely strong") (see also Abbott-Smith's Dictionary), although we could not make this point clear in our own colloquial Japanese version.[2]

Limitation of space prevents me from commenting fully on a considerable number of conscious or unconscious agreements between the first (1888) and the third (1955) committee translations against the second (1917). 'The measure of life' in Mat. 6:27 was revised to 'the stature' in 1917, and was restored to 'the measure of life' again in 1955. This and other interesting examples testify to the steady progress as well as the apparent vacillation in Biblical study during the 67 years from 1888 to 1955.

---

[2] The difficult verse of 1 Cor. 4:6, which made Dr. Moffatt give up translating, i.e. *τό μὴ ὑπὲρ ἃ γέγραπται* 'not to go beyond the things which are written' (RV), was translated into Japanese as follows: 'not to go beyond the *rules* which are written', having no other way than to follow many other translations.