

CHRISTIAN TERMINOLOGY IN THE VOCABULARY OF AN ANIMIST SOCIETY¹

In his preface to *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (Oxford, 1951), Professor H. H. Rowley says:

‘If our records present Hebrew religion as something of an erratic boulder among the religions of the Near East, that is precisely what the subsequent developments demand.’

And it is for that reason that the Bible translator finds himself in such difficulties when he is seeking to render those records of Hebrew religion and its subsequent Christian revelation into the language of a people whose religious background is animist, and, indeed, in so many ways comparable with that of the peoples amongst whom the Jewish people lived. It is, therefore, likely to be of some profit if we examine briefly the gap between the religion of Israel and the neighbouring cults. A Danish scholar, F. F. Hvidberg, has said:

‘In the Old Testament, Yahweh nowhere meets us as a dying and rising God. In Israelite cultic usage it was not the resurrection or the renewal of Yahweh which was represented, but Yahweh’s saving acts on behalf of Israel which were celebrated, and the covenant which was renewed.’

Professor S. H. Hooke in his Schweich Lectures on *The Origins of Early Semitic Ritual* accepts the fact that the Ras Shamra material may throw light on the cultus from which the Hebrews drew in the early days of their settlement in Canaan; but he adds:

‘To accept such a view, if only provisionally, of the beginnings of Hebrew religion does no wrong to its later majestic unfolding. Rather does it enhance the wonder of the achievement of those Hebrew seers to acknowledge “the rock whence they were hewn and the hole of the pit whence they were digged”. There can hardly be a nobler fruit of spiritual insight than to have transformed the conception of a dying God and a sacred marriage with the vision of the suffering Servant of Yahweh, and of an inward union between a people and their God which could find expression in the noble words, “thy Maker is thine husband”, and again, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love”.’

I shall not attempt to catalogue and treat systematically all the translational problems with which workers have to deal in translating the sublimity of such insights into a language whose background religious vocabulary is

¹ The text of an address given at a translators’ conference in Limuru, Kenya, March 1964.

fundamentally animist. I shall only make reference to three aspects of the problem:

- (a) God, the Names of God, and the attributes of God.
- (b) Circumcision, Sacrifice and Worship.
- (c) Resurrection and the after-life.

And it is to the first of these that I shall devote closest attention.

Whereas, as Professor Alan Richardson reminds us (*Theological Word Book of the Bible*, p. 90, art. 'GOD'), 'the Biblical understanding of God is due to the prophetic realization that he is the Lord of history, the controller of the rise and fall of nations and empires', the God of the animist cultus is *deus remotus et incertus*; the control of history and the rise and fall of tribes and peoples rest in the hands of those who were once themselves part of history and part of the tribe, and who now, from the realm of the spirits, determine the pattern of contemporary history and guard the destiny of the present members of the tribe.

This spirit world, potentially benign if the age-old ceremonial continues to be observed faithfully both by the individual and in the corporate life of the tribe, and at the same time potentially hostile should that ceremonial law be infringed, is never alien; it is intimately bound up with the life and destiny of the tribe. Their area of concern is co-terminous with the area of tribal occupation: to be expelled from that area of tribal occupation in the case of grave misdemeanour means expulsion from the protection of the ancestral spirits, and is 'living death'. When the area of tribal occupation advances, ceremonial action is taken to ensure that the new territory is effectively brought under the control and protection of those same ancestral spirits. This intimate association between the spirit world of the tribe and of its contemporary members on earth is, though in the animist and not the theist pattern, of the same order as the appropriation by Israel of the name of God to be 'the God of Israel'.

God, distant and largely unknown and unknowable, is the God of the High Mountain; to the Kikuyu he is the Lord of Mount Kenya. Recourse is only taken to sacrifice for divine intervention when all else has failed. It is interesting here to note that Israel's enemies described the God of Israel as 'a god of the hills' (1 Kings 20: 23); indeed when the children of Israel left Egypt, they came into the wilderness of Sinai, and it was there that God called Moses 'out of the mountain' (Exodus 19: 3) and on that same mountain established the divine law for Israel.

How, then, are the Biblical names of God to be rendered in the languages of animist societies?

We start with the basic Hebrew word 'ēl. This, as we shall presently see, appears in two Arabic praise-names for God which, in their turn, appear in Swahili as *Mola* and *Maulana*. The derived form 'elōh in Hebrew appears in Arabic and in Swahili as *Allāh*; 'elōhīm appears in Arabic as *Allahumma*, an invocatory name for God, not found, I believe, in Swahili. But, given adequate teaching, both 'ēl and 'elōhīm can probably be rendered by the names for God that are customarily used in the tribal vocabulary. Kikuyu uses both *Ngai* (probably taken over from Masai)

and *Mürungu*, and Swahili uses this same Bantu form, *Mungu*. But, if the significance of Yahwistic theology as it develops in the Old Testament is properly to be understood, it seems to me to be very clear that no tribal name is adequate for the rendering of the Sacred Tetragrammaton. When dealing with the account of the great theophany in which God reveals Himself to Moses (Exod. 3: 1-15), the translator has the opportunity for establishing the Name of God in such a way that the reader becomes aware of His nature as the Lord of history, of judgement and forgiveness, of righteousness and love, not of one nation only, but as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore the Lord of the whole of His own created handiwork. There is, furthermore, in Exod. 6: 3 the important identification of EL SHADDAI with the sacred name of God as YAHWEH.

I do not believe that it is adequate, in the languages about which we are speaking, to follow the Septuagint, and to render the Tetragrammaton (as has been done in Swahili) by the word with whose vowel pointing the four consonants came to be marked, that is by a translation, however printed, of ADONAI (*kyrios*) or ELOHIM (*theos*). Apart from any other reason, the Septuagint was prepared for use in an already theistic community. And ADONAI does not have a vernacular counterpart which exclusively or even predominantly expresses the idea of 'Lord'. The Swahili *bwana* can be as much the term of address between two gutter-snipes arguing the one with the other, as between a servant and his master. Sir William Smith once remarked:

'The substitution of the word LORD is most unhappy; for while it in no way represents the meaning of the sacred name, the mind has constantly to guard against confusion with its lower uses, and, above all, the direct personal bearing of the name on the revelation of God through the whole course of Jewish history is kept injuriously out of sight.'

And if that be true of *Lord*, how much more so of the Swahili *Bwana*! I have come firmly to the conclusion that, in any further revision of the Swahili Bible, the rendering of YHWH by *Bwana* will have to be abandoned. It was, I remember, the subject of heated debate amongst us when the present text of the Union Swahili Bible was being prepared. Amongst suggestions which were examined and rejected was that of the rendering of ADONAI (where it was to represent YHWH) by the Swahili *Mola* or *Maulana* to which reference has already been made. Both are honorific titles of God, meaning 'supreme Lord'. The former appears in Rev. 6:10 to translate 'Master' (Greek *despotēs*).

God as Creator presents a difficulty in Kikuyu translation. The verb *-ũmba* means 'fashion, mould, make', and, by an extension of its meaning, it may be used to express the idea of creation. The nominative form, *Mũũmbi*, is used to translate 'Creator'. So Eccles. 12: 1 is translated:

Ririkanaga Mũũmbi waku matukũ-inĩ maku ma unyinyi

'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.'

Ririkanaga Mũũmbi—'Remember Mũũmbi'. But *Mũũmbi* was the Mother of

the Kikuyu tribe; wife of *Gikūyū*, she bore him nine daughters, or was it ten? And they in turn became the heads of the Kikuyu clans.

We turn now to the New Testament, and look first at the translation of LOGOS in the prologue to the Gospel of St. John.

Greek philosophy had invested the word *logos* with a depth of meaning considerably greater than that of a word of human utterance. So too had the Septuagint, which had rendered the Hebrew *'āmar* (to say) and *'imrāh* (the thing said) by *legein* and *logos* respectively. So when St. John wrote of 'the Word' becoming flesh, the reader of the Greek text was already conditioned to a theological understanding of the nature of the authoritative Word of God by which worlds were made. So the question arises as to whether a vernacular rendering of *logos* by a word signifying a word of human utterance can in any way effectively convey the significance of 'the Word Incarnate'. Can, for example, the Swahili *nenō* (human utterance) really meet the need? This, too, will require careful consideration when a textual revision takes place. Two words at least will present themselves for consideration.

amri 'word of authority'. This is from the Arabic *amr* which in its turn is a cognate of the Hebrew *'āmar* to which reference has already been made. J. S. M. Hooper records in his *Greek New Testament Terms in Indian Languages* that *amr* is used to translate *logos* in the Urdu text of Acts 8: 21.

kalima 'word, speech, sentence'. This is from the Arabic word *kalama* (utterance), and the verb *kallama* (speak to, converse with); *Brown, Driver, Briggs* give this as a cognate of the Hebrew *kālam* (converse with, to humiliate or insult). But the Bible Society's Urdu text in Roman script of 1895 uses *Kalām* to translate *logos* throughout St. John's prologue. Krapf adds an interesting illustration of the use of *kalima* in his entry in the *Suahili-English Dictionary*:

Watumwa hawana kalima (slaves have no say in affairs).

Phrases like 'the word of the Lord' and 'word of God' will also need consideration; Kikuyu uses *ndūmīriri ya Jehova* (message of Yahweh). So, too, the translation of 'Gospel' must be discussed. Swahili is fortunate in having *Injili* as part of its Greek legacy through Arabic. *Grimm-Thayer* comments on the two usages and meanings of the Greek noun:

(a) The glad tidings of the Kingdom of God soon to be set up; and subsequently also the glad tidings of Jesus the Messiah, the founder of this kingdom; the proclamation of the grace of God manifested and pledged in Christ, and so, the gospel.

(b) As the Messianic rank of Jesus was proved by His words, His deeds, and His death, the narrative of the sayings, deeds, and death of Jesus Christ.

The British and Foreign Bible Society's notes on the Gospel of St. Mark for the use of vernacular translators call attention to these two different senses in which *euangelion* is used:

(a) the simple message of 'good news' (Mark 1: 15, etc.).

(b) the technical term 'Gospel' (Mark 1: 1).

Unfortunately, the Swahili revisers did not observe any systematic distinction between the former (*habari njema* 'good news') and the latter (*injili* 'the

gospel'), and in both cases the use of capital and small initial letters is in no way consistent. Even if it were to be of readily discernible significance, there is no clear reason why the former appears as *Habari Njema* in some cases and *habari njema* in others. And although the revisers set out to equate *Injili* with the Gospel and *injili* with an interpretation of the gospel (e.g. Rom. 2: 16; 16: 25; 1 Cor. 15: 1; 2 Cor. 4: 3; 11: 4; Gal. 1: 6, 11; 2: 2, 7; 1 Thess. 1: 5; 2 Thess. 2: 14; 2 Tim. 2: 8), there are places where *injili* is also used for the Gospel (2 Cor. 2: 4; 10: 14; 1 Peter 4: 17).

Kikuyu, which has used *ũhoro* (affair, matter) to translate *logos* in John 1, also uses it to translate *euangelion* in both senses, namely by *ũhoro ũria mwega* (that good affair or matter).

The Old Testament in its use of *bāsar* and its derivatives illustrates the development of the word from a purely secular context in which it is used, like the parallel word in Classical Greek, in association with a reward for the carrying of good tidings (see, for example, 2 Sam. 4: 10), and thence to being a word of deeper significance as in 2 Kings 7: 9 (We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace). It further develops in such passages as Isa. 40: 9; 41: 27, and 52: 7 (Good tidings of good). From this Hebrew word we have in Swahili:

- bashiri* announce, bring tidings, report news
- mbashiri* messenger, bringer or bearer of tidings
- ubashiri* announcement, proclamation.

In spite of its appropriateness, neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is the Swahili verb *-bashiri* used to translate any one of the twenty-four occurrences of *bāsar* or the many New Testament uses of the *euangelizō* group of verbs. These are usually rendered by *-hubiri* (preach), although *-lete* (bring)—Luke 2: 10, 1 Thess. 3: 6; *-pasha* (give)—Luke 1: 19; *-tangaza* (announce)—Luke 8: 1; 16: 16; and strangely *-toa* (produce)—1 Cor. 9: 18, are also used; the verbs are followed by *Injili*, *injili*, *Habari Njema* or *habari njema* without any consistent system and occasionally by other nouns.

The last word that comes before us for consideration under the heading of the Names of God is that of our Lord, namely the translation of 'Jesus Christ'. In Swahili, *Isa* is a proper name; our Lord is referred to as *Isa bin Mariamu*. The word comes, of course, from Arabic, but its etymology appears to be very uncertain; the appearance of the word in Arabic does not appear to be earlier than the time of the Qur'ān itself, and it may be a dialectical mutation of the name of our Lord then current among Christians. There are eighteen passages in the Qur'ān where it occurs. The name is also applied to Joshua; the 1884 translation of the Book of Joshua into the Zanzibar dialect bore, as did the translation of 1891, the title *Kitabu cha Isa wa Nun*. Again, the name of our Lord appeared in the titles of the Zanzibar translation of the New Testament of 1883 (E. Steere, revised by Chauncey Maples, H. Geldart, A. C. Madan and Mary Allen) as *Isa Masiya*. This rendering of the name of our Lord had also been used by Bishop Steere in the title of his translation of the Gospel according to St. Matthew in 1869. Articles on the use of the name *Isa* have appeared in *The Bible Translator* (Vol. 4, 1953, pp. 26 f., 83–86 and 102–106). Associated with the question of the use of *Isa* is that of the use of *Masihi* or *Masiya* which come from the Aramaic

māšīah by way of Arabic. *Mmasihia* was also used in the Mombasa text to translate *christianos* in Acts 11: 26; 26: 28; 1 Peter 4: 16, and the Mombasa texts of 1897, 1901 and 1909 use *Masihi* throughout to translate *ho Christos*.

Correspondence took place between the East African bishops and the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1905 and 1906 on 'the proper translation of "Jesus Christ" into Swahili'; the matter is referred to at some length in G. K. A. Bell's life of Randall Davidson.¹ *Isa* was rejected in favour of *Jesu* or *Yesu* on the ground that it 'is a common name in use among Mohammedans'. But the rejection of *Masihi*, *Masiya*, *Mmasihiya* and *Kimasihiya* was made on what must now be regarded as a false charge that it was 'invented by Bishop Steere'. It is strongly suggested that a case exists for a reconsideration of the whole matter, with a view to a restoration of these important words to the Swahili text and possibly also to the text of Scripture in other vernaculars.

From the Names of God, we turn to the attributes of God.

The Hebrew noun 'ēl, which starts its linguistic career by meaning 'a man of might', comes first to be applied to national heroes and they in their turn are assumed to reflect divine majesty; from this the term goes on to indicate a tribal or a national god. It reaches its height when it is applied to 'the one, only, and true God of Israel' and, in this sense, has attributes associated with it which belong to the revealed nature of God. This process has, so far as I am aware, no parallel in the theological discernment of animist societies, and the attributes which are associated with this awareness present considerable translation problems; 'glory', 'honour', 'majesty' are difficult to translate; so too are 'true', 'faithful', 'holy', 'compassionate', 'forgiving', 'gracious'—to say nothing of the Biblical use of 'jealous'; even the concept of living is larger than that of being alive as opposed to being dead. Yet, for a full understanding of the nature of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, these words are most important. We take a few examples from Kikuyu and one from Swahili to illustrate the difficulties which are encountered.

The best that Kikuyu has been able to provide to translate 'holy' is to use the participle *-theru* from the stative verb *-thera* (be bright, clean, clear); and for 'honourable' or 'pure' *-thingu* is used, being derived from the stative verb *-thinga* which means no more than being law-abiding up to the standard of the commonly accepted behaviour patterns of one's day and age.

'Compassion' is a rich, deep word; yet Kikuyu, for 'to be compassionate', has to use *-iguanira tha* (have sympathy for others), a term which also has to stand for 'have mercy on' and 'take pity on'.

'Kindness' and 'graciousness' in their deep, emotive sense imply much more than generosity; *ūtana* and *ūtugi*, either of which has to be used for this great idea of graciousness, customarily have the shallower meaning of generosity.

'Grace', as distinct from just anything good, is virtually impossible to express. In Kikuyu it has to be merely 'goodness'; the adjective *-ega* means 'nice, good' and the abstract noun formed from it, *wega*, which is used to translate 'grace', covers all aspects of goodness.

Swahili is a little more fortunate in having the noun *neema* but even this

¹ G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson*, London: Oxford University Press, 1952; pp. 563 ff.

has been subject to a measure of criticism. According to the dictionaries it can mean 'ease, affluence, comfort; bounty, favour, help; grace (especially of providential blessings), plenty, good harvest, abundance of food'. It comes from the Arabic *na'mm^h* (ease), which is cognate with the Hebrew *nā'am* (be pleasant, delightful, lovely); the Old Testament use of this word is in terms of 'agreeableness to the senses, earthly prosperity, sensual delights'. On the other hand, there is the Hebrew word *hēn* which the Septuagint translates by *charis*, with which is associated the verb *hānan* (be gracious), together with the cognate Arabic word *ḥannan* (grace). It occurs once only in the Qu'rān (19: 4) in a record of the attributes of St. John Baptist. Unfortunately, this word does not appear to have found its way into Swahili; *hanani* would have been a better word than *neema* for 'grace'.

Our second section is concerned with the Cultus—Circumcision, Sacrifice, and Worship.

Circumcision and sacrifice had their place in early Semitic ritual outside Hebrew theology. Circumcision was a dedication of the powers of procreation through the shedding of blood. But in the Hebrew tradition the original meaning of the ritual appears to be completely lost, and the circumcision of the male infant (or of the male proselyte) became the sign of nothing more than the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Again, sacrifice among the Canaanites was associated with the ritual killing of the king, in which the king and the deity were identified. There was a later substitution of a human or animal victim for the king. Three underlying ideas in early Semitic ritual were: first, a controlling of the powers of nature in the interests of the community; secondly, the removal of ritual defilement annually from the community; and thirdly, the efficacy of the substitute victim identified with the dying-rising god in delivering the community from the influences of the demon world.

Over against this, such priestly theology as can be constructed from internal evidence bases the concept of sacrifice on revelation which was an accompaniment of the covenant relation between God and man. It carried with it quite unique prescribed forms of worship, of praise, of thanksgiving, and of communion. And its further distinguishing feature, also unique, was that of a provision for atonement for sin. In this connection G. E. Wright says:

'Priestly writers, no less than the prophets, emphasized the persistent and perennial sins of Israel, the conditional nature of the Covenant, and the pervasive uncleanness of the people. The tabernacling of the holy God in the people's midst was the seal of the fulness of the Covenant and the fulness of felicity in Priestly theology; but holiness could not mix with uncleanness.'¹

Earlier Old Testament reference makes it clear that the uncircumcised had no part in Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel. The actual physical observances of the ordinance of circumcision were as important as the actual physical act of baptism in the name of the Blessed Trinity with water. But the developing teaching of the Old Testament in relation to this rite shows

¹ G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment*, SCM Press, 1950; p. 105.

that the real efficacy of circumcision was dependent on an attitude of heart which was essential for the fulfilment, in its true spiritual significance, of that covenant relationship between God and man (Deut. 30: 6; Jer. 4: 4; 6: 10; Lev. 26: 41; cp. Rom. 2: 29). So the rite of circumcision in the Old Testament looks forward to the Christian rite of baptism and the incorporation of the believer in Christ; sacrifice in the Old Testament reaches out towards that perfect understanding of sacrifice and atonement in the Person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But in animist society 'circumcision' was part of the initiation ritual of both boys and girls, designed to secure their acceptance—by the dead and by the living—into the adult section of the community, and to secure the blessing of the ancestral spirits upon their powers of procreation, so to ensure their fertility.

If there is one word more than any other about which I would wish to be emphatic, and whose exclusion from the Kikuyu Scriptures I would wish to insist upon, it is the Kikuyu word *irua* (initiatory circumcision), as being a wholly wrong equation of animist ritual with the Biblical protosacrament of circumcision. And the use of the verb *-rua* (circumcise in a negative form) becomes quite grotesque when it is used to translate the Biblical word 'uncircumcised'. By very virtue of its quasi-sacramental nature, circumcision readily came to have a symbolic as well as a physical meaning, something which is quite impossible to the word *irua*. Thus, an uncircumcised heart is one from which disobedience to God has not been removed (Lev. 26: 41; Deut. 10: 16; 30: 6); so, too, uncircumcised lips (Exod. 6: 12, 30) and the uncircumcised ear. The literal translation into Kikuyu *mīromo itarī mīruu* (uncircumcised lips)—Exod. 6: 12; and *ndeto itarī nduu* (uncircumcised words) are phrases which cannot be allowed to stand. But fortunately Swahili has a word on which we can depend:

- tahiri* (verb) 'be cleansed ceremonially'; specifically used in connection with the ritual of circumcision
- tahiri* (noun) 'person cleansed ceremonially'
- tohara* (noun) 'ceremonial cleanness'; specifically circumcision
- toharisha* (verb) 'cleanse . . . ceremonially, purify'; specifically circumcise.

The Arabic from which it is derived is *ṭahara* (make clean or pure; make religiously pure), and its Hebrew cognate *ṭāhēr* means 'be clean, be pure both physically and ceremonially, be clean from pollution or defilement'. This Hebrew word is nowhere used in the Old Testament specifically of circumcision; the word *mūl* (circumcise) is translated by the Swahili *-tahiri*, *-toharisha*. It is suggested that the Swahili words should be used in place of vernacular words which misrepresent the nature of the Hebrew ritual.

Amongst the Kikuyu virginity was expected of those presenting themselves for tribal initiation; but sexual intercourse was part of the initiation ritual itself. No word for an adolescent or grown-up girl can, therefore, be found with which to express the Biblical term 'virgin'; to use the word appropriate to her age would expressly deny an unmarried woman's virginity. So again with this word it seems clearly desirable that an appropriate foreign word be used whose meaning is unambiguous. The loan-word will have to be

explained; but this is easier than having to explain away an initial mis-translation. Again Swahili comes to our aid with *bikira* (virgin); it also refers to something newly begun, so that a new garden is *shamba bikira*, just as in English we speak of 'virgin soil'; *ubikira* is 'virginity'. The Arabic from which *bikira* is derived is cognate with the Hebrew *bākar*.

We now pass on to sacrifice.

Sacrifice in animist society is propitiatory in intent, designed to relieve the displeasure of the ancestral spirits by adding the spirit of the animal sacrificed to the flocks and herds in the land of shades. The shadow (Kikuyu *kīruru* 'shadow'; literally 'that which keeps one green or alive') is probably the representation of the undying spirit alike of men and of animals; dead men cast no shadows, says a proverb. To tread on a person's shadow is a grievous offence. Trees also have shadows in this sense; the 'shadow' of a fallen sacrificial tree would be carried and transferred to the tree selected to be its successor.

Ceremonial 'defilement' (Kikuyu *thahu*), either individual or corporate, occasions the necessity for sacrificial cleansing. There is an intricate code of behaviour governing the lives of individuals, of families, and of communities, violation of which brings *thahu*. In many ways this corresponds with certain aspects of the Hebrew 'curse' (*ārar*, Gen. 3 : 17) in that it represents the abiding consequence of the violation of the ceremonial or religious codes, which consequence can only be removed by ritual cleansing. One method of removal was by sacrifice; in less serious matters it could be by *ndahikanio*, that is, by ceremonial vomiting; or by 'anointing' the person in question with *taatha*, the stomach contents of a sacrificial animal. These principles operated consistently within a socio-religious order in which there was no discernible severance between the 'sacred' and the 'secular'.

In passing it is worth noting that the swearing of oaths in Kikuyu was carried out in such a way that the oath-taker invoked defilement (*thahu*) upon himself if it were found to be that he was guilty. The verb customarily used to describe oath-taking was *-ihīta*, which means literally 'to check oneself, head oneself off' and so accept the limitations imposed by truth and the consequences of false swearing, and so 'to take an oath'. And this verb has to be used with some care in translating such phrases as 'by myself have I sworn'; the optative mood is used (the tense infix is *-ro-*) in the actual words of the oath. So that *-ihīta na nyūngū* (swear by [breaking] a cooking pot) means that the oath-taker says, '*Ndokua ta nyūngū īno*' (May I die like this pot [if I am guilty]). But very often the name of a person or a clan was invoked in the oath, implying defilement by sodomy or incest if guilty; one form of such an oath prefixes *Abo* to the oath (cp. Swahili *-apa*, 'swear take an oath'; *kiapo* 'oath'); another prefixes *Abo* to the name of the oath-taker's clan.

It is not proposed to go into detail about the ceremonial of animist sacrifice, but merely to ask a question: can the place of ritual sacrifice in tribal society lend its name for the translation of the Biblical word for altar (Hebrew *mizbēah*)? and can the man who performed the ritual of slaughter on behalf of the defiled man or community be used to translate the Biblical word for priest (Hebrew *kōhēn*) who neither provided nor slew the sacrificial

animal? I have grave personal doubts about the propriety of using the following Kikuyu words:

<i>igongona</i>	sacrifice
<i>kigongona</i>	place of sacrifice, usually a tree, but used to translate 'altar'
<i>mũthĩnji</i>	one who performs sacrifice, with its derivative form <i>mũthĩnji-Ngai</i> , literally 'one who performs sacrifice to God', and used to translate the Old Testament sacrificing priest.

It would seem wiser to adopt into Kikuyu Swahili words whose origin is in the Hebrew Old Testament that we seek to translate:

<i>dhabihu</i>	sacrifice offered to God
<i>madhabahu</i>	altar, the place where sacrifice is made. Both these words are derived from the Hebrew <i>zābah</i> 'slaughter or kill for sacrifice'
<i>kuhani</i>	sacrificing priest under the Jewish dispensation.

While the implications of the violation of the socio-religious code were dire, it is by no means certain that the feelings associated with it involved anything which is more than distantly comparable with the Biblical doctrine of sin, repentance, and forgiveness, either at the time of committing the offence or in the subsequent movement towards restoration to a stable relationship to society and towards the spirits of the ancestors. In Kikuyu, for example, *-ihia* meant fundamentally to 'spoil or break the rules' rather than to sin; *-hĩtia* means 'to take the wrong path, commit a fault'. The meaning of both has had to be stretched considerably to accommodate the needs of the Bible translator grappling with the question of sin. Similarly *-irira* meant to be sorry about the consequences of one's folly rather than to be penitent for the sin that brought them about; *mĩirĩrũ* were regrets about the consequence rather than repentance for the sin. There is, however, a word which is very useful: *-ĩricũkwo*, which means 'to change one's mind or purpose concerning something or somebody'; it is valuable in translating such a passage as 'the gifts and calling of God are without repentance' (Rom. 11: 29) ('there is no going back on the calling of God'); it is of use also in the Old Testament in passages where God is referred to as 'repenting'.

Swahili is fortunate in having the verb *-tubu* (be penitent, repent) with the noun *toba* (repentance). Its immediate source is in the Arabic *tāba* (repent towards God). And it is not readily possible to tell whether this came into Arabic from Hebrew, from Aramaic, or from Christian sources by way of Syriac. There are indications that it was a pre-Islamic adoption, but its origins are in the Aramaic *tūb* and the Hebrew *šūb* (turn back, return, be converted, be restored).

'Forgiveness' is not easily expressed in its Christian fulness; *-kirĩra* by derivation means nothing more than to keep quiet about an offence, not to mention it, rather than to blot it out; and *-ohera* indicates that the punishment which an offence deserved has been remitted, though it does not imply that guilt has been done away with.

The nature of animist sacrifice was such that its ritual accompaniments in

the form of invocation and incantation were designed to be propitiatory, and to calm the vexed spirits whose anger had been aroused by the violation of the tribal code. The Kikuyu word *-thathaiya* had this meaning; another use was to gentle a restive cow. It is not a satisfactory word to express the Hebrew or the Christian idea of worship; yet it was the only word that presented itself to the translator of Psa. 95: 6—'O come, let us *worship*, and bow down: Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker'.

Finally we come to the question of death and the after-life. The Kikuyu word *-kua* means, fundamentally, 'to be broken, be incomplete, cease to be whole'; hence it may describe what happens to a cooking pot when it is dropped, or, used of a person, it may either mean to fall into a faint, to collapse, or it may mean to die. Similarly *-riũka* (a word whose etymology is uncertain, but which may be the reverse form of *-riika*—'descend to the depths', and so literally mean to return from the depths) means either 'to come round from fainting', or 'to return to life after death'. The same wide range of meaning is found in Swahili, and for this reason translators into Swahili have tended to use the word *kiyama* to translate the theological term 'resurrection'.

This word *kiyama* comes from the Arabic *ḳiyāma^h*, for which I have so far found no Hebrew cognate; it may have come from Christian Aramaic sources, and it is used in every way as an equivalent of the Greek *anastasis*; the Swahili New Testament is fairly, but not wholly, consistent in its use of *kiyama* to translate *anastasis*.

An associated difficulty arises with the translation of 'hell, Hades'. Kikuyu uses *agiĩkũrũka kwa ngoma* ([and] he descended into the place of the ancestral spirits). The phrase *kwa ngoma* means the place of the living dead; but in the animist understanding of the after-life, this is presumably heaven, for there is no expectation of a 'resurrection' to be followed by 'judgement'. Swahili, fortunately, has *ahera* which is used as an equivalent of the Hebrew *She'ōl* (A.V. 'grave, hell'); the word itself has Arabic and Hebrew cognates. Both Mombasa and Zanzibar translations used *ahera* frequently, but the Standard text appears to have rejected it in favour of *kuzimu*, a Bantu word meaning 'the place of departed spirits' and corresponding to the Kikuyu *kwa ngoma*. Its use has been retained in the liturgical and theological vocabulary of Swahili, and there may well be a case for a reconsideration of its Biblical use.

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The present treatment of this subject is certainly not complete. My concern has simply been to illustrate from my own experience, now more than a little out of date, some of the difficulties which a Bible translator encounters when seeking to render the text of Holy Scripture within the compass of the vocabulary of an animist society. Discussion will produce a wealth of further detail to supplement the introduction to the subject which this paper has provided.