

impersonal second person—7 times
someone—4 times
person—4 times
plural adjective—2 times
once each: anyone, those, human, we

It may seem that in spite of this, man/men is still retained too often. There are some reasons for that. Virtually all of these are passages which, in the context of Israelite society, are probably speaking of a male. The TEV has attempted to translate the ancient writer's message into modern English without adjusting that message to what it might be in a different culture. The wisdom tradition is, by and large, anti-feminist, and a translation that completely obscures this would be violating an important translational principle. Sexual designation is far less prominent in modern English than in Hebrew, not only because of the sparing use of gender in English, but also because of the immense social differences between the two cultures. Yet we found that there is a fine line between translating a message into our current idiom, and translating a culture. The ancient writer almost surely had men in mind; after all, the book of Proverbs is instruction for young men. But in stating his thoughts, he deals with situations where we today do not think of men as opposed to women, or at least where we feel we should not. We want the writer to speak natural English, but we would not want him to feel uncomfortable with our wording, either. Where there seemed to be any hint of cultural conditioning, we decided to allow the writer to keep his prejudices. The revision, which should be evident in the TEV Bible, was concerned to rid the translated text of our prejudices, not his. (Assuming, of course, that the writer was a man.)

Ecclesiastes was published at the same time as Proverbs. The revisions there are not as extensive. Revisions have been made in the collections of sayings found in the book, but within Ecclesiastes there is a kind of context. In that context, the writer makes it rather clear that he has little use for women. Since the prejudice there is obvious, there seemed little point in tidying up the language.

NOTES

Translating Psalm 23

In attempting to translate the best-known of all the Psalms, the twenty-third psalm, a translator is faced with the fact that its figurative language may not convey much meaning to today's readers, especially to those unacquainted with the culture which forms the background of this magnificent poem of trust and assurance. Even a faithful Bible reader may not fully understand some of the phrases and images in widely-used translations such as the Authorized Version or the Revised Standard Version.

Some of these problems are briefly noted in these comments, together with the way in which the TEV has handled them, in the *Good News Bible*.

In verse 1 the familiar "I shall not want" may be misunderstood, since the verb "to want" is here used not in its most common sense of "desire, wish for", but with the meaning "to lack, be in need of". Even the NEB "I shall want nothing" may be misunderstood by some. So it seems better to say, quite simply, "I have everything I need."

In verse 2 "he makes me lie down" sounds as though the Lord were forcing the psalmist to lie down; what is meant is that the Lord, as Shepherd, provides a place where the psalmist may find rest; so TEV has "He lets me rest."

In verse 3 "he restores my soul" is undoubtedly understood by Bible readers who are familiar with the biblical language. But in current English such a statement has little if any meaning; ordinarily we speak of restoring confidence or courage or hope. The Hebrew word *nephesh* here does not mean "the soul" as separate from the body, but the whole person, the entire being. So it seems better to translate "He gives me new strength" (NEB has "he renews life within me").

The phrase "for his name's sake" at the end of verse 3 is so familiar as to raise hardly any difficulty for the person who reads the Bible regularly. But does the Hebrew phrase "on account of his name" mean simply "for the sake of his reputation"? This may be the meaning intended, but a consideration of this phrase in the other places where it also occurs in the Psalms (25.11; 31.3; 79.9; 106.8; 109.21; 143.11), suggests other possibilities. The name of God is Yahweh, and it stands for his character as revealed in his relation with the people of Israel (see Exodus 3.13-15). He had shown himself as their savior, protector, creator; to him they owed their existence as a nation and on him they depended for their continued wellbeing. He had bound himself to them with a covenant, by which he promised to be their God if they obeyed and worshiped him as his people. He was a God on whose promise they could rely. So when Israelites spoke of the name of their God they were thinking of him as a God who was constant and faithful, who kept his covenant with them. Consequently the meaning of the phrase here seems better expressed by "as he has promised".

"The valley of the shadow of death" in verse 4 is a phrase which through usage in literature and worship has been filled with deep meaning, one which a present-day translator is hesitant to disturb. Elsewhere the Hebrew word here translated "the shadow of death" means simply "darkness" (see Psalm 44.19; 107.10; Job 3.5; 10.22; 12.22; 16.16). As pointed in the Hebrew text the word may here be taken as a compound, meaning "darkness of death". But it is doubtful whether it is meant to refer to death, as such; it seems more likely that it is a vivid figure for hidden dangers, unknown perils. So it seems better to take it in the normal sense, and translate (if the figure is kept) "through the deepest darkness". NEB has "through the valley as dark as death".

In this context, the verb "to comfort" at the end of verse 4 ("thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me") is strange in English, since "to comfort" usually means "to console, to try to cheer up". The shepherd used his rod and staff to defend his sheep from wild animals and to rescue them from dangerous

places; so it is more natural to express the meaning by "they protect me" or "keep me safe" or "reassure me".

In the Orient the host would provide for his guest some olive oil for him to rub on his head, as a tonic for his hair, which had been subject to the heat of the sun and the dust of the road. This was part of the practice of hospitality at the time—a duty which on one occasion Jesus' host failed to observe (see Luke 7.46). There are two problems here for the reader: (1) the custom is unknown to most modern readers, especially English-speaking readers; and (2) the word "oil" is a lubricant or fuel used in engines and motors. If the figure is kept in translation, at least "olive oil" or something equivalent should be used; even NEB "thou hast richly bathed my head with oil" can be misunderstood. So it may be best to dispense altogether with the figure and to represent the meaning by "you welcome me as an honored guest".

The last words of the psalm ("length of days" in Hebrew), as used by Christians, are taken to refer to everlasting life in heaven. But it is highly doubtful that they were so understood by Jews in their worship. The phrase means simply "a long life" or "life-long", as an examination of its use in 21.4 and 91.16 makes clear. The psalmist was talking about the care and protection of Yahweh which faithful Israelites would always enjoy in the Temple, "the house of the Lord". So it seems better to translate as NEB has done, "And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long", or else as TEV, "and your house will be my home as long as I live".

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The translation of *tē astheneia hēmōn* ("in our weakness") in Romans 8.26

There is considerable difference as to how this expression is rendered in the better-known translations. RSV, NEB, JB and *The Amplified Bible* have "in our weakness". TEV has "weak as we are", *Living Bible* has "with our daily problems", *Phillips* has "in our present limitations" and KJV has "in our infirmities".

The Arndt-Gingrich Dictionary lists the different possible meanings of *astheneia* as follows:

- (a) *sickness and disease* (see Mt 10.8, 25.39; Lk 4.40, 5.15, 7.10; Acts 4.9, 28.9; Phil 2.26; Jas 5.14)
- (b) *physical frailty* (see Rom 8.3; 1 Tim 5.23)
- (c) *weakness of any sort* (see 1 Cor 15.43; 2 Cor 11.30, 12.9; Heb 4.15)
- (d) *timidity* (see 1 Cor 2.3)
- (e) *limitation of understanding* (see Rom 6.19)
- (f) *lack of spiritual insight* (see Rom 8.26; 1 Cor 8.11)

There seems little difference between the last two of these meanings.

It is interesting that the particular expression we are considering is placed with meaning (f) for it seems that, within its context in Rom 8.26, *astheneia* does mean this. Paul is saying that, because we do not know how to pray properly ("as we ought" KJV, RSV; "how we ought" NEB; "how to pray properly" Phillips), the Spirit helps us in our *astheneia*. This suggests that