

NOTE

A Translator's Note on Proverbs 11.30

The Brazilian Old Testament Translation Committee had occasion to restudy its translation of Prov 11.30. The Masoretic text reads: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever takes lives is wise." In the initial provisional publication of Proverbs, this verse read: "Righteousness^j produces life, but violence^l kills." The two footnotes were: "^j *One ancient version has righteousness; the Hebrew text has a righteous person*" and "^l *violence; the Hebrew text has a wise man.*" In line *a* the Septuagint has the noun "righteousness" instead of the adjective "righteous," and a number of translations prefer the LXX here. Line *b* has traditionally been translated in English "and he that winneth souls is wise" (King James Version; similarly Jewish Publication Society (1917) and the Douay). Predictably, this is how the New International Version has translated it, "and he who wins souls is wise" (see also New American Standard Bible).

The difficulty in line *b* lies in understanding what the verbal phrase *w^eloqēḥa nephāshōt* means. The verb *lāqaḥ* means "to take, seize, take off, remove, carry off," and when *nephesh* "life/person" is the object, in every instance in the Old Testament the meaning is "to take away life, to kill" (1 Kgs 19.10,14; Ps 31.13; Prov 1.19; Jonah 4.3). This, of course, does not make sense here.

So commentators and translators have emended the text of line *b*, reading *ḥāmāš* "violence" for *ḥācām* "wise." They usually take their clue from the LXX, which reads "and the lives of lawbreakers/evildoers are taken away prematurely"; so RSV, NEB, NAB and TEV. But it is not possible to claim, as does NEB (see also NAB and DHH) that the noun "violence" translates the LXX text. RSV ("but lawlessness takes away lives") accurately labels "lawlessness" a conjecture, and TEV does the same, with its euphemistic phrase "Probable text." Translator's Old Testament (BFBS) has "but violence results in murder" with the puzzling textual note: "*results in murder*: following the Greek."

It is interesting to check the various editions and translations of *La Bible de Jérusalem*. The original edition (as reflected in the French and English editions) followed the LXX for the complete verse: "From fruits of virtue grows a tree of life; the wicked are carried off before their time" (also Spanish JB). But the new French edition (1973) has, for line *b*, "le sage captive les âmes" with the footnote: "The Greek (version), possibly embarrassed by this text, that could be understood 'the wise man takes away life', read: 'evildoers will be taken off before their time'" (so the Brazilian JB). TOB is like BJ: "et le sage captive les gens." The New Jewish Version has "A wise man captivates people."

HOTTP, not unexpectedly, stays with MT, but assigns it a C decision: the Committee propose the translation "and the wise (man) acquires people" (in French: "et le sage acquiert des gens"), and explain:

The meaning seems to be that the Israelite father increases his family, as is shown for instance by the story of Ruth. It is not possible to determine the level of sociological or spiritual development on which this proverb lies; the persons which the wise man acquires for his family may be slaves, partisans or disciples.

In a personal letter, Professor Rüger says that the Committee followed traditional Jewish interpretation, and he quoted two rabbis, Rashi and Ibn Ezra (eleventh and twelfth centuries).

The German Common Language Bible (1982) followed this lead, translating: "Whoever obeys God, his conduct helps others to live. Whoever is intelligent and experienced wins people for himself." In a footnote it says that the verse is difficult to interpret, and the literal translation of the MT follows: line *b* is translated "and a wise person takes people[’s lives]." Similarly the French common language Bible (1982) has "by his wisdom a man persuades others."

The Brazilian Committee decided to follow this interpretation of the MT, but I should say that we did so with considerable misgivings. As it now stands line *b* reads: "whoever increases the number of friends is wise." As in so many other instances, this may be the most pardonable of all failures to understand and translate the MT as we have it today. Selah.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Glassman, Eugene H.: **The Translation Debate. What makes a Bible translation good?** Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press 1981. 132 pp., \$4.25. ISBN 0-87784-467-4.

Books and articles on translation often give the impression that their authors look at the subject in a very abstract way. They would certainly argue differently if they had had much regular experience in translation! In the case of Glassman's book, on the contrary, the reader quickly realizes that he is dealing with someone who knows the subject from inside. In fact, the author spent many years in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, where his work put him in direct touch with concrete problems of Bible translation (for example in Urdu). He now works in Hong Kong as a UBS translation advisor.

The book's central thesis is clear. The author wishes to show that the traditional opposition between translation and paraphrase is really based on inadequate understanding of the factors involved. He himself has come to the conclusion that the question is not "one of either/or" but "rather one of both/and" (22). There is an inevitable element of paraphrase in any translation; that is, certain formal modifications must be made if the content of a message is to be faithfully transferred from one language to another. Of course this does not mean that any paraphrase is legitimate: paraphrase which introduces into the receptor text information which is not in the original must be avoided (see 96f.) The author begins his discussion of this subject by defining what is meant by "translate, interpret, paraphrase." Next, he gives examples of ways in which the biblical writers themselves quote and translate texts. The following chapter describes two main currents in Bible translation, namely "Form-Oriented Translation" and "Content-Oriented Translation". The author then outlines the part played by missionaries in the development of translation theory, and he ends his work by giving a number of "guidelines" to help the