

1. It should be kept in the New Testament, since it is apparently a true witness to Jesus Christ and it has been a recognized part of the Gospel tradition for many centuries.

2. Preferably it should be placed at the end of the Gospel of John, with a note indicating the various textual possibilities. This arrangement would allow the sensitive reader to see more clearly the relation between chapters 7 and 8 which must be understood in the light of the Festival of Shelters. For the Jews of New Testament times the celebration of this festival was associated with the themes of life-giving water and of light. So when Jesus declares that he is the source of life-giving water (7.37-39) and of light for the world (8.12-20), he is declaring that he is the reality of what was symbolized by the Festival of Shelters. I realize that even the best reader may miss seeing this relation. But, if 7.53-8.11 is placed at the end of the Gospel, then the reader will have a better chance to understand the full impact of chapters 7 and 8.

3. It may be necessary to keep the story in its traditional place (after 7.52), if the feelings of people against placing it in a new position are too strong. In such instances, it should be placed in brackets with a note indicating its textual uncertainty, as the *Good News Bible* has done. In my opinion this is less desirable from a purely translational point of view; but it may be wiser, if its transfer to a new place in the text may possibly result in a split in the local Christian community or in the refusal to use the translation. Our "wisdom" must not be allowed to destroy our "weaker brother"

PAUL ELLINGWORTH

## HOW IS YOUR HANDBOOK WEARING?

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People who have worked with UBS Translator's Handbooks generally agree on three things. First, that most normal commentaries contain a great deal of information which translators do not need, since it does not directly affect the meaning of the text. Second, that normal commentaries often fail to deal with questions which translators have to answer. Third, that there have been many changes and developments in the 18 years since the first Handbook, on Mark, by Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, was published in 1961.

This therefore seems a good time to ask: How is this first Handbook wearing? Does it still answer translators' questions as well as it did 18 years ago? And is there anything translators can learn from later commentaries on Mark?

It would be impossible to answer these questions completely in a single article. All I will try to do here is to note some of the problems met by a group of people translating Mark 9.1 to 10.11 into Scots Gaelic. Other groups might have different problems, and might come to different conclusions. This is only a sample.

### 9.5 “*Master, it is well that we are here.*”

(This quotation is from RSV, which is the running text of the Mark Handbook. Unless some other version is indicated, all quotations in this article are from RSV.)

Commentaries and translations still disagree about whether this or KJV’s “it is good for us to be here” is the better translation of the Greek. Is Peter simply expressing the happiness of the experience of the transfiguration? Or is he saying that it is a good thing that the three disciples are there, so that they can build tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah? The structure of the Greek sentence, more literally “it is good for us to be here, *and* we will build three tents . . .”, suggests a close connection between the two clauses, and thus supports RSV. If so, the Handbook is right in suggesting that both “us” and “we” mean the disciples only, not Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. However, Matthew 17.4 breaks the connection by omitting “and”, narrows the second clause by making Peter speak in his own name alone (“I will make three tents . . .”), and smoothes out Mark’s rather rough sentence in other ways.

### 9.7 *And a cloud overshadowed them*

What exactly is the cloud doing? Does it come between the sun and *all* the characters in the story? Or does it come between Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the one hand, and Peter, James, and John on the other? Peter’s talk about making tents suggests that the “heavenly” and the “earthly” characters, the tent-builders and those for whom the tents are to be built, are all on one level. Nor is there any suggestion of Jesus looking up to Moses and Elijah as he talks with them in verse 4. However, the following words, “a voice came out of the cloud”, strongly suggest that the disciples are outside the cloud, and Moses and Elijah, and perhaps Jesus, are inside it. For this reason, the Italian common language translation *Parola del Signore* and the Spanish inter-confessional translation both choose the translation “enveloped” or “wrapped up”, rather than simply “casting its shadow over them” (NEB).

### 9.17–27

It is important in Gaelic, and no doubt in other languages, to know the approximate age of the boy whom Jesus cured after the transfiguration. Facts to be considered include the following. (1) In verse 24, the boy is referred to as a *paidion* or “little child”. (GNB omits the word here, since it has added the word “boy” in verses 19 and 20, and will do so again three times in verses 26–27). (2) Yet the boy is said to have had the evil spirit “from (when he was) a little child” (*ek paidothen*), suggesting that this was rather a long time ago. (3) However, we may doubt whether in ancient times a baby suffering from severe epilepsy would have been likely to live longer than one year. (4) It is difficult to draw any conclusion from the fact that the father was still responsible for his son, leading him about (verse 17). The reason for this may have been, not that he was a “small child” (Handbook, page 283), but that he was too ill to look after himself.

In classical Greek, *paidion* meant a child of about seven or under, the word *pais* being kept for older children up to about the age of fourteen. Some New Testament texts fit in with this. For example, at the age of twelve, Jesus is

called a *pais* in Luke 2.43. But other texts suggest that the distinction between *pais* and *paidion* may have been weakening by New Testament times. In Matthew 2.16, it is not *paidion*, as one might expect, but *pais*, which is used to describe the infants of two years old and less whom Herod killed. On the other hand, Jairus's twelve-year-old daughter is called a *paidion* in Mark 5.39–41. In Mark 9, it therefore seems best not to emphasise the smallness of the epileptic boy, but to use some general word for “child” or “boy”, except in verse 24, where one can say that he had had this illness “since he was small”.

**9.30–31** *He would not have any one know it; for he was teaching his disciples*  
 “For” (*gar*) in New Testament Greek is often a weak conjunction which may be left out in translation, as it is here in the German common language translation *Die Gute Nachricht*. However, most modern commentaries and translations support the Handbook (page 292) in giving the second clause “the necessary emphasis as explaining the reason why Jesus did not want anyone to know of his trip through Galilee”. GNB has “because” in place of RSV’s “for”; the Italian common language translation has “in fact”; and the Spanish interconfessional translation (not a common language translation) has “. . . because he was dedicated to instructing his disciples”.

Notice, incidentally, that there is no contradiction between this verse and Mark 8.32, where the words which KJV translated “he spake that saying openly” do not mean “Jesus taught publicly that he was going to die and rise again”, but “he made this very clear to them” (GNB), that is, to the disciples

**9.36** *And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms*

What exactly did Jesus do? The Handbook (page 295) sees the problem, and reconstructs the course of events by saying that probably Jesus “first took a child by the hand and led him over in front of the disciples, there in the midst of the group as they crowded around Jesus. Then he took the child up in his arms and put him on his lap.” The parts of this reconstruction which are not expressed in the words of the text are (1) Jesus standing up to “take” the child and lead him to the disciples (in verse 35, he is sitting down), and (2) Jesus putting the child on his lap (though this is how many Bible pictures understand the story). Perhaps even Matthew and Luke saw some difficulty, or some repetition, in Mark’s account. In Matthew 18.2 Jesus simply “calls” the child to himself; and in Luke 9.47 Jesus “takes” the child (a word different from the one used by Mark, but related to it).

Perhaps a way out of the difficulty may be found by noticing that whenever Mark uses the participle “taking” (*labōn*), it has a rather general meaning, including, or at least overlapping with, the meaning of the verbs which follow. For example, in the two stories of the feeding of the crowds (Mark 6.41, 8.6), and the account of the Last Supper (Mark 14.22, 33), the “taking” of the bread (and wine) does not seem to be a completely separate action, but rather the introduction to a series of actions. The “taking” of the bread was a necessary first step to breaking it and giving it to the disciples: it is these last two events which are emphasised by the use of main verbs.

It therefore seems likely that Mark saw the sequence of events as follows: (1) A heading or introduction to the whole incident: Jesus "took" a child. As the Handbook says, translators must avoid using words which already include the meaning "embraced". Probably Matthew is right in thinking that Jesus simply called the child, that is, he said "come here"; but this is not expressed in Mark. (2) Jesus then made the child stand in the circle made up of the disciples, or among them. GNB's "in front of" does not seem quite accurate here. (3) Jesus, still seated, put his arms around the child as the child was standing there. (4) Jesus then put his hands on the child's head in blessing.

### 9.49-50

As the Handbook rightly says (page 304), "the real problem of translation in verse 49 is that we do not know exactly what is meant." There is also the complication of the mixed metaphor (expression which uses two different language pictures) "salted with fire". What does seem to be generally agreed is that these verses are only loosely related to verses 42-48, by a series of catch-words or words which are repeated a number of times.

verse 48: . . . the *fire* is not quenched

verse 49: . . . *salted with fire*

verse 50a: *Salt* is good . . .

verse 50b: Have *salt* in yourselves . . .

It therefore seems right to set these sayings out in separate paragraphs, as GNB often does in the OT book of Proverbs. If, in some languages, the metaphor or picture has to be translated by some literal expression, no important meaning is lost, but only the link of a word in common in the different sayings. For example, the German common language translation leaves no connection between verses 49 and 50a: "Everyone must undergo the fire-test. Salt is something good . . .". But there is still a doubt about the meaning of verse 49. GNB's brave attempt at filling out the meaning, "Everyone will be purified by fire as a sacrifice is purified by salt", is very different from the Italian common language translation's "(The person) who will not have salt in himself will finish in the fire"; yet both are possible meanings of the Greek.

### 10.1 *And he left there*

The Handbook (page 307) passes lightly over this phrase, only pointing out that it is literally "leaving that place (*ekeithen* 'thence') he went". More recent commentators note that each time Mark himself uses the word *ekeithen*, it marks the beginning of a new section. (The other places are Mark 6.1, 7.24 and 9.30. In 6.10-11, the word is spoken by Jesus). In the same way, Mark 6.1, 7.24, 9.30 and 10.1 often stand at the beginning of readings in church. The question therefore arises whether we should not make it clear where Jesus and his disciples are coming from. After all, we do not hesitate to replace a pronoun such as "he" by a proper noun such as "Jesus", if this will make the opening sentence of a section clearer. The German and Italian common language translations do this in 10.1: on the basis of 9.33, they translate "Then Jesus left Capernaum". In the other passages, it is more difficult to do this, partly because the previous reference to a place is further away, and

partly because it is to a region rather than just to a town. In Mark 7.24, for example, it would be dangerous to translate, on the basis of 6.53, "Then Jesus left Gennesaret", since 6.56 mentions further travel by Jesus within the region. Yet to translate 7.24 "Then Jesus left the area around Gennesaret" would be unnecessarily heavy. GNB's "left and went away to" carries the meaning of *ekeithen* without the use of words like "from there"; and the beginning of a new section is indicated by a sub-heading.

### 10.2-11

Various aspects of Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce remain difficult for both commentators and translators. In verse 2, the Pharisees' question is probably broader than the question which Jesus asks in reply. The Greek word translated "is it lawful?" means "is it permitted?" or "is there any hindrance?" In this passage its meaning may be expressed as "is there any reason why a man should not divorce his wife?" GNB seems to go a little too far in mentioning "our Law" as early as in verse 2. The Pharisees may have meant "is there any rule, either in law or tradition, which would prevent a man from divorcing his wife?"

In verse 4, it is tempting to combine the two phrases "write a certificate of divorce" and "put her away". The Spanish interconfessional translation, for example, has "the man can separate himself from his wife without anything more being required than drawing up a deed of separation". Deuteronomy 24.1-4, however, distinguishes the two acts of writing and putting away, and the Italian common language translation brings out clearly the relation between them: "If a man wants to send his wife away, let him write a declaration of divorce." The point in the Old Testament setting was that the certificate set the wife free to marry someone else, so that for a man to send his wife away without such a certificate would be unjust.

In verse 6, the best Greek text has "he made them male and female", but modern translations are right to express the fact that the subject is God.

In verse 8, it may be possible in some languages to omit the word "so" before "they are no longer two but one". This sentence would then have the effect of repeating, with extra emphasis, what had been said in verse 7. However, the Greek word for "so" (*hōste*) is often used, especially by Paul, to mark the conclusion of an argument (as in Mark 4.32), especially an argument from scripture (as in Mark 2.28, "So the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath"). It is therefore probably better to include an equivalent for *hōste* in the translation here, even in those languages (English is one) which generally use fewer logical connecting words than Greek.

Perhaps the most difficult translation problem in this passage comes in verse 11, where RSV has "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her." The Greek, like RSV and some other translations, can have two different meanings. "Against her" could grammatically refer either to the first wife, or to the second. Some commentaries note, without accepting, N. Turner's view, expressed in *The Bible Translator*, volume 7 (1956), pages 151-152, that the phrase means "commits adultery with the second woman". The Handbook (page 313) notes that Turner "cannot . . . cite any instance of Mark's using *epi* with the accusative meaning

‘with’.” The other grammatically possible meaning, “committing adultery against the second woman” is almost nonsense, since there is nothing in the context to show whether the second woman was married or single. What is certain is that the idea of a man committing adultery against his wife has no parallel in ancient Jewish writings. Jesus’ teaching at this point seems to be revolutionary. Modern translations are therefore right to make the phrase clear by adding some such phrase as “against his wife” (GNB) or (especially in languages which have the same word for “wife” and “woman”) “against his first wife” (German common language translation).

As far as they go, these samples confirm the tendency of all but the most detailed commentaries (and sometimes even these!) to ignore points which matter to translators, so that translators still need handbooks designed to meet their particular needs. The pioneer Handbook on Mark contains some features which later Handbooks have rightly discarded (especially the division between exegetical and textual notes), but it remains a valuable and practically useful tool. Some problems, however, remain unsettled; there are points on which even experts continue to differ; and more recent translators have come up with ideas which might be more widely shared. There may therefore be a case, some day, for a revised edition of the Handbook on Mark. It is not likely, however, to be a high priority, as long as so many books, especially of the Old Testament, have no handbook at all. Meanwhile the Mark Handbook has recently been reprinted, and will continue to be well used. It is not worn out yet!

## JESUS, SON OF GOD—A TRANSLATION PROBLEM

### SOME FURTHER COMMENTS

*The article “Jesus, Son of God—a translation problem” which was published in the October 1977 issue of The Bible Translator invited readers to let us have their comments in response to the suggestions made in it. We have received comments from two people, which we are happy to print here.*

*The fullest comments have come from Mr. Matt Finlay, who has spent some 25 years working as a missionary in the Singapore–Malaysia–Indonesia region. Commenting on the original article (in which he is quoted) he writes: I have read this article with interest, and see it as an honest attempt to deal with a very difficult problem. Yet I feel that it raises new problems in trying to solve old ones. I would like to set out my thoughts on several important points.*

1. Every Muslim from the Grand Mufti to the most ignorant peasant knows that the Bible calls Jesus “the Son of God”. To produce a version in which this most controversial term has been removed would create an uproar. One of the most common accusations against Christians by Muslims is that we