

<b>JB</b>	a woman was there who for eighteen years had been possessed by a spirit that had enfeebled her
<b>German</b>	unter den Zuhörern war eine Frau, die schon achtzehn Jahre lang krank
<b>CL</b>	war
	<i>in the audience there was a woman who had been sick for eighteen years</i>
<b>YL</b>	.....

*Evaluation:*

Only GNB plainly spells out the *evil spirit* cause. NEB and JB remain somewhat ambiguous by using only *spirit*. LB suggests a purely physical handicap and JBP a psychological problem, both seem to be influenced by our modern view of illness. The German common language translation, probably for the same reason, leaves out all reference to cause.

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## TRANSLATING 1 CORINTHIANS

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In April 1961, *The Bible Translator* published an article entitled "New Help for Translators", announcing the first Translator's Handbook, on Mark, and including two specimen pages. The editor's introduction to the article stated:

"With the appearance of this volume there has been initiated an extensive programme for the production of an entire series of such helps for translators, to include in the first stage . . . Handbooks on Acts, Luke, John, and 1 and 2 Corinthians."

The United Bible Societies keeps its promises, sooner or later. So the inside covers of *The Bible Translator* now list a series of translator's helps, including many handbooks not mentioned in 1961. However, the "first stage" must still be going on, nearly twenty year later, since the handbooks on 1 and 2 Corinthians have not yet appeared. This article is based on the experience of gathering material for the handbook on 1 Corinthians.

Anyone translating this letter is sometimes excited, and sometimes frustrated. Excited, because in the letters to the Corinthians we see more deeply than anywhere else in the New Testament into the life of a young church. Paul's first visit to Corinth lasted almost two years. He wrote at least three letters to the Christians there, and received at least one letter from them. He probably knew the people at Corinth better than any other group to which he wrote. He knew them well enough to scold them at times (see 1 Cor 4.18-21, 11.13-22; all quotations are from the Good News Bible: Today's English Version, abbreviated GNB, unless otherwise stated). At times, they seem to have tested his patience almost to breaking point (2 Cor 2.4, 7.5). 1 and 2 Corinthians are personal letters to real people, dealing with real situations.

That is why translators are sometimes frustrated. More than in the case of any other New Testament letter, we need to know about the situation, in order to understand the text. Who, for example, were "Chloe's people" (1 Cor 1.11, RSV)? Members of her family, as GNB thinks? Slaves, or other dependants? Friends? People who met and worshipped in her home? We do not know, but as translators we need to know.

The same is true of 1 Cor 6.4, where at least four problems arise at once. The least important question is that of punctuation. It makes surprisingly little difference to the meaning, whether the words are understood as a question, an order, an exclamation, or a statement. Most translations agree with the UBS Greek text in taking it as a question. If so, the next problem is to decide whether the question is a real one, expecting an answer, or not. GNB's "Are you going to take (your disputes) to be settled by people who have no standing in the church?" may be understood in either way. NEB's "How can you (do this)?" suggests more clearly that Paul does not expect an answer; and this may well be right.

The other two problems could be settled if we knew more about the circumstances in which Paul wrote. GNB's: "If such matters come up" leaves open the question of whether or not "such matters" had in fact already "come up". The Jerusalem Bible thinks that they had: "When you have had cases of that kind . . .". This is a possible meaning, but not the necessary meaning of the Greek. Even if we think that the Jerusalem Bible goes too far, it is still likely that Paul has a real problem in mind. He did not usually discuss things not connected with reality.

Finally, it would be helpful to translators if we knew who are these "people who have no standing in the church". Are they members of the church, but of the lowest rank or status within it, people who occupied "the very last place", as Paul says ironically of the apostles in 1 Cor 4.9? Or are they "outsiders" (1 Cor 5.12), people who "from the point of view of the church are of no account" (Moffatt), because they are not believers at all? This is not impossible; but it is probably more natural to understand the words as referring to church members.

The difficulties mentioned up to now affect only individual verses. A more general problem is that of what went on when Christians in Corinth met together. Many people would answer without hesitation: "Well, of course, they met for worship". They might add, thinking both of 1 Cor 11.17-25 and of modern church life, "the central act of their worship was the Lord's Supper". This may well be; but in preparing to translate this letter, we must allow it as far as possible to speak for itself, and not force it into the patterns of present-day church life.

On the one hand, it is clear that the Corinthians church did not have the special buildings for worship which we take for granted. They had their own homes (1 Cor 11.22, 34), in some of which Christians regularly gathered (1 Cor 16.19). On the other hand, what went on in their meetings was probably more varied than in most Christian worship services today. The Corinthians, like most of us, had in their worship singing and preaching and the reading of scripture (that is, the Old Testament). They also had, as in some modern churches, "messages in strange tongues", which were usually explained (1 Cor 14.26-33). These were probably not "messages in foreign languages", as apparently in Acts 2, but inspired speech which could not be understood without a special gift. At other times, the Corinthians' meetings seem to have been more like teaching sessions (1 Cor 14.6, 19, 26), or even like trials, in which Christians examined themselves (1 Cor 11.28) and one another (1 Cor 5.4-5) in the presence of Christ.

Translators need to ask themselves whether, in their own language, there is one expression which can cover all this range of activity. It is doubtful whether the English word "worship" can do this. Translators of 1 Corinthians must consider the meaning of various possible words for worship, and see how far they can cover what Christians did as a group in Corinth. Probably several expressions will be needed, just as Paul used a variety of terms in speaking of the Lord's Supper.

Perhaps the most serious translation problem connected with worship arises in 1 Cor 11.2–16, the section which in GNB has the title: "Covering the Head in Worship". The first thing to notice is that there is nothing in the Greek text corresponding to GNB's "in public worship" in verses 4, 5, and 13, and "in worship" in verse 16. These words are added to avoid the suggestion that even in private prayer, a woman must cover her head, and a man uncover his. GNB's example is followed by the French and German common language translations, but not by common language translations in Dutch, Italian, and Portuguese. Among other translations, Barclay and (in verse 16) Goodspeed agree with GNB, but NEB and the Translator's New Testament do not.

The problem is complicated by the fact that in 1 Cor 14.34–35, women are told to keep silent in church—an order which seems to exclude praying in public, and certainly preaching. "In church", here and in other places, does not, of course, mean "in the church building", but "in the church meeting", or "when Christians meet". GNB rightly does not cover up this apparent contradiction, and most commentators agree that 1 Cor 11.2–16 refers to public worship. Some scholars believe that Paul did not write 1 Cor 14.34–35, but the evidence does not seem strong enough for us to take this way out of the difficulty; and in any case, the verses have to be translated.

We can perhaps find a solution by looking more closely at the text in the light of the rest of 1 Corinthians. If chapter 11 is read as a whole, there is an obvious contrast between verses 2–16, which say nothing directly about public worship, and verses 17–33, which speak with emphasis about "your meetings for worship" (literally, "you come together", verse 17; and the same verb is used in verses 18, 20, and 33). Similarly, the phrase "in (the) church" is used in verses 18 and 22, and again in 14.34, 35. In 11.22, the Lord's Supper, shared by the whole Christian community, is also contrasted with ordinary meals in private houses.

Other references in the New Testament to praying or even to preaching do not suggest that these things were done only in meetings of an entire Christian community. 1 Cor 16.19 is understood by some scholars to mean that the meeting in the home of Aquila and Priscilla was one of several Christian house groups at Corinth, who perhaps made up the whole congregation to which 11.17–20 refers.

It therefore does not, on balance, seem necessary or even desirable to add such phrases as "in public worship" in translating 11.2–16.

In principle, Translator's Handbooks are concerned only with matters which affect the meaning, and therefore the translation, of the text. Other matters, however important or interesting in themselves, are left to general commentaries, which translators are advised to consult. There are, however, places where it is difficult to decide just where "background" stops and "foreground"

begins. Professor M. de Jonge mentioned some of these in an article on the Thessalonians Handbook, published in the January 1979 issue of *The Bible Translator*, pages 127–134.

In 1 Corinthians, it is important (but difficult) to decide where Paul is speaking in his own name, and where he is referring to, or even quoting, the letter he had received from Corinth. Paul mentions this letter directly in 7.1. The same verse, literally “now concerning the things you wrote”, suggests that 7.1–16, to which GNB gives the title “Questions about Marriage”, will be the first of several sections containing Paul’s “answers to correspondence”. This seems to be confirmed when we find several places, later in the letter (7.25, 8.1 and 4, 12.1, 16.1, 12) which introduces a new theme with the same phrase: “Now, concerning . . .”. (8.4 does not have the word translated “now”, and reads like an attempt to restart the discussion begun in 8.1).

GNB brings this out by expanding the phrase “Now, concerning . . .” to read, “Now concerning what you wrote about . . .”, everywhere except in 16.12, which reads simply, “Now, about brother Apollos”. In 12.1 and 16.1, however, other translations do not follow GNB’s example, and it may be that in these chapters, Paul was drawing, not (or not only) on the letter he had received from the Corinthians, but on other reports similar to those mentioned in 1.11. If this is so, 11.34, “As for the other matters, I will settle them when I come”, would mark the end of Paul’s answers to questions raised in the Corinthians’ letter. A final decision would need to take into account the structure of the whole letter.

The questions discussed so far in this article mainly concern the situation in which the letter was written. Other problems arise because the situation of present-day readers is so different from that of first-century Corinth. To take a simple example. Paul speaks in 1 Cor 1.17–18 about the cross. (Rather surprisingly, the cross is not mentioned anywhere else in the letter to the Corinthians, though the verb “crucify” is used in 1 Cor 1.13, 23, 2.2, 8). Crucifixion was a common punishment in the Roman Empire, but for Christians there was only one cross which mattered: the one on which Jesus had died. Moreover, when they said “the cross”, they were thinking, not of pieces of wood, but of what they had been used for. All modern readers may not realize this, since the cross itself has become a common part of church furniture; so GNB translates, in both 1.17 and 1.18, “Christ’s death on the cross”. In some languages, or in some cultures, it may be necessary to add a note telling the reader more about this form of punishment.

Modern readers may need help, too, in understanding certain features of Paul’s style. 1 Corinthians is full of what are called rhetorical questions, that is, questions which do not require an answer, but are just a vivid way of making a statement. Usually, a positive rhetorical question is equivalent to a strong negative statement. For example, “What soldier ever has to pay his own expenses in the army?”, 9.7, means “No soldier ever has to pay . . .”. A negative rhetorical question equals a strong positive statement: “Am I not a free man?”, 9.1, means “I certainly am a free man”. (For more about rhetorical questions, see J. Beekman and J. Callow: *Translating the Word of God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 1974, pages 229–248).

Translators would do well to read straight through 1 Corinthians, either in

Greek or in a rather literal translation such as RSV, noting all questions, deciding which ones are rhetorical, and thinking about how they can most naturally be translated. There are fifteen questions in 9.1–12 alone! In some cases, such as 11.13, 14.15, and 14.26, it is not certain whether the questions are rhetorical or real, and the context must be carefully searched for clues.

Other aspects of Paul's style may require study before direct translation work begins, that is, at the time when a group of translators is drawing up principles and procedures for its work. 1 Cor 4.6–13 contains several examples of the figure of speech we call irony. There are other places, such as 10.15, where it is not certain whether Paul is writing ironically or seriously. Languages differ widely in the ways in which they convey irony. In speech, it can be shown by a speaker's tone of voice, or by his gestures or the expression on his face. Unfortunately, these are not things which can be written down and printed; so translators must make the meaning clear in other ways.

Again, for all the fierceness of Paul's language at times ("You fool!", 1 Cor 15.36), he approaches delicate subjects with care and tact, sometimes using indirect language. 1 Cor 9.15, for example, is literally: ". . . in order that in my case things may be done in this way", which for many readers would be almost without meaning. GNB rightly uses more direct language: ". . . in order to claim such rights for myself". Translators have to decide how speakers of their own language would most naturally discuss such subjects.

Similar problems arise in translating Paul's references to sex, especially sexual immorality (1 Cor 6.13–18), and death. In several places (1 Cor 7.39, 11.30, 15.6, 18, 20, 51), Paul speaks of death as "falling asleep". GNB replaces this by literal language, using the verb "die". Languages however differ a great deal in their use of indirect language, depending on which subjects are thought of, by speakers of the language, as too delicate to mention directly. Translators must take account of this. Even within a single language and a single culture, a subject may be discussed differently by different people, in different situations, and at different times. In Britain, for example, sex, and to a lesser extent death, are discussed more openly now than a hundred years ago.

In addition to general questions such as those considered in this article, translators will find in 1 Corinthians a fair share of special problems, and also two of the best-known passages of the New Testament outside the gospels: the account of the Last Supper in 11.23–25, and the "Hymn to Love" in chapter 13. Translators must expect criticism from readers who know older versions by heart, and who turn first to their favourite passages to see what a new translation has made of them. This should not make translators afraid to apply modern translation principles; but they should be prepared, even more than usual, to explain the reasons for the decisions they have made. In this way, they will help people to understand more clearly the message of 1 Corinthians, and to appreciate better the ways in which language works.

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**Footnote to article:** The Handbook on 1 Corinthians will not be published for some time. The author, whose address may be found on the inside back cover, would be glad to receive details of problems (and even solutions!) discovered in translating this letter.