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THE FOUR GOSPELS

A Taiwanese Romanized translation:

The following is an extract from the General Foreword, written by Father Fedders, to the translation of the Four Gospels, published in 1967. The translation was prepared under his general direction.

In preparing this translation of the Four Gospels, I was fully aware of the fact that I am a foreigner in Taiwan and that I am not a Scripture scholar. It was only the urgency of the need of an authorized version of the Gospels in Taiwanese, since a portion of the Gospels is now read every day in our liturgical services, that prompted me to disregard my inadequacies and to launch out into the deep and produce the best translation possible under the circumstances, with the hope that some Catholic native Scripture scholars in the near future will collaborate with the Protestant Scripture scholars to revise and perfect this translation.

In preparing this translation I have depended entirely on the native Taiwanese professors of the Maryknoll Language School here in Taichung, and the native Taiwanese Scripture scholars in Tainan and Taipei. I only directed the work and attempted to see that the translation would be a faithful expression of the original ideas. The style, the choice of modern colloquial Taiwanese expressions were left entirely in the hands of the native Taiwanese editors and scholars.

Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical Letter, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, states, 'It is the duty of the exegete to lay hold, with the greatest care and reverence, of the very least expressions, which under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit have flowed from the pen of the sacred writer, so as to arrive at a deeper and fuller knowledge of his meaning'.

If this is the duty of the exegete, it surely would seem to follow that the duty of the translator must be to make these findings of Biblical scholarship available to the People of God in their own spoken language, namely in their vernacular and not only in the ancient written, classical, stilted language such as the literary forms of written Chinese. There is certainly a place for these elegant literary translations in Chinese Characters in the Church. We are convinced that the nuances and the dynamic equivalence of the original message can be much more adequately expressed through the medium of colloquial Taiwanese, for those who are native speakers of Taiwanese, than through the medium of Chinese characters, which by tradition must follow rigid patterns of expression. A translation in Chinese characters for Taiwanese speaking people is quite removed from their much more pliable and unconstrained methods of expression in their own spoken language. As a consequence the meaning in Chinese Characters is often not apparent and

even obscure while the impact and the life of the message are almost always completely lost on native listeners.

The fact that ten million of the thirteen million people on this island are native Taiwanese speakers should be a cogent reason for translating the Sacred Scriptures in their language, rather than remaining content with a Mandarin version in the Chinese written language. That this attempt to present the Taiwanese people with a living message in their own modern mode of expression is full of cultural risks we are all well aware. A Romanized version which deviates from old classical forms, which have the seal of literary elegance, has its own pitfalls and seems to be begging for trouble. In view of these difficulties a translator of a Romanized version has no easy sailing. All he can hope for is that his version may have merit enough to convince its readers that it is not a hasty piece of work, but that it truly represents a conscientious effort and an honest endeavor to make the Good News have the same dynamic impact on today's listeners as it had on those who heard the message for the first time from the lips of the Master.

In other words we have attempted to do what every missionary in Taiwan does when he preaches a homily after the reading of a portion of the Gospels. First he reads the Gospel from Chinese Characters. Next he lays down the book and launches out into a retelling of the same passage in language that will be understood by the people.

The same purpose also called for a change not only in the word order of the Chinese Characters but at times also in the order of phrases and clauses, when it was judged that current usage or clearness would be served by doing so. We always aimed first at intelligibility without sacrificing accuracy. Least of all was it our intention to adhere slavishly to the Chinese Characters by Romanizing them word for word. This would only be a Romanized form of the Chinese Characters, which would be useful only to foreigners who are not able to read Chinese Characters. Our purpose has been to reproduce the exact meaning in the living language of the Taiwanese, and thus make them become aware that this message is for them today and not a message which was proclaimed some two thousand years ago to the people of that time and hence has no relevance in their lives today. We attempted to present the Gospel message in modern Taiwanese dress.

This is more than a question of whether or not the Taiwanese understand what is read to them in our Churches from Chinese Characters. Certainly every English speaking person who has a grammar school education understands the meaning of such obsolete words as, 'thou', 'thee', 'ye', 'thy' and 'beseech', and yet we have deleted these from our modern versions of the Scriptures simply because they are not used by people today in their colloquial English. The translators deleted these obsolete expressions because they wished to put God's Word in man's language of the twentieth century.

If we have not completely succeeded in doing this, to the satisfaction of all our readers, we shall not at all be surprised. There is perhaps today no English version of the Gospels which has not been criticized for its inadequacies and even inaccuracies.

The Gospels are not mere narratives of events distant in time and place;

to the Christian they are a book of devotion. And here is where the reader's own initiative must impel him to mine the quarry that lies before him. Beneath the surface there are treasures which only devout meditation can unearth. In particular, Christ's utterances about himself are like 'the wonders' which the psalmist found hidden in 'the Law':

'Open my eyes,
and I will scan the wonders of your Law' (118: 18).

Another conspicuous trait of the Gospels consists in the numerous parables used by our Lord to illustrate a truth or a rule of life. But here it is needful to add that the parable style of exhortation does not require every small detail of the illustration to have a counterpart in the application.

The Gospels are but fragmentary records of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. St Matthew's account is fullest in details; yet a comparison shows that he omitted much that is told by the other writers. St Luke states (Acts 1: 3) that after the Resurrection, Jesus spoke to the disciples about 'the kingdom of God', that is, the Church; but he does not satisfy our curiosity regarding the content of these conversations.

No explanatory notes

Although the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation explicitly states, 'Such versions are to be provided with necessary and fully adequate explanations so that the sons of the Church can safely and profitably grow familiar with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their spirit', we regret that time does not allow us to provide these explanatory notes in Taiwanese. It would take at least another year to make these Gospels available to the missionaries, if we wish to supply explanatory footnotes. This is regrettable because our Taiwanese Version would be more readily accepted by our readers, if we could state the reasons for our choice of expressions in footnotes. This task must be left to a future editor.

Although the Protestant scholars formerly did not supply explanatory notes with their translations, they all agreed in Tokyo at the Bible Translators' Conference, August 1966, that a translation without these notes is inadequate.

We suggest that for the missionaries and for those who understand English, the best explanatory notes are found in the Jerusalem Bible. It would be advisable to have a copy of the Jerusalem Bible handy when preparing to read a portion of the Scriptures at worship services or at liturgical functions. A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture in one volume is still more complete: published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York.

If there are any inaccuracies in this version, the Protestant Scripture Scholars should not be held responsible for these. I took the liberty to re-edit the final version in which not all of their observations, suggestions and corrections were incorporated.

We hope that this humble effort to collaborate with our Protestant brothers will be only the beginning of closer and greater cooperation in the future. Our sentiments are best expressed in the words of Cardinal Bea, president of the Vatican Secretariat for promoting Christian Unity, addressed to an

ad hoc group approved by the United Bible Societies' Executive Committee and to Roman Catholic scholars participating in informal conversations on common translations of the Bible in Rome, January 5, 1967. The Cardinal said: 'The Holy Spirit is surely at work drawing us together through the Bible; through the effort of translating the Scriptures together.'

'It does not seem to be an exaggeration to say that the possibility of our cooperation is one of the most important developments in contemporary Christian history. It challenges decades, even generations of suspicion and, in some cases hostility.'

'We stand on the threshold of a great enterprise. We know in our hearts, that the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love, already bind us together. We shall invoke these virtues and proceed with trust in each other in the name of the Lord Jesus.'

Method used in translating this Taiwanese Colloquial version

The basic principle followed throughout this translation was that the Gospels are a spoken proclamation of the Good News, intended to be read out in public, in Church at liturgical worship or in the assembly at a worship service. Therefore in preparing this version of the Gospels every verse was read out loud by a native Taiwanese Professor of our language school staff in the presence of four and sometimes five or six other native members of our staff. Three of these native listeners were neither Catholic nor Protestant. It was only after all the listeners agreed that a given verse of the Gospels was intelligible, colloquial, modern Taiwanese that it was written out in its final form. Some more difficult passages had been read and reread out loud as many as eight or ten times before a decision was made about the final expression of the passage.

The method of Romanized spelling of words used in this translation is based on the Chiang-Chiu dialect as spoken in the eastern two-thirds of the great western plain, from Taichung almost to the City of Kaohsiung. The difference between this dialect and the Choan-Chiu dialect which the Protestants generally use is very slight. The principal difference between the Chiang-Chiu and Choan-Chiu dialects consists in the various uses of the vowel 'e' and the diphthong 'oe'. Any speaker of Colloquial Taiwanese can easily make the adjustments from one dialect to another. The two volume grammar composed by the Maryknoll Fathers—*Tāi-gí Hōe-ōe Kap Bûn-hoat*—is in the Chiang-Chiu dialect and is used all over the island without any major problems. The differences are very few and the changes follow a very consistent pattern (cf. table of variations at the end of the General Foreword).

The decision to use the Chaing-Chiu dialect in the Romanized spelling in this translation was made on the ground that this dialect is spoken by a greater number of people in Taiwan, and that almost all the foreign missionaries who have learned to speak Taiwanese here, have used the Chiang-Chiu dialect. It is also interesting to note that the Taipei Language Institute uses both systems of Romanization in their course, 'Speak Taiwanese'. Since neither system is scientifically correct nor phonetically accurate, the reader must learn to associate correct sounds with incorrect spelling. Most foreigners

and natives find this no serious obstacle. The native Taiwanese, who have had a Junior Middle School education with a smattering of English, learn the system of Romanization in about two weeks.

For those who prefer the system of Romanization based on the Choan-Chiu dialect, it will be comforting to know that the revision of the Romanized Amoy Bible (RAB) which the Protestant Bible Societies have already begun, will be in the Choan-Chiu dialect.

HEBER F. PEACOCK

BIBLE TRANSLATION INTO SIMPLE FRENCH (A Review Article)

Monsieur Pierre de Beaumont, the Consul General of France in the Ivory Coast, has been engaged in the preparation and translation of literary materials into simple French for a number of years. He first became interested in the production of literature for new readers while he was on a diplomatic assignment in North Africa. He observed that even after students had spent several years in French schools, they were unable to read normal French literary materials with any degree of understanding. Moved by a deep concern that the riches of French literature be made available to the new learner of the language, he began to translate some of the masterpieces of French literature into a form of simple French which could be understood by beginners in the language. His task was not conceived primarily as that of providing literacy materials as an aid to language learning, although his materials are very helpful in this area. Rather, he recognized that the teaching of the French language and the development of literacy ultimately had little value unless there was something worth reading in a form of the language that could be understood by the new literate. In the course of the years, he has translated or written more than fifty books in 'modern French for the man of today'. He has become one of the foremost authorities in the growing field of the production of good reading materials in French for new literates.

It is only in recent years that M. de Beaumont has become interested in the translation of the Scriptures. After much success in simple language translation, he one day asked himself, 'If French literature can be translated in this way, why would it not be possible to translate the Word of God into clear and simple French?' This significant question has led him into the task of Bible translating, which now occupies a major part of his time.

His first translation of Biblical material, a selection of the most important texts of the Gospels, titled *La Parole du Christ*, appeared in 1966, with a second edition in 1967.¹ This was followed in rapid succession by translations of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the Book of Acts, and a

¹ *La Parole du Christ. Essai de traduction en français moderne de textes essentiels des Évangiles* par Pierre de Beaumont. Paris: Fayard-Mame, 1966, pp. 92.