

AN ATTEMPT AT A DYNAMIC EQUIVALENT TRANSLATION OF *BASILEIA TOU THEOU*

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Basileia tou theou, normally translated by "Reich Gottes" (Kingdom of God) or "Herrschaft Gottes" (God's rule), is doubtless one of the most important concepts of the New Testament. But however obvious this translation may seem at first sight, it is not at all obvious when one stops to ask what the reader is to understand by it.

In our work on the new German translation of the New Testament *Die Gute Nachricht* we were faced with the problem that the word "Reich" in German means a localized area! A literal translation of the word "Himmelreich" (Kingdom of heaven) in Matthew is open to grave misunderstanding, since the reader will think of a localized area up in the sky. *Basileia tou theou*, however, means God's rule as an event, and thus the sphere in which this rule becomes a reality and everything man expects as a result of this rule. Nor is "Herrschaft" (rule) the second possible German translation, an acceptable solution, since young readers in particular regard this word as authoritarian. Its negative connotations make it impossible to use this word to communicate extremely positive ideas.

For a Jew at the time of Jesus the short phrase *basileia tou theou* expressed everything good which he hoped for from God. The translator's question should therefore not only be: How can I translate this phrase? He can give an adequate translation only by asking at the same time: How can I bring out the positive implications of this phrase? Will the reader sense something of the joyful, confident expectancy which lies behind these words?

As we could find no satisfactory corresponding short phrase in German, we had to search further. In so doing we made the following discovery: The basis of the Greek phrase was the corresponding Hebrew *malkut Jahveh*, which appears in this form only in rabbinical literature, and not in the Old Testament. The Old Testament has, in a few places only, pronominal expressions, which are usually translated by "sein Reich" (his ruling), "dein Königtum" (your being King) or something similar. The basis of the rabbinical phrase is a proclamation in the Old Testament, which appears with particular frequency in deutero-Isaiah: "Jahweh has become King".

As a result of this discovery we asked ourselves: Should we not do the opposite and translate the Greek phrase by a proclamation? In this way it would certainly be easier to bring out the positive connotations. But what was to be proclaimed? "Jahweh has become King" does not fit into the context of the New Testament.

We had therefore to find out what *basileia tou theou* meant in each context. The result of our investigation proved more fruitful than we expected. The following are the meanings found:

1. God establishes his rule
2. God destroys his enemies
3. God eliminates sin, disease, suffering and death

4. God completes his work (as creator and redeemer)
5. God calls men into fellowship with himself
6. God renews the world
7. Men submit themselves to God's rule
8. Men have complete fellowship with God
9. Men live in the renewed world

We did not want a concordant translation, which would use the same wording everywhere but never express anything concrete. Yet nine different translations did seem to us to be rather too many. On closer inspection we found that some of the meanings listed above were contained in others. Meaning 1 embraced 2 and 3, 3 and 5 were contained in meaning 4, and 5 could also be included in 6. And meanings 7, 8 and 9 were, after all, the responses on man's side corresponding to 1, 4 and 6. Meanings 1 and 6 are thus fundamental for the translator.

The German translation is based on the following guidelines: in contexts where the emphasis is on something happening at the present time, the phrase "God wills to establish his rule now" is used. In this proclamatory form the word "Herrschaft" (rule) no longer seems negative. In contexts where the completion of the event is seen as future, even if it has already begun with Jesus, the words "When God completes his work, then . . ." are used. In passages concerned with seeing the *basileia* or entering into the *basileia* we have translated by "God's new world". In each place care had to be taken that the chosen phrase fitted exactly into the discourse structure of the passage in question.

The following verses (translated from *Die Gute Nachricht*) will serve as an illustration:

- Matthew 4:17 From then on Jesus proclaimed his message: Change your [ways]! *God wills now to complete his work and establish his rule!* (Both meanings explicit, since this is a general declaration at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.)
- 23b He spoke in the synagogues and proclaimed the Good News that *God would now complete his work.*
- Matthew 5: 3b . . . for they will be God's people *when he completes his work.*
- 10b . . . for they will live with God in *the new world.*
- 20 Therefore I tell you: you will only *enter God's new world* if you fulfil his will better than the teachers of the law and the Pharisees.
- Matthew 6:10a You are the Lord! *Come and complete your work.*
- 33 Take care, above all, that you *submit yourselves to his rule* and do what he requires; then he will provide you with everything else.
- Matthew 13:19a There are people who have heard the Good News that *God wants to establish his rule*; but they do not take it seriously.
- 24 . . . *When God completes his work*, he acts like a man who had sowed good seed in his field.
- 44a *The new world*, into which God calls you, is like a treasure buried in a field.

- 47 *When God's new world comes*, it is as when a net is thrown into the sea, and, with it, one catches fish of every sort.
- Matthew 25:1 The following story shows what will happen *when the Son of Man comes as Lord*: ten girls went out with their lamps to meet the bridegroom. (Translated differently in view of the special context.)
- John 3:3 Jesus answered: "I assure you: only he who is born anew will see *God's new world*."

GLEND A GILES

EXCLUDING RIGHT MEANING

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As we check our translations we are careful to avoid including wrong meaning. Key terms and expressions capable of ambiguity are usually well checked out to be sure that the circle of meaning does not include elements not required.

However, a possibility that we consider less often is that an apparently accurate translation may exclude right meaning. I have noticed this happening in two types of situation:

- (a) Where implicit information of the type "in addition to—" may not be recognized by readers.
- (b) When there is a literal translation or omission of pronouns.

Examples of each drawn from translation into the Duna language follow:

(a) *Implicit information not recognized*

In Luke 13:15 the Lord says, "Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it?" (RSV). The meaning here is that the Jewish people watered their animals daily *including* the sabbath. I found that in the Duna language by translating this literally I excluded the right meaning. All my translation helpers understood my translation as meaning that the animals were watered *only* on the sabbath. To avoid this exclusion of right meaning I had to expand my translation to read as follows—"As on working days, on sabbath days too, you untether your oxen and asses and take them to drink water."

Likewise when checking 1 Timothy 3:7 where it is stated that "(An elder) must be well thought of by outsiders, . . .", I found that translation helpers understood this as excluding the need for an elder to be well thought of by Christians too. I have now translated this—"You must appoint a man of whom not only the Christians, but outsiders too, speak well."

Galatians 3:8 reads—"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, . . .". Here again a literal translation excludes in the Duna mind God's intention to justify *both Jews and Gentiles* by faith. This can be corrected by translating as follows—"And the scripture foreseeing that along with the Jews, God would justify the Gentiles too by faith, . . ."