

places; so it is more natural to express the meaning by "they protect me" or "keep me safe" or "reassure me".

In the Orient the host would provide for his guest some olive oil for him to rub on his head, as a tonic for his hair, which had been subject to the heat of the sun and the dust of the road. This was part of the practice of hospitality at the time—a duty which on one occasion Jesus' host failed to observe (see Luke 7.46). There are two problems here for the reader: (1) the custom is unknown to most modern readers, especially English-speaking readers; and (2) the word "oil" is a lubricant or fuel used in engines and motors. If the figure is kept in translation, at least "olive oil" or something equivalent should be used; even NEB "thou hast richly bathed my head with oil" can be misunderstood. So it may be best to dispense altogether with the figure and to represent the meaning by "you welcome me as an honored guest".

The last words of the psalm ("length of days" in Hebrew), as used by Christians, are taken to refer to everlasting life in heaven. But it is highly doubtful that they were so understood by Jews in their worship. The phrase means simply "a long life" or "life-long", as an examination of its use in 21.4 and 91.16 makes clear. The psalmist was talking about the care and protection of Yahweh which faithful Israelites would always enjoy in the Temple, "the house of the Lord". So it seems better to translate as NEB has done, "And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long", or else as TEV, "and your house will be my home as long as I live".

ROBERT G. BRATCHER

The translation of *tē astheneia hēmōn* ("in our weakness") in Romans 8.26

There is considerable difference as to how this expression is rendered in the better-known translations. RSV, NEB, JB and *The Amplified Bible* have "in our weakness". TEV has "weak as we are", *Living Bible* has "with our daily problems", *Phillips* has "in our present limitations" and KJV has "in our infirmities".

The Arndt-Gingrich Dictionary lists the different possible meanings of *astheneia* as follows:

- (a) *sickness and disease* (see Mt 10.8, 25.39; Lk 4.40, 5.15, 7.10; Acts 4.9, 28.9; Phil 2.26; Jas 5.14)
- (b) *physical frailty* (see Rom 8.3; 1 Tim 5.23)
- (c) *weakness of any sort* (see 1 Cor 15.43; 2 Cor 11.30, 12.9; Heb 4.15)
- (d) *timidity* (see 1 Cor 2.3)
- (e) *limitation of understanding* (see Rom 6.19)
- (f) *lack of spiritual insight* (see Rom 8.26; 1 Cor 8.11)

There seems little difference between the last two of these meanings.

It is interesting that the particular expression we are considering is placed with meaning (f) for it seems that, within its context in Rom 8.26, *astheneia* does mean this. Paul is saying that, because we do not know how to pray properly ("as we ought" KJV, RSV; "how we ought" NEB; "how to pray properly" Phillips), the Spirit helps us in our *astheneia*. This suggests that

astheneia has to do with lack or limitation of spiritual ability and understanding, not with any of the other meanings that the word can have in other places. If this is so, it seems that Phillips brings out the meaning best of the eight translations referred to above. His rendering of the whole of verse 26 is:

“The Spirit also helps us in our present limitations. For example, we do not know how to pray worthily, but his Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonising longings which cannot find words.”

An alternative to “our present limitations” might be “our limited spiritual understanding”.

RAYMOND R. RICKARDS

HOW WAS THAT?

In many large African cities (as in most major cities of the world) there are numerous young women who earn their livelihood engaged in what has been called “the world’s oldest profession”.

Because it is considered unnatural for women to be unattached in most African societies, special names are often given to women who wander around the city after dark looking for a male escort. In some French-speaking cities the name is *femme libre* (“free woman”).

When a Bible translator in one such city came to the passage about Sarah and Hagar in Galatians chapter 4, he put down what seemed to him to be the best equivalent for what he found in the *Français Courant* NT (common language French translation). However, when a literal back-translation of the translation draft was given, it showed that poor Abraham had two wives: one a slave and the other a prostitute!

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A Translation Consultant recently conducted a translator’s workshop, at which he gave instruction on a variety of topics related to translation of the Bible. As one part of the program he gave a series of talks on the book of Amos, going into some detail about the reaction to Amos’ preaching.

At the end of the workshop all those who had attended were asked to answer a questionnaire, to find out what they thought of the workshop, and whether they had found it helpful. Most questions like “What did you find most helpful?” were answered well, but there was one question which was apparently not too clear. In answer to the question “What did you dislike most?” a number of the participants replied, “I didn’t like the way the Israelites treated Amos!”

(Readers are invited to send in short humorous notes about translation, to help keep “How Was That?” as a regular feature of Practical Papers for the Bible Translator. Notes should not mention the names of languages or translators, of course.)