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SEPPÖ SIPILÄ

AN ORTHODOX LITURGICAL VERSION *VERSUS* AN INTERCONFESSIONAL VERSION OF PSALMS: A Case Study¹

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Introduction: An Orthodox liturgical version

Organizations working with Bible translation, such as UBS, tend to support the idea of interconfessional translations. As far as I can see, there are both ideological and practical reasons for this. From the point of view of practicality, one interconfessional translation is clearly better than several confessional translations. To make one translation is cheaper and maybe even faster than making several translations for different denominations. From the point of view of ideology, to make one translation is an answer to the calling to serve all the churches, an ideological choice that UBS underlines.

However, an interconfessional translation does not always serve the churches. Sometimes the need of one particular Church can be rather unique and the interconfessional translations might not answer to this special need. In this paper I shall discuss issues relating to a special need of one Church, namely, to the need to use the translation in connection with the highly traditional liturgical life of an Orthodox church. When I speak about Orthodox churches, I have in mind the various Eastern Orthodox churches, although many of the issues to be mentioned are not unique to the Orthodox confessions. Similar problems are discussed also, e.g., in the Vatican document *Liturgiam authenticam*.

¹ Many people offered helpful comments on the topic at various stages of this paper. I would like to thank my colleagues in the UBS Europe Middle East Area, members of the LXX group at the University of Helsinki, especially Professors Anneli Aejmelaes and Raija Sollamo, and members of the translation committee for the new Finnish Orthodox Psalms for their interest and helpful comments. Dr Simon Crisp went through the draft of the paper and suggested corrections in grammar and style of English. For the remaining errors, however, I alone am to blame.

Traditions are important, because personal commitment to the Christian faith necessarily relates to the tradition of the believing community, the Church. Interconfessional translations are usually problematic from the point of view of the Orthodox churches, because of the base text. In these churches the Septuagint (LXX) is seen as the normative basis for the OT. The base text is, however, only one aspect of the special need.

We will face this need wherever we want to render a service to an Orthodox church. The special nature of the situation is because Orthodox liturgical life is deeply and intimately connected with the book of Psalms. Practically speaking, the liturgical life (and the texts used in it) is standing on the shoulders of Psalms. There are hundreds and hundreds of passages from Psalms quoted or referred to in liturgical texts. This is why one needs to pay special attention to this link when making a translation suitable to the liturgical life of an Orthodox church.

In this paper, the Orthodox church under study is the Orthodox Church in Finland and the translation is the new Finnish liturgical translation of Psalms for the Orthodox Church in Finland. I shall use the new translation as an example when discussing several aspects that a translation team needs to consider while making a liturgical translation for an Orthodox church.

The new Finnish liturgical translation

The Orthodox Church in Finland uses in its daily life the standard interconfessional Finnish translation published in 1992 (the deuterocanonical books still pending). Before 1992, the Church used the previous standard edition published in the 1930s. Neither of the two standard translations is ideal for the liturgical life of the Church. The situation was problematic for the Church and the members of the Church expressed a wish to have the whole Psalter translated from the LXX to better meet the needs of the Church.

In 2001 the bishops' synod of the Church decided to start the translation work, because they had found both resources and a suitable translator willing to draft the book. However, the Church did not have a deep understanding of the procedures and methods of Bible translation and they sought advice from the Finnish Bible Society. Finally, in 2004 the Bible Society became officially involved in the translation process. The translation was completed and handed to the Church in early 2007.

Special issues in making a liturgical translation

Producing a liturgical translation differs from producing a multipurpose translation. I shall next discuss some of the special issues in translating for liturgical purposes which have come up during the process of making the new Finnish liturgical translation of Psalms. They can be divided into three areas. I shall first discuss issues relating to the choice of base text for the translation. I shall then discuss the purpose and intended audience of the translation. Finally, I shall discuss a special theological issue relating to Orthodox use of the Bible.

Issues relating to the base text

According to the UBS guidelines, the base text for a standard interconfessional translation of the OT, Psalms included, should be the Masoretic Text (MT) especially as printed in the BHS. However, for the Orthodox Church the MT is not an acceptable choice, because according to longstanding tradition the Church uses the LXX as its Old Testament. This is also the reason why the Orthodox Church in Finland started its own translation project. The Finnish standard translations are not based on the LXX but on the MT.

As the Orthodox liturgical translation must be based on the LXX, one has to consider what should be the exact LXX text to be used. This is a serious question, because there is no commonly accepted critical edition of the Psalms in the Orthodox Church. For practical reasons a liturgical version of the LXX Psalter published by the Apostoliki Diakonia printing house under the auspices of the Church of Greece, was taken as the basis of the new Finnish Psalter.¹

Because the translation is based on a special version of the LXX text, several consequences are inevitable. As the wording of the text is tied to one particular printed edition, no critical questions relating to the textual history of the printed edition or to the particular form of the LXX text are asked. The printed edition is taken as given.

The second consequence is that modern interpretation of the text of the Psalms will be based on the ancient Greek translator's understanding of the Hebrew text as expressed in this particular form of the LXX text. Following an ancient translator is not always easy. The LXX is a translation with a great deal of translationese in it (see Pietersma, 2000, xix-xxvi). This will set clear limits to the task of the translator (Räntilä, 2005, 7). Beside the ancient Greek translator's interpretation, the modern liturgical use of the text will act as an interpretational starting point.

The Greek translator's understanding of his parent text

One example will explain how the ancient Greek translator's understanding is reflected in the modern Finnish translation. This example comes from Ps 77.69 (in the MT 78.69). The MT contains a Hebrew clause not easy to interpret: *wayiven kemo-ramim miqdasho*. One possible literal rendering of this is "And he built his sanctuary like high ones." NRSV, among others, however, contains "He built his sanctuary like the high heavens," based on a textual emendation (see BHS). The LXX, on the other hand, has something different: *kai ôkodomēsen hōs monokerōtos to hagiaσμα autou*. A possible translation of this could be "And he built his sanctuary like that of a unicorn" (see Pietersma, 2000, 78, though the LXX suggests the plural "unicorns"). The new Finnish translation naturally follows the Greek. We do not speculate on the reasons

1 *To Psaltērion* (2002). However, the earlier editions of the Liturgical Psalter do not deviate from the latest one in terms of content. The Slavonic Psalter used by various Orthodox churches in Eastern Europe contains a text very close to the Liturgical Greek Psalter. See e.g. Desnitsky (2005, 245-6), for the relationship of the Slavonic Psalter to the LXX. The Finnish committee used various existing translations of the Greek Psalter as supporting tools. Among these were the modern French translation by Placide Deseille (*Les Psaumes prières de l'église*) and the modern academic version by Albert Pietersma (2000).

why the Greek translator rendered as he did, but we take his rendering for granted. The only thing that the committee did discuss was how to render the Greek *monokerōs* into Finnish. There are two general options, namely, to use a mythological animal “unicorn” or to speculate on what existing animal could be called *monokerōs* “one-horned.” The committee decided to use the mythological interpretation opting for the word *yksisarvinen* “unicorn.” Since the question is about the temple of the Lord, using any natural animal could be problematic in this psalm. In particular the suggestion (e.g. in Liddell, Scott and Jones’ dictionary) that in (some) psalms the animal in question could be a wild ox is potentially dangerous, because the OT writers hesitate to use the ox as a symbol for the Lord.

The liturgical setting

The ancient translator’s understanding of his parent text is not the only starting point for interpretation. The liturgical setting in which psalms or their parts are used is also important. The liturgical setting explains why the Greek verb *psallō* is rendered often with the verb “to sing.” During the classical and the post-classical period, the Greek verb actually meant to play an instrument, but the liturgical setting guides the choice of equivalent. In Orthodox liturgical life no instruments are used to create or accompany music. Singing and chanting are the only ways of making music. Accordingly, the references to music-making must be to singing. Psalm 56.10 (in the MT 57.10) is an example of this. The Greek translation is *psalō soi en ethnesin*. Pietersma (2000, 54) translated the passage as “I will make music to you among nations” in accordance with the meaning of the verb in ancient times. The Finnish translation is, however, *Minä laulan sinulle kansakuntien keskellä* “I will sing to you among the nations.”

Issues relating to the purpose and target audience

A liturgical translation can only be a meaningful phenomenon if the purpose of the translation is directly linked with the liturgy or the liturgical life of a particular Church. In our case, the Church in question is the Orthodox Church in Finland. The purpose of the new Finnish translation is linked with liturgical life understood in a broad way. The purpose is to serve not only the liturgy on Sunday, but many other liturgical activities too. The liturgical life of the Church has several sequences, namely, daily and weekly cycles, cycles for great feasts, and especially for Easter.

Since the purpose of the new translation is to serve the liturgical needs of the Orthodox Church in Finland, the target audience is naturally formed by the members of the Church taking part in the various liturgical activities of the Church.

The purpose and the target audience will make it possible (or even desirable) to use church register, words like “salvation” or “righteousness,” without too much of a problem. This may seem to be a benefit, but there are limitations as well. While making the translation the team struggles to take into account old traditions and the vast liturgical literature based on the Psalter. The individual psalms and parts of them must match with the particular chanting traditions of the Church, because texts in liturgical life are not read aloud but

chanted. Finally, it is clear that the particular liturgical context where a psalm or a passage from a psalm is used must also be taken into account.

The use of church register

The Orthodox Church in Finland uses its own register in its liturgical life. Normally it is assumed that such special registers are not suitable for interconfessional translations, because they are too denominationally specific. When the purpose is to serve a particular Church in its own liturgical life, however, such a register is not a huge problem any more. We may assume that churchgoers are familiar with the special register. Therefore the register is not a stumbling block for understanding, but may instead have a positive role by reflecting the customary form of the language.

One of the examples discussed at length by the translation committee is the handling of the Greek expression *kurios tōn dunameōn*. This phrase is traditionally rendered in English as “the Lord of hosts” and appears 17 times in the Psalter. The translator of the Finnish team wanted to use a rendering *sotavoimien Herra* “the Lord of the military forces,” but members of the committee wanted to have a shorter form *voimien Herra* “the Lord of the forces” saying that the shorter form follows church register. It is worth noting that the Orthodox register in Finland differs from the Protestant one. The Protestant counterpart for the Greek expression would be “the Lord of Sabaoth,” but this is never used in the Orthodox register. The members of the committee also pointed out the benefit of using the shorter form: the striking military nuance will be wiped away. It is clear, however, that the shorter form carries little meaning in Finnish, because the forces are left unspecified. After a debate the committee decided to use the expression *taivaan voimien Herra* “the Lord of the forces of heaven.”

Church traditions

The Orthodox churches have a traditional way of printing the psalms in the Psalter. When following this tradition the translators need to organize the book differently than when following an interconfessional way of organizing the Psalter. It is natural that a translation based on the LXX must follow the numbering of individual psalms and their verses. This is not, however, the only difference between an Orthodox Psalter and an interconfessional Psalter. While in interconfessional translations the psalms are divided among five books of the Psalter, in the Orthodox Psalter the dividing principle is the liturgical tradition. According to the liturgical tradition the psalms are divided into 20 short sections called *kathismata*. Each *kathisma* is then divided into three smaller sections (*stases*) separated from each other with a doxology. The liturgical Psalter must indicate the beginning of each *kathisma* and the place of each doxology.

The Finnish translation committee went further than simply indicating the places of the doxologies. The liturgical experts explained that the system is complicated and the exact wording of the doxologies varies from one passage to another. They were concerned that the readers may not always know the system in its details. Therefore, the committee decided to print out the

doxologies in a complete way. Thus, at the end of Psalm 66 we find the doxology:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit
Now, and for ever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Glory be to you, O God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Glory be to you, O God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Glory be to you, O God.

Lord, have mercy, Lord, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

Now, and for ever and ever. Amen.

Chanting traditions

When discussing the liturgical setting of the Psalms, I have already pointed out that in Orthodox liturgical life instruments are not used in making music. Also, texts are not read but chanted, using special patterns. When making a translation for the liturgical environment, one must consider these patterns, because the rhythm of the text, the order and length of syllables, and even the quality of sound must suit the chanting patterns. In Finnish, the ideal poetical line ends either with an open syllable containing a long vowel, or with a closed one whose last consonant is a sonorant (/n/, /l/, or /s/). Some members of the Finnish translation committee are therefore specialists in chanting traditions.

An example from Ps 67.2 (in the MT 68.2) will illustrate the complexity of the requirements set by the chanting traditions. The Greek text is *Anastētō ho theos, kai diaskorpisthētōsan hoi echthroi autou* “Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered.” The passage is used during the morning service on Great Sunday, Easter Sunday. The translation committee decided to opt for the wording *Nouskoon Jumala, ja hänen vihollisensa hajaantukoon* “Let God rise, and let his enemy be scattered.” According to the normal usage of Finnish the verb is very seldom the first word in a clause, but here, it is. This is partly because of the chanting pattern. The passage is just easier to chant if there are two long syllables at the beginning of the line. On the other hand, putting the verb at the beginning of the clause in Finnish underlines the action. This grammatical underlining suits very well the liturgical context of Easter and the resurrection of Christ.

The liturgical context

The liturgical context is very important when translating the Psalter for liturgical purposes, because there are hundreds of quotations from psalms appearing throughout the liturgical library of the Church. Each of the quotations appears in a special place or places. This context must be taken into account. The quotation from Ps 67.2 already pointed in this direction. Another example of the liturgical context affecting the translation is Ps 112.3 (in the MT 113.3). The Greek is *apo anatolōn hēliou mechri dusmōn aineton to onoma Kuriou*. There are two possibilities for understanding this passage. Either we use a temporal interpretation “from the rising of the sun to its setting praise the name of the Lord,” or a spatial one “from the edges of the East to the far West . . .” One could argue that the spatial interpretation is more likely to be

correct, because of the plural “risings” and “settings” in the Greek text. On the other hand, the previous context, “Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore” (NRSV), favours the temporal interpretation. Accordingly, Pietersma (2000, 114) in his translation follows the temporal interpretation. The translator of the new Finnish Psalter wanted to employ the spatial interpretation, but the committee members said that the temporal one is the only possibility because of the liturgical setting. The verse Ps 112.3 is used in greeting the bishop and according to the committee members this fact excludes the spatial interpretation.

Theology and translation

The final issue discussed in this paper relates to a special theological reflection about religion, language, and biblical text. The chair of the Finnish Orthodox translation committee, Bishop Arseni of Joensuu, described his experience in working with the new translation in a recent interview by saying:

I have been considering the content of the Psalms and the poetic nature of expressions. Many things in the texts are concealed and difficult to understand. This is, however, the nature of religion. We cannot express everything using simplified language. Neither can we understand or explain everything.

Arseni of Joensuu (2005, 7)

(Translation from Finnish by the present author)

The end of the quotation is important for the proper understanding of theological thinking. According to the bishop, religion deals with things that are not rational and easily explained. The very content of Christian faith is a mystery and therefore it escapes human understanding and language. The Bible, and the Psalms as an important part of it, reflects this mystical nature of faith. The role of believers is not to struggle to understand difficult passages in the Bible. Their role is to venerate the mystery reflected through the language.

In normal situations theological thinking like this does not create problems for the translation. However, translating passages that are already difficult to understand will be made more difficult when such thinking is applied to the process of interpretation for translation. In standard interconfessional translation projects one of the starting points is that readers should understand the biblical message. When the starting point is moved from understanding to veneration, the consequences can be remarkable.

Sometimes people use this kind of theological thinking to support a literal translation of the Greek. The theological argument could even be used as a smoke screen to hide more human concerns like the fear of criticism. However, it is clear to me that the theological argument cannot be used to support an idea of literal translation against a non-literal one. The real concern in the theological thinking—as far as I can understand it—is that there are limits in human language to express religious mysteries. This is of course very true, but the limitation does not support literal translations. All translations independent of the translation manner adopted express ideas in human language and are by necessity limited. Crisp (2002, 44) suggests that one way to express the mystery through translation would be to create “multidimensional”

expressions. I interpret this as a wish to increase ambiguity, a wish that in certain situations is worth keeping in mind. But when people use a theological argument to support literal translation, they link the literalness and increased effort in decoding the linguistic information to the mysterious language. I think that these people are mixing apples and oranges. Mystery is not a decoding problem. In fact, I would rather argue that because literal translation will confuse the reader, it will make it even more difficult to venerate the mystery.

Conclusions

The main point of this paper concerns the special nature of liturgical translations. I have discussed this subject by focusing on three different issues showing something about the special nature of the liturgical translations. Indeed, the close and deep connection between translation and the liturgical life of the Church makes liturgical translations special cases. For translators, translation officers, and organizations working with interconfessional translations, the special nature of liturgical translation means challenges.

It is clear to me, however, that this special nature must be taken very seriously. Right from the beginning of the planning of a translation project, one should clearly identify the special demands. Two things are of importance. Liturgical translation cannot be done without a deep expertise in the liturgical life of the particular Church. One must therefore take it into account when recruiting translators, editors, and committee members. It is also important to realize that one cannot make a liturgical translation without close links to the Church and its liturgical life. The new translation will be successful only if it is usable in the liturgical context for which it was designed.

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TRANSLATING HYMNIC MATERIALS: Theology and Translation in 1 Timothy 3.16

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Poetic materials always present special challenges to translators. Some of the concerns are: determining the nature, structure, and function of the poetic material; defining the relationships between the various lines, for instance in terms of parallelism and contrast; ascertaining the relationship between the poetic material and its immediate context as well as the whole composition; and finally, deciding on how to render the poetic material in the receptor language, so that its meaning and function are clearly communicated to the intended audience. This last concern can only be achieved as a result of proper and adequate attention to the first three, since it is through an accurate analysis of the text that a correspondingly accurate translation can be achieved.

As printed in the UBS Greek NT, the Pastoral Letters contain only two passages that are indented in such a way as to signal that they are poetic—1 Tim 3.16 and 2 Tim 2.11-13. This does not mean that there are no other poetic materials in the Pastoral Letters, but it does mean that as far as the editors of the UBS Greek NT are concerned, the above passages are obviously poetic and therefore formatted as such. The concern of this paper is the first of these two passages, namely, 1 Tim 3.16, which is quoted below in the RSV and the GNT.

RSV:

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

GNT:

No one can deny how great is the secret of our religion:

He appeared in human form,
was shown to be right by the Spirit,
and was seen by angels.
He was preached among the nations,
was believed in throughout the world,
and was taken up to heaven.