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THE TRANSLATION OF BIBLICAL LIVE AND DEAD METAPHORS AND SIMILES AND OTHER IDIOMS

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Live and Dead metaphors and similes and other idioms are often the testing ground for the quality of a Bible translation. Meaningful translation must try to transfer these figures into the receptor language idiomatically. Yet many modern translations take the course of formal and not dynamic equivalence, and in the process often obscure the meaning of the text. If the principles suggested are followed in the translation of these figures, the meaning of the Bible will be more accurately conveyed to its readers.

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INTRODUCTION

THE quality of a Bible translation may be measured by many things, but among the most telling is a translation's method of handling fixed idioms, especially live and dead metaphors and similes. Anyone who translates any language for any purpose struggles with idioms, but Bible translators seem to struggle the most. There are both linguistic and theological reasons for this.

On the linguistic side, there is often no agreement, even among translators of a particular version, about how idioms ought to be translated. There is an implicit if not explicit truism among those trained more in the biblical languages than in linguistics that even though a word-for-word, or "formal-equivalence," translation is strictly impossible if one is to transfer a message coherently from one language to another, the more closely one approximates such a formal equivalence, the more accurately he will convey the meaning from the source language to the receptor language.

On the theological side, the suspicion of translations which do not in some way show word-for-word correspondence with the original language usually finds its source in a misunderstanding of the task of translation, generically speaking. Since those who believe the Bible is the inspired message of God place a high value on knowing the meaning of that message as accurately as possible, it follows that they are concerned that the process of translation neither adds to nor deletes from that message. But frequently one encounters the erroneous belief that a difference in *number* and *order* of words in the transference from the source language to the receptor language somehow equals a difference in *meaning* in the translation. Every translator, however, from the third-grade student who is studying French to the seasoned scholar who has years of translation experience, knows this is not true. Yet, among Bible translators and biblical language scholars there is very often a distrust of a translator who espouses the translation of *meaning*, or who casts Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic idioms (especially dead metaphors) into idiomatic English. This is so much the case, that even the New International Version, which many strangely criticize for being "too idiomatic," or "too loose," or "too free" sometimes errs on the side of not being idiomatic enough. And if one considers the New American Standard Bible or older versions like the American Standard Version of 1901 and the King James Version of 1611, he is overwhelmed by idioms that were never translated, but only assigned a meaningless or nearly meaningless series of English glosses.

This is not just a problem with English translations. It was a problem when the LXX was translated, and it has continued in all translations until the present. But since the readers of this journal are primarily native speakers of English, it is with the English rendering of biblical idioms, especially dead metaphors and similes, that this article concerns itself.

TRANSLATION THEORY

One must first have clearly in mind what the task of translation is, and not everyone agrees on that task. Some define translation in terms of meaning alone: a translation should accurately convey to the receptor language the *meaning* of the source language.[1] Others extend the task of the translator to the reaction of the receptors: a translation

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[1] John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 19-44.

should evoke in its receptors the same *response* that the original evoked in its original receptors.[2]

The first of these methods focuses on meaning, but it cannot ignore the response of the reader which is intrinsic to the conveyance of that meaning and which is accomplished both in the original and in the translation by form, style, and even by what (to cast a live metaphor) one might call "texture."

Some Bible translators have reacted strongly, however, against defining translation in terms of receptor response. But there was originally a receptor response and there will always inevitably be a receptor response, so it seems unwise to ignore or argue against it. On the contrary, the translator should be aware of it and manipulate it as precisely as he is able. The lofty poetry of Isaiah, translated as lofty poetry in English will doubtless produce a response in the mind of a twentieth-century American similar to the one in the mind of an eighth-century B.C. Hebrew. One cannot be entirely certain about that, but he can be certain that he is much closer to the mark than if he changed the style to that of the law-code or historical narrative.[3] The simple historical narratives of the gospels should be translated into that form in English—simple historical narratives, and if they are translated idiomatically, then there is a reasonable possibility that responses similar to those of their original receptors will be evoked in their modern readers.

Thus, a translation should transfer the meaning of the source language without additions or deletions into the meaning of the receptor language in such a way that it evokes in its modern readers a response that is as nearly as possible like that evoked in its original receptors.

This requirement that a translation be free of additions or deletions in *meaning* does not mean that the translator is a word counter. If one were to ask someone "Comment ça va?" ("How are you?"), and he were to reply, "Comme ci, comme ça," ("So, so"), the translator has not distorted the message, nor has he added anything to the *meaning*, when he translates the French by the English "Not too good, not too bad," nor has he deleted anything if he translates "So, so." In the one case there are six words to the French four, and

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[2]For this emphasis, see the writings of Eugene Nida, especially, Eugene A. Nida, *Toward A Science of Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964); Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Tabor, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974); and Anwar S. Dil, ed., *Language Structure and Translation*: Essays by Eugene A. Nida (Stanford: Stanford University, 1975).

[3]Cf. Nida and Tabor, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 145-52.

in the other case two, but the meaning is the same. Yet this word-counting or word approximation methodology appears again and again in modern versions, such as the awkward "and he answered and said" for ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν (Luke 15:29, NASB), apparently based on LXX's rendering of the Hebrew וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר throughout the OT, when such a translation cannot possibly be real English syntax. The English expression is "he replied," correctly translated in the NIV.

But extraneous additions sometimes occur—and these must be avoided. An example of such an addition would be the Living Bible's translation of Rev 3:10, where ὀργή, "wrath," is translated "Great Tribulation." This translation might be accepted by some dispensationalists as true, but it is adding something to the meaning of the verse which is not actually there.

LIVE AND DEAD METAPHORS AND SIMILES

It is the translation of dead metaphors which, more than almost anything else, shows the linguistic mettle of a translation. What does one do with fixed Greek metaphors which make little or no sense when translated "literally" or by means of "formal equivalence" into English? Some idioms force the translator to be idiomatic in English. Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί cannot possibly be translated, "What to me and to you?" since that is meaningless, and even the most "literal" word-for-word formal correspondence translations have to add something. One must search the receptor language for the native equivalent (and it is doubtful that "What have I to do with you?" is a very close choice). If, then, some idioms *force* the translator to find a native equivalent, why should not the translator always find such equivalents? There does not seem to be any reason not to, unless one has unnecessarily tied himself to form and word order.

Definitions

A dead metaphor may be defined simply as a fixed idiom—a metaphor which has become so much a part of the language that the original impetus for its usage may even be forgotten. In English there are such idioms as "being in the doghouse," or "down in the dumps," or "wind up an argument." Language is replete with them, and would in fact lose much of its color if they were excised. On the simile side there are an equal number: "busy as a bee," "reckless as a bull in a china shop," "sly as a fox."

A live metaphor or simile, on the other hand, is a comparison which is new, made for the occasion, and thus originally capable of being understood immediately without any background information. Scriptural examples of live metaphors would be such things as Jesus'

"I am the vine, you are the branches," or Paul's "grafted into the olive tree."

There are a number of idioms which do not fit into these categories, but which are nevertheless fixed expressions, and which, therefore, must be translated not word for word, but expression by expression. Again, all languages depend considerably on these, and the Greek and Hebrew of the Bible are little different. ἀλλά γε καὶ σὺν πᾶσιν τούτοις τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν ἄγει ἀφ' οὗ ταῦτα ἐγένετο could be glossed "but indeed also with all these things third this day is leading since which these things came about," and some degree of meaning would be transferred. But it is much better to translate something like "And in addition to all of this, this is the third day since these things happened" (Luke 24:21).

The important parts

Beekman and Callow point out three important parts of a metaphor or simile, each of which must be considered in the translation process, though sometimes one or even two of these parts is only implied and not stated:

(1) the *topic*. This is the item which is illustrated in the metaphor or simile.

(2) the *image*. This is the metaphorical part of the figure.

(3) the *point of similarity*. This is the explanation of the similarity suggested between the image and topic.[4]

Thus, in the phrase ἐλογίσθημεν ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς, "we are considered as sheep ready to be slaughtered" (Rom 8:26, quoting Ps 44:22), (1) "we" is the topic; (2) "sheep" is the image; and (3) "ready for slaughter" is the point of similarity.

Many times, one or two of these parts must be inferred, since the speaker left it up to the receptors to understand the idiom without its full statement. An example of this would be Luke 24:32, where those who had been listening to Christ on the Emmaus road said to each other: οὐχὶ ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν καιομένη ἦν ἐν ἡμῖν ὡς ἐλάλει ἡμῖν, "Wasn't our heart burning within us as he spoke to us?" In this case the (1) topic is "heart"; (2) the image is "was burning"; and (3) the point of similarity is understood: "like fire burns."

Translating dead figures

Such "dead" or "fixed" metaphors and similes are not hard to find in the NT, but judging from the translations of them that one finds even in modern versions, they are more difficult to translate

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[4]Beekman and Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, 127.

than to find. It is helpful, therefore, to review some principles for the translation of these before alternative translations for these and other examples in the biblical text are offered.

The discussion of Beekman and Callow is the most helpful recent treatment of dead figures, although their concern is broader than just translation into English: they are offering principles for translators who are working in all languages, especially those newly reduced to writing and often coming from a cultural milieu much more different than even Western culture from the one out of which the Bible came. Thus, English translators do not face all of the same problems that one might encounter in some other languages.

For example, some languages are intolerant of new metaphors. No more metaphors are being formed in the language, so the translation process must include only those native to the language. All others must be explained.[5] English, on the other hand, often tolerates new metaphors, and especially similes, a fact which has facilitated more wooden formal equivalence translations—though often with a partial or even total loss or obscuration of the meaning of the original.

Furthermore, some metaphorical meanings are excluded by current usages in the language. Beekman and Callow cite the problem of translating Luke 13:32, where Herod is called a "fox." "In Mayo, animal names simply refer to the last name of the individual. He is a 'fox' since he belongs to the family called 'fox.'"[6]

English translators also sometimes face the problem of image transfer. Thus the image σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί "bowels and mercies" (a case of hendiadys, Phil 2:1) is unfamiliar to English readers so that some kind of adjustment is necessary if any meaning is to be transferred in the translation from the source language to the receptor language. A striking example of this is found in Ps 1:1, where וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמָד is translated even by the NIV, "[Blessed is the man who does] not . . . stand in the way of sinners." While the context makes the meaning clear to the careful reader, there is an unfortunate collocational clash devised here because in the normal English idiom "stand in the way of" means to hinder, and so the "blessed" man is here one who does not hinder sinners! It would have been much better to *translate* the metaphor by a native idiom such as "does not follow the example of sinners," a translation which conveys the meaning unambiguously and is lexically and semantically supportable.

Such problems of image transfer abound in languages which have had little or no previous contact with the Bible, and most books

[5]Ibid., 141-53.
[6]Ibid., 141.

on translation list many.[7] Thus, to use the example of the fox as a metaphor for Herod, in one Mexican Indian language a fox is one who steals, in another he is one who is heartless, and in another he is one who cries a lot;[8] but the biblical image means to convey the idea "sly." In these language one would have to expand to "Herod who is as sly as a fox" or something equally meaningful. A sheep in one of these Mexican languages is someone who does not understand; in another, someone with long hair; in another, a drunkard who does not respond when hit; and in another, someone who is often seen courting his girl friend.[9] Thus, similar adjustments would have to be made to figures involving this word.

Such problems call for some principles for translators. It seems best to use a kind of hierarchy for the expression of these principles. Thus,

(1) If the dead metaphor or simile has an idiomatic formal equivalent in the receptor language, that equivalent should be used. If there is no idiomatic formal equivalent (a word-for-word translation), then

(2) It may be necessary to change a metaphor to an idiomatic simile, or in the case of a simile, to change only one or two of the three constituent parts of a simile, or to state implied parts of a metaphor or simile. If this is impossible, then

(3) It is necessary to translate the metaphor or simile by a native idiom which corresponds not in *form*, but in *meaning*. In some cases

(4) It may be necessary to combine any or all of these three in order to arrive at a meaningful translation.

It is perhaps helpful to consider illustrations of each of the first three of these possible situations in translation.

(1) An idiomatic formal equivalent is available. Most speakers of English are familiar enough with either the ocean or lakes to understand what James means when he says that a doubter is ἔοικεν κλύδωνι θαλάσσης ἀνεμιζομένῳ καὶ ῥιπιζομένῳ, "like an ocean wave, blown and tossed." The transfer from the source language to the receptor language is accomplished by a word-for-word glossing, and even the order is almost retained with no loss to the meaning (though the order is in fact irrelevant).

(2) A metaphor changed to an idiomatic simile in the receptor language or constituent parts or a simile changed, or implied parts stated. Thus, in Navajo one may not translate "hunger and thirst for

[7]Cf. Nida and Tabor, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 106-7.
[8]Beekman and Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, 138.
[9]Ibid., 139.

righteousness" (Matt 5:6), but one may translate "like hungering and thirsting, they desire righteousness."[10] Likewise, Acts 2:20 presents some interesting difficulties, which may be partially solved by changing the metaphor to a simile. The first phrase can be transferred easily: "the sun will be darkened," but the second phrase, καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἰς αἷμα, "and the moon [will be turned into] blood" is not quite so easy. Larsen suggests "The moon shall become like blood,"[11] but the addition of the implicit *point of similarity* would be helpful (especially since this is first of all a Hebrew metaphor from Joel 3:4, וְהַיָּרֵחַ לְדָם, and secondly only a formal equivalence translation in the LXX, taken over by the NT). Thus, a translation "and the moon will turn as red as blood" is probably even better.[12] In this case the implicit point of similarity, "red," is stated, which makes for the more accurate transference of the meaning, since without the simile one might infer that the moon would be turned into actual blood, a meaning that the Hebrew probably does not carry at all. Larson implies, in fact, that many *live* metaphors should be changed to similes, apparently to avoid ambiguity.[13] This may be more necessary in languages other than English, but if "this is my blood," and "this is my body" were translated "this is like [represents] my blood," and "this is like [represents] my body," the ambiguity that resulted in the doctrine of transubstantiation would certainly be removed.

(3) Metaphors and similes which must be completely recast. In this category are verses which must be either partially or completely recast in order to communicate their meaning most accurately in the idiom of the receptor language. Thus, Rom 16:4, ἑαυτῶν τράχηλον ὑπεθήκαν, "they laid down their own neck," is not a good translation because it misses the English idiom. It needs only partial adjustment, however, to be idiomatic: "they risked their own necks," and one could accept something completely recast, like "they risked their lives" (NIV).

Perhaps Luke 24:32 ought to be put into this category as well. "Wasn't our heart burning within us?" is certainly not idiomatic English, and it is a poor translation since it evokes at least unconsciously another English idiom which means something entirely different: "heartburn" as a description of the burning sensation in the esophagus and stomach caused by excess stomach acidity. It would probably be better to use another English idiom that is exactly

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[10]Nida, *Toward A Science of Translating*, 220.

[11]Mildred Larson, *A Manual for Problem Solving in Bible Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 87.

[12]As done, for example, by TEV.

[13]Larson, *A Manual for Problem Solving in Bible Translation*, 87.

equivalent in meaning, like "Didn't a tingle go up our spine?" or "Didn't it almost take our breath away?"[14] or "Didn't our heart almost stop?" (in which case the image is retained, but not the point of similarity), or "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us?" (in which case it would fit into category 2, a metaphor changed into a simile, TEV).

Translating live figures

Live metaphors and similes, in contrast to dead figures, are expressions newly made up for the purpose of illustration on a particular occasion. "I am the true vine and my father is the farmer" (John 15:1) is an instance of live metaphor. Other examples are "you are the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13) and "you are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14).[15]

In general it is easier to translate live metaphors and similes directly into English, but each case must be considered on its own merits, and the translator must make the decision as to which of these four suggestions above may be applicable.

OTHER IDIOMS

"What have I done to you?"

There are many idioms which do not fit into the category of dead metaphors and similes. All translations of any kind into any language must recognize some of these and translate them meaningfully if the translation is to be coherent at all. It is therefore not a question of whether to translate idioms in a dynamically equivalent way; it is only a question of how many one will translate in this way. But strangely

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[14]It is possible that this translation is also supported by the Hebrew of Josh 2:11. In this passage Rahab is telling the spies that she has heard about all the miracles performed by the Lord for them on their way out of Egypt. She concludes by saying that when she and her people heard about these miracles their "hearts melted" and "each man lost his breath" (וַנִּשְׁמַע וַיִּמַּס לְבָבֵנוּ וְלֹא־קָמָה עוֹד רוּחַ בְּאִישׁ). It is interesting to notice that both of these expressions seem to be describing the same reaction. In this case the reaction is terror—a loss of courage in the face of the conquering Israelites. But the reaction of men is physiologically similar whether it is terror or amazement, as in the case of Luke 24:32. Thus, it may be most proper to use the other half of the Hebrew expression which is also found in English ("took our breath away") for the Greek expression which is not found in English ("our hearts burned"). And while it is true that the idiom in Luke may find a parallel in Lysias, 33:7, "being in a fever of excitement" (LSJ, 860), it is much more likely that these men on the road to Emmaus were speaking a Semitic language and that this idiom comes either from Hebrew or Aramaic (מסס is "melt" in either one; cf. Macus Jastrow, comp., *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols. [reprint, Brooklyn: P. Shalom, 1967], 1.809).

[15]For others, see Larson, *A Manual for Problem Solving in Bible Translation*, 87.

even the NIV seems to miss some of these and sometimes chooses the course of formal equivalence, even when it results in zero or little meaning. An interesting example of this can be found in 1 Kgs 19:20, where Elijah replies to Elisha, מֶה־עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ, "What I have done to you?", translated by the LXX, ὅτι πεποίηκά σοι. One wonders whether the LXX should have read τί instead of ὅτι, which would have at least translated the Hebrew formally. The Vulgate follows the Hebrew with "quod enim meum erat feci tibi?" But the idiom has not been adequately translated by NIV, which only produces the word-for-word gloss, "what have I done to you," which has little meaning in the context, where the phrase obviously means "what have I done *to stop* you?"[16] Here some implied information must be translated in order for the English to fit the context.

"What to me and to you?"

The foregoing phrase is similar to an even more striking phrase, translated by formal equivalence in the LXX and taken over verbatim into the NT by John. In 2 Kgs 3:13 Joram, son of Ahab and king of the Northern Kingdom, comes to Elisha to find out how the war with Moab will go. Elisha is unhappy about this idolator's sudden interest (under the influence of Jehoshaphat) in Yahweh's blessing, and he rebuffs him with the question מַה־לִּי וָלָךְ, "what to me and to you," translated by the LXX, τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί. In the context the sense is obviously something like "why should I help you?" even though NIV translates less acceptably, "what do we have to do with each other?"

But the most interesting thing is that this phrase is exactly what Jesus said to his mother in John 2:4, when she informed him that the wedding feast at Cana had run out of wine. He probably replied in Hebrew (some would say, Aramaic),[17] but the Greek of John is τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί. The KJV "what have I to do with you?", though it is an attempt to translate idiomatically, has always seemed abrasive, especially when followed by the epithet "woman," a most impolite name to use in direct address to one's own mother in English. In light of Jesus' further explanation, οὔπω ἥκει ἡ ὥρα μου, "my time has not yet come," it is probably best to translate Jesus' reply in this context

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[16]TEV: "I'm not stopping you."

[17]The literature supporting the speaking of Hebrew alongside Aramaic during the first century is extensive. For a partial listing, see J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 4: *Style*, by Nigel Turner (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976) 10. See particularly J. M. Grintz, "Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple," *JBL* 79 (1960) 32-47, in which he argues that Mishnaic Hebrew, not Aramaic would have been the spoken language at this time.

something like "how can I help you *now*?" or "why should I help you *now*?" In contrast to its translation of the OT occurrence in 2 Kgs 3:13, "what do we have to do with each other?" (also in a context of a request for help), the NIV translates John 2:4, "'Dear woman, why do you involve me?'" This is not only more polite, but more idiomatic, and is certainly acceptable. Many will be more comfortable with this than TEV's (equally supportable) "You must not tell me what to do."

In each case the translations from NIV and TEV and the others suggested retain the two essential elements found in either the Hebrew מַה־לִּי וָלָךְ or the Greek τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί: (1) a statement of some kind of relationship between the speaker and the addressee ("to me and to you"); and (2) a question of the propriety of the request. The rest must be supplied if the English is to make any sense at all, and what is supplied is admittedly interpretive. But then anyone who has done very much translation knows that interpretation is an essential part of the task. One cannot translate without asking two essential questions: (1) What does this mean in the source language? and (2) How does one convey this same meaning in the receptor language? And as soon as one asks one or both of these questions he is involved in interpretation. This is the reason that "neutral translation" is a myth: one cannot be neutral and work with *meaning*. Again, it is not a question of whether to interpret in translation, but how much and how well.

"Verily, verily"

There has always been a certain fascination with the difficulty of translating either the single ἀμήν, "verily," or the double ἀμήν, ἀμήν, "verily, verily." Even TEV's "I am telling you the truth" lacks idiomatic flavor, to say nothing of NASB's "truly, truly" and NIV's "I tell you the truth." And LB's "what I am telling you so earnestly is this" misses the mark even more.

Perhaps it is helpful to begin with the usage of the Hebrew words and follow the transliteration ἀμήν through the LXX into NT times.

Hebrew and LXX. Related to the verbal root אָמַן, the Hebrew adverb אָמֵן is used in the OT in several different ways. There are, first of all, places where it is a part of a statement by an individual or a group:

Num 5:22. In the context of the test of the woman accused by her husband of unfaithfulness, upon the pronouncement of the curse upon her by the priest, the woman is to say אָמֵן אָמֵן, "amen, amen," best translated, "so be it" (NIV), as the LXX does with the familiar Γένοιτο, γένοιτο, "let it be, let it be."

Deut 27:15-26. This passage includes 12 uses of the single אָמֵן, where it is the answer of the people to the curses pronounced on Mt. Ebal. In this religious context of audience response it is properly translated "Amen!" as an interjection of hearty assent or formal confession. Again, the LXX translates not ἀμήν, but Γένοιτο.

1 Kgs 1:36. The answer of Benaiah son of Jehoiada to King David, when he announced the appointment of Solomon to the throne, was אָמֵן, which in this context might be translated "Amen!" but is perhaps better rendered "so be it!" since it is not in a religious context and is not a congregational response. In contemporary English (outside of slang and jokes) "Amen!" is normally reserved for a religious setting or congregational response (by both Christians and Jews). The LXX translates here with Γένοιτο.

Jer 11:5. In this context of the curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience Jeremiah's response to the LORD is אָמֵן, "Amen!" Considering that it is a direct address to Yahweh, it would be considered idiomatic English to translate it in this manner. LXX again translates Γένοιτο.

Jer 28:6. In response to the prophecy of the false prophet Hananiah that the LORD would bring back the temple furniture, Jehoiakim, and all the other exiles within two years, Jeremiah answers, אָמֵן כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה יהוה, "Amen! May the Lord do so!" to show that the result would be desirable even though it will not actually happen. The incident is not recorded by the LXX.

Ps 41:14. The word here occurs once again in a religious context of audience response, and so it is rightly translated, "Amen! Amen!" Here the LXX translates γένοιτο, γένοιτο (40:14). The same is done with Ps 72:19 (LXX 71:19), Ps 89:53 (LXX 88:53); and Ps 106:48 (LXX 105:48).

Neh 5:13. Similar congregational responses are found in Neh 5:13 and 8:6, where the LXX translates for the first time by ἀμήν (2 Esdr 15:13 and 18:6).

1 Chr 16:36. The final passage in this category is also a congregational response and is rightly translated "Amen!" Here the LXX continues its translation ἀμήν for אָמֵן.[18]

The other category of uses of אָמֵן concerns only Isa 65:16, where it is used in connection with the construct אֱלֹהֵי, and thus is to be

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[18]Interestingly, Symmachus translates אָמֵן by ἀμήν instead of γένοιτο in Num 5:22, Deut 27:15, Ps 40:13 (41:13), Ps 71:19 (72:19), Ps 88:53 (89:53), Isa 65:16, and Jer 11:5. Theodotion translates similarly in Deut 27:15. Ἀμήν also appears in the LXX translation of some Apocryphal books. In 1 Esdr 9:46 it is in the context of audience response; in Tob 8:8 an exclamation of mutual consent when Tobit is taking a wife; and in Tob 14:15, 3 Macc 7:23, and 4 Macc 18:24 as the ending of a book (as it is frequently in the NT). For the text of each of these, see *APOT, in loc.*

translated "the *true* God," followed by the LXX, τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἀληθινόν, "the true God."[19]

A little-used corresponding adverb is אָמְנָה 11,[20] "truly, indeed," used in Gen 20:12 and Josh 7:20. The syntax of Gen 20:12 corresponds more nearly to the usage in the NT, and in this case should be translated something like "really" (NIV), which also corresponds to the LXX ἀληθῶς. Josh 7:20 is similarly an asseveration in which Achan confesses his sin by answering אָמְנָה, "Right!" or "It is true!" (NIV). Here the LXX again uses ἀληθῶς.

Finally, there are two other related adverbs. אָמְנָם, "indeed?" is used five times in the OT, always in questions,[21] and אָמְנָם is used nine times, always in asseverations.[22] In the case of the former the LXX translates by ἀληθῶς, "really," and ὄντως, "really," and in the latter case it translates by ἀλήθεια, "truth," κρίσις, "justice," εἶτα, "then, indeed," and ἀληθῶς, "really." The LXX translators, thus, correctly used a variety of terms for these adverbs, as, indeed, any translator must do if he hopes to convey meaning.

Classical Greek. Liddell and Scott do not list any uses of ἀμήν outside the Greek OT and NT, and gloss the word as a "Hebrew adverb."[23] This seems to indicate that the NT usage is therefore a Hebraism, built partly on some uses in the LXX, and built partly on the proclivity toward transliteration of religiously emotive words— witnessed by the unbroken tradition of simply transliterating the word from Hebrew through to English.

NT usage of ἀμήν. The usage of ἀμήν in the NT is primarily a reflection of the Semitic background of the speakers and writers. As a single word ἀμήν appears in statements only in the Gospels, except where it is used as a proper name for Christ in Revelation. Elsewhere in the NT the single ἀμήν appears at the end of a statement or prayer, somewhat analogous to contemporary usage of "Amen" at the end of a hymn. As a repetition, ἀμήν, ἀμήν, it appears only in the gospel of John. A survey of its usage in the gospels indicates that it usually appears at the emphatic point in a narrative. Sometimes it implies an oath (as in the LXX), and should be translated in such a way that it calls attention to the veracity of the statement (e.g., Matt 10:5). Sometimes it is simply a climax (or attention) marker, however, and

[19]BDB, 52-53; KB, 60-61. Its usage in Mishnaic Hebrew is basically the same as Biblical Hebrew, but Jastrow does not list any uses in Aramaic (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1.77, 78).
[20]BDB, 53.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid, 53-54.
[23]LSJ, 82.

since such a marker is seldom used in written English, it may sometimes simply be left out of a good translation. Where it is possible to include it in idiomatic translation, there are a number of possibilities, and the phrase which best fits the context should be chosen in each individual instance. Some of the possibilities are: "to be honest with you," "I want to make one thing perfectly clear" (though the political overtones of that may make it presently unacceptable), "frankly," "actually," "truthfully," "to tell the truth," "in plain language," "without mincing words," "look!" and "listen!"

Thus, in the case of John 3:3, where Jesus is trying to indicate to Nicodemus both the truthfulness and the seriousness of the fact that one must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God, it is probably best to use something more idiomatic, and therefore more accurate, such as "frankly," (if one prefers one word) or "without mincing words" (if one prefers a phrase).

SUMMARY

Live and dead metaphors and similes and other idioms in the Bible are not easy to translate. Yet if one admits that the task of the translator is to convey the meaning of the source language into the receptor language without additions or deletions in meaning in such a way that the response evoked in the receptors approximates as closely as possible the response originally evoked, he must inasmuch as possible translate these figures idiomatically. There are acceptable principles to use to achieve this kind of meaningful translation, and if these principles are used the quality of the translation will be enhanced and the communication of the Word of God accomplished more fully.

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