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The Translation of Words for 'Covenant'¹

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Perhaps for few New Testament words is the Old Testament background more essential to a true interpretation than for the word *diatheke*. But we immediately run into difficulties because of the very different emphases given to the Hebrew *berith* and the LXX *diatheke* by our major Old Testament authorities. This paper cannot claim to be a full study of the evidence. It offers a few notes on the way to such a study, which may guide us in the immediate problem of producing our various Indian translations.

The problem is challengingly put by the recent American edition of Bauer's Lexicon by Arndt and Gingrich. They will permit the translation 'covenant' only under the most stringent conditions, and in the body of their article suggest as preferable such variants as *declaration of God's will, ordinance, decree*. This interpretation seems to go back to the work of J. Behm, first published in 1912² and repeated in the *Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. Here, in regard to LXX usage, we have the emphatic conclusion: 'Through the retention of the noun *Bund* ("covenant") which does not exactly cover *berith*, through compromise formulae such as *Bundesverfügung* ("covenant-decree") or *Vertragsordnung* ("contractual ordinance"), or through the importation of the noun *Testament* which is foreign to the Old Testament world of thought, the actual linguistic and religious content which is basic for the New Testament idea of *diatheke* is obscured or falsified.'³

On the other hand, Burton⁴ is much more moderate. He agrees that in Biblical usage with reference to God's covenant the stress is on God's initiative and God's gracious promise. But there is still present a certain idea of mutuality, involving obligations laid upon the people and assumed by them, for, he declares, 'the Hebrew word uniformly signifies *covenant, compact*.'

¹ A paper presented to the Bible Translators' Conference at Jabalpur, October, 1960.

² Der Begriff, *Διαθήκη* in Neuen Testament.

³ T.W.N.T., II, p. 130. One may further question how far the German *Bund* is really equivalent to the English *covenant*.

⁴ I.C.C., *Galatians*, Appendix XVIII.

The whole question must now be discussed in the light of J. Pedersen's great work, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*. One can almost say that for Pedersen the idea of *berith* is fundamental for his whole presentation of Hebrew life and thought, in personal, social, national, and Godward relationships. But for Pedersen the key phrase to express *berith* is *psychic community*, a concept which is not quite either *decree* or *covenant*, but is much closer to the latter.

Now Behm admits that *berith* does not always have an entirely unilateral meaning (*decree* or *ordinance*): it alternates between *covenant* or *treaty* and *decree*. This ambiguity is taken over in LXX by *diatheke*. Our translation problem, therefore, can be put in this way. Does the stress rightly laid on the initiative of God in His covenant with men require us to separate out all these passages for one translation, and so distinguish them from *berith* in the sense of *treaty* or *compact* between men? This is done to some extent by R.S.V., which keeps *covenant* for the religious meaning, but offers a number of alternatives for purely human examples of *berith*: e.g. *treaty* (1 Kings 5:12), *allies* of Abraham (Gen. 14:13), *league* (1 Kings 15:19), *bargain* (Hosea 12:1). (We may note for future reference that LXX has *diatheke* in all these places). Or, on the other hand, can we trace a real line of connection between the various uses of *berith* (as Pedersen does), which would mean that R.S.V.'s treatment results in a serious obscuration of meaning, a misrepresentation as great as that feared by Behm for the opposite policy?

Berith-Diatheke AS DECREE

It is agreed by all that in such cases as Solomon's dealings with Hiram⁵ *berith* means *covenant* in its non-religious sense, or *treaty*. We must review the case for giving *berith* a different translation when it refers to God's covenant with Israel.

There is no doubt that God is the author of the covenant. Israel does not bargain with Him, but receives His covenant as a gracious gift. If, therefore, *treaty* (or any similar word) suggests an arrangement between equals, it is plainly a doubtful starter. It must, on the other hand, be observed that a treaty among men is often a very one-sided affair.

On the LXX usage Behm observes that the word *diatheke* is used in poetical parallelism with 'law', 'command', 'ordinances', 'decrees' and 'judgments' (*nomos, prostagma, entolai, dikaiomata, krimata*). The word is also used as the direct object of verbs such as 'observe', 'guard', 'maintain', 'transgress', 'abide in', 'walk in' (*entellesthai, phylattein, terein, parabainein, parelthein, emmenein, poreuesthai*). Hence, concludes Behm, in regard to LXX usage, 'As a synonym of "law" (*nomos*), etc., *diatheke* cannot mean *treaty* or *covenant* (*Vertrag* or *Bund*), but must mean *regulation* or *decree* (*Anordnung, Verfügung*)'. He translates the

⁵ 1 Kings 5:12.

crucial phrase in ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ δίδωμι αὐτῷ διαθήκην εἰρήνης as a decree which brings him salvation (Numbers' 25:12).

Before, however, we agree to this analysis, certain points must be observed.

1. The general principles on which 'poetical parallelism' is invoked in this kind of debate require examination. We may usefully draw the following distinctions: (a) Linguistic Meaning, (b) Linguistic Equivalence, (c) Theological Implications. By (a), Linguistic Meaning, I mean the central core of meaning which a word carries with it in nearly all contexts of its occurrence. By (b), Linguistic Equivalence, I mean the situation of Hebrew parallelism where one word is (metrically) equivalent to another, and the latter tends to indicate the emphasis of meaning to be given to the former. This is an important element in determining (a) Linguistic Meaning, but not the only one, and do the principles of metrical parallelism require us to assume an *identity* of meaning? (c) Theological Implication in the very important deductions which may be drawn from Linguistic Equivalence. But it may be questioned whether in such a situation we should actually alter the translation (i.e. assume a change in Linguistic Meaning), or rather, should point out that such an extension of meaning is implied by certain facts of Linguistic Equivalence, and allow these facts to make their own impact on the word used in translation. A good example is the case of *tsedaqah* in such contexts as Isaiah 46:13. Undoubtedly the Linguistic Equivalence between 'righteousness' and 'salvation' here leads to Theological Implications of vital importance. But it is a question how far the argument extends to the Linguistic Meaning of *tsedaqah*.⁶ By removing *righteousness* from these critical passages in our translation (as R.S.V. does) may we not obscure from the ordinary Bible reader their important bearing on St. Paul's doctrine of justification?

In the case of *berith-diatheke* one may doubt whether the poetical parallelisms adduced by Behm can take us beyond Theological Implication. They tell us that for the Hebrew the covenant relationship created by God was as binding and authoritative as a decree or law, but we cannot infer that *decree* or *law* exhausts the meaning of *berith*.

2. It may further be suggested that while Behm may have given a correct analysis of tendencies in LXX, it is relevant to recall C. H. Dodd's demonstration⁷ of the totally inadequate nature of the word *nomos* as a rendering of the Hebrew *torah*. *Diatheke* in synonymous parallelism with *nomos* is therefore not a bit the same thing as *berith* in synonymous parallelism with *torah*.

3. On the characteristic phrase 'covenant of peace', J. Pedersen declares, 'These two words are of different origin and

⁶ Cf. Burton, *Galatians*, p. 462; Schrenk, *Righteousness* (Kittel Bible Key-Words), p. 42.

⁷ *The Bible and the Greeks*, chap. 2.

scope, but they do not designate different kinds of relationship. *Shalom* means the state prevailing in those united: the growth and full harmony of the soul; *berith*, the community with all the privileges and duties implied in it. Therefore both words may be used together, "a covenant of peace" being only a stronger expression for "covenant". The two words are often used interchangeably.⁸

COVENANT-PEACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The discussion thus leads to an outline of the view of covenant propounded by J. Pedersen. He devotes a whole chapter to 'Peace and Covenant'.⁹ Peace is a rich positive word, denoting the harmony of the community. Though it may exist in different degrees, it is ideally a 'psychic community', 'the blessing acting through the community', which extends first to the family, uniting the individual soul with its blood relatives into a 'corporate personality', and then uniting all families into a wider community of the nation. Such a condition of positive harmony and well-being can otherwise be denoted by the word *berith*, and it may be both expressed and created between individuals or nations, not previously so related, by the conclusion of an outwardly expressed 'treaty' (also *berith*). A famous example of this relationship between individuals is the story of David and Jonathan, on which Pedersen may be quoted: 'Friendship is a community of souls. Two souls enter into a unity and form one whole. It means that they are ruled by a common will, this being the substance of the covenant'.¹⁰

This relationship may be extended to embrace nations. 'The two parties formed common customs and views, a common life'.¹¹ This came about between Solomon and Hiram of Tyre, and so Amos blames Tyre because 'they forgot the brotherly covenant and sold Israelites as slaves to Edom' (Amos 1:9).

Moreover, this relationship of *berith* by no means necessarily means that the two parties are on an equal footing: in fact one is always stronger, and the will of the stronger becomes the dominating force in the covenant. So Pedersen comments on the covenant between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar by which the former was installed as a puppet king in Jerusalem, 'The covenant consists in Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar having one will, viz. that of Nebuchadnezzar'.¹²

A further quotation from Pedersen will show his interpretation of *berith*, and its centrality for Old Testament thought:

'Peace and covenant are thus two expressions of the common life of the souls. All life is common life, and so

⁸ J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, I-II, p. 285.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-310.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 293.

peace and covenant are really denominations of life itself. One is born of a covenant and into a covenant, and wherever one moves in life, one makes a covenant or acts on the basis of the already existing covenant. If everything that comes under the term of covenant were dissolved, existence would fall to pieces, because no soul can live an isolated life . . . Therefore the annihilation of the covenant would not only be the ruin of society, but the dissolution of each individual soul.¹³

It is rather obvious that this analysis can be applied supremely to Israel's relationship with God. If covenants form a series both in regard to inclusiveness and the degree of subordination of one partner to the other, then clearly God's covenant with Israel is the absolute and limiting term of such a series. So Pedersen writes:

'The most apt expression of the relation between Yahweh and Israel is the covenant, *berith*. This denotes the psychic communion and the common purpose which united the people and its God. It is also expressed by saying that the peace of Yahweh reigns in Israel; therefore the relation between them is characterized by love, the feeling of fellowship among kinsmen. The covenant finds expression in the nature and customs of the people. By observing this *mishpat* Israel maintains the covenant, but a departure from true custom, to which in the first place would belong intercourse with other gods, is a breach of the covenant. Yahweh maintains the covenant by acting as the God of Israel.'¹⁴

The important fact of Pedersen's analysis for our purposes is that it indicates a line of development within the same general concept from the relationship of individuals or nations which are 'in covenant' to the use of this idea with regard to God's relationship with His people. At the same time, by stressing the inequality in the balance of psychic forces which exists in all covenants, it makes room for the necessary stress on the initiative and supremacy of God in the limiting case when the covenant is from Him, and not some mere agreement between men.

Even if Pedersen's view be pronounced wrong by those better fitted to judge than I, it is surely a very important possibility. As we are translating, and not interpreting or theologizing, it would seem to be important so to do our work that no such exegetical avenue is closed: the choice of *decree* or *ordinance*, etc., for the actual translation of *berith* would appear to do this, and might very well be judged to fall into the error of substituting 'Theological Implication on the basis of Linguistic Equivalence' for true 'Linguistic Meaning.'

¹³ J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, I-II, p. 308.

¹⁴ *Israel*, III-IV, p. 612. It will be observed in passing that the latter part of this quotation deals effectively with Behm's poetical parallelism between *covenant* and *law, judgments*, etc.

THE TRANSLATION 'COVENANT'

Leaving on one side for the moment the question of how a translation might best leave open the way for Pedersen's interpretation, one may at this point indicate certain key passages referring to the covenant of God where the translation *decree* would be extremely unnatural.

At Ezekiel 16:8 God's covenant with his people is likened to a lover's betrothal:

'When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness, yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine.'

Furthermore, there are certainly some passages where man is said to make a covenant with God. E.g.:

'They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, saying "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant which will never be forgotten"' (Jeremiah 50:5).¹⁵

'And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book; and all the people joined in the covenant' (2 Kings 23:3).

This passage is significant. On the one hand the expressions 'the king made a covenant' and 'all the people joined in the covenant' seem clearly to rule out the idea of 'decree'. The covenant may spring from the unilateral decree of God: but being something which the king can 'make' and in which the people 'join', it cannot be equated with 'law' (Greek sense) or 'decree'. On the other hand, the passage makes it equally clear that what the king and people do is not to bargain with God (it is not a treaty), but to accept His terms: the initiative is wholly with God who has revealed his will (on this occasion) in the words of the Book of the Covenant, and being 'in covenant' with Him means walking after the Lord, keeping his commandments, etc.

Perhaps even more significant is 2 Kings 11:17:

'And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and people, that they should be the Lord's people; and also between the king and the people.'

Here the covenant between the king and people is clearly the same kind of relationship as that between God, king and people. If we adopt Pedersen's phrase of 'psychic community' this need

¹⁵ The LXX equivalent (Jer. 27:5) reads: *καταφεύγονται πρὸς κύριον τὸν θεόν, διαθήκη γὰρ αἰώνιος οὐκ ἐπιλησθήσεται*. Is this exclusion of the idea of man's making a covenant with God accidental or intentional?

not give us theological qualms: for we remember that in the latter case one of the 'psyches' involved is the Almighty. On the other hand it is extremely difficult to see how this passage can be accommodated by rendering *berith* as *decree*.

Furthermore, as Burton reminds us,¹⁶ while the stress is overwhelmingly on the initiative of God, there still remains a certain element of mutuality. It is difficult not to read a connection of thought between the first two verses of Genesis 17:

'The Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless; and I will make my covenant between me and you and will multiply you exceedingly".'

Similarly, in Exodus 19:8, in response to the revelation of God the people say, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do.'

THE CHOICE OF *Diatheke* BY LXX

In Classical Greek the word means an 'arrangement, disposition, testamentary in character' (Burton). It is used in the singular, of a will, and in the plural, of the provisions of a will. In a very few places it also means a compact or contract: in such a sense, however, it is distinctly more one-sided than the natural *syntheke*. As has been frequently observed, if *berith* was understood by the LXX writers as a 'contract', 'treaty' or 'covenant' (in the simple sense), the obvious Greek rendering would have been *syntheke*. There must be some point in choosing the word *diatheke*, and giving it a meaning which it only rarely carried in Classical Greek, and in the Papyri or Josephus, apparently, never.

The reason no doubt is that the LXX translators were very aware of the theological point from which we began—viz. that God's covenant is not a treaty between equals, but the decree or ordinance of God to man. It is basically and inevitably one-sided: it is *diatheke*, not *syntheke*.

This observation, however, does not solve our problem. It is evidence for the overriding consideration in the minds of the LXX translators, but it is not certain evidence for the original meaning of *berith*. *Diatheke* in the New Testament must certainly be understood (except in a few passages) with reference to the Old Testament *berith*, rather than with reference to the usual *koine* meaning of *will* or *testament*. The LXX tradition and *koine* use, however, must have had some influence. We have therefore to observe a two-way process, in which the translation word and its context act and react upon one another.

THE INFLUENCE OF *Berith* ON *Diatheke*

There can be little doubt that in being used to translate *berith* in non-religious contexts the word *diatheke* was stretched

¹⁶ Galatians, p. 497.

to include in fuller measure the idea of *syntheke*. Thus in most of the contexts where *berith* means *treaty* between men, it is rendered by *diatheke*. E.g.: Solomon and Hiram, 3 Bas. 5:26 (1 Kings 5:12); David and the elders of Israel, 1 Chronicles 11:3; the men of Jabesh and Hagesh, 1 Bas. 11:1-2 (1 Sam. 11:1-2).

Moreover, it can take on something of the Hebrew feel of 'psychic community', as is made clear by the phrase *ἐν διαθήκῃ*. One may compare the Ezekiel passage already quoted, which compares God's covenant with the troth of a lover:

εἰσῆλθον ἐν διαθήκῃ μετὰ σοῦ, λέγει κύριος, καὶ ἐγένου μοι.

Again (underlining Pedersen's account of treaty relations between nations), Ahab says to Benhadad (or possibly vice versa—the subject is a little unclear in the Greek):

καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν διαθήκῃ ἐξαποστελώ σε. καὶ διέθετο αὐτῷ διαθήκην.

I will send you forth in covenant. And he made a covenant with him (3 Bas. 21:34; 1 Kings 20:34).

In one of the most striking passages we actually have *diatheke* in synonymous parallelism with *syntheke*:

ἐποιήσαμεν διαθήκην μετὰ τοῦ ᾄδου καὶ μετὰ τοῦ θανάτου συνθήκας.

We have made a covenant with Hades, and with death we have an agreement (Isaiah 28:15).

Nor was this approximation of *diatheke* to *syntheke* limited to the canonical books. It is embedded in a very clear passage of 1 Maccabees:

'In those days came there forth out of Israel transgressors of the law and persuaded many saying, Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles that are round about us' (1 Macc. 1:11).

This is no doubt in deliberate contrast to those who would not profane 'the holy covenant' (1 Macc. 1:63). But when we find that these are also described by Mattathias as 'those who are zealous for the law and maintain the covenant' (*πᾶς ὁ ζηλῶν τῷ νόμῳ καὶ ἰσθῶν διαθήκην*) (1 Macc. 2:27) we seem confirmed in our view that both covenant with the Gentiles and covenant with God are different forms of 'psychic community'.

We get the same impression from the recurrence of the phrase *ἐν διαθήκῃ* in the Wisdom of ben Sirach:

'Be steadfast in thy covenant (*στῆθι ἐν διαθήκῃ σου*) and be conversant therein, and wax old in thy work' (Sir. 11:20).

Similarly, of Abraham, ben Sirach says,

'He kept the law of the Most High and was taken into covenant with him' (*καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν διαθήκῃ μετ' αὐτοῦ*) (Sir. 44:20).

On the other hand, it must be admitted that in the overwhelming majority of instances ben Sirach speaks of the *diatheke* as the covenant of God in a way which might be translated *decree*.

THE INFLUENCE OF *Diatheke* ON *Berith*

This leads to a consideration of the question whether the word *diatheke* itself may not have moulded the later Jewish understanding of *berith*, at least in some quarters, somewhat away from the original sense. After all, a similar thing happened in the case of *nomos* and *torah*. As C. H. Dodd has shown,¹⁷ *nomos* is very much more narrowly legalistic than *torah*, and this had a profound influence on the later Jewish attitude to the Law.

As regards *diatheke*, in many instances from the apocryphal literature it means God's covenant as it does in the Old Testament—with the same degree of opportunity (or not) to render it *decree* or *dispensation*. However, two significant departures from canonical usage become noticeable.

(a) In 2 Maccabees *syntheke* is always used for compacts between men, while *diatheke* is reserved for God's covenant with Israel.¹⁸ This is a most definite and significant break with Old Testament usage, whether in Hebrew or in the LXX. One then recalls that, by universal consent, 2 Maccabees was originally written in Greek. It would appear that only in translation Greek could *diatheke* naturally represent *covenant* (in so far as it is akin to treaty). Left to itself, the Greek mind would naturally choose a different word.

The hint thus supplied by 2 Maccabees is confirmed by Josephus (or his literary assistants¹⁹). In Josephus's work, while there is no mention of covenant with God, *diatheke* always has its *koine* meaning of 'will' or 'testament', and is often used in the plural: on the other hand, treaties or covenants between men and nations are always termed *syntheke*.²⁰

It would appear that for Greek speakers the LXX use of *diatheke* would effectually mask the elements of 'covenant' contained in the original *berith*. That it in fact led to a distinct misinterpretation is suggested by the second tendency which is discernible.

(b) In the apocryphal literature we begin to get for the first time the use of the plural *diathekai* in reference to God's various dispensations toward men:

'The blameless man . . . by word did he subdue the minister of punishment, by bringing to remembrance oaths and covenants made with the fathers' (Wisdom 18:22).

The plural occurs similarly in 2 Macc. 8:15. It is however only sporadic (e.g. once out of 23 occurrences in ben Sirach—44:18)

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁸ Burton, *Galatians*, p. 498.

¹⁹ C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background*, p. 190.

²⁰ Burton, *Galatians*, p. 499.

until 2 Esdras, where there are at least four occurrences: 2 Esdr. 3:32, 4:23, 7:24, 8:27. This way of speaking is quite out of accord with the Old Testament usage. An interesting exception proves the rule. There appears to be only one example of *diathekai* (plural) in the LXX canonical books—Ezekiel 16:29. But the text is obelized by Hatch and Redpath, and a glance at the Hebrew reveals that the word *berith* is not to be found.

The reason is plain. The idea of 'covenant' between God and His people, if Pedersen's analysis is correct, cannot be put into the plural. It is the meaning *decree* that can take a plural, and it is significant that the earliest instances of this plural are from books whose original language was Greek—the second half of the Wisdom of Solomon and 2 Maccabees. The distinction between the latter and 1 Maccabees is also arresting: 2 Maccabees distinguishes accurately between *diatheke* and *syntheke*: 1 Maccabees (originally in Hebrew) does not.

The natural conclusion is that Diaspora Judaism was legalizing the idea of the covenant, as so much else, thinking of it as an enactment or decree: from which it was a short step to thinking of a series of dispensations, *diathekai*. And one suspects that the actual word *diatheke* contributed to this development. Once it had been used in LXX, those who were not steeped in the Hebrew background read it, and, misunderstanding its Biblical significance, began using it in the plural. If this is correct, the usage of St. Paul is very naturally explained. For Paul, a Diaspora Jew, thinking and writing in Greek, fits exactly into this pattern. C. H. Dodd has said that of the Jewish writings known to us, 2 Esdras probably approximates most closely to the outlook of Paul before his conversion.²¹ We have noted the plural 'covenants' as characteristic of this work, and it may not be accidental that the only places in the New Testament where we have the plural *diathekai* (if we may still count Ephesians as Pauline) are in St. Paul's letters—Rom. 9:4, Gal. 4:24, and Ephes. 2:12. Gal. 4:24 requires special treatment. The other two instances are both more or less conventional summaries of the privileges of Israel and are in no way determinative for the New Testament view of the covenant, new or old. And in fact, despite the view of Bauer to the contrary, these seem to be the only passages which are actually improved by the translation *dispensations* or *decrees*.

A full analysis of the New Testament concept of 'covenant' in the light of this discussion cannot be attempted here.²² But one may at least say that the older Hebraic idea persists alongside the narrower concept of the Greek *diatheke*. The former may well underlie the saying of our Lord over the cup at the Last Supper and the development of the idea of the New Covenant

²¹ *New Testament Studies*, p. 118. 2 Esdras is now (after much debate) thought to have been originally written in Hebrew. But its very late date (A.D. 70 or after) may permit our analysis to stand.

²² E.g. there are one or two passages where the meaning should be *testamentary disposition*. These are a problem for exegesis, not, in the first instance, translation.

in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is similarly found, not only in such thoroughly Hebraic writings as the Psalms of Solomon (e.g. 9:10, 17:15), but also in the Hebrew writings from the Dead Sea. A random glance at the War Scroll from Qumran produces the following:

‘With our fathers thou didst make a covenant, and thou has confirmed it with their seed throughout the epochs of time. In all the evidence of thy glory among us there hath always been the memory of Thy covenant. Therefore thou hast granted help to the remnant and ever renewed that covenant, and therefore hast thou ever vouchsafed unto us thy deeds of truth and thy wondrous acts of justice. Thou hast made us unto thee an eternal people, and hast cast our lot in the portion of light, that we may evince thy truth; and from of old thou hast charged the Angel of Light to help us . . . We are in the portion of thy truth. We will rejoice in the might of thy hand and be glad in thy salvation, and exult in the strength of thy right hand and in the gift of thy peace.’²³

This passage surely carries much more of the idea of ‘psychic community’ than of a mere decree or ordinance. The same may be said of the Zadokite Document, which frequently speaks of ‘entering the covenant’. We seem to be confirmed in our suspicion that the contexts containing *diatheke* which lend themselves to the translation *decree* were an aberration from the main Hebraic tradition on the part of the Greek speaking diaspora.

THE PROBLEM TODAY

My conclusion is that we must not allow the LXX choice of *diatheke* to obliterate the fundamental idea of compact leading to mutual relationship. While *berith* in its religious use certainly means a relationship founded by God and determined by Him, it nevertheless signifies a wideness and richness of relationship which is lost by the translation *decree* or *ordinance*. Moreover its meaning is based upon the non-religious use of *berith*, signifying a ‘psychic community’ which may be ‘entered’, as well as ‘given’ or ‘established’. We do not therefore want to follow the R.S.V. in using different terms for the ‘secular’ occurrences, if this course can in any way be avoided.

How may this be indicated? For probably in no modern language is there any word to convey the required meaning. English is fortunate in that the word *covenant* has virtually passed out of everyday use. It is therefore available to be filled with whatever meaning the Bible (or the Biblical theologians!) wish to put into it.

On the whole the Indian versions seem to have favoured the translation which indicates *law* or *decree*. *Niyam* in various forms

²³ T. H. Gaster, *The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect*, p. 277.

occurs in many of the versions quoted in Dr. Hooper's Indian Word List, and in Hindi the obsolete *bacha* seems to have carried a similar emphasis, inclining to *promise*. To follow up the case of Hindi as just one example, it may be pointed out that *bacha* would seem to have the negative merit of not being used much in any context: it has possibly established itself as a Christian technical term which (like the English *covenant*) is open to proper interpretation in the light of Bible study.

On the other hand, in the light of our argument, this type of translation would seem to be mistaken. There would seem to be a great deal to be said for retaining the same translation in the 'secular' contexts as for the religious use of *berith*: and the same word would of course have to be employed also for the New Testament *diatheke*. The obvious choice in Hindi, proposed in the Draft Version of St. Mark, would be *sandhi*. This is the natural word for all those instances of covenant or treaty between men and nations where *bacha* must have been quite meaningless. On the other hand, it is possibly in too common use, and too lacking in the idea of unilateral dispensation which is of crucial importance for the Biblical word. In English, similarly, we may accommodate ourselves to the somewhat obsolete *covenant*, whereas we would reject completely the rendering *treaty*. Opinion in Hindi translation circles therefore appears to be moving in favour of a less common word, *vyavasthan*. Connected with *vyavastha* ('law'), yet different from it, this word seems also to include the idea of mutuality. But the question must still be asked, how far could it be used, say, of Solomon's covenant with Hiram?

At the recent Conference of Bible Translators it appeared that certain groups were attempting to coin a word, or form some compound which would suggest both elements. But for each language, no doubt, the problem presents a different face, and at this point the student of the ancient languages must hand over to the modern translator.

PLEASE NOTE

With effect from the April issue of the *Journal*, the Revd. V. C. Samuel, M.A., B.D., S.T.M., Ph.D. (Yale), who is on the staff of Serampore College, will be taking over the work of Literary Editor of the *Indian Journal of Theology*. Editorial correspondence and contributed articles should in future be sent to him.