

Certainly the GNB translation of "the half-shekel tax" in Mt 17:24 cannot be said to explain everything to the reader so that no further study is required, but at least this translation is more successful than is a formal-equivalence translation in communicating across cultural barriers.

Rather than reject dynamic-equivalence translations as "wrong-headed," is it not the better approach to retain the literal translation when possible while working within the framework of functional equivalence? Those who would reject the principle of dynamic/functional-equivalence translations on the basis of what may admittedly be unsatisfactory translations of individual verses are throwing out the baby with the bath water.

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DYNAMIC OR FORMAL EQUIVALENCE? A RESPONSE

Roger Omanson's response to my *TS* article (June 1989) is most helpful. It brings out clearly many of the theoretical issues involved in translating Scripture. It also serves to sharpen some of the differences between the views I sketched in my previous article and the principles Omanson now so lucidly expounds.

There is one area of agreement between us that upon examination proves to contain a profound disagreement. We agree, I believe, that every translator worth her or his salt will have a decent concern to make a translation intelligible to the reader. A translation should be "user-friendly." It should communicate to the reader, so far as is possible in a translation, the meaning of the original text. But to examine this principle more closely is to bring out significant differences in the ways one can understand what a translation does, and indeed differences in fundamental questions about language, meaning, and communication. These questions have theological implications as well.

Omanson has stated his case well. "The main criteria [for a translation] are determined by the recipient of the translation and the translation's specific function." That function is to communicate the meaning of the text being translated. Although, according to principles of dynamic or functional equivalence, "every effort is made to adhere as closely as possible to the original text" (as I wrote in my original article), nevertheless "meaning has priority over forms when the meaning will not be understood in a formal equivalence translation." "Functional equivalence . . . means thoroughly understanding not only the meaning of the source text *but also the manner in which the intended receptors of a text*

are likely to understand it in the receptor language' . . . the orientation is toward the function of the target text."

Translation is a matter of choices. According to the principles Omanson explains, a translator takes a text and makes translation choices determined by several factors. One factor is the meaning of the text, in its original form, as the translator understands that meaning. Another is the function of the translation: to communicate the text's meaning to a reader. And another is the target audience, or intended receptor: What meaning is the target audience likely to derive from the translation?

Now the translation choices are governed by the latter two considerations. "Meaning has priority over form when the meaning will not be understood in a formal-equivalence translation." Dynamic equivalence proceeds from the conviction that meaning is (to whatever extent) separate from form, and that that dissociation of meaning and form is not only permissible but necessary in order for the translation to serve its function—to communicate to the intended reader. Thus, the culture, language, experience of the intended reader are determinative of the translator's choices.

Thus, the translator has to be clear on both the meaning of the text and the ways the translation is likely to be understood. The translator has to have a thorough knowledge of the language and culture of the target audience; those are normative for the translation, because anything that fails to meet that criterion—let me call it intelligibility—fails in its purpose: to communicate the meaning of the source text. One does not communicate in general. One communicates to readers of a specific cultural background and experience.

I hope this is a fair summary of the principles of dynamic or functional equivalence, though of course it is only a sketch. In restating them, I have concentrated on the translator and the choices she or he has to make, because the differences between my views and the ones so capably articulated by Omanson can best be seen by attending to the "readiness" of a translator to proceed this way or that in carrying out his or her task.

Omanson's translator is ready to make judgments about (1) the meaning of the original text. He or she is ready to make judgments about (2) the experience and cultural background of the intended reader. And the translator is ready to (3) depart from the form of the original text in order to make the translation intelligible to the reader, as the translator understands what would be intelligible (cf. 2).

Where do I differ? To put the matter strongly: (1) the "meaning" of a text cannot be dissociated from its form. (2) Inevitably there will be differences between the world of experience out of which the biblical text comes and the world of experience of the modern reader; these differences should be taken into account, but the experience of the intended reader

should not be determinative of the translator's choices. Let me briefly develop each of these points.

1) Biblical texts exhibit the richness and multivalence of poetry. They have many meanings all at once. There is no univocal "meaning" that can be extracted from the words and images. Narratives work by leading the reader or listener through a sequence of events, with a variety of narrative rhythms and changes of perspective and focus, that continually set up in the listener certain expectations and then confirm or reverse those expectations. The biblical storytellers knew what they were doing. The sequence and pacing of the original text is all-important for the narrative to have its effect. What the storyteller shows as the narrative unfolds is all-important. The meaning of the text inheres in those images and events. So with poetry: images are concrete and particular, yet have resonances that go beyond their particularity. Narrative and poetry are rooted in the world of experience of the author and of the audience the author is addressing. They are highly culture-bound. It is the associations with the experience of the audience—in ancient Israel, in the early Church—that give biblical texts their "meaning."

This "boundedness," concreteness, particularity, and multivalence of meaning will of course present difficulties to the translator. Poetry is what doesn't survive translation, to paraphrase the old saw. What is the best way to communicate the richness of meaning found in a text? I think the best way is to show what the storytellers and poets wanted their audience to see: to be as concrete and specific as possible. If the text speaks of God exalting or lifting up David's "horn," then show that, even if one is aware that the "meaning" is that God will make David victorious over his foes. If the text speaks of "legs of a man," then show the legs. If people swearing an oath to one another are called "brothers," then let that come through.

2) What of the poor modern reader, to whom biblical images can be obscure—whose world of experience may be so different from that of the biblical poets? Modern readers are in the same position as the Ethiopian eunuch. They need a "deacon." They are not biblical scholars. Someone has to explain the text to them. "Mediation" is indicated.

Here is another difference between functional equivalence and the approach I am arguing for. As I believe in respecting the integrity of biblical language and of the world it reflects, so I believe we should envision the intended audience as people capable of entering imaginatively into that world, on its own terms. To say "midday" and "three p.m." does communicate the "meaning" of Mk 15:33, at least in a minimal and fact-oriented way. But Mark's readers used the Roman way of telling time, and so did the actors in that narrative. "The sixth hour" and "the ninth hour" sounds foreign to our ears, but its very cultural boundedness

leads us into the world of Jesus and the disciples, of Palestine under Roman rule, of that Friday. Explanation of the (literally translated) expression in Mk 15:33 can remove the difficulty; the difficulty itself can be the door to that other world. (For a treatment of these matters from another starting point, see my article "Leave Out the Poetry" in the forthcoming *Horizons* 265-72.)

In short, I believe the text needs to be taken on its own terms. Translators should be ready to assume that readers are capable of dealing with the text on its own terms—and that a "deacon" will make that possible, one who can mediate between those different cultures and worlds of experience. The translation itself is not the place for this mediation. A translator should not take it upon himself to choose one "meaning" and convey it in terms purportedly accessible to readers from another culture.

Will there be a Philip, a "deacon," for modern readers? My sense of church, and of the role of Scripture in the Church, leads me to answer yes. The generous efforts of the United Bible Societies are one indication that the riches of Scripture can be made available to modern readers of whatever cultural background. Teaching aids are a necessity, not a luxury. And of course the homily is central to this work of mediation.

Finally, the theological implications of these matters are too profound to go into here. Suffice it to say that there are Christological (incarnational) and ecclesiological aspects to these questions. The Word went forth, and became incarnate, in a certain time and world and language. The Church (including biblical scholars!) mediates the Word. The worldwide community of believers is called to perform that diaconal service. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*

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