

because of the frequent use of mnemonic devices such as assonance, parallelism, repetition, rhythm, music, and so on. Moreover in many oral cultures singing songs interacts with storytelling, thus making it easier to memorize the narratives which also often have a teaching function.

At first the Yali people were reluctant to compose hymns in their own idiom, but once composition of indigenous Yali hymns began there was no stopping. The hymns are usually composed by literate people with access to Scripture portions. Compositions are then tried out at the informal fireside services each evening, and with input from participants they are modified until they flow right. If the composer and his or her friends feel satisfied, they will introduce the new song at the larger community services, such as on a Sunday morning. If the song is a good one - easily memorized with captivating melody and meaningful words - it will soon spread throughout the entire community of 9000, through both formal and informal use.

The following is a typical example of Scripture carried in an indigenous Yali hymn, which is based on John 14:

The path on which we go to God our father,
That path is me, Jesus.
Your hearts must not continue to swell, (be anxious)
Keep trusting in God and in me,
Your hearts must not continue to swell.
(Refrain) Yi o i, our older brother Jesus,
Ho i o i, our father God.

Indigenous hymns like this are not limited to any section of the community but are sung by everyone. Nor are they limited to any particular occasion, except perhaps those composed for a special occasion, such as a lament appropriate only at a funeral. Their role in the life of the church is immeasurable. They are a heartfelt expression of belief; they reinforce a sense of community because everybody takes part, and they are widely accepted in every segment of society and throughout the region; and most significantly they assist transmission and recall of the biblical message. That is what a good translation should do.

NOTES

Revelation by fire: 1 Corinthians 3.13

In 1 Corinthians 3.10-15 we find a very interesting passage on the Last Day and the final Judgement. In these verses the apostle Paul compares the church in Corinth with a building. He himself laid, as it were, its foundation, preaching the knowledge of "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2.2). And other missionaries were called "to build upon it", that is, to deepen the faith of its members and to stimulate the growth of the small Christian community.

The apostle argues that all builders of the church are just servants of God and will be rewarded according to their activities at the end of time.

Fire will test the quality of each person's work: if the work survives, the builder will be rewarded; but if it is burned up, he will be "fined" or "saved as through fire."

Though the general sense of the passage seems to be clear, some of the details of the judgement imagery are not. One such detail is the intended subject of the verb *apokalyptetai* in verse 13; it means "is revealed", or as it refers to a coming event, "will be revealed". Since the Greek text does not have a noun as its subject, translators have understood the phrase in different ways. For example:

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire...(KJV)

His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire...(NIV)

The work that each does will at last be brought to light; the day of judgement will expose it. For **that day** dawns in fire...(REB)

And the quality of each person's work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day the fire will reveal everyone's work...(GNB)

"...for it (the Day) must reveal itself in the fire..." (JB)

"...because it (the work) will reveal itself in the fire..." (La Bible à la Colombe)

Among other things, this shows us that it is possible for translators in English to leave open the question about the subject of the verb "be revealed". But when translators do not have to choose, or do not want to choose, this results in a text that is unnecessarily ambiguous for their readers. And we may be sure that the original text was quite clear for the author and those he addressed.

In languages other than English, translators were often forced to make a choice. And what they chose can easily be seen from the gender of the pronoun, or from the noun they used as subject.

The majority of translators are of the opinion that "the Day" is the intended subject of the verb "be revealed". So are most New Testament commentators; and modern dictionaries and word-books also support this interpretation. They usually refer to passages like Malachi 4.1 ("For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven...", RSV); Joel 2.3, 30; Daniel 7.9; and 2 Thessalonians 1.7, where the Last Day is associated with fire.

Indeed, according to a more-or-less fixed Jewish-Christian tradition, fire was considered as an agent of God's judgement on the Last Day, destroying all those who have turned against God. But in this passage in 1 Corinthians fire is not pictured as the agent of God's punishment, but as a means of **testing**; it tests the quality of the work of missionaries. Commentators who are aware of this difficulty do not hesitate to speak of Paul's "somewhat inconsistent" judgement imagery, due to his supposed use of several fire images in these few verses - but they do so on the basis of their assumption that "the Day" is the intended subject of *apokalyptetai* "will be revealed".

A minority of translators, however, are in favour of understanding *to ergon* "the work" as the subject of the verb: "Everyone's work will be revealed by fire" (see Good News Bible and La Bible à la Colombe above). They are supported by, surprisingly, no more than a few New Testament scholars. Arguments are seldom given; the commentators content themselves with saying that such an interpretation fits the immediate context well.

Nevertheless I think this interpretation is the right one. First of all it does fit the context very well, because in these verses Paul mentions the disclosure of each person's works (see verse 13a especially). A supposed unnecessary repetition in verse 13, an argument often put forward by the advocates of the other view, is not a decisive point against it, since redundancy is obviously a feature of Paul's writing elsewhere (see, for example, Rom 7.14-25; Gal 2.16). Besides, when "work" is the intended subject there is no need to assume a change in the meaning of the idea of "fire" in the latter part of the verse.

But there are other arguments as well in favour of understanding "(everyone's) work" as the subject of the verb "be revealed". This interpretation not only fits the immediate context, it also accords well with the traditional Jewish-Christian theme that not only a person's works but even our secret deeds and thoughts will be revealed and judged on the Day of Judgement. And the verb *apokalyptein* "to reveal" is a term that is associated with "secrets" (as, for example, in Luke 12.2 "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be made known," RSV).

Finally, nowhere in the whole Greek literature does the passive of this verb *apokalyptein* go with "day"; and nowhere is a revelation of the (last) day mentioned, except in one reference from John Chrysostom, which is itself a partial quotation and interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3.13. On the other hand, however, this verb does occur with *ergon* "work" in Greek literature, and the combination is found in at least one text which is independent of Paul's writings (Sirach 11.27, at a person's death there is "a revelation of his works").

All this makes it most likely that in 1 Corinthians 3.13 "(everyone's) work" should be regarded as the intended subject of the verb *apokalyptetai* "will be revealed". Paul wants to emphasise that builders of the church will be judged by God at the end of the age. Fire will test and reveal their works, even their activities that have gone unnoticed by other people. And each person will be rewarded according to his or her efforts for the building up of the church.

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On second thoughts...

Regarding the article "Can pronouns be divine?":

"The overview of handling capitals in English by John Ellington