Translating Romans: some persistent headaches[1]

A.B. du Toit
Research Fellow: New Testament Research Unit
Faculty of Theology
University of Pretoria
PRETORIA
E mail: andriedt@icon.co.za

Abstract

Translating Romans: some persistent headaches

This article concentrates on some of the linguistic phenomena in Romans which continuously cause exegetes and translators alike headaches. Attention is given to the δικαι group, οἱ ἅγιοι, ἐν Χριστῷ/κυρίῳ, hyperbolical contrasts, πνεῦμα, ὀργή and ὁμοιώμα. Various translations are discussed and possible solutions are offered. It all too often happens that, when facing problems of translation, translators seek refuge in the safe harbour of traditional renderings, even if these only camouflage the real issues. Scientifically it is more responsible to continue wrestling with the text and, through trial and error, eventually make some progress than to resign to this type of false certitude.

Opsomming

Die vertaling van Romeine: 'n aantal hardnekkige hoofpyne

Hierdie artikel konsentreer op 'n aantal linguistiese manifestasies in Romeine wat voortdurend aan eksegete en vertalers hoofbrekens besorg. Aandag word aan die δικαι-groep, οἱ ἅγιοι, ἐν Χριστῷ/κυρίῳ, hiperboliese kontraste, πνεῦμα, ὀργή en ὁμοιώμα gegee. Verskillende vertalings word bespreek en moontlike oplossings aangebied. Wanneer vertalers gekonfronteer word met vertalingsprobleme is hulle geneig om al te gemaklik terug te val in die veiligheid van

1 In honour of our esteemed colleague, friend and brother in Christ, Tjaart van der Walt.

tradisionele vertalings, selfs al sou laasgenoemde die werklik kontensieuse punte bloot kamoefleer. Om met die teks te bly worstel, selfs al sou dit foutlopies insluit om daardeur mettertyd vordering te maak, is wetenskaplik meer verantwoord as valse sekerheid.

1. Introduction

Gone are the days when it was axiomatic that expertise in biblical languages automatically qualified one as a Bible translator. In 1949, Ronald Knox, who for nine years conscientiously struggled with translating the Bible for his generation, published a booklet under the title *The trials of a translator*. At that stage Bible translation as the subject of scientific study was still in its infancy. Since then, research into the intricacies of communicating the biblical message in an authentic but understandable manner, has made significant progress (cf. Roberts, 2009). However, the frustrations of Bible translators, first of all to really understand what the biblical authors wanted to convey to their original addressees, and then to communicate that message to their own targeted readers in a meaningful way, have not disappeared. In fact, the challenge to meet the varying requirements of the multiple kinds of translation that are presently in vogue, has only increased.

This article, will focus on some difficult expressions which occur repeatedly in Romans. We shall see how different translations dealt with these issues in their own way and then some proposals will be presented.

2. The δικαι group

The δικαι group, represented in Romans by δικαιοσύνη (34 occurrences), δικαιόω (15 times), δίκαιος (7 times), δικαίωμα (5 times), δικαίωσις (twice) and δικαιοκρισία (once), presents us with one of the most acute problems in terms of exegesis and translation in Romans, although it is not as equally acute in all of these lexemes.

In the case of δίκαιος, for example, the problem presents itself only in Romans 1:17 (*vide infra*). Exegetes and translators generally agree that in all other instances in Romans it refers to an attribute which indicates that somebody or something complies with the norm for what is viewed to be ethically correct, especially as according to

the will of God. In the case of persons, "righteous" or "just" would be acceptable translation equivalents (Rom. 2:13; 3:10, 26; 5:7, 19).[2] However, in Romans 7:12, where δίκαιος qualifies the law, "right" would be a more appropiate rendering (Newman & Nida, 1973:135-136).

The essence of this problem is whether δικαιοσύνη and δικαιόω in Romans refer, or usually refer, to a forensic or a relational (social) event.[3] Here the ways part, with far-reaching consequences for our understanding of Romans. Understood forensically, δικαιοῦν would be translated as "to declare righteous", "to justify" or "to acquit". Understood relationally, it would be translated as "to put (someone) right with (someone)", more specifically, in the sense that God puts sinners in a proper relationship with himself (Louw & Nida, 1988, 1:452; Moore, 1998).

This is not the place to go into this prolonged debate again. Just to mention the names and publications involved would already fill many pages. I therefore restrict myself to a few pertinent observations.

On a theological level, the relational understanding of δικαιοσύνη and δικαιόω is an attractive possibility, especially as there certainly is a causal correspondence between justification and the renewal of the relationship between God and man. From Romans 5:1 it is clear that "having peace with God", which is such an important component of reconciliation,[4] is the result of "having been justified" (cf. also Rom. 5:10-11). The problem here is that the Pauline literature does not provide us with any clear linguistic or contextual evidence that this is the *primary* focus of the δικαι group. On the other hand, as I hope to have indicated in a previous article on forensic metaphors in Romans (Du Toit, 2005), the juridical focus of this word group and its decisive importance for the understanding of this letter should no longer be questioned. Δικαιοσύνη occurs 33

2 This is also the case elsewhere in the New Testament. In certain instances, as in Matthew 1:19, δίκαιος could be translated more specifically as "law abiding".

3 "Event" in the linguistic sense of an action or process. While traditional grammar would categorise δικαιοσύνη as an abstract noun, modern linguistics would here identify it as an event.

4 The family metaphor cluster also expresses the renewal of relationships. Now being part of God's family (Rom. 1:7, 13; 7:1, 4; 8:12, 15, 23, etc.) would certainly also be as a result of justification.

times in the argumentative section of Romans (Rom. 1-11),[5] while Romans 12-15:13 deal with the way in which believers should respond to God's justification of the unjust. The forensic focus of δικαιόω is quite obvious in Romans 8:31-34 where we find a whole cluster of juridical terms (Du Toit, 2005:217-223). Furthermore, Romans is pervaded with other forensic terms or terms closely associated with forensic scenarios, e.g. ὀργή (cf. Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 13:4, 5), κρίνω (esp. Rom. 2:12, 16; 3:4, 6), κρίμα (τοῦ θεοῦ) (esp. Rom. 2:2, 3; 5:16; cf. also 13:2), κατάκριμα (Rom. 5:16, 18; 8:1) κατακρίνω (esp. Rom. 8:3, 34), βῆμα (τοῦ θεοῦ) (Rom. 14:10), παραδίδωμι (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 4:25; 8:32), ἐγκαλέω (Rom. 8:33), and ἄξιος θανάτου (Rom. 1:32). Δικαιόω and δικαιοσύνη[6] undoubtedly stood in the centre of this forensic imagery. In order to convey the good news of God's grace, Paul depicts Him as the unbelievably kind judge who acquits sinners despite the fact that they deserve punishment. His only condition is that they should accept this gospel in faith.

The use of δίκαιος in Romans 1:17b also fits into this picture. It forms part of a quotation from [LXX]Habakkuk 2:4. In the Habakkuk text, however, ἐκ πίστεως is not immediately connected to δίκαιος but to ζήσεται (ὁ δὲ δίκαιος – the righteous); (ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται– by my faithfulness shall live). Our traditional translations followed the basic grid of the Habakkuk text and rendered Romans 1:17b as *the righteous (or just) shall live by faith*. However, since the δικαι stem in Paul is so intricately bound up with πίστις (cf. Rom. 3:22, 26, 28, 30; 4:11, 13; 5:1; 9:30; 10:6), it would be more in line with Paul's thinking to connect δίκαιος to ἐκ πίστεως. The translation then being: "He who through faith is

5 However, one occurrence in Romans 11:3 is text-critically uncertain.

6 However, it should be noted that, in Romans 6, δικαιοσύνη is used in the sense of an ethical norm (i.e. the behaviour required of those who have been justified) and it should therefore be understood as "righteousness" or "right living" (Rom. 6:13, 16, 18, 19, 20; cf. also 14:17). Arguing at a deep theological level, Wright (1995; 1999) proposes a different option. He equates δικαιοσύνη with the covenant faithfulness of the God of Israel. I would fully agree that God's justifying action flows from and proves his faithfulness to his covenant, but from a linguistic perspective such a translation would be too bold. This is illustrated by the fact that Wright (1995:65) himself defines Abraham's faith in Romans 4 as "belief in the god who *justifies* (italics – AdT) the ungodly".

(made/declared) righteous, shall live", or: "He who is justified through faith, shall live".[7]

3. Οἱ ἅγιοι

Οἱ ἅγιοι is Paul's preferred designation for Christian believers.[8] It occurs 25 times in his undisputed letters and of these appearances eight are in Romans (1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25, 26, 31; 16:2, 15). The direct translation of οἱ ἅγιοι would naturally be "the holy ones" or "the saints". The problem is that in many ecclesiastical circles, especially pietistic ones, such a translation could be interpreted as a particular state of personal sanctification (cf. Louw & Nida, 1988, 1:125). This would be misleading, as οἱ ἅγιοι in Paul primarily indicates a *special relationship* in the sense of "belonging to God" rather than an attribute of personal holiness, (Louw & Nida, 1988, 1:125). Moreover, Paul regularly uses this substantive as a *group* designation. Only once does it occur in the singular, but then within the phrase ἀσπάσασθε πάντα ἅγιον, implying that also the individual believer belongs to a community (Phil. 4:21). Therefore, Louw and Nida (1988, 1:125) prefer to translate it as *God's people*. Significantly, even the usually conservative New International Version (1984) uses "God's people" in Romans 12:13, while the Revised English Bible (1989) applies it consistently.

The problem is further aggravated by the fact that descriptors, when used over a period of time, wear away (and often forfeit) part (or most) of their original semantic thrust. Did this also happen with οἱ ἅγιοι? If so, at what stage did it become, like the name *Christians*, a mere reference to the followers of Christ? And, in the absence of other contextual indicators, how do we determine to which extent the original semantic load of οἱ ἅγιοι is retained?

In the case of Romans 1:7, we find a helpful semantic pointer. Here the qualifier κλητοί makes it clear that ἅγιοι is used in its plenary sense, indicating that believers have been called by God *to be His own in a special sense*. Therefore *God's people* or *those belonging to God* would be acceptable alternatives. In Romans 16:2 and 15 (and possibly also in Rom. 15:25, 26, 31), however, it is doubtful

7 Cf. Du Toit (2009:271-272 and 278-279) for a graphic representation of these two basic possibilities.

8 For a discussion of the names used for the early christian communities, see Kümmel (1968:16-19), Schenk (1995:1357-1467), and Roloff (1993:82-83).

whether οἱ ἅγιοι denotes anything more than *Christians* or *believers*.

4. Εν Χριστῷ/κυρίῳ

Volumes have been written about these Pauline phrases, which very much stand in the centre of his theology. I presented my understanding of them, together with a discussion of the most important positions, in a previous article (Du Toit, 2000). Naturally, translating these phrases in their different contexts also causes problems. The few instances in which they are used instrumentally (e.g. "by/through Christ Jesus/the Lord") are less problematic than those in which they are used in a local (spherical) sense (literally "in Christ Jesus/in the Lord").[9] In 2 Corinthians 2:12, for instance, ἐν κυρίῳ is most probably used instrumentally (literally: "a door having been opened for me by the Lord").[10] The same is true of ἐν Χριστῷ in 2 Corinthians 2:14: "Thanks be to God who, through Christ, continuously leads us in a triumphal procession." Romans 6:11, 23; 8:2; 14:14 and 15:17 may be similar cases (for the latter verse, cf. Newman & Nida, 1973:280). However, in Romans, the local usage of ἐν Χριστῷ abounds. Basically, ἐν Χριστῷ indicates that believers have been transposed from being within the domain of sin (ἁμαρτία) and the flesh (σάρξ) to the domain of Christ (cf. Du Toit, 2000:289-292), and their whole existence now being determined by the Christ reality. To understand this extraordinary rich Pauline concept is entirely one thing, but to translate it appropriately is another thing. The easiest option would be to translate it literally and simply with *in Christ* or *in the Lord*. And indeed this was the traditional approach. Even now many translations still follow suit (e.g. RSV52; NIV84; LUT84; NRS89). However, one needs to ask how much *meaning* such a translation could convey. Newman and Nida (1973:117) state categorically that "for English readers, as for readers of many other languages, the literal expression 'in Christ Jesus' says practically nothing".[11]

---

9 Admittedly it is not always easy, sometimes even impossible, to differentiate between the instrumental and the local uses of ἐν Χριστῷ (cf. Du Toit, 2000:290).

10 Cf. Martin (1986:40) "there being an opportunity opened by the Lord for me". Also see those translations which transform the passive into an active, viz. "the Lord having opened a door for me", e.g. BNV83; NIV84; NLT96; NBV04.

11 Cf. the confession of Knox (1949:xi): "More than once, I have taken refuge in an ambiguous phrase, to bypass difficulty."

Unfortunately there is no easy solution to this problem. In the case of strongly source-oriented translations it would perhaps be best to persist with *in Christ*, providing a circumscription in a footnote. A reader-oriented approach, on the other hand, would seek a more intelligible rendering. As an example, compare the following options in the case of Romans 8:1:

- NIV84: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus.*"
- REB89: "It follows that there is now no condemnation for those who are *united with Christ Jesus*."
- NLT96: "So now there is no condemnation for those who *belong to Christ Jesus*."
- "There is no condemnation now for those who live *in union with Christ Jesus.*" (Newman & Nida, 1973:144; cf. also 1973:117.)

This translation difficulty is further illustrated by the manner in which translations fluctuate between the traditional rendering and the more reader-friendly alternatives which they use elsewhere. The NBV04, for instance, uses "in Christus Jezus" in Romans 8:1, but in 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read "één met Christus". From the contexts I can find no apparent linguistic reason for this variation. The BNV83 in turn uses "een met Christus Jesus" in Romans 6:11, but "in Christus Jesus" in Romans 8:1 – again there seems to be, within the specific contexts, no logical explanation for this change.

In conclusion: no modern language can adequately render the fullness of the Pauline ἐν Χριστῷ formula. However, to accommodate readers, expressions such as "in union with Christ", "one with Christ" or even "united with Christ" may be considered. Obviously varying contexts should also be kept in mind.

A note should be appended about ἐν Χριστῷ and ἐν κυρίῳ in Romans 16. It is well-known that, when Paul wrote his letters, various names for the emerging Christian movement were in circulation: "the disciples", "the way", "the holy ones/God's people" (οἱ ἅγιοι), "the brothers", et cetera and no generally accepted appellation had as yet established itself – Χριστιανοί only became prominent at a later stage.[12] Although Paul preferred οἱ ἅγιοι when referring to the

12 Cf. footnote 8. In the New Testament the name *Christian(s)* appears only outside of the Pauline corpus and is restricted to two instances: Acts 11:26;

followers of Christ, he speaks of Andronicus and Junias as "having become ἐν Χριστῷ." before him (Rom. 16:7); obviously he intended to say that they became "Christians" before him. The same applies when he qualified certain members of the house of Narcissus as being "in the Lord" (Rom. 16:11).[13] And when he calls Prisca and Aquila his "fellow workers *in Christ Jesus*" (16:3), is he not simply qualifying them as "fellow *Christian* workers"?[14]

5. Hyperbolical contrasts

To say that translation problems often solve themselves or become less acute when we consider their Semitic background is to repeat a platitude. Here I am referring more specifically to the interesting phenomenon of hyperbolical contrasts, but since this typically Semitic feature has already been treated elsewhere (cf. Du Toit, 1986; 1992), I shall only summarise: Hyperbolical or rhetorical contrasts (which include the so-called dialectical negations) occur when a contrast is formulated absolutely in order to create a certain effect, but is in reality intended only relatively. For example, the Arab idiom "an egg today and not a chicken tomorrow" seems to express an absolute contrast. The speaker seemingly wants an egg today instead of a chicken tomorrow. However, what she/he is really intending to say is: "I would prefer to have an egg today (of which I can be sure) *rather than* a chicken tomorrow (of which I cannot be certain)." Similarly, when God says in Hosea 6:6

> what I want is love, not sacrifice;
> knowledge of God rather than holocausts,

the second leg of this parallelism makes it quite clear that God does not forthrightly reject sacrifices (knowledge *rather* than burnt-offerings). The first line therefore rather wishes to stress that love is far more important to God than mere sacrificial gestures. Accordingly, a better translation would be: "what I want is love, much rather than sacrifice". Due to Semitic influence, we find many examples of hy-

---

26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16. The name only became widely accepted in the 2nd century CE, as witnessed to by Ignatius, Polycarp and the *Mart. Pol.* (cf. Grundmann, 1973:572-573).

13 In Romans 16:7, as well as 16:11, the GNT94 opted for *Christians*; as also the GNB97. Strangely enough, the REB89 made a choice for *Christians* in 16:7, but in 16:11 for *those who are in the Lord's fellowship*.

14 Cf. also Romans 16:9, 10, 13. When Tertius sends greetings "in the Lord" (Rom. 16:22) are these not intended as "*Christian* greetings"?

perbolical contrasts in New Testament texts and it is unfortunate that they are so seldomly recognised. For instance, when Jesus says according to Matthew 6:24 (par. Luke 16:13) that nobody can serve two masters since he "will hate the one and love the other", the hate-love contrast should also not be understood absolutely. The intended meaning is rather that he will be less attached to the one master than to the other.

Although hyperbolical contrasts cannot always be identified with absolute certainty, we can and should reckon with several of them in Romans. In Romans 7:17, within the context of man's losing battle against sin, he declares: "So then it is no longer I who does it, but the sin that lives in me." Surely he would not deny that he was committing sin. In fact, he just previously confessed it (Rom. 7:15-16). So what he wants to stress is that the actual cause for his sinning is to be found first and foremost in indwelling sin, rather than in his own person.[15] The same applies to Romans 7:20bc (cf. Du Toit, 1986:185).

From a hermeneutical perspective, Romans 9:13 is an extremely difficult verse. It literally reads: "As is written, 'I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau'." However, the moment we take into account that this quotation from ^{LXX}Malachi 1:2-3 contains the same love-hate contrast as the one found in Matthew 6:24, the problem is alleviated. God's "hate" is not intended in its plenary sense – the intended meaning is: "I loved Jacob more than Esau" (Du Toit, 1986:185).[16] Again Romans 9:21 states literally: "Or does the potter not have the right over the clay to make from the same lump one vessel for honour and the other for dishonour?" Certainly no potter would intentionally create vessels "for dishonour" – which implies that the contrast is once again not absolute. The intention would rather be something like: "Or does the potter not have the right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for display (or special purposes), and the other for menial (or ordinary) purposes?"

Romans 5:13 usually causes a severe headache: "There was indeed sin in the world before the law, but where there is no law *no account is kept of sin*." Now, to take this statement at face value

15 Cf. Newmann and Nida (1973:139): "So I am not really the one who does this thing; rather it is the sin that lives in me."

16 Cf. also Genesis 29:30 where it is first stated that Jacob "loved Rachel more than Leah" but the very next verse depicts Leah as being "hated".

would be to contradict Paul's argument that the whole of mankind deserved God's punishment. But the problem is solved when we realise that, with the abovementioned in mind, we should reckon with an implicit hyperbolical contrast: "… where there is no law, *less serious account* is taken of sin" (Du Toit, 1986:186).

6. Πνεῦμα

In certain cases it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether πνεῦμα refers to the divine Spirit or to the human spirit. In Romans, the most significant instances are in Romans 2:29; 7:6; 8:10 and 15.[17]

A rather literal translation of Romans 2:28-29a would be:

> [28]For not he is a Jew who is one on the outside, nor is circumcision that which is performed outwardly in the flesh; [29]but he is a Jew who is it on the inside and circumcision is a matter of the heart, in *spirit/by the Spirit* not letter.

In the following translations the two different understandings of ἐν πνεύματι are reflected:

Romans 2:29a

- NIV84: and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by *the Spirit*, not by the written code
- NRS89: and real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is *spiritual* and not literal
- REB89: and his circumcision is of the heart, *spiritual* not literal
- GNT94: whose heart has been circumcised, and this is the work of *God's Spirit*, not of the written law
- NLT96: and true circumcision is not a cutting of the body but a change of heart produced by *God's Spirit*
- NBV04: en de besnijdenis is een innerlijke besnijdenis. Het is het werk van *de Geest*, niet een voorschrift uit de wet …

17 In the case of Romans 8:2, there is also some uncertainty (cf. Cranfield, 1977:375 n. 6).

- Jewett (2007:219): and circumcision (is) of the heart, in *spirit* rather than letter

From the examples above, it becomes clear that the translations that chose for *spiritual* understand πνεῦμα as referring to the non-physical quality of a "circumcision of the heart"; the antithesis between πνεῦμα and γράμμα is intended in the general sense of the spirit *versus* the letter.

A decision for either of the two is extremely difficult. Although Jewett's translation gives the impression that he understands ἐν πνεύματι as indicating the inner, spiritual nature of a "circumcision of the heart", he is actually convinced that Paul is thinking of the divine Spirit. According to him (Jewett, 2007:237 n. 160) "there is no likelihood that Paul refers here to the human spirit". On the other hand, Haacker (1999:73, 138) is of opinion that a reference to the Holy Spirit would imply too much strain within the context of Paul's present argument. I must agree with him. In this context, where Paul is dealing with what constitutes a real Jew, it seems more logical that he would stress the importance of a deepened – and therefore spiritual – understanding of circumcision (cf. Barrett, 1962:60).

We now move to Romans 7:6. Quite literally, this verse would read:

> But now we have been released from the law, having died to that by means of which we were held captive, so that we may serve in newness of *spirit/Spirit* and not in the oldness of the letter.

Here again it is questionable whether πνεῦμα refers to the human spirit or to God's Spirit. Recent translations reflect this uncertainty:

Romans 7:6

- JerB*68*: to serve in the new *spiritual* way and not the old way of a written law
- NIV84: so that we serve in the new way of the *Spirit*, and not in the old way of the written code
- NAB86: so that we may serve in the newness of the *spirit* and not under the obsolete letter
- NRS89: so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the *Spirit*

- REB89: to serve God in a new way, the way of the *spirit* in contrast to the old way of a written code
- GNT94: no longer do we serve in the old way of a written law, but in the new way of the *Spirit*
- Jewett (2007:428): so that we might serve as slaves in newness of *spirit* and not in the obsolescence of letter

By far the most translations and commentaries understand πνεῦμα as a reference to the Spirit (cf. the majority of the examples quoted above, but also Barrett, 1962:135, 138; Newman & Nida, 1973:132; Cranfield, 1977:331, 339-340; Michel, 1978:219, 221; Wilckens, 1980:62, 69-70; Dunn, 1988:358, 366-367, 373 ["probably"]; Schreiner 1998:346, 353; Jewett, 2007:438-439 [sic!]). The Jerusalem Bible and the New American Bible (as quoted above) are lonely dissenting voices.

Nevertheless, a choice for either is once again exceedingly difficult. Possibly, Paul himself would not have wanted his addressees to make such a choice. However, since the translator is forced to make a choice, it may be preferable to side with the small minority, the focus being primarily on the new, spiritual quality of the service of believers in contrast to their old ethos of living by the letter of the law.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 we find the same spirit-letter antithesis. In verse 6ab Paul says that God "has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the *spirit/Spirit*". He then adds what has the ring of a proverbial saying: "For the letter kills, but the *spirit/Spirit* gives life". Verse 6 is preceded by a strong contrast between what is written "with ink" and "on stone tablets" and what is written "by the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor. 3:5).[18] Within this context it therefore seems virtually certain that πνεύματος in 2 Corinthians 3:6b would refer, at least primarily, to the Spirit of God (cf. also 2 Cor. 3:8). But would the same be true of πνεῦμα in the proverbial (?) statement (2 Cor. 3:6c)? The preceding context, as well as the subsequent contrasting of the "ministry of death carved in letters on stone" to the "ministry of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:7-8), may tip the scale in favour of understanding πνεῦμα as a reference to

18 Cf. also 2 Corinthians 3:3: "… written not by ink but by the Spirit of the living God".

the Holy Spirit here as well. But some doubt lingers in the mind.[19] Do we perhaps have a Pauline word play?

We again return to Romans for an overview of some translations of τὸ πνεῦμα in Romans 8:10 – but only the key propositions are represented here:

Romans 8:10

- RSV52: your *spirits* are alive
- NIV84: your *spirit* is alive
- NAB86: the *spirit* is alive
- NLT96: your *spirit* is alive
- NRS89: the *Spirit* is life
- REB89: the *Spirit* is your life
- GNT94: the *Spirit* is life for you
- NBV04: de *Geest* schenkt u leven

It is evident that the choices balance one another – which once more indicates how difficult a firm decision really is. As was the case in 2 Corinthians 3, the Spirit – in this part of chapter 8 – is so strongly in focus that one would be inclined to opt consistently for translating πνεῦμα as the divine Spirit. However, πνεῦμα in Romans 8:10 may rather point to the human spirit. Σῶμα, in the first leg of the apodosis, refers to the human *body* and the human *spirit* would be its logical counterpart. Σῶμα and πνεῦμα would thus together depict the whole of human existence (cf. 1 Cor. 7:34). A switch from the human body to the divine Spirit, while not impossible, would be rather unusual. Also, since, "death" and "life" as well as "sin" and "righteousness" balance each other antithetically, one would expect that, whereas the first leg of the

19 Most translations render πνεῦμα, in both instances, as "Spiritual". Two exceptions are The New Revised Standard Version and the Revised English Bible – the former translates the first antithesis as "ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of 'spirit'", and the Revised English Bible reads "ministers of a new covenant, not written but 'spiritual'". However, both translate the second πνεῦμα with the "Spirit". Significantly, the King James Version reads spirit in both instances.

apodosis describes the negative aspect of the new life of believers, the second leg would then depict its positive side.[20]

But what about πνεῦμα υἱοθεσίας in Romans 8:15?

Romans 8:15

- RSV52: you have received the *spirit* of sonship
- NIV84: you received the *Spirit* of sonship
- NAB86: you received a *spirit* of adoption
- NRS89: you have received a *spirit* of adoption
- REB89: you have received … a *Spirit* of adoption
- GNT94: the *Spirit* that God has given you … the *Spirit* makes you God's children
- NBV04: u hebt de *Geest* ontvangen om Gods kinderen te zijn

At face value πνεῦμα υἱοθεσίας is open to both possible translations. Fortunately the inter-textual comparison with Galatians 4:6 – where the *abba* cry also appears – helps to resolve this ambiguity, for here the Spirit sent into our hearts is the subject of the *abba* call. The same would then also apply to the *abba* cry in Romans 8:15.[21] In spite of the three dissenting voices quoted above, there can be little doubt that πνεῦμα υἱοθεσίας is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

The reason for the dilemma that we experience is that, for Paul, there is such a close connection between the Spirit of God and the human spirit. The human πνεῦμα functions as the meeting-point where the Spirit engages human existence (Rom. 8:16), in other words as the doorway through which the divine Spirit moves into human lives and directs and transforms them. From this perspective, the *Doppeldeutigkeit* in Paul's use of πνεῦμα becomes understandable. Often when he may be referring primarily to the human πνεῦμα, the Holy Spirit would be in the background and vice versa. It is exactly this double usage that makes the choice so difficult.

---

20 Cf. also Sanday and Headlam (1914:198): "Clearly the πνεῦμα here meant is the human πνεῦμα which has the properties of life infused into it by the presence of the Divine πνεῦμα."

21 Within this context it seems highly improbable that ἐν ᾧ would mean "when" – cf. Newman and Nida (1973:154) and Cranfield (1977:398-399).

Let us illustrate this from Romans 7:6, where my contention was that the human πνεῦμα is in focus. Although, according to my understanding, the focus is on the human spirit, God's Spirit, as the mediator of this newness of spirit, is still actively present in the semantic substratum of the text. That would explain why other interpreters may turn the situation around and view the Spirit as the primary referent.

The problem is that the translator is forced to make an either/or choice.[22] She/he should therefore ask, within a given context, whether the *primary* focus is on the Spirit of God or on the human spirit.

7. Ὀργή

The most obvious translation equivalent for ὀργή is "wrath" or "anger",[23] which would explain its presence in our traditional translations. In their turn, modern translators may subconsciously be influenced by their acquaintance with these hallowed documents. But we should nevertheless be cautious, since ὀργή is semantically multi-valent – it can also signify "punishment" or "revenge".[24] Therefore its meaning should be verified in each context.

We start with Romans 1:18, which can be viewed as a Pauline caption for Romans 1:18-32. This pericope is pervaded by forensic motifs, including ὀργή. [25] This would not necessarily rule out "wrath", since in Paul's world a judge's wrath was fully acceptable, even expected, as the appropriate reaction against wrongs committed. However, since this passage focuses on God's *punitive* and not his *emotional* reaction against those who consciously rejected him (cf. the threefold παρέδωκεν in Rom. 1:24, 26 and 28) *punishment* would be a better option.

In Romans 2:1-16, we are again confronted with a forensic background. In Romans 2:5, ὀργή occurs twice. The statement

22 If translation policy makes such a provision, the alternative could be given in a footnote.

23 The linguistic term for this is "unmarked meaning", the meaning which first springs to mind when a word is used out of context. Because of its obviousness it may all too easily slip into a translation.

24 Louw and Nida (1988, 1:176) recognise only "anger" and "punishment"; they may have subsumed "revenge" and "retribution" under punishment.

25 Cf. Du Toit (2005:227-231).

θησαυρίζεις σεαυτῷ ὀργήν ἡμέρᾳ ὀργῆς has traditionally been translated with something like "you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath" (cf. NIV84; NRS89). "To store up wrath" sounds somewhat unusual, unless one would prefer to regard it as a poetic formulation. Instead of "wrath" the Revised English Bible (1989) opted for "retribution": "you are laying up for yourself a store of retribution". However, "punishment" here seems even more appropriate. We could accordingly translate: "(Y)ou are increasing your punishment on the day of punishment".

Does ὀργή in Romans 2:8 refer to God's anger or to his punishment? Most versions render it as "wrath" (e.g. NIV84; NRS89; GNT94; NLT96; NBV04). The Revised English Bible again prefers "retribution". Understanding καὶ θυμός as epexegetical, it arrives at "the retribution of his wrath". The 1983 Afrikaans Bible transforms ὀργή into an event: "(S)traf Hy in sy toorn" ("[H]e punishes in his wrath"). One could argue that ὀργή in its combination with θυμός would be emotive, as in Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8. On the other hand, in Revelation 16:19 and 19:15 (cf. Rev. 14:10), where the two words also occur in combination, τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς may well indicate "the fury of his punishment". In Romans 2:8, Paul may then have added θυμός in order to emphasise the severity of God's punishment. In that case "He will punish them in wrath" may be acceptable (cf. Newman & Nida, 1973:37).

In Romans 3:5, it is noteworthy that certain translations still cling to "wrath" (e.g. RSV52; NIV84; NRS89). De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling (2004) decided on "veroordeelt" (condemned). Others, like the 1983 Afrikaans Bible, the Good News Translation (1994) and the New Living Translation (2004) opted for "punishment/punish". This is justified by the context. The same argument will also apply to Romans 4:15; 5:9 and probably 9:22 as well.

The idea of "revenge" is actually very prominent in Romans 12:19. First, the present participle of ἐκδικέω is used in the sense of "do not be revenging yourselves"; and second, the quotation from Deuteronomy 32:35 doubly asserts that revenge belongs to God. Over and against this quote from the Septuagint Paul inserts ἐγώ, as well as λέγει κύριος, to emphasise that God is the subject of the action and to dismiss human vindictiveness. Obviously,

ὀργή should here then be rendered with "revenge" or "vengeance" (CEV97; NLT96; NBV04; REB89 [retribution]).[26]

The two remaining instances of ὀργή in Romans are Romans 13:4 and 5. In this instance it will suffice to quote the usually conservative New International Version:

> [4]He is God's servant, an agent of wrath *to bring punishment* (εἰς ὀργὴν) on the wrongdoer.
>
> [5]Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible *punishment*, but also because of conscience.

In all ten other instances in Romans, the translators opted for "wrath", but here they (correctly) preferred "punishment". One can only guess as to why they persisted with "wrath" elsewhere. From a semantic perspective there is no convincing reason why "wrath" should be used consistently when God is the subject of ὀργή.

8. Ὁμοιώμα

The translation of ὁμοιώμα also causes difficulty. It occurs in Romans 1:23; 5:14; 6:5 and 8:3 – with Romans 6:5 and 8:3 particularly being the subject of endless discussion (cf. Schneider, 1954:191-197; Cranfield, 1977:106-108, 379-382). Common to all these occurrences is that ὁμοιώμα indicates similarity, but not absolute sameness. This reserve is crucial. In Romans 1:23, where ὁμοιώμα and εἰκών are stringed together in the phrase ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνος, ὁμοιώματι it indicates that the image (εἰκών) displays a certain likeness, but is not an exact replica of the original: "(A)nd they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for what resembles (looks like – ἐν ὁμοιώματι) the image (εἰκόνος) of mortal man, or birds or animals or reptiles." In Romans 5:14, ὁμοιώμα expresses likeness, even a degree of identification in the sense that later generations also sinned like Adam did, but with the reserve that they did not sin in the same degree: unlike Adam they did not transgress a specific prohibition.

Romans 6:5 is a real quagmire of problems. Determining its semantics is difficult, but a satisfactory rendering in any modern

26 Some patristic writers saw this "revenge" as referring to human retribution (Jewett, 2007:775), but that is contrary to the very point of this admonition.

language almost impossible. Apart from the phrase τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, the introductory εἰ and σύμφυτοι also cause problems. A look at some recent translations will illustrate this frustration:

Romans 6:5

- NIV84: If we have been united with Him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with Him in his resurrection.
- NRS89: For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.
- REB89: For if we have become identified with Him in his death, we shall also be identified with Him in his resurrection.
- GNT94: For since we have become one with Him in dying as He did, in the same way we shall be one with Him by being raised to life as He was.
- NLT04: Since we have been united with Him in his death, we will also be raised to life as He was.
- NBV04: Als wij delen in zijn dood, zullen wij ook delen in zijn opstanding.

Notably the Good News Translation and the New Living Translation both rendered the introductory εἰ of the protasis with "since/for since", which is quite in order, and in fact within this context preferable. Conditional clauses in Paul, as also happens elsewhere in the New Testament, may have a causal connotation (Blass *et al.*, 1975:§372). In that case εἰ is not hypothetical, but represents a factual situation. Σύμφυτος is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, but from its use outside of the New Testament we can glean that in the present context it could mean "grown together/united" (cf. Liddell *et al.*, 1985:*s v* II). It is regrettable that the growth metaphor disappeared from all these translations. The Revised English Bible, the New Living Translation and the Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling also sacrificed the likeness motif, expressed by τῷ ὁμοιώματι. On the other extreme, too much has been read into this word, especially regarding baptism, which resulted in endless hair-splitting (cf. Schneider, 1954:191-195). As Cranfield (1977:307) observed: "(T)he context seems to require in the main sentence a movement away from the subject of baptism rather than another statement about it". As was the case with Romans 5:14, ὁμοιώμα indicates likeness, and even a degree of identification

since believers are united with Christ in *his* death; but once again there is an essential reserve: they died *like he died*, but they *did not die the same death as he did.*

This extremely compact verse contains elision in its second half. In order to bring out its plenary content a degree of circumscription will be necessary. We may then translate: "Having indeed[27] grown into one with his death, and died as He died,[28] we shall also be one with Him in his resurrection."

Romans 8:3 shows the same tendency. Skipping over the grammatical problems in this verse, I restrict myself to the relevant proposition, literally referring to God as "having sent his own Son *in the likeness of sinful flesh*" (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας). The first part of Romans 8:3b reflects traditional wording, but "in the likeness of sinful flesh" is a specifically Pauline formulation (cf. Jewett, 2007: 482). One could ask why Paul did not simply state that God sent his son ἐν σαρκὶ ἁμαρτιας. The reason for inserting ὁμοιώματι was to avoid the misunderstanding that Jesus not only took on our human body (or nature), but that He actually also became a sinner. Once again ὁμοιώμα expresses an important degree of identity (which would dismiss a *docetic* understanding of the Christ event), but then the critical reserve sets in: Jesus became human, but He did not sin. The problem for the translator is how to express both the identity and this critical reserve in concise English. I would suggest the following translation: "God, having sent his own Son in a human body like our sinful human body …". This, again, could perhaps lead to the misunderstanding that Paul saw the human body as such as sinful. To avoid such a misunderstanding a paraphrase might be necessary or an explanatory footnote could address the problem.

9. Epilogue

The foregoing selection of translation problems, which of course cannot be divorced from difficulties of interpretation, may give some indication as to the reason why scholars have been wrestling with Romans over so many centuries. But it also illustrates why studying and translating Romans, as well as the other Biblical documents, are such an ongoing adventure.

---

27 In this context, I understand γάρ as a marker of emphasis ("indeed") rather than causal ("for"), as happens often in Paul, e.g. in Romans 7:14, 15, 18; 8:18.

28 Though not dying the same death.

Bible translators should always keep in mind that they are subconsciously preconditioned by the translations with which they grew up. From childhood they know long stretches of these texts by heart. In order to be as objective as possible, it is therefore imperative – but also exceedingly difficult – to distance oneself from the traditional wording. For an authentic translation, concentrating on the original text is definitely the basic requirement. Knowing the socio-historic context within which a text was written is also a *sine qua non.* Following new developments in linguistics and communications science has also become very important, as well as constantly taking cognisance of recent discoveries. Consulting other translations and the various available aids for translation will also greatly help to direct and stimulate thinking.

In this article, a specific aspect of concentrating on the original text repeatedly came to the fore: the necessity to once again scrutinise both the immediate and the wider context of a specific utterance. When confronted with a translation problem, we all too easily take refuge in the beloved and safe haven of traditional renderings, instead of putting the text under the magnifying glass *within its linguistic context* as if we never read it before.

Abbreviations used for Bible translations:

BNV83: Die Bybel Nuwe Vertaling 1983
CEV97: The Contemporary English Version 1997
GNB97: Gute Nachricht Bibel 1997
GNT94: Good News Translation (UK) 1994
JerB68: Jerusalem Bible 1968
KJV: King James Version
LUT84: Die Bibel (Luther revised) 1984
NAB86: The New American Bible 1986
NAV83: Nuwe Afrikaanse Vertaling 1983
NBV04: De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling 2004
NIV84: New International Version 1984
NLT04: New Living Translation. (2nd ed.) 2004
NLT96: New Living Translation 1996
NRS89: New Revised Standard Version 1989
REB89: Revised English Bible 1989
RSV52: Revised Standard Version 1952

List of references

BARRETT, C.K. 1962. A commentary on the epistle to the Romans. Rev. ed. London: Black.

BLASS, F., DEBRUNNER, A. & REHKOPF, F. 1975. Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch. 14. Aufl. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

CRANFIELD, C.E.B. 1977. The epistle to the Romans. 2 vols. Edinburgh: Clark. (International Critical Commentary.)

DU TOIT, A.B. 1986. Hyperbolical contrasts: a neglected aspect of Paul's style. (*In* Petzer, J.H. & Hartin, P.J., *eds*. A South African perspective on the New Testament: essays by South African New Testament scholars presented to Bruce Manning Metzger during his visit to South Africa in 1985. Leiden: Brill. p. 178-186.)

DU TOIT, A.B. 1992. Weereens: hiperboliese kontraste in die Nuwe Testament. *Nederduitse Gereformeerde teologiese tydskrif*, 33:311-317.

DU TOIT, A.B. 2000. "In Christ", "in the Spirit", and related prepositional phrases: their relevance for a discussion on Pauline mysticism. *Neotestamentica*, 34:287-298.

DU TOIT, A.B. 2005. Forensic metaphors in Romans and their soteriological significance. (*In* Van der Watt, J.G., *ed*. Salvation in the New Testament: perspectives on soteriology. Leiden: Brill. p. 213-246.) (Novum Testamentum Supplement 121.)

DU TOIT, H. 2009. Contributions from modern linguistics to New Testament exegesis. (*In* Du Toit, A.B., *ed*. Focusing on the message: New Testament hermeneutics, exegesis and methods. Pretoria: Protea Book House. p. 267-304.)

GRUNDMANN, W. 1973. χρίω κτλ. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 9:518-576.

HAACKER, K. 1999. Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. (Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 6.)

JEWETT, R. 2007. Romans: a commentary. Minneapolis: Fortress. (Hermeneia.)

KNOX, R. 1949. The trials of a translator. New York: Sheed & Ward.

KÜMMEL, W.G. 1968. Kirchenbegriff und Geschichtsbewusstsein in der Urgemeinde und bei Jesus. 2. Aufl. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

LIDDELL, H.G., SCOTT, R. & JONES, H.S. 1985. A Greek-English Lexicon. Oxford: Clarendon.

LOUW, J.P. & NIDA, E.A. 1988. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains. 2 vols. New York: United Bible Societies.

MARTIN, R.P. 1986. 2 Corinthians. Waco: Word Book Publisher. (Word Biblical Commentaries 40.)

MOORE, R.K. 1998. Δικαιοσυνη and cognates in Paul: the semantic gulf between two major lexikons (Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker and Louw-Nida). *Colloquium*, 30:27-43.

NEWMAN, B.M. & NIDA, E.A. 1973. A translator's handbook on Paul's letter to the Romans. London: United Bible Societies.

ROBERTS, J.H. 2009. Bible translation – with special reference to the New Testament. (*In* Du Toit, A.B., *ed*. Focusing on the message: New Testament hermeneutics, exegesis and methods. Pretoria: Protea Book House. p. 579-606.)

ROLOFF, J. 1993. Die Kirche im Neuen Testament. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. (Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament. Neues Testament Deutsch Ergänzungsreihe 10.)

SANDAY, W. & HEADLAM, A.C. 1914. Romans. Edinburgh: Clark. (International Critical Commentary.)

SCHENK, W. 1995. Die ältesten Selbstverständnisse christlicher Gruppen im ersten Jahrhundert. *Aufstief und Niedergang der römischen Welt II*, 26(2):1357-1467.

SCHNEIDER, J. 1954. ὅμοιος κτλ. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 5:186-198.

SCHREINER, T.R. 1998. Romans. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.)

WRIGHT, N.T. 1995. Romans and the theology of Paul. (*In* Hay, D.M. & Johnson, E.E., *eds.* Pauline theology. Vol. 3: Romans. Minneapolis: Fortress. p. 30-67.)

WRIGHT, N.T. 1999. New Exodus, new inheritance: the narrative structure of Romans 3-8. (*In* Soderlund, S.K. & Wright, N.T., *eds.* Romans and the people of God: essays in honor of Gordon D. Fee on the occasion of his 65th birthday. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. p. 26-35.)

Key concepts:

Bible translation
forensic understanding
holy ones
in Christ
linguistic context
Romans
Spirit or spirit

Kernbegrippe:

Bybelvertaling
forensiese verstaan
Gees of gees
heiliges
in Christus
linguistiese konteks
Romeine