

THE LORD'S PRAYER, A CURIOUS IMPOSITION OF THE NOTION OF

LIMITS-VIOLATION IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATING OF ---- ELLIOTT #1758

In our church today (6Nov83), the congregation hissed out, in L.P., a word that grates on me both aesthetically and exegetically, viz., "trespasses." Enough already, so I'm irritated into writing this thinksheet on a particular cultural mis-translation, viz., a word that more specifically points to limits-violation than do any of the three words in the Greek of L.P. + contexts. Sociopsychological explanation: Much Eng. translating is anxious to keep folks in their place--e.g., lower classes, niggers, women ("women," like "niggers," being a dirty word: in our N.Y. church, the toilets, accordingly, say "men" and "ladies").

NUMBERS KEY to N.T. translations referred to in this thinksheet: 1, Tyndale (1525); 2, Great (1539); 3, Geneva (1560); 4, Bishops' (1568); 5, Rheims (1582); 6, King James (1611); 7, Revised Version (1881) (of which 8, Am. Standard V., 1901, is the Am. ed.); 9, Revised Standard Ver. (1960); 10, Moffatt (1922); 11, Goodspeed (1923); 12, Centenary/Montgomery (1924); 13, Weymouth (1929); 14, C.B. Williams (1937); 15, Basic Eng. (1941); 16, Plain Eng./C.K. Williams (1952); 17, Amplified (1958), 18, J.B. Phillips (1958); 19, New Am. Standard (1960); 20, Confraternity (1966); 21, Jerusalem (1966); 22, Today's Eng. Ver. (1966); 23, Living (1967); 24, New Am. (1970); 25, New Life/Ledyard (1974); 26, New Eng. (1976); 27, New International (1978).

DATA DISPLAY and exposition:

NB in italics above: Here my interest is not in the meaning of the 3 Greek words but in Eng. translations bending those meanings in the direction of the breaching of limits set by God/society, specifically in the use of "trespass" and "transgress," both of which have a juridical flavor (slamming the sinner up against the Law and its ultimate sanction, the divine Lawgiver-Judge). Pertinent notes from OED: (1) "trespass": (personal noun) "trespasser," from 1455 on, "on the lands of another; (noun) "a transgression; a breach of law or duty; an offence, sin, wrong; a fault;" 1650 on, "a passing beyond some limit," and so NO TRESPASSING signs; 1769 on, "an encroachment, intrusion"; (verb, fr. Fr. "to pass beyond or across," so in Mod.Fr. "to die") 1455 on, violate another's person, property, rights; 1652 on, "improper or uninvited" inroad or intrusion on "a person's time, attention, patience, etc."; to intrude, encroach, infringe on one's "rights or domains." EXAMPLE: We just got (Nov83) M.L.King, Jr. Day, to honor his effective trespasses against laws trespassing on basic human rights; (2) "transgress" (literally, to step across; verb, 1526-): "to go beyond the limits prescribed by (law, command, etc.); widened by 1619 to "to go or pass beyond (any limit or bounds)," Prometheism, hubris, Gn.3 apricot-eating. (Citations below use only the verb forms.)

1. Only #19 (see "Numbers Key," above), a very conservative and very recent tr., uses "transgress" in L.P. and contexts! Specifically, Mt.6.14f and M.11.25f, each having twice (Gk.) paraptom- (a falling away, a misstep; focus not on limit crossed but on norm deviated from). The Gk. wd. is not used in our other reff.: Mt.6.12, which has (as does L.11.4a) opheil- (debt: failure to meet an obligation, so resultantly the violation of a limit in the sense of breach of contract). The remaining Gk. wd., hamartan- (do wrong, sin; breach of trust, so betrayal), occurs in the remaining ref., viz., L.11.4b.

2. Here now are the translations, by passage, in order of frequency:

Mt.6.14f (paraptom-)

"trespass"--#1-4,6-9,17 ("reckless and wilful sins")--9 times (i.e., translations)

"offend"--#5,10-13,16--6 times

"sin"--#15,23,25,27--4 times

one translation each: #14, "shortcomings (fn.: failings or fallings)"; #21, "failings"; #22, "wrongs"; #24, "faults"

Mt.6.12 (opheil-)

"debt"--#2-4,6-12,14-18 ("owe"),19 (mg.: "moral debts or sins"),20,21,23,25,27--

22 times

*Shrewd insight of W.H. Auden (THE DYER'S HAND, "Hic et Ille"): "The ear...craves the familiar and is shocked by the unexpected: the eye...craves the novel and is bored by repetition." Apply to (1) the Greek/Jew strands of our religion and civilization and (2) the current "inclusive language" controversy.

"wrong"--#19,22,26--3 times

one translation each: #1, "trespass"; #5, "offend"; #13, "shortcome" and "fail"; #25, "sin"

M.11.25f (paraptom-)

"trespass"--#1-4,6-10,12--10 times

"fail"--#14(fn.: "fallings, failings"),17(+ "shortcomings"),18,21--4 times

"offend"--#11,13,16,20--4 times

"sin"--#5,15,23(and "trespasses"),25,27--5 times

one translation each: #24, "fault"; #26, "wrong"

L.11.4a (opheil-)

"sin"--all 27 times!

L.11.4b (hamartan-)

"debt"--#3,5,6-9,13,15-17("offended us or done us wrong"),19,21--12 times

"trespass"--#1,2,4--3 times

"wrong"--#11,14,24--3 times

"offend"--#10,12--2 times

"sin"--#25,27--2 times

COMMENTS: (1) "Garbage in, garbage out" say computer programmers: versioning, even translating (directly), is conservative,*so a not-too-good-but-acceptable translation tends to be perpetuated. (2) "Trespass" is in all our reff. except L.11.4a, where--amazingly!--the commercial-financial "debt" is everywhere "sin," in sharp contrast to Mt.6.12 (where this Gk. wd. is overwhelmingly "debt"). (3) "Trespass" wins decisively for the same Gk. wd. in Mt.6.14f and M.11.25f. (4) Though an unusual translation for the wd. in L.11.4b, "debt" dominates because of the influence of Gk. for "debt" in Mt.6.12 and L.11.4a. (5) "Sin" is the only Eng. wd. covering the whole range of meaning in these wds. in these passages, so I opt for it in the liturgical use of L.P. even though it is laden with some inappropriate connotations. When it comes to WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN? (Karl Menninger's classic), I'm a restorationist. (6) It's the earlier translations that prefer "trespass," a fact illumined by late Med. / early modern English social history: death was the penalty for almost all forms of trespassing, so the word was solemn enough for use in our passages. Severe taboos and sanctions kept that severely classicistic society frozen against "inroads upon the property, territory, or rights of another" (general meaning of TRESPASS, ENCROACH, TRENCH, INTRENCH or INTRENCH, INFRINGE, INVADE in Web.Dict.of Synonyms).

WHOSE BOUNDARIES/LIMITS ARE VIOLATED? "The sacred" being the inviolable, this question's answer locates the sacred in (1) God, (2) society, or (3) the individual. Let's look at these:

(1) GOD--In the somberest sense, "sin" (as in Ps.51) is only against God. It is failing the God of (NIV for *hesed*) "unfailing love." Considered on the simplest grid, the failures are known/unconscious and of commission/omission. While God's love does not fail, God's power and justice require that we not fail God (all of which is set aside by Kubler-Ross in her sentimental-stoic "unconditional love"). Jn.K. Galbraith's 1983 book, THE ANATOMY OF POWER, is here food for theological thought: power is gained/maintained by persuasion, purchase, and punishment-threat. "Hell"? Hear W.H. Auden (A CERTAIN WORLD, "Hell"): "All sin tends to be addictive, and the terminal point of addiction is what is called damnation." Most modern theology is love-saccharine, dealing only superficially with justice and power; and that is the main reason "social action" thinking by churchy types is so irrelevant and even dangerous.

(2) SOCIETY--Socially evolved taboos are necessary limits-setting, rest on "the law of nature," and (in religious societies) use "nature's God" as sanction, with good and evil results. What I remember most from being on Hitler's passenger liner "Bremen" in 1937 is the "Verboten" ("No Trespassing") signs. Look at the 18th-c. slogan *Laissez-Faire* ("No Interference" by government in business): + and - effects!

(3) THE INDIVIDUAL--A.C.L.U. here invests the sacred, with some nutty and some pernicious results (contra God and society). Widened *laissez-faire*.