

authenticate his saying. Two types of sayings in this category are found in the Old Testament.

- (a) The oath formula literally meaning, "your self/soul is alive/living" occurs 5 times (1 Sam 1.26; 17.55; 2 Sam 11.11(2); 14.19). In this context speakers address the addressee as someone superior, swearing by his/her life to authenticate their claim.

Suggested formula

तपाईं/हजुरको जीवन साक्षी राखी म भन्दछु
tapāi/hajurko jīvan sāksḥī rākḥī ma bhandachhu
BT: Acknowledging your life as (my) witness, I say

- (b) The oath formula literally, "Pharaoh is alive/living" occurs only 2 times (Gen 42.15, 16). This is the context where Joseph is accusing his brothers as spies to test them through swearing by the life of Pharaoh, his master.

Suggested formula

फारोको जीवन साक्षी राखी म भन्दछु
Phāroko jīvan sāksḥī rākḥī ma bhandachhu
BT: Acknowledging the life of Pharaoh as (my) witness, I say

Conclusion

This article has presented some guidelines, primarily for the Nepali language and its cultural context. The same principles can be applied independently to other languages as well. It is my sincere hope that those involved in translating the Scriptures, not only in Nepal, but also in our region and beyond may gain some insight from this presentation in finding the appropriate functional equivalents in their respective languages for the Hebrew oath formula. I have proposed the Nepali equivalent core formula "acknowledging the living LORD as (my) witness," with an appropriate action verb like "I say," "I give my word, i.e., I promise," "I assert," as a supplement to it, as suits the occasion. Likewise, other languages must each have their own way of uttering the most solemn statement of intent in a particular form. However, great caution must be taken against the possible risk of selecting random words and phrases in the name of functional equivalence.

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HOW GREEN IS YOUR BIBLE?

Ecology and the End of the World in Translation

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STEPHEN W. PATTEMORE

"... the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."
(Rev 21.1)

Care of the earth's physical environment is becoming an increasingly important issue in our world, particularly in the light of recent reports on the effects of climate change. Christians have not always been to the forefront of action or support for conservation issues. The journal *Conservation Biology* published a debate in 2005 on the role of evangelical theology and its political allies in frustrating urgently-needed measures to tackle problems like species extinction, resource exploitation, and climate change. David Orr alleged:

[C]onservative evangelicals are now complicit with the political forces sweeping us toward more terrible violence and the avoidable catastrophes of climate change and ecological ruin . . . belief in the immanence of the end times tends to make evangelicals careless stewards of our forests, soils, wildlife, air, water, seas and climate.

David Orr, "Armageddon Versus Extinction."
Conservation Biology 19/2 (2005): 291

In reply, Simon Stuart and 30 other Christians from five continents, all involved in conservation biology, disputed the way Orr equated "evangelical" with "right-wing conservative." They stated:

[E]vangelicals are not united in a belief that the universe as we know it will be destroyed at the end of time. Indeed many believe that the overall thrust of biblical theology, built on a number of key texts such as Romans 8:19-23 and Colossians 1:15-20, is exactly the opposite.

Simon Stuart and others, "Conservation Theology for Conservation Biologists: A Reply to David Orr."
Conservation Biology 19/6 (2005): 1690

Yet it is certainly true that a particular view of Christian apocalyptic Scriptures has contributed to an anti-environment position taken by many lawmakers in the U.S.A. Similar views are probably responsible for the lack of environmental concern and action shown by many in the evangelical wing of

in order to urge them not to compromise their faith, but to witness faithfully, following the model of the Lamb, if necessary to the point of death.

And while the message of the book for its first audience is clear enough, it is often the imagery of the visions, and implications drawn from them, that require us to think carefully if we are not to make the book an excuse for various kinds of unethical behaviour.

Destruction unleashed by seals, trumpets, and bowls

Many of the most disturbing passages from an environmental point of view are part of the judgments described in the three series of seven which take up a large part of Revelation—the seals, trumpets, and bowls. But these are not necessarily literal predictions of physical events.

Take as an example the sixth seal (6.12-17) where we read of a great earthquake, the sun darkened, the moon turned to blood, and the stars falling from the sky, the sky vanishing, and all mountains and islands being displaced. Yet there are still people around to hide in the rocks and caves of the mountains. What seems like total destruction of the cosmos is not in fact so. The world continues. These cosmic signs are part of a standard set, an “apocalyptic package,” which at least since Joel’s time were understood to lead up to the “coming of the day of God” (Joel 2.30-32). They stand for the appearance of God and are similar to what happened when God descended on Mt. Sinai. And Peter on the day of Pentecost could state that Joel 2 was fulfilled on that day (Acts 2.16-21). Clearly people could accept that these signs were happening while the world continued normally around them. God had come on the day of Pentecost and the right response was “call on the name of the Lord (and) be saved.” Something very similar is happening in Revelation. The people hiding in the caves are terrified at God’s anger. So these apparently world-shattering events must be read, not literally, but for what they stand for—the terrifying presence of God, something which belongs both to the past and the future.

Again, consider the fourth trumpet (8.12), where a third of the sun, moon, and stars are destroyed. Our knowledge of the earth’s place in the solar system prevents us from holding a literal interpretation which still allows the world and human affairs to continue in any form (as in the passages that follow). The main points are the supernatural origins of these signs, and the ever-increasing devastation, which is yet more intense with the bowls (Rev 16.3-12).

The key to both these sequences is to notice how they parallel the plagues brought on Egypt by Pharaoh’s refusal to release the Israelites. Destruction of water sources, hail, disease, darkness, insect infestation—all can be found in Revelation. The theme of Exodus was not the destruction of the environment and people of Egypt, but rather the deliverance of the oppressed people of God. And Revelation’s story is about the deliverance and vindication of the oppressed and persecuted people of God. They are invited to see their situation in the light of the ancient people of Israel. The pictures of environmental disaster are prophecy—not in the sense of foretelling the future, but in the truer sense of calling humanity to account for its actions. They warn of God’s judgment. They function as promise to the people of God (God is on your side

the church. And while the U.S. may be the most obvious example, it is far from alone in this. In the 2005 elections in New Zealand, one political party, many of whose members are Christians and which openly courted the Christian vote, advanced an environment policy that ignored scientific consensus on crucial environmental matters and spoke out openly against some key environmental protection proposals.

How is it that the same Scriptures, which begin by placing human beings in a garden with the responsibility of caring for it, can be used to justify neglect of the garden, and exploitation of the limited resources available to a growing population? I think the blame lies mainly with interpretations of Scriptures relating to the end of the world. A passage from 2 Peter 3 in the AV puts it plainly:

⁷But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men
¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Bible translation in an era of ecological crisis

At a Christian environmental conference in New Zealand in 2005, several presenters, in the course of grappling with how the Scriptures form attitudes towards the earth, complained that even before interpreters get to work, we have not been well served by the English translation of certain key texts. (For information on this, see the website www.creationcare.org.nz.) And it is my suspicion, based on my own experience, that many minority language translations have followed the translation decisions made in English. I would therefore like here to explore some of those key passages and make some suggestions about their translation. We will come back to consider 2 Peter 3 before we finish, but I want to first examine the book which, perhaps more than any other in the Bible, appears to provide divine backing for trashing the world, the book of Revelation. My main interest here is in the translation of the text, rather than in interpreting, interacting with or reading to oppose the text. And in the end the recommendations I make for the way we translate Revelation will turn out to be slight and subtle and most responsibility still lies with the interpreters of the text. But these small changes, towards the end of the book, depend on an understanding of the book as a whole, the context in the mind of the readers shaped by earlier chapters. So we cannot escape interpretation and I will therefore move from interpretation to translation. In the end I suggest that we ought perhaps to exercise an “option for the earth”—that is, where genuine alternative translations are available, we should choose those that best promote care of the earth.

John’s Apocalypse is best thought of as a prophetic letter. In the tradition of OT prophecy it aims to change the attitude and behaviour of its audience. John’s purpose has been described as being similar to that of the newspapers: “to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” To people faced with difficult decisions in their relationship with the pagan world around them and the demands of imperial cult and culture, John recounts his apocalyptic visions

and will vindicate and deliver you) and warning to all opposed to God and his people.

Positive earth images of protection, cooperation, and justice

With so many negative images of the environment, it is easy to overlook a number of more positive images in Revelation. There are passages where there is specific protection of the environment (7.2-3; 9.3-4). The judgment of God is in fact directed against rebellious humanity, not God's earth. There are passages where the earth itself cooperates with the purposes of God to save and deliver his people (12.16). And there is a concern for justice to be dealt to those who have abused the earth (11.17-18):

The nations raged, but your wrath has come,
and the time . . . for destroying those who destroy the earth.

Finally note the lament over Babylon in Revelation 18. The self-serving economic and political empire represented by Babylon, the great whore, is devastated (2). But this destruction is only appropriate justice for the pursuit of power and wealth and luxury (3, 6-8). And all those who themselves grew rich on her exploitive trade join in lament, with more than a hint of nostalgia for the luxurious living she extracted from the earth. If there is any passage in the book of Revelation which the materialistic, pleasure-loving cultures of our time should hear prophetically, it is surely this one.

The new heavens and the new earth

Reading Revelation as prophetic warning helps to soften the impact on environmental consciousness of many of the negative passages. But perhaps the most important explanation for evangelical neglect of the environment does not lie in the negative passages, but rather in the positive ones! It is the expectation summed up in the words of the old hymn:

*This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through,
My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue,
The angel beckons me from heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.*

In its origins as "negro spiritual," this expressed the longing for escape from the injustice of slavery into a better world. Today, sung by people in comfortable affluence, it more often reflects an attitude which treats the earth and physical life as temporary and disposable. The destiny of the people of God is thought of as somewhere else, somewhere called "heaven." It is important to take this view seriously because (unlike the "rapture") it is built not just on one or two passages but on a network of ideas that runs throughout the Bible (see Norm Mundhenk's article, "Heaven and Earth" in *BT* 57.2 (2006): 92-95). However space will only permit one general comment and a brief examination of relevant passages in Revelation, which raise questions of translation.

In both testaments "the heavens" (as both Hebrew and Greek normally refer to them) are rather ambiguous. They can refer to that part of the universe created by God which lies above the plane of the earth, including the

atmosphere, the sun and moon, stars and planets; the place where birds fly, and from which rain comes. But they are also the place where God lives. This tension is clearly seen in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8.27-30):

Even heaven and the *highest heaven cannot contain you*, much less this house that I have built! . . . O *hear in heaven your dwelling place*; . . .

The New Testament reflects this same tension, but with a couple of additional features. The heavens are now also the place of evil spiritual powers (Eph 6.12). But more importantly, "heaven" has become one of the standard expressions to avoid using the name of God. Thus while there are very many more references to heaven as the source of blessing, of true life and true sustenance, of the spirit, etc., these all reflect the use of "heaven" for "God." So too the many encouragements by Jesus to be part of the "kingdom of heaven" refer primarily to coming under the rule of God, not to travelling to some alternative location. In fact the number of references to anyone "going to heaven" is extremely small. Jesus ascends to heaven (the sky in Luke 24.51 but the dwelling-place of God in Mark 16.19). Paul in a visionary experience is caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor 12.2). John in his vision is invited to come up through the door in heaven (Rev 4.1-2), and the two witnesses within John's vision are taken up to heaven in a cloud (Rev 11.12). Our treasure should be in heaven, our hope is in heaven, our citizenship is in heaven, we expect heavenly bodies, but we are never said to go to heaven. Certainly not in the sense of abandoning earth in order to live in some other location. The life of heaven is life with God. And the ultimate hope described in the book of Revelation is that God comes to earth to live with humanity.

When it comes to Revelation, we must remember that this book describes a visionary experience and its images were never intended to be photographs of reality. Yet heaven and earth are both important symbolic places. Heaven is the place where John sees many of his visions taking place. It is the location of the throne of God, of the 24 elders, the four living creatures (yes, representatives of the animal world in heaven); it is the place from which angels come, from which loud voices are heard, and also the location from which destructive stars and hail and fire fall and where cosmic battles take place. Earth on the other hand is the location of most of the passages relating to the people of God and their struggle. It is also the domain of the unbelieving empires and their kings. It is on earth that the heavenly battle is decided. Earth is a most significant location in the whole story.

But the climax of the book, the fulfilment of all the hopes and longings through the long struggle of God's people, is described in two interacting metaphors.

First, John records seeing a new heaven and a new earth (21.1):

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

To understand this verse we need to see it in its context. It is part of a "mini-apocalypse" which extends from 19.11 to 21.8, filling the gap between

two closely parallel visions in each of which John is guided by an angel: the vision of Babylon the whore, and the vision of New Jerusalem, the bride. The intervening series of four visions reflects the overall movement of the book of Revelation. The last one is 21.1-8 playing the part in this sequence that the longer New Jerusalem vision (21.9-22.9) does in the whole book. This shorter New Jerusalem vision is very closely linked to the previous vision, that of the last judgment (20.11-15). So when we read that the first heaven and first earth have "passed away" (21.1) this is because in 20.11 they have fled from before the face of the Judge. This notion of the cosmos fleeing from before God's face is clearly picture language whose truth does not depend on a literal interpretation of the words. It is just here that our translations may need some attention. How should *apēlthan* (passed away) be translated? RSV, NRSV, and NIV all have "had passed away," while GNT, CEV, NLT all have "had disappeared" and REB "had vanished."

The root verb *aperchomai* essentially means "to go away, depart, leave." There is no instance where it unambiguously means "cease to exist." Certainly in this context, with Rev 20.11-20 so recently in the readers' minds, there is no reason to push the word beyond its normal meaning. The old heaven and earth have, quite simply, left the scene, not been destroyed. The cross-references provided in both GNT and CEV point appropriately to the reference to a new heaven and new earth in 2 Pet 3.13. But for the reader who follows this cross-reference, there will be the added implication from 2 Pet 3.12 that the "passing away" in Rev 21.1 is the same as the destruction of the heavens by fire in 2 Peter. Since modern readers, with a written text in front of them, are much more likely to scan forwards to the rest of the New Jerusalem vision, it would be helpful also to find a way to point them backwards to Rev 20.11 as a close context of interpretation. With this context firmly in mind, supported by a cross-reference, the translation "disappeared" is perhaps acceptable, but translations which move in the direction of "cease to exist" should be avoided. In the Urak Lawoi' NT (1998) we translated rather too strongly as "completely disappeared," perhaps influenced by the Thai (1971) rendering "disappeared completely finished." Appropriately, the 2002 Thai revision has toned down the language to just "disappeared."

It is also in this context that we read that the sea is no more, not as predicting an earth without its marine environment, but as expressing the end of chaos and the power of death. This is precisely because in 20.13 the sea is portrayed as being like Death and Hades because they all contain the dead. Once again it would be helpful for the reader to be pointed back to Rev 20.13 to help understand this puzzling statement. But for the average modern reader, whose normal understanding of the word "sea" does not include the concept of "chaos," it may also be necessary to explain the background in a footnote or information box.

By one careful translation choice and one cross-reference, both well justified, the translation of this passage is no longer locked in to a scheme involving the total destruction of the present order of things. If the destruction of the earth and heavens is no longer explicitly asserted, the reader can readily

understand the "new heavens and new earth" as the result of God's programme of renewal. This is in line with the voice from the throne in 21.5, "See, I am making all things new." Heaven and earth which, old and tired, fled the stage in the previous scene, now return renewed and revitalized.

Secondly we have the positive picture of the New Jerusalem, briefly in 21.2 and more extensively described in 21.9-22.9, "coming down out of heaven from God." Where the previous image was of a new heaven and new earth, here we find the dwelling of God descending from heaven to earth, and the declaration:

See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,

And the longer vision describes the New Jerusalem as bringing together the wealth and variety of urban human culture with the restored and renewed Garden of Eden—humanity restored in its restored environment. This is the Christian hope.

Cosmic conflagration

And so we return to 2 Peter 3, the only NT passage to speak of a destruction of the universe by fire. The idea is a development from several OT passages in which God judges the wicked with fire (e.g., Deut 32.22; Ps 97.3; Isa 30.30; 66.15-16; Ezek 38.22; Amos 7.4; Zeph 1.18; Mal 3.19/4.1). These passages do not speak of a total destruction of the physical world—but this idea developed in connection with the idea of a universal final judgment. For the author of 2 Peter, this idea is a parallel to the universal flood, which in the ancient worldview was a reversal of creation into chaos.

Although the interpretation of this difficult passage is controversial, several things should be clearly borne in mind. First, the author's aim is to combat doubt arising from the delay of the return of Jesus. Secondly, his method is to assure the doubters that judgment is coming. It is the judgment of all human beings which is for him the main defining characteristic of the end. Thirdly, the passage nowhere actually describes the destruction of the physical earth. Careful and conservative translation can therefore leave open possibilities of understanding the passage which functional-equivalence translations may exclude.

Consider first 2 Pet 3.7, which in the NRSV reads:

But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been *reserved for fire*, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless.

NIV translates the highlighted words in the same way as NRSV, but compare: GNT "destroyed by fire"; CEV "set on fire." NRSV and NIV accurately reflect the Greek word *thēsaurizō* (to save up, keep safely) which has a rather positive sense, allowing the possibility that the fire is to purify, not destroy, the physical environment. Destruction is explicitly the fate of godless humanity. GNT and CEV, however, suggest that the result of earth and heaven being stored up for fire is their destruction. This no longer allows a possible link between fire and purification. The key phrase is translated in the Thai

Bible (1971) as "are kept for fire to burn-destroy" and in Urak Lawoi' (1998) "kept in order for fire to burn until completely consumed." However the Thai Standard Bible (2002), which aims to be a formal and, where possible, lexically-consistent revision, has "preserved kept for fire," accurately reflecting some of the positive hints of the Greek.

The second verse to note is **2 Pet 3.10**. This verse is well known for its difficulties—the Greek text is uncertain and its interpretation even more so. This should make anyone cautious in using this passage as the basis for a firm view of the fate of the world. We cannot deal with all the problems here, but will highlight some translation choices which may leave the door open for responsible environmental attitudes.

Compare some of the English translations:

- NRSV: the heavens will *pass away* with a loud noise, and the *elements* will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it *will be disclosed*.
- NIV: the heavens will *disappear* with a roar; the *elements* will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be *laid bare*.
- GNT: On that Day the heavens will *disappear* with a shrill noise, the *heavenly bodies* will burn up and be destroyed, and the earth with everything in it *will vanish*.
- CEV: The heavens will *disappear* with a loud noise, and the heat will melt *the whole universe*. Then the earth and everything on it *will be seen for what they are*.

Note the following issues briefly:

- (1) The heavens (or, better, the sky) will literally "pass by" (*parerchomai*), perhaps echoing Jesus' sayings in the gospels which compare the permanence of his word with the passing nature of the universe (e.g., Matt 5.18; 24.35 and parallels). "Disappear" is probably a fair translation.
- (2) The elements (*stoicheia*) are here probably best translated with GNT as "heavenly bodies" or "stars and planets," but just possibly also referring to the spirit powers thought to control the stars and planets, which are to melt and burn.
- (3) Following this "the earth and the works on it will be disclosed." *Heurethēsatai*, the oldest and best reading of the text, should be translated "will be found" or "will be disclosed." The earth and its works are exposed (not burnt up or destroyed) by the destruction of the heavens, once again underlining the author's concern for discerning judgment, which is further strengthened in the lessons he takes from these declarations. This is that Christians must respond, in the way they live, to the coming judgment of God and the hope of the renewed heaven and earth.

Once again it is helpful to compare back translations of the Thai and Urak Lawoi' of these passages:

- Thai 1971: the sky will pass on ahead completely with a loud resounding noise, and the world-elements will disintegrate with fire, and the world and everything which is in the world will burn up completely.

UL: the whole sky will get lost with a loud resounding noise. All the stars will be destroyed with fire. This earth and everything which is on the earth will burn up completely.

Thai 2002: the sky will vanish with a loud resounding noise and the world-elements will disintegrate with fire and the world and all that is on it will be burnt until completely finished.

The 1971 Thai version preserves a rather accurate translation of *parerchomai* and the Urak Lawoi' opts for "stars" rather than elements, but otherwise the total destruction of the physical earth is explicitly stated in each of these versions. As in the case of Revelation, careful and conservative translation choices would have allowed more room for responsible interpretation of the text within our present environmental crisis.

However, it is neither possible nor desirable to try to line up the text with modern scientific knowledge of the universe. Within the author's worldview it may be possible to imagine that the disappearance of the "heavens" and the destruction by fire of the sun and planets could leave the earth and the work on it exposed, or discovered. But it is not possible from our view of the world. If our descendants are still on the planet in another 5 billion years' time, the predicted expansion of the sun into a red giant before its final collapse will indeed burn up the earth along with the other inner planets. But neither the sun itself nor the stars will be destroyed. It will be a fairly minor catastrophe on the scale of the universe. We do better to translate conservatively and allow the metaphor of judgment (of the wicked) and purification (of the righteous) by fire to guide our understanding. Furthermore we need to hear its encouragement to live lives marked by God's righteousness. And in a passage full of so many background assumptions, translations which aim to be both accurate and responsible will need to help the reader fill in the gaps of their understanding of the original context, using notes, illustrations or information boxes.

Other passages of interest

For their late first-century audience, the passages we have examined about the end of the world build on a background formed by ideas, many of which are found in other passages about God's purposes in the physical and non-human world. Space prevents a detailed treatment of these but one or two key words should be noted before we conclude.

Ktisis is the creation, something which has been created, or the created order. Usually God is the implied subject (except in 1 Pet 2.13) and several times the word is used in a phrase to indicate the very beginning of time (e.g., "from the beginning of creation" or similar, Mark 10.6; 13.19; Rom 1.20; 2 Pet 3.4). Christ is the firstborn (Col 1.15) and the origin (Rev 3.14) of the whole creation, and in union with Christ people are part of a new creation (2 Cor 5.17; Gal 6.15) which is therefore not completely separate from the present creation. The most remarkable passage is Rom 8.19-22 where the word is used four times for the non-human part of the created world. This is spoken of as if it were a person, subject to frustration and groaning, but eagerly expecting its own liberation. This is somehow dependent on the liberation of the "children of

God.” This means that the gospel is indeed good news for the whole of creation. And twice (Mark 16.15 and Col 1.23) there is direct reference to the preaching of the gospel to the whole creation. In almost every case all the English versions translate *ktisis* as “creation” or “the created world” or similar. But in the two latter verses, the functional-equivalence versions avoid the apparently strange idea of preaching to non-human creation. So they translate *ktisis* as referring to humanity (Mark 16.15: GNT “the whole human race”; CEV “everyone in the world”; NLT “everyone everywhere.” Col 1.23: GNT “everybody in the world”; CEV “everyone on earth.”) In Col 1.23, however, NLT avoids the explicit limiting of the audience to humanity, simply translating “all over the world.” Both Thai and Urak Lawoi’ versions follow the lead of GNT in this. But Colossians 1 has already declared Christ to be firstborn of the whole creation, and stated that Christ has reconciled “all things, whether on earth or in heaven.” While it may seem a little odd to talk about preaching the gospel to every creature under the sky, this fits the context perfectly. In our day when the non-human world is desperately in need of good news, this should preferably be left translated as literally as possible, as a stimulus to deeper thought about the implications of Christ’s work.

Two other words often translated by “world” or “earth” are much more common and have many more implied meanings. *Kosmos* occurs 186 times and *gē* 250 times, and their translation needs careful attention to their context. In particular the usage in the Johannine literature is subtle and varied. The Translator’s Handbook on the Letters of John contains a helpful note on five different senses of *kosmos* moving from “the created order” through specifically human references, to the typically Johannine negative meaning of that which is at enmity with God. (“Love not the *kosmos*.”) Nevertheless, if we are to exercise the careful “option for the earth” that I am suggesting, it is likely that a number of passages might need to be re-classified as to the sense of the word which they express. It seems very possible that, in the early part of John’s Gospel at least, the created order is the location for the incarnation and is enlightened by the Word, and while it is the responsibility of humans to believe or not to believe, the object of God’s saving purpose is precisely the created order of things. This should make us cautious about translating *kosmos* in a way that relates exclusively to humans.

⁶For God so loved the cosmos that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. . . . ¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the cosmos to condemn the cosmos, but in order that the cosmos might be saved through him.

Conclusions

Several commentators on the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami described the devastation caused as either “apocalyptic” or “of biblical proportions.” Apocalyptic language may turn out to find new and valuable service in the cause of environmental awareness, but such use is very different from John’s visions. In the book of Revelation, damage to the earth is all part of a standard set of calamities which are associated with the end of the age. They are not the action of human beings on the planet. In the first century and before, and for

many centuries afterwards, there could be no concept of human activity producing such devastation on the earth. The earth itself is so great and its resources so limitless. Dimensions of the earth are the dimensions of unspeakable magnitude: “as many as the grains of sand on the seashore, or the stars in the heaven” is a metaphoric expression of an uncountably large number. We cannot and should not try to make out that first-century Christians were environmentally aware and active. Stress on the environment caused by humans, on a global level, could not have been imagined and the apocalyptic signs of the end of the age are clear evidence of GOD’s intervention.

We live in a different age from John the visionary. In our day, it is not the action of God but the actions of humans that seem to threaten our world. Christians must interpret Scripture in a responsible way, providing a framework for understanding that “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” and that humanity has a responsibility as God’s co-worker in caring for the earth. But responsible Christian interpretation must be based on accurate translations, translations which, while faithful to the first-century Scriptures, also take seriously the current ecological crisis and which are not bound by traditional views on the end of the world. Not only do the passages about the end require careful translation, but so do all references to the physical universe, so that the scope of God’s saving purpose for the whole creation is made clear and every possible encouragement given to God’s people to actively cooperate in bringing about that salvation.

ERIC A. HERMANSON

GET IT RIGHT FROM THE START! Preparing Successful Selections

The author is a retired translation consultant and former Head of the Department of Translation and Text Processing of the Bible Society of South Africa.

Introduction

My experience over more than forty years, first in mission and denominational publishing, and then for 18 years in the Bible Society, is that manuscripts which are far from press ready are regularly submitted for publication.

To reach the correct destination on a journey, we need to start in the right direction and keep going in the right direction to the end. If we do that we are likely to enjoy the journey and arrive at the place we intended, without too much trouble and feeling fine. However, if we do not start right, or we go wrong somewhere along the way, we are likely to have a lot of trouble. We may eventually reach our destination, but we will be tired, frustrated, stressed out, and late!

It’s the same with producing a successful publication. If we start right and we keep going right, we are likely to enjoy working on the production and end up with the publication finished on time and exactly as we intended it to be.