

The Bible's Hidden Treasures -- Why Do I Translate the Bible? (2)

Non-believers stay away from me for fear that I preach to them. On the other hand, believers shy away from me too due to my translations of the Bible (into Mandarin and Taiwanese, each of which is a Chinese dialect) being non-standard. But I do not care. Why should I? It is so much fun doing the translations. Not only that I am learning from the Bible, but I am actually rejoicing!

On top of that, I am taking this opportunity to prove that my Taiwanese systems are working: what better way to prove that certain language systems are working than utilizing them to translate the Bible in its completeness? For those who do not know: there is no such thing as 'an official Taiwanese dialect transcription system'. The reasons for the non-existence are many. One of them is that too many people do not consider having a transcription system for the dialect necessary, considering Taiwanese is only a 'dialect', and that there are transcription systems for Mandarin already, which is the Beijing dialect chosen to be the standard national language for both the Mainland China and Taiwan. These people actually take it for granted that by orally using it day-do-day, generation-to-generation, that dialect will go on forever without having to resort to a system to write it down. (Whew! But wait! How do people write and learn songs? What about scripts for plays and dramas? How do the news announcers do their job? Do they memorize completely orally during the whole process which often requires inter-personal communications? To me, that is impossible. For these people to be able to function without a written system would be more than a miracle. How about people who like to learn Taiwanese? Which system do they go by to learn and to teach?) (The list will go on and on until it reaches a point people begin to doubt if Taiwanese people are civilized!) (By this simple reasoning, obviously, there are Taiwanese transcription systems, only that they are just not official.) (Then why not make one official so that it becomes convenient to people who want to use it?) (.....)

With the computing memories so cheap and computing power so enormous, having a system should at least be no harm. Putting it in a social context, if you want to write to your own parents or grandparents, with whom you have never spoken Mandarin, do you not think it is more appropriate to use a system that is familiar to them? Moreover, to communicate to people in a dialect familiar to them is actually a gesture of love and respect in my opinion.

But who am I to judge?

Back to the fun of translating the Bible, strictly speaking, I am not a Christian in the traditional sense. I believe in evolution – because it makes perfect sense, and I like to read the Bible – because of its beautiful, important, practical and simple moral standards. Still, I consider myself a good Christian. (I know I will have my plate full arguing that point, but let me entertain that idea for the time being.) Not that I actually believe all the miracles mentioned in the Bible, but I do wish they were true, not to mention that they make interesting reading. Miracles do happen to me, several times in my life already. Only that the miracles that happened to me were in much smaller scales than many that happened according to the Bible. But a miracle is a miracle; it does not matter how big or small, or concerning how many people. A miracle is something that simply cannot be explained scientifically. Then how can I explain the fact that I believe miracles do happen as a scientific person? Are not sciences and miracles contradicting each other by nature? How can sciences and miracles co-exist?

The only explanation is that they have to be, meaning, sciences and miracles have to co-exist. Simply put, just as being sweet and being not-sweet are contradicting each other and they do co-exist, by the same token, sciences and miracles have to co-exist while being contradictive to each other. The only reason people are not comfortable with this 'co-existing' idea is that our common perceptions are limited. Simply use some logic reasoning and you will know that sciences and miracles have to co-exist. Let me give one example: ever since a kid I have been wondering if the universe does not have a limit then how can a thing that has no limit exist? If, on the other hand, the universe does have a limit, then what is beyond the limit?

Pardon my shallowness in the understanding of astronomical physics, but do we not have to resort to both sciences and miracles to help explain this mystery? In other words, do not sciences and miracles have to co-exist?

But what are the hidden treasures I referred to in the beginning? I was actually saying that people are more familiar with the big miracles in the Bible, which are elicited by the stories of the Ten Commandments and things with similar significance and familiarity, while at the same time have been not paying so much attention to other and smaller wisdoms. While translating the Bible, I come across interesting facts on daily basis. First of all, I have realized that the Ten Commandments are exactly the same as the traditional Chinese values, word-for-word. Minor treasures are abundant. Paul advised the church members to welcome back those who were lost but need to make sure they themselves are not lost first. Do you know that we have an excellent expression for that in Chinese? 泥菩薩過河自
身難保。 What we are saying is, “For a Buddha to save other people’s lives while crossing the river, He’d better make sure that he himself would not drown first.” Actually, statues of Buddha made of clay are a standard in many parts of China, and therefore, the expression becomes an excellent one to refer to a situation while “one has a hard time taking care of himself.”

Another example is also from one of Paul’s letters. (By the way, I am half way through translating Paul’s letters.) He mentioned the good news that had been hidden by God for ages was being revealed to the saints. We have an excellent expression in Chinese also. We say 醍醐灌頂。 What we are saying is that while one hears the best news, it is like having “the best wine being poured down on his head.”

There are tons of examples in my translations. I also downloaded pictures from the Internet to help expound these wisdoms that have been hidden in the Bible for ages. Please visit my website: MATHisacommonLANGUAGE.com to enjoy the “best wine being poured on your head.”

Thank you for your time.