

Glad News from Mark: a translation of the Greek text by Mary Phil Korsak
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The paper introduces a new translation of Mark's gospel (mine). It relates **1): how I came to do this work. 2): presents the source text (the translator is a first reader) and 3): provides a detailed commentary on the translation before 4) looking at the teaching of the text today.**

1) How did I come to do this work? After seventeen years professional experience, training translators and interpreters at the Brussels *Institut Supérieur pour Traducteurs et Interprètes* in the English and French languages, I gave up my job to follow a course in theology. As a language and literature person I subsequently developed a passion for scriptural exegesis. This in turn meant acquiring sufficient knowledge of biblical Hebrew and Greek to read the texts in the original. (A translator tends to be suspicious of translations!) One day, in a flash, the different choices I had made – the translation bit and the Bible bit - fell together and I decided to undertake a fresh translation of *bereshit* commonly known in English as *The Book of Genesis*. Nine years of painstaking research lead to the publication of *At the start... Genesis made new. A translation of the Hebrew text* (Louvain Cahiers, 1992, Doubleday NY, 1993). More recently, stimulated by curiosity and the desire to explore my favourite gospel as fully as possible, I decided to grapple with the text of Mark. The research involved led me to humbly recognise its astounding richness and again I was inspired to take up the challenge of a new translation. Today, with *Glad News from Mark* I make a jump from the Old, (the First), to the New (the Second) Testament.

2) Presentation of the source text

Under this heading, the paper proposes **a) some general remarks; b) takes a look at the central figure and c) comments on the languages of the source text**

2 a) General remarks

Glad News from Mark is based on the standard academic version, *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland, Deutsche Bibelstiftung Stuttgart 1979*.

The Gospel of Mark, thought to be the oldest of the four canonical gospels (circa 60 Christian Era), is also the shortest. Its sixteen chapters end with verse 16, 8. There are no appearances of a risen Christ and no accounts of the ecclesiastical mission of his followers. To compensate for these seeming omissions, various passages were proposed at a very early date: the best attested version of the complementary text appears in my translation under the heading *appendix* (Mk 16, 9-20). It draws for its content on the other three gospels, Acts, and the Pauline epistles. The theme and style of verses 16, 9-20 differ strikingly from the preceding chapters (1, 1-16, 8).

The main text is a patchwork of different pieces, or *pericopes*, originating in the oral tradition of a Christian community and more or less skilfully bound together by a redactor. The gospel communicates a sense of urgency. The word *euthus/at once/all at once*, which occurs forty-two times, is symptomatic. The story races ahead, leaving the receptive reader breathless and eager for more, ready to weep, ready to laugh. To illustrate: on the one hand, the reader is subjected to the ominous note that increasingly pervades the story as it unfolds (vv 8, 31; 9, 30-31; 10, 33-34): chapter 13 is fearsome, apocalyptic; chapter 15 tells of the unjust assassination of innocence; on the other hand, the reader is invited to rejoice at the unquenchable vitality of the natural world. One pericope describes how the smallest possible seed develops and grows into a tree whose immense branches provide welcome shelter for birds (4, 30-32); another relates how some seeds survive predatory birds, shortage of earth,

scorching sun and smothering brambles. Drawing sustenance from the earth, they grow, against all odds, and bear abundant fruit (4, 3-8).

Broadly speaking, the story follows a curve, comparable to a crescent moon lying on its back or a smile drawn by a child. There is much cause for joy (more banquets than prayers!) before the curve descends towards suffering and death. Then it rises again with an evocation of life renewed beyond the grave (16, 6-8).

2 b) The central figure

The main figure is a man of exceptional energy. He is a healer, a teacher. His presence draws the crowds, while his freedom of spirit provokes deadly animosity. He is quick to anger (1, 41. 43; 3, 5), confrontational (4, 40), capable of biting irony (7, 6), irritated by the slow understanding of his (male!) disciples (8, 17-18), outspoken to the point of harshness (8, 33; 11, 17), ready to undertake fierce argument with the local authorities (11, 27-33). He experiences weariness (8, 21) and frustration (9, 19), yet in the long run he is infinitely patient with his followers (10, 35-40).

His essential message affirms the proximity of a transcendent dimension and consequently he summons his listeners to a change of heart (1, 15), the “heart” being the seat of understanding as well as sentiment. Whereas in Hebrew-Jewish tradition the prevailing metaphor for the divine was kingship, he lays new emphasis on a father-son relationship so intimate that in a moment of agonised apprehension before his death he cries out *abba*, literally ‘Dad’ (14, 36).

2 c) The languages of the source text: Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew, Latin

The gospels are recorded in Greek, the lingua franca of the Mediterranean countries since the time of Alexander the Great (Before Christian Era). Today's readers are often surprised to learn that they are not written in Aramaic, the spoken language of the day in Palestine. Although some Aramaic speech is recorded in Mark, it is translated into Greek in the text. To give an example, the Aramaic words, *talitha cum*, are followed by the Greek translation: *to korasion, soi lego, egeire*

He took hold of the little child's hand and said to her
talitha cum!
which is translated
Girl, I say to you, awake! (5, 41)

Similarly, the Aramaic place-name, *Golgotha*, is followed by its Greek name: “They brought him to the place *Golgotha* – which is translated *Skull Rock*” (literally, *kranion topos/Place-of-a-Skull*, so named because the rock looked like a skull?) (15, 22).

Hebrew plays an important place in the Greek text. The gospel draws heavily on the Hebrew Bible. Verses 13, 22-27, for instance, abound in biblical imagery. It is noteworthy, however, that biblical references bear the imprint of the Greek Septuagint (3rd century B.C.E.). Nevertheless, Hebrew words without translation are found in the text, for example, *Rabbi* (9, 5), *Rabboni* (10, 51), *Hosanna* (11, 9). Furthermore, Greek grammar is affected by Hebrew usage. Verse 2, 15, for instance, follows a Hebrew construction: “Yes, they were many and they followed him” meaning “there were many who followed him”. There are also typical cases of Hebrew tautology: “they feared with great fear” (4, 41); “they were amazed with great amazement” (5, 42)....

Latin is also present. The text is peppered with Latin loanwords. To illustrate, here are some examples with their English renderings: *legio*/legion (5, 9); *speculator*/headsman (6, 27); *denarius*/denarius (6, 37); *census*/poll-tax (12, 14); *flagellare*/flog (15, 15);

centurion/centurion (15, 39). Moreover, in certain Greek phrases it is possible to discern an underlying Latin verb, for instance: *iter facere/* to make one's way (2, 23); *satis facere/satisfy* (15, 15); *genua ponere/* bend the knee (15, 19)... Finally, the meaning of Greek vocabulary is sometimes amplified with a reference to Latin. In one case, the Greek word for *court*, *aules* is explained by the Latin word, *praetorium*: "The soldiers led him away inside the *court/aules* – that is the *praetorium* – and called together the whole cohort" (15, 16). In another case, the value of two Greek coins, *lepta duo*, is estimated in terms of a Roman coin, the *quadrans*: "And there came a poor widow who threw *two copper coins/lepta duo* which make a *quadrans*" (12, 42). Clearly, the use of Latin words is related to the Roman occupation. The word *praetorium* occurs in a specifically Roman context: the *court/praetorium* is that of Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator. The case of the Jewess with her copper coins is more puzzling. Suffice it to say that the handling of Roman coins bearing Caesar's image and inscription would be considered contaminating for a Jew. I must leave it at that.

In summary, four languages are found in the gospel, three of which, Aramaic, Hebrew and Latin, add their colour to the Greek of the source text.

3) Commentary on the translation: a) general remarks; b) the English title and naming; c) Word links d) Restoring and renewing vocabulary; e) Questions of form; f) A new layout

3 a) General remarks

Allow me to say a general word here about the task of translation. Fifty years ago the translator was in the shadow. Today s/he is recognised as an author in her/his own right (see the Unesco Nairobi Convention of 1976). The literary translator relates to a great text much as a musician relates to a score or a dancer to a piece of choreography. S/he acts as a mediator, an interpreter, who re-creates the source text in another language. Practically speaking, literary translation involves an endless number of minute choices, each based on a considerable amount of thought and study. Inevitably, the choices made imply losses as well as gains. While recognising that perfection is impossible, the translator constantly strives towards it. Many discoveries are made along the way, so the effort involved brings its own compensations, but the main satisfaction comes when the task is finished and the end result can be shared with others.

While recognition of literary translation has undergone a revolution, recognition of the work of an individual Bible translator has not. "Mary Phil Korsak is out! Today, Bible translation is in the hands of Committees" (Quote from the president of a panel on Bible translation, of which I was a member, at the Globe theatre, London). Furthermore, the *King James Version* and *The Revised Standard Versions* that followed it have acquired a sacred character. Consequently, translators and readers are conservative: they do not look for novelty.

Glad news from Mark, on the other hand, adopts a different (modern?) approach to translation. This implies that, in keeping with recent translational trends, it attempts to convey a sense of authenticity to today's reader by rendering those peculiarities of the source text which are often glossed over. To give an example, it echoes traces of the underlying oral tradition, which may be considered unsuitable in good prose-writing. Furthermore, I adopt a rigorous approach to the translation of vocabulary (see *Word links* below) and propose a poetic, in preference to a prose, layout. Having completed the work required by these major issues, I felt justified in taking certain two minor liberties: they affect the title and the name of "Jesus". Under the next heading: **The English title and naming** I address these two details first.

3 b) The English title and naming

The title: The *NTG* proposes *Kata Markon*, literally *According to Mark*. The name “Mark” distinguishes this gospel from the other three, so my title includes the name “Mark”. However, in place of the familiar “gospel” or “good news”, I take “glad” from “glad tidings” and end up with *Glad news from Mark*. The new title points to a new translation.

Jeshua With regard to naming, a first option affects the name of the central figure. He is usually known as “Jesus”, transcribed from the Greek *Iesous*. Because the name “Jesus” is overburdened, not to say hackneyed, I distance myself from the Greek here and propose an anglicised version of the original Hebrew name in the form of *Jeshua*.

Other English renderings that may cause surprise are: **god; LORD; I AM**. The following paragraphs explain my choices.

god The source text records *theos*/god with a small letter and the word is usually preceded by the definite article. The equivalent of *theos* in earlier Hebrew tradition is *elohim*, meaning *god* or *gods*. Neither *theos* nor *elohim* are personal names of the deity. I therefore render *theos* as “god” with a small letter.

LORD Second, the word “God”, written with a capital, has generally come to be understood as the personal name of the deity but this view is not supported by scriptural tradition. A digression concerning the tetragrammaton helps clarify what is implied here. In the Hebrew Bible the divine name is represented by the four consonants of the tetragrammaton (transcribed in *At the start... Genesis made new* as *YHWH*). The tetragrammaton is unpronounced and unpronounceable. What happens then when the Hebrew text is recited or read aloud? There are many different ways round this difficulty. One is to pause and observe a moment of silence. Another current way is to replace the tetragrammaton by *adonai/Lord/s*. The Greek text picks up on *adonai*, which it renders as *kurios*. I maintain the current translation *LORD* for *kurios* (however much I personally dislike both words) and make two small modifications to this relic of the tetragrammaton: I write *LORD* with capital letters and without an article.

I AM Third, it is suggested here that another trace of the tetragrammaton is found in the Greek expression *ego eimi/I AM*, which occurs three times in Mark’s gospel (Mk 6, 50; 13, 6; 14, 62). This requires explanation. The four consonants of the tetragrammaton are related to the verb “to be”. Furthermore, in Exodus 3, 14, the divine name is revealed to Moses as “I AM”. Two solutions for the translation of *ego eimi* are illustrated below. The first is from *The Revised Standard Version*, the second from my text

but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart, *it is I*; have no fear” (6, 49-50 *RSV*)

But when they saw him walking on the sea
they thought it was a ghost
They shrieked
Yes, all saw him and were disturbed
At once he spoke with them
Said to them, Courage! *I AM!*
Have no fear (6, 49-50)

The Revised Standard Version adapts *ego eimi* to the immediate context. My choice is different: the link with the tetragrammaton described above, not to mention the extraordinary feat of walking on the sea which here symbolises evil and death, leads me to favour an esoteric rendering: “I AM”.

The above example illustrates a difference of translational approach: where *The Revised Standard Version* concentrates on “meaning”, I give full attention to “words, words, words...”. I hope to show below, under the heading **Word Links**, that detailed attention to specific words is fruitful for meaning also and that it may point in another direction.

3 c) Word links

A basic novelty in the new version concerns the rendering of Greek vocabulary in English. A great deal of spadework has gone into the translation of each word in order to ensure that every Greek word has a corresponding English word. With the help of a concordance, *Concordance to the New Testament, Moulton and Geden, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1989*, I study a particular word in all its contexts before making a definitive choice. The research involved provides the raw material for my translation. The result may be considered poetic rather than didactic, yet it is significant for exegetical studies. For example, in chapter six, seven Greek words used of John the washer appear in the English text as follows: “he is awakened/egerthe” (6, 16); “take hold/ekratesen” (6, 17); “bound/edesen” (6, 17); “kill/apokteinai” (6, 19); “opportunity/eukairou” (6, 21); “corpse/ptoma” (6, 29); “a grave/mnemeion” (6, 29). The same Greek words re-occur in later chapters, with reference to Jeshua and exactly the same English words are chosen to translate them: “he is awakened” (16, 6); “take hold/kratesate” (14, 44); “bound/desantes” (15, 1); “kill/apokteinosin” (14, 1); “opportunity/eukairos” (14, 11); “corpse” (15, 45); “a grave/ mnemeiou” (15, 46). It is suggested that the preservation of word links here represents a gain: it underscores what is common to John and Jeshua, pointing at semantic level to Mark’s presentation of John as Jeshua’s precursor.

By way of comparison, the *RSV* reads “he has been raised” (6, 16) for John, and “he has risen” (16, 6) for Jeshua. Two verbs “raise” and “rise” and two moods, the passive and the active, establish a difference between John and Jeshua which is not found in the source text.

A second example: the Greek word *sindon/a linen cloth*, occurs four times in the Gospel of Mark, twice in verses 14, 51-52 and twice again in verse 15, 46:

A young man followed him
wrapped in a *linen cloth* over his naked body
They took hold of him
But he left the *linen cloth* behind
and naked fled (14, 51-52)

He (Joseph) bought a *linen cloth*
lifted him (Jeshua) down
swathed him in the *linen cloth*
and put him in a tomb hewn out of the rock
Then he rolled a stone up against the door of the grave (15, 46)

As there is no mention of a *linen cloth* elsewhere in the gospel, the double mention in each of these two passages creates a striking cross connection between the episode of the young man and the burial of Jeshua. The episode of the young man is puzzling. Who is he? Why in two brief verses, is attention drawn to his unconventional attire, to his naked body and the *linen cloth* that covers it? This passage has long remained an enigma for readers and exegetes alike.

When connected with verse 15, 46, however, the *linen cloth* acquires particular significance: it is used to swathe Jeshua's corpse; it suggests preparation for burial. Furthermore, in the light of the link established between the young man and Jeshua, the young man's abandonment of the *linen cloth* and his flight can be seen to foreshadow Jeshua's ultimate escape from the grave.

In summary, thanks to a word link, the episode of the young man and the story of Jeshua appear to be mutually enlightening. Remembering that no manifestations of a risen Christ are recorded in the gospel, I suggest that this esoteric evocation is particularly significant.

3 d) Restoring and renewing vocabulary

The language of the gospel is lively, down to earth and rich in metaphor. Whereas translators generally tend to neutralise colourful expressions relating to Jeshua, the present version attempts to echo them. Here are some examples. When Jeshua masters an unclean spirit (1, 25) or the tempestuous wind (4, 39), I have him say "Down, beast!" (literally, *phimotheti/be muzzled*). When dying on the cross, he "shouts out" (*eboesen*) (15, 34). A verb such as "shout" is generally felt to be unsuitable for gospel translation and several Greek verbs are toned down to the one English verb, "cry" (for example, *anekraksen/cried out* (RSV) in 6, 49 above). I have "Jeshua *shouted out* A great cry!" (15, 34). When Jeshua faces the needy crowds, the Greek verb used to denote sympathy evokes a turning upside down of the innards, *esplanxnisthe*. I propose "he felt for them in the pit of his stomach" (6, 34). When he heals a man with skin disease, the Greek participle is akin to the snorting of an animal: it expresses inner turmoil and emotion, anger and displeasure. This seems in keeping with the rough action of the main verb: *embrimesamenos auto euthus eksebalen auton*: "Fuming at him, he cast him out at once" (1, 43). In verse 1, 17, I propose a provocative invitation: "I will make you catch human fish".

Moreover, inspired by the desire to appeal to contemporary readers, the new version makes a deliberate attempt to update the vocabulary of the gospel. Here are a few examples with their current translations: "riddle" for "parable"; "secret" for "mystery"; "trust" for "faith"; "change" for "conversion"; "trip" for "stumble". I also prefer "put him on the cross" to "crucify": it has a beat, easily picked up by a crowd: "Put him on the cross. Put him on the cross..."

The updating of vocabulary in the following passage, quoted first from the *RSV*, then from my rendering, illustrates the difference of effect:

John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins (*RSV* 1, 4-5)

there appeared in the desert John the washer
He proclaimed a washing, a change of heart
freedom from sins
All the country of Judea came out to him
all the inhabitants of Jerusalem also
They were washed by him in the river Jordan
owning their sins (1, 4-5)

It is not easy to break with the long-standing religious tradition that characterises translation of the Scriptures and these few lines required a great deal of thought on my part!

3 e) Questions of form

Besides echoing Hebrew tautology (see above), other characteristics of the source text are reproduced as follows. First, traces of spoken language which survive in the written text from the early oral tradition are maintained as such. The following passage provides an example:

He ordered them not to take anything for the way
- only a stick -
no bread, no bag
no copper for the belt
but shod in sandals
Do not clothe yourselves with two tunics! (6, 8)

Second, when part of a sentence is missing in the source text, it is left missing in the translation. In the following sentence, for instance, an imprecation is implied but not stated. The underlying Hebrew construction expresses strong condemnation:

Amen I tell you
... if a sign is given to this generation! (8, 12)

Another example: in a moment of great loneliness and agonised apprehension, Jeshua makes the following plea;

Said, *abba* – Father –
all things are possible to you
Bear this cup away from me
Nevertheless, not what I want
but rather what you... (14, 36)

The sentence tails off: the expected verb is missing; the blank space makes room for the reader's imagination.

Third, as redactor, Mark assembles pericopes inherited from an oral past to form a continuous text. The written text sometimes bears traces of his editorial work. Verse 12, 35, for instance, begins: "In response Jeshua said, as he taught in the temple..." (12, 35).

The words "In response" open a new pericope, but there is no reference in the preceding passage to the why and wherefore of Jeshua's response. On the contrary, the preceding sentence says "No one dared to question him any more", so "In response" is particularly inappropriate.

Fourth, an interesting example of underlying Hebrew usage is found in the phrase "on the one of the week" (16, 2). The Greek form: "on the first of the week" occurs in verse 16, 9.

Comparable to fossils in the rock, these two phrases indicate two distinct historical strata: the early text and the subsequent appendix. Such detail may be of interest to the exegete and delights a translator like myself who loves juggling with words!

In summary, irregular grammatical forms, awkward constructions, blank spaces, rough-edged transitions and odd phraseology are all carried over from the source text to the new version. Standard translations smooth over these weaknesses in the name of good prose writing. My version maintains them. They bear witness to the history of the text, preserve local colour and create an impression of authenticity which helps convey the reader to another time, another place.

3 e) A new layout

Glad News from Mark is presented with a new format. The spoken rhythms of the source text, which was initially recited, read aloud and listened to, are reflected in a free verse form. The proposed line division makes the conjunction *kai*/and, which is current in the source text and is even found at the beginning of new sentences, superfluous. The free verse form and the sparing use of *kai* lighten the text and make for an easy read as the eye travels down the page. Furthermore, the new form draws attention to repetition in the text: verses 3, 23- 26, for example, read as follows:

He called them to him and told them in riddles
How can satan cast out satan?
If a kingdom is divided against itself
that kingdom cannot stand
If a household is divided against itself
that household will not be able to stand
If the satan rises up against himself and is divided
he cannot stand and that is an end of him (3, 23-26)

Following some modern writers, I also sometimes drop the subject pronoun and write “said”, for instance, rather than “he said”. One word in place of two speeds up the read and underscores the lively style of the original. It also corresponds to the Greek, where pronoun and verb form a single word.

Punctuation is generally omitted. The absence of punctuation links up with the old and the new: punctuation as we know it was unknown to the ancients and it is often minimised or excluded in modern poetics. In the present version, however, I take the liberty of inserting exclamation marks for purposes of clarification or to enhance dramatic effect.

Finally, to allow the reader to perceive the gospel as a complete work of dramatic intensity, the translation is presented without those titles, subtitles or footnotes which have been added with time for the reader’s guidance but which are not found in the source text. However, divisions into chapter and verse, which are also subsequent additions, are maintained to facilitate consultation, or comparison with other versions.

4) The teaching of the text today

Glad news from Mark seeks to create a new, dynamic, contemporary space that can inspire actors, artists, linguists, psycho-therapists, students of the Scriptures as well as the general reader interested in those roots of our culture which are linked to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Though it intends to reach out to a broad readership, I hope it will receive a welcome from believers, comparable to that given to *At the start... Genesis made new*. Here I wish to thank the present Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who kindly wrote of my Genesis translation, “A Hebraist myself, I wish all the Hebrew Bible could be translated in this way”. At the other end of the religious spectrum, the UK organisation *Religious Education Today* has singled out my version of creation for a re-print. The editor, Anstice Hughes, explains that it has potential appeal for “prejudiced adolescents”. I take that as a god omen (lapsus maintained!)