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## SHONA BIBLE TRANSLATION THE WORK OF THE REVD MICHAEL HANNAN, S.J.

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THE PURPOSE OF this article is to evaluate Fr Hannan as a translator, the difficulties that he faced in his work, and the contribution that he made to the New Union Shona Bible. I shall confine my evaluation of this translation to the New Testament, as I have not read his translation of the Deutero-canonical books; but I will also quote some comments that he made on the New Union Shona Bible.

When Fr Hannan died, scholars knew that a great colleague had passed away. It is not only his *magnum opus*, the *Standard Shona Dictionary*, that he has bequeathed as a legacy to the Shona literary world but also a treasure for which the Shona Christian community will ever be thankful — his translation of the New Testament and the Deutero-canonical books. He also made a valuable contribution to the New Union Shona Bible that will soon be in circulation.

I visited Fr Hannan a month before his death and discussed with him the mechanics and problems involved in translation, particularly of the Bible. Fr Hannan told me that his difficulties in translating the New Testament had been numerous: the Shona people spoke many dialects and he had, therefore, to take cognizance of this fact in his translation; that about half of the translation was entirely by himself and might therefore be discounted by native Shona speakers as 'ChiBaba' (which can be freely interpreted as the 'Shona spoken by missionaries'); and that some missionaries who knew Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic maintained that some of his translation did not do justice to the original, and, therefore, did not measure up to the world's standard of translation (and for this reason some Catholic missionaries even preferred to use the Dutch Reformed Church (Morgenster) translation). Indeed so strong were such feelings that as I left Fr Hannan's room, the passage from Wordsworth (*Epitaphs and Elegiac Pieces IV*) echoed in my mind:

There never breathed a man who, when his life  
Was closing, might not of that life relate  
Toils long and hard. The warrior will report  
Of wounds, and bright swords flashing in the field,  
And blast of trumpets. He who hath been doomed  
To bow his forehead in the courts of kings,  
Will tell of fraud and never-ceasing hate,  
Envy and heart-inquietude, derived  
From intricate cabals of treacherous friends.

Fr Hannan also told me how he wished that he had been a native speaker so that he could have rendered his translation more intelligible and meaningful. In entertaining thoughts like these, Fr Hannan was probably not sufficiently aware of his literary capabilities and what the academic world thought of him. In the words of Seneca in *Thyestes*, 'He was too well known to all, but to himself unknown.' He was humble, not puffed up with pride. The Shona sages say, 'Nyanzvi haizviridziri mupururu' (An expert never blows his own trumpet).

However, it must be admitted that his apprehensions were not altogether groundless; for translating from one language to another is a difficult operation, particularly when one is not a native speaker of both the source and receptor languages. In assessing Fr Hannan as a translator, there are some general aspects of translation that need to be borne in mind. Translation can be horizontal, from one contemporary language into another, as say, from English into Shona. It can be vertical, from a language of the past into a language of today as say, from ancient Hebrew into French. Translating the Bible seems to be a blending of both horizontal and vertical translations.

Nida<sup>1</sup> gives three principal methods in translation: literal translation; translation of ideas; and translation based upon the closest equivalents. Literal translation is word for word translation which cannot be used to much advantage; for no two languages correspond throughout in their phrases, idioms, grammatical usages and words. Such a literal type of translation may distort the facts of a language, and sometimes make what is being translated meaningless. The following English examples are quite unintelligible when literally rendered into Shona: My father-in-law (Baba wangu mumutemo); I question the wisdom of such an action (Ndinovhunza ungwaru hwechiito chakadaro).

In translating ideas, a Shona translating from the Hebrew would ask himself this question: 'What would the author have said if he had been using Shona instead of the Hebrew?' This method of rendition cannot be totally rejected; it can be useful sometimes, but according to Nida such a method suffers from some serious handicaps. He says that in 'the translation of ideas' method, the translator tends to give an interpretation rather than a translation that is close to the original.

Nida advocates that a translation based upon the closest equivalent in the two languages strikes the *via media* between two extremes of literal translation and translation of ideas; for the method of closest equivalence is intended to check over-literality on the one hand and unjustified interpretation on the other.

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Nida, *Bible Translating* (New York, American Bible Society, 1947), and *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden, Brill, 1964).

According to Nida, there are three basic requirements a translator needs to satisfy in order to obtain the closest equivalent in translation:

1. The translation must represent the customary usage of the natural language; in other words, the translator must not concoct phrases, idioms and sentence structures that are foreign to the native speaker. The choice of words should, as far as possible, be based on two factors, the cultural significance of the item to which the word refers and the linguistic status of such a word.

Nida warns that in what is called the 'equivalence' method there is rarely exact equivalence. For as already pointed out, two corresponding words in different languages rarely enjoy the privilege of identical interpretation.

2. The translation must make sense, because it is not just a translation of words from one language into another, but the translation of a communication from one language into another. That is why a translator must know the precise meaning of the message in the source language so that he can accurately express that meaning in the receptor language. All translators need, therefore, to have a good knowledge of the linguistic structures of the two languages. According to Nida, this means that the translator must know how the language in question 'generates' sentences and how the structures so generated are related to one another: without that knowledge he cannot manipulate the structures readily and effectively. It is also absolutely vital that the translator be versed in the knowledge of the meanings of syntactic structures. Lack of this knowledge is often the translator's weak spot because, in consequence, he will lack not only an understanding of the meaning of individual words and phrases, but also a fundamental appreciation of the meanings of constructions.

Thus, it is obvious that the translator must have a complete understanding of lexical elements whether endocentric or exocentric. It is also imperative that the translator be sensitive to, and capable of producing, an appropriate style. A language like Shona which has only recently been reduced to writing will present innumerable difficulties, for it is a language that has consecrated expressions which it is desirable to use in certain contexts, proverbs and idioms in which the translator must be versed.

3. The translation must conform to the meaning of the original. This is particularly so in the case of the Bible, which Christians believe is the heritage of the entire Christian world, and which should not be made a vehicle of one's own cherished theories of interpretation.

This is not so easy to achieve, since every translation does to some extent represent the theological views of the translator. Nida says that the complete avoidance of bias in translation is impossible, but the bias can be kept to a minimum.

## FELICITOUS RENDERINGS

In the light of what I have said, I shall now closely examine Fr Hannan's role as a translator of the New Testament. Of course, Fr Hannan was not a native speaker of the source and receptor languages; and Nida says that, from a theoretical point of view, only the person, who knows both the source and receptor languages and both cultural backgrounds as a member of such linguistic and cultural groups, is able to understand the complete denotative and connotative values of the material he handles in his work of translation. Fr. Hannan was a man who had studied his Shona extremely well and had acquired an enormous vocabulary and a deep knowledge of Shona linguistic and syntactic structures; and it was the accumulation of such knowledge that enabled him to produce a first-class Shona dictionary. Equipped with such knowledge, he was also able to leave behind him a translation of the New Testament that is treasured by many: a translation that is in the living language of the people. For if a translation is to be any good, it must be addressed to the times in which it is written. Grant says that one of the main reasons why the Revised Version of 1881-5 failed, and along with it the American Standard Edition of the Revised Version in 1901, was that it did not address the world in which men lived.\* Fr Hannan tried to obviate this difficulty by trying to use the Shona that has been handed down from generation to generation and by the use of formulaic expressions, idioms, phrases that are familiar.

Let me illustrate what I am saying by examples taken from Fr Hannan's *Chitenderano Chitsva*<sup>2</sup> compared with the version in the *Jerusalem Bible*.<sup>3</sup>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Kuzoti kwapera mazuva anenge akati, wakapindazve muKafanaum | When he returned to Capernaum some time later . . . |
| ... (Mark 2:1).  | ... (Mark 2:1).                                     |

*Mazuva anenge akati* is an idiomatic expression that is used in everyday language, and is also used by Shona authors, particularly Chakaipa.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 2. Zvaakanga achivaparidzira Dama, kwakauryiswa kwaari munhu akange akaoma mitezo, akaitwa dekamuteka navanhu vana | 2. He was preaching the word to them, when some people came bringing him a paralytic carried by four men. |
| (Mark 2:2)   |   |

*Akaitwa dekamuteka*, also, is an idiomatic expression, familiar to adult Shona-speakers but one which the Shona would hardly expect a non-Shona speaker to use. It is too polished a phrase to be used even by an ordinary Shona speaker.

\* F. C. Grant, *Translating the Bible* (Edinburgh, T. Nelson, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> *Chitenderano Chitsva* translated by M. Hannan (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> *The Jerusalem Bible* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966).

3. *Farai imi kana muchitukwa noku-shushwa nokureverwa nhema dziri dzose pamusana pangu. Farai mufarise kwazvo, nokuti mubayiro we-nyu mukuru kudenga* (Matt. 5:11-12).

The grammar of this passage is faultless and the sentence structure is very well formed. It sounds quite natural to a Mushona; and *Farai mufarise* is a beautiful piece of good linkage and parallelism.

4. *Kuzoti ava mangwana, zvaakanga odzokera kuguta akati onzwa nzara. Ndokuona mukuyu uri munyasi menzira, ndokuchitsaukira kwauri, asi akauwana uchingova mashizha chete. Akachibva auti 'Usambozofazve wakabereka michero narini'* (Matt. 21:28).

Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

As he was returning to the city in the early morning, he felt hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it and found nothing on it but leaves. And he said to it, 'May you never bear fruit again'.

The sentences in this passage are constructed in a good natural order. The adverbial clauses, *Kuzoti ava mangwana* and *zvaakanga odzokera*, are used in everyday language; and so are the consecutive clauses, *akati onzwa nzara* and *ndokutsaukira kwauri*. The negative imperative *Usambozofa* is almost a formulaic expression.

5. *Houno mumwe muenzaniso waakataura achinanga vamwe vaizvivunga kuti isu ndisu takarurama, vachishora vamwe* (Luke 18:9-10).

He spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else.

As in the other passages, the Shona in this passage is faultless. It contains good Shona expressions: *houno*; *achinanga*; *isu ndisu*. It also contains the direct speech characteristics of Shona: *vaizvivunga kuti isu ndisu takarurama*. The indirect speech is foreign to Shona, although writers of novels under the influence of English use it now.

6. *Kwaiya nomumwe murume woku-mbahuru wakaenda kuneimwe nyika yokurekure kuti andopiwa uma-mbo, achizodzoka* (Luke 19:12).

A man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and afterwards return

Anybody who is familiar with Shona traditional literature, will recognize at once as one of the conventional beginnings of the *ngano* (folklore): *kwaiva nomumwe murume*. The passage is so well translated that it does not sound like a translation but as an ordinary piece of folklore.

7. *Kudai wanga uchiziva nhai kuti chaunopiwa naMwari chii, nokudai wanga uchiziva kuti iyeyi uyu ari kukuti ndipeiwo chokunwa ndiani,*

If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: 'Give me a drink', you would have been the one to

ungadai uri'we watenge watomuku-  
mbira, iye achidai akupa mvura  
mhenyu (John 4:10).

ask, and he would have given  
you living water.

This is a beautiful piece of rendition and few Shona would be able to express themselves so succinctly and so well. *Kudai wanga*, *ungadai*, and *achidai akupa* are parts of the complicated machinery of the expression of hypothetical conditions and consequences which feature eminently in this passage.

8. Kuzoti zuva rodoka vadzidzi vake  
vakaburuka kugungwa, ndokukwi-  
ra mugwa, vonanga mhiri ku  
Kafanaumu. Kwakatenge kwasviba,  
Jesu wakanga achigere kuuya kwa-  
vari, gungwa ndokuchitanga kuiti-  
swa mafungu nedutu rakanga ro-  
vhuvhuta. Pavakati vakwasva igwa  
kwemaira dzinenge nhatu kana ina,  
ndipo pavakaona Jesu achiswadera  
kugwa, achifamba napamusoro pe-  
mvura (John 6:16-20).

That evening the disciples went  
down to the shore of the lake  
and got into a boat to make for  
Capernaum on the other side of  
the lake. It was getting dark by  
now and Jesus had still not re-  
joined them. The wind was  
strong, and the sea was getting  
rough. They had rowed three or  
four miles when they saw Jesus  
walking on the lake and coming  
towards the boat.

This passage is again so beautifully translated that it does not sound like a translation. It is very natural. The translator, as he has done in a number of passages in the four gospels, exploits idioms effectively. If one reads this passage to a group of non-Christian Shona they would understand what was being said without any difficulty, because that is the way the Shona speak. Nida, speaking of 'Bible translating', has this to say about the criterion of good translation: 'The real test of the translation is its intelligibility to the non-Christian who should be reached by its message' (p.21).

The eight passages I have cited reflect, as a whole, the beauty of the verbal art in the *Chitenderano chitsva*. The three versions of the parable of the sower in Matthew, Mark and Luke are masterpieces. They reflect both the verbal art and the skill of the traditional *sarungano* (story-teller).

## CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM OF THE NEW UNION SHONA BIBLE

In addition to Fr Hannan's general good translation of the four gospels there is to his credit the contribution he made to the New Union Shona Bible, which is a revision of the previous Shona Bible which has recently been published by the Bible Society of Rhodesia. The Catholic Bishops decided to adopt this version rather than cherish the idea of producing their own entire Bible; so after Fr Hannan had finished translating the New Testament, *Chitenderano chitsva*, they stopped him from proceeding with the translation of the Old Testament. Instead, in agreement with the other churches, they asked him to read through the New Union Shona Bible which the Bible

Society had just completed translating, in order to propose suggestions and amendments in the translations that would make it acceptable to the Catholics. This task he performed thoroughly and earned renown among the non-Catholic translators.

Before writing this article I paid a visit in August 1978 to Fr J. M. Samupindi, who is in charge of the New Union Shona Bible team of translators, and asked him: 'To what extent has Fr Hannan been helpful to you in your translation?' He rejoined: 'He polished the language, improved the grammar and the spelling'. I asked further, 'Did you accept many of his suggestions?' He answered promptly, 'Father Hannan went through the whole of our translation line by line and made suggestions and rejected certain words; we accepted most of his suggestions. Whenever we turned down some of his suggestions, we did so with good reasons.' I pursued my questions. 'Could you elaborate a little more on Fr Hannan's contribution to the work of your team?' He observed:

Well, I can do so but it will sound like repetition. Fr Hannan knew his Shona grammar and we did not know it; so he helped us out when we got stuck in matters of grammar. His knowledge of Shona was unparalleled. He was knowledgeable and knew what he was doing. I appreciated his critical ability, which enabled us to improve very much the present New Union Shona Bible. His dictionary was also very useful for our translation work. His knowledge of the various dialects helped us tremendously, as our goal was to produce a multi-dialect Bible. In short, I can say that he added certainty to uncertainty. After he had read, made suggestions, and approved of what we had done, we felt confident.

Is this not ironical? Here is a man who thought towards the closing days of his life that he had misspent his time and here is a priest who lauds him for his good work!

I persisted with my questions. 'How much of his *Chitenderano chitsva* did you adopt?' Fr Samupindi answered, 'Our team did not use his *Chitenderano chitsva*'. When I asked why, he replied that Fr Hannan's *Chitenderano chitsva* was based on one dialect whereas their translation of the New Union Shona Bible was a fusion of nearly all Shona dialects, being intended for the whole of Mashonaland. This obviously raises the question: Was Fr Hannan's translation designed for the Zezuru-speech community or for the whole Mashonaland-speech community? The dialect is certainly Zezuru!

To put what Fr Samupindi says in perspective let me cite some of Fr Hannan's comments to the New Union Shona Bible team which are retained in Bible House, Salisbury:

#### Mavambo (Genesis)

It is not with a hope of changing your policy but because my conscience obliges me to make a formal objection I have to state that the use of *doro* to translate 'wine' is not acceptable; the reasons are not dogmatic, but because this goes beyond the limits



of dynamic equivalence and amounts to wrong translation. The same must be said for the translation of 'sacrifice' by *diramhamba* in Gen. 31:54; 46:1.

Just for the record, it seems to me that the use of pre-1966 orthography, for the spelling of proper names only, may prejudice the use of the Shona Bible as a school reader.

#### Chapter 2:

- 2 1 A river flowed from Eden to water the garden etc: *rwizi* has wider dialect distribution than *rukova*.  
The river does not go to the East of Assiriya, it flows roughly from N.W. to S.E. and divides the country of Assiriya in two etc.

#### Chapter 3.

- 14 5 1: *Uchakweya*: is the equivalent to 'crawl'? Would not *kuzvova* or *kugweshwa* or simply *kufamba* be better?  
17 4 2: Would *ivhu* be a better equivalent than *nyika*?  
18 2 3+4 *is miti yomusango* equivalent to 'plants of the field'? Why not *zvinomera musango*?  
2 2: *Aine* — this suggests that the cherubim held a sword. All commentaries I have consulted say that the flaming sword was a separate thing, in addition to, and joined to the cherubim.  
2 2 5: *Chipo*—Very many informants tell me that *Chipo* is not the equivalent of an offering from an inferior to a superior, but only the free gift from a superior to an inferior. If this be true, *Chipo* should not be used for an offering by man to God, either here or verses 4 and 5.  
2 2: *nehwayana* — Most translators describe Abel as bringing of his firstlings, not all his firstlings; many also make the offering a double one: of his firstlings and of their fat portions. Only the New American Bible has 'one of the best firstlings of his flock'. Hence I suggest a small change: *Aberi akauryawo neimwe yehwayana dzake dzamatangwe akakora* (or *yakakora*).

#### Exodus/Kubuda Chapter 3:

- 2 2 4: *murazvo* is peculiar to ChiKaranga; suggest *rimi* which is common to all dialects = *murimi romoto raibuda mugwenzi*.  
8 1 5+6 *ndivarwire pavaljipti*: This is strange Shona, why not *Ndivanunure kuvaljipti*?  
11 3 1: *Ndinoobudisa* (not *ndinobudisa*).  
16 1/1.W.  
-2/1: *Undotonga namambo*: to which Hebrew words do these Shona words correspond?  
3 3-1 W: This sentence is difficult to understand in the original. Does this allow a translation so free that nothing of the original remains? Suggest: *Chokwadi uri murume wangu weropa*.

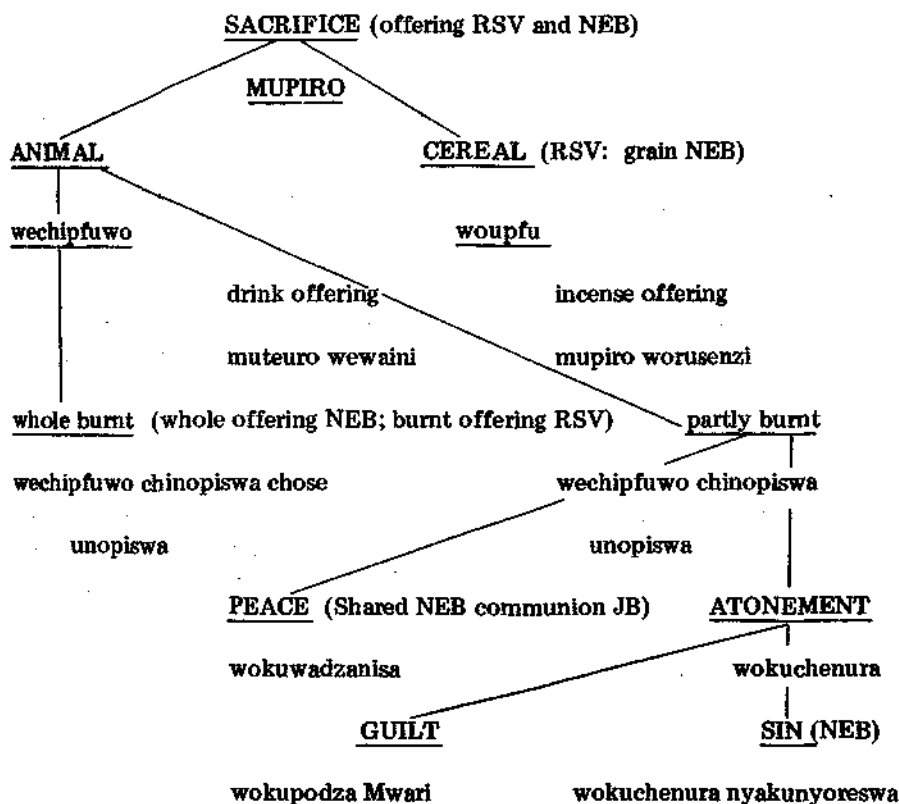
Mupiro/LeviticusGeneral Comment:

Only by overcoming an extreme repugnance was I able to read through the whole of this book.

Two usages are found extremely repugnant:

1. The usage of the Shona word *chipo* to translate 'offering made to God'. In Shona ritual the word *chipo* is not used for 'an offering made to the *mudzimu*', still less could it be used for 'an offering made to God'. The correct word would seem to be the word chosen for the name of the book, that is *MUPIRO*.
2. The insistence on the use of the Shona word *diramhamba* as equivalent to 'sacrificial victim' or 'offering made to God'. Such combination of Shona words as *diramhamba rezitadzo* and *njiva yava diramhamba* are forced substitutions of Shona words for English words, the Shona having meanings of the English words in Hebrew ritual. In Shona ritual *diramhamba* is not a sacrificial victim, it is an animal dedicated to a spirit elder and symbolises the presence of that elder among the living members of the family; this spirit elder's *permission* is asked before the *diramhamba* is slaughtered.

The following is a schematic presentation of the different kinds of offerings and suggested Shona equivalents:



**Kuverengwa/Numbers***General Comments:*

In the book of Numbers, among the words in English for which Shona equivalents are difficult to find are: ark, bdellium, coriander, ephah, hin, log, *priest*, sacrifice and *tent*.

There seems to be no intrinsic reason why the already accepted shonalized borrowed words for the words underlined in the above list are rejected, since the words bdellium, coriander, ephah, hin and log have been shonalized by the translators.

What is the extrinsic reason? It cannot be just the principle, 'if you use a borrowed word you are not translating' because borrowed words are used for bdellium etc. The translators seem to have been compelled to substitute other words, borrowed or not, in place of the words that have been used in previous translations and are already familiar to at least half of the Shona-speaking population.

*Bhokisi* is used to replace *areka*; for most Shona speakers the word *bhokisi* denotes coffin, an unfortunate choice for the ark of the Covenant.

*Dumba* is used in place of *tende/tente*, as if no Shona-speakers ever used the word *tende*, or that a tent was quite unknown to them. It is true, and therefore worth bringing out, that familiarity with tents is a distinguishing mark between nomads, such as the Israelites, and peasants, such as the Shona. How could the Israelites build temporary shelters (*matumba*) in the arid deserts? How can the translators use the word for 'temporary shelter' for a structure so elaborate and so precisely described as the 'tent of meeting'?

*Dumba rokusangana* is the translation of 'tent of meeting'. Apart from *dumba* being not acceptable in place of *tende*, the qualifying word *rokusangana* is neither adequate nor free from associations that are inappropriate for the place where God meets the people of God. For the qualifying word, *rokusanganirana* would be more acceptable.

*Diramhamba*: the way in which this word is used indiscriminately suggests that the translators used a concordance and slapped down *diramhamba* wherever 'sacrifice' or even 'offering' occurs in the concordance, whether the object offered be living or material, e.g. gold plates, waggon etc. In Shona ritual *diramhamba* is not a beast of sacrifice; it is a beast dedicated to a spirit elder and symbolic of his presence among the living.

These few examples of the detailed comments that Fr Hannan made on the translation of the New Union Shona Bible show how meticulously he went through it, line by line. For a man like Fr Hannan, the Shona would use the proverb: *Mbavarira inoda vane nharo* (Perseverance calls for impetuous people). Despite this he was unable to persuade the team not to use *svikiro* for prophet, and *bokisi rechitenderano chitsva* for ark of the covenant etc.

## LAPSES IN THE TRANSLATION

I have indicated the strength of Fr Hannan's translation, I now turn to what I consider one of his weak points. He sometimes uses unnatural sentence constructions which a mature native speaker of Shona would not use. I shall draw a few examples from his *Chitenderano Chitsva*.

1. *Kwaiva nomunhu wakatumwa naMwari, wainzi zita rake Yowane.* A man came, sent by God. His name was John (John 1.6).

The words of this sentence are not in the normal Shona order. People would understand it, but no mature Mushona would speak in this way. We would either say: *Kwaiva nomunhu akatumwa naMwari ainzi Yowane* or *Kwaiva nomunhu wakatumwa naMwari ane zita rainzi Yowane*.

2. *Kukura kunofanira kuva kwake, kuderera kuve kwangu* He must grow greater. I must grow smaller (John 3.30).

The sentence 'He must grow greater', as spoken by John the Baptist, refers to the growth of Christ's influence whereas the word *kukura* should be used to refer only to physical growth.

3. *Zuva rePentekoste rakazosvika, rikawana vose vakaungana, vari pamwechete.* When Pentecost day came round, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven (Acts 2:1).

*Rikawana vose vakaungana* may be a good English or Hebrew or Greek construction, but it is certainly not a construction acceptable to the native Shona-speaker. We just do not use such an expression as *zuva rakawana* in this context.

4. *Varume vaIsrael.* You Israelites (Acts 3:12).

Unless this is a misprint, it means 'The husbands of Israel'!

5. *Imi ndimi vana vavaProfita ne-vechitenderano chakaita Mwari, (achitenderana) nemadzitateguru edu.* You are the heirs of the prophets, the heirs of the covenant God made with our ancestors (Acts 3:24).

The word 'heirs' is not translated by *vana* (children), but by something much more specific such as *vagari venhaka*. Further the translation seems to require a passive, *chakaitwa naMwari*, rather than the active inverted form *chakaita*.

6. *Zita rake rinoera. Anonzwira tsitsi kuna avo vanomutya.* Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him (Luke 1:48).

The applied extended verb stem *nzwira* (feel for) requires the use of two object complements, *tsitsi* (mercy) and *avo vanomutya* (those who fear Him), not an object and an adverbial locative phrase *kuna avo vanomutya* (lit. where those who fear Him are).

7. *Zita remhandara iyo ainzi Maria. Angere akamuti, 'kwaziwai Mambo anemi' pakunzwezvi, zvakaivomukangaidza Angere ndokumuti, 'Musatye, VaMaria.'*

The singular and the plural are used interchangeably; for example (Luke 1:26-46):

Such a mixture of registers is not characteristic of Shona. In Shona novels, if the narrator is talking about VaMarumbeni, he will keep on using the plural of respect. Obviously, registers are changed but not in such a capricious way. As Fr Hannan was a Catholic, his translation of this passage might have been influenced by his respect for Mary and hence the plural of respect.

8. *Zvaaijamba munyasi megungwa reGaririya, Jesu wakaona mukoma nomununguna vari vaviri, Simoni anonzi Petrosi, nomununguna wake Andreyu.* As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew (Matt. 4:18).

This syntax is unnatural in Shona and would not come from a native Shona speaker. In Shona, once one says, *Mukoma nomununguna*, it is already implied that they are two, and the use of *vaviri* is not only redundant but inappropriate.

9. *Ngwarai kuti murege kuita ururami hwenyu pamberi pavanhu nokuda kuti muonekwe navo.* Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice (Matt. 6:1).

An abstract noun such as *ururami* is not a proper object for the verb *kuita* (to do, make, etc.)

10. *Regai kuzviita utongi hwezvava-mwe.* Do not judge, and you will not be judged (Matt 7:1).

This is not the way the Shona speak! We would simply say, 'Musatonga vamwe', or more clumsily, 'Musazviita vatongi vavamwe'. *Utongi* is an abstract noun like judgement. How then can one be *utongi*?

11. *Houno munhu aiya namapere-mbudzi akauya kwaari, akamupfugamira.* After he had come down from the mountain large crowds followed him. A leper now came up and bowed low in front of him. (Matt. 8:2).

The form *houno* (here is one) is used to indicate the present tense: hence cannot be used of past actions or states.

12. *Ndiro Dama rakanaka raMwanakomana wake, wakazozvarwa ari wedzinza raDavidi nezvounmunhu hwake.* This news is about the Son of God who, according to the human nature he took, was a descendant of David (Romans 1:3).

The phrase *nezvounmunhu hwake* appears to be a translation of the Jerusalem Bible's version 'according to the human nature he took'. The phrase *sezvino-itwa vanhu* is a far more natural and idiomatic way of conveying this idea which is beyond human experience.

13. *Ndinokukwazisai mose, vadikani nwi vaMwari, munogara Roma, imi makadanwa kuti muve vanhu vaakazviitira vake.*

To you all, then, who are God's beloved in Rome, called to be saints, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace (Romans 1:7).

The phrase *vaakazviitira vake* involves the use of the reflexive */-zvi-/* in the applied extended verb phrase *-itira vake*: a combination which sounds extremely contrived. The rendering *vaakasaruza kuti vave vanhu vake* sounds preferable and much more natural.

14. *Ndinogarakumbirisa kuti zvi-mwe, zvichida, nokuda kwa-Mwari, ndigozowaniswa pandingaerekane ndazosvikawoko kwamuri.*

The God I worship spiritually by preaching the Good News of his son knows that I never fail to mention you in my prayers, and to ask to be allowed at long last the opportunity to visit you, if he so wills (Romans 1:10-11).

This is a needlessly involved rendering. The whole of the consecutive clause from *ndigozowaniswa* onwards would be far more simply translated as *ndibvumidzwewo kusvikako kwamuri*.

The fourteen examples cited show that the weakness of Fr Hannan's translations lies in sentence structure and, to a lesser extent, in syntax. Nida points out that in a translation, all the words of a language may be correct, and yet the translation may not be understood by the native speakers because of the sentence structure employed. He comments on the unintelligibility to native speakers of certain translations: 'In several instances natives have been observed to read a translation in their own language quite well and yet fail to understand the meaning because the grammatical structure was so unnatural and complicated that they could not follow.' Nida further observes: 'Not only must the length of the clauses and their subordination be adjusted in many instances, but the order of the words and phrases must be carefully considered.'

Fr Hannan's translation is often disappointing in this regard. Was he too anxious to keep close to the original text of the Bible? I remember suggesting this to him, and his answer was, 'Our translation must keep as close as possible to what the Bible means.' Unfortunately, if keeping as close as possible to the original text means generating the type of sentences that I have cited, then the translation would defeat its own purpose; it would fail to deliver the *meaning* and *message*.

The question that springs to mind is whether Fr Hannan had not sufficiently internalized the linguistic and syntactic structures so that he could generate sentences that are acceptable to the native speaker; but the good sentences that we cited earlier, the remarks made by Fr Samupindi, and Fr Hannan's own fame as a good Shona-speaker would tend to refute

this idea. What then is the explanation? Was the good translation in *Chite-nderano Chitsva* done by somebody else or in collaboration with him and the bad translation by him alone? This is difficult to decide; but as one of his colleagues in the work of translation and from contact with his co-workers, I can only surmise that the lapses in his work were due to an incomplete grasp of the whole range of Shona idiom. He found it difficult to abandon certain habits and usages even where these were found deficient or misleading by native speakers. There was also a certain obstinacy at times in his response to corrections and criticisms and this may go some way towards explaining why certain passages do not succeed. Furthermore, certain parts of the New Testament, notably from Acts to Revelation inclusive, did not receive the same attention from others as the Gospels did. Obviously, it might be due to a number of other causes, for I do not pretend for one moment that I have exhausted all the possibilities.

### CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding all that I have said, Fr Hannan was definitely a verbal artist. It is rare that a man's artistic achievement is sufficiently appreciated in his lifetime or ever fully appreciated at all. Although his outstanding contribution to Shona literature and culture was acknowledged by an honorary degree of D. Litt. from the University of Rhodesia, posterity may yet discover much that we have missed in him. The Shona have a proverb which succinctly endorses my suggestion: 'Muchero unokurumbira wakuva' (The deliciousness of a fruit is highly praised when the fruit is out of season).

Finally, this article should not be misconstrued as an attempt to minimize Fr Hannan's gigantic intellectual stature but rather seen as an endeavour to pay tribute to the greatness of his achievement, especially in view of the fact that he was a native speaker of neither the source nor the receptor language that he worked on.