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Some Inappropriate Anthropomorphic Interpretations of the Image of God – A New Proposed Translation of James 4: 5¹

PRUŽINSKÝ, Š.: Some Inappropriate Anthropomorphic Interpretations of the Image of God – A New Proposed Translation of James 4: 5. *Slavica Slovaca*, 59, 2024, No 3, pp. 567-575 (Bratislava).

Some translations of both the Old and the New Testaments, such as Exodus 20: 5-6 and James 4: 5,² render an anthropomorphic image of God as being ‘jealous’. The present article focuses on the latter example and, after comparing old biblical manuscripts and making a critical analysis of the text, the author suggests a more authentic translation of James 4: 5. The new proposed version is considered to correspond to the respective text in most of the oldest Greek biblical manuscripts, as well as to its version in the Church Slavonic translation of the Bible, also viewed in the context of the General Epistle of James, of the Holy Gospels and of the Holy Scriptures in general, of Patristic literature and, not least, in the context of a wholesome Christian spiritual life.

Anthropomorphic interpretation of God, biblical texts, Epistle of James, God vs jealousy, God vs envy, God and zeal.

Introduction

In the General epistle of the Apostle James there is a significant text, difficult to explain, which is often misinterpreted in the sense that God is jealous, that He jealously yearns for the spirit or soul that he has placed in man. However, in the ancient Greek and Church Slavonic manuscripts and in the correct translations of the Holy Scriptures, nothing is written either about the jealousy of God, or jealousy as such: “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain: Is it envy that the Spirit, who has abided in us, yearns for?” In this context, a new translation into Slovak of this biblical text is due, and we suggest the following: “Alebo sa domnievate, že Písmo nadarmo hovorí: Či po závidisti túži Duch, ktorý sa v nás usídlil?”³

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¹ The present study looks at the extant Slovak translation of the biblical text in James 4: 5 and discusses the inadequate rendering of the image of God as being jealous, at the same time proposing a new translation of this New Testament passage. Unless otherwise stated, the translation into English of the quotations taken from the various modern or classical authors’ works belongs to the author of this article.

² See Biblia. Slovenský ekumenický preklad s deuterokánonickými knihami, 4th corr. edition. Banská Bystrica: Slovenská biblická spoločnosť, 2023, p. 261.

³ This is a new translation into English and Slovak of James 4: 5 proposed by the author of this article. In most ancient Greek manuscripts, the text is as follows: “ἢ δοκεῖτε ὅτι κενῶς ἡ γραφή λέγει, πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ τὸ Πνεῦμα ὃ κατώκησεν ἐν ὑμῖν;”. The Church Slavonic translation of this text is: “Нѣли мнѣтѣ, ꙗкоу есѣ пи́саниѣ глаголетъ: ꙗкоу зѣлуети же́лаетъ дѣхъ, ꙗже вѣлѣша въ ны”. For the purpose of this article, the ancient Greek biblical text is quoted from: Aland, B. et al. (eds.): *Novum Testamentum Graecum, editio Critica maior, IV. Catholic letters. Part 1. Text. Installment 1. James*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014, pp. 82-83, while the Church Slavonic biblical text is quoted from: *НОВЫЙ ЗАВѢТЪ ГЛА НАШЕГѦ ІІІА ХРІСТА. СОВБѢНОЕ ПОСЛАНІЕ ІАКѦВЛЕ*, Available online: <https://azbyka.ru/>

From the phrase “or do you think” it results that the Apostle James foresaw the possibility of the emergence of some thoughts in the minds of his readers which would contradict his previous words that friendship with the world is enmity with God. What thoughts could those be? Readers of the Epistle, in the past and even today, could wonder whether friendship with the world must always and unavoidably mean enmity with God. In other words, could love for God somehow be combined with friendship with the world, with its pleasures and sins, specifically with envy? In order to remove the afore-mentioned doubts, the Apostle James tries further to enhance the idea that God has absolutely nothing to do with the world, by this meaning the way of life led by people who commit sin and evil deeds, who feel envy, this being a cause of wars, fights, divisions, and other iniquities of all kinds. The Apostle James tries to strengthen in the hearts of the readers the truth that friendship with the world in this negative sense is incompatible with friendship with God, that any, even the smallest deviation towards the world in its negative sense means abandoning the love for God and being in enmity with Him.

In order for the readers to realize the fact that God has nothing to do with the sinful world, the Apostle James asks: “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain: Is it envy that the Spirit who has abided in us yearns for?”. Of course, this question presupposes a negative⁴ answer: No, God’s Spirit certainly does not yearn envy. The kind of envy which so often occurs among the readers and against which the Apostle James strongly warns is alien to God. Envy is not what God wants from us. Envy is not a quality that Christians should be characterized by because it is alien to their God, His teachings, their faith in Him and also to the Holy Scriptures.

The present study will, therefore, begin by looking at these two incompatible interpretations of the text on ‘envy’ in James 4: 5 as they appear in various modern and earlier translations of biblical texts and in other theologians’ writings. In the second part of the article, we have found it necessary to have an exegesis of some of the key terms used in James 4: 5, which enhances the need for a new translation of this biblical verse as proposed in this study.

Two irreconcilable interpretations of James’s words about envy

Besides the translation into Slovak of James 4: 5 that we suggest above, which is conformable with the text as it appears in most ancient Greek manuscripts and Church Slavonic translations, there are other, significantly different interpretations of this biblical text, a most frequent one being: “God jealously yearns for the spirit he has implanted in us”.⁵ We consider this interpretation inappropriate and incompatible with our translation of this text, as it suggests that God is jealous and therefore selfishly longs for the spirit He has implanted in us.⁶ This idea is tempting, often cited, and leads to interesting conclusions, some of which we could summarise in the following points. 1. The relationship between God and man requires absolute devotion on the part of man. 2. God wants us to be completely devoted and consecrated to Him because He yearns for our spirit “jealously” or “to the point of envy”. 3. God expects from us our total service as a free response to His immeasurable love for us. 4. His yearning for us is so great, that it reaches the stage of “envy” or “almost up to jealousy”. 5. When God “yearns” for us means that He does not want us to belong to anyone or anything hostile to Him, which would separate us from His love

biblia/?Jac.4&utfcs (accessed on 21.8.2024). This is the Russian 8th edition of the so-called ‘Jelisavetinskaja Biblija’ [Elisabethan Bible].

⁴ We have a similar situation in James 2: 14, where the rhetorical question asked by the author of the Epistle expects a negative answer from his readers.

⁵ Biblia. Slovenský ekumenický preklad s deuterokanonickými knihami, c.d., p. 261.

⁶ See Gen 2: 7; Eccles 12: 7.

and the fellowship with Him. 6. Apostle James tries to lead the readers of his Epistle towards the understanding of the truth that the Holy Scripture does not speak about God's yearning for us "in vain". The Holy Scriptures speak about this, so that we understand that everyone who serves the world "betrays God, lives contrary to His will and, as a result, he acts as an enemy of God. 7. In such circumstances, there cannot be any question of compatibility between love for the world and love for God".⁷

The interpretation of James 4: 5 with the meanings mentioned in the seven points above can be found in S. Sakkos's text, who literally writes: "The spirit that dwells in us yearns enviously and loves jealously. That is why it is not advantageous for us to be unbelievers towards God who has dwelled in us, to be like adulterers and adulteresses".⁸ Interestingly, Sakkos himself considers this interpretation to be anthropomorphic and venturous, at the same time admitting that many people would not even be able to formulate such an interpretation of their relation with God, could misinterpret it and could even be scandalized by it.

The interpretation of the examined verse in the sense mentioned above, meaning that God's Spirit longs for us jealously, or almost jealously, can be found also in Archimandrite D. Aerakis's comment that "if we deviate from God's love, which resembles a marriage bond and a spiritual marriage, God is jealous!... This means that God's love is so ardent that God wants our soul to be His bride. God wants it this way not because He would gain anything from it, but because He brings to our soul everything necessary to make it happy and blessed. God gains nothing from the union with us. We gain everything if we show the will to give our soul to the heavenly Bridegroom... God wants us to be His".⁹

We also find a similar idea in the text attributed to the Early Church writer Severian of Gabala who suggests that, in this verse, the Apostle James intends to express the idea that the Spirit of God which is in us "loves us and tries to appropriate us to God. He turns us away from the love for the world and gives us (ever) greater grace".¹⁰

However, the above-mentioned translation is based on gross misinterpretations of the original text and its meaning. The biggest change is the substitution of the noun "envy" with the adverb "jealously". Another important change is the addition of the word "God". And finally, the word "Spirit" is not understood here in the sense of God's Spirit, but in the sense of the human spirit which God breathed into man¹¹ and jealously yearns for. A serious problem here is also the fact that something that is characteristic purely to human life, jealousy, is attributed to God. This characteristic is hardly explainable in a positive sense, as it is essentially a sinful passion which, like any other sin, has very dangerous consequences. In order for this interpretation to be explained positively, additional interventions are made in the text, adding words which are not in the original text, for example "almost jealously"¹² or "up to envy".¹³ The afore-mentioned translations thus lead to the idea that God's longing for our spirit is so great that it comes close

⁷ Ярошевский, Г.: Соборное Послание св. Апостола Иакова. Киевъ, 1901, р. 242.

⁸ Σακκου, Σ. Ν.: Ερμηνεία εις τήν Επιστολήν τοῦ Ἰακώβου. Θεσσαλονίκη: Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιον Θεσσαλονίκης, 1975, р. 120.

⁹ Αερακι, Δ. Γ.: 'Η Επιστολή τοῦ Ἰακώβου. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Ορθόδοξος κυψέλη, 1986, р. 98-99. See also Иванов, А.: Руководство к изучению книг Священного Писания Нового Завета: обозрение Четвероевангелия, Книги деяний апостольских, апостольских посланий и Апокалипсиса. Санкт-Петербург: Воскресение, 2002, с. 21.

¹⁰ Севериан Габальский: Фрагменты. In: Брэй, Д.: Библейские комментарии отцов Церкви и других авторов I–VIII веков. Новый Завет. Кафолические послания. Тверь: Герменевтика, 2008, с. 58.

¹¹ See Gen 2: 7.

¹² See the Roman-Catholic translation, available online: <https://biblia.sk/citanie/ssv/jk/4> (accessed on 21.8.2024).

¹³ See the Evangelical and the so-called Rohacek translation, available online: <https://biblia.sk/citanie/roh/jk/4> (accessed on 21.8.2024).

to jealousy or even envy, but it eventually does not become jealousy or envy. This would mean that jealousy or envy have their degrees, with some lower degrees being still acceptable and higher degrees being not. As a result, one could speak of ‘good jealousy’ or ‘good envy’, or of God being almost sinful, all these being very contradictory ideas. Sakkos is inclined to interpret this verse in the sense that God jealously yearns for our spirit, nevertheless, at the end of his interpretation, he specifies that this is only an anthropomorphic phrasing, saying nothing about what God really is like: “When someone loves somebody and loves them jealously, they cannot bear the fact that the loved one leans towards someone else’s love. This may mean that the loving one feels to have earned the love of their beloved one and wants what has been earned only for themselves, without sharing it with anyone else. When the loved person directs his/her love to a third person, it is a devastating loss for the first person and this incites his/her jealousy. In the case of God’s jealousy, however, something quite opposite happens. God gains nothing from the union with us. Only we gain. God gives and receives nothing back from this union, even if we give Him our love. Our love does not and cannot compare with the love of God, nor to anything we receive from Him ... The so-called “jealousy” or “envy” of God actually has nothing to do with the homonymous and hideous passion of man ... God has nothing to do with human envy and pride, which are repugnant to Him”.¹⁴ It is important to note that we cannot agree fully with the interpretation developed in Sakkos’s text just quoted above, since we would have to accept the ideas that there is also ‘good’ jealousy and that God “receives nothing back” from man. In our view, these ideas are not compatible either with the principles of positive relations between living beings in general, or with the teachings of Christian spirituality anchored in the New Testament.¹⁵

Another problem associated with the above-mentioned interpretation of the verse we are focusing on is the fact that the words of the “Scripture” which the Apostle James refers to cannot be found in any other place with the exception of the Epistle of James. This fact has led to many and often quite different interpretations, or even to the writing of a special monography containing the interpretation of this single verse.¹⁶ It is already in the 15th century that Erasmus of Rotterdam writes that theologians have piled “whole wagons full of interpretations”¹⁷ of this statement in the Holy Scriptures. The differences arise mainly from the fact that the terms “Scripture”, “envy”, “spirit”, and “has dwelled” have been explained and translated in different ways.

The words of the Scripture which the Apostle James refers to cannot be found either in the Old Testament, or in any of the non-biblical writings that have been preserved to this day, be it apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, or Qumran writings. It may be possible to find only a few similar texts which, nevertheless, do not mention a jealous God, but a zealous God. The exegetes mentioned above (Sakkos, Aerakis), who acknowledge the idea of God’s jealousy, consider such mentions of the zeal of God as those statements to which the Apostle James refers indirectly. They translate them in such a way that they depict God as being jealous, at the same time making use of the fact that the ancient Greek term “ζήλος” can have the meaning of both zeal and jealousy, depending on the context. Here follows one such example (otherwise reiterated in other places, too): “You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I am the Lord, your God, a zealous God, who punishes the iniquities of the fathers on the sons to the third and fourth gen-

¹⁴ Σακκου, Σ. Ν.: Ερμηνεία εις τήν Επιστολήν τοῦ Ιακώβου, c. d., pp. 120-122.

¹⁵ See Romans 15: 7; Hebrews 12: 6.

¹⁶ Michl, J.: Des Spruch Jakobus Brief 4, 5. In Blinzler, J. – Kuss, O. – Mußner, F.: Neutestamentliche Aufsätze. Regensburg: Verlag, Friedrich Pustet, 1963.

¹⁷ Σακκου, Σ. Ν.: Ερμηνεία εις τήν Επιστολήν τοῦ Ιακώβου, c. d., p. 109.

eration of those who hate me, but I show mercy to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments”.¹⁸ However, the fact remains that, in James 4: 5, the Apostle makes reference neither to a zealous, nor to a jealous God, but to envy. Envy is a completely different concept, that cannot be arbitrarily defined as jealousy. Moreover, “the word φθόνος (envy) is nowhere in the Septuagint used in relation to God”.¹⁹

St. Bede the Venerable gives a completely different, and, in our view, a more correct and authentic interpretation of the verse in James 4: 5: “This passage (of the Scripture) must be read as a question. The Apostle literally says: Does the Spirit of grace with which you were sealed for the day of redemption (cf. Eph 4: 30) desire that you should envy one another? It is not the good Spirit that awakens the disease of envy in you, but an evil spirit”.²⁰ After this interpretation, Bede adds the following explanation: “Some interpret this verse as follows: ... The Spirit yearns for the opposite of envy. This means that He wishes that the disease of envy be defeated and rooted out of your hearts.”²¹ And at the end he adds: “Some relate what was said (by the Apostle James) to the human spirit and understand it as follows: Do not desire (what others have)! Do not become friends with this world. For as long as your spirit longs for what is earthly, inevitably until then it will long for envy, and you are envious when you long to get what others have.”²²

Therefore, based on the above-mentioned words of St. Bede the Venerable, the verse in James 4: 5 can be translated as follows: “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain: Is it envy that the Spirit who has abided in us yearns for?”. With this accurate, literal and, at the same time, simple translation, without any changes, additions, and anthropomorphisms, we will continue to work in our exegesis of the verse we are focusing on in this study. Our translation thus avoids any arbitrary change in the original biblical text and, consequently, any complex philosophical considerations which may be arguing in favour of such changes. The proposed translation will be in complete accordance with the oldest ancient Greek manuscripts, with the Church Slavonic translation of this verse, viewed also in the context of the previous verses where envy, and not jealousy, is only mentioned.

A translation very similar to ours can also be found in the (Czech) Bible of Kralice, where it is written: “(Does) the spirit that abides in us incline to envy?”²³ J. Mrázek also supports this Kralice translation, clarifying it even more logically and interpreting it as follows: “Do you think that the whole Scripture is empty talk and that the spirit that abides in you leads to jealousy and all that intolerance? Do you really think that the Scriptures lead to this and that this comes from the Spirit? You can’t be serious!”²⁴ Logically, this interpretation is correct and very close to the wording of this verse in the earliest manuscripts of the Bible. It is enough to use the original biblical term “envy” instead of the one expressing jealousy and intolerance, and the result will be the translation we hereby propose: “Is it envy that the Spirit who has abided in us yearns for?”

¹⁸ See Ex 20: 5-6. See also: Ex 34: 14; Deut 4: 24; 5: 9; 6: 14-15; Josh 24: 19; Isa 9: 6; 37: 32; 59: 17; 63: 8-16; Ezek 5: 13; 36: 17-18; Zech 1: 14; 8: 2; Nah 1: 2. See also Gen 4: 7; 6: 3-7; Ps 37(36): 1; Isa 1: 5; Jer 2: 19; Ezek 16: 38-42; 23: 25; Zech 8: 2; Hos 8: 5.

¹⁹ Mareček, P.: *List Jakubův*. Praha: Centrum biblických studií AVČR a UK v Praze, 2020, s. 211.

²⁰ Beda Venerabilis: *Expositio super Epistolas catholicas*: PL 93, 9-130. Available online: http://www.documentaca-tholicaomnia.eu/02m/0627-0735,_Beda_Venerabilis,_Super_Epistolas_Catholicas_Expositio_MLT.pdf (accessed on 20.02.2024), p. 33.

²¹ Beda Venerabilis: *Expositio super Epistolas catholicas*, c. d., p. 33.

²² Beda Venerabilis: *Expositio super Epistolas catholicas*, c. d., p. 33.

²³ *Bibli Svatá aneb Všecka Svatá Písma Starého i Nového Zákona* (Podle posledního vydání Kralického z roku 1613). Praha: Biblická společnost, 1941, p. 274.

²⁴ Mrázek, J.: *Bláznovství víry podřa Jakuba. Výklad Jakubovi epištoly*. Jihlava: Nakladatelství Mlýn, 2012, p. 85.

Having analysed several interpretations of the text in James 4: 5, we could suggest their classification in two main groups. The first type of interpretation states that ‘God jealously yearns for the spirit He has implanted in us.’ The latter merely opens a question which, nevertheless, does not imply in any way God’s jealousy: ‘Is it envy that the Spirit who has abided us yearns for?’ In our opinion, these two types of interpretations are incompatible and we support the latter, which we consider to be in accordance with the context of the Epistle of James as a whole and with the text of this verse as it appears in the most important ancient manuscripts of the Bible (in B. Aland’s critical edition),²⁵ of the General Epistles of the New Testament.

In the following section of the present study, we shall make an exegetical analysis of each of the main concepts in James 4: 5, in the context of the (latter) type of interpretation which we consider more appropriate. This analysis will eventually lead to a clearer outline of the conclusions we shall draw at the end of the article.

Exegesis of basic concepts

In this part we shall focus on the biblical exegesis of the following concepts and phrases: ‘do you think’, ‘Scripture’, ‘says’, ‘in vain’, ‘envy’, ‘yearns’, and ‘Spirit’, as they appear in the context of the whole of James’s Epistle, of its patristic exegesis, of their textual, historical, and critical analysis, also using quotations from the works of some New Testament scholars (Mrázek, Agouridis, Sakkos, Allison, and others). The translation of each of these concepts will not be taken from already existing translations of the Bible, but it belongs to the author of this article.

The opening words of the verse “**or do you think**” (Gr. ἢ δοκεῖτε; Csl. **ἢλὴ μνηστὲ**) are the beginning of the question that we can also find with minor variations in Apostle Paul’s texts, in the Gospels, or in ancient non-biblical literature.²⁶

The term “Scripture” (Gr. ἡ γραφή; Csl. **πνεύματι**), to which the Apostle James makes reference in this verse, does not refer to any specific quotation in the Holy Scriptures, since such a text in the Holy Scriptures can be found only in James 4: 5 and nowhere else. The usage of the term “Scripture” in the singular to mean all the books of the Holy Scriptures is common in the Gospels and also in the Apostle Paul’s texts.²⁷ According to Agouridis, the term “Scripture” in this verse should be understood as “in general, the teaching of the Holy Scriptures about infidelity and adultery”²⁸ in relation to God, made manifest in feelings of envy and desire for worldly and sinful things and values. God’s Spirit does not lead us to envy which comes from the desire for worldly things and values, but on the contrary, it gives us the uncreated grace which has a higher value than everything earthly and merely human. The idea that every passion, including envy, is foreign, unwanted, and unloved by God can be found in several places in the Holy Scriptures, both in the Old and the New Testaments.²⁹ The Epistle of the Apostle James also speaks against envy in several places.³⁰

The statement that the Scripture “**says**” (Gr. λέγει; Csl. **πνεύματι**) is also commonly found in the Gospels and in the Apostle Paul’s texts, also in the form of a question.³¹ The question the

²⁵ See Aland, B. et al. (eds.): *Novum Testamentum Graecum*, c. d., pp. 82-83.

²⁶ See 2 Cor 12: 19; Luke 12: 51; 13: 2, 4. See also ΑΠΠΙΑΝΟΣ, Διατριβαί 1.4.25 and 4.1.33. Available online: https://el.wikisource.org/wiki/Διατριβαί/Βιβλίον_1#Περὶ_προκοπῆς (accessed on 20.03.2024).

²⁷ See Mark 14: 49; Luke 4: 21; John 7: 38; Rom 4: 3; and others.

²⁸ Αγουριδης, Σ. Χ.: *Υπόμνημα εις τὴν ἐπιστολὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰακώβου*. Ἀθῆναι: Ἀριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιον Θεσσαλονίκης, 1956, p. 71.

²⁹ See Isa 53: 9; James 1: 13; Matt 7: 18; 2 Cor 6: 14-15; 1 John 1: 5; 3: 5; 1 Pet 2: 22.

³⁰ See James 3: 14, 16; 4: 2.

³¹ See John 7: 38, 42; 19: 37; Rom 4: 3; Gal 4: 30; and others.

Apostle James poses – whether the Scripture says in vain – is similar in its content to the frequent questions asked by Jesus Christ: “Have you not read?”.³² Those asking these questions obviously assume that the audience knows the Holy Scriptures well. Nevertheless, the words of the Holy Scriptures are reminded because some of the listeners have a problem living according to the words of the Scriptures.

According to the Apostle James, the Holy Scriptures’ teachings against envy and other sins are not given “**in vain**” (Gr. κενῶς; Csl. *бѣѣ*), i.e., uselessly or voidly; Sakkos explains this term meaning “contentlessly, meaninglessly, pointlessly”.³³ This adverb appears only in this place in the New Testament and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (in the Septuagint), and also only once in Isaiah 49: 4.³⁴

The term “**envy**” (Gr. φθόνος; Csl. *зависть*) is always found in the Holy Scripture in a negative sense³⁵ and the Greek word φθόνος always and only means envy. Also, in patristic literature and in other Church writers’ works, envy always has a negative meaning and is considered incompatible with God. Clement of Alexandria, for example, writes: “To Him (Christ) any kind of envy is alien ... Envy is in no way inherent to the passionless and beginningless begotten Lord... Or can anything human arouse His envy? There is another, envious one, tossed about by passions of every kind, that afflicts man ...”³⁶ At the same time, envy is exactly what the Apostle James condemned and sharply criticized³⁷ in principle as the cause of strife, fights, wars, rifts, and divisions. Envy is therefore what God certainly does not desire because envy makes a person a friend of the world and an enemy of God. Envy is certainly not in accordance with God’s will and nature. It is exactly this fact that the Apostle James wanted to emphasize in this verse. If, at this point, the Apostle James would have wanted to express a positive thought about God and his desire for us, he would not have spoken of envy, but would have used another term that can also be explained positively, for example “zeal” (Gr. ζήλος).³⁸

According to Agouridis, among the addressees of the letter there were also people who “indulged in wars, fights, enmity and disorder in order to satisfy their own desires. In verse 4, the Apostle James calls these people adulterers and enemies of God, and in verse 5 he repeats the same idea by asking a question the answer to which is obvious. This question, paraphrased, reads: “Does the Spirit that God has placed in us uncontrollably desire envy, division, and strife?” The answer is obviously negative. After all, it is only God who should be irresistibly longed for (Ps 42: 2). The mention of envy has its special place in this verse because wars and fights are related to the desire to acquire material goods and worldly powers on the part of the enemies of society”.³⁹

The fact that this verse is not about the envy or jealousy of God, but about our, human envy, is, in our view, confirmed by the use, in several manuscripts, of the pronoun “**our**”⁴⁰ (Gr. *υμων*) in relation to the word “envy”. So, it is not God’s envy or jealousy, but our envy, our sickness, passion, and sin.

³² Matt 12: 5. See also Matt 12: 3; 19: 4; 22: 3; Mark 12: 10, 26; Luke 6: 3.

³³ Σακκου, Σ. Ν.: Ερμηνεία εις την Επιστολήν του Ιακώβου, c. d., p. 120.

³⁴ A similar idea can also be found in Isa 55: 11, however, without direct use of the adverb κενῶς.

³⁵ See 1 Macc 8: 16; 3 Macc 6: 7; Wisdom 2: 24; 6: 23; Matt 27: 18; Mark 15: 10; Rom 1: 29; Gal 5: 21; Phil 1: 15; 1 Tim 6: 4; Titus 3: 3; 1 Pet 2: 1.

³⁶ Климент Александрийский: Строматы 7, 2. Available online: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Kliment_Aleksandrijskij/stromaty/1_7 (accessed on 21.03.2024).

³⁷ See James 3: 14, 16; 4: 2.

³⁸ Cf. 4 Kings 19: 31; Isa 9: 7; 26: 11; 37: 32; 63: 15; Zech 1: 14; 2 Cor 11: 2; and others.

³⁹ Αγουριδη, Σ. Χ.: Υπόμνημα εις την επιστολήν του Αγίου Ιακώβου, c. d., pp. 70-71.

⁴⁰ Kódex 049, A88, 489, 1729. In Aland, B. et al. (eds.): Novum Testamentum Graecum, c. d., p. 68.

Envy is something that God does not desire, without any doubt. The expression “yearns” (Gr. ἐπιποθεῖ; Csl. желаетъ) means strongly and fervently to wish for something, or, as Allison states, even “to feel a tender affection”⁴¹ for something. Such an attitude of God towards envy is excluded. The Holy Scripture warns against the desire for evil.⁴²

In our view, the “**Spirit**” (Gr. τὸ Πνεῦμα; Csl. Дѡхъ) mentioned in this verse must be clearly understood as the Holy Spirit, God’s Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity. This is also evidenced by the expression “**who has abided in us**” (Gr. ὁ κατώκησεν ἐν ἡμῖν; Csl. ꙗже вѣлѣша въ ны), which is often mentioned in the New Testament in connection with the Holy Spirit.⁴³ This statement is not contradicted in any way by the fact that the previous and the following verse speak about God, because the Holy Spirit is God and the activity of all the three Persons of the Holy Trinity is always in complete harmony. Neither is this in contradiction with the interpretation of this verse given by St. Cyril of Alexandria, who writes that just as death entered the world due to the envy of the devil, so thanks to the incarnation of Christ, according to the Scriptures, death has been overcome. According to him, the Spirit who has abided in us is Jesus Christ. Similarly, Sakkos considers the Spirit mentioned in this verse to be Christ’s Spirit, who “has saved us and has given us greater grace”.⁴⁴ After all, in the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ.⁴⁵

In order further to explain the term ‘Holy Spirit’ and clarify the way this Person of the Holy Trinity works in our lives, it is useful to mention at this point that, according to the liturgical texts of Byzantine rite,⁴⁶ the Holy Spirit begins to dwell in a person during the Holy Baptism and Chrismation and makes a person a temple of the Holy Spirit. In the liturgical texts, we find that the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is renewed and strengthened by the Holy Eucharist. At the same time, as stands written in the New Testament, if a person does not renounce the Holy Spirit by leading a sinful life without repentance, the Holy Spirit abides in a person once and forever.⁴⁷ If a person progresses spiritually, as time goes on, the indwelling and action of the Holy Spirit in that person intensifies and brings new gifts.⁴⁸ In the Old Testament, we read about God’s Spirit as being incorruptible and abiding “in everything”.⁴⁹

The above-given explanations about the concept of ‘Spirit’ and the clarifications arising from liturgical and biblical teachings concerning the works of God’s Spirit in man, all lead us to understand that the Apostle James cannot logically have expected the Spirit who dwells in man to give other than positive gifts, therefore ‘envy’ and its consequent effects not being among these. However, the Apostle James asks: “Is it envy that the Spirit who has abided in us yearns for?”

⁴¹ Allison, D. C.: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James. In Davies, G. I. – Tuckett, C. M.: The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. London – New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013, p. 611. See also Deut 32: 11; Jer 13: 14; Job 14: 15; Ps 83(84): 3.

⁴² See Ps 61(62): 11; Sir 25: 21; Ezek 23: 5, 7, 9.

⁴³ See also Ерм: Пастырѣ, 5: 1-2; 5: 5; 10: 2, 5. Available online: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Erm/pastyr_hermy/9_1 (accessed on 03.06.2023).

⁴⁴ Σακκου, Σ. Ν.: Ερμηνεία εις την Επιστολήν του Ιακώβου, с. d., p. 119.

⁴⁵ See Rom 8: 9-11; 1 Cor 3: 16; 6: 19; 2 Tim 1: 14; Phil 1: 19; 1 Pet 1: 11.

⁴⁶ See the prayer of the Chrismation rite as it appears in the Orthodox service Book of Needs: Требник на церковнославянском языке. Available online: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Pravoslavnoe_Bogosluzhenie/trebnik-na-cerkovnoslavjanskom-jazyke/1_5 (accessed on 03.06.2023).

⁴⁷ See e.g. I John 3: 24.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Luke 12: 31; 14: 1, 12.

⁴⁹ Wisdom 12: 1.

Conclusion

In our opinion, all the biblical texts mentioned above are convincing evidence of the fact that James 4: 5 should be interpreted as God not yearning for envy. Jealous longing for zeal is motivated by pride and envy, that is why it is not appropriate to consider jealousy an attribute of God. We, therefore, suggest a new and authentic translation of James 4: 5, which is completely in accordance with the oldest Greek manuscripts, with the Church Slavonic translation of this text, with the context of the General Epistle of James, with the Gospels and all the Holy Scriptures, and, last but not least, with wholesome Christian spirituality that does not see God as being either a jealous, envious person, or as an angry Judge whose justice must be done through human suffering.

О неадекватности некоторых антропоморфных понятий о Боге в контексте Иакова 4:5

Штефан Пружинский

Вклад, внесенный этой статьей, заключается в формулировании нового и аутентичного перевода Иак 4:5. Этот новый перевод полностью соответствует древнейшим греческим рукописям, церковнославянскому переводу этого текста, контексту Соборного послания Иакова, Евангелиям и всем Священным Писаниям и, наконец, что не менее важно, здоровой христианской духовности, которая не видит Бога ни как ревнивое, завистливое существо, ни как гневного Судью, чье правосудие должно вершиться через человеческие страдания. Что касается теологических выводов, мы считаем, что Бог абсолютно чужд любому чувству зависти или любой другой чисто человеческой и греховной страсти. Бог остается совершенно бесстрастным, хотя Он стал Человеком в мире, полном греховных страстей, к которым относятся зависть и ревность. Поэтому нет необходимости приписывать Богу отрицательные человеческие характеристики и антропоморфизмы. Что касается отправных точек для практики, автор исследования в контексте нового перевода Иак 4:5 предполагает, что Церковь должна в своей катехизической миссии, осуществляемой, в частности, ее духовенством и учителями, сосредоточиться на позитивном учении о Боге как о ревностном, но бесконечно любящем, прощающем и милостивом Существо, полном отеческого тепла, доверия, радости и мира, с Которым человек может и должен иметь личные отношения.