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THE BIBLE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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FOREWORD

Since its inception in 1816, the American Bible Society has held steadfastly to its paramount organizing purpose; namely, to provide easy access to the Scriptures to all people, everywhere, at costs they can readily afford. Thanks to the help of generous contributors, the Society has continued to carry out this purpose by translating, publishing and distributing Bibles, testaments, and a wide variety of needs-oriented Scripture portions and products throughout the USA. And, through the networking agency of the United Bible Societies, it has helped to enable this same work all over the world. Bringing the Scriptures to people everywhere in languages and forms that are appropriate and relevant to their life situations has been the Society's singular goal, but the underlying assumption of that mandate is the conviction that the highest quality scholarly work with the biblical texts must be involved in the preparation of those Scriptures for people's use.

At the heart of the American Bible Society's work, then, is translation of the Scriptures from the original language texts. Having produced the globally influential common language translation—*Today's English Version/Good News Bible*—between 1961 and 1979, the ABS is presently producing the *Contemporary English Version*, a fresh "functional equivalence" translation that is both innovative and pioneering as it applies new insights from the field of discourse structure and language use toward the development of a clear, natural and easily read English style. After a period of careful research, the Society is now also engaged in the preparation of experimental translations of Scripture portions in multimedia formats in an effort to bring the Bible to those for whom screen-centered technologies are fast becoming the communications medium of choice. In all its translation programs the Society's goal is always faithfulness and accuracy, ensuring that the modern receptor's understanding of, and response to, the translated text will be the equivalent of that experienced by the original hearers/readers.

NEW BIBLE TRANSLATIONS: AN ASSESSMENT AND PROSPECT

Donald A. Carson

I. *Introduction*

The number of new Bible translations around the world is steadily increasing, and one individual can be familiar with only a small number of them. By the end of 1990, parts of the Bible had been translated into 1946 languages and dialects, complete Bibles into 318 languages. These figures do not include the large number of languages in which multiple Bible translations are found. During 1990 alone, versions of the complete Bible appeared in four languages; versions of the New Testament were published in fifteen languages. Only three of these, however, were languages in which no version of the Bible previously existed.

If we focus on English versions, we cannot overlook the fact that the last half-century has seen more work than the previous century-and-a-half. Between 1808 and 1949, fifty new translations or systematic revisions of the New Testament were published in the United States. If we add the number of editions that involved slight revisions, that number rises to sixty.[1] By contrast, from the publication of the RSV Bible to the present, twenty-nine English versions *of the entire Bible* have appeared, plus an additional twenty-six English renderings of the New Testament. This does not include translations of the Hebrew Bible by Jewish scholars, which we shall consider later. It is

[1] These figures are supplied by John L. Cheek, "New Testament Translation in America," *JBL* 72 (1953) 103-114.

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not possible to make an accurate count of minor revisions during this period.

Although I have published reviews of five English Bibles during the past twenty years or so,[2] I cannot claim the breadth of knowledge of Paul Ellingworth of Aberdeen, who in a recent essay surveys translations in fifty-nine different languages.[3] My experience is limited to serving as a consultant for one project, and to leading occasional seminars for Bible translators. The discipline of Bible translation, like other areas of human knowledge, has exploded into a complex network of specializations.

My somewhat limited assessment of new Bible translations (by which I refer to those produced during the last few decades), must focus on trends in both method and result, so far as I am able to discern them.

II. *Assessment*

1. There is widespread recognition of the primacy of dynamic equivalence (increasingly referred to as 'functional equivalence')[4] as the best controlling model in Bible translation. This development owes an incalculable debt to Eugene Nida and his associates, whose influence through their writings is evident across the range of Bible translation projects. Although reviewers have voiced criticisms about them, a handful of seminal books has dominated both discussion of theory and the actual practice of translation.[5] Through seminars and

[2] The most recent being "A Review of the *New Revised Standard Version*," *RTR* 50 (1991) 1-11.

[3] "Bible translations (modern versions)," *The New Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 80-100.

[4] This change in nomenclature has come about because of the influence of Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986). The authors are trying to avoid an undue emphasis on equivalence of audience response sometimes associated with the former term.

[5] In particular, see Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964); Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); and, to a lesser extent, Wolfram Wilss, *Übersetzungswissenschaft: Probleme und Methoden* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1977).

training sessions, their principles are now being inculcated in the growing number of translators in the so-called Third World. In the English-speaking world, very few translations or revisions (notably the New King James Version [NKJV] and the New American Standard Bible [NASB]) have self-consciously set themselves *against* the controlling tenets of functional equivalence.

Our familiarity with this fact must not be allowed to obscure what a remarkable reversal this is. Until the end of WWII, English-speaking Bible readers who did not use the KJV would most likely appeal to the Revised Version (RV) or its American counterpart, the American Standard Version (ASV), or perhaps the Douay Version —and it is difficult to imagine competent English translations that are more 'literal' than these. When Today's English Version (TEV, also known as GNB = Good News Bible) first appeared, by and large it was roundly condemned by most people on the conservative end of the theological spectrum. A few years later, softened up perhaps by the huge popularity, at the personal if not the ecclesiastical level, of both J. B. Phillips and the Living Bible (LB)—which had of course been published earlier than TEV[6] but which for ecclesiastical and constituency reasons had not evoked the same degree of hostile criticism—the same segment of the theological spectrum expressed itself reasonably satisfied with the New International Version (NIV), whose underlying philosophy of translation is not easily differentiated from that of TEV. Today most competent translators recognize the following factors: that (1) 'literal translation' and 'free translation' exist on the same spectrum, distinguishable in the extremes but nevertheless

[6] Phillips's *Letters to Young Churches* was published in 1947; the entire New Testament appeared in 1958. *Living Letter* was published in 1962, the complete LB in 1971. The TEV New Testament appeared in 1966, the full GNB in 1971.

unavoidably connected;[7] that (2) meaning and form, though intertwined, are not only differentiable, but that very frequently meaning in the donor language has to be packaged in a quite different form in the receptor language; that (3) translation is never a mechanical exercise, but entails countless decisions as to the text's meaning; that (4) meaning is not only referential, but may embrace subtle overtones, emotional loading, degrees of naturalness, pragmatic associations, implicit moral obligation, and much more.[8] Indeed, some would go further and insist that this spectrum-model is too simple, too one-dimensional. To treat adequately the distinction between freedom of form and freedom of meaning one is forced, ideally, to aim simultaneously for maximum naturalness (which usually requires some freedom of form) and maximum accuracy. What was a *line* from 'literal' to 'free' becomes a *two-dimensional matrix* that covers the turf from 'literal' to 'free.'

This is not to say that adoption of functional equivalence as a controlling priority entirely determines just where a Bible translation will emerge on this matrix between 'literal' and 'free.' The theory has become so sophisticated and so flexible that the application of its principles by different parties can produce quite different results. What is clear, I think, is that dynamic (or functional) equivalence has exerted a profound influence even on Bible translators who have not formally espoused the undergirding philosophy.

Consider the two most important recent English versions. The Revised English Bible (REB), a revision of the New English Bible (NEB), states that "the guiding principle has been to seek a fluent and idiomatic way of expressing biblical writing in contemporary English.

[7] Cf. John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 19-32. Today most translators prefer not to use the term 'paraphrase' for the 'free' end of the spectrum, reserving that term to refer to a re-expression of a message in another form of the *same* language.

[8] For a useful summary, see Michael F. Kopesec, "A Translator's Perspective on Meaning," *OPTAT* 2 (1988) 9-19.

Much emphasis has been laid on correctness and intelligibility." The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), similarly, insists that the biblical message "must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning; it must be presented in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today." Even so, Robert Bratcher, in an important review of both these English versions,[9] insists that the two are based on "distinct philosophies of translation."[10] Only the former, he says, is a dynamic equivalence translation. Bratcher says that the guiding principle of dynamic equivalence adopts the memorable maxim of the British *savant*, Hilaire Belloc: "The question is not, 'How shall I make this foreigner talk English?' but, 'What would an Englishman have said to express this?'" Certainly the NRSV should be placed a little farther to the 'literal' end of the spectrum than the REB. Still, I suspect that Bratcher's sharp disjunction between two underlying philosophies is overstated. Perhaps, in part, he too quickly adopts at face value Bruce Metzger's remark in "To the Reader" in the NRSV: "this version," Metzger writes, "remains essentially a literal translation." After all, the NRSV committee adopted the maxim, "As literal as possible, as free as necessary." But everything depends on who is judging what is possible and what is necessary. For example, if the readership is university students in North America, and others who have been sensitized to the gender-bias of English, one must conclude that the NRSV is *less* literal and *more* sensitive to the priorities of functional equivalence than is the REB.

In short, dynamic (or functional) equivalence has triumphed, whether the expression itself be embraced or not; even among translators who think of their work as more 'literal,' its influence is pervasive. By and large, this has been a good thing. Nevertheless, a few cautions might not be entirely inappropriate.

First, it is salutary to remember that when dynamic equivalence

[9] "Translating for the Reader," *Theology Today* 47 (1990) 290-292.

[10] Ibid. 290.

theory was being developed and codified, its dominant foil was a more literal approach. Though that foil today has a few vociferous advocates, it has largely lost its power. But just as theological formulation can be seriously distorted if it focuses too narrowly on just one foil, so can the articulation of translation theory. One wonders what the shape of contemporary functional equivalence theory would be if it chose as a foil that approach to meaning associated with the less temperate forms of the new hermeneutic, in which all meaning is denied to the text itself and is reserved instead for the reader/hearer.

Second, the degree of explicitation advocated in some dynamic equivalence theory (and displayed in some translations) needs re-evaluation. Most scholars recognize that a certain amount of 'situational meaning'[11] lurks in any source text—*i.e.* meaning that is implicit in the text *for the original reader*, but not necessarily for the modern reader whose approach to the text must transcend differences in both language and time. Beekman and Callow offer Mk 2.4 as an example ("And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him....").[12] Where the people of the receptor language are familiar only with steeply sloping thatched roofs, language helpers have been known to assume the text is describing a miracle. At one level, of course, the problem turns on the meaning of one word, στέγη ('roof'); at another, the problem is more than one of *mere* definition, but is bound up with a complicated set of associations. The thatched-roof culture does not think of roofs as flat and made from packed, dried mud, places to which people frequently withdraw, accessible by an outside set of stairs, capable of holding the weight of many people, and something that could be easily dug through (Mk 2.4). But that is the problem: Ernst-August Gutt has argued that at some point one must distinguish between 'implicit information' that derives from language-specific principles, and

[11] To use the language of Mildred Larson, *Meaning-based Translation: A Guide to Cross Language Equivalences* (New York: University Press of America, 1984) 37.

[12] *Op. cit.* 47.

'encyclopaedic knowledge' that both the source-language readers and the receptor-language readers inevitably carry with them as they read the text.[13] The demands of the barrier erected by the differences in socially accepted knowledge can never be overcome by translation alone. Of course, this is not to say that there is some particular barrier that translation cannot bridge—all of contemporary linguistic theory stands against such a notion—but only that the *totality* of such barriers *cannot simultaneously* be bridged in the translation itself. Dynamic equivalence theory has doubtless helped us analyze the different kinds of meanings lurking in (or behind?) a text. By aiming to meet the exigencies of some of these attendant meanings (for example, by adding a number of explanatory words), it has sometimes opted to neglect other exigencies, as we shall see.

Third, single-eyed pursuit of what is 'natural' in the receptor language (remembering Belloc's distinction) can generate a host of insurmountable problems. I do not mean to despise natural renderings. One wonders, for instance, why the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) utilizes 'saints' in Phil 1.1. Still, three contrary factors must be observed.

(a) Unremitting pursuit of what is natural in the receptor language may introduce problems elsewhere. Consider an oft-cited extreme case. Some tribal cultures may not be familiar with sheep and lambs, but be quite experienced at sacrificing pigs. In a single passage describing the sacrifice of a sheep, substituting a pig would make the result entirely 'natural' to the readers of the receptor language. But the cost is high, since pigs and sheep are tied to so many strands of the Bible. Are we quite prepared to have John the Baptist cry, "Look! The swine of God who takes away the sin of the world!"? What replaces pigs as unclean animals? Is Christ now sacrificed as a piglet without blemish?

Although this illustration is probably overdrawn, simply because

[13] "What is the Meaning we Translate?" *OPTAT* No. 1 (Jan. 1987), 31-58. Cf. also A. H. Nichols, "Explicitness and the Westernization of Scripture," *RTR* 47 (1988) 78-88.

it is so extreme that few translators would opt for the pigs, yet a host of borderline cases is not hard to find. Should the elements of the Lord's Table ever become yams and goat's milk (or the local fermented drink?), simply because yams and goat's milk function in the receptor culture much as bread and wine function in first-century Palestine? The desirability of cultural naturalness must be weighed against competing *desiderata*, not least, in this instance, the desirability of maintaining the many lines between 'bread,' say, and some related biblical themes and passages (e.g., Jesus as the bread of life, and the anti-typological connection with the manna in the wilderness [John 6]).

(b) The Bible is not a simple book. Doubtless translators should earnestly endeavor not to make it more difficult than it is, but is their work well done when they make it simpler than it is? For example, the ἱλαστήριον word-group is notoriously difficult. But NEB's "remedy for defilement" moves the semantic focus from the sacrificial realm to the realm of medicine; "sacrifice of atonement" (NIV and NRSV), in addition to not being idiomatic in contemporary English, is lamentably obscure; "the means by which people's sins are forgiven" (TEV) is far more natural (though the term 'sins' in North Atlantic English is more frequently accompanied by snickers than shame), but considerably simpler than the donor text. One remembers the biting irritation of the late Stephen Neill when the Tamil translation team of which he was a part managed to smooth out all the difficulties in Ga 3, including those the apostle had intended.

In addition, Margot rightly points out that unintended ambiguities in the source text, better thought of as obscurities in the source text, will largely be cleared up by the thoughtful translator, but intended ambiguities (such as a clever word-play, such as πνεῦμα in John 3) will be preserved if possible, or explained with a note if necessary.[14]

(c) A certain amount of 'foreignness' in versions of the Bible is surely a good thing. Modern novelists recognize the point when they

[14] Jean-Claude Margot, "Should a Translation of the Bible Be Ambiguous?" *BibTrans* 32 (1981) 406-413.

choose an ostensible setting for their works of fiction. Chaim Potok does not make Asher Lev sound like the *goyim*, though I know quite a few *goyim* who enjoy reading his work. Because his protagonist is a lawyer with a Yiddish background, Scott Turow's novels abound in legal jargon quite beyond me, and may throw in an unexplained *Gevalt*. The concern, of course, is for historical verisimilitude. But surely a book as deeply embedded in history as the Bible is bound to deploy some expressions and categories that will not sound 'natural' to twentieth-century American English ears (or for that matter to Swahili ears, or Kikuyu ears). At a certain point, to make an ancient text sound *too* natural ultimately makes it sound phony.[15] This is not to justify stilted, archaic language, or an arcane cherishing of the merely traditional. It is to say that no responsible translation can or should seek entirely to escape the 'scandal of historical particularity' inherent in a text like the Bible. Deployment of somewhat alien categories must not become so noxious as to destroy the basic intelligibility of the flow of the text. But in the translation of historical and ostensibly historical texts, intelligibility is perhaps a more laudable goal than naturalness.

Fourth, dynamic equivalence has often set its agenda in terms of 'equivalence of response.' "Dynamic equivalence," writes Nida, "is ... to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language."[16] Mundhenk insists, "In the final analysis, a translation is good or bad, right or wrong, in terms of how the reader understands and reacts."[17] Once

[15] For a competent if perhaps overstated defense of this view, cf. Edward L. Greenstein, "Theories of Modern Bible Translation," *Prooftexts* 3 (1983) 9-39.

[16] Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* 166; cf. Nida/Taber, *Theory and Practice* 24.

[17] Norm Mundhenk, "The Subjectivity of Anachronism," *On Language, Culture and Religion*, ed. Matthew Black and William A. Smalley (The Hague: Mouton, 1974) 260.

again, there is great insight here. Formal equivalence while the message is lost can scarcely be construed as faithful translation. Many contemporary translations are remarkably effective in this area. Nevertheless, equivalence of response, no matter how carefully worked out, can never be given absolute status. Some of the first responses to, say, Jesus' parables, and doubtless to some of Paul's letters, were extremely negative. Responses are not only personal, but are deeply culturally conditioned. It is hard to imagine generating in a twentieth-century American Gentile the response to Leviticus that its first publication produced among the ancient Hebrews. Certainly it is true to say that increasing sensitivity to the limits of pursuing equivalence of response[18] has contributed (as we have seen) to the shift in nomenclature from 'dynamic' to 'functional' equivalence.[19]

To conclude the consideration of this translation feature, dynamic (or functional) equivalence has largely triumphed, and rightly so. Moreover, among its most competent practitioners, none of its principles or rules or insights is taken so absolutely as to prove embarrassing. They recognize that the 'rules' of functional equivalence translation are like the 'rules' of textual criticism: none can be given absolute status, because there are always countervailing factors that must be weighed. *Lectio difficilior potior* (the more difficult reading [of the original text] is to be preferred) is doubtless a powerful criterion, but it is useless if the production of a difficult variant was unintentional. So also with dynamic equivalence translation: explicitness is sometimes necessary, pursuing 'natural' renderings is a worthwhile goal, and equivalence of response an important consideration. But none is absolute. Neither textual criticism nor Bible translation is as mathematically secure as mechanical engineering. The same caution could be raised against other insights from functional

[18] Cf. especially Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), who has powerfully deployed Relevance Theory to highlight the limitations.

[19] Cf. p.3 n.4, *supra*.

equivalence theory (e.g., the elevation of meaning over form).[20] To ignore such cautions in the effort to raise translation to a 'hard' science can only discredit what is a powerful and useful approach to an extraordinarily difficult task.

2. During the past few decades, there has been an astonishing multiplication of disciplines connected with the task of Bible translation, most of them flourishing and producing voluminous specialist literature. The many branches of linguistics have spawned scores of doctoral programs. Many Bible translators have become passingly familiar with structuralism, discourse analysis, tagmemics, communication theory, sociolinguistics, the various branches of semantic theory, the new hermeneutic, computer tools, and much more. Even to begin to survey this material and assess its impact on new translations would be enormously complex. But perhaps I may venture four observations that have the greatest bearing on new translations.

First, the multiplication of these disciplines means that it is becoming increasingly difficult to control the literature relevant for Bible translators, let alone to become expert in these fields. In other words, while these disciplines have been a fecund stimulus to Bible translators around the world, they have to some extent so taken on a life of their own that the working translator is apt to be a bit daunted by it all. In fact, we are now moving into the era of edited books summarizing recent developments—such as the first book in the UBS Monograph Series, the one edited by Johannes Louw, *Sociolinguistics and Communication*.[21]

Second, at the risk of unwarranted generalization, my impression is that most Bible translators in the West, translating the Bible into

[20] For cautions in this area, cf. Keith Crim, "Philosophies, Theories, and Methods in Bible Translation," *Society of Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers*, No.24, ed. Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 161-167.

[21] Johannes Louw, ed., *Sociolinguistics and Communication*, UBSMS 1 (London: UBS, 1986).

English, French, German, and so forth, or revising earlier editions, remain fairly ignorant of such developments, though many are stellar scholars in the original languages, traditional exegesis, theology and related disciplines. By contrast, a very large number of translators working to produce vernacular Bibles in the so-called Third World, whether they be missionaries or indigenes, are informed—some of them very well informed—of developments in the linguistic and related arenas, but are woefully ill-equipped when it comes to more than a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, not to mention exegesis, theology, or biblical history. I have met more translators than I care to think about, valiantly laboring in difficult conditions, who have never had a scrap of theological education, and are disturbingly proud of the fact. It is easy for each of these two groups to criticize the other, not least by quoting the worst examples from the other side. [22]

Some experts in translation theory argue that a thorough command of, say, *koine* Greek can get in the way of good translation. Far more important, they say, are a basic knowledge of linguistic theory and an appreciation of style. I doubt that the translators of, say, the NRSV, will be convinced by this assessment. The problem to which the translation experts point is a real one, I think, but not because students have learned too much Greek, but because they have learned it in a more or less traditional format. What they need is Greek *and* linguistics—or, better yet, much more Greek (not less), but taught in an atmosphere where linguistic principles and readings are passed on as well.

Third, like all young and flourishing disciplines, those surrounding Bible translation are churning out a fair bit of mediocre and repetitious theoretical material. At the same time, however, they are also producing some work of ground-breaking significance, and much of this work has not yet been culled by translators. One thinks, for

[22] Jean-Claude Margot has commented insightfully on the problem: see his "Exegesis and Translation," *EQ* 50 (1978) 156-165.

example, of the new lexicon of semantic fields,[23] the masterful proposal of Porter that aspect controls the verbal structure of New Testament Greek,[24] the forthcoming lexicon of *Key Biblical Terms* that Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators[25] is preparing for translators, the many *Handbooks* and *Helps* for translators published by UBS, and of the bearing that the GRAMCORD Project will have on understanding syntactic units.

Fourth, the rise of these disciplines has to some limited extent renewed an old debate about the place of theology in translation. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, the schoolmen wanted to preserve the Vulgate that had served them well for centuries, and were appalled by the effrontery of Erasmus. For his part, Erasmus, steeped in the rising humanist tradition of the Renaissance, felt that authority should rest in the text in the original languages, and argued that the Bible must be interpreted from the Hebrew and Greek, not from the Vulgate. In principle, that freed him to prepare his own Latin translation. Luther sided on many points with the humanists, including a closely-reasoned refusal to what would today be described as elevating formal equivalence above semantic equivalence (SW, IV, 184,185[26]). At the same time he elevated what he felt was his Spirit-given theological insight into 'justification by faith' to the point where it controlled not a little of his exegesis, and therefore of his

[23] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. (New York: UBS, 1988).

[24] Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood*, Studies in Biblical Greek 1 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989).

[25] The work is being prepared by Katharine Barnwell, Anthony J. Pope, and Paul Dancy, and is scheduled to appear shortly. The name Summer Institute for Linguistics is used for academic/linguistic work; Wycliffe Bible Translators is used in reference to missionary and promotion efforts.

[26] Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Selected Writings of Martin Luther: Volume 4: 1529-1546* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

translation. Small wonder he could write, "Ah, translating is not every man's skill as the mad saints imagine. It requires a right devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing, Christian, trained, informed, and experienced heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian or factious spirit can be a decent translator" (SW, IV, 186).[27] Of course, similar disputes over translation and interpretation erupted in the early church between Augustine and St. Jerome, and continued in the writings of William Tyndale and Thomas More.[28]

Modernity has changed the shape of the debate a bit, but similar echoes are still heard. Translators have not been slow to dismiss the worst instances of theological control (not to say manipulation) of the translator's task. Versions cannot be assessed by how well they support, or fail to support special doctrines, such as pre-millennialism.[29] On the other hand, some English versions, though clearly well-informed at the linguistic level, seem to run into trouble because they lack exegetical and/or theological sophistication. The RSV of Gn 1.26 reads, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ...'" The TEV, however, renders, "Then God said, 'And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us ...'" On first glance, 'like us' and 'resemble us' seems so much simpler and more straightforward than 'in our image' and 'after our likeness.' (I overlook for the moment that 'after' might be replaced by 'according to' or even 'in line with.') By the time the reader reaches Gn 3,

[27] See note 26. For fuller discussion, cf. W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and Their Background* (Cambridge: University Press, 1955); *Martin Luther, Creative Translator* (St Louis: Concordia, 1965); more briefly, John L. Bechtel, "The Modern Application of Martin Luther's *Open Letter on Translating*," *AUSS* 11 (1973) 145-151.

[28] Cf. especially Heinz Holeczek, *Humanistische Bibelphilologie als Reformproblem bei Erasmus von Rotterdam, Thomas More und William Tyndale*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

[29] Cf. Eugene Nida, "Quality in Translation," *BibTrans* 33 (1982) 329-332; Daniel C. Arichea, Jr., *BibTrans* 33 (1982) 309-316.

however, he or she runs into confusion, for there the serpent deceives Eve by telling her that she 'will be like God' (Gn 3.5, RSV and TEV). When the Lord purposes to banish Adam and Eve from the garden, he does so because (according to the TEV) "the man has become like one of us" (Gn 3.22). Did God change his mind about making humans 'like us', as TEV seems to imply? It appears as if the effort to keep the English of Gn 1.26 simple, natural, idiomatic and plain, laudable in itself, has not been matched by equal effort to preserve distinctions in the source text and therefore to avoid what must strike the thoughtful reader as nonsense.[30]

This is not the place to attempt to articulate the relationship between translation and theology. Though it is surely right to say that theology, to be properly based, must turn on the kind of understanding of the text that is the goal of responsible exegesis and the *sine qua non* for quality translation, we must also say that the theology the translator espouses, consciously or unconsciously, at the moment of translation, is bound to influence him. We may agree that certain priority must be given to the text; we must also agree that no one approaches the text *tabula rasa*. Elsewhere I have tried to work out ways of articulating these relationships; here I wish only to emphasize that the multiplication of disciplines connected with Bible translation leaves plenty of scope for scholars to learn from one another.

3. The previous two points have prepared us for this one. It is now widely recognized that translation cannot be undertaken apart from interpretation, that each translation is itself invariably an interpretation.[31] That in turn drives us to ponder the relationship between translation and hermeneutics. In line with seriously dated

[30] I draw this example from Jacob Van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978) 86-87, with whose approach to translation I am in very substantial disagreement, but some of whose exegetical and theological insights bear pondering.

[31] E.g., Charles R. Taber, "Translation as Interpretation," *Int* 32 (1978) 130-143.

textbooks and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment historiography of Leopold von Ranke, there are still a few conservatives who think of hermeneutics exclusively as the process by which I, the knower, come to understand the object, the text. At the other extreme, some, including Nida and Reyburn in a book published ten years ago, distinguish exegesis from hermeneutics by stating that the former reconstructs "the communication event by determining its meaning (or meanings) for the participants in the communication," while the latter "may be described as pointing out parallels between the biblical message and present-day events and determining the extent of relevance and the appropriate response for the believer."[32] Hermeneutics is thereby reduced to what used to be called application. More sophisticated treatments will accept neither simplification.[33] They envisage a hermeneutical 'circle,' or, to avoid solipsism, a hermeneutical spiral, or a principled fusing of 'horizons of understanding' to make the transfer of information from one horizon to another possible, even if not exhaustive.

But even if we agree, against deconstructionism, that not all meaning resides in the knower, and that the text does bear meaning that can in substantial measure be known, the impact of the new hermeneutic, filtered through the new history and some new forms of literary criticism, is deeply embedded in Western intellectual life. And this post-modern view of knowledge, both a cause and a symptom of the entrenched pluralism of Western culture, has come to affect our Bible translations. We have become comfortable with the view that different English translations have different constituencies, because those different constituencies have different theological commitments, different biases, different educational bases. The sheer diversity of translations is assumed to be not only inevitable, but a good thing.

[32] Eugene A. Nida and William D. Reyburn, *Meaning Across Cultures*, American Society of Missiology Series 1 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981) 30.

[33] One of the best studies is Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

Indeed, there are some good things about it, as we shall note; but they are not all good, and, from the perspective of the history of Bible translation, the situation that has arisen in the West in this century is extraordinarily anomalous. But first we shall return to this question of the constituencies of various English versions from another perspective.

4. We must appraise some recent attempts of some English Bibles to avoid the gender-bias inherent in the language. TEV took some steps in that regard. REB goes considerably farther, but is remarkably inconsistent (or, from the British perspective, less doctrinaire). The NRSV is the first English Bible that systematically struggles with the question from first principles, and is remarkably consistent.[34] Published reviews are now readily available, so I need only sketch those principles here.[35] Readers wedded to more traditional language will doubtless take offense; readers who have already made the transition to principled gender-free use of the English language find it the only truly modern version. By another route we have returned to the question of constituencies for translations.

5. I must say something about the texts being translated. Others in this conference will consider the impact of the Qumran and Gnostic writings on biblical study, not least the bearing of the former on the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible. Apart from the New King James Version (NKJV), defended by a small but vociferous rear guard,[36] all modern English New Testaments are based on an eclectic

[34] For a comparison of REB and NRSV in this regard, cf. Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., "The *NRSV* and the *REB*: A New Testament Critique," *TT* 47 (1990) 281-289.

[35] "To The Reader," *New Revised Standard Version*, ABS, 1989.

[36] The most interesting recent production from this movement is the recently published edition of the Majority Text NT: Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* (Atlanta: Original Word, 1991).

text, the most recent ones being variations on the UBS Greek New Testament Third Edition and Nestle-Aland, 26th Edition. But that does not mean these editions are followed slavishly.

It is intriguing to compare the latest two major English Bibles with their immediate predecessors. The NEB is notorious for the freedom with which it emends texts and moves blocks of material around, especially in the Hebrew Bible. There are at least one hundred textual transpositions without a scrap of text-critical warrant. By contrast, the REB is far more conservative in this regard. When we compare the RSV and the NRSV, we discover far more textual information conveyed in the notes of the latter. Not less interesting is the fact that at many places the translators of the NRSV have opted for a different variant than their predecessors did, usually with very little new manuscript evidence. It would be helpful to have some guide to the basis for these decisions. Doubtless the arrival of UBS Greek New Testament Fourth Edition, with the same text as UBS Greek New Testament Third Edition/Nestle-Aland 26th Edition, but a substantially revised apparatus, will launch a further round of discussion.

I conclude this section with two observations. First, there is a small but growing theoretical literature on the relationship between the translator's task and the establishment of text, including not only traditional questions of textual criticism but the distinctive role of the final text form and the outer boundaries of the text in canonical constraints.[37] Second, although it is too much to expect Bible

[37] E.g., Daniel C. Arichea, "Theology and Translation: The Implications of Certain Theological Issues to the Translation Task," *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church: The Last 200 Years*, ed. Philip C. Stine; Studies in Christian Mission 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1990) esp. 40-48; Hans Peter Rüger, "Was übersetzen wir? Fragen zur Textbasis, die sich aus Traditions und Kanonsgeschichte ergeben," *Die Übersetzung der Bibel—Aufgabe der Theologie: Stuttgarter Symposion 1984*, ed. Joachim Gnilka and Hans Peter Rüger (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1985) 57-64; Adrian Schenker, "Was übersetzen wir? Fragen zur Textbasis, die sich aus der Textkritik ergeben," ibid. 65-80; Harold P. Scanlin, "What is the Canonical Shape of the Old Testament Text we Translate?" *Issues in Translation*, ed. Philip C. Stine, UBSMS 3 (London: UBS, 1988) 207-219.

translators to use exactly the same textual base, it would be exceedingly helpful if translators and publishers could agree on some basic indicators in the footnotes. Expressions such as 'Some manuscripts read,' 'Alternatively,' 'Or,' and a host of similar ones, confuse rather than clarify the principles on which textual choices were made by the translators.

6. With a few notable exceptions, Bible translations in the Western world are now done by committee. Where Christianity has not yet penetrated new tribes, translation is done by a single translator or a pair of translators, backed up by consultants at regional centers. Between these two extremes are the many Bible translations currently being undertaken in some tribal language where many of the tribal people have already become Christians, perhaps through the medium of a regional trade language such as Swahili. Although missionaries still perform a great deal of this work, the increasing tendency is to train indigenes to some minimal standard, and use consultants more extensively in the revisions and editing.

What effect do these quite disparate approaches have on Bible translations? Specifically, what are the effects of committee translation process. At one level, of course, it is always important to remember that in many counsellors there is wisdom. On the whole, versions that are the result of committee work are less liable to eccentricity than are those produced by a single individual (even if that individual has solicited a fair bit of advice along the way). The flip side is not only that committee translations may sometimes be a trifle more staid, a trifle less colorful (compare, say, RSV and Moffatt),[38] but that now and then the committee may settle for compromises that offend no one on the committee.

[38] Cf. Ernst R. Wendland, "Receptor Language Style and Bible Translation: A Search for 'Language which Grabs the Heart,'" *BibTrans* 32 (1981) 107-124; Ross McKerras, "Don't Put Out the Fire!" *NOT* 5/2 (1991) 1-20.

This example comes out of my personal experiences. When I offered a brief (and largely positive) review of the NRSV at last year's SBL, although I approved the translators' handling of 'son of man' in Ps 8 and its quotation in He 2, I suggested that in Dn 7 the text ("one like a human being") and the footnote ("like a son of man") should be reversed. In the rebuttal, I was told that 'son of man' really does mean 'human being,' and that it would have been wrong to ignore the sensibilities of the Jewish scholars on the committee. The irony is that I agree with both points: 'son of man' in Dn 7 does mean 'human being,' and translators need to beware of needlessly offending the sensibilities of their prospective readers, let alone their committee members, Jewish, Black, conservative Christian, or whatever. But in fact, my point was a technical one. Most scholars recognize that the roots of Jesus' persistent application to himself of 'son of man' lie in Dn 7. Although Jesus' usage, as reported in the Gospels, can occasionally be rendered by 'human being' or even by the first person personal pronoun, far too many of the occurrences carry enough technical force that most translations properly preserve 'son of man.' I am *not* saying that later, unambiguously messianic linguistic developments should be read back into earlier material. I am saying, rather, that to lose sight of the biblical roots of Jesus' most frequent expression of self-identity as God's agent is to lose something important.

Because these matters are delicate, and I have no wish that anyone take umbrage, I add a few clarifying reflections.

(a) I agree on the whole with Barclay Newman[39] when he criticizes the New American Standard Bible (NASB) for deploying capital letters for pronouns taken to refer to the Messiah in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 72.2). A note accompanying Ps 45.1b reads, "Probably refers to Solomon as a type of Christ." The Living Bible (LB) similarly utilizes notes to make these Christian connections.

(b) On the other hand, many New Testament themes are constructed out of the trajectories of what is now called inner-biblical exegesis. Some of this is indistinguishable from the best of what used to be commonly called typology. Both inner-biblical exegesis and typology can easily run amok. But that does not mean that the phenomenon does not exist, or is not important. The subject is highly complex and is generating a substantial body of literature, and it interests me a great deal.[40] From the translator's point of view, the question to be considered in this case is the instrument by which the translation should preserve the linguistic *form* of an expression so that the appropriate inner-biblical link can be spotted by someone without access to the original languages.

(c) If it be argued that 'inner-biblical' exegesis inevitably has a broader set of links to consider when 'biblical' refers to the Christian canon than to the Jewish canon, I heartily agree. Bibles *are* attached to communities; committees that cross communities invariably make great gains in terms of fairness and rigor, but there may be some losses as well.

(d) In any case, it seems to me that Jewish scholars interested in, say, the 'son of man' in the "Similitudes" of 1 Enoch might also have an interest in preserving the linguistic form of the expression in Dn 7.

7. A great deal of Bible translation work has been tied to missionary movements.[41] This is less true, of course, where Bibles are being produced to meet the needs of established ecclesiastical bodies. Still, it is very largely true, and from a Christian perspective this is a good thing.

[39] Barclay M. Newman, "Toward a Theology of Translation," *Bulletin of the UBS* 124/125 (1981) 10-21, esp. 14-15.

[40] For bibliography and discussion, cf. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson, ed., *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars, SSF* (Cambridge: University Press, 1988).

[41] Cf. Philip C. Stine, ed., *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church;* and esp. William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission: Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1991).

What is perhaps overlooked is that this reality in turn influences the way translators think of their task. Translators commissioned by the National Council of the Churches of Christ to produce the NRSV will not see their role in exactly the same way as will translators struggling to produce the first New Testament for a remote tribe in Papua New Guinea, precisely because the envisioned readers are so different. I do not mean that the respective cultures of the two reader groups are very different. I mean that one translation effort is overtly and immediately interested in evangelism, and cannot think of its task apart from that goal, while the other serves a more established constituency. Internationally, however, a far greater proportion of translators immediately serve the missionary and evangelistic task than otherwise, and so the preponderance of thought and research and publication in the area is inevitably shaped to serve this large group. When we delve into this literature on Bible translation theory, and try to understand the way it works out in new Bibles, we are being influenced to think of the priorities of translation in a certain way.

I am not criticizing these missionary goals. The sacrifices and achievements of Bible translators around the world are extraordinary, something for which to thank God. But I wonder if Bible translation theory has been shifted a little too far in the direction of simplification and clarity (even when the source text is obscure), precisely because the unstated assumption is that the *only* evangelistic 'agent' for the particular target group will be the Bible itself. Indeed, for all of its history the Wycliffe Bible Translators has adopted the policy of *not* sending out pastors or more traditional missionaries, of *not* setting up schools and hospitals and the like. Traditional missionary endeavor has been left to other organizations. This single-eyed commitment to Bible translation has been remarkably productive. However, it may slightly skew the vision of the translators themselves. One cannot help noting that when Paul established churches in highly diverse centers of the Roman Empire, he quickly appointed elders in every place. He did not simply distribute copies of the Septuagint.[42]

[42] I use the term loosely, without suggesting that the Septuagint as it has come down to us is precisely the same as the Greek Bible the church used during the first decades of its life.

The New Testament that translators are putting into the vernacular frequently describes and mandates the tasks of pastors and teachers and evangelists. Of course, this does not rule out a place for specialized ministry, in this case the work of translation. But unless such work is coordinated with other work, it may take on a disproportionate importance. And it may establish a certain expectation of what all translations *ought* to be.

No matter how excellent and comprehensible a translation is, there will always be a need for pastors and teachers. A few years ago, a friend of a friend was giving out modern English New Testaments (I believe it was the TEV) to students at a British university, on the condition that they agree to read them. A few weeks later this zealous Christian stumbled across one of the students to whom he had given a New Testament. This student had no background whatsoever in the Bible; he had never so much as held any part of the Bible in his hand before. When he was asked what he made of the New Testament he had been given, he cheerfully replied with words to this effect: "Oh, it was rather interesting. The first part was a bit repetitious: it more or less tells the same story several times. But I sure liked that bit of science fiction at the end!" Eugene Nida tells another story of how a Thai Buddhist first read the four Gospels and, asked how he liked the New Testament he had been given, responded, "Oh, that is a wonderful book, and such a remarkable man! Why, he was born and he died, he was born and he died, born and died, born and died. In four reincarnations he made it to Nirvana."[43] Considering that Buddha took 1,000, small wonder the Buddhist was impressed. The point, of course, is that more than translation is needed.

I am not making a surreptitious plea for obscurity in translations, nor am I justifying a secret guild of *cognoscenti* who will unpack esoteric mysteries for the unwashed. I am simply saying that the

[43] Eugene A. Nida, "Bible Translation for the Eighties," *IRM* 70 (1981) 133.

Bibles that are translated with evangelistic purposes in view may in many cases survive for decades, even for a century or two, without substantial revision. In all likelihood, pastors will come along, standards of education will rise—and the same Bibles will still be used. Moreover, very frequently a certain inertia controls this indigenous church: the only Bible they have ever known is *their* Bible, it is *the* Bible, so that those who may want to revise it and upgrade the quality of translation face major hurdles.

These factors suggest two things. First, Bible translators in such areas may need to think about working in tandem with evangelists, pastors and teachers. I understand that there is an internal discussion within the Wycliffe groups on this issue, and that there have already been changes in practice in recent years. Second, although Bible translation is to be undertaken with a target group of readers in mind, that group should not be construed as so narrow in outlook, so ill-informed about Christianity, pre-Christian, and lacking in teachers and preachers that the resulting translation will be hopelessly dated by the time that same group has become an established church.

Clearly, we have swung round once again to the constituents of Bible translations, and so to this last topic I now turn.

8. Not least in the English-speaking world, Bibles have constituencies, some of them overlapping. This fact is in dramatic opposition to the sweeping dominance of the King James Version (KJV) for three hundred years.

The constituencies can be defined in different ways. The level of a reader's proficiency can establish the locus of a constituency.[44] The NEB was sometimes said to be "not in the language of our times but

[44] Cf. Eugene A. Nida, "Translating Means Communicating: A Sociolinguistic Theory of Translation II," *BibTrans* 30 (1979) 319: "But the content of a discourse is only one factor influencing the choice of vocabulary. Even more important are the capacities of the intended receptors. Precisely the same information may be communicated on a technical or nontechnical level, and the choice of a lexical register depends on the receptors for whom a translation is being made."

in the language of the *Times*"—a sort of Oxbridge vernacular. The REB has diluted this elitism somewhat. Contrast the TEV: its strategy of pitching a translation at a more popular level[45] was to produce a version for readers of English as a second language. Both ends of the market scale have advantages and disadvantages.

Constituencies can also be established to some extent by the sponsors of particular versions. British Catholic translators produced the Jerusalem Bible (JB), and now the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB). Their American counterparts gave us the New American Bible (NAB), plus a revision of the New Testament. The Jewish Publication Society published a fresh rendering of the Hebrew and Aramaic Scriptures (*The Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*). During the last three decades, Protestants have sponsored, among other translations, the TEV, the NIV, the NASB, the NKJV, and now the NRSV. But Protestants are so divided that few who will purchase and read the NKJV will become familiar with the TEV or the NRSV, and vice versa. That means there are many sub-constituencies. Some of them are very small indeed: how many of us are intimately familiar with the New Testament portion of God's Word to the Nations (GWN)[46]?

But in an open society where individuals can make their own purchases, the marketplace competes with denominational leaders and publishing sponsors to define constituencies. Recently Arthur Van Eck wrote, "A 1988 survey of 10,000 households which owned one or more Bibles indicated that one-third owned a Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Only the venerable King James Version was owned by more households with all other versions coming below the RSV in this survey."[47] These figures are impressive, though I confess

[45] I use the expression in a non-technical sense. Some translation theorists distinguish sharply between common-language versions and popular versions, placing TEV and its related versions (e.g., *Die Gute Nachricht* and *Les Bonnes Nouvelles*) firmly into the former category.

[46] Biblion Publishing, Cleveland, 1988.

[47] Arthur O. Van Eck, "The NRSV—Why Now?" *RE* 85 (1990) 163.

I would be interested to know how the 10,000 households were selected. Were they tied, I wonder, to mainline denominations?

The reason I press the point is that, in preparation for this essay, I wrote to six major Bible publishers and asked them to give me their sales figures for the past five years. Since the bases for the figures sent to me were not always exactly the same, I have tried to be precise in the specifications. Here are the results.

(a) During the five year period 1986-90, Doubleday sold 250,000 copies of the JB or NJB.

(b) During the same period, the RSV sold 2,184,046 copies. The figure for NRSV, for 1990 alone, is 1,115,901.

(c) In the five-year period from April 1 1986 to March 31 1990, Oxford University Press sold, in the United States alone, 76,720 copies of the NEB. This does *not* include the number sold by Cambridge University Press, which did not respond to my inquiry. But let us be charitable and double or triple the figure released by OUP, and we arrive at a total of not more than 200,000. This does not include copies sold overseas, including the UK.

(d) The Lockman Foundation estimates it sold, from 1986 to 1990 inclusively, 1.2 million copies of the complete NASB.

(e) Thomas Nelson reports that 'to date' (which presumably means from publication to the present, i.e. the ten-year period 1982-1991) the NKJV sold approximately 14 million copies under the auspices of Nelson, and about 4 million more copies in the editions of Gideons International and the American Bible Society. If we halve these figures to reflect the five years from 1986 to 1990, the total is approximately 9 million.

(f) During that same five-year period, the NIV sold approximately 32 million copies, 11 million through Zondervan and 21,327,027 through the International Bible Society.[48]

[48] For various reasons I have not sought the figures on some other translations that might be mentioned. For example, the sales figures on the *Living Bible*, A.J. Holman Co., Philadelphia and New York, 1973, are doubtless very high. But the Living Bible has made relatively few inroads into churches as pew Bibles (unlike the others mentioned in the list above), so I thought it best to leave it aside.

Of course, the size of circulation does not say anything necessary about the quality of the work. However, if the *Annales* school of historiography is right, these figures do tell us something about who is reading and what is being read. The overwhelming sales of NKJV and NIV tell us something about constituencies!

Not all of this compartmentalization is bad. Various constituencies are being served. With the best will in the world I do not see how some of the barriers between the constituencies are likely soon to be bridged. The halcyon days when everyone was brought up on one version, memorizing it and absorbing it as part of the cultural heritage, are gone and will not return. Perhaps it is worth suggesting that when a family or a church does adopt a version, there is something to be said for not changing again too quickly: a certain amount of memorization takes place with much regular use, almost by osmosis. If we value hiding God's Word in our hearts (minds? memories?), rather than in our notebooks or computers, the advantages of some discipline in this area are plain.

III. *Prospects*

Since I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, my perspective on the prospects of Bible translations can be brief. I have already indicated that gender-neutral English use is likely to increase, and that will affect future revisions. More linguistic research will churn from the presses. The first linguistically sensitive Greek grammars will appear shortly, and in the long haul they will help to change the shape of seminary education, and therefore perhaps of what the French call the 'formation' of translators. There are no signs that the flood of revisions and of revisions of revisions, not to mention fresh translations, is abating, but for all practical purposes only eight or ten versions are likely to be viable in the market-place. And if the sales figures are significant, ninety per cent of America's

Bible readers (or, at least, Bible purchasers!) will primarily use one of three or four versions.

Perhaps I may put forward five or six further prospects:

1. During the past decade, computers have served as word processors to help many translators to produce successive drafts, enter corrections, change spellings, and prepare a new version for publication.[49] Although sophisticated computers have been used to produce first draft translations of scientific material, it is unlikely that they will be used to produce first draft translations of literary material as diverse and as complex as that of the Bible—at least in the foreseeable future, perhaps ever. But during the next decade or two a growing number of translators will use computers, linked to CDs or their successors, to access a large body of research. Perhaps more importantly, creative and complex database systems will become more 'user friendly,' with the result that more translators will use them for note-taking and research-organizing functions. At the same time, new advances in the textual criticism of the New Testament will probably occur as software is developed to utilize fully the remarkable system at Münster at the Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung.

2. New advances in the textual criticism of the Old Testament will emerge as the rest of the Dead Sea Scrolls are published, provided they yield enough information to allow the currently competing models of Old Testament textual development to be substantially resolved.

3. There will probably be some major advances in the production of Bibles in languages where many of the people have already become Christians through the medium of a regional trade language. Almost a decade ago, Rachel Angogo Kanyoro laid out the challenges and prospects in Africa.[50] I would be interested to learn how her proposals have prospered, and what the next steps are. But these matters cannot be rushed, not only because of the limitations of the resources available (both people and money), but also for a host of cultural reasons. For example, William Smalley has explicated the phenomenon of language hierarchies, in which multilingual people use different languages for different purposes.[51] I recall on one trip to Australia an Anglican bishop from eastern Zaire, who could speak three languages: his own tribal language, Swahili, and French (in which he had taken his theological education). He chose Swahili when he was describing the state of his diocese to Australian Anglicans—and several Australian missionaries were capable of providing fluent interpretation. But when the bishop was called upon to preach, he preferred to use French—whereupon I was called upon to translate, having been reared in French Canada.

4. There may well be a flurry of new Bible translations and revisions in what used to be called the Iron Curtain countries.

5. There will probably continue to be some concerted focus on the production of fresh translations for the various Muslim populations, replacing older works produced by missionaries who were not native speakers, and whose efforts, though ground-breaking in their day, were beset by numerous problems that cannot be probed here.[52]

6. In the West, there will be the continued production of expensive 'study editions' of the more 'successful' versions. In my view, most of these do little good except make money for the publishers.[53]

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[49] See Harold W. Fehderau, "Using Computers in a Translation Project," *BibTrans* 36 (1985) 418-422.

[50] "A Proposal for Translation Research Strategy in Africa," *BibTrans* 34 (1983) 101-106.

[51] "Thailand's hierarchy of multilingualism," *Language Sciences* 10/2 (1988).

[52] See the important article by K. J. Thomas, "The Challenge of Bible Translation," *The Reformed World* 39 (1987) 675-682.

[53] I would be less opposed to such editions if they restricted themselves to providing information of as neutral a sort as possible, to help the reader

IV. *Conclusion*

Perfect translations are impossible. As Andrew Walls puts it, "Politics is the art of the possible; translation is the art of the impossible."[54] That is overstated, of course, but it is a stark reminder that all translation is compromise. We might usefully compare one's educational choices, where there are few absolute 'rights' and 'wrongs.' Shall I send my children to the local school? To a private school? To a parochial school? To a junior college? To a state university? To a private university? Appropriate answers will vary from child to child, from city to city, according to the resources available. Whatever decision is taken, there are entailments one simply must live with. So it is with translation. It is impossible to achieve perfection in all the possible *desiderata* simultaneously. So responsible translators learn as much as they can, make and correct their choices, and live with the entailments—recognizing that other translators, in different situations and with different skills, targeting a quite different group of people, may make a different set of choices and be forced to live with a different set of entailments.

The 175th anniversary of the American Bible Society is an appropriate occasion to thank God for the advances that have been made, to confess our shortcomings and disappointments, and to

bridge the chasms carved out by distance in time and language and culture. For a variety of reasons too complex to be explored here, I would argue that the additional notes provided by most study Bibles would be better left to separate books.

[54] Andrew F. Walls, "The Translation Principle in Christian History," *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church* 24-39. Cf. Werner Winter, "Impossibilities of Translation," *Problems in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Thomas W. Olshewsky (New York: Hold, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969): "In a nutshell, we seem to have here all the challenge and all the frustration that goes with our endeavors to do the ultimately impossible. We know from the outset that we are doomed to fail; but we have the chance, the great opportunity to fail in a manner that has its own splendor and its own promise."

resolve to press on with the privilege and responsibility of the multifaceted task of translating the Word of God.[55]

[55] I am grateful to Dr. Katharine Barnwell for reading an earlier draft of this paper, and for offering a number of important insights and suggestions for its improvement.