

UNDERSTANDING THE THEORY, HISTORY,
AND PRACTICE

THE
CHALLENGE
OF
BIBLE
TRANSLATION

COMMUNICATING GOD'S WORD TO THE WORLD

GLEN G. SCORGIE, MARK L. STRAUSS,
STEVEN M. VOTH

GENERAL EDITORS

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF RONALD F. YOUNGBLOOD

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DEDICATORY PREFACE

“Great men seem to us men of great boldness; in reality they are more obedient than others.”

—A. G. SERTILLANGES, *THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE*

This volume of essays on the challenge of Bible translation is presented in honor of Ronald F. Youngblood, a leading evangelical voice and an outstanding teacher, scholar, editor, and Bible translator. It is a modest work to honor a great person whose entire direction in life—and significant achievements along the way—has been the natural product of his lifelong obedience to the higher purposes of his Lord.

Ron was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1931, nurtured in modest circumstances, and drawn to faith in Jesus Christ at a young age. During his teen years he moved with his family to the small town of Chesterton, Indiana. In due course he attended nearby Valparaiso University and upon graduation in 1952 married Carolyn Johnson, with whom he has enjoyed the blessing of a half century of mutually supportive partnership. After Valparaiso the Youngbloods traveled to the West Coast, where Ron enrolled in the Bachelor of Divinity program at Fuller Seminary (1952–55) and was formatively influenced by E. J. Carnell, William Sanford La Sor, and David Hubbard. Ron’s emerging aptitude and passion for Old Testament research led the Youngbloods back across America to the Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where Ron earned his Ph.D. in 1961. Always learning, he subsequently invested an academic year (1967–68) on an archaeological fellowship at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem. Over the years he has become a savvy traveler and explorer of ancient things in the Middle East.

At the same time Ron has always been committed to the welfare of the church. This was signaled early on through his ordination to the gospel ministry in 1958 at Oxford Circle Baptist Church in Philadelphia. His direct contributions to congregational life since then have included regular pulpit ministry, lay

teaching, and periodic interim pastorates. One literary legacy of this dimension of his vocation is a collection of his sermons titled *Special-Day Sermons: Outlines and Messages* (1973, 1978, 1989).

Ronald Youngblood has been closely and continuously associated with Bethel Seminary for his entire academic career of over forty years. In 1961 he was hired to teach Old Testament at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and did so with distinction until 1978. Even while subsequently serving for much briefer periods at Wheaton College Graduate School (1978–81) and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1981–82), he maintained his Bethel association on an annual basis as an adjunct professor. In 1982 he accepted the Old Testament professorship at Bethel Seminary West, Bethel's new campus in San Diego, California. Ron's presence added, and continues to add, considerable credibility to this school (now known as Bethel Seminary San Diego), and Southern California has been home for the Youngbloods ever since. It serves as his base for consultations, lectureships, and short-term teaching ministries literally around the world.

Unquestionably, Ron Youngblood has been gifted with a brilliant mind. He has an encyclopedic memory, an enviable aptitude for languages, and an astonishing editorial efficiency and accuracy. Yet for all of that, he has never been one of those stereotypical ivory-tower scholars who thinks (in the words of Adolf Harnack) that he has discharged his duties by treating the gospel "in the recondite language of learning and burying it in scholarly folios."¹ He has always loved the church and respected the laity too much to treat the gospel in such a manner. He represents the democratic instinct of the evangelical tradition at its very best. It is no accident that C. S. Lewis and Billy Graham are among those he most admires.

Ron has made a very significant contribution to biblical scholarship through his many Old Testament publications. There is no scandal to his evangelical mind. Space limitations require that only a few of his scholarly publications be highlighted here. His first book, *Great Themes of the Old Testament* (1968), has enjoyed perennial appeal and is still in print under a new title *The Heart of the Old Testament* (2d ed., 1998). Two of his smaller books, *Faith of Our Fathers* (1976) and *How It All Began* (1980), were blended into *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary* (2d ed., 1999). In this work he demonstrated a judicious "conservationist" perspective while taking full account of the historical origins and literary genre of Genesis. His research on biblical beginnings also qualified him to edit a related work, *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood* (1986), in which two opposing views were fairly presented.

The breadth of Ron's Old Testament scholarship is reflected in additional publications on *Exodus* (1983, 1999), *Themes from Isaiah* (1983), and especially in his extensive work on First and Second Samuel for volume 3 of the Expositor's Bible Commentary (1992), work that was later adapted for inclusion in the two-volume *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary* (1994).

Ron has also been an outstanding editor over the years. He served for a remarkably long run of twenty-two crucial years (1976–98) as the editor of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)*. In this capacity he helped to fortify the scholarly reputation of the Evangelical Theological Society and contributed to the intellectual credibility of the evangelical tradition generally. He has always been an irenic advocate of a high view of Scripture, and during his tenure as *JETS* editor he selected and published a collection of *JETS* articles known as *Evangelicals and Inerrancy* (1984). Certainly no less significant were his labors as an associate editor for the *NIV Study Bible* (1985)—work that continues to this day (he was associate editor for a revised edition published in October 2002)—and as general editor of *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (1995). In 1996 this latter volume won the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association Gold Medallion Award for reference books.

It is for Ron as a person that those of us privileged to know him feel the most affection. His exceptional sense of humor has often brought relief to stultifying committee meetings, diffused tension at other times, and always reminded us that it is unwise to take ourselves too seriously. And there are some paradoxical features of his temperament that endear him to us as well. He oscillates, for example, between statesmanship on significant matters to occasional goofiness over lunch at the local Burger King. He can be a creature of rather parochial lunchtime habits while at home but then immediately get on an airplane for another of his adventures to the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Asia, or the Middle East. A largehearted and generous man, his frugality is legendary.

His accomplishments have been considerable, to say the least, yet he remains a genuinely humble person who encourages younger colleagues and students and rejoices in the accomplishments of others. His heart truly is set on the bigger picture of kingdom advance and the interests of his Savior. And by drawing on the resources of his faith in Jesus Christ, Ron has developed an unusual joy in living and a buoyancy of spirit that are contagious to everyone around him. This joy has remained resilient, even in the midst of anxieties and experiences of loss.

Nothing has been closer to Ron's heart over the years than the challenge of finding ways to faithfully communicate the Bible's meaning through the symbols and words of diverse and changing cultures. This significant dimension of

Ron's vocation began in 1970. Arthur Lewis, his Old Testament colleague at Bethel College, was working on a translation team reporting to the newly organized Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), and Dr. Lewis arranged for Ron to join the team. Ron's administrative efficiency and exceptional gifts for editing and translating became progressively evident, and in 1976 he was invited to join the CBT (initially as a "nonmember" member) during its pressured run to meet a 1978 deadline for publication of the complete New International Version. He has been an integral part of the CBT ever since and played an active editor-translator role in the development of the first revised edition of the NIV (1984). He also served as executive editor of the New International Reader's Version: New Testament (1995, 1998), a Bible designed for youthful readers and adult readers with more limited vocabularies (e.g., those for whom English is a second language). More recently he played a significant role in the development of the Today's New International Version (TNIV), a version designed to reflect more recent developments in English-language meanings. The TNIV New Testament was published in 2002; the Old Testament portion is projected to release in 2004.

Ron continues as an active member of the International Bible Society's Committee on Bible Translation. He seems most alive when he is hunkered down with his closest friends and colleagues in the painstaking collaborative work of Bible translation. In addition to this significant hands-on work, he chairs the board of directors of the International Bible Society, the official sponsor of the NIV and an organization with a vision for Bible translation and distribution that extends well beyond the English-speaking world.

Ron's great passion for the task of correctly handling the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15) will be part of his legacy to the next generation of evangelical scholars and colleagues. He has enriched our lives by his mentoring and friendship and by his faithfulness to Scripture and to the vocation of a Christian scholar. It has been a special honor, inspiration, and delight for all of us to have been associated with him over the years.

—GLEN G. SCORGIE, MARK L. STRAUSS, AND STEVEN M. VOTH

NOTES

1. Adolf von Harnack, Preface to *What is Christianity?* trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), vi.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Glen G. Scorgie

FROM ALEXANDRIA TO UKARUMPA

The twin-engine Cessna descended through a break in the clouds and circled a hillside community before landing on a dirt airstrip nearby. We had arrived in the mile-high town of Ukarumpa in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Encircled by protective fencing, the town is home to over a thousand international residents and their local assistants. Their modest but well-maintained houses cover the slopes. Near the end of the day conservatively dressed people can be seen striding along the roads, shoulders hunched in earnestness as they lug laptops and tote bags of important paperwork home for the evening. An air of quiet diligence pervades the scene.

All around is coffee-growing country, but the town of Ukarumpa exists for a different purpose. Founded in the 1950s, owned and operated by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL—also known as Wycliffe Bible Translators), an evangelical parachurch organization, it is probably the world's largest installation for the purpose of linguistic research and Bible translation. The linguistic techniques, computer software, and technical support employed here are state-of-the-art. Fact-gathering visits to tribal situations are kept brief and to a minimum out of respect for fragile indigenous cultures. An impressive number of translation projects have already been completed, and personnel here are working in no less than 175 different languages.

Ukarumpa may be exceptional, but it is not an oddity. Rather, it is a notable example of a much larger enterprise going on for many years just below the radar screen of public awareness. This work is really as old as the Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew Bible prepared in the Egyptian city of Alexandria prior to the birth of Jesus Christ. It is as venerable as the New Testament itself, in which,

as former missionary Andrew Walls puts it, “the very words of Jesus come to us in Greek dress.”¹ It is as ancient as Jerome’s fourth-century Latin Vulgate version that monopolized the mind of the Western church for over a millennium.

But the challenge of Bible translation as we know it today is fueled to a considerable extent by evangelical Protestant passion to get the transforming Word of God out into the hands and hearts of the people of the world. The evangelical tradition is nothing if it is not Bible-centered,² so it continues to resonate with the sentiments of Protestant Reformer Martin Luther, who said, “I should prefer all my books to perish that only the Bible might be read, for other books take up our attention and make us neglect [it].”³ And evangelicals exude an almost boundless confidence in the spiritual power of these same Scriptures, a confidence memorably expressed by Charles Spurgeon when he said, “The word of God is like a lion. You don’t have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself.”

The evangelical view leads first, then, to the conviction that Bible translation is a vitally important endeavor. But what exactly is the challenge of Bible translation all about? As with translation endeavors generally, the goal of Bible translation is to transfer the meaning of a biblical text from its source language to some other receptor language so that *communication* occurs. Everything else about the translation business—all the linguistic expertise and scholarly apparatus, the lexicons, and the software—is little more than scaffolding. The key point is that communication is not just a matter of proclaiming something. It requires that the message sent out be received—and not only received but received in such a way that the reader (or viewer or listener) actually “gets it.” In Bible translation, faithfulness to the original meaning of a text is important, but it is not enough. The other critical test is what it enables its readers to understand. Translation is all about communication, and communication is by its very nature dialogical. It cares about its source *and* it cares about its audience. It is about what *actually transfers* from a point of origin to a destination. Every undergraduate is familiar with Bishop George Berkeley’s philosophical question, “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around, does it make a sound?” In a similar vein we might well ask, “If a translation is published but fails to communicate, is it really a translation?”

Particularly in these days of fuzzy thinking and epistemological malaise, it is important to affirm something else about Bible translation: Not only is it highly desirable; it is also *possible*. It is thoroughly Christian to hold that the divinely inspired Word first communicated through Hebrew and Greek language (and the ways of viewing life that those languages reflected) can now be meaningfully

conveyed through other human languages as well. It is a great grace—and one to be celebrated by Christians—that divinely revealed truth is portable between linguistic systems and equally potent in its new dress. Meaningful communication need not be confined within the locus of any linguistic system, including the loci of the original biblical languages.

The Christian faith carries within itself the grounds for affirming the possibility of interlinguistic transfer and successful Bible translation. It does so through its heuristic paradigms of Pentecost and the Incarnation. Certainly this is at least part of what was symbolically proclaimed at Pentecost when an international audience in Jerusalem reported that every one of them was able to hear and understand the apostolic gospel in his or her own tongue (Acts 2:11). It was Luke's way of affirming that Babel was not to be God's final and fateful verdict on the human race. And Christian hopefulness about Bible translation does not depend on this alone. It is grounded as well in the Incarnation itself. The paradigm of the Incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, is foundational to the translator's task. Andrew Walls again puts it so well: "There is a history of translation of the Bible because there was a translation of the Word into flesh."⁴ Bible translators must be modest, but they also ought to be—if they are Christians—optimistic as well. Meaning can never be transferred between linguistic systems comprehensively (thus the modesty), but it can be transferred truly and substantially (thus the hopefulness). Historic Christianity affirms with the apostle Paul that "in Christ all the *fullness* of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9, emphasis added). Christ's divinity was not lost or diminished through his assumption of our humanity. Christian translators rightly draw inspiration from the triumphs of Pentecost and the Incarnation.

The Incarnation is a Christian's ground for affirming that translation is possible. It may also be treated as a pointer to how translation ought to be conducted. The God who previously communicated in a variety of ways eventually chose, as his ultimate communication initiative, to become fully incarnate as a human being (Heb 1:1–2). God's truth was communicated with unprecedented clarity and depth as God *fully* embraced our humanity. The application of this principle to translation leads us to conclude that the more thoroughly the Bible is translated into the language and thought-constructs of a receptor group, the more powerfully and effectively its divine message can be expected to shine through. Just as the early church celebrated a Savior who was fully God and fully human, without compromise of either nature, we should expect by analogy that the most powerful translations for communicating divine truth will be the ones that are most thoroughly contextual (or "human") in form. Unlike ancient Docetism, incarnational Christianity enters fully and without fear into the world as it is.

Bible translation is both important and possible—yet it is also far from simple. Quite a few contributors to this volume refer to a famous Italian aphorism about all translators being “traitors.” *Traitor* is a strong word, and these contributors deliberately use it to puncture naïveté about the business of translation. They use it as a way of humbly acknowledging that some things will become hidden through translation and that, realistically, good translation is more about minimizing such losses than escaping them altogether.

Today the complexity of the translation challenge is becoming more deeply appreciated. As a result the Christian public is undergoing a somewhat painful adjustment in thinking as it comes to understand that no two human languages ever match up exactly word for word in a convenient parallel-column sort of way. Translation is not as straightforward as converting Fahrenheit temperatures to Celsius or Roman numerals to regular numbers. Thus, one of the recurring themes in this volume is that translation is not an exact science. We should take this to mean that the fantasy of a one-for-one mechanical conversion process has finally been exposed for the falsehood it really is. Consequently, we should begin to think of translation method as different from the more rigid methodologies of the hard sciences and as demanding a wider breadth of competencies and sensitivities on the part of the translator. It is, after all is said and done, an art. Yet, for all of this there is still a rigor and a discipline to translation that is actually more demanding than the older model anticipated. As a result the challenge might better be described as a *disciplined art* of Bible translation.

In certain cases Christians who hold to a high view of Scripture find it difficult to adjust to this reality. By way of explanation, some of their more uncharitable opponents speculate that such persons are Fundamentalists, and as such are allergic to complexity and gravitate out of fear toward simplistic resolutions of issues. But the problem with this dismissive view is that not everyone who highly esteems Scripture and who struggles to embrace established principles of Bible translation is a Fundamentalist by viewpoint or temperament. There must be something else going on as well. Others propose that the problem lies in a linguistic naïveté widespread among conservative Christians, a naïveté that can be corrected through better information and education. This may well be the case in some instances, and the dissemination of accurate information can only help.

But perhaps conservative objections will prove resistant to such efforts, because they are actually rooted in something else, namely, some common conservative assumptions about biblical inspiration and inerrancy. According to the historic evangelical view, divine inspiration is more than a general influence over the biblical authors as a whole; inspiration extends to the micro-level of the very

words found in the original text. This is an important doctrine for evangelicals, and it needs to be maintained. But at this point the reasoning of some (not all) conservative evangelicals begins to shift from defensible doctrine to questionable inference. Each individual word of Scripture, the questionable reasoning suggests, was specifically selected by God and delivered to us from above in a manner very similar to dictation. The words were sent down, one at a time, like crystal droplets. Each word is an autonomous integer, separate from the rest, and each is to be treasured like a sacred gem and cherished inviolate for all time.

When it comes to translation preference and practice, the implications of this way of thinking are predicable. Those who view Scripture this way (and not all evangelicals do, of course) favor attempts at word-for-word translation. Translations produced in this fashion are naively thought to retain all the precious original words, except that they are just in a different code now. The inclination is to assume that in every language there is a template of more or less exact equivalents to the inspired Hebrew and Greek words with which we started out. This is, of course, not the case at all. If evangelicals are to get beyond their current impasse over translation theory, they will need a more profound doctrine of biblical inerrancy—one that continues to respect the inspired words of the original text but also acknowledges that these words are mere instruments in the service of a higher purpose, namely, the communication of meaning.

Today there is a growing awareness of the strategic role that (usually anonymous) translators play. Most Christians do not understand the original languages, and therefore do not personally have access to the text of the Bible as it was originally written. For the most part they are dependent on translators to tell them what the Bible says. Translators are thus the first-line gatekeepers for the Word of God. Just as stock market investors need to be able to trust corporate executives and their auditors, the church must be able to trust its translators. When translators are, fairly or unfairly, suspected or accused of ulterior motives or deliberate distortion, there is a crisis of confidence. The current debates in the church over translational integrity requires that thoughtful clergy and laity gain information about what is going on in this field so they can determine for themselves where their confidence should be properly placed. The literature on translation (and Bible translation in particular) is substantial, but it is for the most part written for specialists and practitioners. Popular literature on the topic is still not extensive. This volume is a modest contribution toward a more accessible body of work on this important topic.

Admittedly, this book provides only a narrow window on the broad enterprise of Bible translation. While there are some references to translation in

Spanish and other languages—and certainly many of the principles articulated have wider application—the book focuses on English Bible translation. It is a familiar criticism that the disproportionately large and ever-increasing number of English Bible translations reflects both an intolerable inequity and patent Anglophone self-indulgence. While there may be, in certain restricted instances, a measure of truth to this criticism, the other reality is that the English language continues to change, probably more rapidly than some others, and English Bible translation must keep pace with these developments. Beyond this, there is also the fact that the potential usefulness of an English translation today far exceeds that of most other language translations—and probably equals the potential reach of many hundreds of smaller language translations put together. So both sides of this issue have to be weighed fairly. The spread of the English language around the world is truly phenomenal, and it just so happens that today Bibles in English have an almost unmatched potential to communicate globally.

The contributors to this volume, though not in lockstep, are generally united in their support of the translation theory of functional equivalence in its basic contours. The reader will soon discover that the influence of Eugene Nida has been significant for many of the contributors. Nida's views on translation, as found in such publications as *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1974), and *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (1986), provide the theoretical foundation for their ongoing enterprise. And, as Dick France points out in this volume, the influence of Nida is, if anything, even more profound among contemporary translators (like those in Ukarumpa) working outside the English-speaking world. Despite their general theological conservatism, such individuals seem comfortable with so-called “functional equivalence” translation philosophy and are evidently accustomed to bold ventures in it every day.

The majority of the contributors to this volume are leading international scholars in the field of biblical studies who also have a wealth of experience as Bible translators. This is a most welcome and distinctive characteristic of this group of writers. Most have been doing translation for years—and doing so with unsurpassed rigor and expertise. This is evident in the rich variety of illustrations they tumble out to explain their points and in the plethora of examples they use to buttress their arguments and confirm their statements. They are practitioners—even better, they are practitioners who understand theory. This may be the greatest strength of this book. A significant number of these same contributors have also served with Ronald Youngblood on the Committee on Bible Translation, so some of these essays function unintentionally as a kind of apology for the New International Version (NIV).

Even those of us who are not experts in Bible translation can readily grasp the importance of accuracy (or faithfulness) as a translation ideal. The contributors to this volume readily agree, yet they widen our horizons by explaining that accuracy is not the only criteria by which a good translation should be measured. In different ways, they consistently speak of a second category of qualities that translators should aspire to achieve, namely, those (like clarity, naturalness, and readability) that pertain to audience sensitivity and are so essential to closing the communication loop between sender and receiver. Finally, the authors speak in different ways of a third category of qualities that are of a more aesthetic and affective nature. Such ideals as beauty, orality (suitability for public reading), and dignity are also important to a translation's popularity and durability. In short, there is more to a great translation than first meets the eye.

The eighteen essays have been organized into three sections that address, respectively, the theory, history, and practice of Bible translation. The first six essays (chapters 1–6) examine the competing theoretical approaches (or so-called philosophies) of translation and evaluate their respective merits. The second set of six essays (chapters 7–12) explores the history of Bible translation, with particular attention to English Bible translation and with special reference to the KJV and the NIV. The third set of essays (chapters 13–18) addresses the actual practice of translation and includes some illuminating case studies in translation.

The contributors to this volume have come together, not because of a uniform commitment to a particular philosophy of Bible translation, but because of their mutual appreciation for their friend Ronald Youngblood—an outstanding scholar, a gifted translator, and above all a person of Christian character and contagious joy. It is our hope that this volume will be not only a worthy recognition of his work but also a further contribution to the task for which he has shown such passion and ability—the disciplined art of Bible translation. The following chapter summaries are provided for the reader's convenience and as an aid to locating treatments of specific topics of interest.

PART 1: THE THEORY OF BIBLE TRANSLATION

In chapter 1, Moisés Silva offers personal reflections on an old Italian complaint that translators are traitors in the sense that they always (and necessarily) fall short of conveying the *total* meaning of a text in one language into another. His personal struggle early on to translate into English all the rich nuances of Spanish, his own first language, convinced him that any “literal” word-for-word translation strategy will prove both impossible and ultimately unhelpful. As he points out, even so-called literal Bible translations like the ESV reflect countless

interpretive decisions and departures from strict literalism. With literary sensitivity Silva explains that a faithful translator is obliged to convey in clear and readable form, not only the meanings of individual words and phrases, but something also of the structure, rhythm, and emotive elements of the original text. Ultimately the “accuracy” of a translation should be measured by the degree to which a translator has achieved all of these things. Silva sees the good translator, not as a traitor, then, but as someone who responsibly “transforms a text by transferring it from one linguistic-cultural context to another.”

Kenneth Barker, longtime member of and spokesperson for the Committee on Bible Translation, which has among its many translation achievements the New International Version, sagely observes in chapter 2 that every group of Bible translators must establish at the very outset the type of translation they intend to produce. This in turn requires a conscious philosophical positioning of their translation project. After emphatically rejecting as naive the possibility of meaningful translation without at least some degree of interpretation, Barker acknowledges that a group of translators may choose to pursue a philosophy that leans either toward formal equivalence or toward dynamic equivalence. But he argues that it is also possible to adopt a balanced or mediating translation philosophy that combines the strengths of these respective options while avoiding the weaknesses inherent in their more extreme forms. Barker presents the NIV as an example of such optimal balance in its intentional pursuit of the four highly desirable translation characteristics of accuracy, clarity, beauty, and dignity.

D. A. Carson (chapter 3) begins by noting two opposing trends in recent years: (1) the virtual triumph of functional-equivalence theory across the scholarly disciplines relevant to Bible translation, and (2) the contrasting rise of what he calls “linguistic conservatism”—a popular movement with a strongly expressed preference for more direct and “literal” translation methods. By pointedly challenging a couple of representatives of this latter perspective, he builds his case for functional equivalence as the only responsible approach to Bible translation for a general readership. As he then points out, the ideological gulf between the practitioners of these two competing approaches is nowhere more evident than in the recent debate over gender-accurate language in Bible translation.

Carson devotes the remainder of his essay to sounding a caution on the limitations—and even risks, when taken to excess—of functional-equivalence theory. Responsible practitioners of functional equivalence will not make “reader response” the supreme criterion in translation decision, nor will they concede the skeptical assumption of an impassible dichotomy between message and meaning. He calls for limits on a variety of other factors as well, from the pursuit of

comprehensibility and stylistic elegance at all costs to the dubious incorporation of opinionated study notes in the published text of Scripture.

In chapter 4 Mark Strauss addresses current issues in the gender-language debate. The chapter is essentially a response to various charges leveled by Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem against recent gender-accurate Bible translations (see *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Word* [2000]). Strauss begins by listing a surprising number of important areas of agreement between the two sides—shared convictions about the nature of authoritative Scripture, the translation enterprise, and even gender language itself.

Strauss then moves on to critical areas of disagreement between the two camps. Most of these, he suggests, are rooted in different understandings of linguistics. Throughout this section Strauss repeatedly concedes that the gender-inclusive approach may in some cases sacrifice some of the nuances of the original text. But such losses, he insists, are unavoidable and “come with the territory” of translation work. He urges the opponents of gender-inclusive translation to be equally up-front about the dimensions of meaning they are compelled to sacrifice through their approach. At the very least there should be a cessation on both sides of emotive charges that the opposition is deliberately distorting the Word of God.

In chapter 5 the late Herbert Wolf, a longtime member of the Committee on Bible Translation, reflects from his own experiences on the communal dimensions of translation. He begins with a carefully nuanced acknowledgment that translators belong to larger communities and traditions that powerfully inform and shape (but—and here he shows his epistemological optimism—need never completely determine) their reading of the biblical text.

Wolf also sees great benefits in the fact that most recent translations of the Bible have been group projects—not least that group arrangements enable translators to pool strengths and purge idiosyncrasies; and here he speaks (as only an experienced translation practitioner can) of the humbling aspect of having one's work tested and improved by peers. He also sees translation as communal in the sense that it draws from related fields like archaeology and linguistics, a point he illustrates with fascinating insights from the field of rhetorical criticism. Finally, the potential readers of a translation also constitute a most relevant community, inasmuch as responsible translation decisions will always factor in readers' anticipated responses to the text.

In chapter 6 Charles Cosgrove reflects on the values that should inform and the approach that should characterize a Bible translation methodology compatible with the legitimate aspirations of postmodernism. The defining feature of such a legitimate postmodern approach, he suggests, is best encapsulated in the

adjective *holistic*. Under this rubric he first considers translating the Bible as a *whole* (that is, as a canonical integrity), then translating the *whole* communicative effect of Scripture (that is, its genre and medium, as well as its language), and finally, translation as an activity of the *whole* people of God (the democratization of translation).

Cosgrove's first point—translating the Bible with canonical integrity—raises such difficult issues as whether the translation of the Old Testament should be guided in any way by how the New Testament purports to quote it. His second point affirms the postmodern trend to “challenge traditional distinctions between form and content and the hierarchy that subordinates one to the other.” At the same time, he notes, the postmodern view is properly sensitive to the enormous challenge (and downright trickiness) of achieving holistic equivalence in any communication transfer between distinct cultural-linguistic systems. Finally, Cosgrove argues that “the democratizing or ‘flattening’ cultural effect of postmodernity—epitomized by the Internet” means that the age of officially authorized versions is permanently over. He anticipates such a future scenario with optimism, because he believes that the inevitable diffusion of translations will only make the fullest sense of Scripture more accessible to all.

PART 2: THE HISTORY OF BIBLE TRANSLATION

In chapter 7 Dick (R. T.) France provides a concise overview of the history of English Bible translation. He stresses throughout that English translation remains a never-ending challenge for two reasons: (1) manuscript resources continue to improve, and (2) the English language continues to change. After noting that ad hoc sections of the (Vulgate) biblical text were translated into English from as early as the seventh century, he describes the contributions of translation pioneers such as Wycliffe and Purvey in the fourteenth century and Tyndale and Coverdale in the sixteenth, and traces the development of English translation through a long list of works culminating in the Authorized Version of 1611—a Bible that “had no significant rival for 270 years.” As France points out, certain continuities of language and style were deliberately preserved throughout this long history (an English translation tradition, if you will), one result of which is that certain echoes of William Tyndale’s “vigorous, idiomatic” style persist even to the present. Particularly helpful is the care France takes to explain the motives behind these projects, the distinctive features of each translation, and the notable advances embodied in many of them. A flood of translations followed the publication of the Revised Version in 1885, and from this point the survey is necessarily more selective. Nonetheless, it is easy to see that readability and literary

elegance have been among the keys to a translation's relative popularity and longevity.

The chapter concludes with a brief treatment of important contemporary issues in English Bible translation. On the topic of religious opposition to advances in translation, France notes candidly that “conservatism, in the sense of resistance to change, seems to affect people in matters of religion more readily than in other areas.” Other topics include the determination of the most reliable manuscripts, the choice between literal and dynamic translation alternatives, the vexed issue of gender inclusiveness, and consideration of a translation's suitability for public reading.

Of all the Bibles in the English language, the King James Version is properly regarded as the most influential. Alister McGrath's *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (2001) is a valuable recent study of the King James Version's magisterial contribution over a wide range of fields. In chapter 8 the late Walt Wessel reviews McGrath's book through the lens of an experienced Bible translator and makes insightful comparisons and connections between the KJV and the translation projects (most notably, the NIV) of which he had been a part in recent years.

Wessel begins by describing the KJV's powerful influence on his own life as he emerged from a German-speaking American community in the earlier decades of the twentieth century—an influence that proved difficult to shake years later when he engaged in Bible translation himself. We see Wessel's own values reflected in his applause for John Purvey's stated commitment to produce the second Wycliffite Bible of 1384 by translating sentences and other linguistic meaning-groups rather than in a wooden word-for-word way. We see them again in his support of Luther's insistence that a Bible translation “sound right” as well as prove accurate. Not surprisingly, Wessel is also intrigued by the innovative committee structure adopted by the translators of the KJV. Finally, he gently corrects McGrath's understanding of “literal translation,” as well as his presumption that the eloquence of the KJV was purely accidental.

Kent Eaton (chapter 9) offers an engaging profile of James “Diego” Thomson (1788–1854), one of the most creative and effective promoters of Bible distribution in nineteenth-century Protestant missions. A Scottish-born agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society—and a consummate colporteur—Thomson is considered by some “the patriarch of Protestantism and public education in South America.” His perambulatory missionary career, which began in 1816, spanned numerous countries of Central and South America, as well as Canada and Spain.

In his tireless efforts to sow the seed of the Scriptures in all soils, he displayed remarkable powers of persuasion and a gift for judicious ecumenical compromise.

Eaton's profile of Thomson underscores the point that good translation by itself does not automatically ensure that the Scriptures will be read and understood by the groups for which they were designed. Priority must also be given to the effective *delivery* of the Scriptures—something that requires attention to such things as publishing, literacy education, ecumenical cooperation, product promotion, aggressive colportage, and efficient physical distribution systems.

Dick France offers an overview of the history of Bible translation in English. Walt Wessel examines one great chapter of that history, the story of the King James Version; in chapter 10 John Stek focuses on another—the New International Version (1973; complete Bible 1978; rev. ed. 1984) and how it came to be. As a key participant in this story, Stek makes careful use of unpublished primary sources to narrate the development of the most popular English-language Bible on the market today. The chapter traces the genesis of the NIV to the initiatives of a layperson in the small (Dutch) Christian Reformed Church in America in the 1950s and records the growing confluence of energy for the project as the National Association of Evangelicals, then the New York Bible Society, and eventually Zondervan Publishing House joined the cause. The conscious positioning of this translation in relationship to other available English versions is made clear. It is worth noting that from the beginning all the actual translation work has been done by a vigilantly independent Committee on Bible Translation, whose steady efforts and periodically changing membership are carefully recorded here.

Under the title “That Fabulous Talking Snake” (chapter 11), Ronald Veenker offers a controversial reflection on the first three chapters of Genesis. The essay focuses on the identity of the unusual serpent in the Garden of Eden. Veenker points out that the seductive snake is nowhere explicitly equated with Satan in this narrative, even though this assumption about the snake's identity has prevailed in mainstream Christianity since the earliest centuries and been subsequently reinforced by influential Christian writers such as John Milton. Veenker suggests alternatively that the passage is about theodicy, not diabolical temptation, and that the snake is not Satan at all but an innocent animal made to speak so that, as a verbal and therefore patently intelligent creature, it can be held morally responsible and judged for its actions in opposition to the will of God.

Certainly not every reader will agree with Veenker about the snake, but the inference he draws from this discussion is one that even his opponents will likely concede. Translators should not presume to make explicit that which ought properly to remain enigmatic or merely implicit in the text. As he puts it, “It is important for the task of translation, and even annotation, that the scholar try as much as possible to free himself from leading the reader to his own personal perspective” on a matter.

David Noel Freedman and David Miano’s article on textual criticism—“Slip of the Eye: Accidental Omission in the Masoretic Tradition” (chapter 12)—is an excellent reminder that many disciplines impinge on the task of translation. As the authors point out, “The first step in Bible translation is the determination of the text.” The article deals with the phenomenon of haplography, a surprisingly common form of unintentional scribal error in the copying of ancient biblical manuscripts. Haplography occurs when a copyist’s eye, in response to some form of repetitiveness in the manuscript, is tricked into passing over and omitting characters, words, or even whole lines. Freedman and Miano classify the various ways the fallible human eye can slip; using the first two chapters of Genesis as a case study, they provide rather compelling evidence that such “mechanical errors” occurred in the textual transmission of even the most important biblical manuscripts. The conventional wisdom in textual criticism has been that the shorter version of a text is the more reliable, because (so it is assumed) it is more pristine and free of agenda-driven embellishments. The authors challenge this conventional wisdom by concluding that often the longer alternative reading is more reliable, because it has been less truncated by haplography.

PART 3: THE PRACTICE OF BIBLE TRANSLATION

In chapter 13 Bruce Waltke offers a translation and exegesis of Agur’s confession in Proverbs 30:1–6. He challenges the assumption that these verses express a bitter epistemological skepticism (vv. 1–4), which a more orthodox and faith-filled editor subsequently endeavored to contradict and correct (vv. 5–6). Instead, Waltke makes a case (strengthened by appeals to wisdom parallels in Job and Baruch) for reading these six verses as the unified work of a single author. Moreover, he argues, the skeptical tone of the first four verses is not an absolute skepticism but a humble acknowledgment that deep truth remains forever elusive to the human mind until it seeks and finds it in the inspired revelation embodied in Scripture. As such, Agur’s confession constitutes “the most sustained argument in the Bible for the necessity of special revelation (through Israel’s Scripture) to bridge the gulf between the infinite and the finite.”

Waltke concludes that the best foundation for Bible translation lies precisely in this conviction that “the Bible is God’s special revelation for humanity’s salvation and that God inspired its words.” Such a conviction certainly reinforces the urgency of the translation task, as well as the importance of translators handling the biblical text with care and reverence. Finally, the translator, inasmuch as he or she makes plain that which otherwise would remain enigmatic or unknown, is privileged to participate in God’s work of moving people from darkness and despair to illumination and hope.

In chapter 14 Steven Voth offers an intriguing comparative analysis of how the Hebrew word *ṣedeq* has been translated for—and understood by—English-speaking and Spanish-speaking readers in recent centuries. As Voth points out, *ṣedeq* was translated for an English-speaking audience in the King James Version quite consistently as “righteousness” and for a Spanish-speaking audience by the magisterial Reina Valera Revisada as *justicia* (justice). While *ṣedeq* has a breadth of meaning well in excess of any single English or Spanish word, the KJV translators’ decision to use “righteousness” moved Anglophone Christianity along a trajectory that prioritized personal morality to the relative neglect of other important nuances of *ṣedeq* and the biblical theology it embodies. Conversely, the Spanish decision to go with *justicia* (justice) sensitized that particular culture more to the social imperatives and communal obligations of Christianity and perhaps somewhat less to the call to personal sanctification.

The article considers historical factors that may have influenced these respective translation choices, and, even more important, it examines the profound impact of these word selections on English and Spanish readers’ respective understandings of the gospel message. Ultimately, Voth argues, even the ways in which the Bible was able historically to challenge, sensitize, and transform these two cultures was profoundly affected. The article is a sobering reminder that ideological realities can intrude into the translation process, often unconsciously, yet with huge consequences for both churches and cultures.

In chapter 15 Andreas Köstenberger reviews the special challenges and opportunities faced by those endeavoring to translate the Gospel of John. As he does so, he discusses textual, background, ideological, exegetical, and stylistic considerations. Among the textual issues considered is whether the questionable account of the adulterous woman (7:53–8:11) should be retained in the English text—and if not, how its qualified status should be visually conveyed in the page layout. The many other issues addressed include the best rendering of Johannine references to time (for example, “the tenth hour”), and the fact that in John the conjunction *ḱai* has a considerably wider semantic range than the simple English word *and*.

The most important ideological consideration addressed is how to translate *hoi Ioudaioi* (in the KJV, consistently translated “the Jews”) in ways that reflect complete translation integrity, sensitivity to the unique context of each Johannine usage of the term, and concern about the ever-present risk of contributing to the great evil of Christian anti-Semitism. At the end Köstenberger ranks nine leading English translations by their degree of apparent concurrence with the translation decisions he commends in this article. As it turns out, the NIV and ISV earn second place in the unofficial competition, with the recent TNIV taking top spot.

In chapter 16 Douglas Moo considers the special challenges of translating the term *sarx* (KJV, “flesh”) in the Epistle to the Romans. This ubiquitous term is actually a “polymorphous concept”—one that has a number of quite distinct meanings, even in the apostle Paul’s own usage. Moo suggests five basic senses of *sarx*: (1) the physical material that covers a body’s bones, (2) the human body in its entirety, (3) human beings generally, (4) the human condition (as legitimately distinct from God), and (5) the state of human fallenness (in illegitimate opposition to God).

The fallible translator is under considerable pressure to determine in each instance which meaning of *sarx* the apostle had in mind. Much is at stake, since the potential meanings of the term range from those with neutral connotations to those with highly negative associations. A tempting response, therefore, and one followed by a number of more “direct” Bible translations, is to apply a simple word-for-word equation and let *sarx* come through consistently as “flesh.” The problems with this option are (1) that it leaves the determination of meaning entirely to the reader, which is an abdication of the translator’s responsibility, and (2) it only sets the reader up to confuse material reality (one meaning of *sarx*) with sinfulness (another meaning of *sarx*)—along the lines of the ancient Gnostic heresy. The TNIV actually uses twenty-eight different words or phrases to translate *sarx*, and Moo’s own labors in translation make him appreciate these efforts, including even the use in some instances of the admittedly awkward term “sinful nature.”

In chapter 17 James Smith III profiles two venerable traditions of interpreting and translating the word *hypostasis* in relation to faith in Hebrews 11:1. The first tradition (which Smith traces to John Chrysostom and finds reinforced in the West by the Vulgate’s rendering of it as *substantia*) understands the term to refer to an objective “substance”—a divine gift through which the promised future has already become in part a reality. The second tradition, which he links to Martin Luther and the English translation pioneer William Tyndale, views it in the more subjective or psychological sense of “surety,” or being sure. Smith sees the former tradition sustained by, among other translations, the KJV (“now faith is the *substance* of things hoped for”), and the latter extending into the present through versions like the NASB (“now faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for”).

Nevertheless, he argues, the subjective “surety” tradition now prevails in modern English versions, and it is also being recommended by the United Bible Societies to translators around the world through the resource materials the UBS makes available to them. Smith considers this state of affairs regrettable, not only because it perpetuates a flawed interpretation of *hypostasis*, but also because (from a pastoral perspective) it fails to convey a healthy God-centered vision of faith as “participation in divine realities already present.” The article

concludes with a call for great vigilance against unwitting adherence to flawed traditions of translation.

Finally, Larry Walker (chapter 18) analyzes the use of capital letters in translating Scripture into English. Neither biblical Hebrew nor Aramaic employed capital letters at all, and New Testament Greek did not use them in the way that English does. Since English begins proper nouns (in contrast to common nouns) with a capital letter, the English Bible translator is obliged to decide through judicious interpretation which biblical words are proper nouns, and therefore treated as such, and which are not.

Walker provides an extensive set of comparative reference tables (twenty-eight in all) that lay out how the KJV, the NIV, and an assortment of other English Bible translations handle the capitalization of the more difficult nouns found in Scripture. These tables (and the commentary that accompanies them) survey references to deity, names of persons and places, titles of mythical beings, personifications, and terms connected to religious ceremonies. Walker's analysis is helpful in detecting capitalization trends over time, as well as the general tendencies of different translations. Some capitalization decisions, as he points out, are purely matters of style and preference. Others, like the translator's choice between "spirit" and "Spirit," can be of enormous significance.

NOTES

1. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 32.

2. See, for example, David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–19; and Roger Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," *Christianity Today* 42, no. 2 (9 February 1998): 40.

3. Cited in Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *A Compend of Luther's Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 16.

4. Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 26.