TOWARDS A POETICS OF FAITH: THE CASE OF BIBLICAL TRANSLATIONS

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of
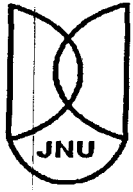
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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For my
 Mother
  What a woman!

CERTIFICATE

Certified that this dissertation entitled, **Towards a Poetics of Faith: The Case of Biblical Translations,** submitted by Karuna Harinarain, Center of Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Mast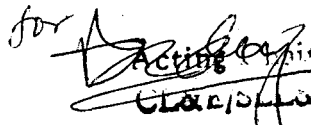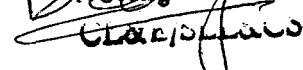er of Philosophy, is her original work and has not been submitted, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma in this or in any other university or institution. This may, therefore, be placed before the Examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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This dissertation entitled, **Towards a Poetics of Faith: The Case of Biblical Translations**, submitted by me to the Center of Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma in this or in any other university or institution.

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Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

Bible Versions

ASV   American Standard Version

HOV   Hindi Old Version

HRV   Hindi Revised Version

KJV   King James Version

NASB New American Standard Bible

NIV   New International Version

NKJV New King James Version

NTPI New Testament and Psalms Inclusive Version

REB   Revised English Bible

RSV   Revised Standard Version

TEV   Today's English Version

Others

SIL   Summer Institute of Linguistics

UBS   United Bible Societies

WBT   Wycliffe Bible Translators

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Chapter I

Introduction

Towards a Poetics of Faith: The Case of Biblical Translations

The enterprise of Bible translation continues to flourish centuries after this volume of literature, on which the Christian faith rests, first came into its canonized form. In fact, even before it came into its canonical form, sections of it were being translated and commented upon.[1] The long history of Bible translation is also witness to it being a dangerous enterprise. Some of the key players in the history of Bible translation testify to this fact. When Jerome produced his Vulgate in the vulgar tongue, the language of the masses, he was sharply denounced (c 400). John Wycliffe's translation so enraged the Church authorities that they dug up his grave and burnt his bones some forty years after his death (1415).William Tyndale was strangled and his body burnt for providing a new translation of the Bible for the English (1516).[2]

Yet, the question remains, what is it about this body of literature that draws people to such translating drives, indeed, demands of them a lifetime's scholarship and study, to effect the goal. Biblical translations are undertaken not just in the language situation where this body of literature has never reached, but also in those, like English, where numerous versions have existed for centuries. What is the need for these translations and re-translations? Why must such an arduous task be undertaken? Answers to these questions provide us with one possible entry point into this vast and ever expanding area of scholarship.

Understanding the place and status of the Bible within Christianity allows for a partial answer to the aforementioned questions. The history of Christianity is witness to the myriad ways in which peoples groups, theologians and academicians have viewed its Holy Scripture- the Bible. Yet, part of the common heritage that all Christians, irrespective of their denominations share, is the conviction that the Bible occupies a unique status in the life and worship of the Church and its members. Their convictions

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[1] See James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 13-26.

[2] V. George Shillington, *Reading the Sacred Text: An Introduction to Biblical Studies* (London, New York: Continuum - T&T Clark, 2001) 173-174.

regarding the same arise out of their distinctive theological interpretations of the Bible. It becomes necessary therefore, to delimit the scope of this study to one such faith confession.

1.1. *Evangelicalism and Biblical Translations*

In this study we shall look at the biblical translations that take place within Evangelicalism. Contemporary evangelicalism represents a complex phenomenon whose diversity has been analyzed in a variety of ways.[3] Despite a wide difference in theology, evangelicals share a common emphasis on the final or the sole, authority of the Bible. In their emphasis on the primacy of the Scripture, they understand themselves as maintaining the ancient faith of the Church, in the tradition of the Reformers, defending it against modern forms of perversion. Characteristic of evangelicalism is its claim that the conceptual categories, arguments and analysis in terms of which the biblical authors present to us God, man, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Satan, sin, salvation, the Church and all the rest are in truth God taught, and therefore have abiding validity.[4] While not discounting the literariness of the Bible, they afford primacy to the thought which the language encases, the thought of God. Evangelicals also recognize that the teachings of the Scripture, given as they were centuries ago, have to be unshelled from the local particularities in which we find them embedded, in order that it may be reapplied today in terms of our own culture.

In narrowing the focus of this study to an evangelical Protestant understanding, one recognizes that, other faith traditions also view the Bible, in whole or in part as sacred literature, according it varying degrees of authority. Nevertheless,

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[3] See George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). The term *evangelical* is used in this study to designate a broad segment of Protestantism that understands itself as maintaining traditional or orthodox belief over against positions that are described variously as 'liberal,' 'neo-orthodox,' or 'modernist.' In this broad usage it includes groups that may be defined by others as 'fundamentalist,' as well as those who prefer the label 'neo-evangelical.' Conservatives or traditionalists outside the reformed tradition are less likely to adopt the evangelical label, although they often share closely related views concerning the Bible and the biblical authority. The Bible Societies and the Wycliffe Bible Translators are also included in this label because their confession of faith on which they base the rationale of translation and what they believe of the Bible is a close parallel to the evangelical perspective. See Appendix 3, 4 and 5 for a statement of faith and vision of Bible translation projects across the globe.

[4] See Appendix 1, 2 for an exposition of the evangelical doctrine of the Scripture.

the centrality of the Scripture as a means of inducing faith in the non-believer, within evangelicalism gives a distinctive shape and emphasis to the translation enterprise.[5] For the evangelicals, the Bible is a tool of evangelization, and the manner of translation depends largely on what they understand to be the functional aspect of the text. Consequently the aim is to be comprehensible to the average layman who is un-indoctrinated and hence not privy to any complex theological jargon or the theological debates that characterize the contemporary set-up.

1.2. *The Bible as Revelation*

If Christianity is seen as a religion of **'revelation,'** a faith response to the act of God's communication with man revealing to him God's plan for his salvation, then in a unique way, man's contact with God of whom the Bible speaks, is linked to the records of what God has 'said' and 'done' in the past which are contained in the Bible. On the part of the Church, a unique linkage is assumed between God's communication with mankind and the Holy Scripture. While, for the believing Christian, revelation is not strictly circumscribed within the pages of the Bible, all that is known of the many events and reflections which constitute the very foundation and essence of the Christian faith comes from this one source-the Bible. Indeed, what is known of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, after whom the faith is constituted and modeled, is known from the biblical witness of him. Of what are confessed to be the acceptable models of behaviour for Christians, are also taken from these writings. To a large extent, the truth claims of the Church rest on the reliability of the truth claims of the Scripture, and without its Scripture, the Christian faith would not be what it has historically understood itself to be, nor what it continues in our day to claim that it is.

Let me precise about the limits of this discussion of the Bible as the 'Word of God.' Assumption for evangelicals is that the Bible *is* the Word of God and this whole discussion assumes that fact. This study does not forward any proof for the same. No such proof is possible beyond the biblical self- claim and Church doctrine; it is a matter of faith. In what follows however, we shall attempt to unravel the meaning

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[5] This maybe viewed in contradistinction to translation enterprises within Catholicism, wherein the primary text translated is not the Bible but the liturgy.

of that doctrine. We are interested not in proving or disproving that the Bible is the Word of God but in understanding what it means for Christians to take the Bible as the Word of God. More importantly, such an understanding is sought from the perspective of the translator. Consequently, we shall attempt to unearth the limits such an understanding imposes on the enterprise of translation. Our understanding must be set in the context of what the evangelicals believe to be the broader teachings of the Scripture concerning itself.[6]

1.3. *The Theological Factor*

This study, as has been mentioned already, seeks to study the dynamics of biblical translations, such translations that take place in an evangelical context. Hence, the theological factor necessarily comes into play. The traditional definition of theology is- it is faith seeking understanding. This broad and all inclusive definition of theology is here appropriated to understand a poetics of faith.

For the Bible is, in more ways than one a body of literature which expresses theological insights in various ways. It is this theological insight which is sought to be retrieved and re-expressed in another language. Moreover the very enterprise of translation in this context stems from one such theological insight: that which understands Christian praxis as involving the transmission of the Word of God across linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is rooted in an incarnational theology of language itself. The belief that Jesus, the son of God translated himself from a divine into a human context, adopting the local coefficients of a specific community. This act of divine revelation in human form is recorded in the Scripture and becomes the sign that points the way towards translation of the Scripture into every language by once again adopting the local coefficients.[7]

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[6] See Appendix 1, for an evangelical understanding of the critical meaning of the Bible and the nature of revelation received in the Bible and in the person of Christ.

[7] See Jeremy Brown, "Theology of Language in the Context of Theology of Mission with a Look at Babel and Pentecost," Jun. 1999. Biola U. 27 June 2005
<http://www-students.biola.edu/~jeremyb/writings/LanguageAndBible.html>.

At every point therefore, it becomes necessary for us, to identify the theological factor that informs the understanding and the praxis, such that it may be traced to its implications for the translation enterprise.

1.4. *Leading Questions*

The first question that this study addresses then, is –'*What is the Word of God?*' and how is its meaning understood and related to Christian praxis? Subsequently, we shall address the question, '*Why must the Word of God be Translated?*' Again what is emphasized here is the need for a theological understanding. For the enterprise of the translation of the Bible that has been undertaken for centuries, is closely linked with what is understood as God's will for man's life and his purpose, such an understanding is gathered from the Bible itself. Having studied the issue of the imperativeness of communicating the Word of God and therefore the need for translating it, we finally address the issue of the practice and the theory of biblical translations-'*How is the Word of God to be Translated?*' These three questions that give shape to this study are intimately linked. In the reverse order one sees that- any translation enterprise must stem from a motivation. In the case of biblical translation, especially in the evangelical context, the translation is done so that the Word of God is shared with people who have not before heard of the 'good news' of God's salvific action in history and his plans for the salvation of man through the lordship of Christ Jesus. It is then linked to the 'why' question that is addressed in *Chapter III*. Moreover, the 'how' question will ultimately rest on one's understanding and conception of what is the Word of God, how was it written, what register of language was used, all of which pertain to questions of language and style as also to the question of cultural registers.

1.5. *Towards a Poetics of Faith*

The three questions that give shape to this study are set within the broader parameter of finding a 'poetics of faith' in and through translation. The title of this study needs elaboration.

1.5.1. *The Word of Faith*

One begins with understanding the term, 'faith' and its relation to scriptural translation. What is the location of this faith? Is it in the mind of the reader or the writer/translator? If faith is, as William F. Lynch says, 'a form of imagining and experiencing the world,'[8] then in the case of scriptural translation, it finds its way in the realm of expression. The language of the Bible is the language of belief. Further, this language of belief envisions the power of these writings as such that might educe a response of faith from the reader or the listener.

The word of revelation has its correlative in the word of faith, and in this sense may be considered a constitutive activity. The word, is revelation, that is, the disclosure of the plan of God for the world in which at the same time, both the destiny of man and, in a sense, the being of God is concerned. To the revealing word, the answer is the word of faith, which is at once an acceptance of what is spoken, hope in the promise, and a willingness to give oneself to the work of God by wholly satisfying his will.

If the word of faith is thus understood, the implication for translation is to focus on the instrumentality and functionality of the language of the Scripture and not just its 'givenness.' This amounts to a focus on the readership orientation which will then demand a translation which is 'impactful' by making the message imaginatively credible to the readers.

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    [8] William F. Lynch, *Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973) 5.

1.5.2. *Cultural Poetics*

The issue of poetics is an important one because the Bible is not just a body of abstract, propositions or a philosophical treatise which comes in a culturally disembodied form. It attests to a cultural specificity in which it was written and produced. It is also a collection of texts which rely on a variety of cultural and literary forms that express theological insights. In viewing the Bible as literature, one acknowledges not just, 'what is the text saying?' but also, 'how is it saying it?' The Bible also demands more by way of response, a very change of world view, than other literatures. Thus, it becomes all the more important to pay attention to the mode in which the word of revelation operates.

Auden observed that, 'Literature embodies what it indicates.'[9] This brings us to the all too important question of form and content and its separatibilty. R.M Frye writes in a similar strain that, 'a literary form is its meaning; its meaning cannot be "abstracted" from it, cannot be paraphrased without loss.'[10] Frye is arguing for the inseparatibilty of the form and content. In the case of the Bible as literature, this same sense must apply. The ultimate meaning rests in the final fused complex of the form and the content. Yet again, it must be mentioned that one understands the form not just in a literary or linguistic sense, but in a cultural context also. Which is to say that, the form itself is a fused embodiment of language and the culture to which the language belongs.

Take for instance, the case of the parables. Much of the meaning of the parable lies not in what is said but how one arrives at the final understanding of the meaning of the parable. It is the precise orientation, the simile format which lends these parables much of its appeal and relevance. By way of a parable, Jesus presented his listeners with a familiar cultural context usually taken from their everyday life, to enable them to see things in a new way. It was often told in answer to a question or to make a point more clear through illustration. Since agriculture played an important part in lives of his contemporary listeners, Jesus based many of the parables on

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[9] As quoted in T. R Wright, *Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 6.

[10] R. M. Frye, *Perspectives on Man: Literature and the Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961) 43.

agricultural practices.[11] The aim was to enable the people to draw moral truths for themselves and apply them to their lives. The meaning lay in arriving at it, via the form, which itself arises in this case from the cultural moorings of the times in which the writing emerged.

Coming back to Frye's contention; he posits that the meaning of the text cannot be extracted from it or 'paraphrased' without loss. The loss that he speaks of is in terms of certain aspects of the meaning which are fused with the form. In order to staunch this loss of meaning, and perhaps aim at a possible gain, a new form must be taken up as opposed to a paraphrase. Once again the focus is on the functional aspect of the Scripture and its instrumentality in being able to convey the word of revelation in response to which the translator hopes to elicit a word of faith. I agree with Wright when he says, 'Literature...is more easily defined in functional rather than ontological terms, in terms of the effect for which the readers and critics value certain texts. It is a matter of what they do for us...'[12]

This same insight, when applied to scriptural translations implies for the translator, the need to ascribe primary status to its functionality. The translator then shifts the grounds of comprehension to that of the recipient culture. When the translation takes place in a cultural milieu far distanced from the original context, there is a greater need to couch the message in terms which are culturally relevant for the receptor to keep up with the functional aspect. Using forms like those of the folktales in oral cultures to give shape to the message.

If 'accuracy,' 'clarity' and 'naturalness' of expression are the goals of translation, then the receptor language begins to determine, not just the grammatical form of the translation, but its cultural encasing as well. Hence, the translator is required to engage in a 'cultural archeology'- unearthing the cultural storehouse of the receptor, embodied in the language and customs of the users- to identify the most appropriate terms of expression.

We are already approaching the question of 'inculturation.' Two definitions of 'inculturation' may be forwarded to argue out this point of a cultural poetics. William

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[11] The parable of the Sower (*Mark 4:3-8*), for instance refers to the world of agriculture.
[12] *Theology and Literature* 6.

Reiser defines it as, 'a process of a deep, sympathetic adaptation to, and appropriation of, a local culture in which the church finds itself....'[13] This same desire for inculturation is expressed in the words of Pope John Paul II when he writes, '...the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith. A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, nor thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out.'[14] In other words, a word of revelation, in order for it to become a word of faith, which is also an aspect of culture must adapt and appropriate the local culture.

The language of faith, which is the language of the Bible, in order for it to be an operative word, inducing and educing faith must be filtered through the thought categories of the culture. Each time that the Scripture is translated in a new cultural milieu, a new poetics of faith is evolved, a new presentation of the message in an appropriate cultural encasing.

1.5.3. *Dynamism of Translation: Towards a Poetics of Faith*

Finally, one comes to the element of dynamism of any translation enterprise. The word 'translate' comes from the Latin, *translatus*, a past participle of *transferre*. Two words are combined in this one word: *trans* + *latus*.[15] The first has to do with change, the second with movement (or re-movement) of some sort, especially movement that involves a carrying of something. It has been widely agreed that translations imply a movement, a crossing over of something across linguistic and cultural barriers, which in some cases is also considered a 'renewal' of the old.

There are myriad ways of looking at the process of translation, in all of which one can never deny that all translations are inextricably linked to the old, and can never stray too far away from it. The crucial question that needs to be asked is, what precisely ties the new to the old and what is it that is carried over? Is it the words or the holistic meaning? Is it the form or the content? We have already been alerted to the

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[13] As quoted in Catherine Cornille and Valeer Neckebrouck, eds., *A Universal Faith: Peoples, Cultures, Religions and the Christ* (Loovain: Peeters Press, W.B Eerdmans, 1992) 5.
[14] Ibid., 10.
[15] *Reading the Sacred Text* 174.

fact that such an easy dichotomy between form and content is never possible. Yet, the belief that language points to a real referent, however indirectly, is crucial to the Christian faith. It is this 'real referent' which constitutes the 'something' that is sought to be carried over in and through translation.

Essential to the meaning or the significance of a text is the form in which it is presented. The changing times implies changing meanings and the significance of such meanings. The changing climes imply changing registers of conception and yet again the changing significance of the meaning. At the same time, if some degree of 'faithfulness' and 'fidelity' to the text has to be maintained, something of what is understood as the 'intended' meaning of the text must be conveyed. This ties up with the issue of the functionality of the Scripture- to elicit a response of faith. This will only happen if changes in the form of the text, indeed the very selection of words keep up with changing times.

The *King James Version* speaks of the 'Holy Ghost' and 'seeing spirit.' In the earlier times, 'spirit' meant a 'phantom' but in its current usage, the word, 'ghost,' has come to mean the same, while 'spirit' has taken on the meaning earlier expressed by 'ghost.'[16] In order to avoid a misconception, these words must be changed to keep up with its differing significance in the changing times.

Eric Pend relates the prolonged efforts of a Bible translator working in the Luba-Katanga Language of the Congo region. He spent years looking for the right expression for the term, 'Holy Spirit.' All the words in the native language that denoted the concept of a spirit had negative connotations of witchcraft and sorcery. Finally, he chanced upon the term, 'Nsenka.' It stood for an official in the court of the Chief, whose function was to meet those who had business with the chief. He would find out what they wanted and then usher them into the presence of the Chief and act as their advocate and intercessor.[17] The functions performed by the 'Nsenka' matched those assigned to the Holy Spirit within Christian theology and therefore it was a most

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[16] Eugene Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954) 209.

[17] See Pend, 'The Bible and the Missionary,' ed. S. L. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from Reformation to the Present Day,* vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) 395-396.

appropriate translation.[18] The translator thus appropriates the cultural moorings of the receptor community to translate the key concepts which are then rendered in both culturally relevant and comprehensible terms. The translator uses the eloquence of the vernacular context to give force and shape to the Christian proclamation. Hence, translation remains an ever unfinished task and changes must be made to keep up with the changing times and the changing climes.

Moreover, if something of the 'intentionality' of the author is to be followed, then one of the goals of translation is not just its comprehension and understanding, but its continued relevance. For the Christian who reads the Bible as God's uttered thought, or account of His actions in the past; these writings continue to engage his present and point towards God's leading for his life in the future.

Achtemeier writes:

> Part of the confession that God has spoken in the past, and that we have
> an authoritative account of those words, also refers to the present. To say
> that Scripture is "inspired" means that God continues to address his
> people through its pages in the present. For the Christian, the "inspired"
> Bible means that God spoke not only to our fathers in the history of
> Israel, and to the Apostles in the founding generation of the Christian
> church, but that he also continues to address his people through its pages,
> as they are read in public worship and private devotions. [19]

The Scripture comes to us as a word from the past and exhibits in its language and content a continuing link with that past. But the contemporary authority of the text may be linked to it being heard as a contemporary word, since it witnesses to a biblical God who is not bound to the past, but is active in the present and is shaping the future. Thus, Bible's authority for the Church also depends on its ability to speak an intelligible and credible word to the present generation. This brings us to the oft

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[18] The role of the Holy Spirit as understood in Christian theology is that of an, 'advocate,' 'comforter' and an 'intercessor.'

[19] Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of the Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) 21.

debated questions of contextualization.[20] Therefore, translation comes to involve not just exegesis, (retrieving the meaning of the text) but also hermeneutics (how is the meaning applicable in the present context).

Many argue that this hermeneutical element comes into play only in the pulpit and in the hands of the preacher. Others highlight the fact that, the Bible as a tool of evangelization should in one sense be self-explanatory. This is what motivated the Reformers to undertake the translation of the text into the vernaculars, freeing the stronghold of the clergy on this sacred text, thereby allowing the laymen to access the mind of God through the text. Therefore, something of this hermeneutical task must inform the biblical translation. When such a translation reaches the hands of an average un-indoctrinated reader, he must feel its continued relevance.

The set task, however, is not as easy as it sounds and the translator always has to make important decisions about its rendering. The Bible also, it may be kept in mind, presents itself as a historical text. Jesus is understood not as a generalized humanity but as a person in history. This historical and cultural specificity of the text cannot be overlooked. Yet, this same particularity presents itself as applicable to one and all. The Gospel, as *Chapter III* will argue, is understood as applicable for the whole world. The Gospel principle of Christianity operates on two levels. That of 'universality,' which in turn is hinged on an 'indigenizing principle.' Christianity as a missionary faith presents itself as providing a faith for the whole world. This universality does not (or rather should not, if the gospel principle is to be maintained) bring in its wake, a cultural homogeneity; rather it accords a legitimate status to the particularities of each culture. This amounts to a radical view of the legitimacy of each language and culture as being acceptable carriers of the message of God embodied in the Scripture. The inclusiveness of the Gospel demands that the Scripture be translated in the language and culture of the recipient/or targeted community and therefore tends towards an indigenizing force, which is released in each scriptural translation and in each domestic expression of faith.

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[20] Contextualization is a common term in translation studies which opens the debate of 'naturalization' or 'domestication' of the text. In order for the text to be understood in a new context certain terms of the text must be translated into the language and cultural milieu of the receptor.

Recognition of the twin principles of historical specificities of the text, and the need for indigenizing it in translation, complicates the task of the translator, who always has to balance the demands of the two. In some cases the demand is to render the translation in the contemporary idiom of the people. How much latitude does one allow for and at what points in the text?

The enterprise of translation brings back the focus to the question of re-vision. Each translation is a new composition because of the new ways in which it proclaims the message. Translation opens up the possibility of a new and fresh understanding of the Word of God, which is the crux of Christianity. It allows for the imagination of the reader to engage with the language, in understanding the word of revelation. It is in this sense that we understand the scriptural translations- it is a movement in search of the word of faith, hence always a movement 'towards a poetics of faith.'

1.6. Paradigms of Biblical Interpretation

The history of the Judeo-Christian faith is amongst other things a long history of the interpretation of its sacred text. Various approaches have been taken to understanding this canonical body of literature on which rests the Christian faith. The interpretative landscape is not easily described as it spans many a centuries and involves varied and complex methods of biblical interpretation. What remains certain however is that interpretation precedes any translation. For one has first to understand the meaning of the text before one engages in any attempt at its transfer across a lexico-cultural barrier.

'IS Exegesis possible Without Presuppositions?' is the title of one of the most interesting articles of Bultmann.[21] The answer to his own question is, no. Bultmann wasn't suggesting that readers of the Bible may decide ahead of time the specific meaning of a text. He did believe that 'objectivity' properly understood was the aim of an exegete. His point however, was that, all of us bring a world view to the text and it is virtually impossible to suppress that world view.

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[21] Rudolf Bultmann, "IS Exegesis possible Without Presuppositions?" ed. Schubert M. Ogden, *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: World Publishing, 1960) 289-96.

Interpretation of the Bible depends to a large extent on the perspective of the interpreter. While this should not be an unqualified statement, one is also forced to acknowledge the fact that whether one is dealing with Holy Scripture or any other written materials, there is invariably some influence on our thinking from the socio-cultural setting that has conditioned our lives. In the contemporary setting, it may be agreed, that to a considerable degree our perspectives are forged by elements of rationalism, or perhaps by nationalism or even a narrow individualism. In various permutations and combinations, these factors have affected us, shaping our world-view and it is this world view which we bring to our reading and conception of the Word of God.

It may perhaps be useful to sketch three broad paradigms, or 'theories of biblical literature' that have emerged historically and still prove useful for modern Bible-readers and scholars. It would be naïve to assume the possibility of an 'objective' or 'neutral' method of interpretation. Moreover, majority of the readers of the Bible rarely operate with an explicitly formulated theory of the text. Yet, theoretical assumptions inform any reading. Identifying these, with their distinctive configurations, and established patterns enable us to speak of paradigms, by which is meant distinctive ways of conceiving the biblical text that are identifiable across a broad range of use. These constitute the pre-understanding that leads to the development of certain methods of interpretation which has important implications for the translation enterprise. The various forms of biblical criticisms may be clubbed under three broad rubrics: Divine-Oracle, Historical, or Literary.[22]

1.6.1. Divine-Oracle Paradigm

In this paradigm the biblical text and divine voice are so closely linked that a reading of the biblical text and the voice of the text is taken to be the voice of God. The critical assumption of this paradigm is the 'direct divine origin of Scripture' which implies the

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[22] The delineation of these paradigms follow a similar approach put forward by Holliday. See Carl R. Holliday, 'Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible,' *New Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 1 (Pellegrini, Perth: Abingdon Press, 1994) 125-149.

divine authorship of all writings.[23] By so attributing to God the authorship of all the writings that constitute the Bible, it is becomes possible to speak of the Bible as the 'word of God' in an unqualified and literal way. This however, is an extended metaphor, in the sense that the writer of the texts are taken to be recording in a direct sense what God desired. Therefore, it is God who is the real author who inspired the biblical authors.[24] Concomitantly, the Bible is taken to constitute a single genre despite the obvious variety of genres in the biblical writings. The Bible is seen as presenting one grand narrative, unfolding a single, continuous, coherent story of salvation history. This last principle would imply a harmony in of all the writings. Each section of the Bible is in one sense a part of the larger continuous speech made by God.[25]

The Scripture is taken to be directly expressive of divine will. This presupposes a direct correspondence between Scripture and divine intent and assumes that the will of God is somehow embodied within and expressed by the text. The text becomes the primary locus of the reader's attention, and the primary locus of revelation. The place the reader looks for, or listen to, the Word of God is within the sacred pages of the Bible. God is assumed to speaking directly through the text. The Bible becomes a 'manual for life.'[26] The divine oracle paradigm continues to operate in Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions; in conservative Roman Catholic traditions and Protestant traditions as also in Orthodox and more conservative Jewish traditions. The theoretical understanding which informs much of the contemporary translation enterprise is based on this paradigm, modified as it is with contemporary sociological, anthropological and linguistic research.

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[23] See N. Peterson, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 9-12.

[24] See Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of the Scripture* 21-33. He presents a spectrum of views on Biblical inspiration which he clubs under two broad categories, 'liberal' and 'conservative.'

[25] J. I. Packer, 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,' eds. D A Carson and John D Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983) 325-356. Packer comments on the principle of harmony in synthesis which is derived from the evangelical doctrine of the Scripture. It may be noted that this doctrine falls within the divine oracle paradigm.

[26] I owe this phrase to a friend who to all intents and purposes may be typecast as an 'evangelical' and this is the sense in which he approaches the biblical text.

1.6.2. *The Historical Paradigm* [27]

Within this approach, the Scripture is understood as 'historical' in many ways. It is seen as presenting a historical narrative. Much like the divine oracle paradigm, the Scripture is seen as relating salvation history- a story of Israel and that of the Church. Although in this paradigm, multiple versions of these stories may be allowed for, as opposed to the harmonizing principle of the divine oracle paradigm. The Bible is seen both as a 'historical artifact' from which history may be constructed and a 'historical product' which has undergone stages of formation and development.[28] The biblical text therefore, speaks of a history and conceals one. It also has its own history, which may be recovered through the historical-critical method.[29]

The important difference one marks here is that while the focus of revelation in the divine-oracle paradigm is within the text, in this, it is located outside of it. The text is not the sole bearer of God's revelation which may be retrieved by a complex historical process of which it is a part. Since the human element in the biblical writings is given importance, any discrepancies and conflicting points of view within the text are no longer seen to implicate God. He is no longer responsible for them. One also recognizes that the received Bible has undergone a long history of development and canonization.

An extension of the notion that a text has its own history is the recognition that the history of the text can be conceived in stages leading up to its canonical form. The canonical form and ordering itself, is seen as a historical process. Attention is paid not only to the post history but to the pre-history of the text as well. Attention is also paid in one sense to the fact that religious communities have accepted these writings as normative for their faith and practice. These are therefore read and interpreted as

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[27] See E. Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

[28] Holliday, 'Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible.'128-131.

[29] See Peterson, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* 9-23.This approach is best characterized by, 'grammatical-historical exegesis.' It focused attention on a detailed analysis of the text in conformity with the 'original' historical situation as also the 'original' language. The approach was developed as a reaction to an allegorical interpretative approach of the Scripture, as also the prevalent tendency to read the text in the light of one's contemporary language and culture context. So if the Bible was read in English, it was assumed that what was being said in the text, directly addressed the present context in an uncritical way. In opposition to such a method, the historical-critical method stressed the need to understand the 'intended' meaning of the text as it was in the mind of the author and in the context in which he was writing.

making explicit claims and theological demands which represent the collective judgments of the believing communities that preserved and transmitted them.

The biblical text is grounded in its history, set within the past and therefore distanced from the contemporary readers by a vast cultural, linguistic, geographical and historical gap. Consequently, it is incumbent upon the contemporary reader to become a good student of the original-context, to be aware of its languages, customs and political and social history. In terms of the interpretative practice, one comes to stress the grammatico-historical exegesis which focuses attention on the detailed analysis of the text in conformity with the original language of the original historical situation.[30]

Since the original historical circumstances that produced the text are given such high premium, determining 'what the text meant' becomes a major aim for the interpreter. What did the author or the community that produced the text intend to convey? How was the text heard and understood by its original audience? The ultimate concern however, is not 'what the text meant then' But 'what it means' now. There is a simultaneous mediation of two worlds. That of the past and the present.

The historical paradigm eschews the single genre principle of the divine oracle paradigm. On the contrary, it recognizes the multiplicity of theological perspectives, as also the multiplicity of genres, because one is never too far away from an awareness of human authors of these divine writings. Consequently, one does not glaze over any discrepancy or contradiction in the scriptural text. A corollary of such an understanding is also that it becomes more difficult to hold on to a concept of Scripture, as the Word of God in an unqualified sense.

1.6.3. *Literary Paradigm*

The last paradigm is called the Literary paradigm by which one does not identify a distinctive theory of the text, rather a nebulous conception spanning the range of

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[30] See Packer, 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics.' 349-350. Packer gives a detailed account of the methods of this exegetical approach.

diverse interpretive practices. The Bible is not taken to be a 'sacred' text alone; or as in the historical paradigm, an object which allows for various constructive or re-constructive criticisms that relate only tangentially to the text; here the text *per se* is the reader's sole focus. What is said in the text is taken to be the voice of the text alone, not that of God or any other intermediary author. Extra textual reference to the world outside in terms of the author's intention or historical or social realities presupposed by, or referred to, are discounted.

The term 'Literary' captures this focus on the words of the text and the conviction that the message and the meaning of the text inhere within the literary texture. Text is both its own author, and constitutes its own world. Rather than focus on the text as a historical product, one sees it as a finished product and hence in contrast to the historical paradigm one takes a-historical view of the text. There is no emphasis paid to identifying previous influences on a text or determining whether or how previous texts, traditions or events had formatively shaped the text. Moreover, the 'Autonomy of the text' is assumed it is seen to be intrinsically meaningful regardless of its historical setting. Focus is on the intrinsic aspects of the text-genre, structure, content-style etc, and the interpretive activity is seen as a primarily aesthetic activity. Under this rubric such interpretive practices like Structuralism, Rhetorical criticism, Narrative criticism, Reader-Response criticism and Deconstruction and many more may be clubbed which afford a variety of ways of approaching the literary text.

The three paradigms that have been delineated provide broad frameworks within which all the theories and methods of biblical criticism maybe categorized. Each paradigm centers on critically important aspects of Scripture which interpreters have prized as being of paramount importance. One recognizes the possibilities and limitations of each of these approaches and in so doing also acknowledges that the actual interpretive methods may not operate within one paradigm in an exclusive sense.

In fact contemporary approaches, borrow from each of these to arrive at the meaning of the biblical text. So even while one operates largely within the divine oracle paradigm, one recognizes the merits of acknowledging the historicity of the text as well and therefore employs an approach which focuses attention on the historico-social setting of the writings to understand what the text meant, at a particular time.

Features of the literary paradigm allow one to recognize the importance of different literary genres of these writings as also the importance of the reader or interpreter; his own perspective and social location which bear upon the interpretative practice. Also important is the structuralist understanding of language as culturally derivative and culturally expressive, which also meant that biblical texts have been read not only to discern their 'content' but also for what they reveal about the social matrix of the communities that produced them.

1.7. Relativity in Interpretation and its Implication for Translation

That interpretation proceeds translation, has already been acknowledged. How one understands and appropriates the meaning will largely depend on the paradigm within which one operates. For instance, if one is operating solely within the literary paradigm, such meaning may be a solely aesthetic one, while in the divine oracle paradigm the meaning comes to be seen as expressive of divine will. A certain way of appropriating elements of the historical meaning, may however, show this meaning as a construct of the faith traditions that have transmitted the biblical text and in that sense the meaning is an imposition which demands that the text be read in tandem with socio-historical contingency. The paradigms therefore determine the different levels of value one might attach to the biblical text which in turn will determine how it is to be rendered in translation.

It may be stressed here, that the scriptural translations that happen in the evangelical context operate largely in the divine oracle paradigm.[31] In fact the very motivation for them to translate the text stems from their reading of the text in this mode. The Scripture embodies God's uttered thought and it must be translated in all languages such that all might have access to the divine will in their own language. In ascribing primacy to this divine will, the reader must eschew an exponential relativity in interpretation which will necessarily undermine the authority of the text. What is emphasized here is not a rigidity or fixity of meaning, rather an acceptable range which is tied to the 'intended' meaning of the text. Such an intended meaning is

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[31] See Appendix 3 and 4 for WBT's statement of faith that reveals the fact of them operating within the divine-oracle paradigm.

realized by focusing on the historical and cultural context in which the meaning was first generated and for which it was first intended. This relativity in interpretation allows for a degree of flexibility in translation and tends towards the search of a poetics of faith. This implies finding ways of contextually appropriating a received text and re-conceiving it by adapting and shaping it to the new situation of the reader.

Chapter II

Aspects of Meaning: The Word of God

2.1. *The Objective*

This chapter seeks to understand various aspects of the meaning of the Bible as the Word of God. Key issues that are stressed are those of the nature of revelation in the Bible, authority and status of the Christian Bible, the historical-cultural specificity of the biblical text, intentionality of these writings and its intended meaning. The discussion emphasizes the evangelical point of view and attempts to relate these to its concomitant implications for the enterprise of translation.

An abiding concern of many who take on the task of understanding and interpreting the Bible, in various milieus, academic, religious or even private, revolves around the task of, 'letting the Bible "speak" for itself.' Instead of imposing preconceived notions on the Scripture, whereby nothing 'original' may be learnt from it. The basic problem consists in trying to listen to and understand the text in an 'objective' way.

Such objectivity however, is never possible. Each reader comes to the text with a pre-understanding, with particular questions or aims which will then determine for him what the text means and what is it that it is 'saying.' The Bible, as we have seen in the previous chapter may be read within three broad paradigms, as it may also be read using interpretative methods derived selectively from more than one of these paradigms.

Underlying this issue of understanding the Bible as the Word of God, is a more vexing problem, namely, what kind of book is it to which the reader 'listens' and from which he attempts to learn, what is the nature of the truth it seeks to convey, and how does it intend to do that? This previous question could be answered if one could

determine how and for what purposes the Scripture was originally composed and assembled as a collection. Consequently, one is led to enquire into what the Bible itself says about its own composition and intentions. Central to all such enquiries is the primary issue of the relationship of the Bible to God's will for his people and his world. What then is the nature of literature that the Bible is, and how was this literature produced and by whom? Answers to these, and similar questions may point the way towards understanding how precisely does one hear God's voice speaking through the pages of the Scripture.

2.2. The Old and the New

The word, *Bible*, (Book) is derived through Latin from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning 'books.' It was originally the name given to the outer coat of a papyrus reed in the eleventh century B.C. By the second century A.D, Christians were using the word to describe their sacred writings recorded on the papyrus.[1] The writings that constitute the Bible are divided into two major parts. The *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*. The Old Testament was written and preserved by the Jewish community for more than a millennium before the time of Christ. The New Testament was composed by the Disciples of Christ, during the first century A.D. The word 'testament' used in the two divisions of the Bible goes back through Latin *testamentum* to Greek *diatheke* which is better translated as 'covenant' rather than 'testament,' designating a compact or agreement between two parties.[2] In the case of the Bible, it refers to an old covenant between God and His people, (*Exodus 24:7*).[3] In

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[1] Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974) 7. See also F. F Bruce, 'The Bible,' ed. Philip Wesley Comfort, *The Origin of the Bible* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992) 3-11.

[2] Bruce, 'The Bible' 5.

[3] All biblical quotations in this study are from *NKJV* unless stated otherwise.

the Book of *Jeremiah 31:31* a new covenant is foretold which would supersede the previous one; this is the new compact between God and Christians.[4]

There is much debate about the value and accuracy of these terms, 'Old' and 'New' Testament. It may be argued that to many 'modern' readers, the adjective, 'old' has a pejorative connotation, of something no longer useful and therefore to be disregarded in favour of the more useful which constitutes the 'new.' Yet again, the word, 'testament' is used in English mainly in legal contexts. The problem with using the term, 'covenant' is that the Bible speaks not only of two, but multiple covenants. The controversy about labeling the two parts of the Christian Bible is more than a debate about words. It concerns to a large extent, Christian attitudes towards the legacy of Israel. Is the Old Testament to be jettisoned or kept as an essential part of the Christian faith? If it is kept, how should it be used- as a religious text to be taken seriously in its own right, as a preparation for the Gospel, or as a necessary presupposition to the understanding of the New Testament? In the realm of scriptural translation the translator's point of view will decide which text is to be translated, especially when the means to attain such a goal are limited and choices with regard to the books to be translated are to be made.[5]

2.3. *The Bible as the Word of God*

I recently came across a book on a library shelf entitled, *The Old Testament Speaks.*[6] The Old Testament however, does not 'speak,' not literally. It is a text, not speech as we understand it.[7] Whenever someone suggests that a text 'speaks,' they are using figurative

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[4] Bruce also relates how the terms, Old testament and New testament came into general Christian use in the later part of the second century when Tertullian translated the Greek 'diatheke' into Latin by, 'instrumentum,' meaning a legal document but the two parts are not documents in the ordinary sense of the term.

[5] Evangelicals, the UBS and other translation agencies have a stereotypical approach to what to translate as well the order of translation. Translating and publishing the New Testament and following it with the Old Testament has been the routine pattern. John Harris challenges the stereotype. See "Don't Translate the New Testament: The Case for the' Mini Bible, '" *Bulletin of the United Bible Societies, Current Trends in Scripture Translation* 182/183 (1997):177-186.

[6] Samuel J. Shultz, *The Old Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

[7] 'Speech' is here understood as a convention of audible verbal communication.

language to describe the effects of a text. The fact that people use this figure of speech about texts might possibly suggest that they wish perhaps that the text would speak literally to them. Speech however, implies life, a personality, a living presence especially in the context of a conversation.[8] A text on the other hand, 'speaks' only in so far as it can 'be transformed back into [spoken] language.'[9] In this, we find a crucial aspect of biblical studies and theology which centers around the text of the Bible, understood as the Word of God. Within the divine oracle paradigm, the voice of the text is presumed to come from a living presence- that of God who is taken to be the author of the text and consequently of the speech of the text.

The expression, 'Word of God' itself, is variously understood, but in the popular Judeao-Christian tradition the Bible as the Word of God, is seen as God's revelation of himself in the written form and of his speech recorded in the writings that constitute the Bible. The collection of writings that constitute the Bible, are together seen as God's revelation to mankind. A means whereby and wherein God communicates and reveals himself to man. It is in this sense, that God is seen to speak of himself and his plans for the salvation of man through the pages of the Scripture. But what is a 'word' or 'the word' in the context of the Bible? And what does it really mean to speak? Does one accentuate the qualifying 'of God,' or the noun, 'word'? There is an equivocation in this expression, 'the word of God.'

2.3.1. *The Spoken Word of God*

A word is a means by which thought is communicated, and in speech, this is achieved by the use of one's vocal chords that emit sounds. When one turns to the text of the Bible, one does not 'hear' the voice of God. It is a metaphorical sense in which the term is used. Dodd contends that it implies a means whereby the, '"thought" of God which is the truth,

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[8] V. George Shillington, *Reading the Sacred Text: An Introduction to Biblical Studies* (London, New York: Continuum - T&T Clark, 2001) 72.

[9] H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* Rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 352.

is mediated to the human mind.'[10] Germane to our discussion of the Bible, as the Word of God, is an acknowledgement that, one of the forms of God's self-disclosure or revelation, as reported in the Scripture was his direct speech, speech to and through the prophets,[11] the patriarch and the Apostles as also from the lips of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.[12] James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer elaborate on how the prophet was conceived of as a 'spokesman' of God. Not just a message-bearer, from God to the king or other individuals, to Israel or to other nations but sometimes relating the very words of Yahweh.[13] The opening lines of the prophetic books provide us a means to understand how it is understood as God's 'speech' to men.[14] Whatever the writings contain, is taken to come directly from God. The refrain, 'thus Yahweh says,' or 'thus says the Lord' seems to fuse the human speech with that of the Divine. We are also told that the material we read *is* 'the word of Yahweh.'[15]

Much of the Old Testament writings are in forms other that prophetic books and yet claim to relate divine speech. Biblical writers recorded what they believed to be God's doings in creation, his providence, and grace; poets celebrated and responded to the glorious things that they knew about him, apprehended through their lives and in nature. Such writings were, grammatically speaking, neither God's direct speech nor his words given to them, but their own, as they committed these to writings. Yet, as J.I. Packer rightly observes, 'the N.T. writers again and again cite this material, whatever its literary genre, as God's direct speech substantively, as if He were the historian, teacher or poet, just as they cite prophetic oracles as God's direct speech.'[16] B.B. Warfield observes

[10] C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible,* Rev. ed. (Glasgow: Collins, Fount ,1986) 26.

[11] See section entitled 'Scripture as Inspired Word: Interpreting Prophecy,' in John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 139-194.

[12] Ibid., 139.The sayings and teachings of Jesus as recorded in the gospel accounts of the apostolic witness is understood as recorded speech.

[13] *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986) 1.

The term, 'Yahweh' as used here is an ineffable name for the Old Testament God s transliterated from the Hebrew YHVW which was understood as the 'Tetragrammaton.'

[14] These were books believed to be written by men who held the prophetic office or had the prophetic gift but did not hold the prophetic office. See Geisler, *From God to Us* 7-16.

14 The repeated use of the phrase can be seen in the book of *Jeremiah.*

[16] 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,' eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983) 335. This may be illustrated

in this context, how the New Testament writers' view of the entire Old Testament was- 'what scripture says, God says.'[17] We will come back to this point of the Old Testament citation in the New Testament later as the study develops.

In the context of the 'spoken' Word of God, it is also appropriate to think as much in terms of audiences as hearers, as of readers. Biblical scholars agree that in the ancient world, the way to attend to the Scripture would be hearing it read rather than reading it in silence.[18] In fact, prior to the invention of printing, few people could afford the luxury of a personal copy of the Bible which we so take for granted today. Goldingay observes, how even the private reading of the Torah[19] was a spoken act for the Jews.[20] The dissemination of the Scripture itself was by way of reading it aloud to a congregation or a group. A tradition that continues till today in Churches where the lectern reading from the Scripture is followed by the proclamation, 'This is the Word of God,' and to which the response of the congregation is, 'Thanks be to God.' This has an important implication for interpretation which is that of the oral Scripture. The written word of God is thus transformed into a 'spoken' word.[21]

In the literal sense however, the Bible records the words of men. Writes Brown, 'only human being use words, and so, when one has entitled divine communication as, the "Word of God," one has already indicated that the divine communication is in human words,' and needs to be understood in a similar sense. [22]

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in *Matthew* 19:4-5, *Acts* 4:25, 28:25, *Romans* 15:3-12, *1 Corinthians* 10: 6-11. *Hebrews* 1:5-13, 3:7, 10:15, 12:5-6.

[17] B. B Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (London: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959)145,152,348. See also Appendix 1.

[18] Greer elaborates on the early Jewish reading and interpreting tradition in the synagogues. Kugel and Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* 13-26.

[19] Torah refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. These are the five books which were believed to be written by Moses, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.* Collectively known as the Pentateuch, these were used in the synagogues and represented the entire body of religious law, including both sacred literature and oral tradition. See Daniel J. Harrington, S. J., 'Introduction to the Canon,' *The New Interpreter's Bible,* vol.1 (Pellegrini, Perth: Abingdon Press, 1994) 7-21.

[20] *Models of Interpretation* 37.

[21] See W. A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) for a detailed study of the importance of the orality of the Scripture.

[22] R. E. Brown quoted in *Models of Interpretation* 169.

If God 'spoke' through human writers who themselves spoke and wrote messages designed to communicate to other people of their time, it implies an approach to understanding God's words that seek to understand the human words of these writers and messengers. How this is accomplished, is explained in terms of the concept of *inspiration*.

2.3.2. *The Living Word of God*

According to the Bible itself, the Word of God is none other than God. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God.'(John 1:1)* [Emphasis mine]. Further, the Word is God in action. The understanding is that when God speaks, God does. 'God said, "Let there be...and there was."'[23] What this implies for the Bible believer is that God's word is more than mere information that can be contained in a written page. It is action, and a creative and redemptive action. According to the Bible this action comes to us primarily in Jesus Christ- the Living Word of God, who was with God since the beginning but it is in his historical act of redemption and in the community of the faithful, that we come to 'know' him. Thus, in one sense the Word of God comes to us an act of redemption. For these reasons, the Bible as the Word of God, may be taken in a derivative sense as well, because it contains the records of the action of the Word of God, the Living Word (Jesus) on behalf of the people.

2.4. *Historical and Cultural Specificity of the Bible*

The Bible, as we have it today also attests to a multiplicity of historical, linguistic and cultural traces which must be accounted for. Even though the ultimate authorship of this sacred text of the Judeao-Christian tradition is attributed to God, the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven of the New Testament are authored by more than forty authors writing at specific times in the history of men and from specific geographic

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[23] See *Genesis 1.*

locales.[24] These writings span vast historical gaps, the present form itself, has undergone a complex process of selection and canonization.[25]

The history of the canonization makes an interesting study which is beyond the scope of this work; what remains certain is that the Bible as we have it today, did not just fall miraculously out of heaven, nor is it inscribed with a special heavenly language peculiarly suited to the purposes of the divine revelation, neither was it dictated directly or immediately by God without reference to any local style or perspective.[26] The biblical writers employed the linguistic resources available to them as they wrote to specific people with particular needs at particular times. Paul's epistles in the New Testament for instance, are addressed to specific churches and their problems therein. These human authors were not lifted out of their limitations in knowledge, memory and language, and ability to express themselves in special contexts in specific periods of history. Moreover, these writers were not autonomous, but functioning members in communities of faith. The book of *Jeremiah* opens thus:

> The words of Jeremiah the son of Helkiah, of the priests who were in
> Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord
> came, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, King of Judah, in the
> thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim, the
> son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of

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[24] This is the Protestant Canon. The Old Testament corresponds to the Hebrew canon and contains 39 books. These fall into four blocks; Law (*Genesis - Deuteronomy*), Historical (*Joshua – Esther*), Wisdom Books (*Job- Song of Songs*), Prophets (*Isaiah- Malachi*). The New Testament consists of the Gospels; *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,* followed by the *Acts* of the Apostles, 13 epistles attributed to Paul. Nine epistles written to Communities, followed by the book of *Hebrews*, followed by 7 general or 'catholic' letters. The book of *Revelation* concludes the New Testament canon.

[25] For the history of canonization of the biblical books see, Daniel J. Harrington, S,J, 'Introduction to The Canon,' 7-21. See also. F. F Bruce, *The Canon of The Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988).

[26] An evangelical exposition of this is, 'In inspiration God used the culture and conventions of his penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise.' See Appendix 2.

Zedekiah the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, until the carrying away

of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month. (*Jeremiah 1:1-3*).

These opening words characteristically combine two features. It alludes in one sense to the book's human and historical origins. In that we are told who the prophet was, some information about his family background, and what historical period he had lived in. We are also given some information about the community to which his words were given. 'Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel.' (*Jeremiah 2:4*). Secondly, we are given categorical information about the contents of the writings as that which is the word of God given to the prophet:

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying: "Before I formed you

in the womb I knew you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

Then said I: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a

youth." But the Lord said to me; " Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you

shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you

shall say." (*Jeremiah 1:4-7*).

This dialogue between the prophet Jeremiah and God continues for a few verses before the prophet addresses himself to the community, giving them words from God. In the subsequent sections, what is written is prefixed or suffixed by the oft repeated expression, 'says the Lord.' The words of the written text relate to a specific historico-cultural context but the presence of the phrase, 'says the Lord' adds another dimension to it. These writings then, are both the words of God, as also the words from godly men to specific communities addressing problems and situations within certain contexts and cultures.

In illustration of the cultural specificity of these writings one need only refer to some of the terms used, that point to the culture specifically. Terms like the 'Samaritan,' 'Sadducees,' 'Pharisees;' concepts like the 'Passover,' 'Crucifixion,' all these are understandable within the cultural specificities of the times in which they were written

and of which they speak. As Kraft writes, '...the scriptures are specific to the cultural settings of the original events.'[27]

2.5. The Nature of Revelation Communicated through the Scripture

One of the important insights gathered from the cultural specificity of the writings that constitute the Word of God is an understanding that God's revelation of himself (as the Bible portrays it) does not take place in abstract terms, 'out into the thin air' so to speak. It would not be incorrect to say that what we know of God's nature is not so much through what He says of himself but how he acts in specific situations. (This again is an interpretation of the Scripture.) Kraft dubs this as a 'Receptor-Oriented Revelation.'[28] That is to say, that each biblical writing participates completely in the context to which it is addressed. And the topics treated are dealt with, in categories culturally and linguistically appropriate to the way a particular culturally and psychologically conditioned participant perceived of that situation and its needs. Large portions of the New Testament are therefore, phrased in terms of Greek conceptual categories since it was addressed to an audience steeped in a Hellenist culture.[29]

Many biblical scholars commenting on the nature of the biblical content observe the 'dynamic' nature of revelation of the biblical God. What this implies is that nothing of God's nature is revealed apart from his interaction with humans. Wright quotes Brunner on this point, 'The Bible says nothing of a God as He is Himself and nothing of a man as he is in himself, but only of a God who from the first is related to man and of a man who from first is related to God.'[30] Wright further comments:

> The primary means by which God communicated with man is by His
>
> acts, which are the events of history. These events need interpretation,
>
> it is true, and God provides this in His Word by chosen heralds or

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[27] Charles H, Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981) 134.

[28] Ibid., 169.

[29] See 3.4.3.

[30] Earnest G. Wright, *God Who Acts* (London: SCM Press, 1952) 90.

messengers. But the focus of attention is not upon the Word of God in and for itself so that it can be frozen, so to speak, within a system of dogmatic propositions. The word leads us, not *away* from history, but *to* history and to responsible participation *within* history. It is the accompaniment of history. The Bible thus is not primarily the Word of God, but the record of the Acts of God, together with the human response thereto.[31]

'Christianity' writes Dodd, 'is thoroughly committed to the view that God reveals Himself in and through history.'[32]

In the Bible, the most theological portions, like the book of Romans participate in the 'eventness' of the fact that they were written as letters from specific persons to specific persons to meet specific needs. Kraft therefore calls the Bible as 'God's Inspired Casebook.'[33] He defines a 'casebook' as —'a book of case histories,' a collection of descriptions of 'illustrative real- life exemplifications of the principles to be taught.'[34] There is a 'concreteness' in the nature of these writings. The words of God are time conditioned, rooted in time. For instance, through the prophets, the biblical God relates to people in the specific circumstances of their lives, speaking a concrete word that confronts them where they are and demands a response from them. The fact that the books of Scripture explicitly come from human authors, invite us to approach them historically. The materials consistently draw attention to its own historical background and thus make it incumbent upon its reader to understand it against that background. The casebook nature is perhaps best exemplified in the four Gospels, the books of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and *John* which record the life, works and teachings of Jesus, his interactions with people, be it his disciples, the Jewish religious leaders or the ordinary folks of his day. Yet again, the Gospels exemplify the divine-human authorship in that, each Gospel writer records the life of Christ from his own perspective, in terms of his

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[31] Ibid., 107.
[32] Dodd, *Authority of the Bible* 9.
[33] Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 194.
[34] Ibid., 198.

own interest, concerns and perceptions. In exhibiting the unique styles and language of individual authors they alert one to the historic materiality not just of the text, but of the authors too.

2.6. *Biblical Languages*

It has been widely agreed that the Bible is written using ordinary literary conventions, it is also written in 'ordinary human languages.'[35] There is no special 'biblical Hebrew' or 'new testament Greek' that God or scriptural authors spoke. The biblical authors, surmises Goldingay, used the languages of their particular day, with the distinctive vocabulary and style peculiar to them as individuals.[36] The entire New Testament was written in a language other than the one in which Jesus preached. In adopting 'koine,' the everyday Greek to write the New Testament, the writers were adopting yet again the cultural registers of the community that was addressed.

Yet another important feature about language to be kept in mind especially with regard to biblical translation is that the languages of the Bible are 'subject to the same limitations as any other natural languages.'[37] They are therefore, not rightly regarded if they are treated as too 'sacred' to be analyzed and translated. Furthermore, as is true of all languages, the Greek and Hebrew vocabulary idiom, and grammar that we see employed in the Bible participate fully in and have their intended meaning only in terms of their interaction with the culture in which these languages were used. The authors did not invent unknown words or use them in unknown ways. 'All the vocabulary was itself rooted in the finite experience of men and women and all of the expressions must be understood in terms of this type of background.'[38]

That the eternal councils of God belonged to the commonplace, everyday speech of ordinary men and women was a view that was, and remains revolutionary. It resisted

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[35] Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation* 179.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Eugene Nida and C. R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 7.
[38] Ibid.

the tendency in some parts of the early Church to cast the biblical message into an elitist Gnostic type. No attempt was made to develop a professional cultic language.[39]

2.7. Diversity in the Scriptural Text

The word Bible, comes from the Greek 'Biblia,' and indicates a plurality of books. This fact already informs us as to its nature. It is a collection of literary works, of distinctive linguistic expressions. 'The Bible is in fact composed of different types of Literature.'[40] Each literary genre, be it legal, prophetic, lyrical, gospel, epistolary, or apocalyptic, has distinctive characteristics which bear upon the form and the way in which the biblical teaching is expressed. Being able to distinguish and classify the various literary forms found in the biblical text is essential for its interpretation.[41]

The Old Testament is seen to contain a wide range of literary genres and sub-genres: narrative, legal material, wisdom sayings, prophetic oracles, liturgical texts, various types of psalms, prayers and confessions to name only a few. Within the narrative portions of the New Testament, one finds miracle stories, stories in which a significant pronouncement is made by Jesus and stories that essentially relate controversies between Jesus and his opponents among others. The various epistles not only reflect different genres, letters of thanksgiving, friendship, exhortation, instruction, but also contain smaller identifiable units like sermons summations, confessions, prayers and hortatory materials. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament, contain writings that are themselves apocalypses, but also works that include apocalyptic sections.[42]

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[39] See Lamin Sanneh, 'The Gospel, Language and Culture: The Theological Method in Cultural Analysis,' *International Review of Mission*, vol. LXXXIV Nos, 332/333 (1995): 47-64; 'Pluralism and Commitment,' *Theology Today*, vol. 45 (1988): 21-35.

[40] Ralph P. Martin, 'Approaches to New Testament Exegesis,' ed. I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eedermans, 1977) 226.

[41] See section entitled 'On Reading Bible as Literature,' in T R Wright, *Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 41-82.

[42] See Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London: Fontana Press, 1989).

Attention to the literary form serves an important interpretive function. The meaning and significance of the text may be unclear, until one realizes, through careful attention to the literary form that it is, for example, a particular type of psalm, such as a communal lament that likely stemmed from a crisis within the community and reflects an antiphonal structure. John Goldingay too, draws attention to the diversity of ways in which the Scripture communicates its message, 'Scripture has a variety of ways of speaking, and the process of interpretation requires a variety of hermeneutical approaches corresponding to this variety of type of texts.'[43]

Consequently, he puts forth models of interpretation corresponding to the broad categories in which he classifies the materials of the text.[44] Goldingay's methodology is just one such model of interpretation that pays close attention to the form of the message. Kermode who calls the Bible, 'a delight in the manifold exercise of literary craftsmanship,'[45] suggests various literary approaches to the text that take as their substance of criticism, the very 'literariness' of the Bible which accounts for its internal diversity. In recognizing the diversity that marks these texts, it is necessary to accord status not just to the different literary genres but also to the diversity in perspectives of the authors that characterize these writings.

2.8. *Unity of the Scriptural Text*

'The new lies hid in the old; the old lies open the new.' -St Augustine[46]

The Bible exhibits a multiplicity of voices, a multiplicity of forms and of thematic concerns. As has been observed in a prior section, it has been written by more

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[43] Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation* 1.

[44] Ibid., 1-11. His categorization is in terms of the, 'Witnessing tradition' (a way of looking at Scripture's narrative), 'authoritative canon' (a model that applies most directly to commands in the Torah and elsewhere), 'inspired words,' (a term especially at home in connection with prophecy), and 'experienced revelation' (covering material such as psalms, apocalypses, and wisdom books and letters).

[45] *The Literary Guide to the Bible* 15.

[46] As quoted in Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (1950; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994) 55.

than forty authors over a vast period time, each of them writing in and of their specific historico-cultural location and concerns. The plurality and time-conditioned specificity of these writings must eschew any attempt at unity. And yet unity there is, that is so boldly proclaimed by Christians who see continuity in each of the writings, a linear tradition between the Old Testament and the New Testament. They see Christ as the unifying center and principle of the Scripture.[47] Central to the Christian interpretation of the Scripture is the belief in a unifying history of God's redeeming works and acts, of which the advent and work of Christ is the ultimate focus. Jesus Christ is considered the center to which everything in Scripture is united and bound together –beginning and end, creation and redemption, humanity, the world, the fall, history and the future.[48]

Kugel and Greer relate how a specifically Christian interpretation was given to the Hebrew Bible, making Christ as the key to the interpretation of the Scripture allowing for an understanding of its true significance.[49] The Hebrew Scripture is treated in one sense as a detailed prophecy of the Christ to come of whom the New Testament authors write. The prophecies made in the Old Testament are understood to be fulfilled in the person of Christ. In relating the life and works of Christ, the book of *Matthew* uses the formula of prophecy fulfillment nine times.[50] According to *Luke* it is the risen Lord Jesus, who reveals the true meaning of Scripture fulfilled in him. *Luke 24:44-46* reads:

> Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scripture. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day."

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[47] See D. L Barker, *Two Testaments: One Bible* (Downers Groove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976). Baker gives a detailed discussion of this point.

[48] See Appendix 1.

[49] Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* 109-125.

[50] See *Matthew* 4:14, 8:17, 12:17, 13:14, 13:35, 21:4, 26:54, 56, 27:9.

The New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament liberally and in complex ways. 'The Hebrew Scriptures became a warrant for Christian practice.'[51] More importantly, it provided the justification for the preaching of the gospel. The focus however, may be found in 'citing texts to demonstrate the truth of the gospel.'[52] In illustration of this point one may turn to Paul's epistle to the Church at Galatia. In *Galatians 3* the story of Abraham is treated as the story of a promise made in the past and fulfilled in Christ. Paul's interpretations correlated with his understanding of the salvation history, and the unveiled mystery of Scripture is related to the unfolding of events in time.[53]

The New Testament writers, who were also the earliest Christian apologists, applied themselves to what may be termed as a 'Christian exegesis'[54] of the Old Testament Scripture which they had received. What they wrote of Christ and how they interpreted his life and works in their writings was rooted in the details of the Scripture:

> Christ's life, his death and resurrection, his session at God' right
> hand, the rejection of the Jews and the preaching of the Gentiles, and
> Christ's return at the end of the age -all of this is a story that gives
> some order to the scriptural text that are used.[55]

In short, these writers assumed that:

> The O.T. contains the promise; the N.T. the fulfillment. The former
> points forward to the coming of Christ, and leads up to him; the latter
> takes in him its starting point, and looks back upon his completed
> sacrifice as the atonement for the sin of the world.[56]

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[51] Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* 136.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.,134-136 . Greer discusses Paul's use of Old Testament quotations.
[54] Ibid., 130.
[55] Ibid., 133. See also 'Unity and diversity in the Bible' and 'The Unity of The Sense of the Scripture,' in Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* 53-57.
[56] Ibid., 55.

Therefore, in their interpretation of the entire text from a specifically Christian perspective, they brought a unity to bear upon this text. It may be stressed that such a unity does not subsume the diversity of perspectives rather reads an overarching design, which for them unites all of the writings that constitute the Bible.

2.9. The Christian Bible

Christianity was born as a sectarian movement in the first-century Judaism, and for a century at least, some Christian continued to think of themselves as Jews.[57] There was however, a fundamental divergence between the Jewish and the Christian understanding of the Scripture. The latter claimed that Jesus was the Messiah that the Scripture pointed to, a claim which was categorically rejected by the former. Thus it is true as Rowan Greer has said that, 'basic to the task of the formative period [of Christianity] is the transformation of the Hebrew Scriptures so that they may become a witness to Christ.'[58]

For all Christians in the formative period, 'Scripture' was the Jewish Scripture whose authority and importance for the Church's self-understanding are evidenced in the multitude of citations and allusions in early Christian writings.[59]

It may be noted that, for Christians the primary focus of divine revelation was not Scripture, but Christ, to whom the Scripture was understood to bear witness. Christian preaching, 'the gospel,' was the primary authority for faith in the first centuries, and Scripture was interpreted in its light.[60] On the other hand, Christians were not the first to interpret the Hebrew Scripture. As Greer writes, 'even before the last parts of it were written, earlier parts were being written about, analyzed as to their true meaning and their

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[57] See Karl Baus, *From Apostolic Community to Constantine*, vol. 1 (London: Burns and Oates, 1980) 59-77.

[58] Greer, 'The Chritian Bible and its Interpretation' 111.

[59] See Henry M. Shires, *Finding the Old Testament in the New* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 126-127; see esp. 35-64.

[60] Greer, 'The Chritian Bible and its Interpretation' 114. See also James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 14.

applicability in changed circumstances, in a word interpreted.'[61] So the early Christians inherited a tradition of the interpretation and application of the Scripture.

Christian writings that had begun to appear soon after the birth of the Church were intended to assist, not replace oral proclamation, which was the authoritative form of apostolic witness in first century.[62] A practice, that continues till this day in areas where the Christian message is proclaimed for the first time.

It was Irenaeus, who in the second century, first provided the nomenclature and theory for uniting the two canons in a single Christian Bible.[63] In Christian theology, the canon of Scripture refers to the list of sacred books that serve as the rule or norm of Christian faith and life. The word 'canon' derives from the Greek *kanon* which means 'reed' or 'measuring stick.'[64] One sense of the word 'kanon' was 'ruler,' that which straightens or could be measured. The notion of canon as rule or norm of faith and life predominated among Christian writers of the first centuries. Paul evoked peace and mercy on 'all who walk according to this kanon.' (*Galatians 6:16*) The term 'Canon of Scripture' has a dualistic sense –the idea of an authoritative list of sacred books and its function as the norm or rule of faith in life. Irenaeus put forward this concept of the 'rule of faith' which according to him was the key that unlocked the Scripture and the standards of truth by which all writings and teachings were to be judged; but it also depended on the Scripture, deriving its categories of interpretation from it. It finds echoes many centuries later in Luther's appeal to *sola Scripture* (Scripture alone). In an attempt to reform the Church of his day, he appealed to the Bible as primary source or norm of faith of doctrine, setting it over and against the teaching of the Church.[65]

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[61] Ibid., 13.

[62] Lee Martin Macdonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988) 76-77.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Bruce M. Metzer, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 289-93.

[65] See Ninian Smart, 'The Explosion of Europe and the Re-forming of Christianity,' *The World's Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 315-352.

Protestants, following Luther, shifted authority for interpretation from the teaching office of the Church to the individual conscience informed by the Holy Spirit. The Bible therefore, functions in a distinctive way in the congregational life and personal piety of Protestants. The symbolism of the Word, read and expounded, at the center of the traditional Protestant service of worship points to a fundamentally different way of understanding scriptural authority than that of the traditional Roman Catholic mass which is commonly understood as liturgy centered.[66] The Bible functions for many Protestants as the primary medium of communion with God, hence it plays a critical role in Protestant experience of God, a major factor distinguishing Protestant and Catholic approaches to theology and translation. The dominant image of evangelical Protestantism today is of a Bible centered faith, and Protestants are typically identified as 'Bible believers.' Whatever the accuracy of the claim, and implied contrast, it is an important witness to the authority accorded to the Bible by a major stream of the Reformation.

2.10. Authority of the Bible

The Judeao-Christian faith is linked to the authority of its Scripture in an intimate way, because it is in the pages of this written book that they look for a warrant for their practices and beliefs. Biblical authority is understood as the Scripture communicating instructions from God about belief and behaviour, the way of faith and of obedience, and the life of worship and of witness.[67] Achtemeier articulates this sense most cogently in his introduction when he writes:

> it points to the belief on the part of the church that there is a unique
> linkage between God's communication with humankind and that
> specific collection of Literature. All that we know of the words and
> deeds of Jesus, who, by what he said and by what he did, kindled in

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[66] While Catholicism is liturgy centered, Protestantism is largely understood as being Bible centered.

[67] This statement may be qualified by adding that this is especially the case with the conservative groups that call themselves 'Bible believers.' Evangelicals too hold to this belief.

> many of his contemporaries the unshakable conviction that contact
>
> with him meant in a unique and unrepeatable way contact with God
>
> himself, we know from the same Scripture.... All that we know of the
>
> many events and reflections which constitute the very foundation and,
>
> essence of our faith we know from that one source.[68]

In short all we know about the Christian faith and its claim of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus is based on what the Bible says.

2.10.1. *Divine Authorship and Authority*

While there is no contention about the fact that the Bible has always had special authority for Christians, the nature and consequences of that authority have been understood in different ways during the Bible's long history of formation and use. Fundamental to all views, however, has been the belief that the Bible constitutes a privileged source of knowledge about the nature and will of God. Traditionally this understanding was expressed in terms of divine authorship or agency. Thus the Bible was, or contained, the 'Word of God.' Carl F.H. Henry writes, 'Scripture is authoritative because it is God's word.'[69] The Westminster Confession of Faith (1.4) is a similar case in point. It reads:

> The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed
>
> and obeyed, depended not upon the testimony of any man or church,
>
> but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author there of; and
>
> therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God.[70]

In a similar tone, the *WBT* statement of faith posits, 'The Holy Scriptures as originally given by God are divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the

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[68] Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of the Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1980) 13.
[69] 'Authority of the Bible,' *The Origin of the Bible* 24.
[70] Ibid., 12.

only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.'[71] Thus, authority of the Bible was assumed by making an *apriori* assumption about its divine authorship.

2.10.2. *Divine-human Authorship and the Locus of Inspiration*

Traditional understanding of the Bible's authority is closely associated with notions of divine communication. As has been noted already, the Bible is described as the 'Word of God' even though relatively few of its actual words is represented as divine speech. In attempting to explain how human language could represent divine thought, early Jewish and Christian theologians appealed to the concept of *inspiration*.[72] The idea was derived from a prophetic model but was extended to writings and utterances of diverse origins and content.[73] Inspiration implies that the Scripture in some way has its origins in God himself. The debate about inspiration, writes Bernard Ramm, 'is not less serious than that of the Reformation.'[74] This concept is used to explain exactly how the Scripture came to be written. Within these there are a range of views spanning from that of 'verbal inspiration' or the 'dictation view' to the 'encounter view.'[75]

What is of utmost importance here, as Achtemeier rightly points out is, precisely what is the locus of this inspiration.[76] The oft quoted scriptural verse in this respect is *2 Timothy 3:16*, '*All Scripture* is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.'[Emphasis mine]. In short, the Scripture is not only an account of God's

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[71] See Appendix 3.

[72] See Luis Alonso Schokel, *The Inspired Word: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 58-73. See Appendix 2 for an exposition of the evangelical doctrine of inspiration of the Bible.

[73] See Achtemeier, 'Locus and Mode of Inspiration,' *The Inspiration of the Scripture* 22-39

[74] *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) vii. Evangelicals treat this book as a standard.

[75] See David S Dockery, 'The Divine-Human Authorship Of The Inspired Scripture,' eds. Duane A. Garret and Richard R. Melick Jr., *Authority and Interpretation: A Baptist Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987)13-43. Docker gives a summary of different views on inspiration. For a comprehensive view of alternative ways of understanding inspiration, see J.K.S. Reid, *The Authority of the Scripture* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

[76] *The Inspiration of the Scripture* 21-40.

revealing acts and his plans for the salvation of man, it is also a manual for life for the Christian, hence necessary for the ongoing life of a community of faith.

From the perspective of the translation of scriptural texts too, it is important to understand the precise 'locus of this inspiration.' Is it the very words of the text? Such a view is held by those who afford primacy to the dictation view or to verbal inspiration.[77] Alternatively one may surmise that it is the author who is inspired by God such that, the words he writes derives authority from the inspiration. Yet another perspective is to identify the ideational content of the message as the locus of inspiration. Such a view does not eschew either the author's inspiration, or that of the words he writes, rather it gravitates towards a more functional understanding of Scripture.

2.10.3. Evangelicalism and the Concept of Inerrancy

Because the authority of the Bible has been so closely identified with the doctrine of inspiration, efforts to analyze or reassert the Bible's claim to authority often focus on this concept. [78] Nevertheless, the concept of inspiration remains a theory of agency that cannot in itself define or secure the authority of the Bible. Two other terms that are closely identified with claims of biblical authority are 'inerrancy' and 'infallibility,' both of which seek to explain authority of the text in terms of the veracity of the biblical statement. These terms are exceedingly popular in conservative evangelical circles.[79] The language of 'inerrancy' emphasizes the necessary relationship between the accuracy of the words and the message, often extending the claims to historical and scientific

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[77] This view places emphasis on God's actual dictation of the very words to the human writers. The theory is developed from the passages found in the Old Testament prophets. What is a proper assessment of some parts of the text ("thus says the Lord...") is applied to the whole Bible.

[78] *The Inspiration of the Scripture* 22. For a history of the doctrine see Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972).

[79] See George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). See also Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* 82.This too is a textbook that evangelicals treat as standard.

statements as well as spiritual and moral teachings. An example of this position is provided by 'The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.'[80]

Attending to this concept of inerrancy becomes all the more important when on enters the realm of translation of this written text across centuries. The spreading of the Bible by textual transmission and translation opens the door to variance between original form of the written word and secondary forms like copies and translations; while the former may especially succumb to the vicissitudes of time, neither of them can be exempted from human error. Warfield cites the example of the *Wicked Bible* which dropped the strategically positioned word, 'not' and put forth a wicked biblical commandment indeed; 'Thou shall commit adultery.'[81] Conservatives therefore, hold the inerrancy principle as applicable to the autograph alone, but with qualification. As Greg L. Bahsen writes:

> The evangelical doctrine pertains to the autographic text not the
> autographic codex, and maintains, that the present copies and
> translations are inerrant to the extent that they accurately reflect the
> biblical originals.[82]

2.10.4. *Authority Based on Functionality*

In support of the authority of the translated Scripture, the evangelicals, appeal to Scripture's own view of its authority because throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, the authority of the Bible is assumed. The citations made from within the Scripture are authoritatively posited with the rubric, 'says the Lord,' the assumption

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[80] This is a nineteen-article statement defining the 'biblical and historical position on the Inerrancy of the Scripture,' formulated by the International Conference on Biblical Inerrancy, an ecumenical assembly that met in Chicago in 1978.Norman Geisler introduces the 'Statement' by highlighting the connection with authority: 'The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age...Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.' Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) ix.

[81] Ibid., 157.

[82] "Inerrancy of the Autographa," ed. Geisler, *Inerrancy* 155.

being, what Scripture says, God says, while totally discounting the human element of the divine-human authorship. More importantly, it may be remembered that when the New Testament writers appealed to the authority of the Old Testament, 'they used the texts and versions that were at hand, just as we do today.'[83] Jesus too, claims the evangelical point of view, considered the extant copies of his day as authoritative.[84] Moreover the text used by the New Testament writers as their authoritative Scripture was not the 'original' Bible but the Greek Septuagint translation.[85]

The widespread use of copies and translations as 'authoritative' texts form the basis for imputing a functional authority to the secondary source. While the original form is important, its content, 'faithfully' reflected in the copies is equally important. What is emphasized is not just the 'givenness' of the Scripture but its 'instrumentality,' what it achieves.[86] The instrumentality of the Scripture is tied up with the issue of first bringing people to faith and then providing them models of behavior to live by.

2.10.5. Authority Based on Relevance

Finally, it must be kept in mind that all forms of authority are fundamentally relational, authority is not only asserted but must be acknowledged in order for it to have efficacy. So is the case with the Bible, its authority needs to be acknowledged by the hearer or reader through an appropriate response of faith. Yet, in order to be acknowledged, its message must first be comprehended, and more importantly its relevance must be seen.

Wherever the question of biblical authority has been raised in the history of the Canon, it has been linked to the question of meaning and the underlying question of purpose. For most of that history, belief in the Bible as a source of divine revelation and a

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[83] F.F. Bruce, Foreword, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility* by M. Beegle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 8.

[84] See John. W. Wenham, 'Christ's view of the Scripture,' ed. Geisler, *Inerrancy* 2-36.

[85] See Greer, 'The Rise of the Christian Bible' 109. See also Edwin. A. Blum, 'Apostles' view Scripture,' ed. Giesler, *Inerrancy* 38-53.

[86] J.I Packer uses Karl Barth's terminology to highlight the importance of the functional element of the Scriptures. See 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics' 325.

guide to salvation was unchallenged, but it could be maintained only by hermeneutical means that enabled readers to discern the spiritual message in the human words. The definition of 'hermeneutics' as put forward by J.I Packer is, 'the theory of biblical interpretation or the study of the process whereby the Bible speaks to us [from God] as Christian believers.'[87]

The word 'hermeneutic'(s) comes from the Greek *hermeneuo*, which means 'verbalize, translate, and explain.'[88] The terminology itself implies the need to retrieve a meaning which pertains to the present context.

In one sense the authority of the Bible is one of communication; it depends on comprehension and understanding. When its message is not heard or is seen to be relevant, its authority is undermined. That is the reason for the crisis of biblical authority that has characterized much of the contemporary situation. Therefore, the question of biblical authority is inextricably bound up with the question of interpretation and hermeneutics. Irenaeus had addressed this fundamental problem of all Scripture: its dual character as a word of the past, which is always to some degree alien and unrepeatable, as a word for the present, informing and forming faith. Authority of the Bible at any point in time is in one sense dependent on the ability of the Scripture to act as a bridge between the past and the present action of God. It is a means by which God addresses new generations through words from the past. The expectation of hearing a word for today hence a new word- is fundamental to the evangelical understanding of the authority of the Scripture and informs much of their translating principles.

2.11. *Intention of the Biblical Writings and its Intended Meaning*

There can be no contention about the fact that the words of the Bible was written for a purpose which was to elicit a response of faith from the people. Biblical statutes, wisdom prophesy and epistles overtly urge people towards a more confident faith and a more

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[87] 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics' 332.
[88] Ibid.

specific commitment; and biblical narrative poetry or psalmodies have similar aims. They offer not merely historical information or aesthetic or cultic records but an implicit invitation. One reason why various kinds of works were collected and eventually became Scripture was so that they might continue to affect something in the lives of people. The ultimate aim is to engender or to deepen the responses of faith.

Consider for instance, the Johanine confession that the selection made in his account of the gospel is to bring forth a response of belief. The author's intention is plain in his words. *John 20:30-31* reads:

> And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; *but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ*, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. [Emphasis mine].

The selective use of the details of Jesus' life, to which the writer of *John* confesses, is for the purpose of inducing belief. Goldingay observes that the biblical narratives combine ideology, historiography and aesthetics in relating the events- thereby aim to inculcate a world view. [89] 'Stories illustrate the commitments that the faith entails, providing examples of how believers should or should not behave.'[90]

In that they give to the receiving community models of behavior. Jesus' parables illustrate how the hearer's frame of reference and his categories of comprehension were made use of by Jesus in relating imaginatively the complex kingdom-principle. [91] Particular attention is to be paid to these stories, parables and other narrative forms which are forged and used to have maximum impact on the reader. Goldingay writes:

> we are not changed by new rules. The deep places in our lives...are not ultimately reached by instruction...only by stories, by images,

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[89] Esp see section, 'Scripture as Witnessing Tradition: Interpreting Narratives' 13-84. See also T. R Wright, *Theology and Literature* 41-42.

[90] Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation* 57.

[91] Ibid., 80.

metaphors, phrases that line out the world differently and evoke transformed listening.[92]

Even the process by which the canonization of various literatures took place to from an authoritative canon bears witness to the fact that they were considered regulative for the ongoing life of the people of God. As Childs writes, 'The heart of the canonical process lay in transmitting and ordering the authoritative tradition in a form that was compatible to function as Scripture for a generation that had not participated in the original events of revelation.'[93]

A focus on the intentionality of the biblical writings implies that we pay attention not just to the 'givenness' of the Scripture but to its 'instrumentality.'[94] We have seen in the previous section how biblical authority in the context of evangelicalism, in fact implies that the Scripture communicates instructions from God about belief and behavior, the way of faith and obedience and the life of worship and witness. The evangelical doctrine claims:

> Although the Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense
> that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally
> conditioned by the customs and conventional view of a particular
> period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a
> different sort of action.[95]

This evangelical doctrine of Scripture exercises a control over the interpretive practice. It is concerned with a way of reading the historic Scripture such that it makes apparent God's message being conveyed through them to Christians and the Church. That is to say, as Walter C. Kaiser does, operating within the divine-oracle paradigm and partaking of some elements from the historical and literary paradigms, 'To interpret we

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[92] Ibid., 89.

[93] B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, London: Fortress, SCM, 1979) 60.

[94] Packer, 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics' 325-328.

[95] See Appendix 3.

must in every case reproduce the sense that the Scriptural writer intended for his own words.'[96]

A focus on the 'intended' meaning of the author is closely tied to the recognition and value of the cultural and historical backgrounds against which these writings emerged. Understanding the context is therefore essential for a proper interpretation. Each of the letters of Paul was written to a particular Church or individual at a particular point in Paul's ministry to address particular concerns or questions in that Church. In order to grasp the sense behind the exhortations one needs to enter the thought world of the writer and his audience. The attempt is to determine what the text presumably meant in the original context. To achieve this, a historical-grammatical exegesis is used which takes into account the linguistic, cultural and historical context within which the meaning is circumscribed.

Mark Strauss dwells on the issue of distorting the Scripture, by citing two instances. *Matthew 15:2* relates the incident of the Pharisees accusing Jesus' disciples of eating with unwashed hands. In *Matthew 23:23* we are introduced to the 'white-washed tombs.' Strauss opines the high likelihood of the modern readers to interpret these in the light of their own cultural values. So instead of the issue of ceremonial uncleanness, which informs *Matthew 15:2*, we might read it as an issue of sanitation. The latter instance may be interpreted as an attempt at concealment, since whitewash often means, 'to conceal' or 'to gloss over' in English. In fact tombs were painted white in Palestine to reveal their location so as to avoid ceremonial defilement by those who might accidentally touch them.[97]

Keeping in view the intentionality of the authors, scriptural interpretation, especially with the aim of a faith response as its final goal (which is assumed to be the intention of the writer), it becomes necessary to eschew a tireless relativism. E D Hirsch rightly observes in this context that in the post Kantian milieu of relativism, most

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[96] 'Legitimate Hermeneutics,' ed. Geisler, *Inerrancy* 118.

[97] Mark K Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998) 27.

interpreters have concluded that, 'all knowledge is relative.'[98] A return to author's own meaning is considered both unnecessary and wrong. Instead meaning in our present context becomes a personal, subjective and changing thing. 'What speaks to me,' 'what turns me on' and 'what do I get from the text,' are the significant concerns rather than what an author intended by his use of words. From an evangelical point of view this is seen as, 'usurp[ing] the author's revelatory stance and insert[ing] one's own authority for his.'[99]Hirsch's proposal of making a distinction between 'meaning' and 'significance' points the way out of this predicament from the evangelical perspective.

> *Meaning* is that which is represented by the text; it is what the author
>
> meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs
>
> represents. *Significance* on the other hand, names a relationship
>
> between that meaning and a person, or a conception or a situation.[100]

The crucial problem in interpretation is discerning which implications belong to the text and which do not.[101] A historical approach then offers some safeguard against purely subjectivist and relativist interpretation of the biblical texts.[102]

Such an approach is crucial for those like evangelicals, who are operating within the divine oracle paradigm. The Bible after all makes claims that seek to transform the life of one who approaches it in faith; its authority is undermined if relativism undercuts those very claims. The Bible, Auerbach argued, makes a claim to truth and demands a response which involves a radical re-orientation of our world view.

> Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our reality for
>
> a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality; we are to fit our lives

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[98] *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1967) 4.

[99] Kaiser, 'Legitimate Hermeneutics,' ed. Geisler, *Inerrancy* 119.

[100] *Validity in Interpretation* 8.

[101] Ibid., 62.

[102] A 'historical approach' emphases such meaning as, what its author meant by it, or what it would have meant to an ideal audience.' Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation* 35.

into its world, feel ourselves as elements in its structure of universal history.[103]

Hence Goldingay, quoting Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the goal of biblical interpretation is not only, 'understanding but also ultimately a new and different praxis.'[104]

2.12. Evangelical Understanding of Scripture and its Implications for the Translation Enterprise

A focus on intentionality which ultimately seeks a Christian praxis implies that an interpretation of the scriptural text be done, not just keeping in mind the propositional and informative element of the Scripture, but also its expressive and imperative element. The aim of the translator therefore, becomes one which seeks to present the message in such a way that people can feel its relevance (the expressive element in communication) and can respond to it in action (the imperative function).[105]

The cultural specificity and historical materiality of the text has a dualistic implication on interpretation and consequently its translation. Because the Scripture refers to a historical context in which they were written and of which they write, it is open to a historical interpretation. There is however, a vast cultural gap between the biblical writers and that of our own. We are distanced by many a centuries from the thought background from which the words of the text come. Therefore, it would be naïve to treat people and words from the past as though they belonged to our own present. They must, in the first instance, be interpreted in terms of their own worlds.

Yet, the cultural specificity of the revelation also implies that, central to the mode by which revelation takes place is the adoption of the frame of reference of the

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[103] As quoted in Wright, *Theology and Literature* 42.

[104] *Models for Interpretation* 90.

[105] See 'The Informative Function,' 'The Expressive Function' and the 'Imperative Function' in Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1969) 24-26.

hearer or the reader.[106] The authority of the Scriptural message rests to a large extent on its continued relevance to the present context. As *Hebrew 4:12* reads, 'for the Word of God is living and powerful,' it is not a dead word from the past trapped in its historicity. Evangelicalism stresses the 'Dynamic' character of the Scripture, a meeting place of past word with an ever changing present. The burden of translation is to be true to that 'dynamic' nature thereby freeing the text for a fresh hearing and response. It implies a concern for the contextualization of biblical message such that it gets all the way across what may be called a 'hermeneutical bridge' into the real life contexts of ordinary people. Rene Padella writing in the last quarter of the twentieth century observed:

> Hermeneutics has to do with a dialogue between Scripture and a
> contemporary culture. Its purpose is to transpose the biblical message
> from its original context into a particular twentieth-century situation.
> Its basic assumption is that God who spoke in the past and whose
> Word was recorded in the Bible continues to speak today in
> Scripture.[107]

For the evangelist translator, a strictly historical approach to interpretation and consequently its rendering in translation, it is assumed, would prevent the biblical message to speak across the wide historical and cultural gulf. The biblical message would, 'remain meaningful only in a world which is definitely not our world.'[108] A balanced approach takes both the original and the recipient context into consideration, giving them both their due weight. 'The aim is that the horizon of the receptor culture is merged with the horizon of the text in such a way that message proclaimed in the receptor culture may be a dynamic equivalent of the message proclaimed in the original context.'[109] In this sense, the translator comes to write the application aspect of the Scripture into the

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[106] See Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981)169-193.

[107] Ibid., 144.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid. Also see *chapter IV* for detailed treatment of this aspect in translation.

translation. By so doing, he attempts to 'merge' the horizon of the source text with that of the recipient and the hermeneutical task gets subsumed within the space of the translation.

It may be cautioned as well that ultimately the burden of translation is to forge a method by which the cultural specificity and historicity of the message, as well as its comprehensibility in the present context be maintained. While the particularity of the message implies that it's historical character be reflected in the translated text, its goal of comprehensibility implies that the translator transpose it into the language of the recipient community. In this context Kraft writes, 'The aim is to communicate God's message as specifically as possible in today's languages and cultures so that the members of these cultures will be able to trust their interpretation reflexes when they study the Scriptures.'[110] This becomes more important when the authority of the Scripture is understood to be tied to a large extent to its comprehensibility. Conversely as Nida has argued, the translator must also strive at a rendition wherein the Scripture message is not misunderstood nor is it made intentionally abstruse. He writes, 'we do injustice to [the biblical writers] to assume that they were being intentionally obscure.'[111]

The kind of translation that is fashioned is heavily dependent on one's understanding of the divine-human authorship of the text. As Achtemeier may have put it, it depends on what one supposes the locus of inspiration to be; the very words of the autograph, the author or the content, the ideational element of the text. In a strictly conservative perspective which holds to the verbal inspiration view or the dictation view, emphasis is paid to the very words and grammar of the original text. Consequently, the translation which is forged may in all probability seek to maintain the same word order as the Greek or the Hebrew even when it imparts an archaic flavour, or worse make it incomprehensible in its new rendition. In these versions 'faithfulness' in translation, is understood as 'faithfulness' to the form of the original languages combined with necessary adjustments to the grammar and syntax of the target language. In form centered translation a pronoun is usually translated by a pronoun and a verb by a verb, even

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[110] Ibid., 134.
[111] Nida and Taber, *Theory and Practice* 7.

though there might be a more idiomatic way of expressing the meaning in the target language. Compare for instance, *NRSV Judges 1:35*, 'The hand of the house of Jacob rested heavily on them,' with the more idiomatic wording of *REB*, 'but the Joseph tribes increased their pressure on them.' By contrast, other translations give priority to the content and are willing to adjust the form to the target language usage.[112] This easy opposition between a content-centered and a form-centered translation may not always work.

The differences among the books, and among the individual authors, are due to the varying ways in which these authors understood the meaning of the events and the divine plan for salvation of mankind, and to the varying circumstances in which they wrote. While it is legitimate to be concerned about the diversity in understandings while keeping in mind the professed unity of the Christian apologist or interpreter, it should not be the aim of the translator to impose a reading on the divergent text to make this unity obvious.[113]

Also efforts must be made to render the diversity of styles and genres that is a part of the original, that is to say attention be paid not just to the context of the message but to the form as well. Translation also depends on whether one has an oral or a literary relationship with the Scripture, a communal or an individual one. In this regard the translator may also pay attention to the oral quality of the Scripture especially when translating in a milieu wherein the text is likely to be read aloud more often than pored over for individual edification.

There are various aspects to understanding the Word of God. How one approaches the scriptural text largely determines the way it will be translated. Essential to the evangelical point of view however, is the understanding that the Bible exhibits a

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[112] Jack P Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation*, 2nd.ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991). Lewis presents a comprehensive analysis of the features of various English versions of the Bible.

[113] See section entitled, 'Necessity for a Theological Understanding,' in Robert Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (London, Glasgow: Collins, 1974) 92-112.

dynamic revelation from God. This dynamism is related to its contemporary authority, a word from the past with a continued relevance. This word of revelation is also understood as a powerful word which can draw out a word of faith from the listener or the reader, which explains the status of the Bible for the Christian faith. The Bible plays a pivotal role in the Church and the life of the believer because it is believed to communicate the mind and will of God. It also presents the acceptable models of behaviour, and is a repository of all theology.

Chapter III

The Word of Faith: Christian Praxis and its Rationale

3.1. The Objective

This chapter attempts to delineate the rationale behind the translation enterprise. The question it addresses is, 'why must the Word of God be translated?' Consequently, we shall probe into the concept of Christian Mission, its corollary in a Christian praxis and Bible translation as a part of this Christian praxis. In that, the focus shall also be on the theological suppositions that legitimize the enterprise of biblical translation, indeed, demands that such an endeavor be undertaken.

> Bible translation as a process is both a reflection of the central act on which the Christian faith depends and a concretization of the commission Christ gave his disciples. Perhaps no other specific activity more clearly represents the mission of the church.[1]

3.2. Christian Message and the Proclivity towards Mission

The previous chapter emphasized the pivotal role played by the canonical Scripture in the life of the Church.[2] It is not only the source book of all valid theology, but more importantly represents the crucial standard of authority providing the justification and rationale of Christian belief and praxis. Christian praxis itself is understood as a proclivity towards mission. It has been widely held that 'Mission' and 'Evangelism' have been essential expressions of Christianity.[3] Hostility towards both the terms however, is by far

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[1] Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 28.

[2] Robert Grant would argue that the existence and nature of the canon implies the existence of the Church just as the New Testament expresses the response of the Apostles and their disciples to Christ, so the Church expresses the same response. In the post apostolic phase this would imply that the Church, a community of believers comes into existence as a result of their faith response to the proclamation of the Scripture message. *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1974) 25.

[3] Valson Thampu, *Recovering Mission: Towards a Non-Western Paradigm* (New Delhi: Theological Research and Communication Institute, 1995) 50, 74.

3.2.1. Gospel Praxis and Mission

Thampu posits a holistic model of mission and the biblical faith itself, which he argues is modeled and based on the life and teachings of Christ.[4] The impetus to mission springs from the very heart of the Gospel itself. Missionary outreach is variously understood but in essence implies sharing the message of Christ. The Christian understanding is that Christ entered history so as to pay for the sins of the world, which he did by dying on the cross. This death is seen as a means of re-conciliation with God- a relationship which was broken at the time of the Fall.[5] This salvific action of Christ is not limited to one but is for all who believed in him. The most popular verse quoted in support of this is *John 3:16*, 'For God so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' [Emphasis mine].

In this sense, the 'Gospel,' Christian preaching, is the message of salvation that is the 'good news' for man. And an 'evangel' bears this message to the world. What he does by way of dispersing the message is called 'evangelism' and the activities he engages in as a corollary to the message is 'mission.' Newbigin defines 'mission' as, 'the entire task for which church is sent into the world.' Mission means to him, those 'specific activities' which are undertaken by 'human decisions to bring the gospel to places or situations.'[6] For the believers, 'mission' flowed out from the very logic of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The truth that the early Christians believed had been disclosed in Jesus and was *for* the world because it was *about* the world. It was and is the 'Gospel for the world.'[7]

3.2.2. Christianity as a Missionary Faith

'Christianity was never more *itself* than in the launching of the world mission.'[8]

God's revelation in Christ and the hope of eternal salvation through him is considered, not just for the specific community in which the incarnation is believed to have taken place, but intended as a universal proclamation spreading out from the community and the reaching out to all the nations of the world. *Mathews 28: 19-20*

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[4] Ibid., 1-20.

[5] See Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of the Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1999) 224-264. See also Appendix 1 and 2 for an evangelical exposition of this belief.

[6] Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel and the Pluralistic Society* (London: SPCK, 1986) 121.

[7] Ramachandra, *The Recovery of the Mission* 224.

[8] B. F. Myer as quoted in N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) 360.

records what is popularly known as the 'Great Commission,' in which Jesus commanded his disciples to spread the message of the Gospel because it was a universal faith:

> Go therefore and make disciples *of all the nations* baptizing them in
> the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching
> them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am
> with you always even to the end of the age. [Emphasis mine].

It was obligatory for the Apostles to spread the message of the Gospel as it becomes binding for every believer in Christ to carry out this mission. This is both the Christian praxis and the rationale for it.

Christian faith is seen as an essentially 'missionary' faith geared to spread the 'good news' to the whole world and it becomes incumbent on every Christian to partake in this 'Mission of God.'[9] 'The Christian faith...is intrinsically missionary,' writes David. J. Bosch. This dimension of Christian faith he argues, is not an 'optional extra.' 'Christianity is missionary by its very nature or it denies its very *raison d'etre.*'[10]

3.2.3. *A Gospel for the World: Christianity's Claim to Universality*

In his comprehensive study of the history of Christian missions across the globe and down the centuries, Stephen Neil asks the all too pertinent question, 'how is it that a religion of the Middle East, radically changed its character by becoming the dominant religion of Europe? And is now changing its character again through becoming a universal religion, increasingly free from the bounds of geography and of Western Civilization?'[11] There are two inter-twined issues here:

- Christianity makes a claim to universality.

In the person of Christ it offered to every man regardless of his age, sex or social background a means of salvation, indeed, it was an exclusive claim that it offered.[12]

- How is this claim sustained and worked out?

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[9] Thampu describes this as, embracing, 'the totality of God's redemptive engagement with His creation and involved both the church and the world.' *Recovering Mission* 18.

[10] *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991) 8-9.

[11] *A History of Christian Mission*, Rev.ed. (London : Penguin, 1986) 15

[12] See Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission* 179-218. Ramachandra presents an analysis of this exclusive claim.

This exclusive claim worked on an inclusive principle. Adrian Hastings writes, 'Christianity's stress was on universality, its direct appeal was to people of every background and language to be incorporated within a single human community.'[13]

This inclusiveness did not imply a demand for cultural homogeneity; on the contrary it worked by means of preserving the cultural particularities of each people. '[Christianity] was... something which could blend with coefficients of the most diverse nature, something which, in fact, sought out all such coefficients.'[14]

The inclusive principle also implies that no language or culture has an exclusive claim in the plan of salvation which is as much for the Jews as for the Gentiles.[15] The operative assumption of this enterprise is/was a theological notion that a universal God had seen fit to apportion human family into the diversity of nations *Acts 17: 26* reads, 'And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.'

The great commission calls the disciples of Christ to take his message to all these nations, making it available to them in their tongues in preparation for the establishment of the true kingdom which is of Jesus Christ.

As the book of *Daniel 7:14* reads:

> then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that *all people, nations and languages should serve him*. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. [Emphasis mine].

All national, linguistic and cultural differences are safeguarded by religious sanction. It is this ability of Christianity to take on an ever changing garb, local coefficients that express the unchanging core of belief in salvation through Christ that has allowed it to claim universality as well as grow to the status of a world religion.

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[13] Adrian Hastings, *World History of Christianity* (London: Cassell, 1999) 27.

[14] Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, vol. 2 (New York: Putnam, 1908) 145.

[15] See section 3.4.2. below.

3.3. Nature of Christian Transmission

Recognizing Christianity as a missionary faith, from thence onwards it is logically binding to study the nature of Christian transmission and the part played by the Holy Scripture therein. In comparative religious perspective one may at this initial stage draw a parallel with Islam which again has like Christianity, enjoyed tremendous success as a missionary faith. In contradistinction to Islam however, which has for centuries stood tenaciously for the non-translatability of its Scripture, for Christians, each phase of transmission has involved a translation of its Scripture; finding indigenous coefficients that express the message of the Scripture in terms which are both acceptable and relevant to the targeted community. In fact, one of the ways of studying Christian transmission is to identify Christianity as a religious movement which has from its incipient stage has been a 'vernacular translation movement.'[16]

3.3.1 The Concept of Translatability

Lamin Sanneh fleshes out the notion of 'translatability,' which he argues is a characteristic of the Christian faith. Evidence of the vast spread of Christianity across the globe, with each clime sporting an indigenous expression of the faith, must imply that Christianity is open to continuous translatability. The belief in this concept of 'translatability' is linked to the idea of 'divine translation' which will be discussed later; it is also rooted in a specific theological interpretation of the New Testament writings wherein is recorded the early spread of Christianity. It is understood as a process whereby the Christian message recorded in its Scripture and its material co-efficient in praxis, shows a capacity to enter into each cultural idiom.

This deepens the notion of scriptural translation to something more than merely substituting words and grammar from one language for words and structure from another. It suggests that there is something inherent in the Christian faith, evident from the New Testament onwards, which renders it compatible with all cultures.[17] This notion of

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[16]Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989) 7.

[17]See Introduction, Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture; 'The Gospel, Language And Culture: The Theological Method In Cultural Analysis,' International Review of Mission, vol. LXXXIV Nos, 332/333 (1995): 47-64; 'Pluralism and Commitment,' Theology Today, vol. 45 (1988): 21-35.Charles Kraft takes a similar stand in arguing for the possibility and necessity of the, 'Dynamic-Equivalence Transculturation of the Message.' Christianity in Culture: A Study in

'translatability' has an important implication: that every culture is 'relativized' and none may be legitimately 'absolutized' as the final form of Christian life and faith. The missionary Church has no monopoly on the form of faith required in receptor culture; just as early Judaic Church could make no claims upon Gentiles that they be circumcised. [18]

3.3.2. *Mission as Translation as Opposed to Mission as Diffusion* [19]

In his epistle to the Church at Corinth, Paul writes:

> For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you unless you utter the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For if you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks and him who speaks will be a foreigner to me. *1 Corinthians 14:8-11.*

The focus of the Christian praxis is on communication of a message or of a body of doctrine. What is hoped for is a response of faith which is then seen as an assent to a body of truth. The logic is simple: a true assent cannot be elicited if the message is not comprehended and the message cannot be comprehended unless it is in 'words easy to understand'; 'for if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound who will prepare himself for the battle?' The ground of comprehension is shifted to the new medium with the targeted audience in mind. Christian religious translation proceeds on an inclusive principle with comprehension of the message as the end goal.

If Christian mission is, praxis involving communication and involvement and with making the gospel relevant to the targeted audience as its end view; it will and does involves cultural particularity and historical specificity. Sanneh posits that they are two ways to proceed from this point of understanding. One of them is to make 'the missionary

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Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-cultural Perspective (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981) 276-290.

[18] The reference is to the first phase of Christian expansion when the message of the Gospel was carried outwards from a predominantly Jewish set-up to that of the Gentiles. The cultural practices like circumcision that had demarcated the Jews from the Gentiles, had to be set aside to allow the Gospel to work on an inclusive principle. See Paul's defense in his epistle to the church at Rome(*Romans 1-2*).

[19] Sanneh articulates these two models of Christian transmission. See *Translating the Message* 29.

culture the inseparable carrier of the message,' this he calls, *mission by diffusion.*[20] The initial cultural base from which the religious faith emerges becomes the 'cultural identity' of the religion, which is then imposed onto other societies which accept the faith. The pan-Islamic cultural identity is predicated on the indispensability of its Arab heritage.[21] Again Christianity itself, in certain turns of its history operated with the western paradigm and garb as the only acceptable expression of the faith which it then sought to impose on the receptor community amounting to cultural imperialism.[22]

The other way, argues Sanneh, is to make the recipient culture the 'true and final focus of the proclamation.' This will imply that 'religion arrives without the presumption of cultural rejection.'[23] This Sanneh calls *'mission by translation.'*[24] Adoption of the vernacular implies adopting the indigenous cultural criteria for the message. This points to a radical 'indigenizing principle' at work in Christian mission going far beyond the standard and widely accepted portrayal of mission as western cultural imperialism. History is also witness to the fact that Christian ascendancy fostered the corresponding ascendancy of Latin in the West and Greek in the East leading to an expression of cultural imperialism but this is against the Gospel principle in which universality does not imply homogeneity but a pluralist expression of that universal.

Again Sanneh writes:

> Christianity appears to stimulate the vernacular. It would also appear
> that in its formal, organized character, the religion encourages
> uniformity that conflicts with the vernacular. It is a safe prediction that
> the success of Christianity will ultimately come to depend securely on
> its vernacular roots, and that bureaucratic centralization will come to
> require some form of cultural absolutization.[25]

These two contradictory impulses are always at work in Christian mission and transmission; therefore one agrees with Edmund Hill when he points out that the

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[20] Ibid.

[21] See Lamin Sanneh's comparative treatment of the Islamic and Christian mission models in, 'Translatability in Islam and in Christianity in Africa: A Thematic Approach,' eds. Thomas D. Blakely, et al., *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression* (London: James Currey, 1994) 21-46.

[22] Such cultural Imperialism was widely prevalent in the colonial era when the 'missionaries followed the colonial flag.' Yet, contemporary evangelical understanding maintains that this paradigm is contrary to the gospel principle and does not offer a sustainable model for the growth of Christianity.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Sanneh, *Translating the Message* 52.

universalism of Christianity, or of the Gospel, is not a 'given' as a mark of the Church, it is not automatically present. On the contrary, it is a vocation, a call, 'a task imposed' by Christ, and the Church has far to go towards its realization.[26] The implication for scriptural translations is also far reaching, and suggests an earnest approach to evolve a domesticated, indigenized poetics of faith which although necessary, can never be taken as a given. In this sense too translation of the Scripture remains a never ending task.

3.4. *Early Christian Transmission and the Principle of Translatability*

> Christianity....has throughout its history spread outwards, across cultural frontiers, so that each new point on the Christian circumference is a new potential center. And the very survival of it as a separate faith has evidently been linked to the process of cross-cultural transmission.[27]

> Translatability is the source of the success of Christianity across cultures....Christianity has been a trans-cultural phenomenon, and indeed its doctrinal system remained plausible at all because of the rich variety of cultures that sustained the church.[28]

The spread of Christianity, as has been argued already, can be read in terms of 'vernacular translation movement.' Its claim to universality is sustainable only in the face of adopting culture as the natural extension of the religion. This characteristic which marks the faith can be observed from the very early emergence of Christianity when the first Christians were, what may be called 'Jewish Christians.'[29]

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[26] As quoted in Catherine Cornille and Valeer Neckebrouck, eds., *A Universal Faith: Peoples, Cultures, Religions and the Christ* (Loovain: Peeters Press, W.B Eerdmans, 1992) 19.

[27] Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* 22.

[28] Sanneh, *Translating the Message* 51.

[29] Martin Goodman, 'The Emergence of Christianity,' *World History of Christianity* 19.

3.4.1. *Jewish Christianity*

It has been widely agreed that Christianity was born amongst a people who were Jews. Jesus himself was a Jew, yet the most urgent task of the early Church was to distinguish itself from Judaism while striving at the same time to establish a continuity between the Hebrew Scripture and the Christian Gospel.[30] The task at hand for the Apostles was 'the Christian transformation of the Hebrew scriptures.'[31] They sought to re-interpret it such that it pointed to the coming of the Messiah. Even while they engaged in such exegetical tasks, they carried the message of the gospel outwards from Jerusalem to the neighboring areas. The book of *Acts* records the missionary acts of the Apostles as they spread the word of Christ.

Wright vividly captures the striking speed of growth of the early Christian movement.[32] That this growth was taking place across language and culture barriers, is of remark. The preponderance of the Greek-speaking Christians in certain parts of the primitive Church forced the Apostles to embark on translation, interpretation and exegesis of the existing Scripture. And therefore, it was ancient Greek which was neither the native nor the working language of Jesus or his disciples, which came to be the primary medium of religious discourse. The 'original' Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament Scripture and Aramaic, the working language of Jesus, both came to be afforded a marginal status right in the incipient stages of early Christian dispensation.

The use of ancient Greek was more a matter of expedience than anything else.[33] By the 1st century A.D., there were a large number of 'Diaspora Jews' who had spread across the Hellenist world in centers like Alexandria.[34] They had grown distant from their mother tongue- Hebrew, and adopted Greek as the language of everyday speech, while the former remained the language of their religious instruction. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the 'Septuagint'[35] was already circulated and used in

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[30] See Kugel and Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* 111.

[31] Ibid.,126.

[32] N T Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) 360.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Goodman also talks of the 'Diaspora Jews' of the 1st century. See 'The Emergence of Christianity' 12-15; see also Karl Baus, *History of the Church: From the Apostolic Community to Constantine.* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980) 66-70.

[35] The Septuagint has a long history. The legend recorded in the *Letter of Aristeas* tells us that seventy-two translators working seventy-two days produced the same version of the Scripture. While the complex history and process by which this translation came to be cannot be constructed, what remains certain is that one of the purposes of the translation was to give access to the Jewish Scripture to the non-Jews; although the Greek speaking Jews living outside Israel remained the primary

Synagogues of these Diaspora Jews. Walls would argue that the Septuagint was the first 'Jewish vernacular translation.'[36] The Septuagint therefore, came to be appropriated as the authoritative text while the Apostles proclaimed the message of Jesus to these people. 'Diaspora Jews,' writes Goodman, 'spoke and thought in Greek rather than in Hebrew, and treated the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, as a sacred text in its own right.'[37] Therefore, one agrees with Sanneh when he writes that, 'Christianity from its origins, identified the need to translate out of Aramaic and Hebrew and thereby came to relativize the Judaic roots.'[38]

In fact, in the early Christian encounter with the Hellenist world, we are immediately made conscious of the process of evangelization by translation. This takes place as we have seen at two levels: the Bible of the early Christians was not the Hebrew text but its Greek translation; and the New Testament writers interpreted, and in that sense translated, what was written in the Old Testament as a warrant for the Christian faith. The freedom with which the New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament following the Septuagint, has been widely held to show that their interest was not in the 'original' words per se, but in their meaning. Moreover these quotations were interpretative and expository. The writers sought to indicate the 'true,' which is the Christian meaning of these words. [39]

3.4.2. *From the Jews to the Gentiles*

The first radical leap however, that was made in the history of Christian mission and Christianity was what has been popularly called the 'Gentile break-through.'[40] The Old Testament makes a clear distinction between 'Israel' and the 'the nations;' between the 'Jews' and the 'Gentiles,' and the Apostles were forced to confront and expand their understanding of God's 'plan for salvation' which was now understood as not for the Jew alone, but for the Gentiles as well. So in the 'de-stigmatization' of Gentile culture, we see a move from exclusiveness to an inclusiveness which implies a radical concept, a

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beneficiaries. As soon as Christianity moved outside the bounds of the land of Israel and amongst the Greek- speaking Jews who were the first to hear the Apostles' witness, the Greek Septuagint became the Church's Bible. See Karl Baus, *History of the Church* 65-66.

[36] Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* 24.

[37] Goodman, 'The Emergence of Christianity' 14.

[38] Sanneh, *Translating the Message* 1.

[39] See J. I. Packer, 'The Inspiration of The Bible,' eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983) 35.

[40] Sanneh, *Translating the Message* 1.

pluralistic dispensation of Christianity.[41] C. H. Dodd, the eminent New Testament scholar, remarks on the 'revolutionary' character of the breakthrough.[42] A large section of the New Testament books are records of the early spread of Christianity, the emergence of the Church, and the conflicts and the challenges therein.[43] What they also testify to is, the fact that while Christianity gets expressed in terms of a cultural specificity, that cultural specificity itself is never a binding norm.

In *Galatians*, Paul writes, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave, nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' (*Galatians 3:28*)

In the early Church then, the cultural distinctions between the Jews and the Gentiles were transcended through the work of Jesus. The Apostle Paul propounds cultural pluralism without reducing Christ to a cultural ideology.[44]

The Apostles were all Jews and being Jews, they would have attached a lot of significance to the law and the synagogue as the exclusive standards of religious truth. Yet, early on in their Christian dispensation, they had come to realize that the Gospel demanded a plural frontier for its diffusion if it had to be made relevant to other cultures. The transformation of these Jews into Christians and their gospel praxis led them to the realization that there wasn't any normative culture, least of all a Judaic one which alone could bear God's truth.[45] Dodd writes:

> Behind all the scholastic arguments of the *Epistles* to the *Romans* and
> the *Galatians* lies the crucial question whether religion is a matter of
> rational inheritance and external tradition, or a matter of ever fresh
> personal response to the gracious dealing of God.[46]

As Paul affirmed, 'there is no partiality with God,' (*Romans.2:11*)) which would imply that all persons are precious in God's sight. *(I Peter 2:4)* From their understanding of the life and work of Jesus Christ, they came to a radical view about God's impartial

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[41] Ibid., 24-46.
[42] C. H. Dodd, *The Meaning of Paul for Today* (London: Fontana Books, 1964) 47.
[43] See Robert Grant, *A Historical Introduction* 90. The New Testament writings are often taken as means of reconstructing the history of the early church. They are in this sense taken not only as a historical artifact but as a collection of historical documents. This is the way the Bible is read within the historical paradigm.
[44] C. H. Dodd, *The Meaning of Paul for Today* 39.
[45] Ibid., 39.
[46] Ibid., 39-40.

action in all cultures, there being no exclusive or normative pattern for Christianity. So even at the conceptual level 'translation' becomes the model for Christian expansion.

3.4.3. *The Greco Roman World*

As Christianity spread further outwards and encountered the Greco-Roman world, it was met with an entire well developed system of thought which it needed to penetrate.[47] The New Testament writings bear witness to this process; the introduction of concept of 'Logos' in John's Gospel illustrates this point. John writes:

> in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, He was in
> the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and
> without Him nothing was made that was made....And the Word
> became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as the
> glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
>
> (*John1:1-3, 14*)

The English term, 'word' is the replacement of 'Logos' that was used in the Greek version of the Bible. The concept of the 'Logos' was a wide spread idea known to early Greek philosophers; to Philo, for whom the 'Logos' was a middle being between God and the world, and to the Gnostics,[48] for whom he was a redeemer. The very attributes given to the concept of 'Logos' by John, divine essence, personal subsistence and the incarnation based there on – are lacking in previous conceptions of it. The specifically Christian achievement consists in having taken over an idea already existing in variations and having given it an unmistakably Christian stamp.[49]

This is how the scriptural translations also proceed. The translator seeks to familiarize himself with the language and the culture of the targeted community, seeking words that are the closest in meaning to the biblical concept sought to be translated, then the words are imbued with a distinctly Christian meaning that suffuses it, thereby expanding it and making it comprehensible in the target language.

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[47] See section entitled, 'The Way into the Pagan World,' in Karl Baus, *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine* 86-123. See also Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* 28. Walls calls this the 'Hellenist-Roman' Phase of Christian transmission.

[48] For Gnosticism see Baus, *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine* 181-192, 477-480.

[49] Ibid., 121.

Faced with a Hellenist worldview, which prided itself on a rational philosophical worldview, the Apostles embraced the cultural terms of the receptor community re-interpreting and re-formulating and translating the Christian thought, propelling it to the conceptual philosophical plane. Jesus was no longer only a person but also the 'Logos'- that stood for divine reason, the controlling principle of the universe and which was manifest in speech. Tonynbee writes, 'In converting the Greco-Roman society in the course of the first five centuries of the Christian era, the Early Christian Church had smoothed the convert's path by...translating Christian beliefs into terms of Greek philosophy.'[50]

3.4.4. *Christian Expansion and the Translating Principle*

Historians of Christianity and the Church, variously divide its history of expansion in separate phases. Many like Walls identify a 'translating principle' at work in Christian history.[51] Walls writes:

> Each phase represents its embodiment in a major culture area which
> has meant that in that phase it has taken an impress from that culture.
> In each phase the expression of the Christian faith has developed
> features which could only have originated in that culture whose
> impress it has taken within that phase.[52]

While such a neat phase by phase compartmentalization of the history of Christianity may be contestable, a clear picture of the translating principle at work does emerge. So the Greek translation of the Scripture emerges as a response to the preponderance of the Greek speaking Jews and the Gentiles of the Hellenist-Roman world. Later, Latin came into use. Karl Baus writes:

> The use of Latin was determined by the linguistic tradition of the
> Roman Christian community, which at first was composed for the most
> part of Greek-speaking members and consequently used Greek for
> preaching and liturgy. Only with the disappearance of Greek majority

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[50] Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Historian's Approach to Religion* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1956) 160.
[51] Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* 25.
[52] Ibid., 16.

did the necessity arise for translating the Holy Scripture of the new
faith into Latin, and preaching in Latin.[53]

In this regard Adrian Hastings writes, 'Latin was inevitable, if Christianity was to maintain its universality.'[54] He further writes that the translation of the Scripture into Latin was 'early and unproblematic.'[55] Latin being the literary language used by the Christians unfamiliar with Greek, it was simply the obvious thing to do. 'No one thought that the Scripture has less authority in Latin than they did in Greek.'[56]

This same pattern- translation as a response to the receptor community's need, as also a means to find in roads into a new culture that was sought to be evangelized seems to have happened in Syriac, then later in Coptic and in more than one form of Coptic. By the middle of the fourth century the Scripture was also being translated into Gothic, then Armenian and by fifth century into Ethiopic and Georgian. Hastings goes on to write, 'The impressive series of translation can produce no great surprise once the Christians sense of universality is recognized.'[57]That sense stressed in the 'Epistledo Diagnetus' of being at home in any language and culture.[58]

Hastings argues that the privileging of Greek, as Christianity's 'sacred' or original language is a much later phenomenon. It first came with Byzantine clerics from the late fourth century who increasingly identified the Church with the empire centered in Constantinople; secondly with the Renaissance biblical scholars preoccupied with the 'original' text of the New Testament to an extent far beyond the concern of the early medieval Church; thirdly, with modern theorists of religion, anxious to provide every religion with a 'sacred language.'[59] Evangelical Christianity however, has constantly demonstrated that it was not 'sacred language' per se but a 'sacred message' in the person of Jesus Christ.

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[53] *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine* 243.
[54] *World History of Christianity* 30.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 26. This anonymous letter reads, 'Christians are not distinguished from the rest of the mankind by country, or by speech or by dress. For they do not dwell in the cities of their own, nor use a different language, or practice a peculiar life...but while they dwell in Greek or barbarian cities according as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the land in clothing and food, and other matters of daily life. Yet the condition of citizenship they exhibit is wonderful, and admittedly strange... every foreign land is to them a fatherland....'
[59] Ibid., 30.

3.4.5. Culturally Plural Paradigm of Scriptural Translation

The initial 'Gentle breakthrough' becomes the paradigm for the Church missionary action.[60] Early on in the apostolic age, 'it became clear that the movement of the church was to be not from the circumference inwards to Jerusalem, but outwards from Jerusalem to the circumference.'[61] This movement was to take place within a culturally pluralistic paradigm. Essential to this paradigm were two principles:

• The need to translate the Scripture into the everyday language of the people.

• Using the terms and concepts of the receptor culture which implies a total system of thought to make the Gospel both familiar and comprehensible.

3.4.6. Vernacularization of Scripture

Transmission of Christianity across cultural frontiers has in fact resulted in a series of Christian transformations across the centuries.[62] A corollary of these transformations across the centuries is also the transformation of its Scripture and its essential vernacularization. The expression implies not just an adoption of the language, but all that the language suffuses and embodies. The vernacular context becomes the final criterion for translation. The text of the Scripture is sought to be unscrambled from one cultural yoke to be reformulated in another cultural context. This amounts to a readership orientation. The topics treated are dealt within categories which are linguistically and culturally appropriate to the way a culturally and psychologically conditioned participant perceives of the situation and its needs. Hence, each time the Scripture is translated in a new cultural milieu a domestic expression of faith emerges as it is filtered through the culture of the community that is sought to be evangelized. In response to the word of revelation, a new cultural poetics of the faith emerges.

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[60] Sanneh, *Translating the Message* 46.

[61] Stephen Neil, *A History of Christian Missions* 20.

[62] Andrew F. Walls also reads the history of Christian Transmission as revealing the 'continuous translatability principle.' See 'Culture and Coherence in Christian History,' in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* 16-25. One only has to see the variety and plurality of the expression of Christian faith to realize this. An essentially Western garb of Christianity is different from an Asian or African one. See Ray O Costa, *One Faith- Many Cultures* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988); See also Marvin K. Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

3.5. *The Theological Principle: The Living Word and the Written Word*

To understand the translatability of the faith and its Scripture, one needs to emphasis the theological supposition on which the enterprise was launched.

3.5.1. *Divine Act of Translation*

The Christian faith emerged as a response to the life and works of Jesus Christ who himself was a Jew, followed the laws enshrined and entrusted in the Old Testament, to which he attributed all authority and his coming is seen as the fulfillment of the prophecies made in the Old Testament- the coming of the *Messiah* for the redemption of world. It is in his person that the Christian faith rests. 'Christian faith,' writes Walls, 'rests on the divine act of translation: "the word became flesh, and dwelt among us."'[63]

Again one resorts to a comparative perspective. In the Islamic faith, God speaks to mankind, calling to obedience. The embodiment of that speech is to the Quran, the direct speech of God, delivered in Arabic at the chosen time through God's chosen Apostle and this speech is unalterably fixed forever because the Islamic faith does not sanction a translation of its Scripture. In the Christian faith, God becomes human. It is this conviction translation of the Divine-Eternal Word into human that conditions even the Christian attitude to translation of its Scripture.

The parallel between Scripture and Christ is suggested in the opening of the epistle to *Hebrews* which reads:

> God who at various times and *in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers* by the prophets has in these last days *spoken to us by His son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things through whom also He made the world. (*Hebrews 1:1-2.*) [Emphasis mine].

We have two senses of the term, 'word' by which God 'spoke' to humanity; Christ is understood as the Eternal Word of God- the word translated. That fact is the sign that the contingent Scripture also described as the 'Word of God', unlike the Quran, may and should be translated. As the Mississagua Document reads:

> Translation has been the backbone of Bible Society Ministries, and it is still a key element in our mission. *It is rooted in the incarnation that*

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[63] Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* 26.

the Word became a human being and it is linked to our biblical hope
that one day God will be praised in every language.[64] [Emphasis mine].

In the simplest of terms the Christian rationale for scriptural translations may be understood thus: Christ, the Eternal Word of God translated himself into humanity, and the account of this translation is in the Scripture; but He translated not for a specific community alone but for the whole world and therefore the Scripture that attests this act must be translated for the whole world,[65] that all might know of his salvific action on their behalf.[66]

3.5.2. Translatability and Cultural Particularity

But if Divinity was translated into humanity in the person of Jesus, he did not become generalized humanity. The Bible records that he became a person in a particular locality and in a particular ethnic group, at a particular time and space- that is to say under culturally specific conditions. It was not a depersonalized or amorphous act of translation. The original proclamation too has been written down in the Scripture in the context of a particular people, their life situation and culture. The Word of God is therefore already 'incultured' in a sense that the Gospel comes to people not in pure or abstract form but expressed in the language and with reference to a situation of a particular time and handed down as a part of a particular historical tradition. 'In inspiration God used the culture and conventions of his penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence....'[67]The evangelical understanding is that for its continued relevance, it then needs an on-going reinterpretation and translation in the context of each people, their

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[64]As quoted in Basil A. Rebera, Introduction. *Bulletin of the United Bible Societies, Current Trends in Scripture Translation* 182/183 (1997): 1.

[65] See Appendix 4, 'Why Translate the Bible?'

[66] The analogy between Christ as the Eternal Living Word and the Scripture as the written Word, informs much of the theological interpretation of Scripture. Especially some of those who hold to the 'inerrantist' view of the Scripture. Proceeding from the sinless character of Jesus they argue that God's Word too must be inerrant. See variations in this view in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).

[67] See Appendix 3.

situation and life.[68] Such a re-interpretation, takes place in translating the Scripture in new cultural idiom thereby making it relevant to a particular people and their life and culture.[69]

When the Gospel of Jesus is proclaimed to a particular people and they respond to its changes in faith, they express this response in their reflection, their celebration, their relation to God and to the others, their life. All these are necessarily conditioned by their situation and their culture. They will use their own language and symbols. In this encounter between the Gospel and culture, not only the culture, but also the Gospel changes, in so far as, in the light of new situation and as a consequent of cultural expressions, new aspects of the Gospel are highlighted.[70] Which is why Amaladoss who understands transmission of the Christian message as 'inculturation,' would call it a 'process' and not a one-time event.[71] A 'Dynamic Vernacular Translation,' as Sanneh would have us call it, is an ongoing process.[72] 'Translation is a continuous task with a goal never finally attainable,' writes Grant.[73]

3.5.3. Inculturation of the Word of Faith

The 'incultured' message of the Bible needs to be understood in cultural terms as also translated into a new cultural language. As the message is carried to different 'nations,' the faith will be expressed in the vernacular of the soil. To continue with the linguistic analogy, as the Incarnation took place in the terms of a particular social context, Bible translation aims at releasing the word about Christ so that it lives within that context in the persons of his followers, as thoroughly as he once did in the culture of the first century Jewish Palestine. Given that, one may account for the endemic hazards and problems of translation as a necessary part of the process of Christian mission. Walls writes:

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[68] Ibid. The evangelical doctrine reads, 'Although the Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that it its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional view of a particular period, so that the application today calls for a different sort of action.'

[69] In the previous chapter we had argued for the dynamic nature of revelation in the Scripture. From the evangelical stand point this dynamism is linked to the functionality of the Scripture and is to be replicated in translation. That is, a culturally relevant idiom must be taken up for its translation such that it is both relevant and comprehensible in the new milieu.

[70] Michael Amaladoss, *Becoming Indian: The Process of Inculturation* (Bangalore: Center for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies,1992)11.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Sanneh, *Translating the Message* 7.

[73] Grant, *A Historical Introduction* 57.

> Key words or concepts without an obvious equivalent in the receptor
> language, central biblical images rooted in the soil or history of the
> Middle East or the usages of the Roman empire, the shift of meaning in
> apparently corresponding words, the luggage that receptor language
> terms carry with them- these are means by which the word about Christ
> is applied to the distinctiveness of a culture and thus to its commanding
> heights; new situations have the potential actually to reshape and
> expand the Christian faith.[74]

Walls argues that the problems of translation are the problems of the 'incarnation' of the Word of Christ in a new soil. 'The struggle to present writings embedded in languages and cultures alien to the present situation of every people is validated by the act which translated God into a medium of humanity.' [75] In the Christian context it is the 'Incarnational' model which provides the rationale for scriptural translations.

The universal claim of Christianity remains a tenable position so long as it whole heartedly pursues inculturation in practice.[76] Inculturation is a task always yet to be achieved, because it involves a never ending appeal to cultural conversion.[77] There is no such thing as a ready made model for Christian culture and civilization, least of all the Euro-American which so often is presented as an 'acceptable' and 'successful' model of inculturation. As Lesslie Newbigin remarked, 'the Gospel escapes domestication.' [78] And so does the biblical text, yet 'domestication' it is, which is sort at each point to be able to communicate its message with impact and relevance.

Various authors speak of 'earthing,' 'rooting,' 'grounding', or 'inserting' the Gospel.[79] Such metaphors point to the underlying concern that the Christian message

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[74] Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* 29.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Aylward Shorter, 'Inculturation: The Premise of Universality,' in *A Universal Faith: Peoples, Cultures, Religions and the Christ* 1.

[77] Inculturation may be defined as, 'The assimilation of something into a specific culture through observation, experience, and teaching. In theology, this is the process by which the gospel message is assimilated into a specific cultural setting.' Terry E. Shoup, "TheoGlossary: A Glossary of words and Theological Terms." Sept. 2000. Santa Clara U. 27 June 2005 <http://www.scu.edu/pm/resources/theoglossary/print.html >.
    It is differentiated from the term 'acculturation' which is understood as, 'The process whereby individuals from one culture adopt the characteristics and values of another culture with which they have come in contact.' 'Testing and assessment Glossary of Terms.' 1995. QuestionMarkCorporation. 27 June 2005<http://www.questionmark.com/uk/glossary.html>.

[78] 'The Enduring Validity of Cross-Cultural Mission,' *International Bulletin for Missionary Research*, vol. 12, no.2 (1988): 50.

[79] See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990).

needs to be transposed into cultural or anthropological language and not merely into a semantic or literary one. The point further pressed- amounts to saying that it is useless to proclaim the Gospel if it is not allowed to take root. Christianity's growth, it is claimed, depends on this, and this condition in turn, implies the abandonment of mono-cultural uniformity. As a theologian from India puts it, 'Christianity, with its universal message cannot grow as a religion today, unless it abandons its preference for western culture, with its rational, technically minded, masculine bias, and opens up to the feminine, understanding of reality in the East.'[80]

There is an abstractionism in assuming that a 'Church, 'Gospel,' or 'faith' pre-exist, and accompanies, the act of evangelization in a culturally disembodied form. The idea seems to be that there is an 'essence of the Gospel' that there are 'core values' or an 'invariant core,' that culture is an extrinsic, separable phenomenon, a 'husk' enclosing a kernel. In fact, religion is by definition a 'cultural system' and is integrally linked to culture. This is equally true of the Christian Gospel, the supra-cultural validity of which Shorter argues, 'consists in its capacity for cultural re-expression in a serious of historical inculturations stretching back in a trajectory of meanings to the events and outlooks of the New Testament, and appearing to authentic values in every human cultural tradition.'[81] Shorter further quotes Francesco. R. De Gasperis to say that the Gospel, 'travels throughout history from one incultured form to another.'[82]

This implies that the subject of inculturation is not the Gospel, in the sense of a core or essence rationally paraphrased in a propositional form. As Metz points out the dogmas and faith statements of the past require decoding if we are to understand them today, because they belong to 'alien culturation.' Pressed further, he points out that the Gospel is not a theological treatise but a history. What is then incultured is a 'trajectory of meanings' which goes back through the events of Church history to those of New Testament, the person of Jesus Christ and his teachings are then made 'imaginatively credible' to people of the receptor culture, through inculturation.[83]

What is incultured, is the language in which the faith is expressed, the language of the receptor community for which the Scripture is translated in terms which are culturally

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[80] S. M. Michael, 'The Role of the Church in the Transformation of Culture,' *Indian Missiological Review*, vol. 11, no. 11 (1989): 79-95.
[81] Aylward Shorter, 'Inculturation: The Premise of Universality' 12.
[82] Ibid., 13
[83] Ibid., 14-15.

relevant for it. 'Inculturation' and 'contextualization' are in this sense terms that denote the presentation and re-expression of the Gospel in forms and terms proper to a culture. Carrying this argument forward into the realm of scriptural translation, it may be surmised that the biblical writings too need to be transposed into a cultural and anthropological language and not just a literary and a semantic one. Its acceptance at the grass root level, as also its relevance which is dependent on its comprehension will demand it.

3.6.1. Bible Translation and Evangelization

Bible translation has been for centuries an essential part of Gospel praxis.[84] It would not be far from the truth to say that 'the missionary work of the church has been essentially Bible-centered.'[85] We have seen in the previous chapter how the Bible is considered authoritative for the people of faith; amongst other things it contains an account of the coming of Jesus Christ and his work for the salvation of man. A message which needed to be shared urgently with the whole world. 'The Bible's message is evangelistic and is the basis for church planting and church growth.'[86] Pend writes of the 'three-fold cord' which bound the missionary or the evangelist to the Bible. The evangelist's own spiritual life and his authority as a messenger was intimately linked with his knowledge of Scripture; the message he sought to proclaim and the Church into which he brought his converts was centered on the Bible; and the written Scripture was a means by which he believed that people could come to believe in the Gospel.[87]

This last point implied for any missionary that the Bible needed to be translated if the people were to be brought into the saving knowledge of Christ. To the extent that in the past centuries, evangelization has been co-terminus with Bible translation projects.[88] Benedicta Ward and G. R. Evans observe how each phase of Christian transmission went hand in hand with translation of the Bible into the language of the community which was

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[84] See Ramachandra, *The Recovery of the Mission.* 265.

[85] Eric Pend, 'The Bible and the Missionary,' ed. S. L. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from Reformation to the Present Day,* vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). See also. Benidicta Ward and G. R. Evans, 'The Bible and the Church,' ed. Adrian Hastings, *World History of Christianity* (London: Cassell, 1999) 119-122.

[86] See Appendix 4.

[87] Pend, 383. This is a popular understanding amongst the evangelicals. Greg L. Bahsen writes, 'we maintain, that the Bible we have in our hands is *fully adequate to bring us to Christ,* to *instruct us in his doctrine and to guide us in righteous living.*' 'Inerrancy of the Autographa,' ed. Norman L. Geisler, *Inerrancy* 186. [Emphasis mine].

[88] See Benedicta Ward and G.R. Evans, *World History of Christianity* 119-122.

being evangelized.[89] For the Protestant missionary in particular, who following the Reformation stuck to the principle of *Sola Scripture*, Bible distribution was considered a means of evangelism itself. '...the protestant missionary sought to give people the Bible in the language they could read so that they might discover for themselves the truth of the Gospel and the Church might be born among them by the impact of the Word of God.'[90]

The Word of God was a word of revelation which educed a word of faith. Hence, the Bible was not only considered powerful in ushering in people into a relationship of faith, but was also considered indispensable for the stability of the Christian Church which they were trying to build. For the Church to be truly 'indigenous,' it was believed that it must have the Scripture in the mother tongue of the people.[91] 'So wherever the Christian Gospel was carried,' writes Pend, 'there men set to work to make the Scripture available' to people in their language.[92]

3.6.2. *Bible Translation Agencies and their Mission*

The use of the Bible in evangelism cannot be stressed enough. Bible as the center of faith is evidenced in the establishment of many societies down the centuries, having as their sole aim the production and the distribution of Scripture. While not discounting the importance played by many a missionary and religious orders, established for the spread of the gospel both in countries of their origin, and in other parts of the world, special emphasis must be paid to the Bible societies under the aegis of which several translation projects have been taking place even in the remotest corners of the world. Amongst several missionary societies that were established in the eighteenth century, two need special emphasis; *The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK)* (1698) and *The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG)* (1701).

The two societies were closely connected with each other. The SPCK formulated its aim as:

> to promote and encourage the erection of charity schools in all parts of England and Wales; to disperse, both at home and abroad, Bible and tracts of religion; and in general to advance the honour of God and the

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Eric Pend, 'The Bible and the Missionary' 385.
[91] See Appendix 4.
[92] Ibid., 395.

good of mankind, by promoting Christian knowledge at home and in

other parts of the world by the best methods that should offer.[93]

Together with the *SPG*, which was formed to assist in the missionary work initiated by *SPCK*, they focused on providing both Bibles and missionaries for witnessing[94] in England and other parts of the world. *The Religious Tract Society* (1799) grew to form *The British and Foreign Bible Society* in 1804, having the exclusive goal of the production and distribution of the Scripture in the languages of the world. At first various auxiliary groups were set up to aid the parent societies in England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland.[95] These went on to form National Bible Societies across the globe, to meet the needs of their specific countries. Following the Second World War, the *United Bible Societies* (*UBS*) was set up as a permanent means of common counsel and planning between various Bible Societies. Of the special note is the emphasis on the central place of laymen in the Bible translation projects.[96] 1996 marked the Jubilee year for the **United Bible Societies**- a completion of fifty years in mission and was marked by the *UBS* assembly which met in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. The Assembly's affirmation of its commitment to translation for as long as these are people waiting to receive the Scripture in their own languages, was inscribed in its document called the 'Mississauga Document.' Under the Section heading 'In all Tongues: Translation, the unfinished Task' it set out its objective, 'To make the Holy Scriptures available to *all* in a translation that is faithful to the original text and in a language which is easily understood.'[97] [Emphasis mine].

The *Wycliffe Bible Translators* is an international evangelical agency founded by William Cameron Townsend in 1942. It has as its aim the translation of the Bible into all such indigenous languages that need it. In explicating the rationale behind their evangelistic mission, they write:

> History documents the Bible's profound impact on individuals and
>
> societies. Its impact is greatest when written in the "heart language" of
>
> a people. Barriers to understanding the gospel are reduced. People
>
> grow spiritually. Strong, healthy churches result. Strong churches

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[93] Ibid., 386.

[94] This is a common term amongst evangelists. The act of proclaiming the gospel to the people is understood as 'witnessing' to the saving works of Christ.

[95] Ibid., 389.

[96] See Appendix 3 and 4.

[97] As quoted in Basil A Rebera, Introduction. *Current Trends in Scriptural Translation* 182/183 (1997): 1.

reach out to their neighbours in acts of service, which can ultimately

transform whole communities and bring glory to God.[98]

According to their Mission Statement they desire that by the year 2025, three thousand language groups of the world which have not as yet received the Word of God in their mother tongue shall have a translation program started in their language context to achieve this goal.[99]

The thrust therefore, is to produce translation that can serve the needs of *all* the people of the world, because it is the whole world that is sought to be evangelized. Of special note is the emphasis placed on the laymen in all such translation projects. The translation is therefore intended for the average un-indoctrinated reader. While fidelity to the word of revelation is important, this same fidelity also demands that the translation in the language of the people for it to be comprehensible to them.

3.7. *Conclusion*

The enterprise of biblical translation is understood in the light of the Christian proclivity towards mission. The idea of mission itself stems from the heart of the Christian message and is understood as Gospel praxis. The belief that Christ died that salvation may be for the whole world, allows Christianity to present itself as a faith for the whole world. In that its claim to universality operates on an inclusive principle and is intended for all, Jew and Gentile alike. Therefore, mission is in one sense understood as an urgent need to spread this salvation message through the whole world.

The Bible as a book of revelation which contains this message is believed to have the power of releasing a word, response of faith to its word of revelation. As a part of the missionary endeavor of reaching to the whole world, it therefore needs to be translated in terms that are comprehensible to the people which amounts to receptor orientation. Christian religious translation therefore proceeds on an inclusive and an indigenizing principle with the aim of comprehensibility. This is also understood as a culturally plural paradigm of translation.

One possible way of studying the nature of Christian transmission and expansion across the centuries is to see it as a 'vernacular translation movement.' Evangelization of

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[98]See Appendix 4.

[99] See Appendix 5.

new communities takes place by translation of the faith and it's Scripture into the vernacular of the soil. This is also a process of 'inculturation.'

That this translation is possible is linked to the central act on which the Christian faith itself rests. The translation of Divinity in the human context is understood as the central translation act which releases a word of faith in response. The problems of incarnation in a human context are the problems of translation across historical, linguistic and cultural barriers but can be overcome by adopting the inculturation principle. The attempt is always to, 'incarnate' this same word of revelation using vernacular coefficients which will be both relevant and comprehensible such that a word of faith may be released. Thus the enterprise of translation as a handmaiden of evangelization stresses on cultural and linguistic particularity as also the functionality of this word of revelation.

Chapter IV

In Other Words/ Worlds: Practice and Theory of Biblical Translations

> ...how can they come to faith if they have not understood the message?
> And how can they understand if the message is not communicated to
> them? ... For faith results from a person's responding to an
> understanding of the message, and the message results from someone
> communicating Christ. (*Romans 10: 14-17 TEV*)

4.1. *The Objective*

This chapter addresses pertinent questions relating to language, culture, contexts and ideology that impinge on the enterprise of translation. Inferences are drawn from various translations of the Bible. Key issues that will be highlighted are those of 'comprehensibility' of translation, 'faithfulness,' 'fidelity' and 'receptor-orientation.' Consequently, different models of translation theory are studied to see which is best suited to the evangelical praxis of Bible translation as mission.

The previous chapter reflected on the communication aspect of the Christian faith through the centuries. We studied how the Christian transmission is predicated on a 'translating' principle in history. In this respect we enquired into the question of, 'why must the Word of God be translated.' That is, the Christian rationale behind Bible translation as a mission. Given the imperativeness of translating the Scripture for both fostering, and sustaining the faith community, the next level is to address the question- 'how must the Word of God be translated.'

There can be innumerable approaches to the translation of the Bible. Once again it becomes necessary to identify the paradigm within which one understands and translates the text. It is the evangelical point of view which is stressed here. Indeed, as was argued in the previous chapter, evangelization itself comes to be understood as translation. While insights are drawn from re-translations in the English language, the focus is on biblical translations for communities which are newly evangelized.

Most of the contemporary translations that take place under the aegis of the Bible Societies, the *WBT* or the *SIL*[1] take as their principle focus, the laymen.[2] The translation is therefore geared to be comprehensible to the average un-indoctrinated reader such that he can 'come to faith.' As the Apostle Paul wrote, 'how can they come to faith if they have not understood the message?' With 'understanding' and 'comprehensibility' as the chief goals of translation, the translator aligns his work to a readership orientation. The ground for comprehension is shifted to the new medium.

The message needs to be recovered and re-expressed in a new way to be comprehensible and relevant to the targeted community. Essential to that re-expression is the language of that community, as also the culture of which the language is both a derivative, and an expression. Since culture and language are understood as the means by which faith takes root in a community, these two are the primary aspects that the missionary translator addresses. The re-translation therefore, is not just a new poetics of faith, that is a new expression in the language of the targeted community, but a *new cultural poetics*. It is in cultural terms that the new message must be incarnated to meaningfully impact the audience. As Jenkins observes, 'Bible transmission as mission focuses on finding terms and concepts in the recipient culture and language. This makes Jesus and his followers into Africans for African hearers, makes them Chinese for Chinese audience.'[3]

4.2. Comprehension as the Chief Goal of Translation

In addressing the question of Christian transmission with its concomitant scriptural translation, which is its handmaiden, the evangelicals identify two important aspects of the biblical writers that are germane to our understanding of the translation enterprise. One has to do with the intentionality of these writers and the other to do with the language and style of these writers.

- The biblical writers, believes the evangelical point of view, wrote out of a conviction that the circumstances they wrote of had given them insights into the plan of God for the salvation of man. As Eugene Nida and Reyburn write, 'the writers of the Bible had

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[1] The Summer Institute of Linguistics (*SIL*) is a sister concern of the Wycliffe Bible Translators(*WBT*) and is committed to language training in indigenous set-ups.

[2] See Appendix 4 for translating principles and focus of the Wycliffe Bible Translators.

[3] P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 113.

a message and usually a very urgent one. Hence, there was no premium placed upon obscurity or ambiguity.'[4] At another point Nida says that, 'Biblical writers...had an urgent message which they were intensely concerned to communicate and hence they undoubtedly did structure their message with the channel capacity of the receptors in mind.'[5]

• The biblical writers wrote in the language of the common people.

The points listed above have an important bearing on the translation enterprise. In both cases the ultimate goal was comprehensibility of the message which ties up with the urgency of the communication process. The ideal of 'comprehension' then sets the goals of the translation enterprise, thereby affecting the 'how' question which is the focus of this chapter. Comprehension of the message which is hoped to educe a response of faith is preceded by the communication of the message. In the case of scriptural translations, the communication happens through the medium of a written language.

Eugene Nida's writings, on which much of these insights are based, have a conspicuous missionary orientation. In fact, he conceives of the translator as a 'missionary-translator.'[6] His concern, as also that of contemporary Bible translation agencies, is the production of such Bibles which may be used in indigenous and vernacular milieus and outside the context of the established Church. This is an important observation because it imposes a novel task on the Bible- that of being a self-communicating Word of God, outside or prior to a teaching ministry.[7] It may be inferred then, that the purpose of such a translation must relate to its comprehensibility. It could not be one which required explanations or introductory preparations of the readers. Hence, it needs to be simple and idiomatic.

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[4] Eugene A. Nida and William D. Reyburn, *Meaning Across Culture: The Communication of the Christian Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981) 12.

[5] Eugene A. Nida and C. R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 164.

[6] *God's Word in Man's Language* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952) 23.

[7] Nida articulates this in the following terms, 'Our communication is primarily sowing the seed, not transplanting churches....This does not mean that the communication of the full revelation of God is unconcerned with the church; but the indigenous church we are committed to, whether in central Africa or central Kansas, is not the church we have structured, but *one raised up by the spirit of God...* The development of an indigenous church will always be the living *response of people to the life demands of the message.* The source of the information ... is never more than a catalyst.' [Emphasis mine]. *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960) 221.

4.3. *Notes for Missionary-Translators*

There are various aspects of language and culture that a missionary-translator must keep in mind before he attempts to translate the biblical text into a vernacular language. A deep sympathetic understanding to the receptor culture is necessary for the process of inculturation and is considered imperative if the word of revelation is hoped to incarnate afresh in the new soil. In the previous chapter we had argued that language and culture are the means by which a faith takes root in a community. Essential to the process of communication therefore is the study of these two aspects such that the translator may work at the evolution of a new cultural poetics of faith.

4.3.1. *Language and Culture: 'Two interdependent Symbolic Systems'* [8]

Nida starts his influential book on the communication of the Christian faith, *Message and Mission*, by saying:

> The major difficulties in communication result largely from the fact that we take communication for granted. Whenever we hear someone speak, we tend to assume that what is meant is precisely what we understand by these words. But words do not always mean what we think they mean, even in our native tongue. [9]

The problem of comprehension or rather the 'correct' comprehension does not imply fixity of notion, but an acceptable range not too far away from the mark. The issue is complicated enormously when one attempts to translate a written code into other languages and cultures. For the 'hearing' or perception or comprehension of the message is at least as dependent on the way in which the receptor 'decodes' it, as it is upon the way the would-be communicator 'phrases' it. [10]

If the words do not mean the same as we think they do in our own language, argues Nida, how much more must the gap be between languages belonging to vastly differing cultures. Further, both the phrasing of the language and the decoding of it is intimately linked with the cultural context of the writer, the translator and the receptor. Language, surmises Nida, 'is in not only a part of human activity, it is the most

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[8] *Contexts in Translating* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2001) 13.

[9] Eugene A. Nida, *Message and Mission* 1.

[10] Ibid., 34.

characteristic feature of human behaviour, and the possession of distinctive languages is certainly one of the most obvious feature which distinguishes human cultures.[11]

Twentieth century has seen a phenomenal development in the study of the nature of language, we have come a long way from seeing it solely as an object, but are now concentrating on its various aspects- as having a genius of its own, as an instrument, a way of communication, that is to say, the function of language.

4.3.2 Culture

Modern sociologists and anthropologists would agree that language constitutes the most distinctive feature of a culture. Culture itself, the comprehensive understanding of which is indispensable for both Christian mission and scriptural translation, may be described in a simplistic manner as, the totality of the beliefs and practices of a society. Kroeber writes that for an anthropologist, 'culture is all learned behaviour which is socially acquired, that is, the material and non-material traits which are passed on from one generation to another. They are cultural in the sense that they are transmitted by the society and not by genes.'[12]

An accepted culture covers everything in human life. Paul Herbert points out how the assimilation and interiorization of the culture is so successful in general that an individual's thought, feelings and actions seldom conflict with those of his or her society. Our culture shapes both our acting and our thinking. It provides the models of reality that govern our perceptions, although we are likely to be unaware of its influence on us, it seems 'natural.' Experience is also interpreted from a specific cultural frame of reference.[13] Language as an intimate part of this culture is also transmittable and accumulative. In fact even though it is a relatively small part of culture, language is 'indispensable for both the functioning and the perpetuation of the

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[11] *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954) 211.

[12] Alfred Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948) 1. See also Alfred Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1952).They summarize the culture concept as consisting of 'patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (that is historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values, culture may on the one hand, be considered as a product of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.' 357.

[13] Paul G. Hierbert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 30-52.

culture.'[14] Language is the intimate, most articulate expression of culture, and many argue that, so close are the two that language can be said to be synonymous with culture, which it suffuses and embodies. More so in oral cultures, language is very close to a complete cultural experience.[15]

Given such an understanding of culture, it is necessary for the missionary-translator to engage intimately with the culture of the community that is sought to be evangelized to acquire an adequate understanding of how it operates and structures its beliefs and thoughts.

4.3.3. Language as a Thought Structuring Lens

Just as culture conditions our perception of the world, indeed conditions our experience and response to it, so is the case with language. Language is far from being a transparent medium, it is not a clear and unobtrusive lens through which one both registers, and understands and communicates to others. Language is rather a special window organizing what is seen and making sense of it. Max Black's analogy may be useful to explain this.

He writes:

> Suppose I look at the night sky through a piece of heavily smoked glass in which certain lines have been left clear. Then I shall see only the stars that can be made to be on the lines, previously prepared upon the screen, and the stars that I do see will be seen as organized by the screen's structure.[16]

Edward Sapir argued that, 'The people of different cultures, speaking different languages are not simply attaching different linguistic labels to elements of the same

[14] Nida, Contexts in Translating13.

[15] Christian transmission is so closely linked with the concept of culture that its study becomes essential especially in the context of scriptural translations. Therefore Luzbetak argues that, 'the concept of culture is...the anthropologist's most significant contribution to the missionary endeavor.' See Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures (1963; South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1975) 59.

[16] As quoted in T. R Wright, Theology and Literature (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 13.

real world but are actually operating in terms of different realities.'[17] The particular patterns of the language are the ways of 'moulding' thought.[18] One language pattern will produce a thought world somewhat different from the thought world produced by another language system. Benjamin Whorf studied the phenomena and concluded thus:

> The forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws
> of patterns of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the
> unperceived intricate systematization of his own language shown
> readily enough by a candid comparison and contrast with other
> languages especially those of different linguistic family....And every
> language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are
> culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality
> is not only communicated, but also analyses nature..., channels his
> reasoning and builds the house of his consciousness.[19]

A language system, as a constituent of and constituting culture, controls a person's thought pattern. The fact of cross cultural communication taking place across different language registers, implies not a linguistic determinism but alerts us to a potential influence on thought patterns.[20] This insight is significant for all translation enterprises alerting the missionary-translator to his own cultural presumptions that may bear upon the interpretation of the text as well as its rendering in another language.

4.3.4. Language as a Dynamic Cultural Resource

A Structuralist theory of language takes into account both the personal and the social aspects of language. It sees language as an individual human activity that presupposes and reflects a complex network of social activities and relationships that are tied to

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[17] As quoted in Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981) 288.

[18] See a further explication of this mould theory of language in, Daniel Chandler,
"Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis." Sept. 1995. 27 June 2005
<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/whorf.html>.

[19] Benjamin Whorf quoted in Marvin Harts, *Culture, People, Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1988) 138.

[20] Ibid. Chandler argues that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis carried to an extremity would imply an unavoidable linguistic determinism (our thinking is determined by language) along with linguistic relativity (people who speak different languages think differently), which must necessarily eschew all attempts at translation or even communication across language frontiers. This would imply an 'untranslatibility.' Chandler therefore argues for a 'weak Whorfianism', a more moderate position which stresses on influence rather than determinism. "Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis."

particular cultures. As the system of signs and symbols, language is the expressed manifestation of this complex system of social relationships and cultural norms. As a function of culture, language is both culturally derivative and culturally expressive. Within the Structuralist theory of language, the relationship between meaning and language is functional rather than ontological. What this implies is that meaning is not inherent in the very words used, but acquires meaning as a part of a social function played by it. There isn't anything in the distinctive nature of a sound in itself which makes it correspond to a particular meaning. Similar words are not fixed symbols which have exactly corresponding meanings in other languages.

Therefore, language is not to be understood as a mere 'tool' fashioned to achieve limited and temporary goals. It is a 'dynamic cultural resource,' reflecting the spirit of the people and illuminating their sense of values.[21] This resource may be tapped by the translator, in understanding the deep seated cultural kernels which organize the society and structure its value system. For the missionary-translator, this implies an imaginative approach to the receptor language- especially those in which the translations take place for the first time.

4.3.5. Language Study as Cultural Archaeology

There is a necessity for a skillful and sensitive 'cultural archaeology,' by which one may discern the stored paradigms whereby a society represents and promotes itself. Language and culture are so intimately linked that it becomes a 'dynamic cultural storehouse' revealing the way in which a community thinks and operates, revealing also its values and concerns. A study of the language in use then enables the translator to understand the culture of the people who use it. In an attempt to develop a *Poetics of Faith* in translation, it is necessary to use the receptor's cultural frame of reference; the operative terms of this frame of reference may be understood by studying the language in use which is also a means of undertaking a cultural archeology.

In illustration of this point one may refer to Crowther's approach. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, of the Yorubas in Nigeria, recognized that translation was more than a mechanical exercise and involved something of the genius of the people reflected in the

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[21]As quoted in Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis,1989) 165.

language they used. In order to retrieve cultural values from the accumulated treasure of people, he made it a point to interact closely with the ordinary people paying close attention to their speech.[22] He believed that translation imaginatively demands the approach of an archeological skill. 'The translator should be prepared to dig underneath the layers of half-conscious notions and dim familiarities to reclaim the accumulated treasure.'[23]

One of the predominant concerns of biblical translations is finding the appropriate vernacular terms especially with regard to the most fundamental biblical concepts like the name of God. The cultural archeology will entail a fearsome responsibility. Does one introduce a foreign term with the added fear of alienating the receptor, or use names of God from within the language? Many argue that the place to begin search is the traditional belief system of the culture. To do this adequately, will require a careful consideration of full range of words in the domain for 'spirit beings,' as well as a careful review of all the traditions associated with the being.[24] The Bible in the Tangkhul dialect of the Nagas, uses such vernacular terms. 'Holy Spirit,' is rendered by 'Kathara Mangla.' The word 'mangala' could be used to denote any spirit being but clubbing it with, 'kathara,' which means 'clean,' imbues the phrase with a concept of purity and holiness thereby making it a culturally appropriate denotation for the third person of the Trinity. Similarly, the term for God in the Old Testament is not 'Jehovah' or 'Yahweh' but 'Vare,' a short form 'Varevara.' The word is derived from, 'Ara,' earlier used in the Tangkhul language to denote the unknown supreme God, creator of all things. The term 'va' is derived from 'ava' which stands for 'father.' Together the two terms connote a sense of a supreme father god who is the creator of the world and above all other beings. These familiar vernacular terms which denote a pre-existent concept of god in the Tangkhul language and culture are appropriated and used to denote the biblical God.[25]

In order to make the name of God a more familiar and intimate reality, the Hebrew term, 'Yahweh' which had been retained in the *HOV* was replaced by the word, 'Prabhu' in the *HRV*. 'Prabhu' is both a familiar and a culturally appropriate denotation

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Norm Mundhenk, 'Who is God in Papua New Guinea? ' *Bulletin of the United Bible Societies, Current Trends in Scripture Translation* 184/185 (1997): 67-79.

[25] I owe this insight to Tuingayung Muivah, who translated and explained these terms from Tangkhul to English for me.

for God in Hindi and the reader is spared the sense of reading about a foreign God with a Hebraized name in the Biblical text.[26]

The same sense of a cultural archeology in language use is suggested by Ubolwan Mejudhon with regard to Thai Bible Translation.[27] Mejudhon demonstrates the importance of the affective domain of Thai culture and language use, which she suggests must be taken into consideration if the Thai Bible hopes to be a useful means of evangelization.[28] The Thai language she posits, is expressive and reflects the soul of Thai culture; it also reflects Thai hierarchy through the Thai semantic domain of words which provide suitable words for particular roles and statuses in social interaction and communication. The Thai semantic domain of words point to characteristics of Thai culture and the translator should study the semantic implications of Thai words before translating the Scripture. There are for instance, a variety of words that she notes, for denoting God.

- *Loka-Thada-* embodies the essence of the Creator.

- *Loka-Chate-* the world's Sovereign.

- *Loka-nart-* the world's Condescender[29]

The third word, *Loka-nart* fits perfectly the Thai worldview of hierarchy and dependency but tends towards the archaic. Paraphrasing the word into everyday language, argues Mejudhon, would result in an emotional, powerful Thai word for God and Jesus. This also ties up with Thai cultural expectation of religion operating in the emotional domain as opposed to it being a cognitive rationalization.[30]

Mejudhon suggests that the Thai Bible translation must fit into the affective domain of the language for it to be 'impactful.' With reference to the much quoted verse from *John 3:16,*[31] she offers several alternatives that take into account the cultural registers of the Thai. Love in the Thai language has the element of bonding and delight. Instead of translating love as *rak,* which has a carnal meaning, a more appropriate word, she

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[26] See corresponding renditions of *Psalm 1:6* and 2:2 in the *HOV* and the *HRV*.
[27] See 'Bible Translation and the Affective Domain of the Thai,' *Bulletin of the United Bible Societies, Current Trends in Scripture Translation* 184/185 (1997): 81-91.
[28] Ibid., 81. By 'affective domain,' she refers to feelings, emotions, values and attitudes; in opposition to the 'cognitive domain' which emphases thoughts, memorizing, analyzing and evaluation.
[29] Ibid., 90.
[30] Ibid., 87.
[31] 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.'

suggests is one which appeals to the Thai affectively and can be translated as passionately attached to, or can combine *rak* with loving kindness or mercy. *Rak-pook-pun* (relational bonding love) or *rak-metta*(merciful love) are more suitable translations. 'Give' (*hai*) is an ordinary word in Thai, which conveys no emotion. *Sala* (sacrifice) is more pictorial and emotional and hence better suited to convey the sense behind the verse. The Thai Bible translates 'believe' as *wang jai*, which leans towards the casual. Mejudhon's contention is that, *chuer jai* be used, as it conveys a pictorial meaning of trust and confidence in the being and word of the other person.[32]

For purpose of translation, it is important to keep in mind that languages are integral part of cultures of people and effect their perception. The meaning of words used in a language, reflect cultural understandings. This same sense lies behind Nida's articulation when he writes that 'Each language has its own genius' and 'to communicate effectively in another language one must respect this uniqueness.'[33]

4.3.6. *Language in Flux*

Another very important aspect of language is its 'location.' Culture and language is not located 'in' written texts where it is articulated and used but more importantly in the minds of users who form a part of society which is in flux. Consequently, all living languages too are constantly changing. Sometimes the words may be the same but the meaning may change.[34] Nida gives us several examples. 'Vulgar' had earlier meant 'common' or 'popular' and 'awful' meant 'inspiring with awe,' but now 'awfully vulgar' implies being 'very uncouth.'[35] This feature of language implies its contrariness to the goal of comprehensibility and hence the proclivity towards newer and newer translations in keeping with the changing times and climes. Therefore, Claudius Buchanan writes, 'translations must, in the lapse of ages, change with a changing language.'[36]

4.5. *Comprehensibility and Contexts*

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[32] 'Bible Translation and the Affective Domain of the Thai,' 91.
[33] Nida and C R Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* 3.
[34] See Nida, *Customs and Cultures* 209.
[35] Ibid.
[36] As quoted in E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India 1793-1837: The History of Serampore and its Missions* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967) 88.

Contexts play a crucial role in understanding the meaning of a piece of writing as also a spoken utterance. John Austin demonstrated the interplay of the text and context with his example of the sentence 'the door is open.' In the context of a person sitting in an office and another person knocking on the door, the sentence by inference is synonymous with 'come in.' The same original sentence uttered in a context of two people standing next to a cage with a lion in it, is certainly not synonymous with 'come in.' It still means more than is actually said, in this case something synonymous with 'our lives are in danger,' with the added implication 'run.'[37] The utterance interacts with the contexts to produce different implications. So is the case with the biblical text. Stuart Macgregor writes:

> It could be said that context is the unfortunate foundation of
> meaning. It is so because when interpreting, consideration must
> be given to two very vague contexts: both the context from
> within which a text is written and the context from within
> which the reader engages with the text. A responsible
> hermeneutics therefore respects the intention of the author and
> is acutely aware of the biases of the reader.[38]

The sociological and historical context of the biblical writing largely determines its meaning; as also the socio-cultural context of the reader determines its meaning and significance.

4.4.1. Multiple Context of the Translation Process

Translation does not take place in a cultural milieu identical with that of the biblical culture, nor does translation take place in a cultural vacuum. The translator does not create a new language for translating the Bible, but uses language which is already inculturated. There are multiple contexts that impinge on the communication process in the translation enterprise. There is at first the 'original' context in which the biblical writers wrote, in which they responded and in which the meaning was first interpreted and received by the original receptors; then there is the context of the biblical

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[37] John L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).
[38] "Hetero-Contextuality: Context and the Hermeneutic of Love." 2002. 5 July. <http://www.definitive.co.nz/essay/heterocontextuality.pdf.html >.

translators, and further down the line is the context in which the receptors operate, and in terms of which they make sense of the biblical message.

That the cultures of the times, the places of the people of the Bible are very distant and alien to the times and cultures of the modern Bible translator, goes without saying. Therefore, if the message of the Bible is to be properly understood, an adequate exegesis of the text must take into account the rites and rituals, symbols and customs and the dynamics of horror and shame that pervaded the world and the times of the Bible. Such an approach to the understanding of the biblical text also makes us aware of the importance of the rites and rituals, symbols, customs, the beliefs and sensibilities of the people for whom the Scripture is being translated. Awareness of the translator's own context is also important if he is to adequately understand the meaning of the biblical text and then re-formulate it in the language of the recipient.

4.4.2. Historico-Cultural Contexts of Biblical Writings

As has been pointed out in the earlier chapters, the various books of the Bible were written in specific historical contexts and were directed at specific historical audiences. And of the New Testament writings, it has been argued that they arose as a 'response to the needs of a believing community and addressed the problems therein.'[39] Each biblical writing participates completely in the context to which it is addressed and the topics treated are dealt with in the most suitable cultural and linguistic categories. Large portions of the New Testament, are phrased in terms of Greek conceptual categories and when Paul quotes the Old Testament, he quotes from the Septuagint (Greek translation) rather than the Hebrew one, largely because the message is addressed to a Greek speaking audience.[40] These are steeped in the Hellenistic thought patterns and culture. The message is contextualized within a culturally appropriate frame of reference in such a way that it would be maximally intelligible to those within that frame of reference.

The Bible as we have seen is far from being an abstract philosophical treatise, on the contrary it has tangible historical and social materiality which it is a part of and

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[39] See Robert Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (London, Glasgow: Collins, 1974) 13.
[40] See 3.4.3.

which it addresses.[41] Such a contextual historical understanding of any meaning of the biblical text precludes the notion of the Bible positing a supra-historic message or meaning which gets encoded in the written language. It would be dangerous to let a timeless a-priori understanding of the divine message direct and bear upon biblical translation across the board. Waard and Nida too, draw our attention to the fact that integral to that message, and expressive of it, are concrete events usually acts of particular people as distinct from a set of abstractions.[42]

4.4.3. Translator's Ideological Context

The significance of context is applicable at all stages of translation, in the exegesis, interpretation, re-structuring and reformulation in another language as also in the reading of the translated text. While one admits that a fully objective exegesis is never possible, the translator especially needs to consciously minimize the subjective element. This may either be a conscious ideological approach which sets out to understand the text and then render its perceived meaning from that ideological view point.[43] It moves in the direction of imposing certain values on the text, or reading into the text the kind of view which characterizes that ideology. Thus, certain political, social, theological or denominational biases of the translator may be imposed on the text. The cultural background of the translator may well prevent him or her from seeing the text as it was in the mind of the writer. Moreover personal, theological preferences, upbringing, denominational commitments, our personality, gender, all these can and do affect the translator and thus the translation. But translators can hopefully minimize the impact of personal cultural values by attempting to heighten their awareness of the biblical cultures as different from their own and by taking them into account in their renderings.

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[41] See 2.4.

[42] Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, From one Language to Another (Nashville, Camden, New York: Thomas Nelson, 1986) 35.

[43] The word 'ideology,' as the Webster's Dictionary defines it, it refers to 'A body of doctrine, myth, symbol of a social movement, institution, class or large group,' as 'a body of doctrine with references to some political and cultural plan, along with the devices for putting it in operation.' Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1986) 4 .' Ideology is the biases, opinions, preferences, and stereotypes of a person or a group; a systematic or a generally known perspective from which a text is written, read, or interpreted.' "Ideological Texture." 1999. Emory University. 3 July <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns/i_defns.html>.

Nida talks of this at great length as being 'faithful' to the 'intended' sense of the writer or as an attempt to reproduce the meaning of passage as understood by the writer.[44]

For instance, some interpretations suggest that the demonic who claimed the name of a Legion, was in effect suffering from an inferiority complex, and the translation must express this idea.[45] But as Nida suggests, if the demonic were to reply to Jesus' question as having an inferiority complex rather than being possessed by a 'Legion,' his insight would be anachronistic as also such insight would not be that of the deranged person himself. Whether a modern translator believes in demons or not, is not the issue. What is important is that, the Gospel writers took them seriously, and it is the viewpoints of the Gospel writer and not one's own presuppositions which should be reflected in a translation.[46]

The role of ideology of the translator has surfaced with a vengeance in the area of gender inclusive language debate of the Bible. That the context in which the Bible was written, was a patriarchal one is beyond dispute. In the contemporary milieu of gender sensitiveness, various debates about the language of the Bible have arisen. Mark Strauss talks at great lengths about the 'distortion' of biblical cultural contexts in the feminist versions of the Bible. A tendency to distort the 'patriarchalism' of the biblical period characterizes these translations. Evident in such passages that deal with genealogy, these version subvert the Jewish culture of following genealogy with respect to the male heads of a family. Consequently, the *NTPI* renders *Matthew 1:2* as, 'Abraham and Sarah were the parents of Isaac.' Such a rendition is not appropriate to the Jewish culture in which the writing first emerged and tends towards an ideological imposition in attempting to project an egalitarianism that a translator might believe should characterize the Church today. Therefore, Strauss emphasises the importance of maintaining a 'cultural distance in order to accurately reflect the author's intent.'[47]

4.4.4. *Receptor's Cultural Context*

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[44] Nida and C R Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* 8; see also *Meaning Across Culture* 19.

[45] *Luke 8:26-33.*

[46] George V. Shillington, *Reading the Sacred Text: An Introduction to Biblical Studies* (London, New York: Continuum - T&T Clark, 2002) 176.

[47] Mark K Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998) 155-157. The inclusion of the names of Sarah, Rebekah and Leah undermines the significance of the inclusion of other women characters (Tamar, Rehab, Ruth and Bathsheba) in Jesus' ancestry.

And finally, when we come to the level of the receptors, contexts play a crucial role in the comprehension of the message. With comprehensibility as one's goal, the task of the missionary-translator is of communicating effectively and yet not compromising commitment to the 'intended' meaning of the source text.[48] The receptor is also far removed from the biblical culture. Let us for instance, take the cultural context in which Jesus lived. The interpretational reflexes of Jesus' hearers were conditioned by the same culture as his, and so they did not need explanation of the assumptions and agreements underlying Jesus' words and actions.[49] Textured into the fabric of the biblical texts are all kinds of unfamiliar designs, hues, events, characters and ideologies which are from a different world. Who for example is a Samaritan? Do we have a similar social category in our culture? While translating, how does one render this figure in the translation? Which despised figure in the new culture and language will carry the same connotation as the Samaritan did in the original context of the parable?[50]

The problem with leaving the Samaritan un-translated is that the new readers imagine what they wish about the man thus designated. He shows compassion to the fullest, so we call him 'good' without any reservations. But as Shillington points out, Samaritans were not 'good' in the minds of first century Palestinian Jewish people and they were certainly not better than the Jewish priests and Levites as the parable implies.[51] How does a translator carry over into the new language and culture all the connotations wedded to the context of the parable?

One probable answer is that of finding a 'cultural equivalent' in the new cultural context of the receptor. Assuming that such an 'equivalent' is available, the question that remains is related to the extent of liberty one can take with a body of writing which presents itself, 'as rooted history and consists primarily in recounting how God has entered history to reveal the divine power, will and person.'[52] Moreover the God of the Bible is portrayed as acting in specific instances, not merely in generalized ways. Thus the specific historical [cultural] context of the Biblical account acquires very important

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[48] Ibid., 178.

[49] The term 'interpretational reflexes' is used here in the same sense as by Kraft when he writes, 'we learn as a part of our cultural conditioning, a set of interpretational reflexes, a set of habits in terms of which we automatically interpret a happening. Our responses are reflexive in the same way that most of our muscular responses are reflexes.' *Christianity in Culture* 129-132.

[50] See *Luke 10:30-37*.

[51] Shillington, *Reading the Sacred Text* 177.

[52] Nida and Reyburn, *Meaning Across Culture* 29.

theological implications which cannot be discounted in translations.[53] A historico-cultural transposition would affect the credibility of the message.

4.4.5. Role of Receptor's Interpretational Reflexes

The importance of using the receptor's frame of reference can be demonstrated by the opening words of *Psalm 23*, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' In the Hebrew Psalm as also in the English versions, although the word for 'sheep' does not appear at all, the two metaphors of caring shepherd (God) and the dependent sheep (the author) are the central ideas of the first four verses but only the shepherd metaphor is overtly identified. The caring nature of the shepherd is a cultural assumption, derived from the institutionalized definition of the ideal shepherd, as is the dependence of the sheep. If this is reconstructed the way newly evangelized Ndonga readers (who are un-indoctrinated) would, the problem would be glaring. Edward. R. Hope, a translation consultant based in South Africa illustrates the problem.[54] In the Ndonga Bible the first line is translated literally as, 'the Chief is my herdboy.' Hope points out that in the context of the Ndonga peoples' culture, who herd sheep, goats and cattle, this sentence conveys implications not found in the Hebrew text. The most 'natural' Ndonga interpretation would imply an inferiority of the Chief who has no more status than that of a hired herd boy.

The literal translation is thus not 'faithful' in terms of meaning, since Ndonga herd-boy and Hebrew shepherd are not 'equivalent' metaphors, but neither is there another word for 'shepherd' in Ndonga. There is a further weakness in this translation; the first line has led the reader to expect a discourse that is negative in tone, exemplifying the statement about the inferiority of the chief. The readers assume that the next line 'I lack nothing,' is relevant to the preceding line. The transition from 'the chief' to 'me' after only one sentence signals the contrast between the topics, with the result that the reader interprets the sentence as meaning, 'I am rich,' with the inference that the chief is poor in comparison to me. The inference both makes the second sentence relevant to the first and confirms that the discourse is in fact about the chief's inferiority.

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[53] Ibid.

[54] See 'Re-Defining a Functional Theory of Translation,' *Bulletin of the United Bible Societies, Current Trends in Scripture Translation* 182/183 (1997): 7-19.

The discourse function of the first line leads to the following verses being misinterpreted. But when the Ndonga reader reaches verse 3, it is unmistakably positive about the chief and suddenly it seems that the author is self contradictory. Is this a different chief? The texture of the whole Psalm is destroyed and it becomes unintelligible even though every sentence in it makes sense in isolation. Since the text does not give clues establishing the proper cultural context, and the intended discourse, the readers naturally interpret it in terms of their own culture.

Hope contends that it would have been far better to translate the opening line as, 'I am God's sheep and He is my Shepherd.'[55] This establishes a discourse about God as a caring shepherd and about the author as a dependent sheep setting the right tone for interpretation. The translator's job then, is not only to mediate the text but the relevant contexts as well to the targeted reader and this may be achieved by using the receptor's frame of reference.

4.5. *Language, Culture and Comprehension: Some Illustrations*

> The meaning ... comes from a reservoir in which all of our prior
> experiences are contained. When we encounter a social stimulus, we
> dip into our reservoir and using our own unique thought process, we
> extract the meaning we deem appropriate and attaché it the stimulus.[56]

For the comprehension of a historically and culturally distinct and distanced message, the translator needs to build upon the receptor's reservoir of meaning. This may be by way of making explicit in the translated text that which is implicit, or by providing supplementary or marginal notes which aid the reader.

The role of context in translating is essential not only for the correct comprehension of intended meaning but also to prevent a misreading of it. Nida writes, 'Accuracy of content should not be judged primarily in terms of being true to the author, but in not causing misunderstanding of the message by those for whom the translation is intended.'[57] The phrase 'generation of vipers'(*Luke 3:7*) is an obvious reproof to the hypocrites of Jesus' day, but the Balinese would interpret such a phrase as a great

[55] Ibid., 12.

[56] L. A. Samovar and R. E. Porter, quoted in Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 148.

[57] Nida, *Context in Translating* 3.

compliment since in their culture, vipers are considered sacred animals of paradise.[58] Consequently, Nida suggests that an 'equivalent' expression might be 'offspring of creeping vermin.'[59]

It is necessary for the missionary-translator to do substantial background work not only in understanding the biblical cultures but also that of the receptor community, their language and culture and the totality of their contexts. One translator in Latin America rendered *Revelation 13:15*, 'gave breath to the image,' in a way that rendered it as, 'He made the image stink.'[60] To the Zanaki people living along the shores of lake Victoria, translating the sentence, 'behold I stand at the door and knock,' (*Revelation 3:20*) implied that Christ was declaring himself to be a thief, for in their culture only thieves make a practice of knocking on doors to be certain no one is in. 'An honest man will come to a house and call the name of the person inside, and in this way identify himself by voice.'[61]

The Mossi of Burkina Faso cannot conceive of ships or anchors, living as they do in dessert climes of the Sahara. To translate literally *Hebrews 6: 19* to say that God is, 'a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul,' would confound more that it would enlighten. As pastoralists, the Mossi are instead more at home in the world of herds and fields, and therefore it would make more sense to speak of, 'a strong and steadfast picketing-peg for the soul.'[62]

In one language in Mexico, missionaries wanted to translate the idea of the word being 'full of grace and truth.' *(John 1:14)* The word rendered as 'grace' was taken to mean 'gift of life' or more literally, 'a living gift.' However, since the only living gift people exchanged in the culture was chickens, the people understood the phrase to say the word was 'full of chicken and truth.'[63]

Among the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan, the expression 'having a big heart' is used for miserly persons, while its opposite is used for those regarded as generous. It is a cultural paradigm in which it is understood that misers are those who amass things for themselves, storing them away in their hearts. Consequently, their hearts are large.

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[58] Nida, *Customs & Cultures* 216.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 43.
[61] Ibid.,47.
[62] Ibid.,48.
[63] Ibid.

Generous people, by contrast acquire a small heart by giving away all that they have. The Akha of Burma use this same figure of speech but for them, 'a big heart' describes a conceited man, while a person with a 'small heart' is considered cowardly.[64] An awareness of cultural presupposition is behind the work of translation.

The Hebrew Bible follows the Jewish custom of attaching the father's name, as also the name of one's native place with that of the person; like 'Joshua ben Nun' (Joshua, son of Nun) or 'Moabite Naomi' (Naomi who is from Moab). The English language does not follow this custom and following the *KJV* from which it was translated, the *HOV*, renders the same phrase as, 'Joshua, son of Nun.' Many parts of India however, have a similar custom of appending father's name and that of the place of origin with the name of the person. The *HRV* therefore, reverts to this culturally relevant and familiar way of naming a person. Hence one reads 'Joshua ben Nun' instead of 'Joshua son of Nun.'[65]

4.6. Receptor Orientation: Bible Translation as Communication

The previous section illustrates the necessity for both a cultural archeology of language, and an attempt to develop a cultural poetics if the goal of comprehensibility is to be met. The necessary transpositions that this entails, raises the question of fidelity in translation. 'Fidelity' or what is understood as 'faithfulness' plays a crucial role in translation practice. More so when it is applied to a canonical volume which presents itself as the 'infallible,' 'inerrant' Word of God. Of special note for the translator is John's statement at the end of the book of *Revelation* which reads, '...if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life,...' (*Revelation 22:18-19*).

The important question that faces every biblical translator is related to the extent of liberty that can be taken in adding or subtracting from the Word of God. At another level, this notion of fidelity is tied up not only with the 'givenness' of the Scripture but also with its 'intentionality' which in turn is linked to its 'functional' aspect of educing a word of faith. This functional aspect is the chief goal of the missionary-translator who

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[64] Nida, *Customs and Cultures* 207.
[65] See Corresponding renditions of *Joshua 6:6* in the *HOV* and the *HRV*.

conceives of the Bible translation as a form of communication. Hence one of the goals the translator sets himself is to understand and then express the meaning of the source 'perfectly.' However, to be concerned for fidelity should focus not only on the meaning of the text as the translator understands it. Fidelity is achieved when the receiver receives the message with some degree of accuracy. Consequently, it becomes necessary to think about elements of communication which increase or reduce the fidelity of the message for the receiver. Berlo states that in effective communication, '...the receiver is the most important link in the communication process.' He argues that when the source chooses a code for his message he must choose one which is known to his receiver.[66]

A guiding principle in a translation which aims at comprehension should be, 'for whom is the translation intended?' Engel observes that communicators need to develop an audience-focused process in strategy development. He writes, 'the key to communication strategy... is to discover the sources they are turning to.... In short, we must adapt to their patterns of information search and not expect them to come to us.'[67]

With this principle in mind it becomes necessary to align oneself to the receptor's perspective. With the receptor's interpretational reflexes in mind, one focuses on what is a culturally relevant form or medium for the receiver.

4.7. Summary and Implications

Having considered these examples, it is obvious that no translation will ever retain all of the various types of meaning embodied in a text, and its associated hypertexts. Since the processes of denotation, inference and implicature, rely strongly on the cultural contexts of the original author/editor and of the original readers. These processes can only function in a translation in a way 'intended' by the author if the readers know or are informed about the relevant contexts. Alternatively, as has been practiced, the translators attempt to find a 'equivalent' cultural context in the target language which will result in a new cultural poetics in which the word of revelation gets expressed.

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[66] David Berlo, *The Process of Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1960) 52.

[67] James Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979) 131.

The conclusion one draws from the previous two sections tend towards viewing language in the case of scriptural translation as instrumental in function and contextual in character.[68] In so considering the language used in the translation of the Scripture, the missionary-translator is able to focus on the goal of comprehensibility. One also realizes the necessity for the translator to recognize his own cultural pre-suppositions which are reflected in the way he may interpret and translate the Bible. From thence onwards, the need is to develop a cross cultural perspective. A recognition that other cultures may view and articulate reality differently. Readership orientation would imply adopting the vernacular context of the targeted community. Identifying the ways and means by which the receptor would have fashioned the language of faith. This implies a need for an in-depth study of the cultural milieu of the receptor community. Stephen Neil relates the five-fold missionary strategy adopted by William Carey in India. The primary focus of this strategy was, 'the understanding of the language, culture and thought of the non-Christian people.'[69] One of the most important aspects of biblical translation is finding the right vernacular term for basic biblical concepts.

4.8. The Theory of Translating the Bible: From Formal Correspondence to Functional Equivalence

Having considered the two most important elements of biblical translations, namely, language and culture which together constitute the context of translation at various levels, one may proceed to an evaluation of various theories of translation that have undergirded a variety of translation projects. How precisely does one formulate a methodology of translating this canonical volume on which the Christian faith is founded? Can this text be 'faithfully' translated and yet be easily understood? How does one understand the notion of 'fidelity' within the context of biblical translations? These are some of the questions that this section addresses. To that extent we take as our starting point, the works of Eugene Nida. His theory of translation was developed from his own practical work from 1940's onwards when he was translating and organizing the translation of the Bible in various countries across the globe. In apportioning Nida's works for our analysis, one may be justified by highlighting the key role he has played in pointing the road away from a strict word-for-word

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[68] Sanneh, *Translating the Message* 208.

[69] Stephen Neil, *A History of Christian Missions* Rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1986) 224-225.

equivalence to a more meaning based translation. The theory he developed along with his colleagues had been the Bible Societies' approach to translation for over four decades, starting from the 1960's and has influenced other Bible translation agencies as well. Today, the theory of translation is expanding far beyond the theory of the meaning-based translation as posited by Nida. Yet, one observes the continued relevance of some of the questions he raised. The aim is to identify the limitations and strengths of these models.

4.8.1. *The Translation Process*

Any theory or practice of translation must begin with a basic understanding of translation process. For the missionary-translator, this process is a specific one, and is guided by his conception of the translation as a means of communication. One such way is to envisage the translator's function as that of a reader in the first instance. Separated as he is from the original texts and contexts by a vast gulf of time and culture, he is obliged to apply a grammatico-historical exegesis to try and reconstruct the right original context as far as possible.[70] Then functioning as a writer, the translator mediates the 'meaning' of the text to the target audience across the cultural and historical gulf. Again contexts are crucial. The target audience will only understand the text in the way the author 'intended' by understanding the relevant context. This again involves knowledge of the culture and other sociological aspects of the original participants and the original communication event. In the process of translation the missionary translator need also take into account the cultural biases of his targeted reader.

The translator participates in two simultaneous text acts, functioning as a reader in one, and as a writer in the other. At the same time the translator is participating in two cultures, simultaneously, mediating successfully or unsuccessfully, a text and a culture. But this scheme is an over simplification of the translator's task for there are innumerable choices that need to be made. One starting point can be a clear idea about the purpose of the translation, as also the targeted audience. The type of translation one will compose will largely be affected by these broad parameters.

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[70] This is tied to the goal of recovering or reconstructing the author's 'intended' meaning.

4.8.2. *Formal Correspondence Model*

One of the approaches to translation is the formal correspondence model, which may to all effects and purposes be termed a 'literalistic' approach. The focus of understanding being the surface-level linguistic forms through which the message is conveyed. Primary attention is paid to the words employed, and the specific details of the grammatical structures of the source language. Since languages are seen as merely alternative codes for the same reality, one seeks in this model, as far as possible, to render a word in the source language by a single word in the receptor language. Often the word order of the source language is also followed.

This approach tends to minimize the deep cultural contexts in which words are rooted and from which they derive their meaning. Kraft posits that its aim is to be, 'faithful to the original documents.'[71] But this 'faithfulness' centers almost exclusively on the surface-level forms of the linguistic encoding in the source language and their literal transference into corresponding linguistic forms in the receptor language.

Formal correspondence models therefore, aim at transferring the word forms of the source language into the corresponding word forms of the receptor language. An example of inadequate literalism shared by the *KJV*, the *ASV* and the *RSV* is found in *Mark1:4*, where the English word form 'baptism of repentance' are employed to express what would more naturally be conveyed in English by an expression such as 'turn away from your sins and be baptized.' (*TEV*) Similarly, *Matthew 3:8* is rendered by such a phrase as, 'bring forth...fruits meet for repentance,' which express what in Greek might have signified something like, 'do the things that will show that you have turned from your sins.' (*TEV*) [72]

The *HOV* may also be understood as following the formal correspondence model. Hence, there is a strict word-for-word translation that is followed. *Matthew 3:8* is rendered as, 'bring forth fruit fit for the changed heart.' While the *HRV* reads, 'Do things which are befitting of your transformed heart.' The revised version is therefore, a more meaning-based translation. Several examples may be given from the two versions of the Hindi Bible to illustrate the differences between a formal correspondence

[71] Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 265.

[72] See Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991). See also Keith R. Crim,' Modern English Versions of the Bible,' in *The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 1 (Pellegrini, Perth: Abingdon Press, 1994) 22-32.

approach and a more meaning based translation. The *HOV* rendition of *Psalms 4:2* exhorts the, 'sons of men' following the word order of the Hebrew text. (as reflected in *KJV*) In the *HRV*, this is replaced by a more meaningful term, 'man' or 'mankind.' Similarly, the *HOV* retains the gendered term, 'Purush' ("man") in Hindi, while the *HRV* replaces it by the generic term for man, as in mankind, 'Manushya,' which is more appropriate.[73]

It has been argued in the earlier section on language that, reality or one's perception of it, is structured differently by different cultures and that these differences are strongly reflected in language. In the case of the Thai Bible translation we saw that a word for word translation which does not take into account the affective and semantic domains of the Thai language, ends up alienating the reader rather than drawing from him a response of faith. Kraft writes:

> Since cultures and their languages do not correspond exactly with each other, formal-correspondence translations are frequently found to create the misimpression that God requires us to learn a foreign (i.e., Hellenized language) before we can really understand him.[74]

Such a model compromises the evangelical goal of comprehensibility to a large extent.

4.8.3. *Dynamic Equivalence Model*

At the other end of the spectrum is the Dynamic Equivalence model[75] most cogently articulated in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. In 1969, Eugene A. Nida and Charles Taber, published this comprehensive reference book on Bible translation that develops the ideas earlier put forth in Nida's *Toward a Source of Translating*.[76] The text gathers the insights from modern linguistics and the author's vast experience in consultancy work with translation projects and develops a theory known as 'dynamic equivalent translation.' This approach and the theoretical framework on which it was based had a major impact on the work of biblical translation across the globe and elicited mixed reactions.

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[73] See corresponding renditions of *Psalm 1:1* in the *HOV* and the *HRV*.
[74] Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 267.
[75] DE from henceforth.
[76] *Towards A Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964).

A contextual over a verbal consistency was now prioritized. In Nida's own words:

> Since words cover areas of meaning and are not mere points of meaning and since in different languages, the semantic areas of corresponding words are not identical, it is inevitable that the choice of the right word in the receptor language, to translate a word in the source language text depends more on the context than upon a fixed system of verbal consistency, that is, always translating one word in the source language by a corresponding word in the receptor language.[77]

It was a meaning based translation.[78] The understanding that under girds this approach is that a so called 'word-faithful' translation may well result in a 'meaning faithless translation.'[79] The substantial difference between such translation as that of J.B. Phillips or *Today English Version*, which have been immensely popular, was due to the fact that they were based on the DE translation theory.[80] Their translators went beyond the mere surface level word and grammar forms, both in the source and in the receptor languages, they dug deeper into the source cultures to carry their renderings more totally into the kind of expression that is 'natural' to the receptor language and culture. To do this J.B. Phillips states:

> I have found *imaginative sympathy, not so much with words as with people,* to be essential .... I have attempted, as far as I could, to think myself into the heart and mind of Paul, for example, or of Mark or of John the Divine. Then I tried further to imagine myself as each of the NT authors *writing his particular message for the people of today*. This has been my ideal, and that is why consistency and meticulous

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[77] *The Theory and Practice of Translation* 15.

[78] E. H. Glassman, *The Translation Debate: What Makes a Bible Translation Good?* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1981) 74. He devotes his work to showing the virtues of what he calls 'content-oriented' translations, another name for dynamic-equivalent translations.

[79] Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 203. It may be mentioned here that Jerome' Latin vulgate is posited as an early example of DE or idiomatic translation because Jerome expressed the purpose of translating as, 'sense for sense' rather than 'word for word.' See Nida, *Towards a Science of Translating* 13; J. Beekman and J. Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 24.

[80] Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 267.

accuracy have sometimes been sacrificed in the attempt to transmit freshness and life across the centuries.[81] [Emphasis mine].

The 'consistency and meticulous accuracy' to which Phillips refers which he admits of having sometimes 'sacrificed' were those defined in terms of the formalistic and literalistic translation model that were earlier described (formal correspondence model). Yet, Phillips was in another sense exhibiting consistency and accuracy of a different order. Nida has at many times posited that the term, 'accuracy' cannot be understood in a strictly formal sense. He argues that 'accuracy' can only be rightly determined by judging the extent to which the response of targeted reader is 'equivalent' to the response of the original receptors. The aim was to go far beyond what was the focus of the earlier theory of translation. There was still focus on, grammar and expression but for the purpose of building a 'communicational bridge' between the author and the cotemporary hearer.[82] And building such a bridge would have to take into account the cultural and linguistic involvement of both the ancient author and the contemporary hearer. The translation sought to elicit from contemporary reader of the New Testament for instance, a response 'equivalent' to that elicited from the original reader of the communicative Koine Greek (the common people language).

In recognition of the non-equitability of languages as formerly conceptualized, in this mode a translator used receptor-language constructions so they function in the receptor's cultural world to convey the meaning that are supposedly equivalent to the original meanings in the New Testament Greek speaking world.

Consequently, for the Gbeapo people of Liberia the word for a prophet is, 'God's town-crier,' who is the official mouthpiece of the chief. This phrase is deemed to be more relevant for the receptors who will more readily accept the term to stand for God's spokesman; while words like 'diviner' and 'soothsayer' carry such connotation as those of sorcery which might distort the Biblical intention.[83] The understanding behind such a model is that due to the non-equitability of the forms of languages and cultures, these meanings will never exactly duplicate the 'original' in the Greek world. But they shall carry on 'equivalent impact' in the receptor language. Such a DE

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[81] 'Translator's Foreword,' in The New Testament in Modern English (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958) xii.

[82] Kraft uses this term to describe the new translation practice. Christianity in Culture 270. Kraft agrees with Nida in advocating the use of a dynamically equivalent message to secure a response from the recipient that is equivalent to the response of the original recipients of the message.

[83] Nida, Customs and Cultures 21.

translation is described as, 'the closest natural equivalent to the source language message.' It is directed primarily towards 'equivalence of response rather than equivalence of form.'[84] The quality of such a translation is to be evaluated in terms of:

> the degree to which the receptors of message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose.[85]

An important commitment of this dynamic view of the Bible translation was the understanding that 'effective' translation involves more than simply the conveying of the information. According to Nida and Taber:

> it would be wrong to think... that the response of the receptors in the second language is merely in terms of comprehension of the information, for communication is not merely information. It must also be expressive and imperative if it is to serve the principal purposes of communication such as those found in the Bible. That is to say, a translation of the Bible must not only provide information which people can understand, it must present the message in such a way that people can feel its relevance (the expressive elements in communicator) imperative function.[86]

In this model the issue of translation lies outside the mere words of the source and receptor languages in and of themselves. It lies in the impact of the concept embodied in the linguistic forms on the reader or the hearer. If the impact is such that it results in the wrong understanding or lack of understanding on the part of the average, 'un-indoctrinated' reader or hearer, the translation is deemed to have failed.

William A. Smalley further elaborated on the concept of DE in his book, *Translation as Mission*.[87] There are, Smalley rightly observes, problem areas in the earlier definition, 'Just whom to consider as original receptors?' Especially when there

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[84] Nida, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* 166.
[85] Ibid., 24.
[86] Ibid., 24.
[87] William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission: Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1991).

are layers of oral and written tradition. 'We can only reconstruct through exegesis what the impact on the hypothetical readers may have been at a stage when the book was written or edited... or became part of the cannon of scripture.'[88]

Smalley's comment is valid and posits for the translator a colossal task in exegesis. Evangelicals would argue that the message must have been understood, observed and applied, since it formed the basis for the upholding and extension of the Christian Church. It has also been evident that translation done on the basis of DE principles have played an effective role in evangelistic activities all over the world.

4.8.4. *Functional Equivalence Model*

The term Dynamic equivalence, was often understood as referring to anything which might have a special impact and appeal for receptors. It was with this in the mind that de Waard and Nida started using the term 'functional equivalence.'[89] The authors argue that FE was a more appropriate expression particularly because of, 'the twin basis for effective translation and socio-linguistic translation orientation, in which the focus is upon function.'[90]

It can be argued that perhaps in the early presentation of the theory and its application, form and meaning issues had been oversimplified or wrongly understood. It is with this in mind that they emphasize that '...it is not to speak of the Greek or Hebrew text (or a literal translation) as being merely "the form" and a freer idiomatic translation as being "the meaning."'[91]

An expression in any language consists of a set of forms which serve to signal meaning on various levels lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical. The translator must seek to employ a functionally equivalent set of forms which in so far as possible will match the meaning of the original source-language text. This implies a focus on the literary texture of both the source text and the translated one.

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[88] Ibid., 124-125.

[89] FE from hence forth.

[90] Waard and Nida, *From one language to Another* vii-viii. The authors mean nothing fundamentally different from what Nida had intended by the term, 'dynamic equivalence' but a new terminology is sought to avoid the misunderstandings of the older term as also the abuse of the principles by some translators.

[91] Ibid.

Once again Smalley distinguishes between three types of meanings: ideational (meaning as information) interpersonal or interactional (meaning as relationship between the people involved in the communication, the kind of communication they are involved in the feelings and attitudes they display) and textual (meaning as the way in which the communication is structured, the meaning which lies in form itself. Of the three kinds of meaning, DE translation had focused more heavily on ideational meaning and thus tended to be mono dimensional. As Smalley observes, '...many translators have not been as aware that in sacrificing the textual form for the ideational meaning important textual meaning may also be lost.'[92] The FE translations tried to do more justice to formal and structural aspects of the text. Yet this was achieved at times, at the cost of naturalness of expression and clarity of communication.

The solution perhaps lies in a more intermediate position on the continuum between the extremes of functional equivalence and formal correspondence. This partially explains the success of the English New International Version (*NIV*), in evangelical circles as a middle of the road translation. This translation is easier to understand for a modern public than the *KJV*, or even *RSV*, since it uses a more contemporary form of English. Yet its register has remained sufficiently formal and elevated particularly in the more familiar passages, so that people feel it is a translation that can be used in worship service and Bible study.[93] In many minority language situations in India for instance, people cannot (yet) afford the luxury of having two or more translations in the language. The translation undertaken in the language is based on FE principles, but has to play an important role in liturgical purpose and Bible study besides its function as an evangelistic tool. One also has to reckon with the fact that church language cannot be entirely avoided, and that a 'higher' register than common language has to be employed.

The aforementioned models of translation bring back the focus on the theoretical underpinnings that inform the practice of Bible translations. Whether a strictly formalized theory informs the practice of translation or the other way round is

[92] *Translation as Mission* 124.

[93] See Kees F. de Blois, 'Functional Equivalent in the Nineties: Tendencies in the Application of Functional Equivalence Principles in Different Parts of the World,' *Bulletin of the United Bible Societies, Current Trends in Scripture Translation* 182/183 (1997): 21-38.

contestable, hence the title of this chapter, '*In Other Words/ Worlds: The Practice and Theory of Translation*'[94] Yet again, we revert to the question of scriptural authority and the locus of inspiration. Of what is evidenced in the DE and the FE models of translation, it can be surmised that they have a more relaxed attitude towards it in contrast to a strictly fundamentalist conception of 'inspiration' which is linked to the very words of the autograph. Taber and Nida view the biblical languages as no different from other 'ordinary' languages and subject to the same limitations.[95] Hence the ease with which a 'word for word' translation which has been the traditional Christian approach for centuries is replaced by a 'sense for sense' translation which is deemed more 'faithful.'[96]

The concept of 'faithfulness or 'fidelity' is understood not in terms of 'givenness' of the text but its 'functionality' in eliciting a response of faith from the reader/ listener, which in turn is linked to the authority of the Scripture.[97] If Bible translation is seen as mission, as it is in the evangelical paradigm, then the translated biblical text itself is seen as a tool of evangelization. This translation is seen as a communication, which imposes on the translator the goal of, 'comprehensibilty.' A controlling factor is the principle of equivalent effect (a response of faith to the word of revelation). This in turn demands of the translator to adopt terms of understanding and comprehension of the recipient or 'a receptor-orientation' in translation.

The traditional approach to translation as in the formal correspondence model adopts the source text as the model and seeks to bring the reader to the text, therefore the word order and grammar of the 'original' languages are maintained in translation. In the DE and the FE models, the text is brought to the reader. This is variously understood by terms like, 'inculturation,' 'naturalization' and 'domestication.' The new

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[94]*Towards A Science Of Translating* 5. Nida noted that the art of translation had outstripped the theory of translation. His work attempted to put forth a theoretical basis for what was already being practiced.

[95] Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice* 7.

[96] The formal correspondence model is sometimes called a 'literal' translation as opposed to a, 'free' translation based on the DE model. See. Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice* 22, 171.

[97] Germane to our discussion here is Archea's analysis of the subject of inspiration. He defines two poles in the Christian view of authority as it is expressed through the doctrine of inspiration. One is the fundamentalist view that the very words of the text are inspired, hence authority is intrinsic to the text. The other view is that inspiration is connected to the function of the biblical text within the Christian community in ushering in people to a response of faith to the word of revelation. In this sense he argues that authority lies behind the text. See. Daniel C. Arichea, 'Theology and Translation: The implications of certain Theological Issues to the Translation Task,' ed. Phillip C., *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church* (Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1990) 23-30.

aim is to relate the text to the receptor and his modes of behaviour relevant within the context of his own culture.[98]

An important implication of the adoption of the receptor's frame of reference is a larger degree of interpretation that gets written into the translated text.[99] Something of what has traditionally been understood as the hermeneutical task, as also the task of the'application' aspect of the message gets subsumed within the translation, resulting in a radically new cultural expression of the biblical text.[100] The emphasis is on 'what does the text mean.' Carried to its extremity a DE and FE model can result in a complete transformation of the text. Take for instance the example of the *Cotton Patch* version by Clarence Jordan. Nida and Reyburn observe that this is a cultural, historical and linguistic transformation of the text.[101] Jesus is born not in Bethlehem but in twentieth century Gainesville, Georgia. He is lynched not crucified.[102] It was such abuse of the principles of the DE model that led the authors to change the expression to a 'functional equivalence.'[103] While the DE and the FE models are best suited to the goals the missionary-translator sets himself, it may be submitted that these translations are in one sense of the word 'manipulations.'

In being 'faithful' to the 'intentionality' of the Scripture they tend to intentionally move away from the source text. This is tied up with the issue of the authority of the Scripture being hinged on its contemporary relevance. The hermeneutical or the interpretative task therefore gets subsumed in the translation process. The re-interpretation of the text in a new cultural context, of what is considered to be its contemporary relevance, gets written in the main body of the biblical translation. It

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[98] Kraft agrees with Nida and notes that different cultural backgrounds produce different cultural needs which in turn prompt the reader to ask different questions. This will in turn lead to different cultural modes of expression of the biblical text. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 144-146, 284-286.

[99] While every translation is an interpretation, this element is restricted to a large extent in the formal correspondence model which as we have seen is a surface level transfer from one word to another in a different language.

[100] See Robert L. Thomas, 'Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics?' 6 July <http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj1g.pdf.html >.Thomas argues that Nida's DE and FE models are essentially application oriented as both models are attuned to a missionary orientation.

[101] *Meaning Across Culture* 19.

[102] Nida, *Towards a Science of Translating* 184. Kraft calls this a, 'transculturation.' See Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 284-286.

[103] Kraft advocates a more restricted approach to translation than that of the DE model. '...The translator is not free to provide the degree, extent and specificity of interpretation required to establish the message solidly in the minds of the hearers. Nor is it within the province of a translator to elaborate on the written message to approximate that of the spoken communication.' See Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 280.

therefore raises a pertinent ethical question regarding the maximization of personal interpretation in the DE and FE models. What is purported to be the 'intended' meaning of the author, may very well be a manipulation by the translator. Recalling Hirsch's differentiation between, the meaning and the significance of the text, a stricter parameter for the re-expression of the biblical text may be placed to stem an unprecedented manipulation as was evidenced in the Cotton Patch version of the Bible.

4.9. Afterthoughts

In the light of the preceding analysis, it may be said that the translation enterprise as is conceived by the missionary-translator, demands a commitment to the context of the translation rather than the text as a self-contained normative system. A literal translation is somehow deemed inadequate, inappropriate or ineffective for 'impacting' the audience. This implies a shift from literalness of the text to a fresh discourse. This in turn implies a shifting in the ground of comprehension to a new medium, forcing a distinction between the 'essence' of the message and its cultural supposition, with the assumption that such a supposition enables us to affirm the primacy of the message over its cultural underpinning. Translation therefore, has to be both an exegetical and a hermeneutical endeavor. That is to say, once the elements of the text are isolated, (exegesis) they can be meaningfully presented so that receptors can reconstruct the author's 'intent' as it applies to their circumstances (hermeneutics). Effective translation of the word implies a re-incarnation of the word in the soil of the new cultural milieu where its relevance is hoped to be realized. Such a re-incarnation will take place by adopting the vernacular terms of the receptor culture.

Chapter V

Conclusion: A New Cultural Poetics of Faith in and through Translation

This study started with a delineation of the terms in which an evangelical perspective understands and appropriates the Bible as the Word of God. Operating as they are, primarily within the divine oracle paradigm, the evangelicals approach the Bible as the principal locus of God's revelation. In the course of our discussion, we analyzed the specificities of the theological interpretation which structure evangelical thinking and praxis, especially with regard to the area of scriptural translations.

The Christian faith, we saw, is intimately linked to its Holy Scripture, wherein it is believed is recorded the acts of God in history, his leading of his people, and a clear pointer of his will for the lives of the believers. The Scripture is seen as regulative for the ongoing life of the community of belief. Germane to our discussion, is the specific interpretation which sees the Bible as an 'active' Word of God. It is understood in constitutive terms. Which is to say, that for the evangelicals, this same Word of God has the power to draw people into a relationship of belief and of faith. The word of revelation, believes the evangelical point of view, elicits a word of faith.

It is this belief which allows the evangelist to conceive of the Bible as an evangelistic tool. Evidenced in the widespread phenomenon of colportage, the evangelist lays much store by the Bible in effecting a relationship of faith with the biblical god.[1]

Christian praxis, we observed, is understood in terms of 'mission' the ultimate goal being, the spread of the message of Christ through *all the nations, all tribes and all tongues*. The rationale of Christian praxis was rooted in the belief of God's salvific action through Jesus, who died on the cross to pay for the sins of the whole world. Consequently, the Christian faith makes a claim to universality- 'a faith for the world.' This universality is seen to operate on an inclusive principle which takes into account the cultural particularities of the people, thereby affording each language and culture a legitimate status.

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[1] Eric Pend calls the colporteur the, 'hero of the Bible Societies literature.' It was the colporteur who usually carried Bibles and biblical tracts, distributing them to people in the hope and belief that on reading the Word of God, it will take root in them and bring them within the fold of the believers. Eric Pend, 'The Bible and the Missionary,' ed. S. L. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from Reformation to the Present Day,* vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) 399-400.

Such an understanding is again rooted in a specific theological understanding of the New Testament writings. These are conceived of, as the primary documents relating Church history and the early growth and spread of Christianity[2] Consequently, the 'Gentile breakthrough' becomes the model for Christian expansion. The Apostles of Jesus did not restrict their ministry to the Jews alone, but spread outwards from Jerusalem carrying the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles in their home territory. In the Hellenist phase of Christianity, lies the evidence of the 'mission as translation' model. Not only was the Scripture translated in Greek to reach the Greek audience, but the Gospel message was itself couched in Greek philosophical terms for it to be understood and acceptable for the Greeks. The concept of 'Logos' is appropriated to make Christ comprehensible. This implied for the evangelicals that the entire system of thought of a language and culture must be appropriated and expanded in order for Christ to be 'at home' in that culture and for the culture to feel 'at home' in Christ.

Two critical inferences drawn from this conception came to be related to issues of culture and language. As Sanneh would argue, no language and culture is privileged as the sole bearer of the message of God, which was as much for the Jews as for the Gentiles. This brought about the 'relativization' of Judaic roots in the early Christian expansion and implied for the evangelist that there could be no normative Christian culture. That the gospel was made available to the Gentiles, implied a concomitant 'destigmatization' of other cultures and languages. Every language and culture could legitimately bear the message of God.[3] The evangelical point of view comes to understand the success of Christian expansion as dependent on an adoption of a cultural pluralism. Hence the need for an inclusive mode of operation which is rooted in the cultural moorings of each people.

Such a conception releases a radical indigenizing principle in Christian transmission. Bible translation as a necessary part of this Christian transmission also undergoes an indigenization. The evangelical perspective, we studied, emphasizes the

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[2] Grant appropriates the New Testament writings in these terms. He writes, 'The Church is the primary historical reality that stand behind this literature.' The history of the early Church is reconstructed from these New Testament writings. Robert Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (London, Glasgow: Collins 1974) 13-15.

[3] Lamin Sanneh, Introduction, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis,1989) 1-48. See also Lamin Sanneh, 'Particularity, Pluralism and Commitment,' 1990. religion-online. 27 June 2005

< http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=140>.

need for 'inculturation.' Because they understand the original revelation as a revelation in culture, and in history, they take this to be a paradigm of operation. The universal claim of Christianity (predicated as it is on an inclusive principle) remains a tenable position so long as it whole heartedly pursues 'inculturation' in practice.

This theological interpretation of the nature of revelation, has far reaching implications for the translation of Scripture. The foremost being the necessity of translating the Scripture into the language of the people such that they might access the mind and will of God for their lives in their own tongue. The evangelists feel the need to transpose the biblical text not just in semantic or literary terms but more importantly, in cultural and anthropological ones. As language and culture are the means by which a faith is believed to take root in a community, it is in these two areas that the evangelist operates. Hence the importance of anthropological insights which is stressed for missionary-translators, as also the necessity of a cross-cultural perspective.

Bible translation comes to be seen as not just a theological task but a 'missionary' one. For the evangelist, this aspect of mission is based on as Walls writes, 'the central act on which the Christian faith depends.' It is the act of divinity translating into humanity in the person of Jesus. It is also a 'concretization of the commission Christ gave his disciples.'[4] Such an understanding points towards a principle of 'translatability' of the Christian faith and its Scripture. Shorter argues that the,

> "supra-cultural validity" of the Christian gospel, consists in its capacity of
> cultural re-expression in a series of historical inculturations stretching back in
> a trajectory of meanings to the events and outlooks of the New Testament
> writings and appealing to the authentic values in every human cultural
> tradition.[5]

This trajectory of meaning needs to be decoded from its cultural underpinning and reformulated in another context in the terms that are relevant to that context.

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[4] Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 28.

[5] Aylward Shorter, 'Inculturation: The Premise of Universality,' eds. Catherine Cornille and Valeer Neckebrouck, *A Universal Faith: Peoples, Cultures, Religions and the Christ* (Loovain: Peeters Press, W.B. Eerdmans, 1992) 1.

The felt need is as Metz points out, to make Christ and his teachings imaginatively credible to the people of the receptor culture through inculturation.[6] This compels the missionary-translator to adopt the terms of the receptor culture; a 'receptor-orientation' in translation. Because translation is understood in terms of communication, for this communication to be efficacious, a goal of 'comprehensibility' is set for the translation. Informing the evangelical praxis is perhaps the belief that unless the receptor is met on his home ground, they may not freely accept and receive the Word of God. It is an 'incarnational' approach to communication stemming from a biblical interpretation. Paul, in his letter to the Church at Corinth makes explicit this point when he writes:

> For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews...to the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak, I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. (*1 Corinthians 9:19-22*)

Paul is articulating the need for a receptor orientation in communication.

The goal is always to seek a response of faith from the reader or hearer. The translator therefore comes to emphasize the 'functionality' of the Scripture as opposed to its 'givenness.' In our discussion of the various models of translation, we highlighted how the formal correspondence model is centered on the givenness of the biblical text and hence attempts a word to word transfer. The DE and the FE models on the other hand, emphasize the functional aspect of the Scripture. They seek a response of faith. Which is understood as a 'dynamically equivalent' response which is close to the original.

Whether or not such an 'equivalence' of response is possible is highly contestable. I agree with Smalley when he highlights the difficulty of the reconstruction of the 'original' response.[7] Given the vast historical and cultural gap, this reconstruction may not be possible and even if it were, how can a response of faith be quantified? It can only be observed in terms of the effect. The evangelist may read this in terms of the birth of a community of belief. It can also be seen, I surmise, in the emergence of a 'new cultural poetics of faith.' In saying this I should like to specify that it is not the translation made by the missionary translator that is the issue, but such translation that emerges out

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[6] Ibid., 12.

[7] William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission: Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1991)124-125.

of a revision of the translated text and emerging in response to the forces of recipiency to the Word of God.

It may be recalled that authority is a relational concept and must be acknowledged rather than forced. This same principle applies to the authority of the Scripture. In the case of scriptural translations, the initial text may to all purposes have crudities in its turns of language. If the revision principle is followed through, especially at the hands of native Christian scholars, these crudities may be filtered out, refining the biblical language by grounding it more firmly in the cultural particularities of the receptor community and leading to a domestic expression of faith which gets reflected in the biblical text.

The Enterprise of Translation

Throughout this study, the term, 'enterprise' has been used to denote the translation work. Synonyms for the same help in an understanding of what it entails. It is an 'activity,' a 'venture,' an 'endeavour.' All these words involve a degree of uncertainty with regard to the outcome, they also point towards something that is inherent in any translation process. It is an active engagement which involves a prolonged effort on the part of the translator. The effort is not just to understand the meanings and implications of the source text but also to find the most appropriate terms to re-write them in another language. Finding the appropriate terms and the process of re-writing involves something of the uniqueness and genius of the language in which the translation is made, hence the need for a 'cultural archeology.'

When the translated text is one which demands a radical transformation in the very world-view of the hearer or reader, one need pay greater attention to the way in which the biblical claims are made. Religious translation involves not just the element of aesthetics (which is linked to its literariness) but also the question of impact which is intimately linked to the relevance of the text in a contemporary set up.

The word of revelation, seeks a response of faith. The language of the Bible is the language of belief in which the faith gets expressed. Faith, as we understood in the beginning of this study is a, 'form of imagining and experiencing the world.' If one holds to this definition, then one can infer that the language and form of the Bible must also be imaginatively credible if it has to be efficacious in inducing faith. Many theologians

stress the importance of a 'theological imagination' in understanding faith. Something of this theological imagination is, I contend, a necessity of the translation enterprise as well.

Biblical translation is a form of renewal.[8] The old is somehow deemed inappropriate in its ability to communicate the message of God hence a new way must be found. That which has been 'active' in the past in eliciting a response of faith and establishing a Church amongst the people, in order to be 'active' in the changing times and the changing climes, must release a fresh understanding of the Word of God. The 'incultured' word of revelation must be untied from its local particularities. In order for it to be relevant, it needs an on-going re-interpretation and re-translation in the context of each people and their life situations. In our analysis of the theory of biblical translation, we observed that contemporary translations take on something of what had traditionally been understood as the task of hermeneutics. In the missionary approach, which aims at a level of comprehensibility and lucidity for the laymen, the application element of the biblical text is subsumed within the translation itself. So the focus is not just on *what the text meant* but *what it means* in a given socio-cultural milieu. It is this re-interpretation which is imaginatively re-cast in a new language using relevant terms of its culture.

Coleridge's understanding of 'imagination' may be appropriated in arguing out this point. He defines imagination as:

...the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a

repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I

AM....It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate...[9]

The process of translation too is an act if creation; it involves something of a 'dissolution,' a 'dissipation' of the source text in order to 'recreate' it in a new language. This brings to mind Wonderly's understanding of the DE model of translation as an 'indirect transfer' which he says involves, 'a decomposition and re-composition,' or an 'analysis and restructuring.'[10] In the imaginative use of language and in the re-composition and restructuring, each translation evolves something which is new. There is

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[8] Synonyms for the word 'renewal' are aid our understanding. Regeneration, restitution, revitalization, a rebirth, replenishment or a restoration.

[9] James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, eds., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (Princeton: Bollingen Series LXXV- Princeton University Press, 1993) 304.

[10] W.L. Wonderly, *Bible Translation for Popular Use* (London: United Bible Societies, 1968) 51. He refers to the formal correspondence model as the 'direct transfer technique.'

an inherent dynamism in any translation process; this dynamism coupled with the goals of comprehensibility and relevance lead to the evolution of a new cultural poetics of faith.

Translation involves the attempt to re-express the meaning of the source using the terms and resources of the receptor language. It inheres with the working system of this new language. Something new is brought into the language, but the comprehensibility and more importantly its relevance can only be in terms of the existing social and cultural conventions of the receptor language. In this process the receptor language and its system is expanded in effective terms. It is put to a new use. In so doing, the translated element from the source language has also in a radical sense been expanded by translation. The genius, dynamism and uniqueness that characterizes each language and culture, draws the translated element to interact with the new cultural milieu releasing a new word of faith. The process of translation therefore, involves not just the substitution or replacement of the old by the new, but a transformation of the already existing into something new.

Something of what may be termed as a dialogical confrontation between the claimed universality of the Christian faith and the particularity of any vernacular articulation takes place in the translation process. This will necessarily involve an interaction between the world-view contained in the source text, and the world view which is integral to any language and culture. The interaction will, I surmise, bring about transformations which cannot be foretold. In blending with the local and vernacular coefficients, what shape the biblical text will take, cannot be pre-decided. Hence, there can never be any assured results or even a fixity of translating principles. This dialogical confrontation will however, produce a new texuality, interweaving and enmeshing something from the source with something from the receptor language and culture, transforming and expanding both. The translated text will also be a domesticated version which is both immediate and intimate.

In studying the dynamics of Christian religious translations, we delineated the specifically evangelical theology of the Bible and related it to its implications for the enterprise of biblical translation. While for the missionary-translator, the ultimate focus is on a 'dynamically equivalent response,' this study has led me to conclude that such a focus will invariably bring in its wake a *new cultural poetics of faith*. It is 'new' in the sense of it being a 'regeneration' and 'revitalization' of the old biblical text in a new

milieu; it is intensely cultural because the receptor-orientation of the missionary-translator will necessarily tend towards the cultural particularities of the recipient. It will also be a new way of 'imagining and experiencing the world' as under God and operating in accordance with his will. It will be a necessary outcome of the translation (in translation) and will be achieved through it.

Afterthoughts

I have been acutely aware of the limitedness of my work in focusing on the, 'Mission as Translation' paradigm of Christian transmission. The historical fact remains that in many turns of the history of Christian transmission across geographical, linguistic and cultural boundaries, 'Mission as Diffusion' has also been pursued. It is not without evidence that Christian and secular scholars alike impute imperialistic drives to Christian missionaries. Regardless of the evangelical understanding of 'Mission as Translation,' as the sustainable model of Christian expansion, they have defied this same principle in praxis. Closer home in India, both models have been pursued. William Carey, the 'Father of Modern Missionary Movement,' pursued the translation model and to his name is attributed the translation of the Bible in many Indian languages.[11] Alexander Duff, on the other hand, championed the diffusion model. In opposition to a primacy of the vernacular of the land, he proposed a different approach to evangelism which would be centered on an education in English. The Christian values embodied in English Literature, it was believed, would attract high cast Hindus to Christ.[12] Both these approaches have had great consequences for Indian History and have impacted both the languages and cultures of the people.[13]

A comparative study of the ideological and theological underpinnings of both these models and the concomitant role played by the Holy Scripture, has tremendous research potential. The question I would like to address would relate to a comparative understanding of the Bible as expressing and articulating a poetics of faith in both these models. Does this poetics of faith remain entrapped in a linguistic and cultural freeze in

[11] See J. S. M. Hooper, *Bible Translation in India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, Rev ed. W J. Culshaw (1938; London, Oxford University Press, 1963) 25-26. Hooper gives a list of all translations of the Bible, in whole or in part which were done by Carey.

[12] George Menachery, ed., *The St Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India*, vol.1 (Trichur: St Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India, 1982) 57.

[13] Ibid. 61. See also sections entitled, 'Protestant Christianity in India' 53-65; 'General Survey of Evangelisation in India' 186-191; 'Culture at the service of Evangelisation in India' 200-203.

the diffusion model or is there a felt need for a renewal of the Scripture for its comprehensibility?

This entire exercise has also opened for me an amazing window into a cross cultural understanding of how different cultures conceive of themselves and articulate it in their languages. When the subject is that of 'faith', it becomes all the more intensely personal and immediate a conception. Reading the accounts of the endemic difficulties of the translation enterprise by biblical translators; nevertheless the belief in a possibility of translation; as also the cross-cultural encounter they so vividly portray, also points a way for a future research endeavour. I would like to study in greater depth and detail the dynamics of this cultural poetics of faith. To that extent I am motivated to study the biblical translation enterprise that is underway in the Oraon and Mundari languages of the Chottanagpur belt in India, the place of my birth. The language and culture of these people exhibits a complex and rich oral cultural tradition and it should be exciting to see how this may be appropriated for biblical translation; as also study the effect of Bible translation on the vernacular.

In conclusion I should like to point out that this study has been an immensely rewarding experience. I started with one simple question-'Why are there so many translations of the Bible?' A preliminary probe led me to yet another question- 'Why must the Bible be translated in order for it to be understood?' In finding my answer to this question I dared to step into this vast area of scholarship. Many a times have I been humbled by the magnitude of the task and consequently wondered to myself, 'what can I possibly say that centuries of scholarship hasn't said already?'

The worth my work, I now realize, is not in re-expressing what others have said, and with greater eloquence and force than I could ever say, but it is in the particular orientation in which one question and its answer has lead to another. *Chapters IV, III* and *II* may very well be arranged in the reverse order. For I started first with a study of the practice of biblical translation which led me to enquire into the theory of translation that evolves from the practice, this in turn is grounded in a specific theological interpretation of the Bible. The Bible is translated in most instances for it to be made comprehensible and relevant; it is a theological task and a part of the missionary endeavor. However, in this enterprise of translation, what emerges is a fashioning of *a new cultural poetics of faith*, in and through translation.

Appendix

1. **"Creation, Revelation, and Inspiration"**

"The Triune God, who formed all things by his creative utterances and governs all things by His Word of decree, made mankind in His own image for a life of communion Himself, on the model of eternal fellowship of loving communication within the Godhead. As God's image-bearer, man was to hear God's Word addressed to him and to respond in the joy of adoring obedience. Over and above God's self-disclosure in the created order and the sequence of events within it, human beings from Adam on *have received verbal messages from Him, either directly, as stated in Scripture, or indirectly in the form of part or all of Scripture itself.*

When Adam fell, the Creator did not abandon mankind to final judgment but promised salvation and began to reveal himself as Redeemer in a sequence of historical events centering on Abraham's family and culminating in the life, death, resurrection, present heavenly ministry, and promised return of Jesus Christ. Within this frame God has from time to time spoken specific words of judgment and mercy, promise and command, to sinful human beings so drawing them into a covenant relation of mutual commitment between Him and them in which He blesses them with gifts of grace and they bless Him in responsive adoration. Moses, whom God used as mediator to carry His words to His people at the time of the Exodus, stands at the head of a long line of prophets in whose mouths and writings God put His words for delivery to Israel. God's purpose in this succession of messages was to maintain His covenant by causing His people to know His Name-that is, His nature- and His will both of precept and purpose in the present and for the future. This line of prophetic spokesmen from God came to completion in Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Word, was Himself a prophet- more than a prophet, but not less- and in the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation. When God's final and climactic message, His word to the world concerning Jesus Christ, had been spoken and elucidated by those in the apostolic circle, the sequence of revealed messages ceased. *Henceforth the Church was to live and know God by what He had already said, and said for all time.* At Sinai, God wrote the terms of

His covenant on tables of stone, as His enduring witness and for lasting accessibility, and throughout the period of prophetic and apostolic revelation *He prompted men to write the message given to and through them, along with celebratory records of His dealings with His people, plus moral reflections on covenant life and forms of praise and prayer for covenant mercy.* The theological reality of inspiration in the producing of Biblical documents corresponds to that of spoken prophecies: although the human writers' personalities were expressed in what they wrote, the words were divinely constituted. *Thus, what Scripture says, God says; its authority is His authority, for He is its ultimate Author,* having given it through the minds and words of chosen and prepared men who in "freedom and faithfulness" spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1 Peter 1:21). Holy Scripture must be acknowledged as the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin."[1] [Emphasis mine].

2. " Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Inspiration"

"Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God, witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called *infallible* and *inerrant*. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths.

Infallible signifies the quality of neither misleading, neither being misled, and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe and reliable rule and guide in all matters.

Similarly, inerrant, signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.

We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. *In inspiration God used the culture and conventions of his penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise.*

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[1] As quoted in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 498-499.

So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions between Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in the Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed....Inasmuch as all Scripture is the product of a single Divine mind, interpretation must stay within the bounds of the analogy of Scripture and eschew hypotheses that would correct one biblical passage by another, whether in the name of progressive revelation or of the imperfect enlightenment of the inspired writer's mind.

Although the Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional view of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action." [2] [Emphasis mine].

3. "Why Translate the Bible?" [3]

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ commanded his followers to share the good news with all nations. *Since Scripture is essential to knowing Jesus, it must be translated so that people everywhere can truly understand its message.* As directed through the Great Commission, the Church carries the responsibility for Bible translation. Wycliffe serves the Church in this highly specialized ministry.

History documents the Bible's profound impact on individuals and societies. *Its impact is greatest when written in the "heart language" of a people. Barriers to understanding the gospel are reduced. People grow spiritually.* Strong, healthy churches result. Strong churches reach out to their neighbours in acts of service,

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[2] Ibid., 500-501.
[3] Rationale behind translation enterprise as articulated by the WBT. 3July, 2005
<http://www.wycliffe.ca/how_we/HTML/nutshell1.html>.

which can ultimately transform whole communities and bring glory to God. [Emphasis mine].

4. "What We Believe" [4]

As a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), Wycliffe Canada subscribes to the E F C's Statement of Faith:

- *The Holy Scriptures as originally given by God are divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.*

- There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh; we affirm his virgin birth, sinless humanity, divine miracles, bodily resurrection, ascension, ongoing mediatorial work, and personal return in power and glory.

- The salvation of lost and sinful humanity is possible only through the merits of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, received by faith apart from works, and is characterized by regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit enables believers to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

- The Church, the body of Christ, consists of all true believers.

- Ultimately God will judge the living and the dead, those who are saved unto the resurrection of life, those who are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

" What We Believe About God's Word:"[5]

- *The Bible is God's message for all people everywhere.*

- *The Bible's message is evangelistic and is the basis for church planting and church growth.*

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[4] Statement of Faith by WBT. 3July, 2005
http://www.wycliffe.ca/how_we/HTML/nut_believe.html >.
[5] Ibid.

- The *most effective means of communication is the mother tongue.*

- *For a church to be truly indigenous, it must have Scripture in the mother tongue* of its people.

- Bible translation is the task of the whole Church and everyone can have a part. [Emphasis mine].

5. "Vision 2025" [6]

Vision 2025 proposes that by the year 2025, together with partners worldwide, we aim to see a Bible translation program begun in all the remaining languages that need one. We estimate that as many as 3,000 programs will need to begin in the next twenty years for Vision 2025 to happen. Wycliffe's desire is to see people groups with the Word of God sooner rather than later, while insuring the integrity of translation. As are our current standards, translations done in the future *must be faithful to the original and clear to the speakers of the language.*

Vision 2025 is a vision for all believers. Wycliffe has always partnered with others around the world, but Vision 2025 has encouraged partnering and networking in new ways around the world with language communities, national churches, seminaries and Bible schools, missions, other Bible agencies and research and educational. [Emphasis mine].

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[6] Vision statement by the WBT. "Vision 2025." 3 July 2005 <http://www.wycliffe.ca/how_we/HTML/nut_vision25.html>.

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