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Bible Translation in the Context of the "Text, Church and World" Matrix - a post Nida Perspective

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Introduction:

At the top of the agenda of the Bible Society and Bible translation movement worldwide is a certain text, namely the Biblical text. The Biblical text has been understood and may be understood in any number of ways depending on the perspective, ideology or background of its reader. This in turn can generate widely differing readings, interpretations and translations. The Bible Society/Bible translation movement is primarily dominated by the Church. The term Church here refers to the Christian church community in both its Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant manifestations. This is evidently not a monolithic block – but exhibits a wide diversity of colors, textures and shades, some complimentary and some clashing. It may however be understood to possess a certain fundamental unity in spite of the visible internal and external diversity. The Biblical text as understood by the Christian church comprises of the collection of books commonly called the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Christian church community holds that this collection of writings contains Gods Word, or that it is a record of Gods dealings with the people of Ancient Israel/Palestine, who were the recipients of His message as spoken through certain of them – Abraham, Moses, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets and others, but supremely through Jesus of Nazareth – God has communicated a divine Message that is authoritative, truthful, reliable and relevant for the entire human community for all time. In other words, these Biblical writings contain Gods Word to all people everywhere. (For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished Matthew 5.18/ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words

will not pass away Mark 13.31). The Biblical text is accepted and believed by the church, and yet is intended not only for the church but for the whole world. However the whole world does not and may not believe nor accept the authority or the relevance of this text.[1] Moreover the world may read or interpret this text in ways that are completely divergent from official church readings or interpretations.[2] What is the role of Bible translation in this context? This question is the main concern of this paper.

The Text – base and original source of translated texts:

There is no doubt that the Biblical text is an ancient text, written by a vasriety of individuals and groups of people over several hundred years and covering a wide range of contexts, periods, peoples and cultural traditions as well as linguistic and religious traditions. To complicate the picture are the thick and impenetrable layers of both traditional and modern interpretations spanning a wide range of periods – Jewish, Christian and secular. The resulting kaleidoscope of meanings and beliefs coexist in unexpected environments and in unrecognizable guises. The challenge posed in deciphering the complexity implied by such a corpus is truly immense. There is no certain handle or single key available for capturing the essence or the whole truth pertaining to totality of the Biblical writings. It is not surprising that professional biblical scholars dedicate their entire lives to this enterprise, yet none of them has claimed to have been able to tell us everything there is to be known about this set of writings. The proliferation of specializations in the domain of Biblical studies has enormously complicated the ability to master the whole. The need for an integrated vision or unified view of the whole grows ever greater with the plethora of Biblical specializations, ranging from Biblical archaeology, Biblical text criticism, Biblical languages – (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), Old Testament Studies, New Testament Studies, Septuagint Studies, Biblical Anthropology and Cultural Studies, Biblical Geographical and Historical Studies, Individual Biblical Book Studies, Individual Biblical

1) For an illuminating discussion of the authority, reliability and inspiration of Scripture see Paul J. Achtemeier (1980).

2) On the question of interpretation see for example Wolfgang Iser (2000) or Mikko Lehtonen (2000).

Character Studies, etc. Besides there are also a diversity of methodological approaches and perspectives in most of these areas – thus complicating the task considerably. The Biblical books as indicated above were written over a number of years by a wide variety of human authors, reflecting their individuality and unique gifts and employing diverse literary styles, discourse types, genres, narrative and poetic types and covering a wide range of subject matter from virtually every area of life and culture.[3)]

The original Biblical text does not exist. Or to put it another way – no one has until now laid their eye or hand on it. Extant copies of copies of these have been unearthed in various locations of the ancient Biblical world. Thanks to the painstaking, patient and demanding labors of textual/text scholars, we have a rational basis for believing that current critical editions of the Biblical writings are as close to the real thing as we can get, given available evidence.[4)] But still the resulting critical editions of the Biblical text remain in ancient languages rooted in ancient cultures, traditions and religions.

The Bible Translation Imperative:

As everyone knows the Old Testament, elsewhere referred to as the Hebrew Bible, was originally written in ancient Hebrew while parts of it such as Genesis 31.47, Jeremiah 10.11, Ezra 4.8-6.18, 7.12-26 and Daniel 2.46-7.28 are written in the closely related ancient tongue of Aramaic. The books of the New Testament on the other hand are written in the ancient Greek tongue current at the time of early church, commonly called Koiné. The ancient African/Alexandrian translation of the Old Testament of the Hebrew/Jewish Holy Scriptures commonly referred to as the Septuagint is written in ancient Greek. If this text is intended for every man and woman in the affluent modern suburban malls of the northern continents or the sprawling slum ghettos and impoverished rural villages of the southern continents – the need

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3) John Barton's ed. ***Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretatio*** (1998) and Steven L Mackenzie & Stephen R. Haynes eds. ***An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application – To Each Its Own Meaning***(1999) are a good place to begin for more on this. See also Julio Trebolle Barrera's wide ranging text ***The Jewish and the Christian Bibl*** (1998).

4) See Emanuel Tov's ***Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bibl*** (1992) and Kurt Aland & Barbara Aland's ***The Text of the New Testament*** (1987) provide excellent introductions on this problem.

for the translator's intervention becomes indispensable. Indeed without translation the Biblical writings would remain forever closed and inaccessible to the millions whose lives are touched by them. For the vast majority of people the Bible that they know and read is a translated Bible, that is, a Bible in a language they can read and understand, a domesticated Bible that has with the help of the translator crossed the boundaries of time and space, of language and culture, of the cultures and languages of the Biblical world to those of our time, of the ancient political, economic, historical and religious environments to those of own time. To what extent does this Bible resemble the original one? Is it possible to recover the original meanings of this ancient text in our modern translations and environments? Is it possible to read this ancient text other than from our own current contexts and in terms of our needs and situation? To what extent then is translation a betrayal or is 'traduire sans trahir' (Margot) a live possibility?[5] These and numerous other questions continue to bedevil the modern and postmodern translator.

Yet Bible translation remains unavoidable, at least for the Christian church. It is no secret that the Biblical writings are central and indispensable in the life and work of the Church. These writings are so to speak her foundational document, her guiding document, her compass point. They are understood to provide the basis for reliable and authoritative teaching and preaching, the basis for evaluating true and untrue positions, correct and incorrect teachings and in general for a true understanding of the faith, i.e. what Christians believe. The role and function of the Bible in evangelism and in revitalizing Christian worship and liturgy is believed to be central to Christian existence and almost taken as a given. So is its role in fostering close and loving Christian communities through common small group as well as individual Bible study, reflection and mediation. Scriptural texts such as 1 Timothy 3.16-17 ('All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed' TEV) are used to reinforce this view of the role and function of the Scriptures. If the Scriptures are central to the Church's self understanding and identity and for the spiritual nurture and growth of her

5) A former UBS translation consultant Dr Jean Claude Margot wrote a book on this problem with the title — ***Traduire sans trahi*** (1979).

members as well as for her worldwide mission and expansion, their availability and accessibility becomes not only imperative but necessary for her continued existence and vitality.[6)]

The Bible is the Church's book. No church can exist and carry out its historic mission and ministry without appeal to the Scriptures. (While in practice some churches may actually carry on without any appeal or dependence on the Bible – it would be difficult for such churches to justify their existence without some appeal to the Christian Scriptures). The old traditional and liturgical churches of the northern continents need it. No less the new indigenous or the so-called independent churches of the southern continents, or the charismatic and Pentecostal churches now mushrooming everywhere. A possible problem in this love affair between church and Bible is the danger of bibliolatry – a legalistic and slavish appeal to the letter rather than the spirit of the Scriptures, poorly lacking in sound exegesis or interpretation.. Undoubtedly this problem exists in some pockets where proper Biblical education is lacking. It could and does lead to a certain fanaticism and intolerance, especially of those whose positions may differ. Another danger relates to churches and individuals in established and traditional Christian communities who have lost touch with the Bible and prefer rather to refer to theological tomes and seminary textbooks, or the word of their professors and former seminary teachers to validate or give authority to their message. Both dangers exist and ought to be guarded against. The middle ground that respects the Biblical text and also gives ear to theological and biblical scholarship is to be commended.

It has been noted[7)] that in the case of the indigenous and so-called independent churches of the southern continents – their coming into existence coincided with the emergence of Bible translations in the languages of the

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6) See A.O. Mojola's paper "The Bible – a Tool for Change, Renewal and Mutual Learning" presented at the OD and Churches Consultation held at Mbagathi, Nairobi Kenya, 18-22 November 2002.

7) See for example David Barrett's writings, notably his "The Spread of the Bible and the Growth of the Church in Africa" in ***UBS Bulletin*** No.128/129, 3rd and 4th Quarters, 1982/1984:5-18 or William Smalley's ***Translation as Mission – Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement***(1991: Chapter 10 on "Translation and Indigenous Theology"). Philip C. Stine ed. ***Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church – The last 200 Years***(1990) contains some stimulating presentations on this subject

people. The first missionary churches were often closely tied to the cultures, practices and values of the missionaries and moreover depended on foreign Bibles usually in the languages of the missionaries. The vernacular Bible was in a sense the tool that liberated and empowered the indigenous or native Christians. It gave them direct access to the Bible in their own languages. They could hear God speaking to them in their own native languages. Translation brought about another Pentecost. The new indigenous Christians were now in a position to engage the missionaries, to contest their interpretations, to question the authority of the missionaries on the basis of the more reliable authority of the Bible. The Bible thus empowered and released the native believers to relate directly to the God of the Bible without the mediation of the missionary. The translated Bible thus becomes an agent of church growth and of providing Christian identity in new environments. Needless to say the translated Bible is everywhere perceived as the Bible and God's Word for the people for whom it is intended and in whose language it is written. The translated Bible in any language becomes for the Christian believer the inspired and authoritative Word of God in that language.

The Church – custodian and interpreter of the Biblical text:

The Church has an inalienable vested interest in the Bible and more or less has the controlling share on the Bible. No wonder she sees herself as the custodian of the Bible, to keep and protect it, to save it from disappearance, distortion or corruption. This role implies that the Church has a strong interest in maintaining the integrity or purity of the Biblical text through the ages. In other words, nothing ought to be added to it, or taken from it or changed in any way. This is quite an important and pivotal function given that there are those who have wanted to change the Biblical text in precisely this way by adding, subtracting or changing it. Some have actually succeeded in doing so. The motivation for this is simply the desire to have a text that is consonant with one's beliefs, teachings, or statement/s of faith. Translations such as those of sects like the Jehovah's Witnesses are of this type.

Related to this is the thorny issue of canon. How many books belong to the Bible? Who should decide which books are part of the Bible? Is the canon open or closed? Can any new books be admitted or has a decision on

this question been made once and for all? What in fact were the criteria for deciding which books should be part of the Biblical canon? How about the question of their ordering? Is the sequence in which they come one after another important? Was this also settled once and for all? Can any new ordering of the books-based for example on some preferred and defensible scheme- be permitted? Is the present system permanently frozen? How about the system of chapter and verse divisions of the Biblical text? Is it permissible to originate a new system of versification and chapter division based for example on a careful study of discourse elements, genre typology, literary structure and function, etc.? Why not? A strong case can obviously be made for any of these suggestions. The main question here however is: who is qualified to decide? And by what authority? Would their decision be binding? Donn F. Morgan's observations in his book ***Between Text and Community*** is of relevance here. There he writes: "…the shaping of the text by the community is accomplished by the way in which it is read and interpreted. We may perhaps speak of a 'canon within a canon' at this point. Communities select those parts of the canon that they will use to understand, even to justify, the way they will live out the authoritative story. Although we agree that the canon as a whole remains authoritative for the community, nonetheless, no community can structure its concept of mission, identity, and social norms without highlighting some scripture and often ignoring or disagreeing with other scripture. In all of this, the community-shaping function of canon remains constant, regardless of the changing or unchanging nature of the text"[8)]

There is no consensus in the Christian church community on the exact nature of the canon – especially concerning how many books belong to the Biblical canon? Or which books these should be? There is however a core of books on which everyone is agreed. There is in fact a general consensus by all Christian churches on the 27 books of the standard ***Greek New Testament*** – in any of the Nestle and Aland editions, normally used as a basis for UBS sponsored Church translations. Disagreements begin beyond this basic list. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church for example is not dogmatic on this question and is inclined to allow for some additions. However the suggestion that the Gospel of Thomas should form a part of any officially accepted

8) Don F. Morgan, (1990), p.16.

Christian New Testament still remains on the margins and fringes. There is also a general consensus by all Christian churches on the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible, as found for example in the UBS distributed ***Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia***. Some differences exist in the ordering of these books as well as in the chapter and verse schemes followed. Some traditions follow the Hebrew book order as well as chapter and verse schemes while some other traditions follow alternative schemes. In addition to this basic core some churches admit additional books.[9] The Catholic church admits all the additional books contained in the African/Alexandrian Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible – but which are lacking in the Biblia Hebraica as we now have it. The Orthodox churches would also in addition admit other books not in the Septuagint. The question of Biblical canon is not a matter for individuals or even para-church agencies or institutions such as the UBS to make decisions on. It is entirely a question for the Christian faith communities themselves.[10] Translators have no say on this matter. They are merely servants and as servants can only translate as per the instructions or brief given them by the commissioning churches.

The role and function of the church as custodian of the integrity of the Biblical text as indicated above goes hand in hand with its role as the arbiter of permissible readings and interpretations as well as what may be termed non-permissible or heretical readings and interpretations of the divine Word as found in the Biblical text. Christian faith communities are concerned that readings and interpretations of the Biblical text be in accord with the historical creeds, with the received traditions of the various Christian faith communities and with their official doctrinal positions or declared statements of faith. Within certain limits and under certain circumstances these communities may allow for certain corrections or changes to established traditions or declared doctrines or statements of faith in the light of new Scriptural readings or interpretations. Movements of reform, renewal and change emerge from time to time within the Christian church. The Protestant

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9) For a detailed discussion of this see Siegried Meurer, ed. The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspectiv (1991).

10) Lee Martin McDonald's The Formation of the Christian Biblical Cano (1988), John Barton's Holy Writings, Sacred Text – The Canon in Early Christianit (1997), C. Theobald's Le Canon des Ecriture (1990) or Gerald Maier's (Hrsg) Der Kanon der Bibe (1990) offer good discussions of the issues.

reformation is a well known example. In recent times the Second Roman Catholic Vatican Council of the last century is another important example. These movements in turn have impacted traditional interpretations of the teachings of the Church in a range of areas. Such movements of reform and renewal no doubt through their fresh readings and interpretations and resulting practices cannot fail to impact exegetical and translation praxis. In many situations where the Bible is being translated for the first time translators are often the first theologians, and the ones who invent and create the terms and concepts of theological discourse and liturgical practice in the target or receptor language and culture.[11] Their exegetical readings and interpretations in the new or first translations often become the preferred readings and interpretations. An interventionist approach to translation could also through new translations contribute to the creation of fresh readings of familiar texts and to new interpretative practices and uses of language[12]. Such translation activism could through use of fresh and new concepts, exploratory turns of phrase to re-express the familiar and stale further contribute to new reinterpretations of traditional doctrines. It is no wonder that Bible translation is too important to be left to the translator!

Does this imply that the Church is a censor of texts? Some churches may understand their role and function with respect to texts in precisely this way. Hence the need for 'imprimaturs' and 'nihil obstats'!. Others may do the same thing but rather unobtrusively. The idea of target audience acceptability and endorsement may play a similar role. The recent case of a new revised edition of the NIV that incorporates gender sensitive language is illustrative of the powerful role of target audience acceptability in influencing and shaping translations.

The Church and the initiation or commissioning of translations:

Bible translation is intended to serve the interests of the Church, including the missiological interest to reach the un-churched. The majority of Bible translations are initiated or commissioned by the Church to serve such

11) See William A. Smalley (1991), ibid.

12) In hisThe Translator's Tur (1991:223-231) Douglas Robinson discusses this phenomenon in terms of 'subversion'.

interests. In the real world it is increasingly being recognized that translations are purpose driven and outcome oriented. No translation happens merely for sake of translation. And none happens in a vacuum. Translations are products of their time, reflecting the circumstances of their production as well as the reasons for their production. They mirror the contexts of those who produce them as well as the contexts of those who actually do 'consume' them or those originally intended to 'consume' them. Functionalist approaches to translation make no secret of their view that translations need to consciously take into account those who are going to use them or benefit by them.[13] Translations must seriously take into account the needs of these 'consumers' of the Biblical text – their backgrounds – their social, cultural, economic, educational, religious backgrounds, their age, gender, ideology, etc. These considerations in turn influence the translation methodology, strategies, procedures, choices, etc as well as the type and level of the resulting translation.

The British philosopher John L Austin in his classic text ***How to Do Things with Words*** (1962) popularized the idea that we actually do things with words – with our sayings, statements, declarations, promises, oaths, curses, greetings, etc. This can be extended to the idea that we also actually do things with texts, including translated texts. The question of text-function thus becomes crucial. Those who initiate and commission any new translation need to investigate and determine which of the many possible desirable text functions, the resulting translation is intended to serve, i.e. the uses to which the intended text is expected to be put. In practice it is possible to have a translation that has no clearly defined text function and that has no clear audience, addressee or intended user in mind. Such a translation cannot be judged a success. To succeed a translation must have a clearly defined purpose and intended outcomes as well as a clearly defined audience group or addressee satisfying certain characteristics and values.

In Eugene Nida and Charles Taber's now classic text ***The Theory and Practice of Translation*** (1969), Nida and Taber spoke of two types of situations, namely (1) "those in which the language in question has a long

13) For a clear exposition and introduction to functionalist approaches to translation, see Christiane Nord's ***Translating as a Purposeful Activit*** (1997) or Hans Vermeer's "Skopos and Commission in translational action" in Lawrence Venuti, ed (2000), pp. 221-232.

literary tradition and in which the Scriptures have existed for some time and (2) those in which the language has no such literary tradition and in which the Scriptures have either not been translated or not so set in their form as to pose serious problems for revisers".[14] In these kinds of situation, Nida and Taber argued that "it is usually necessary to have three types of Scriptures: (1) a translation which will reflect the traditional usage and be used in the churches, largely for liturgical purposes (this may be called an 'ecclesiastical translation', (2) a translation in the present day literary language, so as to communicate to the well-educated constituency, and (3) a translation in the 'common' or 'popular' language, which is known to and used by the common people, and which is at the same time acceptable as a standard for published materials"[15]. In reference to the second situation above – which has no literary tradition and no Biblical text rooted in the life of the church – Nida and Taber added that "one must usually accept as the norm the oral form of the speech used in formal discourse".

A new look will reveal that so many other audience groups or addressees with real and diverse needs can now be readily identified, sometimes on the basis of consumer and market oriented empirical research. At the time of Nida's writing, priority and emphasis was placed on what has come to be known as a 'common language translation' of the Bible with the aim of catering to the needs of the second situation. In line with this emphasis, Nida and Taber spelt out a system of priorities. The key priority given there was that – 'The audience has priority over the forms of language'. Secondly he made clear that – 'Non-Christians have priority over Christians'. Thirdly that – 'The use of language by persons twenty five to thirty years of age has priority over the language of older people or of children', and lastly that – 'In certain situations the speech of women should have priority over the speech of men'.[16] The type of translation that meets these specifications was referred to as a 'common language translation' and for many years and in many places, was the preferred translation and was much championed by the Bible Societies. Some of what Nida and Taber spell out in these priorities would enter into what in modern parlance is referred to as the 'skopos' of the

14) Op. cit. p31. This text is usually referred to as TAPOT.

15) Ibid.

16) see TAPOT, pp31-32,

translation in question. Skopos simply stands for a clear definition of the intended purposes or uses of a translation in view of its intended audience or receivers.[17)]

It has increasingly become evident that a scientific market survey of Scripture needs is necessary to spell out the kinds of audience groups who should be addressed, or whose specific needs ought to be taken into account. The resulting list of addressees far outnumbers the three types identified by Nida and Taber. The segmentation or fragmentation (as some refer to it) of the target/receptor audience groups considerably increases the nature of the task and the ability to adequately satisfy existing needs. The church and those individual Christians who heavily sponsor or finance this enterprise are increasingly being faced with hard choices – how to use dwindling resources to meet expanding needs and how to prioritize among the competing Scripture needs.

The World – What does it does it have to do with text and church:

The Text – Church – World matrix is an inseparable three member set. The two member set of **text and church** alone – is clearly inadequate. A church with the Biblical text but out of touch with the world, would be irrelevant and unconnected with it. The church is of the world and part of the present world order. The church serves the world, is sent to the world and her mission is to the world. Similarly the two member set of - **church and world** – is equally inadequate. A church without the Biblical text would be ill equipped to face the world or to serve and minister to it. The text shapes the church and empowers for her mission. The matrix as is evident needs to be at the very minimum a three member set of **text- church- world**.[18)]

The church is necessarily in the world. She finds herself in specific world situations, specific world languages, specific cultural configurations, specific historical, political, social, economic, educational and religious conjunctures.

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17) see Hans Vermeer's paper (in L. Venuti 2000: 221-232) cited above for a discussion of this term.

18) See Francis Watson who looks at this <text-church-world> matrix in his book ***Text, Church and World – Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspectiv*** (1994) from a theological and hermeneutical point of view.

The church inevitably finds herself perceived to be part of a specific civilization, ethnic grouping, racial group, etc. even though she transcends all such entities and outlasts them. The nature and form of the world in which the church finds herself influences to a considerable degree the nature and form of the church – her color and shape, her texture and self identity, her fidelity to the Gospel of Christ, her effectiveness in witnessing to this message, etc. The church is called to be light and salt to the world around it, to be a symbol of the life, of truth and justice, of peace and reconciliation, of harmonious living and inclusiveness. If the church is true to herself and to her mission, or if the values that she preaches are embodied in her institutions and exemplified in the lives of her members – then inevitably the church is bound to impact and transform the world around her in a fundamental way.

The world is an amalgam of cultures and civilizations, of religions and contexts, of peoples and languages, of diverse value systems and traditions. The world is defined by diversity and plurality. Yet underlying all this is a unifying thread, namely the unity of humankind and human needs, the unity of our common destiny and common brotherhood and sisterhood in God, the Creator of all and the One Father and Mother of all. The message of the church has relevance and meaning only in this context. The Christian Scriptures are of universal and global import. This Gospel of the Kingdom is for the entire world and for all peoples:

> *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1.8)

> *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age".* (Matthew 28.19-20)

> *"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* (Revelation 7.9-10)

Bible translation is a mediation between languages and cultures, a bridge

between worlds and in the case of the Biblical text, a bridge between distant historical periods. Translation has been described as an act of not just of translating texts but of translating cultures, translating worlds. It needs to place one foot firmly in the world of the source text and its underlying source cultures and languages and the other foot firmly in the world of the target/receptor text and its underlying target cultures and languages. A competent translator is expected to be a master of both the source and target languages as well as steeped or immersed in their underlying cultures, a competent exegete of the source text and a mother tongue speaker / first language speaker of the target language. The languages and cultures embodied in the Biblical texts are not an exclusive property of believers but of all members of the cultures that produced these texts or in which those texts were produced. These texts are only subsets of the larger culture which is by definition larger than the sum of all its parts. There is in fact no exclusive Christian or holy language or culture exclusive to them as such. The language of any translation is part of the language of the larger culture – of which the language of any text is only a limited manifestation.

A proper understanding of any text therefore entails a full understanding of the group that produced it and the system of belief of which it is a part. Thus Christians understand the Biblical text in terms of their Christian practices, rituals, traditions, values, lifestyles, history, belief systems and interpretative or hermeneutical practices. But Christians are members of the world and of their societies. They share in the cultural practices, prejudices, or even crimes of their specific societies. National values, ethnic attitudes, civilizational hubris, ethnocentric myopia, etc. – all have a way of distorting or perverting the values and ideals of the Church in specific locations. A competent translator has therefore no alternative but to gain knowledge of the world of both the source text and target text. This will aid in understanding those who produced the source text as well as the world of which they were a part, and of understanding those who are the intended receivers of the translated text in the context of their faith communities, as well as understanding the larger world they inhabit – its language, culture, values, traditions, ideologies and alternative religions/belief systems, politics, economics, etc.

The <text, church and world> matrix and some implications for Bible translation:

The upshot of the foregoing is simply that Bible translation needs to take place in the context of the <text-church-world> matrix. This of course only applies to translations initiated or commissioned by the Church or Christian groups for purposes and uses of their choice. Translations by non-Church or non-Christian groups, including for example groups of secular scholars, or scholars of other religious or alternative belief systems, would by no means be governed by this matrix. In such cases their particular belief system would substitute for the 'church' slot in the schema, <text - ** - world>, where ** would be substituted by the name of the presuppositions or belief-system of whoever is translating, and then the same rules and considerations would apply.

Bible translators are servants of the churches or of whoever is the sponsor or financier of the translation project/s they are involved in. They receive instructions or the translation brief (skopos) from the sponsors/financiers of the project. The sponsors would normally specify in advance the type of audience or addressee for whom the translation is intended, the function or use for which the translation is intended or expected to be put, the type or kind of translation required or the type and level of language recommended for use, etc. Translators are expected to use their expertise and skills to produce a high quality product that is faithful to the original within the constraints of the skopos and that will be acceptable to the sponsors as well as to the intended recipients of the product.[19)]

Bible translators need to be trained to a very high level of competence. Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown writing mainly with commercial translation in view, includes among other key desirable requirements – the completion of a university degree in modern languages or linguistics as well as a postgraduate course in translation studies.[20)] As already indicated above they are expected to be competent mother tongue speakers or habitual users of the target/receptor language and also well trained to handle the intricacies and nuances of the source language text. They should moreover be knowledgeable

19) On this see Nord or Vermeer, op.cit.

20) See Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown, ***A Practical Guide for Translator***, (1993), p6.

in handling other texts in the source language and culture. They should have a wide knowledge of both the oral and written literature of their own mother tongue. Besides they should be trained in interpreting and competently analyzing the realities of the world of both the source and target language. These are high demands and very few translators in current Bible Society translation projects are able to meet them. Even the obvious and basic requirement that translators should normally translate into their mother tongue or language of habitual use is widely flouted, so much that the non-mother tongue translator is the unmarked case – i.e the norm! A quick look at many Bible translation journals shows this to be case. Non-mother tongue translators should in fact be the odd ones out.

The widespread practice of using other translations as source texts for third language target texts is another serious challenge that needs to be overcome. There is much benefit to be derived by moving directly from a source text in the original to the target text in a second language rather than via the medium of a secondary source text in a secondary language. This challenge is not as impossible as it has been made to appear. If resources are set aside for the adequate training of translators in Biblical languages, there is no reason why they would fail to master them. After all these languages are languages like any other. Prioritizing this need should make a real difference in the quality of the resulting Bible translations. Bypassing the secondary source texts and their languages will have the added benefit of bypassing the weaknesses and misreadings as well as the baggage and distortions that may flow from 'source' texts in secondary languages that may be far removed culturally and linguistically from the original source language and culture. It may happen that some target languages and cultures have more in common with the original source text and language, and that the secondary source texts and languages may obscure this fact in addition to creating their own peculiar problems unrelated to the original.[21)]

Working directly with the source texts and with a proper understanding of their underlying cultures is likely to greatly facilitate a direct comparative analysis of both the source and target cultures and languages. For a majority of African translation projects translators have often expressed the feeling that

21) On this point see also A.O.Mojola, "Bible Translation in African Christianity" in AICMAR Bulletin, Vol 1/2002:1-14.

the underlying Biblical source culture may be closer to the target African cultures than to the mediating secondary cultures, usually Western European. That this is so greatly contributes to satisfying the demands for the inculturation and contextualization of the Biblical message. This demand clearly follows from the fact of the incarnation. God became human and fully employed the full resources of the receptor culture to communicate the divine message of salvation. This has a link to translation methodology and approach.[22)]

Translations based on this perspective see the act of translation as essentially a cross-cultural communication challenge requiring every tool and insight needed for the understanding of persons, peoples, cultures and languages as well as of cultural products including texts in their original contexts[23)] From this perspective translation goes beyond the words or sentences in a given source text, and beyond the discourse units or entire text type to the immediate contexts within which a given text was produced. Moreover the circumstances of a text's production and the general contexts in which such texts are produced, including the entire underlying culture and its system of meaning production and communication − all these may provide a key to understanding a given text and to better rendering it in another language and culture. The new discipline of Translation Studies realizing the complexity of translation phenomena draws on a whole range of other disciplines. Basil Hatim[24)] includes in his list the following − contrastive analysis, sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, text linguistics, psycholinguistics, cultural studies, gender studies and literary studies, while Mona Baker[25)] for example includes − psychology, communication theory, literary theory, anthropology, philosophy and cultural studies. Baker goes on to remark that "The study of translation has gone far beyond the confines of any one discipline and it has become clear that research requirements in this area cannot be catered for by any existing field".[26)]

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22) See also Andrew Walls, ***The Missionary Movement in Christian History − studies in the transmission of the Fait*** (1996), pp. 27-28.

23) See David Katan, ***Translating Culture*** (1999), Basil Hatim, ***Communication Across Culture*** (1997), Eugene Nida, ***Message and Missio*** (1960). See further Andrew Walls, ***The Cross Cultural Process in Christian History- Studies in the transmission and appropriation of the Fait*** (2002).

24) See Basil Hatim, ***Teaching and Researchin*** (2001), pp80-84.

25) Mona Baker, ed. Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies, (1998), p.279.

In this interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary environment, a variety of methodological approaches to translation have become common place, among them – Linguistic, Literary, Semiotic, Interpretivist, Functionalist, Descriptive and system oriented and Post-colonial approaches. As indicated elsewhere by the present writer[27] :

> There remains however the question whether it is necessary in Scripture translation to commit oneself to any one theory, or to be eclectic and use whatever useful insight or technique there may be in any number of theories, for the accomplishment of one's task in accordance with the expected functions of the translation in question and the particular needs and situation of the audience envisaged. It seems to us that in the current interdisciplinary environment within translation studies, the question, as I see it, is no longer which theory is the correct one. Clearly an openness to helpful insights and ideas from whatever source or theoretical origin, seems to be the wiser move. This naturally calls for a certain healthy and critical eclecticism that draws on all available resources, data and information to create or recreate translations that are culture sensitive and attentive to the specifications/ commission/skopos of the translation project in question, while endeavouring to maintain fidelity to the source text within the constraints and limitations available for realizing this goal.

From the perspective of this presentation – Bible translation ultimately seeks to be faithful to the Text and to serving the interests of the Church and her mission to the World. What is important therefore is that the translator use the best tools at their disposal to produce high quality texts in the receptor language and culture that meet the needs of the intended target audience or group, in accordance with the intended uses of the translation in question. It is expected of the translator to be firmly focused on the original

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26) Ibid.

27) See Aloo Osotsi Mojola, **"*Rethinking the Place of Nida's Theory of Translation in the New Millenium: Scripture Translation in the Era of Translation Studies – A Critical Assessmet*"** p18 of original version of paper presented at the UBS TTW in Malaga, 2000, noy in abridged version in Tai-il Wang, ed. 2000: 277-304.

texts,

standing on the ground and soil of their faith community and the **church** that commissions the translation while at the same time taking into account the historical and cultural contexts of the underlying social worlds, that of the source text and that of the target language and culture.

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