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"Little girl, get up!" - The Story of Bible Translation

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Τὸ κοράσιον, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε

"Little girl, I say to you, arise." (RSV)

"Little girl, get up!" (CEV)

1. Introduction

The gospel writer Mark tells of a leader of the synagogue named Jairus who came to Jesus with a desperate request. His daughter was very ill and was dying and he asked Jesus to come and lay his hands on her so that she would be healed and would live. Jesus was apparently willing to help, but he was delayed on the way by a woman who wanted to be healed of an illness from which she had suffered for twelve years. Before he could reach the little girl, messengers arrived with the sad news that she had died. There was no longer any point in troubling the Teacher, they said. But Jesus did not accept the message and he did not want others to accept it either. "Do not fear, only believe," he told those around him. He continued on the way to Jairus' home, and when he arrived there, he remonstrated with those weeping outside the house. "She is not dead, only sleeping," he announced. Then he went inside to the child, took her by the hand and said, "'*Talitha cum!'* which means 'Little girl, get up!'" The narrator of the story reports, "The girl got straight up and started walking around" (CEV). Everyone was greatly surprised, but Jesus commanded them to tell no one what had happened and he instructed them to give the little girl something to eat!

2. *Talitha cum!* - The Power of the Word

In many societies words are very powerful. They may be used to communicate messages, and in their use they have power to effect both good and evil. Many words are not generally considered to be good things. In the Bible, likewise, the word has a creative function and it has a communicative role from Genesis to the Apocalypse.

2.1. The Word and Creation

The first spoken words that are recorded in the Old Testament are a command pronounced by the God of Creation, “Let there be light!” The Creation account then reports, “And there was light.” It affirms that the Creator judged the light to be good and he separated light from darkness. The account continues with the quotation of the next command of the Creator God without any commentary. The power of the words is assumed and accepted. No explanation is given by the writer of how the words of God were fulfilled in the Creation Story any more than Mark explains how Jesus’ words awakened the little girl from her sleep. Perhaps the ancient Israelites who first told this story orally understood the creative power of words; perhaps it was because the words were spoken by the Creator himself that they were fulfilled. In any case, the narrators who preserved the ancient oral account preserved the words in the quoted form as though an unknown listener had recorded the very words of God’s mouth. Those who wrote the story then presented them in the form of direct quotation because this was the style that was used by the Hebrew Scriptures for portraying the dramatic force of words.

An extension of the creative power of words is found in words of blessing. Very early in the Creation Story God’s words not only created but also blessed. God’s first blessing was pronounced on the sea monsters and the fishes and the birds, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth,” he said (Gen 1.22 RSV). The story of Genesis includes other blessings to give good life, to give children and to protect and prolong life. But there are also curses, and the first curse is a result of the first sin. Curses are the opposite of blessings: they take away life and bring sorrow and tragedy to the victim of the curse. The power of words is reflected in the English terms, “benediction” and “malediction” from

Latin roots that mean literally “good speaking” and “bad speaking”.

Indeed, poets have long known the power of words. Ancient Greek poets and dramatists used satire in their poetry and plays, and Roman poets developed satire into the form of a poetic genre. This was poetry that used irony, innuendo and derision to attack someone the poet considered not to be living according to accepted social standards. To be targeted by the poet was frightening and dangerous. In more recent times, the African poets of *négritude* have spoken of the creative power of the poet. To record an event in a poem is not merely to describe the event, but to create it. Naming is creating.

Throughout the Scriptures the creative power of words is evident. John proclaims this truth in the prologue to his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Jesus’ words to the little girl, “Talitha cum!” are an expression of benediction in its most literal sense. They are a command that recreates life in Jairus’ daughter. The result is an unexpected turn of events for the mourners, a wonderful surprise for everyone who witness the event, and a call to get on with the daily tasks of life, specifically, to give her something to eat!

2.2. The Word and Communication

The role of words in communication is an important theme in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The book of Genesis establishes this biblical theme in God’s communication with Adam and Even and in their broken communication after the Fall. But the epitome of this theme is found in the story of the Tower of Babel. Humankind was able to accomplish great things through cooperation in planning and in laboring together, but God was displeased with their arrogant scheming and he announced,

> These people are working together because they all speak the same language. This is just the beginning. Soon they will be able to do anything they want. Come on! Let’s go down and confuse them by making them speak different languages - then they won’t be able to understand each other. (Gen 11.6-7 CEV)

The result of God’s decision, though once again it is not reported how he

carried out his plan, was that the work on the Tower came to a rapid end, “because the LORD confused their language and scattered them over all the earth” (Gen 11.8-9 CEV). Clearly, the builders had no experience in translation and were unable to restore communication across the newly existing barrier of language on such short notice.

In the book of Esther it is recorded that King Xerxes ruled over an empire that extended from India in the east to Ethiopia in the west. Maintaining effective political control over this vast empire required a highly developed and effective system of communication. When Haman plotted to destroy the Jews in the entire kingdom, he called upon the King’s secretaries to write letters “to every province in its own script and every people in its own language” (Esther 3.12 RSV). Royal couriers carried these messages to all the high provincial officials and national leaders throughout the empire. When Esther pleaded with the King for the life of her people, a second message was sent throughout the 127 provinces of the empire. This one likewise was written in all the scripts and all the languages of the kingdom, including the language of the Jews in their own script. The messages were marked with the King’s seal and were taken by horsemen mounted on swift horses throughout the empire. Obviously, translators and interpreters played an important role in the Persian courts of antiquity.

The profusion of languages that resulted from God’s night-time creative act at the Tower of Babel finds its dénouement in the New Testament event of Pentecost. The writer of the book of The Acts of the Apostles records that the apostles were gathered together and, “The Holy Spirit took control of everyone, and they began speaking whatever languages the Spirit let them speak” (Acts 2.2 CEV). The result was that many different nationalities and races from three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe, heard the men from Galilee speaking in their own languages about God’s powerful deeds. The language barrier that was established by God at the Tower of Babel is broken by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the apostles on the Day of Pentecost.

Each of these events is a record of the communication of an important message. At the Tower of Babel, the message that the people were communicating to one another was a message of human arrogance and rebellion against God. The messages that were sent in the name of King

Xerxes throughout his kingdom brought first a message of death and despair, then a counter message of life and hope. The message that Jairus brought to Jesus was his personal request for help, but messengers soon arrived with a different message. Theirs was a message of sorrow about a change in circumstances that should logically have changed Jesus' course of action. But Jesus continued on the basis of the first message. He also refused to accept the message of the mourners whose weeping was an announcement of death. After raising up Jairus' daughter, he commanded the people not to communicate to others what they had seen. On Pentecost Day, the ability of the apostles to speak other languages allowed them to communicate the Good News of salvation.

3. *Talitha cum!* - Transmitting the Message

The history of the translation of the Bible is the story of the communication of the Word of God to the people of the world. This is a direct response to the "Great Commission" of Jesus in Matthew 28.18-20 and of his final words to his disciples as recorded in Acts 1.8. In New Testament terms, the aim of Scripture translation is the communication of the Good News.

3.1. Translation in the Bible

In his account of the raising of Jairus' daughter, the gospel writer Mark performs an act of translation in his text. He recognizes that some of his readers or hearers may not understand the Aramaic words of Jesus to the little girl that he quotes verbatim. Therefore, within his text, he gives the meaning in Greek,[1] as he explains with the phrase "which means." Literally, the Greek explanation is a relative clause, "what is translated" or "which is interpreted." There follows the writer's own Greek translation of the original Aramaic text. Mark takes his reader from a source text to a receptor text.

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1) Several times in his Gospel he gives Aramaic or Hebrew words and then provides an interpretation. They may be a personal name ("Sons of Thunder", 3.17), a place name (Golgotha, 15.22), a command as here and "Ephphatha!" (7.34), and Jesus' cry on the cross (15.34), "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

If this is an example of translation within the biblical text, the history of Scripture translation also goes back to the Bible itself. The first account of a translation event is related in Nehemiah 8.1-12 when the Jews had returned from 70 years in Babylonian captivity. After resettling in their old home territory, the people gathered in Jerusalem and called upon Ezra the priest and scribe to bring out the Law of Moses and read it to them. Ezra and the Levites read to the people, men, women and children who could listen with understanding. But the people had adopted the Aramaic language while they were in Babylon and they did not understand the Hebrew of the Torah when they heard it read. So the Levites helped them to understand. “They gave an oral translation of God's Law and explained it so that the people could understand it” (Neh 8.8 GNB).

The only record of written translation in the Scriptures is found in the Prologue to the deuterocanonical book Ecclesiasticus that is also known as The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach. This book was originally written in Hebrew in about 180 B.C. and according to the Prologue it was translated into Greek by Sirach’s grandson who spent some years in Egypt during the reign of King Euergetes. In his foreword to the book he writes, “I wanted to use all my diligence and skill to complete it and make it available for all those living in foreign lands,” but he adds that Hebrew and Greek are not identical. Therefore, he asks his readers, “And please be patient in those places where, in spite of all my diligent efforts, I may not have translated some phrases very well” (GNB).

Sirach’s grandson refers in his foreword to other books that had already been translated into Greek. He cites specifically the Law and the Prophets and indicates that there were other books also. In fact, it was just before and during this time that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures called the Septuagint was translated. This was also done in Egypt in Alexandria. According to the “legend of the Septuagint” (Robinson 1997:4), this was a committee project in which 6 scribes representing each of the 12 tribes of Israel were sent by Eleazer the high priest in Jerusalem to Egypt. They worked in teams of two translators for 72 days, each team in isolation from the others. All the teams translated the Hebrew text and their drafts were identical, this being proof of the divine inspiration of their work. In honor of the seventy-two translators, the translation was given the name “Septante” or

"Septuagint", often referred to as the "LXX". This Greek translation was the version of Hebrew Scriptures that was used extensively by the Jewish community during and shortly after the time of Christ. This was the version that was quoted most often by the New Testament writers.[2)]

Just as Mark wanted his readers to understand the meaning of his original text, the early Christians wanted their message to be understood. From the time of Pentecost, Jewish Christians were scattered very widely both because Jews had been living in distant countries before then and because of persecutions that soon befell the Christians. But their vision was not one of a closed faith. It was open and the Word of the Incarnate Christ was soon translated from the Greek of the LXX and of the New Testament writings into new languages.

3.2. History of Bible Translation

The history of Bible translation may be broken into several eras. Eugene Nida speaks of four principal translation periods in terms of church activity (Nida 1972:ix-x). These eras are essentially historical, but each represents an important period of translation activity.

1.early Christians and the dominant languages of the Ancient world

1.Reformation

1."Great Missionary Endeavor"

1.mother tongue translators in new churches and common language translations

3.2.1. Early Church Era

The first era of Scripture translation was the time of the consolidation and expansion of the early Christian church. During this time the Christian church and, with it, Scripture translation moved in three broad directions from its early beginning in Egypt, eastward across Asia, southward and west across northern Africa, and northward and east into Europe.

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2) Extensive study is being conducted by scholars to understand the translation methods and techniques that were used by the translators of the Septuagint. See, among others, Olofsson 1990.

Following the translation of the LXX within the Jewish community in Egypt, the earliest translation activity apparently occurred in Old Syriac. Syriac was a Semitic language closely related to Aramaic that was spoken to the north-east of Palestine around the upper Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. It was the literary language of Edessa in what is now south-eastern Turkey. Parts of the Pentateuch were translated into Syriac as early as the 1st century A.D. (Wegner 1999:242). It is not known whether the earliest translation was done by Jews, by Jewish Christians, or by non-Jewish Christians.[3] By the 3rd century Edessa was an important Christian center. The 5th century revision of the Syriac translation called the Peshitta was influenced by the Septuagint. The Syriac Scriptures were taken eastwards to India at a very early date and in the 6th century the Peshitta was taken by the Nestorians to what is now called Sri Lanka and to China. Although it is reported that the Nestorians had translated the Gospels into Chinese for Emperor Tai-Tsung by 640 A.D., no samples remain of that translation (Nida 1972:70).

During the 1st century A.D. the Christian church was becoming established in Alexandria. The Apostle Mark is believed to have brought Christianity to Egypt and Libya. By 65 A.D. the first church was founded in Alexandria. It used both the LXX and Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The oldest manuscript fragments of the Gospel of John dating to the 2nd century were found in Egypt.

The Christian church grew in North Africa moving up the Nile River and westward along the Mediterranean coast. Translation took place in Egyptian languages possibly as early as the 2nd century. By the end of the 3rd century the entire Bible had been translated into the Coptic dialect called Sahidic. This dialect was spoken in Upper Egypt but became extinct by the 10th century. In the 6th-7th centuries the Bible was translated into Bohairic, the dialect of Lower Egypt. This was the language of Alexandria and it became the language of the Coptic Church and is used liturgically up to the present day, although popular use died out in the 17th century. These translations, and those in other Coptic dialects, were all from the Septuagint.

Far to the west in Carthage, in what is today Tunisia, a Christian community had been established by the end of the 2nd century. Some three

3) In the 2nd century a new and very literal Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was made by Aquila to replace the LXX for the Jews.

centuries earlier Rome had defeated Carthage and many Romans lived in Carthage and the surrounding area. Although the local languages were Punic and Berber, the language of commerce and of the elite was Latin, and this was the language of the Christians. It is possible that the earliest Latin translations of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament texts, were done in North Africa in what is now referred to as "Old Latin" (Wegner 1999:250-251). There were many "Old Latin" translations dating from about 150-220 AD, one of which is known as "Afra". Because of the widespread early translation of the Scriptures that occurred in North Africa, beginning with the Septuagint, Africa has been called "the cradle of Bible translation" (Sugirtharajah 2001:31).[4)]

Meanwhile, in Asia the Christian church was moving northward into Armenia and Georgia. Tradition relates that the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddaeus went to Armenia. However, it was through the efforts of St Gregory the Illuminator that Armenia became the first nation to officially adopt Christianity as the state religion. This occurred at the end of the 3rd century or the beginning of the 4th century. The Bible was translated into Armenian in the beginning of the 5th century. The names of two translators are associated with the Armenian Bible, Mesrop who devised the alphabet for Armenian, and Patriarch Sahak. The translation was done from both Greek and Syriac source texts, since both languages were known by the translators and their assistants (Delisle and Woodsworth 1995:12).

Georgia lay to the north of Armenia and some traditions identify the creation of the Georgian alphabet, as well as the Albanian alphabet, with Mesrop. Christianty was introduced into Georgia in the 4th century through a slave woman named Nino (Wegner 1999:248). She was a Christian who had been captured by the Georgian king and who later became a nun. Translation of the Scriptures had begun by the middle of the 5th century and was probably based at first on the Armenian translation.

Meanwhile, to the south of Egypt there were Nubia and Ethiopia. The Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized by the Apostle Philip was from the royal court of Candace in Meroe in the land that was called Cush or Nubia. According to tradition, he returned to his homeland with his new faith, but

4) See Ype Schaaf's book *On Their Way Rejoicing*(1994) for an account of Bible translation and the church in Africa. See also Noss 2001.

there is no evidence of the establishment of a Christian church at that time. However, it is known that the Gospel had reached Nubia by the 3rd century and there was an established church in the 5th and 6th centuries. The Nubian language was written with the Greek alphabet and parts of the Bible were translated into Nubian from Greek source texts. The Christian church flourished until the 16th century when it finally succumbed to Arab and Islamic influence.

To the south-east of Nubia in what is the modern state of Ethiopia, legends recall the journey of the Queen of Sheba to visit King Solomon in Jerusalem. The son that she bore from her visit to King Solomon became Menelik the First, king of Axum, the capital of Ethiopia. Legend further maintains that his mother took him back to Jerusalem to be educated and when he returned to Axum with the son of the high priest, they brought back the Ark of the Covenant to Axum where it is said to be preserved to the present day.

It is not known precisely when the Christian church came to Ethiopia. The story is told of two young men named Frumentius and Aedesius from Syria who had travelled to India by sea in the 4th century. The two men were captured along the Red Sea coast of present-day Eritrea and were taken to the royal court in Axum where they were given good treatment. They were assigned duties in the court and they received a royal education. Through Frumentius the royal family became Christian. Many years later when they were allowed to leave Axum, Frumentius went to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria and asked him to send a bishop to Axum. The bishop consecrated Frumentius himself and sent him back to Ethiopia.

According to some traditions Bishop Frumentius translated the Bible into Ge'ez, the language of the people of Axum. According to other traditions a group of monks known as the "Nine Saints" came to Ethiopia from Syria and it was they who translated the Bible. By the end of the 6th century the entire Bible had been translated into Ge'ez, or Ethiopic, as it is also called. The source text was the Greek although there is also Syriac influence. This is the Bible that is used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church today. It has 54 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament for a total of 81 books, making it the longest Christian canon. It includes the books of Jubilees and Enoch that are not found in either the LXX or the Vulgate.

3.2.2. Reformation Era

Nida's second major period of translation activity is associated with the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. This is combined with the invention of the Gutenberg Printing press in the mid-15th century. The combination of the reformers' call for the Bible to be made available to the people instead of remaining essentially in the hands of the clergy and the relatively easy and inexpensive means of mass producing books on the printing press was a great boon to Scripture translation and distribution.

During several centuries before the time of the Reformation, there was relatively little translation activity. In Africa the Nubian and Ethiopian churches did not translate the Scriptures into the languages of the surrounding local peoples. In North Africa, the language of the church was Greek in the east and Latin in the west. These were the languages of business and trade, of the Jewish diaspora and of Roman colonizers. Even Augustine, of Punic origins himself, who took great interest in translation, preferred to use the Old Latin versions and gravitated toward Rome rather than toward his own African origins. Some would argue that one of the reasons why the church disappeared in North Africa, apart from the Coptic Church in Egypt, was the fact that the Bible was not translated into the languages of the people. Scripture translation did not move south of the Sahara Desert until the Missionary Era.

The earliest Arabic translations of Scripture occurred relatively late. Numerous manuscripts exist from the 9th and 10th centuries, although Scripture translation may have taken place as early as the 7th century. Early Arabic Old Testament translations were based on the Coptic translations that were themselves based on the Greek Septuagint.

In Asia the Syriac translation has already been mentioned above. This was the translation that was used in India by the church that St.Thomas had founded. The first missionaries from the West encountered this Bible when they arrived in India at the beginning of the missionary era. No translation was done into local languages by the church in India until a translation was made into Malayalam in 1811 from the Syriac. In China Bible translations

were reported in the 13th century, but no actual evidence of these translations has survived (Nida 1972:70).

Up until the time of the Reformation the Bible that was used throughout the church in Europe was mainly the Latin Vulgate. In the east the translation of the Slavonic Bible was begun by St. Cyril and after his death was completed by his brother Methodius in the 9th century. This Bible in the Slavic language became the liturgical translation of the Church. This version, like the Syriac and Armenian versions that were also used by the eastern church, was based on the Septuagint.

Among Reformation translators, the greatest recognition usually goes to Martin Luther who translated the Bible into his own German language. Martin Luther espoused a specific type of translation: one based on the language as spoken by the people. His emphasis was on clear communication of the biblical message. Because of Luther's translation technique and his mastery of language, this Bible in its language and style established a lasting standard for German language and literary expression. The translation itself, "the Luther Bible," remains in use, after numerous revisions, still today.

The first book to be printed on the Gutenberg Press was the two-volume Vulgate in 1456 that is known as the "Gutenberg Bible". Ten years later the second Bible was printed. This was the German Bible printed in 1466, the first modern language Bible to be printed. By the end of that century, at least a portion of Scripture had been printed in 12 different languages (Nida 1972:484). Of these languages only Hebrew and Aramaic were not European languages. By 1500 the Scriptures had been translated into a total of 35 languages worldwide. Three centuries later, at the beginning of the 19th century, the total stood at 74 (Smalley 1991:34).

3.2.3. Missionary Era

The beginnings of the modern era of Christian work are to be found in the 16th and 17th centuries and through the 18th century. In their early missionary activity in Africa and the Americas, Catholic missionaries mostly used the Vulgate, although they did translate Scripture texts for use in catechisms and lectionaries, for example, in Angola in Kikongo in the 16th century and Kimbundu in the 17th century, and in Mexico in Nahuatl and in

Peru in Quechua both in the 16th century (Mitchell 2001:420-21). Roman Catholic translation activity also took place in China in the 16th century.

The 19th century was the era of the "Great Missionary Endeavor" as Nida called it. The Industrial Revolution had taken place in Europe, the period of colonization by European powers was beginning, and spiritual awakening was occurring in Europe with religious movements that were both local and international. This was a period of much missionary activity, mostly going out from the Christian churches of Europe and North America to the rest of the world. It was a time of intense translation activity. During the 19th century alone, the Scriptures were translated into 446 new languages. This missionary activity continued in the 20th century and by its end at least a Scripture portion had been published in an additional 1390 new languages for a total of 2287 languages.[5)]

Many of the foreign mission bodies supported Bible translation work, but much credit must also go to the Bible Society Movement that traces its beginning to March 7, 1804, when the first Bible Society was formed. This was the British and Foreign Bible Society and it upheld three principles, namely, "a missionary and evangelistic concern, a world vision, and an inter-denominational undertaking in the service of and on behalf of all Churches" (Béguin 1965:12). The formation of new Bible Societies occurred rapidly during the early part of the 19th Century, spreading from the British Isles to the European mainland and in all directions overseas. Late in the same year of 1804 a Bible Society was formed in Basle in Switzerland. In 1806 the Dublin Bible Society was formed, in the United States of America the Philadelphia Bible Society began in 1808, and the Finnish Bible Society in 1812. In the same year Bible Society activity began in Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, and in Ceylon. It began a year earlier in East Pakistan. In Africa Bible Society work began in Ethiopia in 1812, in South Africa a Bible Society was founded in 1820. During the early part of the 19th Century the Bible Society Movement spread throughout the world.

The primary goal of the Bible Societies was to make the Scriptures available to Christians and non-Christians. The Bible was to be provided without notes and doctrinal comment in languages the people could

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5) See United Bible Societies, *World Annual Repor* 2001, p. 330.

understand and at prices they could afford to pay. Where there were no Scriptures available in a language, translation was required. As early as 1818 the American Bible Society published its first Scriptures in Native American languages of North America. In 1819 the British and Foreign Bible Society opened a Translation Department.

The beginning surge of missionary Bibles came in the late 18th century in Asia with the Tamil Bible in 1727 and the Malay Bible in 1733. The first Chinese Bible was Joshua Marshman's translation in 1822 immediately followed by Robert Morrison's Chinese Bible in 1823. The surge continued with the Malagasy Bible, the first Bible in Africa, in 1835, and the first in the Pacific Islands in Tahitian in 1838. By the end of the 19th century some portion of the Scriptures had been translated into 620 languages (Smalley 1991:34).[6)]

The impetus for this immense translation effort came from the missionaries themselves, who actively learned new languages, wrote them down, and began translating the Bible with the help of new Christians and sometimes with the assistance of non-Christians. The impetus came equally from mission boards and the Bible Societies who provided financial and organizational support.

3.2.4. Modern Era

The Modern Era may be associated generally with the mid 20th-century period when the "winds of change" were blowing, marking the end of the colonial era. Political independence was often accompanied by ecclesiastical independence and a diminishing role of the traditional missionary. Translation methods also changed, with emphasis on anthropology and linguistics and a more professional approach to translation. From literal and formal translations, the new approach called for common language levels and dynamic and then functional equivalence.[7)] The emphasis was on the message less than on the form. Instead of missionary translators, mother tongue speakers of the language became the primary translators. The Bible Societies were in the forefront of this movement.

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6) For summaries of Bible translation in Asia, see Ogden 2001 and for Europe see Ellingworth 2001.

7) See Nida 1964; Taber and Nida 1982; Larson 1984; Wilt, ed. 2002.

In 1946 individual Bible Societies established a world fellowship of Bible Societies that is known as the United Bible Societies. This organization today includes 138 member Bible Societies that are located and that work in over 200 nations and territories around the world.[8)]

In the earliest days of Bible Society development there was openness to common efforts with Roman Catholics. However, in 1826 the British and Foreign Bible Society, under pressure from Scottish revivalist movements, not only barred publication of the books that are referred to by Protestants as the "Apocrypha", but they even decided to cease to collaborate with other Bible Societies that did publish and distribute Bibles that included the Deuterocanonical books. Although there were occasional contacts and even overtures that resulted in very limited co-operation between certain Bible Societies in Great Britain and the United States with the Roman Catholic Church, the ecclesiastical division that resulted from the Protestant Reformation was not easily bridged.

Nevertheless, during the past half-century the climate of alienation and frequently even of hostility has undergone a radical change. Many factors may be cited as having contributed to this change. Perhaps the most important was the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Pope Paul VI's pronouncements in 1965 on the importance of Scripture as the basis for preaching, on easy access to the Scriptures, and on co-operation in the translation of the Scriptures. Today nearly one-half of Bible Society translation projects are inter-confessional.[9)]

Most recently, discussions have been initiated and agreements have been made between the Bible Societies and Orthodox Churches for cooperation in Scripture translation and publication. Currently the Greek Bible Society is translating the Septuagint into Modern Greek, the revision of the Patriarchate Bible in Armenian is underway through the Armenian Bible Society, and Slavonic and Syriac text projects are underway through the Bible Societies of Russia and Turkey respectively. In Africa the Bible Society of Ethiopia is

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8) For a history of the United Bible Societies, see *Taking the Word to the World: Fifty Years of the United Bible Societie* by Edwin H. Robertson (1996).

9) The United Bible Societies and the Vatican have signed a document entitled *Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bibl* (1968, 1987in which guidelines are set down for joint translation projects.

working with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on a new edition of the ancient Ge'ez New Testament and on a new translation of the complete Orthodox Bible into Modern Amharic.

A number of similar organizations have been created with the primary goal of Bible translation. The oldest and largest of these is Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT) and their academic counterpart, Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), who work closely with the Bible Societies in many parts of the world. Their main focus has been in writing down hitherto unwritten languages and translating the New Testament into these new languages. Increasingly they are also becoming engaged in Old Testament translation. The International Bible Translators (IBT), the Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT), the Pioneer Bible Translators (PBT), the International Bible Society (IBS) and Bibles International (BI) are all dedicated to the same task of Bible translation. Nearly 20 sister organizations have joined together in the "Forum of Bible Agencies" to promote common efforts in the translation and distribution of the Scriptures.

3.3. Bible Translators

The development and movement of Scripture translation can be traced chronologically across geographic areas, but often a translation is due to the vision and the effort primarily of one person, even though others may be brought into the effort. In the following paragraphs brief sketches are provided of four translators who represent different eras, different traditions, and different approaches to translation. The four representative translators are the following:

- Bishop Wulfilas who reduced the first language to writing for Bible translation
- St. Jerome, a churchman who might have become pope but who instead became the "father" of the Vulgate
- William Carey, one of the first translators of the classical missionary tradition
- Bishop Samuel Ajai Crowther, an African Christian who became a churchman and a translator of the Bible into his own language

3.3.1. Bishop Wulfilas

Wulfilas or Ulfila (311?-383?), whose name means “Little Wolf”, was a Goth and was born in what is now Romania. Later in life he fled religious persecution and moved to the area that is Bulgaria today where he remained the rest of his life. Wulfilas owed his Christian faith to his Roman Christian ancestors on his mother’s side who had been captured by the Goths in their raids on Cappadocia in what is now eastern Turkey. He was a reader in religious services and studied the Bible. When he was about 30 years old, he was consecrated bishop and he worked to evangelize the people he was serving. However, he came to realize that a translation in the language of the people was necessary if his efforts were to succeed. Because the Gothic language was not written, he devised an alphabet of 27 characters using Greek and Latin letters and a few German runic letters to write the language. He thus became the first of many Bible translators who have first had to reduce a language to writing before they could undertake translation in the language.

For the next forty years he translated the Bible into Gothic, basing his translation on the Septuagint. The New Testament translation was based on the Byzantium text. His approach was a very literal word-for-word approach, closely following the Greek syntax. Because he did not want to encourage the Goths in their bellicose ways, he left out the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings with their stories of Israel’s wars. Nevertheless, the Goths continued to fight and in the 5th century the Gothic Bible went with them as far as Spain and Italy. Few fragments remain of this translation, except the beautifully decorated 6th century *Codex Argentus* in the library of the University of Uppsala in Sweden.

3.3.2. St. Jerome

Jerome, whose full name was Eusebius Hieronymus (345?-420), is known today as the patron saint of translators. He was born into a Christian family in Dalmatia in modern Yugoslavia and at the age of 12 he was sent to Rome to get an education. There he was a student of the best-known grammarian of the day, the famous Aelius Donatus. He studied rhetoric and

the Classical authors, Vergil, Cicero and Horace, among others. From Rome he travelled as a young man throughout the Roman Empire. He went to Antioch where he studied Greek but while there he became very ill. During his illness he had a dream in which he found himself being judged. When he was asked who he was and he replied that he was a Christian, the Judge replied, “Thou liest, thou art a follower of Cicero and not of Christ”. In his dream he promised from then on to read only “the books of God” (Wegner 1999:254). From Antioch he went to the desert of Chalcis in Syria where he lived for two years as a hermit. Here he learned Hebrew as well as gaining a great appreciation for an ascetic way of life. He returned to Rome in 382 and was appointed secretary to Pope Damasus who commissioned him to revise and standardise the Latin Bible.

As Jerome began his work, he saw the disarray of the Scripture translations in Old Latin and he began to revise them, working first on the Psalms and the New Testament from Greek texts that were available to him. However, he soon became convinced that he needed to go back to the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament instead of the Septuagint which was itself a translation from the Hebrew. In 384 when Pope Damasus died, Jerome returned to Bethlehem where he studied Hebrew and translated the Old Testament books into Latin from the Hebrew source text. He completed the work in 405 and his translation came to be known as the Vulgate, which means “popular” or “common”. It was in the popular or common Latin of the day and it was not immediately accepted by churchmen who preferred the archaisms of the “Old Latin”. Gradually, however, its merits were recognized and at the Council of Trent in 1546 it was pronounced the official Bible of the Church. The Vulgate has served the Church for more than a thousand years, longer than any other translation of the Bible.

Jerome held the accuracy of the original text in great esteem and he attempted to provide a critical text for the New Testament (Baker 1998:497). His approach to translation as stated in his famous letter to Pammachius in 395 was “sense for sense and not word for word.” This was clearly influenced by his study of Cicero’s approach to translation. Nevertheless, he also seemed to make allowances for what is called today Sacred Text by arguing that even the order of the words had meaning.

3.3.3. William Carey

William Carey (1761-1834) was "the prototypical missionary-translator-scholar, writ large" (Smalley 1991:40). Coming from a very humble background in England, Carey went to India in 1793 and became a missionary legend in his own time. He had very little formal education and was mostly self-taught, learning Latin and Greek and Hebrew from books and grammars that he borrowed. He also learned to read French and Dutch and Italian. With this linguistic background he went with his wife to work in India.

On arrival in India he took up employment with the East India Company because he believed that missionaries should be self-supporting. He set about learning Bengali, partly relying on a translation that had been done by an earlier missionary. He soon became convinced that the translation he was using was not acceptable and he began to do his own translation. Carey's Bengali New Testament was completed three years after he arrived in India!

In 1799 Carey was joined by two new colleagues, William Ward, a printer, and Joshua Marshman, a translator and scholar like Carey. The three of them established a printing press at Serampore, a Danish colony. Carey revised his Bengali New Testament several times and published it in 1801 on the new press. The Pentateuch in Bengali also translated by Carey followed in 1802. Carey soon realized the importance of Sanskrit as a religious language. He set about learning Sanskrit and he translated the Bible into Sanskrit. Then he learned Marathi and translated the Bible, and then Hindi. For each language except Hindi he wrote a grammar and a dictionary. His colleague Joshua Marshman translated the Bible into Chinese and published the first full Chinese Bible on the Serampore Press in 1822.

In addition to the translations that Carey did himself, he also worked with teams of native speakers. They would translate, he would correct their drafts, and the translations would be published. In this way Scripture translations in a total of 40 languages had been published on the Serampore Press by 1832, in addition to numerous grammars and dictionaries and other materials.

In retrospect, however, there were fatal flaws in Carey's approach to Bible translation. Perhaps it was his early method of learning languages that flawed

his understanding of the subtleties of natural language use. Perhaps it was his failure to understand the nature of mother-tongue speech. Partly, it was also his own lack of both formal linguistic and biblical training. In addition, there was his emphasis on “accuracy” that he attempted to achieve by following the wording and structure of the original Greek and Hebrew as closely as possible. In any case, very few of the translations produced at Serampore were greatly used. Nevertheless, Lamin Sanneh observes that the significance of William Carey was not in the numbers of languages, but in the important influence that he and his colleagues had through their linguistic, literary, agricultural, and botanical efforts, through launching education schemes and new industries, and through efforts in the area of social reform. And as a missionary, Sanneh writes, “Carey allowed for the indigenous expression of Christianity, trusting that the gospel, faithfully proclaimed, would stimulate the arrangements proper to it” (1989:101).

3.3.4. Bishop Samuel Crowther

Samuel Adjai Crowther (1810-1889) is a predecessor of contemporary Third World Christians who have become translators of the Scriptures in their own languages. He was a Yoruba born in what is now Nigeria. As a 12-year old boy he was taken as a slave and was put on a Portuguese ship going to America. The ship was stopped by a British warship and its cargo of slaves was freed and taken to Freetown in Sierra Leone. Here the boy was introduced to Christianity, he was baptized, and he became the first student at Fourah Bay College, the first secondary school in Africa. He became a teacher and an Anglican catechist and in 1841 he participated in the Niger Expedition on behalf of the Church Missionary Society to explore possibilities for mission work inland along the Niger River. When the Expedition failed, he returned to Sierra Leone and was sent for theological studies in England. He was ordained the first African priest of the Church of England and was later consecrated a bishop.

From England Bishop Crowther returned to Sierra Leone where he preached the Gospel to the freed Yoruba slaves in their own language. Then in 1845 he returned to his home area of Abeokuta in Nigeria in a team of three missionaries, an Englishman, a German and himself a Yoruba. On the occasion of his mother’s baptism, he translated the baptismal liturgy into

Yoruba. Then he began translating the Bible, starting first with the Epistle to the Romans, then the Gospel of Luke, and next the Book of Genesis, followed by the book of Exodus. Starting the work alone, he enlisted others to help him until he was supervising a team of both Yoruba and missionary translators. The Yoruba New Testament was published in 1862 and in a revised edition in 1865. The complete Yoruba Bible was published in 1884 and with various revisions, it is still being used today.

4. *Talitha cum!* - Translating the Words

The Bible is without doubt the most translated document in the world, but that is not to say that translating it is easy or simple. As has been indicated in the historical overview above, there has often been controversy and difference of opinion over what to translate and how to translate. Wulfila was so concerned over the accuracy of his translation that it is questionable how well his translation could have been understood by its intended audience (Wegner 1999:256). Jerome took a more free stance regarding translation and became embroiled in argument with the theologian Augustine, among others, over his approach to translation. Carey, like Wulfila, was concerned about accuracy, but unlike Wulfila, he was not a mother tongue speaker of the languages he translated and his approach to translation seriously compromised the quality of his translations. Crowther's approach to translation was similar to Martin Luther's and his Bible translation holds a place in Yoruba literary tradition that is similar to the place of Martin Luther's Bible in the history of German language and literature.

The challenges facing the translator are many and in the following paragraphs we will briefly survey several of them:

1. translation principles and issues in the Aramaic text and its Greek translation of Jesus' command to Jairus' daughter
2. translation of names of God
3. interpretation and translation of key terms
4. transmission of source language literary form and the appropriation of receptor language literary form

4.1. Translation Issues

Jerome's translation principle of "sense for sense" was a precursor to Eugene Nida's principle of functional equivalence. By this principle, the emphasis was placed, not on imitating the words and the structure of the original, but on the communication of their meaning. Jerome defended his approach using Mark's translation of Jesus' words to Jairus' daughter (Nida 1964:13).

Aramaic: Ταλιθα κουμ.

Greek: Τὸ κοράσιον, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε.

RSV: "Little girl, I say to you, arise."

CEV: "Little girl, get up!" (CEV)

The Aramaic source text is comprised of two words. The first is a feminine noun meaning "little girl" or "maiden". It is a vocative, that is, it is a form of address. Jesus is addressing the little girl. The Greek noun is a diminutive. Therefore, RSV and CEV both say "little girl" while some French versions use the French diminutive *fillette*. The second word is a singular second person imperative verb form that expresses a command, "arise" or "get up." Jerome justified his own free translation style by pointing to the Gospel writer's insertion of the clause, "I say to you," that does not occur in the source text. In contemporary translation terminology, it could be said the Mark was making explicit what was implicit in the original text. The RSV faithfully represents the Greek translation of the Aramaic source text. CEV, on the other hand, translates the Aramaic, omitting Mark's addition.[10)]

There are two additional textual problems that are found in the manuscripts of this text. Some manuscripts have "Tabitha" in place of "Talitha". According the Metzger (1975:87), this is a result of confusion by scribes with the proper name in Acts 9.40 where Peter says to the woman who had this name, "Tabitha, arise." The second textual problem is in the verb form. The gender of the Aramaic noun is feminine, but the verb form "cum" is

10) Compare the parallel passage in Luke 8.54 where the same event is recorded and the quoted words of Jesus do not include "I say to you." See, however, Luke 7.14 where in a similar situation, Jesus does add these words to his command to the young man to rise up.

masculine. The more correct grammatical form in the feminine gender is “cumi” and this is found in some manuscripts and in some translations. However, “cum” may also occur with feminine and neuter nouns and this form is found in many translations on the basis of the best manuscript evidence.

Finally, in this text the translator faces an ambiguity. Does the verb mean to arise in the sense of physically sitting up from a lying position or does it have the deeper meaning of rising from the dead? In other New Testament contexts this Greek verb is used for resurrection from the dead, but here most translations today understand it in light of Jesus’ assertion that the little girl was sleeping. The RSV retains the ambiguity of the Greek, whereas the CEV interprets it in terms of getting up from sleep. The following verse tells us that she got up and started walking around, emphasizing the normal human experience of waking up from sleep and getting up from bed.

4.2. Translating Key Terms

Key terms or key words are found in any text, whether Scriptural or not. They are the basic words that carry the central meaning of the text. For the translator, the correct or at least the best translation of these words is extremely important for the communication of the message. The names of God are, of course, key terms. Key terms are often divided into two types, the technical or concrete terms and the abstract or more philosophical terms. The technical terms relate to biblical life and culture and include terms like tabernacle, temple, synagogue, vine, cedar, snow, winter, satrapy, governor, talent, crown, and many others. The abstract terms relate to biblical thought and theology. These include terms like holy, law, sacrifice, covenant, wisdom, favor, faith, righteousness, truth, grace, glory, flesh, spirit, and life, to cite only a few examples. The verb “arise” in the story of Jairus’ daughter is associated with the key term and concept of resurrection.

Key terms that express basic concepts of biblical theology and of Christian faith require thorough understanding on the part of the translator as regards both the source context and the receptor context. Young-Jin Min demonstrated this point in his discussion of the meaning of Ecclesiastes 1.7 as this verse is rendered in the Korean versions of the Bible (1991:226-231). Eugene Nida

in his most recent book *Contexts in Translating* (2001) also focuses on the importance of context for the translator.

Among the most difficult terms are those that relate to God's characteristics such as the Old Testament concept of *chesed* and the New Testament concept of *charis. Chesed* represents God's loving relationship with his people. It is God's long-term commitment to be faithful to the covenant that he made with the people of Israel. The King James Version translates it as "lovingkindness" but this term is archaic in English today. RSV calls it "steadfast love" while CEV refers to it as "faithful love". Some contemporary translations simply refer to it as God's "mercy", his "kindness" or his "favor", but these do not seem to capture the full scope of the Hebrew term.

New Testament epistle writers speak of God's *charis* to refer to God's great goodness that is extended toward people because of his great love for them and not because of any merit on their part. It is God's underserved love for his people. English and French have borrowed a word from Latin that is used in Jerome's Vulgate, namely, "grace". CEV avoids the borrowed term and says instead that God "treats us much better than we deserve" (Romans 3.24). In the benediction CEV says, "I pray that God will be kind to you" (1 Peter 1.2). However, the translator must ask whether in rendering the term according to the different contexts in which it occurs, the translation does not lose something of the significance of repeated use of a key term throughout the text. On the other hand, to borrow the term "grace" as many languages have done from English and French, does this not introduce an unknown word and therefore a meaningless concept into the receptor culture?

The concept of sacrifice in well-known in many traditional cultures. Translators therefore frequently find an affinity between the religious practices of their own traditions and the practices that they find in the Bible, especially in the sacrifices of the Old Testament. But the question that often faces the translator is whether terms may be used from traditional religion without implying acceptance and endorsement of the indigenous religious practices. In some cases, translators choose to adopt terms from Islam instead of from their own religions. For example, *sadaka* might be borrowed from Arabic through a neighboring language to take the place of a term for sacrifice as practised by the ancestors. Or, in the case of the sacrament of baptism, translators might adopt a form of the English or French words that

are themselves borrowed from Greek instead of using terms that were associated with purification rites in their own traditions.

4.3. Translating Names of God

God is a very central person in the Bible from Genesis to the Apocalypse and the words that are used to refer to God are important key terms. How then shall God be referred to in a translation of the Bible? The translator must go first to the source text where the first reference to God in the Bible is in the very first verse of Genesis. Here God is referred to by the Hebrew term *Elohim.* This is a plural masculine form that is used as the generic term for God in the Old Testament. The singular form *El* is also used as well as *Eloah*. But God also has a personal name in the Hebrew Scriptures. This is the name that was given to the Israelites through Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3.14). It is referred to as the Tetragrammaton or by the short form Tetragram. This means that the name is made up of four consonants *YHWH* in its original Hebrew form.

In the Septuagint the common Greek term for god was used for Elohim. This was *theos* and it was this masculine noun that was used in the New Testament as a generic reference to a god or to the one God of Israel or, in the plural, to gods. The Christian church has followed this practice very widely, that is, using the local language term for God in translation. In the Gbaya language of Cameroon and the Central African Republic, God is called *Sõ,* which is a term that means "spirit". The "Spirit that put humankind" is the Creator God. Among the Samba who live in the Alantika Mountains along the Cameroon-Nigeria border, God is known by two names. Some call him *Venèb* and others call him *Yaama. Vanèb* is the Creator and *Yaama* is the sun that was created by *Vanèb*; therefore *Yaama* as the sun is also associated with God. In the early days of Scripture translation, the Samba were divided over which name to use for God in the Bible. They have chosen to call him *Vanèb,* although he is also still known as *Yaama*. Among the Zimé of Chad, the name that has been used for the God of the Bible by translators is a traditional name for God that is identified with Rain.

The choice of the word to use for God is not always easy or self-evident. Among the Pévé of Chad the name for God is *Ifray*. This is a compound

word in feminine gender that means literally “mother-sky/heavens” (Venberg 1971:68). Similarly, among the Iraqw in Tanzania the God of Creation is *Looa* who is a female god. “Looa is referred to as the Mother of all and the source of life,” Aloo Mojola writes (1994:87). Pévé translators adopted the Pévé term and found ways to avoid direct collocational clashes of referring to *Ifray* as “Our Father”. However, up to the time of Mojola’s writing, the Iraqw translators had found no solution except to borrow the Swahili name for God, *Mungu*, but this had not been fully accepted by Iraqw Christians.

Translation of a personal name may be more difficult than translating a common noun. Therefore, proper nouns are often transliterated and thereby carried across into the receptor language. But God’s name YHWH posed a unique problem in that it came to be seen by the Jews as being too sacred to pronounce. In its place they read *Adonai* which was a title meaning **“**Lord”. Accordingly, in the Septuagint, the Greek term *kurios* “Lord” replaced the tetragram. Many modern translations follow the practice of the Septuagint translators. Wherever they encounter *YHWH* in the source text, they read it as *Adonai* and render that as “Lord”. This is often written in upper case letters or in slightly reduced upper case letters as in RSV and CEV. The use of capital letters for the entire word is meant to indicate that this is a special use of “LORD” as opposed to its usual meaning of “Lord” with reference to God or to someone else who is considered to be one’s superior. Some translations seek to express the meaning of the name *YHWH* that is associated with the concept of existence. For example, some French versions translate it as *l’Eternel* “the Eternal One”. Some versions transliterate the tetragram. The King James Version writes it as “Jehovah” and other contemporary versions use the form “Yahweh”. In some languages a transliterated form “Yehova” has been used, especially in translations of the early missionary era.

Debate continues among translators over the most appropriate way to render God’s name. Some suggest that it should be a transliteration of the name itself. Others argue that the attitude of the Jews toward the name should be respected as was done by the translators of the LXX. Others suggest that an equivalent receptor language name for YHWH should be used in place of the Hebrew name. For example, the Chichewa Bible translation team adopted a traditional praise name, *Chauta* meaning “Great-[God]-of the-Bow”. This was

the one whom the Chewa considered to be "the great Provider and Defender of his people" (Wendland 1992:436).

4.4. Translation and Literary Form

A Gbaya folktale session begins with the following antiphonal chorus:

Ngai no'o, zii to-o
To-o zekeDe zekeDe, zii to-o,
To-o zekeDe!
Zonga no'o, zii to'o
To-o zekeDe zekeDe, zii to-o,
To-o zekeDe!
Hirr kpinggim to-o!

The storyteller sings the first line as a call to his or her audience, "Young men, listen to a tale," "Young women, listen to a tale," "Mothers, listen to a tale," "Elders, listen to a tale," and the song may continue until all the members of the audience have been invited into active participation in the performance. The members of the audience reply in chorus, "A tale laugh, laugh, listen to a tale." At the end, the performer calls out "Hirr kpinggim to-o!" These words represent the sound of something heavy being pulled or of pushing a very heavy object followed by a heavy crashing sound.

By this song the audience is reminded that a folktale is for laughter, but it is also weighty. It is for fun, but it is also serious. It is entertaining, but at the same time there may be a lesson to be learned. In brief, a tale is performed to entertain and simultaneously to communicate a message. In order to be successful in this effort, the artist uses all possible means. That is, the artist uses all the riches of the language at his or her disposal. These include the lexicon and the grammar of the language, as well as its various aesthetic devices. This is true of what is called literary art whether it is oral or written.

The Bible as we have it today is written, but in its earliest stages much of it was oral. Evidence of this fact can be observed in both the Old and the New Testaments. In its written form, the biblical writers have retained and developed devices that enhance the communication of their message. This is especially evident in the prophetic texts of the Old Testament that are mostly

poetic. Like the Gbaya folktale performer, the biblical poets used sound to express and to emphasize their message. They used various literary devices like rhyme, rhythm, stress, plays on sound, wordplays, and many others.[11)]

In the Creation Story as recorded in the first chapter of Genesis, the primordial state of the earth is described by the Hebrew expression *tohu va bohu* (Genesis 1.2). This was translated in the Septuagint as "unsightly and unfurnished" and in the Vulgate by adjectives meaning "void and empty." But the Hebrew expression plays with the repetition of sounds. The sound expresses the meaning of formlessness and emptiness. In many languages, especially in Africa, these words with their special dependence on sound for meaning would be ideophones. In Bishop Crowther's Yoruba translation, this is rendered, "[The earth was] jũjũ, [it was] ṣ*ofo*." The first of these Yoruba words is an ideophone depicting something that is in disorder or that is topsy-turvy. The second is a verbal form meaning "be empty."

The book of Isaiah, like the majority of the prophetic messages in the Old Testament, uses poetic form and this includes many poetic devices. In Isaiah 10.14 the prophet quotes the words of the arrogant Assyrian king who boasts that he conquered the whole world without *upotseh peh umetsaptsep "*anyone opening the mouth and chirping." The repetition of the "p" and "ts" sounds is apparent in these words, but there is especially the *tsaptsep* which represents the chirping sounds of little birds. The Revised English Bible tanslates, "not a beak gaped, no cheep was heard," and CEV says, "no one even ⋯ made a peep." This is a well-known literary device that is called onomatopoeia.

Onomatopoeia falls within the larger category of terms that are today called ideophones. These are a virtually universal category of lexical items that express whatever can be physically perceived. Onomatopoeic words specifically imitate sounds that one hears, like the chirping of birds, the barking of dogs or the pulling and dropping of a very heavy object. But other ideophones depict what one sees, smells, tastes, or feels, or even emotions that one experiences. Therefore, the earth that was in disorder is described in the Yoruba Bible as *jũjũ*.

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11) For an introduction to Hebrew poetic form see Zogbo and Wendland's book *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible: A Guide for Understanding and for Translating*(2000).

In cultures where ideophones are commonly used in everyday speech and especially where they are prominent in oral art forms like folktales, narratives, proverbs, riddles, and poetry and song, it is appropriate to use them in Bible translation. In many biblical texts, they may be used with great effect. The Korean writer Lee Young Shin uses onomatopoeia in his Bible comics. In the story of David and Goliath (1999:64), he describes the twirling of David's sling "bung bung bung", the launching of the stone "hwak!" the stone striking Goliath's forehead "p^{h}ok!" and the thud of his fall "k^{h}ung!" In Indonesia the sound of David's sling is *SYIIIING⋯*, the stone flies *SYUUUUUUT⋯* and *BUK!* it strikes Goliath's forehead. Translators tend to be more conservative in the biblical text than in comic versions. Thus, in the Gbaya Bible only one ideophone is used in this narrative and this is to describe the giant's fall to the ground *rum*. To introduce more ideophones here could create an air of comedy that is appropriate in comics but not in the biblical text.

In biblical narrative where description is used, ideophones are often the most effective means of expressing the meaning of the source text, even when ideophone expression may not be used there. When Ezra was in shock and dismay after being told of the Jews' mixed marriages (Ezra 9.3), the Gbaya translators depict him sitting *tokoro*, that is, in adject despair. In the Gbaya translation of Revelation 1.14, the color of the Son of Man's head and hair is described as being *kpung kpung*. This is an ideophone that describes something that is pure white. In verse 16 the sword that came out of his mouth is *peDeng-peDeng*, this being the ideophone that describes a very sharp blade.

Poetry is the biblical genre in which ideophones may occur the most prominently. In Psalm 19.8 the Lord's commandment is pure *ngelele*; in the 23rd psalm, the psalmist says that his cup is filled to overflowing *zerere.* Parallelism is a feature of Hebrew poetry as well as of Gbaya verbal art. In Psalm 20.8 ideophones were used by the translators to reflect the parallelism and express the meaning of the original text:

RSV: They will collapse and fall;
but we shall rise and stand upright.

Gbaya: For them it's falling to the ground *samgbang,*
but for us it's standing upright *keng.*

Ideophones must, of course, be used with care because they are dramatic words that call attention to themselves and may result in what is sometimes called “over-translating.” For example, most translations do not use ideophones to describe the state of the earth in Creation because to do so would imply that the writer of the Creation Story in Genesis had been personally present to observe what the earth looked like as God began the process of creation.

5. *Talitha cum!* - Reading the Message

The reading of the Bible and Bible use are topics that may have been overlooked in the past, but they are presently receiving increased attention among both Bible translators and theologians. In the following paragraphs we will consider first the reading of the Bible by the translator, then we will consider the reading and use of the Bible by the audience.

5.1. Bible Translators and Bible Reading

Bible translators are taught that one of the three key translation principles is faithfulness to the original text. The other two principles are clarity and a natural language style. Being faithful to the source requires an accurate reading of the source text. Translators therefore concentrate on the exegesis of the text in order to achieve an accurate understanding of the original text. Translators are instructed to be objective and not to interpret. This has been underscored by the Bible Society stipulation that the translation should be “without doctrinal note or comment.” But clearly the text does not stand as a formula that may be read without any possible deviation. In fact, we recognize that in our reading of the text, we do interpret, we do have perspectives, and indeed we are influenced by theology and by ideologies. Our understanding of the message we translate is filtered through a number of frames (Wilt 2002).

For example, in Mark’s translation of Jesus command to the daughter of Jairus, do we understand the words, “I say to you,” to be Mark’s way of rendering explicit what he understood to be implicit in the Aramaic text within the context where Jesus was speaking? Or was this his way of

indicating a formulaic expression that had a kind of magical power? Or perhaps, this may have been a discourse marker that Mark as writer used in his translation to draw the reader's attention to the importance of the words that would follow? Did this phrase have theological significance, namely, that Mark was drawing attention to the speaker as being Jesus, and was he thereby emphasizing Jesus' power and authority? Mark's motivation for inserting this clause may not affect how we translate it today, except in the case of the CEV. At the same time, this example reveals the many frames that can be applied to what would appear to be a relatively straightforward translation.

In the case of the verb, "to arise", the theological implications are potentially more prominent. Although Jesus downplays the event by putting it in terms of sleep, the reader believes the information that was brought by the messengers that the little girl had died. Therefore, the command "Arise!" has a double meaning, that of getting up and that of coming back to life. In some languages the ambiguity of the Aramaic and of the Greek will not be possible. Then the translator will be obliged to make a theological decision about the translation.

There are many ambiguities in the text where the translator must adopt a perspective, but there are also ideological positions held by the translator that may affect the entire Bible translation. Recent New Testament translations in languages of Europe and North America have been influenced by the "hoi Ioudaioi" question. This is whether the article and noun *hoi Ioudaioi* that occurs frequently in John's Gospel should be translated literally "the Jews" as was done in most earlier translations, or should it be interpreted according to context? Where it does not intentionally refer to all the Jews, but refers instead to the Jewish religious and political leadership, should it not be translated "the leaders of Jews"? The discussion, of course, arises out of the context of the post-war Europe. CEV and other recent translations have adopted this latter approach.

Some writers, among them Gosnell Yorke of the United Bible Societies (2000:114-123), have called for an Afrocentric approach to translation. It is argued that the oversights and distortions of earlier translations from a predominantly European ethnocentric perspective need to be corrected in the translation itself, in introductions to individual books in the Bible, and in

supplementary materials like footnotes, glossaries and maps in order to give a correct and accurate interpretationa and rendering of the biblical source text. This relates not only to the geographic implications of Afrocentrism, but to the issue of race as well. A verse that is often cited in this regard is Song of Songs 1.5 that in RSV reads, “I am very dark, but comely.” In CEV this has been rendered, “My skin is dark and beautiful” to make it clear that the connotation is positive and not pejorative.

A very recent example of ideological influence is in the position of those who wish to exclude “Allah” from Bible translation on the grounds that the God of Islam cannot be the same as the God of the Old and New Testaments. In some earlier translations, names and vocabulary that had Arabic etymologies were excluded from use because of a missionary ideology. Today, the issue has more to do with world events and global politics than with theology.

5.2. Bible Reading and Bible Use

Bible translation is a process that may appear to end when the manuscript is submitted for printing. However, the significance of a Bible is ultimately not in its translation but in the use of the translation. It is as the Bible is read and studied and taught that it can have an influence on the lives of its readers and on the theology of those who preach and teach and learn from i t.[12] Throughout history this has been true and the King James Version in English and the Luther Version in German are only two examples. The African theologian John Mbiti affirmed that this was also true for Africa when he wrote, “The Bible in the local language becomes the most directly influential single factor in shaping the life of the church in Africa” (1986:28). William Mitchell of the United Bible Societies anticipated the arrival of the first Old Testaments on the languages of the Quechua and Aymara peoples of the Andes Mountains in South America when he suggested that “the Old Testament will be appropriated by the Andean people in a unique way” (1987:129).

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12) For a collection of important papers on this topic, see *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church: The last two hundred year* edited by Philip C. Stine (1990).

R.S. Sugirtharajah in his book *The Bible and the Third World* (2001) looks at the Bible through the ideological perspective of colonialism. He divides the history of translation into three eras, precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial. While Nida divided the history of translation according to an ecclesiastical and missiological perspective, Sugirtharajah's perspective is political. It interprets the world and its history within the framework of a particular colonial experience, that of the European imperialism of the 19th-20th centuries. Thus, both the translation and the reading of the translated Scriptures are interpreted against the backdrop of colonialism. Sugirtharajah describes the Bible before the time of the European colonial empires as "a marginal and minority text" (2001:13). During the colonial era, he sees Bible translation and the expansion of the colonial political and commercial empire as going hand in hand. He refers to Biblical imperialism for which he gives much credit to the success of the Bible Societies in translating and disseminating the Scriptures. Finally, he refers to "postcolonial reclamations" of the Bible (2001:173) and here he includes liberation theologies, vernacular readings and postcolonial biblical criticism.[13)]

The issue of inclusive language has recently been a subject of great debate and controversy especially in the world of English-language translation, but it is a more significant issue than language alone. Nyambura Njoroge and Musa Dube are contemporary African women theologians from Kenya and Botswana respectively who have edited a book entitled **Talitha cum!** *Theologies of African Women* (2001). In their book they use Jesus' command to Jairus' daughter as a call to African women to "get up, arise and echo the cries of the people who exist in their context of pain and suffering, exclusion and marginalization, violence and helplessness" (p. viii).[14)]

If the translation of the Bible can be seen in terms of the incarnation of Christ, the fact that in translations of the Bible the name of God is usually translated into the local or indigenous language has been seen as a sign of God's acceptance of all people of all cultures. Musa Dube, however, charges that "Instead of bringing the gospel home to women, translation of the Bible

13) See also "A Korean Minjung Perspective: The Hebrews and the Exodus" by Cyris H.S. Moon in Sugirtharajah 2000:228-243.

14) See "Women's Rereading of the Bible" by Elsa Tamez in Sugirtharajah 2000:48-57.

in Africa has, in fact, marginalized African women and excluded them from social and spiritual spaces" (2001:22). The Ghanaian Presbyterian minister, Rose Teteki Abbey, explains that even though the Gã name for God has been adopted and is used by Gã Christians, this has not counter-balanced the heavily male-oriented and patriarchal portrayal of God by the church (2001:140ff). The name *Ataa Naa Nyonmo*, literally, "Father Mother God", refers to the maleness and femaleness of God, but the attributes of God as evident in the traditional Gã name have not been associated with the God of the Bible although he is also portrayed in the Old Testament by metaphors that are feminine or that speak to the experience of women. Rose Abbey cites the compassion of God in Hosea 2.21, God as a woman in labor in Isaiah 42.14 and God as a mother in Isaiah 46.3-4 and 66.13. Thus she calls for a rediscovery of *Ataa Naa Nyonmo* in "a theology that recognizes both the maleness as well as the femaleness of God" (p. 154). It is thus not insignificant that the Iraqw Christians have not been willing to abandon their own name for the female God Looa in favor of the masculine Mungu borrowed from Swahili.

6. Conclusion

Bible translation is crucial to the communication of the Word of God to humankind and it continues today at a greater pace than at anytime in history. Even though estimates indicate that 94% or more of the world's population has access to the Scriptures in a language that they can understand, there are still some 3000 languages in which no Bible translation exists. If the incarnate Christ came for all human beings and if God reveals himself through his translated Word, then all peoples have a right to receive God's Word in their own languages.

Meanwhile, there are languages that are dying as their speakers adopt other languages. Do Christians have an obligation to translate Scripture texts into languages before they disappear forever? At the same time, there are new languages, those commonly referred to as pidgins and creoles. Increasingly, translations of New Testaments and Bibles are being done in these languages.

At the same time as new translations are being done, earlier translations

are being revised. Many English versions could be cited, the New King James Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the Revised English Bible, and the New Living Bible, for example. The same is occurring in other languages where much appreciated older versions are being revised for new generations of users.

While translation is still carried out in the written medium, the new media are increasingly being used both for new translations and in the diffusion of existing translations. Radio and television, video and interactive CD-Roms offer new opportunities for sharing the Scriptures with those who may not take time to read or who may not be able to read the written word on the printed page.

In brief, the task of communicating the Scriptures in the languages of the people of the world is greater today than it has ever been. The vision that we share as Bible translators is the vision that John recorded in Revelation 7.9-10 (CEV):

> After this, I saw a large crowd with more people than could be counted. They were from every race, tribe, nation, and language, and they stood before the throne and before the Lamb. They wore white roes and held palm branches in their hands, as they shouted,
>
> "Our God, who sits upon the throne,
> has the power to save his people,
> and so does the Lamb."

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