

nantly aspects that is, they primarily indicate completed as distinguished from uncompleted action—whereas English verbs customarily express various distinctions in tense. These differences clearly require some adjustments. Similarly, long involved sentences in the Greek New Testament need to be broken up into smaller units if the meaning of the original is to be communicated effectively in a language such as English. Likewise, idioms such as “bowels of mercy,” “circumcised of heart,” and “gird up the loins of the mind” require some adaptations if they are to be anything other than confusing sequences of terms.

In some instances it may be necessary to invert the contents of individual verses; but if so, then why not change the order of the paragraphs? Why, for example, follow the order of the narrative of the Prodigal Son when the story might be more effectively told by starting the young man out in the pigpen and then providing the background information by means of flashbacks? Why is it that some translators do not hesitate to change “white as snow” to “very, very white” (if snow may not be known in the culture), but do not want to translate “the uncircumcision” and “the circumcision” by “Gentiles” and “Jews,” respectively, as in Romans 3:30, even though verse 29 indicates clearly what is meant?

In cultures in which there is no practice of anointing, certain references to anointing are translated by terms meaning “to commission” or “to designate for a task”; but in societies that do not practice sacrifice, translators insist upon finding some way to describe such religious activities, despite their strange content. But why should such a distinction be made? Many translators do not hesitate to substitute “hyenas” for “wolves” in the expression “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” but they do not believe that “sheep” should be changed to “goats,” even though in the local culture goats are highly prized and sheep are neglected scavengers.

To find adequate answers to the problems that translators face, not only in the practical phases of working out acceptable solutions to differences of cultural content and values, but also in providing a well-grounded defense for what has been done, one must have more than a series of “rules of thumb” that seem acceptable and helpful. Nothing less than a thorough analysis of all the major factors involved in the communication of messages can provide the necessary foundation for fully adequate principles and procedures of adjustment. Such an analysis inevitably requires a consideration of the theory of communication, as applied specifically to translating, because anything short of such a detailed study tends to raise far more questions than it resolves.

## 2

*What Communicating Means*

In analyzing translation one must begin with a satisfactory model of communication. By means of such a model one can describe the principal factors and relations that enter into the communication of a message in the source language. What is required is something far more sophisticated than merely ready answers to “who said what to whom under what circumstances and for what purposes?” This shorthand summary of some of the basic elements in exegesis can be useful, but it is not enough for a thorough study of the many complicating factors in communication.

**Communication Model**

In any analysis of translating, the point of departure must be the original communication. This means beginning with three essential elements of the communication: the source (S), the message (M), and the receptor (R), which may be diagrammatically represented as follows:

$$S - M - R$$

Without these three basic elements there is simply no communication.

In this chapter the emphasis is upon communication within a single language (“intra-lingual communication”); in Chapter 3 the communication model is extended to include interlingual communication—in other words, translating.

In order to understand a message produced by a source, it is important to know as much as possible about the source; inevitably both the form and the content of a message that the source encodes have been determined by many factors relating to the source’s own personality and experience. In general, this information can be divided into two types: (1) general background (e.g., education, social status, occupation, religious affiliation) and (2) linguistic background (e.g., mother tongue, language of education, literary training, sources of allusions and quotations). To understand the quotations in the Pauline letters it is important to know that most of them are based on the Septuagint rather than on the Hebrew text. This does not mean that Paul was unacquainted with the Hebrew text, but only that he did not hesitate to quote the Greek translation, especially at those points where it served his special purposes.

In describing the message, it is essential to distinguish two important elements: (1) the form and (2) the content. The form consists in all the formal features, starting with the sounds and proceeding to the level of literary art. Many of the formal features of any message are obligatory—that is, they are imposed by the nature of the language itself, without the speaker's necessarily thinking consciously of them as part of the message. These features include the sounds represented in the alphabet, the forms of the words, the syntax of the sentences, and many of the features of the discourse (e.g., the use of active versus passive, the sequence of clauses). All such features are obligatory in that they are largely dictated by the formal requirements of the language itself. Not all formal features, however, are determined by the language structure. Many of them are optional—for example, the order of ideas in expository discourse, the choice of literary forms (e.g., parable, allegory, proverb), and the employment of certain rhetorical devices (e.g., rhetorical questions, chiasmus, parallelism, double negatives for emphasis).

The content of any message is derived principally from two different sets of relations: (1) the relation of verbal symbols to one another (the "formal meaning," involving both syntactic and rhetorical levels), and (2) the relation of verbal symbols to features of the nonlinguistic world (the "referential meaning"). In general, it is this latter type of meaning to which one most often refers in speaking of the meaning of any message. In fact when speaking about the message of the Bible, the term "meaning" is often used on at least two quite different levels: (1) the immediate meaning of a specific passage and (2) the higher, or theological, significance of the passage. Hence, the meaning of passages about the crucifixion of Jesus is sometimes discussed in terms of the actual events described, but more often in terms of the symbolic metaphysical importance of this crucial event in "salvation history."

Except where otherwise noted, referential meaning is restricted in this analysis to the first level of meaning because this is the level of meaning that is of primary importance for Bible translators. This does not imply any depreciation of higher levels of meaning. It is only that the higher levels are basically secondary, in the sense of being built upon the first level.

This first level of meaning, consisting of both formal and referential relations, involves two different aspects: cognitive and emotive. The cognitive aspect is the conceptual understanding of the relations between the verbal symbols themselves and between these and the nonlinguistic (practical world) objects, events, and abstracts, for which they stand. The emotive aspect involves the manner in which those who participate in the communication do not react emotionally to the formal and referential aspects of the message. The formal features themselves involve both cognitive and emotive elements. The formal order of ideas, reflecting certain logical relations (e.g., cause and effect, reason and result, generic and specific), are purely cognitive, but the manner in which the formal elements are arranged may produce marked differences in emotive reactions. The balance of lines, the rhythmic arrangements of words, the parallelism of thought may have a very pleasing

form, irrespective of the content. When there is a particularly effective combination of cognitive and emotive aspects of both the form and the content, one may be assured that this is a truly literary production, as in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, for example.

In dealing with referential meaning, it is essential to make certain important distinctions related to the roles of the participants. For example, the meaning that a source wishes to convey may be stated as the "intent." Whether the intent is properly communicated or not may be quite another matter. Furthermore, a source may have had an intent that is quite different from the apparent content of the message. This is particularly true of irony, in which the evident intent contrasts purposely with the usual meaning of such a message. One must also reckon with the fact that no two receptors are ever likely to comprehend and respond to a message in identically the same way. This means that absolute communication is never possible, for no two individuals ever share completely the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

In comparing the intentions of a source with the understanding of a receptor, one must not expect to find identity. In general, however, the two are close enough to be culturally functional, and this is what ultimately counts.

Some analysts of meaning wish to add to the intention of the source and the meaning for the receptor a third kind of participant meaning: the "theoretical norm"—that is, how a particular message should be understood by persons within a particular language-culture context. Some might prefer to call this "theoretical norm" the "legal meaning" or the "ideal meaning."

Still other persons would like to include a "timeless meaning"—that is, a meaning of a message that would be unrelated to a specific time-space cultural setting. This has been called by some the "theological meaning" and by others the "hermeneutical meaning." But this is an issue that can concern us only after we have analyzed somewhat more fully some of the basic elements in communication between languages.

### Multiple Levels of Meaning

All messages have a first level of meaning. This is the immediate (often called the "literal") meaning of a passage and one on which in most instances most persons can agree. There are of course passages that are ambiguous or obscure because we no longer know enough of the background to understand what is being talked about—for example, the necessity of being salted with fire (Mark 9:49). In some instances, there are purposeful ambiguities, reflecting the intention of the author, as when the Gospel of John (3:8) likens the Spirit to wind (using the Greek *pneuma*); but in most instances of intentional ambiguities, the context signals the play on words.

Intentional ambiguities can rarely be reproduced in a translation, and accordingly some marginal help is necessary if the reader is to understand the formal features involved. Ambiguities that result from the scholars' lack of

understanding would likewise be identified. This is best done by means of marginal helps or supplementary lists because attempts to reproduce them in the translation do injustice to the original author who evidently had one or another meaning in mind and was not trying to be obscure. To expect the untrained reader to resolve such obscurities is fair neither to the reader nor to the original author.

In addition to a first level of meaning, many passages of Scripture have two or more higher levels. It is the very essence of a parable to contain both a first-level meaning—that is, an account of what happened in the illustrative story—and a second-level meaning, the “point” of the story. The story of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7) is not merely a narrative about a shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep in order to look for one lost sheep. It has a second-level meaning—namely, the attitude of God toward sinners. In fact this second-level meaning is the real point of the story.

Some parables may have several different levels or reveal multiple meanings on a higher level. The story of the Prodigal Son tells something about the penalties paid for sin, the egotism of self-righteousness, and the meaning of suffering love.

Allegories are narratives in which most or all of the individual details have some higher, or symbolic, level of meaning. But in allegories the double levels of meaning are generally quite obvious, and in many instances the relations are made quite specific.

For the most part, multiple levels of meaning are marked by certain formal features of a context. The symbolic meanings of the *words* “Adam” and “Eve” suggest that these names are something more than simply designations of a man and his wife. The lack of important historical details in the story of Cain and Abel may also be taken to indicate that these events have more than a single level of signification. In certain instances, special emphasis, indicated by unexpected repetitions, may carry meaning, as in the case of Ruth who is referred to as a Moabitess or from the land of Moab a total of eight times in the short book bearing her name. Some scholars have thought that this may be important in understanding the purpose behind the writing of the book—namely, as a defense of the Jews who had taken Moabite wives and were suffering from the strictures laid down by Ezra and Nehemiah.

In some instances, a first level of interpretation may be so unacceptable to some persons as to compel them to see only a higher level. This has often been true in the interpretation of the Song of Songs, in which the first-level meaning of sexual love is completely allegorized in terms of the relation of Christ to his church.

It is even possible to see some higher-level meaning in what is not said. For example, Luke’s detailed treatment of the life and ministry of Paul seems to stop short of what one would expect to be the climax of the story—namely, the condemnation of Paul and his death. But this obviously did not fit Luke’s purpose. At no place in his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles does Luke indicate any direct condemnation of the Christian movement by Roman

authorities. The fact that Luke ends his account of Paul by indicating that he was able to preach the Good News “with boldness and freedom,” thus omitting entirely any mention of later developments, may be said to communicate something on a “higher level,” without, of course, making it explicit.

Though the translator is not so immediately concerned with the higher levels of meaning as is the expositor or the preacher, he cannot properly undertake to translate any text without an awareness of these multiple levels of meaning.

### Role of Receptors

No analysis of communication can be complete without a thorough study of the role of the receptors of a message. In the first place, it is important to know about their general background (e.g., their ethnic origins, religious beliefs, educational levels) as well as their linguistic background (e.g., their mother tongue, any supplementary language or languages, and in the case of the Bible the language in which the existing Scriptures were read). For example, for most Christians of the first century, the Scriptures were the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint.

In some cases, it would be very useful if we knew who certain receptors were. Who, for example, was Theophilus, to whom Luke addressed his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles? Was his name merely symbolic, “beloved by God”? Was he some government official to whom Luke was making his defense and explanation of Christianity? Was he a Christian or a pagan? Or is it possible that he was the one who underwrote the publication of these books (for ancient writings often did have a dedication to the publisher or benefactor)? The fact that we do not know who Theophilus was only highlights the importance of knowing to whom a message is specifically or generally directed. The reason for wanting to identify the receptors is that one can then judge more accurately the basis for the author’s particular formulation of his message.

Normally, the receptors of any important message are likely to reflect differences in backgrounds, interests, and values. There are even two quite different theories as to receptors to whom the Epistle to the Galatians was directed. Paul seems to be unusually explicit in the analogy between Sarah and Hagar, on the one hand, and between Jerusalem and Sinai, on the other. But obviously the Judaizers among those receiving the letter would have had an interpretation of these analogies entirely different from the one that Paul had. Paul evidently assumed that all persons involved would know something about the Old Testament background to this illustration, but he could never have thought that they would necessarily all agree with him.

How receptors understand a message does not depend primarily upon their knowledge of the cultural or historical backgrounds involved, but upon their evaluation of these. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Southern Baptists may have essentially similar objective information concerning certain biblical pas-

sages, but they put the information into very different conceptual structures, with the result that their interpretation of these passages is entirely different. The same was evidently true of the Pauline and the Judaizing parties in early Christianity. Understanding the message, therefore, consists in much more than mere possession of certain information. The message has meaning only in terms of certain all-embracing structures of thought, which include pre-eminently the basic presuppositions and tenets of the receptor culture or sub-culture. But these factors cannot be considered until some further attention has been given to the setting of the communication.

### Setting of the Communication

The setting of communication (whether of spoken or written messages) consists of three factors: (1) time, (2) location, and (3) roles of the participants. The temporal factors are divided into three phases: (a) prior events that may influence the nature of the communication, (b) the actual time of the communication, and (c) the later events, including anything that is known about the response of the receptors to the communication. The importance of prior events is emphasized negatively in the difficulties that scholars encounter in trying to understand 2 Corinthians. If we only knew precisely what the events were that prompted Paul to write as he did, it would be so much easier to understand the message of this letter.

Some persons have thought that they could ascertain the response of the original receptors of Paul's letters by noting the ways in which these letters were interpreted by the early Christian Fathers. But most of the writings of the Fathers are dated some two to three hundred years after Paul's letters, and in some ways they are further removed in time than we are today, inasmuch as we possess a great deal of historical data that was not generally available to the Christian exegetes of the third and fourth centuries. What we need to know, and what in so many instances we do not know, is how receptors responded at the time. It is the lack of such information that so greatly impairs our ability to interpret some of the difficult passages of the Scriptures.

The factor of location has to do with the place in which a communication occurs. Under traditional circumstances, oral communication would imply that the source and receptors were in the same place. Today this is often not the case, because radio and television present unusual opportunities for displacement in both time and place. But in terms of biblical communication, scholars are very much interested in the location of communication. Was the Gospel of John, for example, written in Ephesus, and does it therefore reflect what is regarded as a typically "Ephesian view" of Jesus?

The differential roles of source and receptors are also important in understanding a communication. Is the relationship one of teacher to students, official to subjects, petitioner to king, or prophet to people? These reciprocally related roles are important in understanding and evaluating both content and form. The roles of Paul and Philemon are important in understand-

ing the meaning of Paul's one strictly personal letter. If we only knew the roles of source and receptors of the Book of Ruth, a number of problems would be cleared up almost immediately.

### Noise

To understand certain problems associated with communication one must reckon with the factor of noise—anything that disturbs the message during the process of transmission. This may consist of obvious external physical noise, which may prevent the receptors from hearing correctly or adequately. But it may also be psychological noise—for example, interference with the message because of preconceptions about what people think should have been said. This is apparently something of what happened when Paul was brought before the council (Acts 23:1-10). The Pharisees and Sadducees were so opposed to one another that they heard neither Paul nor each other.

Other forms of psychological noise may consist of inattention or distraction. It is also possible to treat the influence of literary forms upon the content of a message as being a kind of "literary noise," because the forms themselves tend to distort the uniqueness of the actual communication event by providing a limited number of molds into which the infinite variety of actual experience must be accommodated.

Errors that occur in the process of manuscript copying and recopying may be regarded as a form of "noise," inasmuch as these modifications can alter the content of the message over a period of time. The accidental mistakes of copyists are, however, relatively easy to detect, because they tend to occur in readily recognized contexts—for example, elimination of lines that end or begin with the same sequence of letters or words, substitution of forms that are better known or fit the context better, and substitution of letters that represent identical sounds (this is a familiar feature in manuscripts that are written down from dictation).

It is by no means so easy to detect the changes that occur because scribes undertook to "improve" the text—for example, by making parallel passages more consistent in wording, by deleting or altering expressions that seemed to contradict certain theological viewpoints, and by adding expressions that may have been only marginal notes in a prior manuscript. Such expressions were often incorporated into a later manuscript because they seemed appropriate or simply because a later scribe assumed that an earlier scribe had omitted them and tried to correct the mistake by putting the omitted words in the margin. All scribal modifications may be regarded as "psychological noise"—the unconscious errors resulted from inattention or distraction, and the conscious alterations involved modifications that were influenced by certain scribal assumptions about matters of textual consistency, theological content, or fidelity to tradition.

For the biblical scholar, however, the most important factor of noise has simply been the loss of background information through the centuries. The

original authors and receptors shared much background information that made the message meaningful. A high percentage of this background data is no longer available to us, and accordingly there are many passages of Scripture that cannot be properly understood. This is not because these passages were meaningless or obscure when they were first written. In fact there is no evidence that any of the Scriptures were purposely written in the form of prophetic oracles or as Kabbalistic messages. The writers of the Bible had a message—and usually a very urgent one. Hence, there was no premium placed upon obscurity or ambiguity.

Our lack of information about the meaning of the original texts of the Scriptures is not, however, limited merely to data concerning historical events and cultural practices. There are many fine points of grammatical structure that cannot be clearly interpreted, simply because we do not know enough about the ancient languages to be able to state with certainty how to interpret certain grammatical structures. For example, we do not know in John 13:2 whether the Devil “had put into the heart of Judas the idea of betraying Jesus” or whether the Devil “had already decided that Judas would betray Jesus.”

Furthermore, there are many words, especially in the Old Testament, that occur only once, and are not otherwise known. When the context is not clear, we cannot be certain what these words mean. In some instances, related words from other languages may give us some clues, but it is always dangerous to depend upon similar roots or stems, because they may have quite different meanings, even in closely related languages.

### The Medium and the Channel

Because biblical materials are exclusively in written form, one tends to overlook some of the communication problems involved in the medium and the channel. The medium is the communication code—for example, words (oral or written), pictures, ritual events, or spontaneous acts that may show love, hate, joy, or the like. The channel is the means by which the message is transmitted—for example, in ancient times by word of mouth or written document, and in our day often by radio or television.

Within the Bible itself there is much that reflects oral tradition. This would be true not only of some parts of such books as Genesis, Joshua, and Judges, but undoubtedly occurs elsewhere, in far more instances than many persons imagine. It is also true that in the New Testament many of the accounts of Jesus were no doubt passed on in oral form long before they were committed to writing. As long as there were numerous eyewitnesses to the events, it may have seemed quite irrelevant to write down anything, particularly since so many early Christians apparently thought that Jesus would be returning very soon “to put his enemies under his feet.”

One entire branch of biblical scholarship—namely, literary analysis—is dedicated primarily to the reconstruction of the earliest sources of the biblical

texts. Uncovering the presumed levels of tradition, whether written or oral, is a complex task with many uncertainties, but it is important in trying to understand the meaning of many texts, especially in their earliest forms.

The translator of the Bible, however, is primarily concerned with the document as finally prepared by a particular author or authors. This is what the translator must translate. To understand certain aspects of the Gospel of Luke, it is useful to study the implications of the background documents or traditions, to which Luke himself alludes in his introduction (Luke 1:1-4), but of primary significance is the manner in which Luke himself interpreted this material, not how earlier sources may have regarded the data. These problems introduce matters that can, however, be adequately treated only after further consideration is given to some of the broader implications of communication theory.

In order to understand more fully some of the problems of communication, it is essential to recognize that any channel presents some basic deficiencies. Written communications are always deficient to the extent that they do not fully reflect all the significant contrasts that exist in the spoken language. Differences of phrase-final pauses and intonational contours normally mark important syntactic boundaries, but more often than not they are either lacking in written texts or are only imperfectly marked. In texts of ancient Greek these phonological contrasts were conspicuously absent, and, to make matters worse, words were even written together without spaces between them.

Written channels of communication have the advantage of seeming to preserve forms more carefully than do oral traditions, but manuscripts had to be copied by hand and the size of editions was extremely limited, thus requiring extensive copying and recopying if wide circulation of any message was to be obtained. Thus one can readily understand how literally thousands of minor differences could creep into the manuscript tradition of something as extensive as the New Testament.

There is not the same wealth of variant readings for the Old Testament, due to the particular history of the text, but there are at least five thousand different readings that have a significant bearing upon the meaning of the text. Furthermore, because of a lack of numerous so-called witnesses to the text (in comparison with the New Testament, of which the number of different manuscripts is almost overwhelming), it is often quite impossible to ascertain the form of the Old Testament text with any high degree of certainty.

### Work of the United Bible Societies

The Greek New Testament (Third Edition) published by the United Bible Societies contains several thousand textual variants that are important for the understanding of the text. Furthermore, these have been classified as A, B, C, or D, depending upon the extent to which the reading in the text is to be regarded as reliable. The Nestle-Aland Greek Text, which contains the same critical text, has a different apparatus, in that it lists all significant variants

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regardless of whether they are meaningfully significant, but it lacks the classification as to textual reliability.

For the Old Testament, a committee for the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project spent ten years of work in reviewing more than five thousand textual variants in the Old Testament that involve meaningful differences and applied the same type of classification as to textual reliability. The five preliminary reports of the committee's findings have now been published. The first of five final reports is to be published in 1981 (first in French and then in English). These will contain all the relevant evidence from ancient Hebrew manuscripts, ancient versions, medieval rabbinic sources, and modern textual studies, together with full explanations as to the basis for the committee's decisions.

### Cultural Presuppositions

Much of the referential meaning for the receptors of any message depends upon the cultural presuppositions of a particular society. The presuppositions are the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and ideas that are generally shared by persons, but are rarely if ever described or defined, simply because they seem so basic and obvious as not to require verbal formulation. Note, for example, the question posed by the disciples to Jesus in John 9:2, "Whose sin was it that caused this man to be born blind? His own or his parents?" The disciples never questioned the fact that sin must have been the underlying cause of such a misfortune: this was a basic presupposition. Jesus' response must have been quite a shock. Similarly, the account of creation, which speaks of dividing the waters above the firmament from the waters beneath it, is based on a worldview that assumed a kind of dome in the sky, on which the stars had their places and through the windows of which rain could pour down upon the earth.

These underlying presuppositions about world and life can be conveniently divided into five classes: (1) the physical earth and living beings, (2) history and destiny, (3) supernatural beings, (4) interpersonal relations, and (5) intellectual activity.

1. *The physical earth and human beings.* There seems little doubt that for the people of biblical times creation was regarded as something that took place in seven periods of twenty-four hours each, thus providing not only an explanation of creation that was far less fanciful than the Babylonian myths, but also serving to sanctify the seventh day as a distinctive period of religiously prescribed cessation from work. Furthermore, the world was regarded as being populated by only those groups that had descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Because the loss of blood accompanied the loss of vital force (as blood flowed out, so did the life of a person or animal), so "life was in the blood," and blood sacrifice became a means of symbolizing "life."

Living beings were also classifiable as clean and unclean, those which

could be eaten and those which could not. The lists of clean and unclean animals and birds provide a few classificatory clues, such as chewing the cud and the cloven hoof, but there is no attempt to explain or to justify the distinction between clean and unclean animals and birds. It is simply assumed as one of the basic facts about nature, without which many other distinctions in life would have little or no meaning.

2. *History and destiny.* Presuppositions about history and destiny are important, not only in view of the concept of "the chosen people," but also in relation to the ideas of a future reign of God, an era of peace, the triumph of righteousness, all of which are unique as far as the ancient world is concerned.

The concept of a binding covenant, taken from the realm of interpersonal relations, is one of the dominant elements in Old Testament thought about God and God's people. It is in the light of this presupposition that the prophet can proclaim ultimate hope and victory despite an almost hopeless immediate future. Because of the covenant love of God, there must ultimately be a triumph for the people of God, a reign of peace, and a vindication of righteousness. But without the presuppositions that underlay such proclamations of the prophets, these words could only have seemed to the people like empty dreams of demented seers.

As for the ultimate destiny of individual human beings, the Bible contains two sets of presuppositions that seem to be contradictory and are never resolved explicitly. In the Old Testament death and the grave (often spoken of as Sheol) are pictured as a shadowy abode of spirit beings, who seemingly fade gradually into oblivion, whereas the New Testament contains quite a different picture of paradise and the heavenly abode, where God "shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." In contrast with the rewards of heaven, there are the punishments of Gehenna, "where the worm does not die, nor is the fire ever extinguished."

Any recognition of a progressive revelation in Scripture, and particularly of any significant difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, must inevitably involve certain differences in presuppositions. This does not rule out divine inspiration, but it does mean that the revelation took place within the context of real events and different patterns of behavior and thought.

3. *Supernatural beings.* So much is a personal sovereign God a basic presupposition of the Bible, that at no place is God described or defined, or God's existence proved. God is simply taken for granted as the most basic presupposition about the supernatural world. But the existence of other supernatural beings, such as angels, demons, and the devil, also rests on basic presuppositions. Furthermore, supernatural beings are regarded as having power to bless and to curse, to reward faithfulness and to punish neglect. They communicate with persons by apparitions, dreams, visions, and through the drawing of lots, and human beings may communicate with the

supernatural by means of prayer and, in the context of the Old Testament, through sacrifices and offerings. In addition, certain objects could be so impregnated with supernatural power that they could not be handled by persons not specially consecrated to do so, as in the case of the ark of the covenant.

To say that all of these events and objects represent basic cultural presuppositions is not to make any judgments as to their reality. They were simply taken for granted and their power was not questioned. Jesus speaks of the crippled woman whom he had healed on the sabbath as "this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept in bonds for eighteen years" (Luke 13:16).

4. *Interpersonal relations.* Presuppositions about interpersonal relations are often the most complex. The concept of group responsibility and hence corporate guilt may pose special problems of understanding; but such a presupposition is necessary, if one is to make any sense of many of the accounts of the Old Testament, such as the guilt of Achan at the conquest of Ai (Josh. 7:1-26). The acceptance of slavery as a legal institution, the dominance of husbands over wives (in matters of divorce and property rights), and the retractable nature of paternal blessings (Gen. 27), all rest upon important presuppositions about interpersonal relations.

5. *Intellectual activity.* Presuppositions about the validity of certain types of intellectual activity may be particularly difficult for persons in another culture to understand or to appreciate. From the biblical viewpoint, for example, truth is not an abstract definition of reality or being but is essentially right thinking about moral behavior, and wisdom is not intellectual capacity to formulate philosophical questions and provide cogent systems but rather the ability to decide moral and human issues with justice. The symbols of light and darkness are not related in the Bible to knowledge and ignorance, but to deliverance from or slavery to evil. And "to know" the Lord, sin, or deliverance, is not to "know about" such objects or events, but to experience them.

But presuppositions about valid intellectual activity also involve the acceptability of certain procedures for ascertaining what is true. For example, the use of quotations in the Scriptures differs markedly from what present-day scholars would regard as acceptable canons of proof. The Gospel of Matthew (2:15), for example, cites "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Hos. 11:1), even though in the original context the reference is clearly to the people of Israel and not to the Messiah. Similarly, the Gospel of Mark announces a citation from Isaiah, though the first part of the quotation actually comes from Malachi. In the Letter to the Hebrews (1:7), a citation from the Old Testament in which God makes the winds his angels and flames of fire his servants is quoted in an inverted form, "God makes his angels winds and his servants flames of fire."

Such procedures for quotation of Old Testament texts were quite in keeping with the contemporary presuppositions about the use of sacred texts.

Unless one understands the New Testament usage in this light, confusion can become seriously confused. When Paul makes a point of the Old Testament use of "seed" and not "seeds" as a reference to Christ (Gal. 3:16), one should not conclude that Paul was unaware of the fact that in reality "seed" in this context referred to "descendants" or "lineage." He was simply using canons of scriptural reference that were completely acceptable in his day, and was arguing with the Judaizers in a way that they would have accepted as fully valid. But such use of the Scriptures rests upon presuppositions about verbal proofs that are in general foreign to present-day assumptions about how authors should be cited.

These types of presuppositions, which are so basic to any adequate comprehension of the meaning of any communication, do not, however, exist in a vacuum, even though for the most part they are never verbalized. Being so fundamental to a people's whole outlook, they do not require specification; no one feels any obligation to state the obvious. But to state that the presuppositions are not verbalized does not mean that they are empty rationalizations. Quite the contrary, they are constantly manifested in the daily life of the people of any culture, both in the recurring cultural patterns of behavior and in the ways in which people understand and interpret events.

### Patterns of Behavior

Patterns of behavior are those recurring events that are typical of any society, and it is through such actions that the basic presuppositions about life and values become most readily known. The casting of lots to determine innocence or guilt, the use of Urim and Thummim in deciding issues, the use of ashes from the altar in ordeals, and sexual abstinence before going into battle are indices of significant presuppositions about how supernatural guidance and help may be obtained. The emphasis upon names, the importance of verbal blessing and cursing, and the creation of the world through "speaking," all indicate an assumption about the power of words. The importance of levirate marriage, the virginity of the bride, and the use of a wife's maid to beget children (who are then reckoned as those of the wife), all point to certain presuppositions about interpersonal relations of marriage and sex that are quite foreign to modern society. Similarly, the symbolic values assigned to sheep and goats, touching the horns of the altar, and swearing by the "loins" (in reality, the genitals) likewise suggest quite a different set of assumptions about the value of certain objects and actions.

Even more important, however, than the recognition of such patterns of behavior as having underlying presuppositions distinctive of the so-called biblical culture is the fact that these different patterns and their respective assumptions form a consistent whole. This does not mean that they are consistent from the outsider's viewpoint, but within the structure of which they are a part they constitute a meaningful set of integrated relations.

### Interpretation of Events

Not only do the sets of recurring patterns of behavior indicate quite clearly underlying presuppositions about reality and values, but the ways in which events are interpreted also signal important elements in the presuppositions. At one particularly crucial time the Israelites, having suffered severe defeat at the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 4-5), insisted on taking the Ark of the Covenant into battle, because they were confident that this would protect them from defeat. But despite the presence of the Ark, the Israelites were defeated. The Philistines, however, were soon stricken with bubonic plague, and they interpreted this epidemic as punishment from the God of Israel and accordingly sought to placate him by returning the Ark with several gold mice and replicas of bubonic tumors. The presuppositions about the "positive taboo" associated with objects such as the Ark are essential to the understanding of the actions of both the Israelites and the Philistines.

Similarly, in the story of Achan at Ai the magnitude of the guilt can be understood only in the light of the ancient practice of *herem*—that is, consecrating everything to destruction in honor of the deity. Any violation of such a procedure, at least in theory, was regarded as nothing short of sacrilege. Furthermore, Achan's sin implicated his entire family, in view of the prevailing concepts of corporate guilt; hence the stoning of Achan and all his household seemed a completely fitting punishment for such defilement.

In many instances, the interpretation of events involves no such serious issues, but the understanding of an event may depend very much on certain presuppositions. For example, in John 4:27 one reads that the disciples were "greatly surprised to find Jesus talking with a woman." Most persons today would be surprised if Jesus did not take advantage of the opportunity to speak to a woman so evidently in need. But it is only in the light of the Jewish tradition that insisted "no Rabbi would speak with a woman" that one can fully understand the surprise of the disciples.

This same story, however, may give rise to an entirely different interpretation in societies having quite a different set of presuppositions about behavior. For example, in some places a request for food or water from a woman under such circumstances (when there was evidently no one else around) is almost always interpreted as a request for sexual relations. It is quite impossible in a translation designed for the people of such a society to change the story of Jesus' conversation with the woman, but it is certainly essential that some marginal note be employed to explain correctly what was intended by Jesus' remark and how the subsequent surprise of the disciples is to be understood.

The cultural presuppositions, the behavioral patterns that reflect such presuppositions, and the interpretations that persons give to objects and events all constitute a unified whole. One simply cannot change any part without

immediately running into problems with certain other aspects of the system. For example, some persons have insisted that the demoniac who claimed that his name was "Legion" was really suffering from an inferiority complex, and that the translation of this story should make this clear. But if the demoniac were to reply to Jesus that he had an inferiority complex rather than being possessed by a "Legion," his insight would have been rather anachronistic, to say the least, and such insight is not normal for persons who are so deranged. But an even more complicated problem results from the rest of the story. It may be one thing to free a man from an inferiority complex, but quite another thing to cast such a complex into a herd of swine.

Whether a modern translator believes in demons or not is not the issue. What is important is that the Gospel writers took them seriously, and it is the viewpoint of the Gospel writer and not one's own presuppositions which should be reflected in a translation.

One Bible translator attempted to produce a version of the New Testament designed for rural, uneducated people in the southern United States. In one of his earlier attempts Jesus is said to have been born in a shack, because there was no room in the motor court. But this type of "modernization" of the account immediately involves a cultural transposition, which produces a credibility gap for the rest of the story. Motor courts simply do not fit in a land where camels and donkeys were the chief means of transportation. The historical setting of events, the cultural presuppositions, and the interpretations of events are all woven into the same biblical fabric. If the translator cuts into it at one point, it unravels throughout. Consequently, if one does attempt to culturally transpose when rendering the biblical message, it is essential that one be consistent and go the whole way.

This is precisely what Clarence Jordan did in the Cotton Patch Version, in which Rome becomes Washington, Annas and Caiaphas are co-presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Jesus is lynched rather than crucified. However, Jordan was unable to maintain a complete transposition, and as Paul sails to Rome in Acts 27-28 the story reverts to its original historical setting, rather than having Paul make a quick jet trip.

It is important to note that this culturally adapted version, although excellent in many ways, has not been adopted or appreciated by those who are socially, educationally, economically, and geographically closest to the cultural transpositions that have been introduced. Only those persons who for special reasons are sympathetic with Jordan's view of church and society have been able to appreciate the none-too-subtle irony of these cultural modernizations.