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Translating Means Communicating

Having discussed the various factors that enter into the communication of a message within a single language (and primarily in terms of the biblical languages as the source languages), we must now analyze the applications of communication theory for the problems of translation—that is, the transferring of a source-language message into a receptor language. The model for this involves the same essential elements as for communication within a language: the source, the message, the receptors, the setting, and the interpretive frame of reference.

The Receptor-Source

Translators, who can be regarded as the immediate source of translations, always play a double role, inasmuch as they are both receptor and source, but they are basically secondary receptors (unless they happen to participate in an original communication—for example, in so-called simultaneous interpreting). Normally they should be persons who speak the receptor language as their mother tongue but who have a completely adequate comprehension of the source language. The source language and its cultural context, however, may have been learned through the medium of a world language, which may or may not be the translator's own.

More fundamental, however, than knowledge of a language and its cultural frame of interpretation are the attitudes that translators have toward such languages, because their emotional identification with one or another language is crucial. Translators, for example, who are more in love with Greek or Hebrew than with their own mother tongue are likely to prove very poor Bible translators. They will almost inevitably feel constrained to carry over into their own language some of the forms that they have learned to appreciate in the foreign tongue.

On the other hand, it is also possible for translators to become so enamored of a receptor language they have studied (especially when they have reduced such a language to writing and thus tend to regard it as "their own") that they may want to "purify" it of all foreign borrowings or may think that its exotic differences must all be preserved for posterity by being incorporated into the Scriptures. It is not easy for one to be in love with a language and at the same time be completely objective about its strengths and

weaknesses—and all languages have both. But translators need to be sufficiently informed in their study of literary potentialities of a receptor language in order to be objective.

The Message

Perhaps the most difficult task for any translator is to think of the message in terms of the receptor-language frame of interpretation based on the presuppositions and values of the culture. Having studied the message in the source language, a translator almost inevitably understands it in the light of this language-culture context. But this is precisely what the average receptor cannot do. Being unacquainted with the source language (otherwise there would be no need for a translation), the receptors must interpret the message in terms of the only frame of interpretation that they have—namely, their own receptor culture.

Because translators always recognize, at least to some extent, this problem of disparity between the source and receptor languages (and their corresponding sets of presuppositions and values), there is usually some effort made to correct what may seem to be crucial difficulties. One type of correction that leads to many errors is borrowing—that is, introducing into the receptor language those foreign terms that will presumably carry the content that they have in the source language. But they rarely do so. Words that are borrowed by the translators themselves (not those that have been borrowed at an earlier time and may have already been "naturalized," even to the point where many receptors are not aware of their borrowed status) do not come into the language clothed in their proper content. In fact such words may be said to enter a language entirely naked. They have to be given their semantic clothes from association with certain objects and events. Such a word may also be said to be a "zero" word; it is not nothing, but a significant absence of something. This means that it will inevitably be given some content, but not necessarily the content that it had in the language from which it has been derived.

Early Roman Catholic missionaries in Latin America hoped to communicate the proper meaning of God by introducing the Spanish term *Dios* among Indians who had worshipped the sun as the supreme deity. But though *Dios* was borrowed, it soon acquired only the meaning of the sun-god, who was then called *Tata Dios*, "Father God." In one of the languages of Africa Protestant missionaries insisted on borrowing the Greek *pneuma* (in the form of *nyuma*) for "spirit," even though the indigenous language contained numerous terms for spirit. Similarly, Roman Catholics borrowed *Espiritu* (from Latin *spiritus*) for the same local language. But both Protestant and Roman Catholic catechists had to explain these terms by indigenous expressions, and they happened to employ precisely the same forms in doing so. In the end nothing had really been gained, for the borrowed words simply came to be interpreted in the light of already existing beliefs. This does not mean

that borrowed terms are never legitimate, but it does mean that filling them with content is not an easy task. In general, descriptive phrases are much better than borrowed foreign terms.

Media and Channels

Because Christian faith, especially in its Protestant forms, has been traditionally expressed so preeminently in verbal forms, it is sometimes difficult for Christians to realize that the communication of religion in other societies may employ quite different media. In many religions very little is said about one's beliefs. In fact there may be no formalized statement about the tenets of such a faith. Individuals are not instructed in religion; they are simply expected to practice it by offering gifts to the ancestors, sacrificing to the gods of the forest, or pouring libations to the spirits of the animal world. They learn by performing its rituals, not by being catechized. In fact many Hindus refuse to engage in religious dialogue: they claim that it is contrary to the very nature of religion, for religion is something to be experienced rather than to be discussed. They contend that to experience is to know, and merely to talk about religious beliefs is to miss their true meaning.

It is precisely the emphasis upon the catechetical or verbal role of Christianity that makes it seem so much more like classroom instruction (like going to school) than like worship. In fact, when some Africans have been asked if they are Christians, they have explained their negative reply by adding, "But we have not learned to read." It is quite possible in some forms of Christianity to know a great deal about God without knowing God, and to be instructed in the faith without really believing. This does not mean that the verbalization of religious experience is unimportant, but it is basically secondary and derivative. Formulations of doctrines are only descriptions of reality; they are not the reality themselves.

The basic problem for Bible translating is that in so many cultures religion is not primarily an object of verbal discourse, but a series of ritual events by which human being's relation to supernatural powers and realities are "re-enacted." In a sense this is precisely the strength of many pentecostal and charismatic movements, with their emphasis upon experience rather than upon intellectual comprehension.

The problems of channel are, however, equally as serious as those involving the communication media. At present great emphasis is placed upon the distribution of the Bible to those outside the Christian community. This is both important and strategic, but it involves a number of problems that are directly related to the form of the message itself, because the Bible was not produced primarily as a message for those outside the community of faith. It was essentially a message for those who had already accepted the faith.

The books of the Old Testament were written primarily as a record of God's dealing with persons within the covenant relation. These books gained a considerable audience in the ancient pagan world because they contained such a

relatively high set of moral and ethical values and because they differed so conspicuously from the myths about the nature gods of the Greeks and Romans. But the Old Testament was never designed to serve as a vehicle of evangelism or proselytism. As to the New Testament, the Epistles in particular were directed to the peculiar problems of the believing communities, and even the Gospels were written first and foremost for the establishment of the faith among believers. Secondly, these documents were evidently intended to serve the important purpose of assisting the witness of those who communicated their faith to others, by providing in written form a substitute for the personal witness of those who had been with Jesus but who were dying off in increasing numbers by the time the Gospels were composed.

Though the Scriptures were designed to accompany the witness of the believing community, they were not prepared as "tracts for popular distribution." In fact, in the ancient world the cost of books was relatively so high that widespread distribution of the biblical message through handwritten scrolls was quite impossible. Though literacy was almost universal in the ancient world, its use was far more commercial than recreational, and few persons were wealthy enough to have libraries.

At the present time, however, the churches and the Bible Societies have undertaken to distribute the Bible in relatively inexpensive editions to many persons who are entirely untouched personally by the church. The Bible is thus not simply a confirmatory document used by the church in its word-of-mouth witness, but is an "instrument of evangelism"—in fact, it has been called "the cutting edge of evangelism." This means, however, that the Scriptures are being used as a channel quite different from the original one.

Because some persons wish the Bible to go where the missionary cannot go, and some even intend for the New Testament alone to produce a "New Testament church," it is not strange that new demands are being placed upon the Bible and the translator. Some persons, for example, would like to have the translator "fill out the text," adding all the background information that may be useful to present-day readers, so that they may understand everything that the original reader did. This would mean producing a combination of commentary and translation, much like the ancient Targums written for the Jewish people when many among them could no longer readily understand Hebrew. Others would go even further and insist that the Bible itself be re-written, to contain the same truths but in entirely new cultural clothing. This would mean both reinterpreting the contents and re-editing the style to fit modern readers.

Most persons, however, strongly reject the idea that the Bible should be rewritten, because they respect too much the historical setting of God's revelation and have too high a regard for the integrity of the documents themselves. They insist, however, that certain background information must be given in marginal helps, so that the present-day reader can understand the distinctive features of the biblical account. They also realize that certain adjustments must be made within the text itself, but obviously there must be

limits to such adjustments. Otherwise the translation ceases to be really a translation and becomes a kind of running commentary.

There is, however, no general agreement as to what can and should be done to make the Scriptures more meaningful to persons of today. The fundamental reasons for the need to do something different from what has been the traditional practice are due in large measure to the distinctively different way in which the Scriptures are now being used as a channel of communication. The solution to these problems is the essential concern of the final chapters of this book.

The Receptors

In any original communication a competent source quite naturally attempts to anticipate the ways in which receptors are likely to respond to or interpret the message. This means that the source employs what might be called "anticipatory feedback"—that is, sensing in advance how an audience is likely to react to what is said. As a result, the writer chooses words and employs discourse forms that will be effective in communicating the message.

Anticipatory feedback is actually the mechanism behind the development of the rhetorical style known technically as "diatribe," a type of philosophical argumentation that takes up one by one the possible arguments of one's opponents and attempts to answer them. Such rhetorical devices are quite common in the Pauline Epistles, especially the Epistle to the Romans where the opposition arguments are frequently identified as such and in some cases imaginary opponents are even addressed by the use of the second person plural (Rom. 2:1, 17; 3:1; 6:1; 7:1; 9:19).

Though authors should be expected to employ some measure of anticipatory feedback with respect to their original set of receptors, one cannot expect them to anticipate the ways in which all persons at all times and under all circumstances will react to what they say. In a sense it is translators who must employ anticipatory feedback as they direct the message to an audience different from the first. Translators, however, do not have the privileges of the original author—namely, to edit, restructure, and revise the original work on the basis of possible criticism. Translators must reflect the manner in which the original author anticipated the problems of comprehension on the part of the original audience, but translators can assist their own audience by producing a text that does not mislead the reader. Therefore, in the wording of the translation and in the supplementary information it contains, the text should be a clear and accurate representation of the message as communicated by the original author, so that the receptors of the translated message will not misunderstand how the original receptors must have understood the message.

How the receptors of a translation interpret the form and content of a message depends in considerable measure upon the extent to which they understand the original language-culture setting. If they understand the presup-

positions and values and comprehend the meaning of the various biblical patterns, they will have little or no difficulty in deciding what the original message must have meant to the first receptors. If, however, they lack this information and if they have no ready access to such data, it is inevitable that they will understand the message of the translation only in terms of their own frame of interpretation, in which their own cultural presuppositions and values play a dominant role. For example, if receptors have no knowledge of the practice in ancient times of a man "marrying his sister" (probably a reference to a practice similar to the Hurrute tradition of adopting a wife as a sister, as a means of facilitating transfer of property rights), they can only interpret Abraham's relation to Sarah as being incestuous, and they may very well conclude that Sarah's sterility was a fitting divine punishment.

More crucial to an interpretation of the biblical message, however, are the "holy wars," in which not only men, but women, children, and even cattle are slaughtered. Such events are not only abhorrent to the so-called civilized world (though the bombing of civilian populations is a modern parallel), but they are equally inexplicable to many so-called primitive peoples, who simply cannot understand why women and children were not permitted to live, to be adopted into the tribal group, and thus to increase the strength and well-being of the community. The destruction of cattle is thought to be even more senseless.

Without some understanding of the presuppositions about the hallowed character of the Sabbath, most readers completely miss the point of the Pharisees' objection to what Jesus' disciples did on the Sabbath day as they went through a wheat field and plucked, threshed, and ate the grain. Readers can see the reprehensible nature of "stealing the grain," but they cannot understand how anyone could or should object to threshing and eating it.

For societies where spitting is used to convey a blessing (e.g., the Shilluks in the Sudan), the fact that Jesus spat upon the tongue of a man as part of the process of healing his dumbness is understandable; but to many others this use of spittle seems not only strange but repulsive.

Sensitive translators will recognize that many accounts in the Scriptures produce misunderstanding. But what are they to do? They cannot change the nature of the account and still be faithful to the text that they are translating, for they are translators; they are not the original writer. Some translators have felt that they should introduce into the text all the information that might be useful in providing background for a full understanding of a passage, but to do this would be to violate the authenticity of the original communication. No such explanation was necessary in the original communication, because the receptors shared with the source the same background data and presuppositions. To translate as though the original receptors did not understand how to comprehend the message would introduce an anachronistic element that could be fatal to a proper appreciation of the historical integrity of the message. But to do nothing about such background information can be equally misleading.

Despite the lack of background information, however, many readers of the

Bible seem not unduly disturbed by what they do not understand or by what they judge to be contradictory or inconsistent. Many have been taught that the Bible cannot contain any errors, and therefore they conclude that any problems of comprehension must be their own fault and not that of the text. In fact, however, most persons simply put their confidence in someone whom they regard as a competent guide in such matters, and they conclude that since someone else has faced the problems and has continued to believe, they can and should do likewise. If the church possesses a particularly strong "sense of community" (and especially if it has important social, economic, and legal force), persons will remain at least nominal or statistical members of the community, despite almost total lack of active faith. In a sense they possess a kind of schizophrenic religious experience, with two different sets of ideas that have not been resolved, and often two different sets of behavior reflecting these differences.

A more satisfactory approach to the differences and conflicts between presuppositions in the biblical and receptor cultures consists in understanding enough of the background of biblical life and times to appreciate the manner in which the divine revelation has come in the midst of these cultural assumptions, and even despite them. It is only then that one begins to comprehend certain of the unique features of the biblical revelation: God's initiative in seeking humankind, a concept of history that looks forward to the rule of justice, the transformation of human beings through love, and the unparalleled personality and ministry of Jesus.

But in the same manner as God was revealed in the person of the Son, who had "emptied himself" of certain divine prerogatives, so the revelation of God in the biblical record can be understood only within the limitations imposed by the presuppositions and cultural patterns of the language-culture setting. These insights are not something that the translator can translate into the text of the Scriptures; they must come as the result of the teaching of the "believing community." The translator can only provide a limited amount of adjustment and supplementary information. A translation is not a substitute for a commentary, nor is a text of Scripture equivalent to a sermon.

Diverse Sets of Presuppositions

In previous sections the presuppositions and values of a culture have been spoken of as though they constituted a single consistent whole. This is, however, by no means the case. Within the Bible itself there are quite different presuppositions. The henotheism (that is, one God superior to all others) of certain parts of the Old Testament gives place to monotheism, which denies the very existence of other gods. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament is completely rejected in the New Testament. The polygamy of the Old Testament is set aside in the New Testament. Jesus himself referred to certain aspects of the law as "you have heard it was said," and then proceeded to give the law a quite different interpretation and relevance. It was precisely the

differences in presuppositions that gave rise to the first conflict within the church—namely, the manner in which Gentiles were to be admitted to the fellowship.

Not only does the Bible reflect different sets of presuppositions of ancient Palestinian life, it also contains references to certain Greco-Roman presuppositions of the ancient world. The Johannine writings clearly indicate the struggle of the early church against the beliefs of Gnosticism, which were based on a primordial dualism of spirit and matter and which sought to interpret the incarnation and the resurrection in dualistic terms, thus allowing for the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Christ.

If one is prepared to recognize differences of presuppositions in the Bible, it is even more necessary to realize that there are quite different sets of cultural assumptions in most present-day societies. Within the western world, for example, the "scientific viewpoint" is supposed to represent the thinking of "modern man," but this is far from being generally true. Perhaps most intellectuals possess a "scientific, secular view of the world," which might be characterized roughly as (1) an explanation of life on the basis of biological evolution, (2) a mechanistic interpretation of the universe, requiring no "supreme intelligence," (3) an interpretation of history based essentially on purely human forces operating within certain ecological limits, and (4) a set of ethical values that are derived from human nature and are essentially humanistic. Along with such views of the world go a rejection of supernatural beings, a repudiation of magic, and lack of interest in religious activities.

But for a majority of persons in the modern world, this scientific view of life is quite foreign. They may have rejected established religions, but they have certainly not given up clairvoyance, astrology, mediums, witches, and amulets (such as rabbits' feet, lucky pennies, and images). Some may even claim a "scientific view" in certain contexts of life, but they fear a curse from a good person and they seek healing from those claiming "miracle cures." In fact, many persons, despite their formal adherence to one or another system of thought, have strange mixtures of belief, and rarely if ever do they attempt to resolve the underlying contradictions: they believe what they want to believe. In a sense they are "spreading their risks," and they seem to be as content with second-hand doubts as with second-hand faith.

In view of the important differences of presuppositions that may exist within a single society, it is not surprising that there are vast differences between the biblical culture and other cultures in the world. One might assume that the differences would be particularly striking if one compared the culture of the Bible with that of some present-day society in Central Africa. In reality, however, they have much in common: polygamy, belief in miracles, the practice of blessing and cursing, slavery, systems for revenge, sacrifice, and communications through dreams and visions. The pastoral Navajos see much in the Bible that is parallel to their own way of life: tending sheep, casting out evil spirits, corporate responsibility, discerning the weather by the

sky, foretelling its, and the expectation of the end of this world (after which great changes will be instituted).

In a sense the Bible is the most translatable religious book that has ever been written, for it comes from a particular time and place (the western end of the Fertile Crescent) through which passed more cultural patterns and out from which radiated more distinctive features and values than has been the case with any other place in the history of the world. If one were to make a comparison of the culture traits of the Bible with those of all the existing cultures of today (one would have to reckon with some two thousand significantly different groups of persons), one would find that in certain respects the Bible is surprisingly closer to many of them than to the technological culture of the western world. It is this "western" culture that is the aberrant one in the world. And it is precisely in the western world, and in the growing number of persons in other parts of the world who share its worldview, that the Scriptures have seemingly the least ready acceptance.

One of the important developments in Christianity that reflects this difference in cultural outlook is the rapidly growing number of "indigenous churches." It is estimated that in Africa alone, within the last twenty years more than fifteen million persons have become related to the "independent" or "separatist" churches, which for the most part find themselves at home with the Bible but alienated from the traditional institutions of western Christianity. Instinctively these persons feel an identity with the Bible, but they feel out of place in traditional western churches, which in so many ways no longer reflect "the life and faith of the Bible."

Though one cannot face fairly the problems of the translator without reckoning with the many and often striking differences between the culture of the Bible and that of other societies, it would be quite wrong to exaggerate the diversities, as some persons have done. As anthropologists have frequently pointed out, there is far more that unites different peoples in a common humanity than that which separates them into distinct groups. Such cultural universals as the recognition of reciprocity and equity in interpersonal relations, response to human kindness and love, the desire for meaning in life, the acknowledgment of human nature's inordinate capacity for evil and self-deception (or rationalization of sin), and its need for something greater and more important than itself—all these universals are constantly recurring themes in the Bible. These are the elements in the Scripture that have appealed to numberless persons through the centuries and across cultural frontiers.

What is important about recent interest in the Bible in the western world is the very fact that the Scriptures come from another age and from a distant culture. For a long while modern persons have been told that their problems are the direct result of their technologically based life characterized by urbanization and industrialization, but now many are discovering that persons portrayed in the Bible had precisely the same problems and needs as persons today—the proclivity to sin even when they want to do right, the feeling of

guilt, a need for forgiveness, power to resist temptation, and the desire to love and to be loved. The fact that these universal needs are exemplified within the context of concrete historical events involving real life is what makes the Bible so much alive and appealing to persons in so many societies.

Historical Setting of the Bible

As compared with the basic documents or verbal traditions of other religions, the Bible is unique in its portrayal of actual events involving specific human beings. Whereas the religious documents of Hinduism concern primarily the exploits of the gods, the Bible is concerned essentially with the activity of God in human history. And in contrast with the religious treatises of Buddhism (which contain primarily philosophically derived ethical principles) and with the Koran (which focuses upon the exhortations and warnings of the prophet), the Bible is rooted in history and consists primarily in recounting how God has entered history to reveal the divine power, will, and person. Biblical faith is thus firmly rooted in events—in a God who acts.

Moreover, the God of the Bible is portrayed as acting in specific instances and not merely in generalized ways. Thus the specific historical context of the biblical account acquires very important theological implications, and Christians have almost instinctively reacted against any attempts to transpose the cultural and historical context of the biblical accounts. In reaction to one attempt to transpose the biblical message into an African setting, a chief remarked, "If that was what really happened, then why did not our grandfathers tell us about it?" Making the biblical account too contemporary can, in fact, destroy some of its very credibility.

From the standpoint of Judeo-Christian biblical theology, the entrance of God into history at specific times and places is both relevant and crucial. It is obvious, therefore, that the events recorded in the Bible cannot be altered. If, however, a certain event depends for its meaning upon a set of presuppositions that are conspicuously different from those of the receptor culture, what is the translator to do to prevent serious misunderstanding? In the first place, the translator cannot hope to make the message so clear that any reader can fully understand it without any reference whatsoever to the presuppositions that underlie the biblical account. That is to say, the translator cannot be expected to so transpose the message linguistically and culturally that it will fit completely within the interpretive frame of the receptor culture. To do this would mean to rob the message of its distinctive time-space setting. Furthermore, the translator's purpose is not to make the message sound as though the events took place in a nearby town only a few years ago. Rather, the objective should be to so translate (and with the translation to provide such background data) as to prevent receptors from misunderstanding what the original receptors understood when they first received the message.

Where the message seems merely unusual in terms of a particular receptor culture, the translator is not required to make adjustments or provide supple-

mentary information; commentaries are designed to do this very thing. Where, however, a translation results in a text that would have a contrary meaning or would be misleading or would seem meaningless, then something must be done, either through some adaptation in the text or by means of cross-referencing or by some marginal note, whether on the same page or in a glossary. Just how this is to be done and under what circumstances will be dealt with in Chapter 7.

One can be sympathetic with translators who wish to produce a translation that is at the same time a running commentary. As already noted, this is what the early Jewish Targums were—a blend of translation and commentary. They arose out of what might be called an “evangelistic concern,” because many Jews could not understand the Hebrew text and so needed something that would make the text fully meaningful. Accordingly, the Aramaic Targums were prepared; but it is important to note that they were strictly limited in their usefulness and the principle of the Targums was not adopted in Christianity.

The targumizing tendency, however, still exists among some Bible translators, especially among those who prepare texts for presumably “primitive peoples.” Since such peoples are not used to books and are often regarded as incapable of appreciating or understanding the differences between the text and the marginal helps, the argument is that certain radical adjustments, major inclusions, and supplementation of the text, for example, are required.

As a temporary expedient, such a procedure may have its value in tentative and preliminary materials, but in general the very persons for whom such texts are prepared soon repudiate them, once they acquire more knowledge about the Scriptures and the form that they have in major languages. A combination of translation and commentary is often repudiated as just another instance of paternalism on the part of those who have failed to see that even presumably primitive persons are intellectually capable of making important distinctions between the biblical account and necessary supplementary information.

The Difference between Exegesis and Hermeneutics

Exegesis may be described as the process of reconstructing the communication event by determining its meaning (or meanings) for the participants in the communication. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, may be described as pointing out parallels between the biblical message and present-day events and determining the extent of relevance and the appropriate response for the believer. Both exegesis and hermeneutics are included within the larger category of interpretation.

It is the task of the biblical scholar to provide insight into the problems of exegesis, and it is primarily the task of the preacher to help persons understand the relevance of the biblical message for the quite different language-culture settings of today. Some persons have misconstrued the preacher's task

as being merely that of an exegete, and it is not difficult to see how it could have arisen, in view of some of the almost incredibly difficult translations of the Bible that have been in use. In fact, in one instance members of a translation committee objected to producing a clear translation of a particular passage, though they readily agreed as to its meaning and how it could be effectively and accurately expressed in the receptor language. They objected to producing a perfectly clear translation, and gave as their reason, “What then would the ministers have to do?” Obviously, with at least some of the exegetical difficulties resolved, the preachers could begin to preach, rather than merely to exegete such difficult passages.

The practical results of differences in the hermeneutics of the Scriptures depend in considerable measure upon whether the biblical cultural practice can be literally imitated. For example, if persons can imitate certain cultural features—resting on the seventh day, requiring long hair for women, abstaining from “unclean foods,” and prohibiting women from speaking in church—they often do so, on the basis that the forms prescribed in the Bible must be preserved as being supracultural, even though the presuppositions that gave these forms their original significance are not accepted in the receptor culture. When these forms are carried over as regulations for present-day living, there is usually some attempt to insist on the validity of the accompanying presuppositions.

Most persons, however, interpret the biblical cultural forms in quite a different manner. They make no attempt to duplicate the formal features, but they try to understand the relation between the biblical cultural forms and the corresponding presuppositions and try to understand the relations, together with their meanings.

For example, when some of the Tzeltal believers in southern Mexico read Paul's admonition to refrain from marrying in order that God could be served more faithfully, they reasoned that for themselves at least quite the opposite situation prevailed. They felt that young people did not really settle down to serve the Lord with their whole hearts until they did get married, and therefore what was important in Paul's teaching was not abstinence from marriage but serving the Lord with complete faithfulness. This implied for the Tzeltals quite a different form from the one advocated by Paul for the Corinthians.

Some Protestants have taken special pleasure in citing Jesus' admonition not to call any man “father.” They have studiously avoided this form, while failing to see that “reverend” or “doctor” implies precisely the same kind of class and rank distinction within a community of faith. Hermeneutics does not focus primarily upon the cultural forms but upon their relations to the presuppositions that do or should underlie them.

Somewhat more complex problems of hermeneutics occur when the biblical forms of behavior cannot be imitated or should not be practiced at the present time. Nevertheless, some persons insist that all the accounts described in the Bible must be accepted as fully justifiable actions. Accord-

ingly, the exploit of revenge that Samson carried out against his enemies are regarded as justified vengeance, rather than as the tragic consequence of living by brute force. And Jacob's cleverness in cheating his brother Esau is similarly interpreted by many as predestined divine guidance rather than as a fearful failure in justice that contributed to generations of enmity, hatred, and suffering. A proper hermeneutics of the Scriptures can be based only upon the relations between the events and the associated presuppositions, as seen in the light of the whole biblical account and not from the narrow perspective of some momentary advantage.

On the basis of this type of hermeneutics preachers proceed to note parallels in modern life, and they do not have far to look. They may see in the story of the Good Samaritan a parallel in a black traveling salesman taking care of a member of the Ku Klux Klan who has been badly injured in an auto wreck; or the parable of the Prodigal Son may suggest a father welcoming home a hippie son who brings back a drug habit and venereal disease. The preacher's task is to lead the congregation in finding relevant parallels in modern life, and in discovering how persons can meaningfully live out the Good News in worship of God and in service to others.

Some theologians have insisted that the preacher's task must stop short of making an application and that laypersons must discover the implications of the text for themselves. But if preachers are only exegetes, they have adopted a role quite different from that of the ancient prophets, for the latter did not hesitate to declare how persons should right wrongs. The expository ministry of Jesus, largely through the use of parables, left no doubt as to what his followers should do if they wanted to "inherit the kingdom."

The task of the preacher, however, is quite different from that of the exegete and likewise very different from that of the translator. Hermeneutics, if it is to be effective, must depend upon linguistic and cultural transposition; but exegesis must confine itself to the detailed analysis of the original communication event, so as to provide a historically accurate and meaningful basis for later exposition. The translator must likewise provide the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, so that it too may be employed effectively by receptor-language expositors in their task of transposition.

4

The Form of the Message

In any message there are two important elements that carry meaning: form and content. Both of these are especially crucial for the translator because they both involve a number of features requiring certain adjustments or supplementation if the meaning of the text is to be satisfactorily communicated.

The formal elements involve all formal features, from the transliteration of proper names to the literary genre. The meaning of these formal features is both cognitive and emotive. For example, the logical sequences of thought in a discourse (without regard to content) are basically cognitive, but ways in which such thoughts may be arranged and related may produce favorable or unfavorable emotive reactions.

The basic features of form involve primarily the following categories: (1) transliteration, (2) morphological structures (the structure of words), (3) phrase structures (the combination of words into clauses and sentences), (4) rhetorical devices (e.g., direct and indirect discourse, rhetorical questions, personification, chiasm, irony, hyperbole), (5) measured lines (i.e., poetic structures), (6) figurative language, (7) discourse structure (i.e., the organization of content in narrative, descriptive, argument, and dialogue discourse), and (8) literary genre (e.g., apocalyptic, prophetic, legislative, epistolary).

Everyone will agree as to the importance of adjustments in the meanings of certain words and phrases, but some persons overlook almost completely the problems of adjustments in purely formal features, for they seem to carry little or no meaning and therefore would seem to be more or less mechanical elements in the translator's task of transferring a message from the source to the receptor language. It is quite true that some of the so-called lower levels of structure (sounds, word classes, and syntax) involve largely obligatory adjustments, though these are not without certain subtle differences of meaning; and the so-called higher levels of structure (e.g., rhetorical features, discourse structures, literary genres) involve much more optional elements. But it is precisely in the area of optional elements that a translator has some of the most difficult decisions to make. These aspects of language involve important values, for they are so intimately related to matters of style.

Even though these formal features of language seem to be much less important than the content of a message, they are nevertheless extremely significant and must be seriously considered before any really satisfactory analysis can be made of the translational difficulties involving content, which are considered in Chapter 5.