The Terms of Translation
Ideological Challenges for Bible Translators

by Roy E. Ciampa

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I was able to carry a naïve assumption throughout more than twenty years as a seminary professor of biblical studies. I often see it in my students as well. It probably has surfaced because of fifteen years in Bible translation. It's simply the assumption that the teaching of the Bible will inevitably result in a positive impact on the lives of others. That assumption reflects my own experience of the Bible and the ideological context in which I have operated since first gaining significant knowledge of it through personal reading. Of course the Bible has been experienced by millions of people as liberating, freeing, transforming, saving, and empowering. It provides the key to understanding God's love for us, how that love has been manifested, and how it's to be expressed one to another.

This is true of Bible translators as well. They have experienced the Bible's ability to impact their lives for the better. It has granted them a life-changing understanding of God, of themselves, of salvation, and of their purpose in life. Given such a positive relationship with the Scriptures, and their high regard for its authority and inspiration, they might naturally assume that the Bible's impact on new peoples and cultures will inevitably be positive.

We who translate the Bible are usually aware of the historical role of the Bible in promoting cultural changes that benefit society, including the establishment of orphanages, hospitals, schools and other institutions, and its remarkable role in the fight against slavery, prejudice and other social evils. But as a professor training present and future Christian ministers and workers, I recognize that this same material, so wonderfully transformative in people's lives, has also been taught and used in ways that harm vast numbers of people. My fear is that somehow I and my students would add to those numbers, and so I want to consider in this article one translation practice that might help us prevent an inappropriate use of Scripture.

The Bible and Ideological Criticism

The abuses I am most concerned with in this essay are those that result from the ideologies we hold and bring to Scripture. These ideologies are often applied and reinforced in our translation and interpretation of the Bible, most often in unconscious and unintended ways. Sandra Schneiders offers a simple definition of ideology, framing it as "that entire generalized theoretical structuring of reality through which one experiences all of life."[1] But she offers another definition (in passing) that does more to highlight the relationship of ideology to issues of power. Ideology has to do with "a thought world generated by and supportive of a particular power agenda . . . usually only visible to those excluded from the power system."[2]
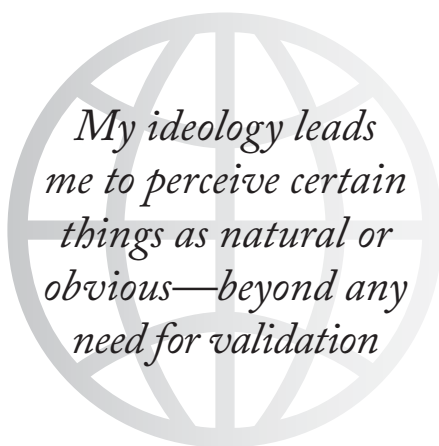
I find both of Schneiders' definitions very helpful, but would offer the following as my more inclusive definition of ideology for the purposes of this essay:

> The complex set of individual and socially-shared conscious and unconscious loyalties (whether philosophical, interpersonal, emotional or whatever) that are influenced and reinforced by my cognitive mapping of my world and which lead me to prefer certain ways of seeing myself, my context and the broader world around me, to perceive some things as problematical and not others (which other people might consider problematical), and to prefer particular ways of addressing the problems which come to my attention.

The reference to "loyalties" in my definition is intended to highlight the relationship between ideology and power agendas as well as the unconscious nature of this relationship for most people. My ideology leads me to perceive certain things as natural or obvious—beyond any need for validation or defense. Because we all tend to be blind to our own ideological commitments,

I need to hear from others to better be able to recognize my real or perceived blind spots and complicities. I need to be receptive to critiques, especially those that alert me to harm or injustice that is established or sustained by my way of perceiving and acting in the world. As an evangelical Bible translator my ideology has tended to make me (and many others like me) assume that the translation (and preaching) of the Bible is obviously and inevitably a positive activity that could hardly do anything but good in the world. Those who do not share my ideology will more readily recognize problematical consequences of my translation (and preaching) of the Bible.

Ideological issues related to Bible translation are innumerable. They

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relate to every aspect of Bible translation, including issues like:

- *who* translates the Bible? (people within the receiving community or outsiders or some combination that reflects a particular power structure)
- *what parts* are prioritized? (starting with the Old Testament or the New, whole books or portions, and which books or portions)
- *for whom* are we translating? (for churches, groups of believers, unreached peoples)
- *why* are we translating? (with clear evangelistic/ missionary purposes or for

the strengthening of existing churches and/or believers, or for other purposes)

- *how* are we translating? (by whose rules, philosophy, funding, accountability, or technology)
- *who decides* all of these things? (who has the power, and why)

Power is reflected and exerted at every one of these points, and the extent to which people recognize or feel any concern for how power and implicit agendas are at work will depend upon their own ideologies.[3] While this applies to Bible translation work in both missionary and in established Christian contexts, these issues are especially sensitive in contexts where missionaries are working to provide Bible translations for those who do not yet have the Bible in their own language.

The Ideological Roots of the English Bible

Certain word choices in the early translation of the English Bible are clear examples of the influence of ideology. When William Tyndale used "congregation" in the place of "church," "senior" (and later, "elder") instead of "priest," "repent" instead of "do penance," and "love" instead of "charity," he was understood to be undermining direct ties with traditional church vocabulary and doctrines, and how the Scriptures had been traditionally understood in that context. He was attacked as a heretic trying to pass off his heresies as though they were inscribed in Scripture itself.[4]

English Bible translators were very aware that their word choices would be understood in light of their potential implications for contemporary and future political and religious power structures. The King James Version (of 1611) was prepared after the separation from Rome, in a context where King James I was motivated to reduce the level of conflicts between Anglican bishops and Puritans in his realm. The churches were divided on numerous subjects, and that division was both

reflected in and reinforced by the different Bibles they used. The Geneva Bible (of 1560), which was favored by Puritans, included marginal notes that promoted Calvinistic and antiroyalist views. As Bruce Metzger points out, "One of the reasons that led King James, in 1604, to agree readily to a new translation of the Scriptures was his dislike of the politics preached in the margins of the Geneva Bible."[5] He invited scholars from both camps to work on the project, to develop a Bible that would be acceptable to both groups. Among the rules to be followed by the translators, however, included the stipulations that the Bishops' Bible (of 1568) was to be followed except when faithfulness to the original would not allow it, that the "Old Ecclesiastical Words" (like "church" and "charity") were to be used rather than recently proposed alternatives (like "congregation" and "love"), and that there were to be no marginal notes except where necessary to explain Greek or Hebrew words (Metzger 2001:71).

The decision to produce a translation based on work by scholars from both camps clearly reflects the (ideological) commitment to promote a more peaceful coexistence (on royal terms). The rules regarding the use of the Bishops' Bible and traditional ecclesiastical terms may be understood to reflect other parts of the king's ideology, and the rule about minimal marginal notes (to eliminate promotion of the views of one side or the other) may also be seen as essential to the goal of having a translation acceptable to both parties (in light of the role such notes played in making the Geneva Bible unacceptable to the king and other Anglican leaders). The King James Version is like all other translations in that it is not merely the result of an objective scientific (or pietistic) process of finding linguistic equivalents, but reflects the impact of ideology in a variety of ways, which would include word choices.

Ideological issues in the translation of the Bible are more serious than with

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the translation of virtually any other piece of literature, due to its status as a sacred text to the vast majority of its readers. Since it carries much greater influence than other writings, whether ancient or modern, it has the potential to do both much greater good and much greater harm than other documents or translations.

The Bible is a Dangerous Book

So, the Bible, amidst all its tremendous good, can be considered a dangerous book. More than two thousand years of Bible translation and Bible usage provide us with innumerable examples of ways in which the Bible has been used to promote or justify oppressive relationships, institutions and customs, including crusades, inquisitions, slavery, anti-Semitism, apartheid, genocide, and the abuse of women, children and minorities. It has been used to empower the powerful at the expense of the powerless. It has also been used in the decimation of native peoples and cultures and the oppression of those who do not submit to its teaching. There are others who willingly submitted to their understanding (or others' understandings) of its teaching, but who found it anything but a liberating experience. A letter signed by Andean Indians and addressed to John Paul II when he visited Peru in 1985 included the following indictment:

> We, the Indians of the Andes and of the Americas would like to take this opportunity of John Paul II's visit to give the Bible back to him, because, in five centuries, it has not given us love, nor peace nor justice. Please take back your Bible and hand it over to our oppressors because they need it more than we do. In fact, since Christopher Columbus set foot here, one culture, one language, one religion and values intrinsically European were imposed upon America by force.[6]

There are many different ways in which the text of the Bible has been and can be used to promote injustice and oppression, and these reflect a translator's ideology or his ideological blinders. The task of Bible translation must be done with an awareness of the ideological issues it raises, and translators need to think carefully about what steps can be taken to reduce unintended collateral damage that could result from a lack of attention to ideology (in light of what has actually happened in the history of the use of the Bible). In this paper, therefore, I wish to address one particular way in which Bible translation reflects and shapes people's ideologies. It relates to that intuitive understanding of many translators who value "direct transferability" in their translation.

Ideological Commitments to Direct Transferability and Their Consequences

By "direct transferability" I'm referring to the idea that readers of Bible translations should feel that the Bible (and God, through the Bible) directly addresses them in their particular circumstances. Approaches to Bible translation that, in Schleiermacher's terms, move the biblical writer toward the reader (domestication) rather than forcing the reader to accommodate to the biblical writer ('foreignization'), are most susceptible to the problems I am concerned with here. Domesticating the Bible to the receptors of a Bible translation is often seen in the attempt to create equivalence. Nida and Taber describe "dynamic equivalence" as "a quality of a translation in which the language of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that *the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors*" (emphasis added).[7] By "response"

they mean "the sum of the reactions of a receptor to a message in terms of understanding (or lack of it), emotional attitude, decision and action".[8] It would seem that a primary reason one would respond the same way as the original receptors is because one believes that one's situation reflects that of the original receptors and, therefore, one has been addressed directly in precisely the same way.

The more a Bible translation speaks in the idioms of my particular language and refers to artifacts or concepts from my cultural environment (e.g., dollars, pounds, kilometers, etc.),[9] the more predisposed I am to adopt the perspective that it was written with my particular context and culture in view and to speak directly to me and my neighbors. I believe "dynamic equivalent" (and other more domesticating) translations have distinct advantages and benefits and that they will be the best approach in many instances, but we should be aware of potential problems or harm to readers if they are not used wisely.

Harriet Hill points out that "Naïve audiences often consider God to be speaking to them directly through Scripture. (Their perceptions of God, and thus the mutual cognitive environment they access, are often heavily influenced by those who have told them about him, however.) They use naïve interpretation, accessing cultural assumptions from their own cognitive environment to process Scripture as best they are able. This can lead to misunderstanding of the author's intended meaning."[10] I am simply pointing out that the naïveté to which she refers is quite common, and often reflected even in statements of Bible translators themselves regarding the power of new Bible translations. It is not uncommon for translators and other Christian leaders to inform their supporters that when people began to hear the Bible being read in their own language for the very first time they responded in dramatic ways, because

for the first time *they heard God speaking to them directly* from the Bible.

Translators, and indeed churches, need to think through whether, or to what extent, leading readers to think the Bible is addressing them directly is an ethically, ideologically or theologically appropriate result, or not. One possible conclusion might be that such a result is more appropriate for some parts of the Bible than others.

Direct transferability is seen as highly desirable (and thanks to the ideology of many, quite natural) to many Bible translators (and readers) but, in my opinion, is also a potential source of much danger and abuse. In case after case, unless the context clearly does not allow for it, readers of the Bible

For the first time they heard God speaking to them directly from the Bible

have shown they expect the function to be the same even if the original and receptor audiences and contexts are in fact significantly different.

Ideological/ethical challenges arise (among other cases) when a translator does not give very careful attention to parts of the translation that refer to source text social or cultural realities that will be interpreted in the translation as references to target audience social or cultural realities. That is, the text is expected to function in the same way in the receiving community as in the community of the original receivers, due in part to lack of awareness of the differences between the two audiences and the implications

for what we might call "*dys*-functional equivalence." Tremendous power is exerted, in particular, whenever a Bible translation is taken to refer to groups in the target culture. This is what I refer to as the "mapping of identities."

On Direct Transferability and the Mapping of Identities

By a "mapping of identities" I mean the idea that people or groups in the biblical text are identified with people or groups in the receptor culture and context, with one identity being mapped onto another. This takes place, for instance, when readers of Bible translations directly apply biblical referents (i.e., "priests," "lawyers," "tax collectors," "kings/rulers," "Jews," "slaves," or "wives") to people they believe fit those labels in their own society. They immediately see the cultural similarity or parallel between the group in the biblical world and their own world. Even when translators recognize that there is no exact parallel between the referents in these two cultures, they may decide to label a biblical category or group with the name of a similar group in the receptor culture. There is a tremendous amount of power being exercised in this choice, since translators are deciding which group(s) should be identified with a positively or negatively referenced people in the original text (e.g., a group that is made to "stand in" for the Samaritans, or for any of the groups mentioned above).

In the following sections I will look at several cases where the mapping of identities between biblical referents and groups within receptor cultures has led to extremely troubling results.

Masters and Slaves

Since the New Testament refers to slaves as a part of the Greco-Roman household, English-speaking readers of the Bible found a basis (and created further bases) for the view that the Bible condoned modern slavery—and even the transatlantic

slave trade—generating interpretations of other biblical texts to support the (now clearly unbiblical) view that people of color were under God's curse and born to serve white people as slaves.[11] The fact that the slavery of the Roman world (a horrible evil in its day) was of a different nature and origin than modern racism and slavery, was deemed inconsequential.[12] It was sufficient that the Bible spoke of slavery without explicit condemnation, and thereby the direct transference condoned a more modern institution of slavery.

Allen Dwight Callahan reminds us that "the abolitionists of the North and the planter class of the South read from the same Bible. Long before Lincoln, [Frederick] Douglass had learned that the Bible was the highest authority of American slavery and the strongest link in the chain of oppression and violence that warranted slavery as the sacred basis for the Christian culture of what would become the Confederacy".[13]

I understand that one of the reasons some members of the ESV translation committee supported a decision to change the translation of δοῦλος in 1 Corinthians 7 from "slave" to "bond-servant" is because the former term could too easily be identified with slavery as it is known by English readers and the second translation was felt more likely to cause readers to hesitate before making such an identification. This changing of terms is one approach to avoiding premature transference based on the assumption that the text addresses the reality we are familiar with. Perhaps a neologism like "bond-*slave*" would be even better than "bond-*servant*" (since most people distinguish servants from slaves in terms of ownership/employment).[14] In many cases it may be best to handle this issue by explaining the different nuances of this cultural reality through the use of paratextual material (e.g., a footnote or sidebar).

*T*ranslators are deciding which group(s) should be identified with a positively or negatively referenced people in the original text

Husbands and Wives

Since slavery is no longer an acceptable part of Western culture (at least not explicit, legalized slavery), when readers come to biblical texts that mention slaves and masters they realize instantly that the texts, if they are to be applied, cannot be directly transferred. Since husbands and wives are omnipresent across all societies, people without in-depth knowledge of biblical cultures readily assume that the marital relationships being referenced and addressed in the biblical texts closely parallel those with which everyone in their context is familiar. Most Bible readers are not familiar with important aspects of marriage relationships in the Greco-Roman world. In that particular context, marriages were not typically entered into by men and women of similar ages, but by adolescent girls and fully adult men. And, although there are references to well-educated women in the Greco-Roman world, they seem to be exceptions to the rule (and considered noteworthy, literally, by the ancient authors). Normally men and husbands were much better educated and had greater exposure to information and experience outside the household. This is implicit even within one of the most remarkable texts of the New Testament relating to this subject. In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Paul says women or wives are not allowed to speak in the church meeting (in fact it would be shameful to do so), but should ask their own husbands at home if they have any questions. This latter clause only makes sense in a context where it is safe to assume that a wife's husband is better informed and therefore capable of answering whatever questions the wife might have. Such was the context of the typical Greco-Roman marriage.[15] All of the New Testament

statements about how wives and husbands should relate to each other are addressed not to wives and husbands who married peers of similar age and life experience as in modern western cultures, but to wives and husbands within the asymmetrical relationship that was the Greco-Roman marriage. Should all that the New Testament authors wrote about husbands and wives be considered directly transferable to husbands and wives who do not reflect the cultural inequities (i.e., unequal ages, levels of maturity, education and life experience) of the Greco-Roman marriage? More to the point of this essay: *how could readers even begin to ask this kind of question if there is nothing in the translation to alert them to the differences between the people addressed in the original context and those who have those same labels (husband/wife) in their own contexts?*

This is, I think, a real challenge. We are certainly not going to translate the Greek terms as "Greco-Roman wives" or "Greco-Roman husbands"! And we can't translate one of the terms "child-bride" (especially since many of the wives would no longer be adolescents as when they were first married). Again, it may be that the best that can be done is to provide paratextual material (a footnote or sidebar) that gives some indication of the distinctive aspects of the roles and relationships in the original cultural context. Perhaps other solutions will be discerned or developed, but only if translators become aware of the problem and struggle with it.

During the 2009 Nida School of Translation Studies, a missionary Bible translator with more than twenty years of experience told me he had never been aware of the differences between Greco-Roman marriages and marriage as he had known it all his life. This lack of awareness may be a factor in

the terrible track record of the global church. These texts have been used to justify wife abuse in both developed and developing countries. On another occasion a translation consultant told a group of translators (including myself) about a situation where he returned after a seminar break to find one national Bible translator telling another (with regard to one of the passages on submission), "See, this is where the Bible says we can beat our wives." Thankfully he took the opportunity to explain that the Bible says no such thing. We would all reject any suggestion that the Bible supports wife abuse, but many Christians unwittingly teach wives and husbands to relate to each other according to a Christianized version of Greco-Roman standards, without being aware of or contemplating the significance of the differences.

"The Jews": Some or All, Then and Now?

Certainly one of the ugliest ways in which direct transferability has manifested in Christian history has been with respect to references to "Jews" in the New Testament. Statements made about particular Jews or Jewish leaders or groups in the New Testament have been taken to be accurate descriptions of all Jews in different times and places. The fact that the Gospel of John uses οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (usually translated "the Jews") to refer to a prominent group of Jewish opponents of Jesus, intending to focus only on some Jewish religious leaders, hasn't helped things throughout history. So, for example, the ESV renders John 5:16-18 as follows: "And this was why *the Jews* were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ... This was why *the Jews* were seeking all the more to kill him ..." (emphasis added). Modern readers easily forget that *all* of the characters in the story are Jews, as were Jesus, his disciples, the invalids mentioned in v. 3 (including the one Jesus healed), and even the author of the book. What distinguished the people persecut-

ing Jesus was not the fact that they were Jews, but that they were religious leaders openly opposed to Jesus. The author is hardly condemning all "Jews" but has a focus on the particular group that was opposing and would seek the death of Jesus.[16]

Martin Luther is the most notorious example of an influential Christian leader whose assumption of direct transferability in this area has been used to justify atrocities against Jews. In his 1543 tract, *On The Jews and Their Lies*, notice how Luther implies that whatever was said about the particular Jews who were addressed by John the Baptist and by Jesus may be directly applied to Jews in general in his own days. (I have italicized "them" and "they" so as to highlight how Luther identifies the two in his context.)

These texts have been used to justify wife abuse in both developed and developing countries

He did not call *them* Abraham's children, but a 'brood of vipers' [Matt. 3:7]. Oh, that was too insulting for the noble blood and race of Israel, and *they* declared, 'He has a demon' [Matt. 11:18]. Our Lord also calls *them* a 'brood of vipers'; furthermore in John 8 [vv. 39, 44] he states: 'If you were Abraham's children ye would do what Abraham did. ... You are of your father the devil.' It was intolerable to *them* to hear that *they* were not Abraham's but the devil's children, nor can *they* bear to hear this today.[17]

Near the end of this same tract he goes on to call on his readers "to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with

dirt whatever will not burn ... that their houses also be razed and destroyed ... that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them ... that their rabbis be forbidden to teach ... that safe conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews."[18] His bloodcurdling call for pogroms was later used by the Nazis to support their odious agenda. Indeed, Luther was a gifted Bible scholar and university lecturer (and a former Augustinian friar), but his intuitive approach of reading the text as directly transferable, with a mapping of the identity of the ancient opponents of Jesus onto all Jews of all times, was the result of an ideological blinder of cataclysmic proportions.

Because of the misunderstandings that have been caused by passages like this, some translators have proposed renderings that are less likely to mislead. For example the NET translates the key words as "the Jewish leaders". Some other translators have suggested rendering it as "some of the Jews". Still others refer to all first century Jews as "Judeans", an attempt to distinguish those terms that refer to modern ethnic and religious identities from those that refer to the ancient people who predated Rabbinic and modern Judaism. I think an historical awareness of the potential misunderstandings of the traditional translation should lead translators to either adopt one of these translation strategies or make use of paratextual materials to explain the terms. This would minimize the risk that Jewish people today will continue to be profiled as "villains" due to an inappropriate identification with opponents found in texts of the New Testament.

Sexual Identities in the New Testament?

The case of sexual identity is rather different from those addressed above. The traditional translations of "slave," "wife," "husband," and "Jews" have

often undergirded abusive ideologies across a very long history due to an unfortunate intuitive use of direct transferability in translation choices. In contrast, the word "homosexuals" (or "homosexuality") appeared in English Bible translations for the very first time in the twentieth century, reflecting the fact that the conceptual framing of homosexual and heterosexual orientations or identities took hold in English-speaking contexts within that century.[19] But in light of the tendency towards direct transferability, it's important to understand that the Bible is not speaking of sexual orientations but of sexual practices, regardless of one's orientation.

This is not the place to develop a full biblical treatment of 'homosexuality', a treatment that would require a more complete integration of different portions of Scripture. I only wish to point out that modern ideological pressures from the homosexual debate can make us evangelicals want to expand Paul's terminology to include everything we think ought to be included in his choice of terms. This is particularly the case in the listing of the terms for sexual vices in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, where the term 'homosexual' has more recently been applied. My view is that Paul uses the term *porneia* ('sexual immorality') to prohibit all illicit sexual activity (including all sexual activity outside of the one-flesh union of husband and wife), but that his use of further terms in that listing needs to be understood within the moral landscape of the Roman world. Paul is cutting across the sexual landscape of his time, not ours.[20]

It's remarkable that most classical scholars agree that the ancient Romans did not have a concept of sexual identity or orientation (hetero-/homo-/bi-sexual). Rather, they had a concept of gender identity, one that identified maleness with the dominant position in sexual intercourse.[21] A man's reputation and social standing as a man was secured not on the basis

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of whether he primarily had sexual relations with people of the same or the opposite sex, but on the basis of whether he had the dominant position in sexual intercourse. Same-sex behaviors were most often engaged in by married men who practiced procreational sex with their wives but also engaged in recreational sex with male household slaves and/or prostitutes. One of the terrible realities of household slaves in the Roman world (both males and females) was that they were subject to the sexual requirements of their masters. These immoral same-sex practices were endemic throughout the entire Roman world, and more broadly practiced than any modern attempt to isolate a particular demographic of same-sex identity.

A particular modern sexual identity/demographic—one that was never part of the cognitive environment of Paul's ancient context—came to be explicitly identified as the object of New Testament vice lists by introducing the term "homosexuals" into modern Bible translations. Modern readers, therefore, are led to believe that Paul has "homosexuals" in mind (whether practicing or not) rather than men in his own world who practiced forms of sexual exploitation (mainly of other males) that were familiar to his ancient readers but possibly quite foreign to us.[22] In my view, the introduction of the modern socially-constructed concept of a sexual orientation/identity and demographic entails a reverse-mapping *which reflects ideological blinders of recent origin.* This transference ends up "targeting" certain members of a modern demographic that was not part of the social or conceptual landscape in Paul's world.

None of this is meant to suggest that Paul would condone same-sex relations of any kind. It was

clear to most first century Jews, including Paul, that the only licit sexual relations were sexual relations between heterosexual spouses. But the translation of his terms should be faithful to the behaviors and context to which he referred and beware of mapping sexual behaviors of the Roman world onto people identified with a sexual orientation or identity in our own world.[23] In a society where people are marginalized, bullied and end up committing suicide because they are identified (or identify themselves) as gay or homosexual, Bible translators must be especially circumspect about inscribing that identity into the middle of a New Testament vice list if it is not exactly what Paul had in mind.

Other Historical or Potential Mappings
These four mappings of identity are merely examples, but they strike me as some of the most important examples in the global movement of the church. One can easily see the historical and the potential consequences. Other potentially harmful mappings in the use of direct transferability would include the translation of Hebrew and Greek terms for "king" or "ruler" (potentially translated "chief" in some contexts), for "tax collectors," "lawyers," or "judges".

Wittingly or unwittingly, certain power structures and ideological agendas are both reflected in, and established by, the use of translations. They can encourage readers to reflexively associate references to people or roles in their own social contexts (including social identities or structures never contemplated by the ancient authors) to ones that referred to particular groups, social structures

or roles in the original biblical contexts. Of course Christians need to apply ancient texts to their own contemporary contexts, but I have attempted to address some of the problems that arise when Christians understand their translations to be speaking directly to their own social context. So a key question confronts Bible translators: to what extent should readers of a new translation be informed that the text does not address them directly, and that serious consequences might ensue if they apply the text as though it did.

Translators' Responsibility for Guiding Product Usage

Producers and distributors of commercial products with potential dangers or side effects often provide consumers with warning labels or exhortations to refrain from improper usage. Advertisements for medications are accompanied by remarkable disclaimers that point out all the dangers that may be associated with the drug. The medications are still recommended and prescribed by doctors, but with an awareness of the potential complications and damage.

Like these producers and distributors, I believe Bible translators should recognize their responsibility to take steps to minimize the possibility that their products will be used in ways that are abusive or harmful. I'm speaking of the impact of ideologies that end up being improperly underwritten by the translation. Translators need to be fully conscious of the ways in which biblical texts have been used to support unjust and oppressive power structures in societies that have historically embraced them. They must consider what preventative measures might be taken in their work.

Undoubtedly, there are numerous strategies that might be adopted. One would be to consider, where feasible, potentially 'foreignizing' the translations of terms that might be likely candidates for improper

applications of direct transferability. Another strategy would be to incorporate guidance into a preface or introductory materials, suggesting both appropriate ways of reading the texts as well as some of the unfortunate and inappropriate ways in which they have been read in the past. (This could include the tendency to take references to certain people or kinds of people in the text as ciphers referring directly to a particular type of person or people in the context of those receiving the translation.) They might also be encouraged to hold themselves and other readers accountable for making sure the Bible is only used in ways that promote the proper love of God and others. The translation should not reflect the

Translators could be more intentional about footnoting those terms that seem to automatically map identities

interests of powerful people or groups at the expense of the powerless.

It should be clear that I am most concerned about terms that relate to social groups or roles, and whose translation may have implications for how social relations are configured or reinforced within the receiving culture. This happens especially when readers are not given any reason to think twice about it. For this reason, translators might reconsider the kinds of issues that get addressed in footnotes or sidebars. The tendency has been to use footnotes to address textual issues, alternative translations, or references to what are considered culturally unusual elements in the original texts.

But perhaps translators could be more intentional about footnoting those terms that seem to automatically map identities, items in the text which carry cultural distinctions that may not be otherwise obvious to readers.

Conclusion

We who love the Bible cannot afford to be naïve about its impact. While it has brought great good to people's lives throughout the world, it has also been used to promote or justify oppressive relationships, institutions or cultural customs. It has been used to empower the powerful at the expense of the powerless.

Those of us involved in the work of Bible translation and interpretation need to work with a more profound awareness of the darkness of the human heart, including our own hearts. We need a profound suspicion of the uses and relations of power, including ways in which "love" has been co-opted by the powerful to justify the asymmetrical power relations in society (so clear in the argument that the enslavement of Africans reflected love and benevolence in "civilizing" and "Christianizing" them).

While we may believe in human depravity, have we fully thought through the implications of this depravity in what people might do with their Bible translations? In my view it is a responsibility of the translator to sensitize readers to issues of power and moral responsibility with respect to the vulnerable, and to suspect the infinite human capacity to rationalize unjust structures, institutions and behaviors. When their products are well received, Bible translators end up becoming crucial shapers of the cultures that receive their translations, whether they recognize it or not. They must think through issues of ideology and how Bible translations impact or justify certain power relations in the receiving community, and do what they can to minimize unhealthy consequences wherever possible. **IJFM**

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Endnotes

[1] Sandra Marie Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament As Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 170.

[2] Ibid., p. 120.

[3] I am using "ideology" where some missiologists might prefer the term "worldview". But worldviews reflect ideas about reality, understandings of origins, of what exists and doesn't exist, of how the world is constructed, and how that world works (materialism, spiritism, Christian, etc). The questions of our ingrained loyalties and our taken-for-granted relationships to power structures are not usually part of what we have in mind when we think of a worldview. Tyndale and Luther, to whom I refer in this article, thought they were simply expressing a biblical worldview, one more accurate and biblical than that of Roman Catholics. The vast majority of Bible translators that I know would probably say they are also simply seeking to express their biblical worldview. It is usually only with some significant hindsight and cultural distance that we can recognize the extent to which work was carried out in a way which reflected unconscious loyalty to particular power structures. This loyalty simply went unrecognized at the time. People like me, and indeed many Bible translators, tend to remain unaware of the extent to which all thinking is tied up with, and can end up supporting, an ideology that lives within worldviews as do germs in even healthy human bodies. Ideology is a better term for incorporating this dimension of power.

[4] See Paul Ellingworth, "Translation Techniquess in Modern Bible Translations", in Philip A. Noss (ed.) *A History of Bible Translation* (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura, 2007), p. 319.

[5] See Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2001), p. 65.

[6] Edesio Sánchez-Cetina, "Word of God, Word of the People: Translating the Bible in Post-Missionary Times", in Philip A. Noss (ed.) *A History of Bible Translation* (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura, 2007), pp. 391-392.

[7] Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 200.

[8] Ibid., p. 206.

[9] The new Common English Bible uses the expression "God's DNA" at 1 John 3:9, a fine example of the sort of thing I have in mind.

[10] See Harriet Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication.* (Manchester, UK; St. Jerome Publications, 2006), pp. 30-31.

[11] See Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

[12] See Byron 2004, Glancy 2006, Harrill 2006.

[13] See Callahan, ibid., p. 23.

[14] This usage or invention of a term reflects what the KJV and other English translations have done with transliterations like 'deacon', 'apostle', 'baptize', etc. These were not (originally) translations but transliterations of Greek words, and can be used to cue readers that we are introducing a different reality.

[15] See Treggiari 1993, Evans Grubbs 2002, Lefkowitz and Fant 1992, Cohick 2009, Witherington 1988.

[16] The usage is not that dissimilar to the reference to "the Romans" in John 11:48, where Roman soldiers are meant (sent by the Emperor), and not Romans in general.

[17] Martin Luther, "On the Jews and Their Lies", in In J. J. Pelikan, Hilton C.

Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds.), *Luther's Works, Vol. 47: The Christian in Society IV* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 141.

[18] Ibid., pp. 268-270.

[19] As far as I can tell, the earliest appearance of any of the related terms in a Bible translation was in the Amplified Bible of 1958, which translated the final two vices in 1 Cor. 6:9 as "those who participate in homosexuality." In 1961 the New English Bible translated the key words, "homosexual perversion." Those words were paraphrased simply as "homosexuals" in the *Living Bible* (originally in 1962 in *Living Letters*). Since then, translations have regularly referred to "homosexuals" (NASB, NKJ) "practicing homosexuals" (NAB, NET), "homosexual offenders" (NIV 1984), "homosexual perverts" (TEV), or, most broadly (and in direct conflict with the point being made here), "any kind of homosexual" (HCSB, changed in later printings of the same edition to "anyone practicing homosexuality"). Most Bible readers today understand their Bibles to refer directly to those in our own societies known as "homosexuals." Before the twentieth century the various translations tended to be vague or use euphemisms for same-sex behavior. For empirical evidence on the usage of the language of "homosexuals" (and "heterosexuals") see: http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=homosexuals%2Cheterosexuals%2Chomosexuality&year_start=1600&year_end=2000&corpus=0&smoothing=3. For discussion of the historical development of the concepts see, e.g., Dreger 2000:127; Davidson 1990; Katz 2007; Paris 2011.

[20] See my fuller treatment of this in "'Flee Sexual Immorality': Sex and the City of Corinth", in Brian S. Rosner (ed.), *The Wisdom of the Cross: Exploring 1 Corinthians*

(Nottingham, England: Apollos/InterVarsity, 2011), pp. 111-118.

[21] On same-sex behavior in the Roman world and the background to what Paul addresses in 1 Cor. 6:9, see Hallett and Skinner 1993, Richlin 2003, Skinner 2005, Williams 2010, Paris 2011, Ciampa 2011. To be absolutely clear, by "dominant position" we have in mind the Roman distinction between those who sexually penetrate others and those who are sexually penetrated. In Roman thinking, true masculine gender was understood to be established by maintaining the former role and absolute avoidance of the latter role.

[22] The Greek terms Paul uses are μαλακοί and ἀρσενοκοῖται. One possible way of translating them would be to refer to "men who don't respect sexual boundaries (or men who actively disregard standards of sexual behavior) or who sexually exploit boys or men." For more on the background to Paul's language, see Williams 2010:164-165 and Ciampa, 2011:111-118. To avoid any inappropriate application of direct transferability it may be important, where possible or acceptable, for Bible translations to include footnotes that clarify the Roman background and how it may differ from the sexual landscape of the receiving culture.

[23] The 2011 revision of the NIV translation has dropped the word "homosexuals" and now translates the key terms as "men who have sex with men." That is a significant improvement, as it describes a particular behavior rather than people of a particular sexual orientation (or even the behaviors of people with a particular sexual orientation or identity). Of course, without any further information twenty-first century readers will still take that descriptive translation to be another way of simply referring to "homosexuals."