# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## PRESERVING CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL DISTANCE—INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND 'ISRAEL' IN RECENT VERSIONS

We now take up the third issue raised by our investigation in Chapter 11 of the DE's handling of 7 representative biblical texts. A crucial test of the adequacy of any translation is how it handles those features of the ST that are most distant, historically and culturally, from the life-experience of the receptor.

### A. INTRODUCTION

As we have seen Nida was not insensitive to the possibility that emphasizing 'naturalness' in translation could lead to cultural transposition. Accordingly he warned that the search for natural equivalents must not distort the historical and cultural context of Scripture which is an integral part of its message. Therefore 'Jerusalem' cannot be replaced by 'Washington DC', as in the Cotton Patch Version; 'demon-possessed' cannot be translated by 'mentally distressed' as in J.B. Phillips.

Nevertheless since DE theory regards translation as an act of communication whose success will depend on the receptors' attitudes as well as their capacities, we will not be surprised that tension occurs wherever the presuppositions and prejudices of the receptors are at odds with those of the ST.

We have been alerted to such conflicts in earlier chapters where examination of GNB renderings revealed for example, the elimination of anthropomorphic references to God (e.g. to His bodily parts or His jealousy) and the modification of the imagery or sacrifice.

The translation of weight, measures, and money is a particularly difficult area. How does one preserve the cultural and historical distance of the ST and yet provide intelligible renderings? Does the GNB's rendering of 'the first day of the week' by 'Sunday' convey the same meaning (e.g. in Matt 28:1; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; 1 Cor 16:2)? It is interesting that the REB has overturned the NEB's dynamic equivalents at this point and returned to a literal translation. Should measures of distance be given in modern 'miles' or Greek στάδια? So far as money is concerned the REB has substituted for NEB's equivalents in pounds sterling, a transliteration of the ST value e.g. 'two hundred denarii.'

Likewise in the case of ancient Hebrew measurements, the REB has stayed with such transliterations as 'bath' and 'kor' whereas the GNB opted for dynamic equivalents from the modern context (e.g. 2 Chron 2:10).

Language is not a neutral instrument. Every language reflects the cultural and spiritual journey of those who speak it. For example the Hebrew verb ידע has normally been translated 'know' in English. But in passages such as Genesis 4:1 'Adam knew his wife' GNB translates the verb 'had intercourse with' (and is followed by the Indonesian and other DE versions) despite the fact that this usage has long been accepted in English as a result of the influence of the Bible on the development of our language. Does this choice of a more natural and explicit rendering by the GNB represent an unbiblical understanding of knowledge and of sex?[1]

Likewise in Exodus 36:2 we read that the Lord put חכמה in the heart of the craftsmen who are called to construct the Tabernacle. 'Wisdom' is not the quality that we would see as necessary and so the GNB renders the Hebrew word by 'skill' reflecting the technological emphasis of our world view.[2]

Such 'natural' cultural equivalents do not allow the Bible to speak in its own terms or to challenge ours.

In recent English translations, however, the major concern with regard to cultural acceptability has undoubtedly been 'sexist language'. Pressure for the appropriate use of inclusive language has been just one aspect of the broader movement for the due recognition of the role of women in society. This was evident in our examination of the GNB's translation of Psalm 1 in chapter 11.

## B. INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE[3]

Lord Coggan's statement in the Preface to the REB (p.ix) sets out a major motive of most modern translations and revisions in English.

> The use of male-oriented language, in passages of traditional versions which evidently apply to both genders, has become a sensitive issue in recent years; the revisers have preferred more inclusive gender reference where that has been possible without compromising scholarly integrity or English style.

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1    A. Newman, 'Componential Analysis and Functional Ambiguity Equivalence' *Babel* 21:1 (1975), 25-35.
2    cf. N. Weeks, 'Questions for Translators', *The New Testament Student and Bible Translation* (eds J. Skilton and C. Ladley) (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978).
3    A fuller treatment is found in the author's 'Bible Translation and Gender', *Interchange* 45 (1989).

Thus Gen 1:26 in REB reads 'Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness' and Ps 1:1 becomes 'Happy is the one who...'. However, the subsequent resumptive pronouns are masculine thus effectively nullifying the inclusiveness of the initial 'one'. Furthermore the REB translators are not as consistent as their counterparts in the GNB and NRSV revision e.g. at Heb 12:23 it is unlikely that the writer was thinking only of males when he/she penned '[...]the spirits of good men made perfect'!

When the American Bible Society produced *The New Testament in Today's English Version* in 1966 and the complete *Good News Bible* in 1976 it was already sensitive to a changing culture with regard to women's concerns. Minor changes were added in subsequent reprintings. The Preface to the Second Edition of the entire Bible that recently appeared (The Bible Societies 1994) states that the main issues addressed by the revisers were 'passages in which the English style was unnecessarily masculine oriented' and 'passages in which either the style of translation or the terms used had given rise to problems for some readers'. Only the former attracts further elaboration:

> the built-in masculine linguistic biases of both the ancient languages and the English language caused some Bible readers to feel excluded from being addressed by the scriptural Word... In practical terms it means that, where references in particular passages are to both men and women, the revision aims at language that is not exclusively male-oriented... At the same time, however, great care was taken not to distort the historical situation of the male dominated culture of Bible times.

Examples of the new steps to inclusiveness taken by the GNB revisers, seem to fall into four categories. Firstly 'brother' is often replace by 'brothers **and sisters**' (e.g. James 4:11; 1 John 4:20; Acts 15:36). Secondly a singular which was formerly followed by a masculine pronoun is replaced by an indefinite plural. So Luke 4:24 now becomes **'prophets** are never welcomed in **their** home town'. Thirdly, masculine singulars are avoided in other ways. Thus 1 John 4:20 'If someone says he loves God' is changed to 'If **we** say **we** love God' and subsequently 'For he cannot love God' becomes 'For **people** cannot love God'. In Matt 25:40 'these brothers of mine' is changed to 'these members of my family'. While in John 3:5 'unless he is born of water' become 'without being born of water'. Fourthly 'they' is used as a common gender singular such that Luke 9:24 now reads: 'For whoever wants to save **their** own life will lose it, but whoever loses **their** life for my sake will save it.'

The changes are arguably sensitive and not driven by radical feminism. Thus in Genesis 2:7 GNB retains 'man' for אדם—'Then the Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it'— Where many these days would argue for 'human being'. Inevitably there are still occasional inconsistencies. Matthew 5:15 'No

one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl, instead **he** puts it on the lampstand' is particularly curious. Firstly the Greek verb is actually plural i.e. **'they** do not light a lamp...' etc. Anyway it is more likely in its cultural context to have had a female subject if gender were to be marked. Comparison with the synoptic parallels (cf Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16) confirm the impression of inconsistency.

Occasionally it could be argued that the historical context has been overridden as in the laws of Exodus 21:12-19 laws concerning homicide, kidnapping, and fighting where GNB alternates masculine and common genders even though the Hebrew subject is אִישׁ and the context envisages males.

Conservative as the GNB revisers have been in their application of inclusive language principles, their stated motive raises serious questions. The Preface gives the rationale that 'some Biblical readers feel excluded from being addressed by the scriptural Word'. This implies that the Bible should be experienced as a direct word to the modern reader in his or her very different context. Yet this is an unrealistic burden to place on the translation. All Bible readers today, men and women, are foreigners in the world of the Bible, and its different 'horizon' has to be recognized and preserved rather than obliterated in translation.

Actually gender is not as deep seated in English grammar as it is in Latin or French where every noun is assigned gender or some Aboriginal languages where every verb is marked as to whether it is 'he' or 'she'. Its main locus as we have seen is our pronoun system. More than eighty bisexual pronouns have been coined since the eighteenth century (ne, ter, heer, et, ip, hesh, himer, hiser etc.) The repeated coining of such neologisms bears witness to an ongoing opposition to the generic masculine in English. On the other hand it demonstrates a native stubbornness to any attempt to force the use of artificial common gender pronouns.

The use of 'one' has been commended as a native epicene as in 'Anybody can see for oneself' or 'Every man and woman is architect of one's own destiny' (an extended use). However, native speakers seem to sense intuitively that such usages are pedantic.

A second area of tension between structure and usage is that of gender marked nouns either in themselves (e.g. widow, nephew) or by the addition of a feminine suffix such as '-ess', '-ette', and '-ine' or the addition of an adjective as in 'lady doctor', 'male nurse'. This marking involves women more than men leading to the charge that English is a sexually biased language which either makes women invisible through the use of the generic masculine or forces visibility on them through such words as

'authoress', 'suffragette', 'heroine'. It is the derivative nature of these feminine forms that is seen to imply the secondary and inferior nature of women.

## Other European Languages And Inclusive Language

Gender distinctions in English are essentially arbitrary. We do not read any social significance into the distinctions between a sibling's male and female children (niece, nephew), and between a parent's male and female siblings (aunt, uncle), or between the latter's children, though French does make a distinction between *cousin(e)*. The German borrowing of the French terms alongside the native *Vetter* may reflect a felt need for gender distinction.

Spanish provides a wider range of common gender kinship terms: *padres* parents; *hermanos* brother/sister; *tios* uncle/aunt, *primos* cousins; *sobrinos* nephew/niece. But one would not infer that this reflects a less sexist society since the system is much older than any women's liberation pressures. Presumably too, feminists might well resent that the inclusive form is usually masculine reflecting a patriarchal heritage.

Whereas in English the current trend is against distinctive feminine forms, in German feminists are apparently insisting that the first female bishops should be called *Bischofinnen*. This follows a similar pressure to make women disciples more visible in the Gospel narratives by the use in sections at least of *Jüngerinnen*.[4]

## Non Western Languages and Inclusive Language

Ellingworth has summarised the responses received from UBS colleagues with regard to inclusive language sensitivities: Finnish like most other non Indo-European languages knows no grammatical gender and a single personal pronoun refers to all humans. The situation is similar for Turkish. Thai and related languages have a generic word for person and a common third person pronoun. The same is true of Philippine languages, Malay-Indonesia and related languages. A specifier is necessary to distinguish male or female. In Chinese, the term for 'male' doubles as the term for 'humanity' or 'people', as in English until recently. Korean has optional male and female forms but their use is limited to special circumstances. In Bantu languages **muntu** (pl **bantu**) covers both male and female. West African languages such as Ewe, Akan and Ga have specific terms for 'human' and common third person pronouns. Completely unrelated indigenous languages in Latin America make similar provisions.

> Even when due allowance has been made for the fact that all my informants are male, and many of them are expatriate, it appears that languages for which inclusiveness is a structural problem form a small

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4  P. Ellingworth, 'The Scope of Inclusive Language' *TBT* 42:1 (1992) 133.

minority, representing a rather narrow though very influential segment of the western world.[5]

## Feminine Language and God

We have seen that the language of the ST is sometimes more gender neutral than the traditional English versions suggest. The GNB (together with NJB, NRSV and REB) has sought to remedy the situation and to be sensitive to women readers.

Feminists working in the area of Bible Studies and Theology have inevitably been impatient with what are perceived as minimal and even insignificant concessions. An Inclusive Language Lectionary (1983)[6] called for inclusiveness to be applied to language about God. The Preface stated:

> All persons are equally loved, judged and accepted by God This belief has been promoted by the church and has it roots in the origins of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Young and old, male and female, and persons of every racial, cultural and national background are included in the faith community. Basic to a sense of equality and inclusiveness is the recognition that God by nature transcends all human categories. God is more than male or female, and is more than can be described in historical and culturally limiting terms. Words and language, though inadequate and limited, are means by which we convey God's holiness and mystery. Seeking faithful expression about God and about God's inclusive love for all people the Division of Education and Ministry of the National Council of the Churches of Christ authorised the preparation of An Inclusive-Language Lectionary.

Using the Revised Standard Version as the base text they modified any language that appeared to discriminate against women, or against certain social or racial groups. Masculine pronouns when referring to God or anything pertaining to the deity, were eliminated. Instances of the use of masculine references to Jesus during his earthly life were retained, but the frequency of appearance was diminished. Female imagery for God implicitly in the text was made explicit; male titles and metaphors were recast whenever possible.

This recasting of metaphors resulted in what was considered 'formal equivalents' of several words and phrases. 'Son of Man' was replaced by 'the Human One'; 'Son' or 'Son of God' by 'Child' or 'Child of God'; 'Father' by 'Father' and 'Mother'; 'Lord' when used as a substitute for the divine name appears as 'the Sovereign One' and when it is a reference to Christ it becomes 'Sovereign'.

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5    Reported by P. Ellingworth in 'The Scope of Inclusive Language' *TBT* 42:1 (1992) 133-134.
6    *An Inclusive Language Lectionary* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983).

Familiar words were also rendered differently. 'Brethren' becomes 'Brothers and sisters'; 'kingdom' is 'realm'; and 'king' is 'ruler' or 'monarch'. Occasionally women's names have been added to the text, e.g., Abraham (and Sarah). In addition to this, whenever darkness is equated with evil it has been replaced by 'night' or other expressions which do not give offence to non-whites.

Some feminist scholars, however, are contemptuous of such modest gains:

> Feminists working the in the area of religious ideas all have some recognition of the revolutionary nature of the women's question as related to patriarchal religions such as Christianity and Judaism. Some regard this as an integral reform that does not touch the substance; a matter of better translation and exegesis that will reveal that Jesus (or Moses) were feminists, although no one managed to notice this until now. Others regard the change as so fundamental that it must bury all patriarchal religions forever in the scrap heap of history as outworn and even demonic world views. For them Judaism and Christianity equal patriarchy and only patriarchy. No one who is truly a feminist can find an authentic meaning for herself within the context of these traditions. To do so is sheer masochism and dependency. Feminists must purge themselves of all traces of adherence to these religions and turn to alternative women's religions.[7]

According to Elizabeth Achtemeier[8], every feminist theology published in the USA in the last two decades has called for the use of female terms for God. She notes further the frequency of the birthing image:

> The feminist rejection of God and its resulting idolatry are built on the theological misstep of identifying God with His creation. And that misstep becomes inevitable when the feminists reject any notion of the inspiration of the canonical witness to God, make their own experience their authority and use female language for God. As soon as God is called female, the images of birth, or suckling, or carrying in the womb, and, most importantly, the identification of the deity with the life in all things becomes inevitable, and the Bible's careful and consistent distinction between Creator and creation is blurred and lost.
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> As the Church struggles with the issue of women's full equality, therefore—and struggle it must to insure that equality, if it wishes to live up to its Gospel—let it divide the wheat from the tares in the demands women are making of it. Some of those demands are being couched in theologies totally at odds with the biblical faith. The church must be guided in its liberation of women by the canon of the Bible that remains its sure authority for all faith and practice.

Our reason for discussing inclusive language is that is provides a relevant case study in considering the extent of **cultural adaptation** that can be justified in translation.

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7   R.R. Reuther, 'Feminism and Patriarchal Religion', *JSOT* 22 (1982).
8   E. Achtemeier, 'Female Language for God', *The Hermeneutical Quest*, (D.G. Miller, ed., Allison Park, P.A.: Pickwick, 1986) 97-114.

Every text reflects elements peculiar to its own natural environment, institutions and culture. Some loss of meaning is inevitable in the process of substitution or replacement in the RL. The problem looms far larger in the translation of an ancient text such as the Bible than it does with material from mathematical studies or scientific experiments where there are no specific local features.

To this point modern versions including the DE translation such as the GNB have handled the inclusive language issue with reasonable sensitivity to the historical integrity of the ST.

As we have seen, it is a non-issue outside western societies. However it is not impossible that in the future feminist calls to overturn the overwhelmingly masculine imagery referring to God might find a responsive ear in those indigenous societies which traditionally have female deities.

We turn now to our second case study of cultural adaptation which does seem to have had ramifications for recent non-Western Bible versions; namely, the handling of terminology relating to Israel.

## C. THE FATE OF 'ISRAEL' IN RECENT VERSIONS

Many scholars have reminded us that the Christian movement began within Judaism, as a form of Judaism, and that the New Testament writers described and interpreted the ministry of Jesus in well established Jewish terminology. The incalculable literary influence that the Hebrew Bible (the Christian's Old Testament) has exerted on the New Covenant Scriptures is undisputed. There are 239 acknowledged Old Testament quotations drawn from 185 Old Testament passages. There are a further 198 unacknowledged quotations. Again we find in the New Testament 1,167 direct references to 944 Old Testament passages and to this could be added several thousand allusions to Old Testament verses. This is all the more remarkable if, as normally assumed, the bulk of the New Testament writings was written in a different language, on Gentile soil, for Gentile audiences.

With regard to the actual *Sitz im Leben* of the New Testament documents, the most urgent problems facing the early Christians were their identity vis-a-vis the rest of Judaism, the destiny of Israel, and the status of Gentile converts.

Thus scholars such as Jacob Jervell , Krister Stendahl and D.W.B. Robinson were to interpret the New Testament, and Paul's letters particularly, in the light of the vexed question of the constitution of the people of God after the advent of the Messiah. For example, W.D. Davies, in his presidential address (1976) to the *Studiorum Novi*

*Testamenti Societas* entitled 'Paul and the People of Israel', claims that Paul's letters were composed in the context of a dialogue within Judaism but were later read outside and over against that context by Gentiles who had little understanding of Judaism. Hence 'the disputes between Paul and his kinsmen once removed from their *intra muros* setting no longer appeared as attempts at the reinterpretation of a shared tradition but as forages of hostility...the denigration or rejection of Judaism and of the people of Israel as a totality.' Thus, after Justin Martyr, it became a commonplace in Western Christendom for the church to assume the titles and privileges of Israel and to read the New Testament writings in the light of an anti-Semitic tradition. This predominant understanding of the Pauline Corpus is one of a number of anti-Jewish stereotypes that continue to give offence to Jewish scholars today.[9]

I would like now to examine the handling of terminology referring to 'Israel' in the GNB and its Dynamic Equivalence counterparts in other languages.

## 'ISRAEL', 'HEBREW' AND 'JEW'—THE BIBLICAL USAGE

The study of ethnic self-designation is fascinating. What people call themselves depends on whom they are addressing. The closer one gets, the easier it is to distinguish labels such as British and English, Hollander and Dutch, Gypsy and Rom. Often there are more than two appellations, e.g., Aborigine, Koori, Yolngu, Black (and some unprintable ones). The term chosen usually reveals something about the relationship of the speaker or writer to the referents.

'Israel' is the main designation of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the biblical literature. It has remained the insiders' self appellation. The term 'Jews' came to be used when addressing or quoting non-Jews. Other terms such as 'Hebrews', 'the saints', 'the circumcision', 'the people', 'the twelve tribes', are also used with their own connotations. A Bible translator needs to be sensitive in handling terminology referring to Israel and the Jewish context because such terms function as important cultural nodes in the source text. Before looking at these recent versions, however, it would be appropriate to summarise the biblical usage.

'Israel' is the main name in the biblical literature. The term is found some 2,467 times in the Old Testament and 79 times in the New. A glance at a concordance of the Hebrew Bible reveals, however, that almost all these occurrences are in the first two divisions (i.e. 'the Law' and 'the Prophets'). In the last division, 'the Writings' composed after the destruction of the kingdom of Israel and the exile of its survivors,

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9  Cf. M.J. Cook, 'The New Testament and Judaism: An Historical Perspective on the Theme', *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987)

this designation was almost entirely superseded by 'the Jews'. The name Israel is formed from the noun אֵל (God) and a verbal prefix meaning 'strives' and is explained in Gen 32:28 in the story of the patriarch Jacob. 'Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed' (cf. Hos 12:4).

Henceforth, Israel was used as the personal name of Jacob (e.g. Gen 50:2; Exod 1:1; 1 Chron 1:34). It was also used as a tribal and national name to refer to his descendants: 'the sons of Israel' (e.g. Exod 40:38; 1Sam 7:2; Isa 47:3). Later, after the Davidic kingdom split in two, the term was applied to the larger northern kingdom until its destruction by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

The southern kingdom which persisted till the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 570 BC was called Judah (Hebrew: יְהוּדָה) after the tribe that settled in the mountainous desert region south of Jerusalem (Josh 20:7; 21:2; Judg 1:16; Ps 63:1). Judah was the son of Jacob and Leah. Leah's commentary on his name in Gen 29:35—'This time I will praise the Lord'—suggests a link with יָדָה (praise) and the divine name (YHWH). In practice, the Greek form Ἰουδαῖος (Jew, Jewish) and Ἰουδαία (Judah), like the Hebrew originals, refer particularly to the place of origin, though Paul's pun in Rom 2:29 warns us not to completely discount the influence of etymology, viz. 'He is a Jew who is one inwardly...His praise is not from men but from God.'

Another term sometimes used in the Old Testament but very seldom in the New is 'Hebrew' (Hebrew: עִבְרִי; Greek: ἑβραῖος), an old word of uncertain meaning related perhaps to the nomadic Habiru people who are frequently mentioned in Babylonian, Ugaritic and Egyptian texts of the mid 2nd millennium. It has been suggested that the Israelites were called the עִבְר people', the 'outlanders' (e.g. Gen 14:13), because they had come from the land beyond. In the older narratives, the word 'Hebrew' seems to have been used in a derogatory manner by others, and sometimes in a self-deprecating manner by Israel itself in dealings with foreigners (Gen 40:15; 43:32; Exod 1:15-19; 2:2-13; 3:18). In certain Old Testament passages, 'Hebrew' designates people who are economically dependent, as distinct from those in Israel who were free (Exod 21:2; Deut 15:12; Jer 34:9, 14). However, that connotation is never primary. The Old Testament usage is consistently ethnic. Most occurrences are found in discourse spoken by or to non-Israelites.

The inter-Testamental period and the New Testament era witnessed an intense struggle within Judaism over the identity of the true Israel in the face of foreign rule. Furthermore, although post-exilic Judaism had considerable missionary success among

the inhabitants of the Hellenistic Mediterranean world—some estimates suggest that up to one tenth of its population were Jews by belief if not by birth—there is much evidence of strong anti-Semitism in contemporary documents. The Gentile world did not appreciate the peculiarity and separation of the Jewish people. Because they refused to participate in Gentile cults and social life generally, they were regarded as godless, haters of foreigners, and even haters of men in general. Alexandrian writers in particular, spread horrific tales about the history and the worship of the Jews which were readily believed and repeated. Contempt for Judaism is revealed in the works of Cicero, Pliny and Juvenal. This anti-Semitism often boiled over in bloody persecution.

No doubt the use of terms relating to the Jews in the New Testament era was largely influenced by these conflicts. The word 'Hebrew' (as noun and adjective) has the most neutral meaning but is only found thirteen times in the New Testament. It denotes, in particular, the language and script, and then also the people who use them. In 2 Corinthians 11:22 and Philippians 3:5 Paul emphasises his Hebrew speaking origins and affiliations as something positive. It seems that among Jews 'Hebrew' had become an exclusivist epithet proudly used by those who claimed to be uninfluenced by subversive Hellenisation.

'Judah', 'Jew', 'Jewish', and 'Judaism' are terms with a more political or sociological colouring denoting, first of all, membership of the nation and, subsequently, proselytes to Judaism. As we have noted above, these terms began to be used after the destruction of the Davidic kingdom of Israel, in the post-exilic writings of the Old Testament. Ἰουδαῖος occurs 83 times in the Old Testament, 53 of which are in the book of Esther. The Septuagint coins the noun Ἰουδαισμός to represent Judaism as a way of life and faith (2 Macc 2:21; 8:1; 14:38; 4 Macc 4:36) and Paul takes up the term in Gal 1:13f—Paul also uses Ἰουδαικός to refer to Jewish myths (Tit 1:14) and a verb ἰουδαΐζω meaning 'to live as a Jew' (Gal 2:14). While these terms were sometimes used by Jews to refer to themselves, especially in dealings with foreigners (1 Macc 3:34; 8:23; Tob 1:18), by the time the New Testament was being written the word 'Jew' was being used by Gentiles as a term of abuse reflecting the increasing anti-Semitism mentioned above. The derogatory associations connected with Ἰουδαῖος strengthened the tendency within Judaism to opt for the theologically pregnant 'Israel'. This development is reflected in the New Testament writings where it is found as the main self-designation of the Jews.

In the New Testament documents the word Ἰουδαῖος occurs 194 times with two striking clusters in John's Gospel (71 times) and the Acts of the Apostles, especially chapters 13-28 (79 times). The word occurs only 16 times in the three Synoptic

Gospels, and two of these are the derogatory 'King of the Jews' applied to Jesus by Gentile lips. Gentiles also figure in three of the remaining four references in the Synoptics. It is clear that Matthew, Mark and Luke prefer to use 'Israel'. (This term occurs 26 times in such phrases as 'land of Israel', 'house of Israel', 'God of Israel', 'king of Israel'.) The frequent use of 'the Jews' in John's Gospel is therefore quite arresting, particularly as the polemical connotation is very evident.

However, despite John's absolute and pejorative use of 'the Jews' (e.g., 1:19; 7:11;18:12), it seems clear from the few, but fundamental, passages where 'Israel' is used (e.g., 1:31; 1:49; 3:10; 12:13) that the writer is still within the sphere of Israel. Thus Jesus is portrayed as 'king of Israel' and Nathaniel is praised as a genuine 'Israelite' in whom there is no guile (1:47).

In the Acts of the Apostles there are 79 instances of Ἰουδαῖος practically all found in Chapters 13-28 where Paul's missionary journeys in Gentile territory are narrated. There are 15 occurrences of 'Israel' and 14 of these are in the earlier chapters where the Jerusalem church is described.

In Paul's letters 'Jew' is used 26 times, usually in opposition to 'Greek' or 'Gentile' and generally not unfavourably. He uses the term 'Israel' some 20 times to refer to the historic people whose glorious destiny is assured because 'the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11:28).

Our conclusion, then, is that in the New Testament the various writers' choice of 'Jew', 'Israel' or 'Hebrews' is not haphazard. These terms have distinctive nuances, though the connotations in each writer are not the same. It could be argued that the positions of the various writers vis-a-vis Judaism is revealed in their selection of terms.

We have noted that 'Israel' is the main self designation of the Jews in the New Testament: a name with tremendously favourable connotations, a reminder that they were the chosen heirs of the patriarchs. As Paul says of his kinsmen in Rom 9:4-5, 'They are Israelites and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ.'

Comparison of a Greek concordance of the New Testament with that of the GNB reveals that in the source text there are some 77 references to 'Israel' (including four occurrences of 'Israelite') whereas in the GNB there are 99 even though the GNB fails to reproduce the term in six instances. We shall return to these later.

A similar comparison for the terms 'Jew(s/ish)' reveals that the Greek New Testament has 191 occurrences whereas the GNB has 224 occurrences even though in John's Gospel it actually reduces the number from 71 in the Greek New Testament to 41 in the GNB John.

The GNB rendering of οἱ ’Ιουδαῖοι in the Gospel according to John is worthy of special mention. The insistent, often polemical use of 'the Jews' is not reproduced in the GNB. Robert Bratcher, the main translator, has claimed[10] that attention to the context yields four different meanings: 1) the Jewish people; 2) the Judaeans who live near Jerusalem; 3) people hostile to Jesus; and 4) the authorities in Jerusalem. Concordant translation of οἱ ’Ιουδαῖοι as 'the Jews' would fail to convey the real meaning. Whatever merit there is in Bratcher's analysis is diminished by his presupposition that the conflict between Jesus and 'the Jews' reflects hostility between church and synagogue in a later age when the Gospel was written. An exegete may perhaps speculate, but a translator cannot get behind the text. Moreover, the DE emphasis on analysis fails to recognise that John could have expressed his meaning in terms of Bratcher's categories had he chosen. John's distinctive, consistent and absolute use of οἱ ’Ιουδαῖοι seems to imply a certain attitude and perhaps relationship to Judaism. Bratcher's limited definition of contextual meaning must be rejected. However puzzling John's usage may be to us, it is such a pointed motif of the Gospel that the translation is bound to preserve it.

Lest we be in any doubt about the influence of the GNB in recent non-European versions, it is worth recording that the 22 occurrences of οἱ ’Ιουδαῖοι translated by Bratcher as 'the Jewish authorities', are all translated in the same way in the Indonesian, Malay and Kriol; i.e. at John 1:19, 2:18, 20; 5:10, 15, 16, 18; 7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:22; 9:18, 22; 13:33; 18:14, 31, 36; 19:31, 38; 20:19. The Aboriginal Kriol *Baibul* actually has *serramonimen* for 'authorities', not a bad dynamic equivalent if one accepted Bratcher's position.

Outside John's Gospel the tendency of the GNB and other DE translations to interpolate extra 'Israels' or 'Jews/Jewish' not found in the source text reflects the translator's attempt to make the version more user-friendly for the modern reader. But in translating from one language to another, sensitivity to the complex relation between form and meaning is needed. One cannot make explicit in the version certain background information regarded as implicit in the original without risking distortion of the text and its message.

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[10] R. Bratcher, "The Jews' in the Gospel of John', *TBT* 26:4 (1975)

The GNB translation of the Letter to the Hebrews illustrates how such interpolations can distort the text. We find the adjective 'Jewish' inserted before 'priest', 'law', 'temple', at, e.g., Heb 8:4; 9:25; 10:1, 11; 13:10, 11. Likewise, 'Israelites' is interpolated at 11:28, 29, 30, 31 and 'People of Israel' at 12:18. The recent Malay, Indonesian and Chinese versions reproduce the GNB'S interpolations, even though the Preface to each claims that the translation is from the original languages. Not only are such interpolations gratuitous, since the background information can be gleaned from the 'context', especially from the Old Testament, but they skew the message. One begins to feel that what is being described was as alien to the original receptors as it is to the modern Gentile reader to whom the GNB seeks to accommodate its translation. Yet a natural reading of Hebrews implies that it is in fact addressed to Jews as the traditional title of the letter assumes.

Finally, we shall consider the fate of 'Israel' in three Pauline letters where beyond doubt both the nature and calling of Israel, and the relationship in Christ of Jews and Gentiles are absolutely central.

## THE FATE OF 'ISRAEL' IN ROMANS, GALATIANS, AND EPHESIANS.

### a. 'Israel' in Romans
The terms 'Israel' and 'Israelites' are found in Romans only in chapters 9-11. There are 13 occurrences at 9:4, 6 (twice), 27 (twice), 31; 10:19, 21; 11:1, 2, 7, 25, 26. Earlier in chapters 1-3, there are nine references to the 'Jews'. Later, in chapter 15, there is a reference to 'the circumcision' and three references to 'the saints'.

Many scholars (e.g., Stendahl[11]) would argue that Romans 9-11 forms the heart of the letter and the main reason for its composition. Paul is concerned here about Israel in God's purposes. Gentiles are treated only in their relationship to Israel. Paul is here expounding the concept 'Israel'. Nowhere else in his writings does Paul use the name so insistently.

It is noteworthy, therefore, that the GNB drops 'Israel' from the text at Rom 9:4, 6b and 31. We shall set these out, adding the renderings of some other recent foreign DE translations published by the UBS. But first, after the clause from the Greek New Testament, I shall set a formal correspondence translation, in this case the RSV. For my purposes the NIV, REB or NRSV would have served equally well.

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11   K. Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West', *HTR* 56 (1963 199-215.

**Romans 9:4**

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| Greek NT: | 'οἵτινές εἰσιν 'Ισραηλῖται ὧν ἡ υἱοθεσία;' |
| RSV: | 'They are Israelites and to them belong the sonship...' |
| GNB: | 'They are God's people; he made them his sons...' |
| DGN: | 'Denn sie sind Gottes erwähltes Volk, das er als seinen Sohn...' |
| AKB (Indonesian): | 'Mereka adalah umat yang terpilih dan Allah menjadikan mereka anak-anakNya sendiri...' |
| HNj (Swahili): | 'Hao ndio watu wa Israeli ambao Mangu aliwateua wawe watoto wake...' |

**Comment:** It is remarkable that in the very place where Paul is launching his exposition of the destiny of Israel in the divine plan, the GNB should substitute for 'Israelites' the more general 'God's people'. Note that the GNB is followed at this point by other UBS versions in our sample with the exception of the East African Swahili version. I may add that the recent Malay and Chinese New Testaments follow the GNB in rendering 'Israelites' by 'people of God'.

**Romans 9:6**

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| Greek NT: | 'οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ 'Ισραήλ, οὗτοι 'Ισραήλ.' |
| RSV: | 'For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.' |
| GNB: | 'For not all the people of Israel are the people of God.' |
| DGN: | 'Aber nicht alle Israeliten gehören zu Gottes Volk.' |
| AKB (Indonesian): | 'tetapi bukan semua orang Israel adalah umat yang dipilih oleh Allah.' |
| HNj (Swahili): | 'maana si watu wote wa Israli ni wateule wa Mungu.' |

**Comment:** The GNB replaces the second reference to Israel by 'people of God'. This reduces the shock value of Paul's statement (and remember that DE theory emphasises the need to elicit equivalent response). The GNB interpretation is no doubt a correct inference but it is not what Paul is saying. Paul is talking only about Israel. The modern Gentile reader might not realise this from the use of 'people of God'. The apostle is saying that not all descendants of Jacob/Israel are true Israelites. Many have failed to fulfil their calling and to enter into the promised inheritance. They are therefore disqualified not only from the broader category of 'the people of God' as a whole, but also from the titles and privileges of Israel that he has enumerated in Rom 9:4-5.

In this case, the other three UBS versions quoted above, viz. the German, Indonesian, and Swahili, all follow the GNB, as do the Malay and Chinese.

**Romans 9:31**

Greek NT: 'Ἰσραὴλ δὲ διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν.'

RSV: 'but Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on law did not succeed.'

GNB: 'While God's people who were seeking a law that would put them right with God, did not find it.'

DGN: 'Das Volk Israel aber, das sich abmühte, durch Befolgung des Gesetzes vor Gottes Urteil zu bestehen, hat dieses Ziel nich erreicht.'

AKB (Indonesian): 'Sebaliknya, orang-orang Yahudi selalu berusaha mentaati hukum supaya hubungan mereka dengan Allah menjadi baik kembali. Tetapi mereka justru tidak berhasil.'

HNj (Swahili): 'hali watu wa Israeli waliokuwa wakitafuta Sheria iletayo kukubalika membele yake Mungu, hawakuipata.'

**Comment:** Again the substitution of 'God's people' for 'Israel' in the GNB is highly unsatisfactory. Paul is describing the historical experience of literal Israel that strove for righteousness by keeping the law, but did not make the grade. In passing we note another inaccuracy, namely the translation 'who were seeking a law'. Israel already had the law. διώκων does not mean 'seeking'. The expression is awkward but the RSV's 'pursuing' conveys the idea. The NRSV's 'striving for' is even better.

We note that here other UBS translations show some independence of the GNB. The Chinese and the Malay are as bad in that they both substitute 'the chosen people' for 'Israel'. The Indonesian for some reason opts for 'the Jews', while the Swahili like the German retains 'Israel' but inserts 'people' before it.

### b. 'Israel' in Galatians

The churches of Galatia had recently been visited by Judaizers whose teaching had not only cast doubt on Paul's authority as an apostle but also implied that faith in Christ had to be supplemented by conformity to elements of the Jewish law, if the Galatians were to be saved. In answer, Paul expounded the gospel he had received from Christ: to accept the arguments of the Judaizers would be to revert to being under the law with its attendant curse. Rather, God's blessings come via the death of Christ, to those who have faith in Christ (chapter 3).

Finally, Paul gave them some practical advice on how to evaluate the many Jewish visitors who came their way, how to distinguish those who wanted to enforce circumcision on the one hand, from other Jewish believers who followed Paul's own κανών, viz. 'neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new

creation' (6:15). Verse 16, to which we now turn, is Paul's benediction on true Israelites, couched in language that echoes the Songs of Ascent (Ps 120-134).

### Galatians 6:16

Greek NT:  'καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ Θεοῦ.'

RSV:  'Peace and mercy upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.'

GNB:  'As for those who follow this rule in their lives, may peace and mercy be with them—with them and with all God's people.'

DGN:  'Allen die sich an diesen Grundsatz halten, schenke Gott seinen Frieden und sein Erbarmen. Sie sind das wahre Gottesvolk Israel.'

AKB (Indonesian):  'Bagi orang-orang yang hidup dengan pendirian itu dan begitu juga bagi seluruh umat Allah, saya mengharap Allah akan memberikan sejahtera dan rahmatNya.'

HNj (Swahili):  'Wanaofuata mwongozo huo nawatakia amani na huruma; amani na huruma kwa Israeli wateule wa Mungu.'

**Comment:**  The GNB drops 'Israel' from the text, assuming that Paul's benediction is a general one for 'all God's people'.

D.W.B. Robinson has argued persuasively against this interpretation.[12]

Paul's teaching about the unity between Jewish and Gentile believers is expressed in the concept of the 'new Adam' (Col 3:10) not the New Israel. This 'new man' category was behind Paul's teaching that all were 'sons of God' and 'one man in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:26-28) but again this is a broader concept than Israel.

Irrespective of whether one accepts Robinson's interpretation of 'Israel of God' however, our main concern should be that the translation does not unnecessarily close off the exegetical options as the GNB does here by dropping the reference to Israel, thus locking up the reader to its own spiritualised interpretation.

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12  D.W.B. Robinson, 'The Distinction Between Jewish and Gentile Believers', *ABR* 13(1965) 29-48.

We note that of the other UBS versions sampled, the German (but not the French) leaves open the exegetical question with its 'God's people Israel'. Of non-Western versions the Indonesian, Malay, Chinese and Kriol all follow the GNB in dropping the reference to Israel and substituting 'for all God's people'. The Swahili, however, apart from repeating 'peace and mercy', follows the Greek faithfully and reproduces 'Israel of God'.

### c. 'Israel' in Ephesians

The Epistle to the Ephesians 'celebrates, not merely the unity of all believers in Christ, but the unity of Gentiles with Jews in a new unity created by God Himself through the blood of Christ. And underlying this unity is (not some general doctrine of the brotherhood of mankind, but) a historical and theological relationship between the Jews through whom the Gospel came, and the Gentiles who received it from them'.[13]

The handling, therefore, of the one reference to Israel in Ephesians is not insignificant.

### Ephesians 2:12

Greek NT: ὅτι ἦτε τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς Χριστοῦ, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ ᾿Ισραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας

RSV: 'remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise...'

GNB: 'At that time you were apart from Christ. You were foreigners and did not belong to God's chosen people. You had no part in the covenants which were based on God's promises to his people...'

DGN: 'Ihr jedenfalls wart früher von Christus getrennt. Ihr wart Fremde und gehörtet nicht zu Gottes erwähltem Volk. Die Zusagen, die Gott seinem Volk gemacht hatte, galten für euch nicht.'

AKB (Indonesian): 'Pada waktu itu kalian tidak bersatu dengan Kristus, kalian adalah orang asing yang tidak termasuk umat pilihan Allah. Kalian tidak termasuk dalam ikatan perjanjian yang dibuat Allah dengan umatNya.'

HNj (Swahili): 'Wakati ule ninyi mlikuwa bila Kristo; mlikuwa nje ya jamii ya Israeli; mlikuwa wageni na hamkuwa na sehemu yoyote katika lile agano la zile ahadi.'

**Comment:** For the modern Gentile reader the ancient barrier between Jew and Gentile is of little relevance. But the apostle Paul had fought almost single-handed for 25 years to establish that Christ's death had removed the great dividing wall of hostility

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13 D.W.B. Robinson, 'Who were "the Saints"?', *RTR* 22 (1963), 45-53.

between Israel and the nations. The struggle has been won but it is only the morning after. Hence he says to these Gentile converts: 'Therefore remember that you were estranged from the commonwealth of *Israel* ' and not just from the generality of 'God's chosen people'.

Of the other UBS versions checked we note that the German, Indonesian, Malay, Chinese and Kriol have all followed the GNB in dropping 'Israel' and replacing it with 'God's chosen people' in Eph 2:12. Only the Swahili has retained it.

## D. CONCLUSION

We have raised the question, 'How well do modern versions enable the reader to understand the Bible in its own terms?' This study has sought to examine the handling of terminology referring to Israel in the GNB and its counterparts, especially in non-European languages.

It is the latter that are the major concern. After all, any evaluation of a translation has to take into account its purpose and intended audience. The GNB clearly has real communicative strengths and, arguably, whatever defects it has can be overcome by consulting a more 'formal correspondence' version such as the RSV, REB or NRSV.

However, Christians in the third world do not enjoy the luxury of access to other versions. The politics and economics of Bible translation are such that most will only have one Bible, if that, in their own language. What are the implications for third world churches if the only Scriptures they possess are Dynamic Equivalence translations?

Naturalness in translation is no doubt desirable, but must not be absolutised. Intelligibility is a more reasonable aim. The modern version is being asked to take over the evangelistic task of the Christian and the teaching role of the church.

However, our study of the translation of terminology referring to Israel raises the question of 'naturalness for whom?' Which receptors are in mind? This study suggests Westerners! Generally the readings adopted tend to be those of the GNB and the translator's approach very much that laid down in the UBS and SIL translation manuals.