

dependent upon the Resurrection, in clear contrast with the Gospels' overall evidence.

Rendering the biblical text in translation provides the primary theological frame within which all target language readers interpret its meaning.

No one culture or language is fully adequate to convey all religious truth, and that must include Hebrew and Greek. Perhaps that is why Abraham, a non-Jew, must continue to serve as the prime example of faith. His role as one who responded to God in and from his own cultural context set in motion the process of ongoing cultural adaptation of the faith he held and for which he is honored.

Modern Bible translators are engaged in the task of shifting the Word into a new cultural and linguistic context so that it might there take root and become incarnate. It is a theological task from beginning to end—from interpretation to choice of word and phrase. It establishes (*plays a crucial role in establishing*) the theological language to be used and brings into the theologizing task those many cultural distinctives that can ensure that the Word truly becomes incarnate in that context.

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“THEOLOGIZING” IN BIBLE TRANSLATION with Special Reference to Study Notes in Chichewa

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“Theologizing” in Bible translation—how, where, and why?

In his insightful monograph on the subject of “doing African Christian theology,” Richard Gehman observes:¹

In any successful effort to communicate the Gospel to a people across cultural boundaries there must be some measure of relating biblical truths to the known practices and beliefs of the people. Without translation, no communication is possible. And theology is translation. . . . As (Tite) Tienou has observed, theology “is reflection on God’s self-disclosure contained in the Scriptures with the purpose of generating the knowledge of God and better obedience.” As such, Africans have been reflecting on the Scriptures since the Bible was first translated into the vernacular languages. All Bible translations are interpretations of the text from which the Bible is being translated.

As in Africa, so also throughout the world. The activity of Bible translation inevitably involves the translators in a significant and sustained act of “theologizing.” It is not a question of “if” but “when”—more specifically, *how*, *where*, and *why* in the text this specialized act, and art, of cross-cultural

¹ Richard Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective*, Nairobi, Evangel Publishing House, 1987, 26-27; the quote from Tite Tienou is found in “Biblical Foundations: An African Study,” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, VII:1, 98.

communication is effected.¹ This principle holds true no matter what type or style of version is being prepared, from the most literal, formally correspondent reproduction of the original text to a highly idiomatic recreation in a contemporary language.²

However, Bible translation is not merely a "reflection" on God's revelation as recorded in the Scriptures, coupled with just any sort of effort to communicate this message to people today. There is a crucial qualification that applies here: This effort must always be guided by the criterion of *meaning*, namely, that reservoir of semantic significance which has been specifically encoded in the written Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible within their original historical, sociocultural, linguistic, literary, and ecological setting. Thus, in addition to being *creative* (to varying degrees, depending on the aim of a given translation), this process of contextualizing must also be correspondingly *controlled* in a relevant manner, that is, appropriate for and acceptable to the intended audience. That is where the "how, where, and why" becomes an important issue, yet one that is not always fully appreciated or practically addressed. In this article, I will briefly explore these notions as they pertain to the task of theologizing with respect to the text and co-text of the Scripture translation in Chichewa,³ in particular, the extensive study notes that are being composed in the preparation of a popular "study Bible" edition.⁴

Theologizing within the translated text

Bible translation is, or should ideally be, a "corporately run," community-based type of Christian communication. This is yet another factor contributing to its great difficulty—that is, how to get so many diverse individuals and groups to cooperate, let alone substantially agree, as they proceed to carry out such an important and influential assignment. This consideration exists over and above the more obvious communicative problems that arise due to the fact that two or more different languages arising from disparate material and conceptual cultures are involved in the text-transmission process.

Bible translation is thus a highly challenging endeavor as the translators, as impartial text "mediators," try their best to represent the *essential* message that has been inscribed within the original documents of Scripture. In order to achieve the best results, therefore, the process invariably requires some form of proactive and interactive message contextualization—that is, joint theologizing in the "neutral" sense, attempting to remain as objective and unbiased as possible. Though never

1 Thus *theologizing* is an important aspect of what is commonly referred to in missiological circles as "contextualization" (for a thorough critical discussion of this key concept, see Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994, ch. 4).

2 I would agree with Gehman that a much greater degree of *creative* contextualization, or theologizing, is manifested in an idiomatically composed, in contrast to a more literally rendered, version of the Bible: "Once Scripture is translated into the vernacular, theological reflection by the people is then possible, free to draw upon the figures of speech, analogies, patterns of logic and arrangement, religious and philosophical concepts. Theology is proven to be contextualized by the response it evokes from the people. If the truth of Scripture is communicated by a medium [i.e. manner or style] which seems foreign, then it is not [adequately] contextualized. If the message pierces the heart and seems like their own, then it is contextualized" (*African Christian Theology*, 87).

3 Chichewa is a southeastern Bantu language that is spoken by over ten million people in Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique.

4 For more information on this ongoing translation project, see my "Contextualising Bible Reading in South-Central Africa: The Preparation of an Annotated Edition ('Study Bible')—with special reference to the gospel of Luke in Chichewa," *Neotestamentica* 34, 1 (2000): 143-171.

perfect in actual practice, honest and able translators seek to ensure that no deliberate additions, subtractions, or changes in crucial content enter the text, especially those that would favor one's own doctrinal position. In any case, there will always be a greater or lesser degree of theological contextualization that has to be implemented since use of another language automatically, by default as it were, situates the original religious and ethical message of Scripture within the total thought-experiential world of the people who speak it—including their current belief system, life view, customs, values, traditions, social institutions, physical and geographical environment.

How much theologizing occurs then during Bible translation? This is not an easy question to answer since it all depends on the situational circumstances, some of which we will consider further below. Again, the issue of *intended audience* is of utmost importance because this will determine both the type and the extent of the adjustments and adaptations that are made within the scope of the vernacular text. A translation that is suitable for, as well as acceptable to, one target group may not work out so well for others in terms of grammatical style, wording, or even the spelling system that is used. There are some obvious differences in these respects that may be observed, for example, in the three major Chichewa versions that are available in Malawi: The old (1922) *Buku Lopatulika* (Sacred Book) translation was intended mainly for Protestant Christians who wished the Chichewa text to be very similar in wording to the King James Version in English, which in turn follows the forms of the Hebrew and Greek texts quite closely. Another older (1966) missionary translation, *Malembo Oyera* (Holy Writings), on the other hand, was prepared for Catholics in a style of language that was somewhat more idiomatic as far as the Chichewa is concerned. The recently published (1998) *Buku Loyera* (Holy Book) translation aims to be acceptable to both Protestants and Catholics, and it was deliberately composed so that the Bible's meaning would be expressed in the form of natural, everyday (popular language) Chichewa—without following the text of any particular English version.¹

Since I participated in the preparation of the *Buku Loyera* version, I will take that as my primary point of reference. This then is the basic definition that guided our committee's work: Bible translation consists in *re-presenting* as much as possible of the relevant *communicative significance* of the biblical text in the Chichewa language and cultural setting in a dynamic, *functionally equivalent* manner. Such a meaning-oriented version is one that the intended audience, namely, an average lay-Christian constituency, considers as being contextually most suitable in terms of both *efficiency* (relative intelligibility) and *effectiveness* (message utility, impact, and appeal). The degree of acceptability had to be both anticipated and subsequently assessed with respect to the primary socio-religious settings of Scripture use, for example, evangelistic outreach, personal devotions, Bible study, contemporary worship services.

Some examples

It is important to recognize that even a very *literal* version will inevitably be theologically contextualized in the process of reproducing an original text that was verbally represented in a very different language and culture. This occurs either

¹ On the theory and practice of a "popular language" Bible translation, see William Wonderly, *Bible Translations for Popular Use*, New York: United Bible Societies, 1968, ch. 5.

actively or passively, and often quite unpredictably as well. In the case of the *Buku Lopatulika*, for example, it was decided that the term *kachisi* "traditional ancestral shrine" should be used to designate the "temple" in Jerusalem. One wonders what sort of an impression is hereby conveyed, however, since there was only one central temple, but the land of the Achewa is full of area-specific *akachisi* shrines. The respective modes of construction of these two types of religious building are also radically different, for the latter are small temporary grass and stick shelters constructed at the base of a large shady tree somewhere out in the bush.

"Holy Spirit" is an example that is notorious in the Bantu language group. To begin with, the concept of spiritual "holiness" is itself very difficult to convey (that is, *woyera* "a living being that is white, clean, light, pure"), but "spirit" is even more problematic. *Mzimu* refers to a personal "ancestral spirit," that is, some known human being, usually a clan relative, who has died and been existentially transformed to live on in a reduced and invisible, yet still proximate, state. How this anthropomorphic term applies to the immortal God (*Mulungu*) is not apparent; certainly, a great deal of extratextual theologizing is required to clarify this crucial biblical concept. In many such cases of linguistic or cultural inequivalence where key theological ideas are involved, it is frequently necessary for less, rather than more, information to be expressed in the vernacular. This is because a textual description often proves to be linguistically unnatural and comparatively even more perplexing to the average person, for example, *Mpweya Woyera wa Mulungu* "the Clean Breath of God" for Holy Spirit.

A seemingly "safe" literalistic approach is not always the answer either, as many instances of *passive*, that is, unintentional or unforeseen, theologization would suggest. For example, the Christological title "Son of Man" was from the beginning rendered as correspondently as possible, but the result, not surprisingly, turns out to mean something quite different from originally intended—*Mwana wa Munthu* ("a Child of Somebody," male or female, possibly even illegitimate!). In modern idiomatic usage and a secular setting, this phrase could imply that the "somebody" concerned is an ethnic African, as distinct from a white "European" *Mzungu*. In such instances, the biblical text in translation depends even more heavily upon the continued teaching ministry of the churches in order to re-theologize, that is, to further describe and explain the foreign or otherwise misleading concepts in question.

A more *idiomatic* type of version allows for comparatively more verbal adaptations to be introduced into the translated text as the message is more thoroughly or radically adjusted to fit the lexical and syntactic categories of the target language. It is important to point out, however, that ideally only the *forms* of the original document (its sounds, lexical structure, grammar, or discourse arrangement) may legitimately be changed in the process. At times the modification may be considerable (for example, cases of word order) so as to render the message in such a way that it may be more readily and accurately comprehended by the intended audience. But any potential addition, omission, or alteration with regard to the biblical content must be kept to the minimum—and then only in cases where there are no other options, for example, when a more general expression must be used, such as *kumwamba* "to the place above" for "heaven," or *atumwi* "people who are sent" for "apostles."

Where no agreement can be reached, a loanword or lexical “borrowing” is typically resorted to. But in these instances, the work of theologizing is simply transferred to receptors, without any active guidance on the part of the translators. Thus the term *bapostolo*, while it may be used to denote “apostles” in the New Testament, nowadays more commonly refers to the leaders and/or members of some contemporary African independent church body. How far the formal contextualization process is pushed, or how much “controlled theologizing” is allowed in any given case, depends on the related factors of usage and users—that is, the primary purpose and setting for which the translation is being made and for whom. Many times it is necessary to reach a collective compromise, especially during the selection of certain prominent items of religious vocabulary, such as the designation for the new Bible itself, that is, *Buku Lopatulika* + *Malembo Oyera* => *Buku Loyera*, or where individual, denominational “theologies” conflict, for example, “baptize” *batiza* or “Sabbath” *sabata*.

The *Buku Loyera* is intended to be a popular language version, one that is easily understood and largely appreciated by all speakers of Chichewa, but especially the medial, child-rearing generation. Therefore, it goes much farther in restructuring certain biblical concepts and in naturalizing its manner of expression than either *Buku Lopatulika* or *Malembo Oyera*. The most obvious example of this concerns the personal, covenantal name for God in the Old Testament—יהוה in Hebrew, variously rendered as “Yahweh,” “Jehovah,” or the “LORD” in English versions. Here *Buku Loyera* employs the indigenous, pre-Christian name for the High (Creator-Sustainer) God of the universe in the traditional cosmology of the Chewa people—*Chauta* “Great-One of the Rainbow”. This is an outstanding, and no doubt somewhat debatable, example of local theologizing in action, but the term was not chosen to accommodate the biblical message to indigenous ancestral religion. It simply represents the translation committee’s best efforts to communicate who “God” *was* and *is* to people today in a *functionally equivalent* way—in a manner that is both referentially and connotatively more familiar to them.

Many other, perhaps less disputable instances of such conceptual contextualization are to be found in the *Buku Loyera*, for example, *sheol/hades* => “place of dead people”; *high places* => “shrines for worshiping images there”; *Messiah* => “that [well-known] promised Savior”; *scribes* => “teachers of Laws”; *grace* => “being favored in the heart by God”; *propitiation* => “a sacrifice for appeasing sins”; (sinful) *flesh* => “our character that is inclined to evil things”; *mediator* => “one who stays in the middle” (cf. *Buku Lopatulika* here: “clan representative/negotiator”). During these efforts to conform the text of Scripture in specific cases to suit the Chewa language and thought-world, the process of local theologizing had to be controlled or guided by the consensus of reliable biblical scholarship, as expressed in major commentaries, handbooks, and Bible dictionaries, as well as by the opinions of various church leaders and Chichewa language experts. The latter pointed out, for example, that the phrasal verb *kutembenuka mtima* “to be turned around in one’s heart,” was a much better candidate to convey the biblical imperative *repent* than *kulapa* “to regret, feel remorse,” as used in the older missionary versions (with no element of life-change implied).

Such linguistic contextualizing affects not only individual words and phrases, but frequently entire sentences also need to be completely restructured in the interest of greater intelligibility. This exercise too involves considerable text-affirmative and apologetic theologizing because an understandable version has the added benefit of preventing possible erroneous interpretations and indefensible doctrines. For example, the first part of Rom 3.22 reads in *Buku Lopatulika* (a back-translation): "... the righteousness of God which comes from faith on Jesus Christ to all who believe"; most untutored respondents think this means that human "faith" automatically brings the blessing of divine righteousness. This passage has been clarified in the *Buku Loyera* translation as follows: "The very way in which people are found/deemed righteous in the eyes of God is that those people believe Jesus Christ." To be sure, the specific language *forms* of the original Greek (KJV, RSV, etc.) have been noticeably changed. But as a result of this application of creative, yet controlled, theologizing, the intended message of the Scriptures comes through much more distinctly and also naturally to the average speakers—and more important, *hearers*—of Chichewa.

Theologizing within the translation *co-text*

As has been suggested above, a serious communication gap, or even a complete breakdown in transmission, may occur due to the "conceptual interference" that takes place when an indigenous, culturally conditioned worldview is superimposed upon the biblical one as the text of Scripture is read or heard. Such barriers to accurate message re-presentation may arise on account of either an apparent, but alien, *correspondence* or a more ostensive, but inexplicable, *clash* with regard to the respective forms and/or functions of the biblical (SL) and local (TL) entity, event, or situation that is under consideration.

The hermeneutical activity of contextualizing a Bible translation enters a new dimension when serious attention is given to the large amount of information that lies *implicit* as part of the context of the author's original message. There is obviously a limitation to the amount of verbal theologizing that can be effected within the actual text of any translation, no matter how idiomatic in style and structure, to enable its readers to fully and correctly comprehend what is being said. Certain types of information can be readily conveyed only by means of explanatory and descriptive notes—that is, with reference to pertinent aspects of the *setting* which surrounded the biblical text, for example, the history, customs and culture, peoples and places of the ancient Near East, geography, plants and animals, prominent artifacts or works of art, and so forth. Such selective comments serve to orient readers with regard to the extratextual environment of the Bible when it was first written and transmitted. A large measure of deliberate theologizing takes place during this operation too. For example, this is what the *Buku Loyera* has to say in a footnote about the ubiquitous "unclean spirits" that Christ had to deal with during his ministry (a back-translation):

spirits that pollute people: were ancestral spirits that when entering a person would render him/her unfit to worship with (a polluted person).

Serious translators have come to realize that the provision of this sort of background information is not an option; it is absolutely essential if people are going to be *empowered*, as it were, to interact with the Scriptures in a meaningful way—that is, from a position of *knowledge*, where they are able to really

“investigate” these sacred writings like the ancient Bereans did (Acts 17.11). They will thus be able to develop their own formal expressions of Christianity and doctrine (“local theologies”) on the basis of a much firmer biblical foundation. In contrast to past procedure then, most vernacular translations nowadays include much more annotation in terms of both quantity and quality. It will be necessary of course for the translators and reviewers of such notes to take special care as they reflect upon (or theologize about) certain potentially controversial concepts and issues. Thus they must not use this as a means to promote the views of any one church body at the expense of another, for example, regarding the temporal and spiritual significance of the “Sabbath” (for example, Mark 2.27) or the “rock” upon which the Church is built (Matt 16.18). In such cases, *if* an explanation or interpretation is attempted (at times it may be expedient to say *nothing* at all), the comment will normally have to include a statement that is somehow representative of each of the major theological positions with regard to the issue at hand, for example, concerning the “1000 years” of Rev 20.6.

It is equally apparent that the text of a translation alone, even one that is augmented by the periodic footnote, is not sufficient to prevent such misunderstanding from occurring and to point readers in the direction of a more reliable interpretation, one that is generally supported by the recognized community of biblical scholars. Where possible, therefore, an even more extensive “co-text” in the form of additional notes has to be provided in order to allow a wider frame of reference, or cognitive environment, to be conceptually evoked, one that will make possible a more accurate interpretation of the translation text itself by projecting readers back into the “world” of Bible times: its history, customs, places, and peoples.¹ This widespread need has given rise to a growing movement throughout the world to publish more fully annotated “study Bibles.” This in turn provides an occasion for a great deal of local theologizing to be effected—that is, in the form of various comments intended to give the target constituency a better understanding of the original situational setting and historical background of the Scriptures. There are a wide variety of such “supplementary helps” available—for example, section headings, larger and smaller sectional introductions, cross references, illustrations, maps, comparative charts, timelines, glossary, concordance, and topical index. I will focus on co-textual notes, however, since it is here where the greatest amount of creative, contextualized hermeneutics can be applied by national scholars and mother-tongue communicators.²

What is it then that sparks or stimulates a particular note to be supplied alongside a translation? To a great extent this process arises out of long, perceptive personal experience in communicating the message of the Scriptures in the vernacular and in varied congregational or compositional settings, for example, preaching, teaching, witnessing, counseling, literature development, music ministry, and Bible translation. Such a background helps to alert a person as to where there may well be a potential problem point with respect to specific elements of a certain passage, even when read in its surrounding textual context. In other

1 On the importance of this contextual dimension in current thinking on Bible translation theory and practice, see the various essays in Timothy Wilt (ed.), *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, Manchester: St. Jerome, 2002.

2 I distinguished ten types of notes for use in the Chichewa study Bible: exegetical, situational, thematic, structural, stylistic, functional, contextual, translational, intertextual, and textual (“Contextualising Bible Reading,” 152-157). These may also be termed the biblical “paratext.”

words, there is a strong likelihood that the intended sense of a given word, phrase, clause, or even the entire verse will be totally misunderstood or will be too difficult to understand at all, at least for the majority of hearers. This lack or loss of communicative quality is usually occasioned by some sort of linguistic, conceptual, or cultural mismatch that arises from within the overall target language situation. Without some form of direction therefore in the form of a footnoted explanation, there is a good chance that the wrong meaning will be suggested, even granting a certain amount of flexibility in this regard. Alternatively, due to the text's excessive difficulty or obscurity, no meaning at all might be conveyed to a majority of the target constituency for whom the study Bible is being composed.

Both the placement and the wording of notes throughout the biblical text are determined according to an implicit application of the communicative principle of "relevance." Thus an appropriate balance must be maintained whereby the conceptual "cost" (effort) that is expended in mentally processing a given note is adequately compensated for by the cognitive "gain" that will be derived from understanding the content, intent, impact, and/or significance of the specific text being referred to.¹ This general principle applies also in terms of both quantity and quality to the selection and formulation of the corpus of study notes considered as a whole. If too many notes are supplied, especially those that are not really very informative, the reader's interest and capacity to deal with the material will be diminished. The same outcome may be expected for notes that are conceptually too dense or stylistically difficult to readily understand. Therefore, the process of critically testing and revising the notes for a given book is one that needs to be sustained for the duration of the editorial process and beyond—that is, in preparation for the production of an updated edition of a published study Bible within ten years.

A number of examples of co-textual notes selected from the Luke portion of the Chichewa study Bible are cited below to indicate the nature and degree of linguistic, cultural, and theological modification that may be required. These are given in the form of a relatively literal English back-translation; to save space, the actual Chichewa expression will be reproduced only when it seems relevant to the particular feature being illustrated. These passages are merely suggestive of what might be accomplished in this vital area of encouraging a more dynamic indigenous hermeneutical initiative through the mediating activity of an intelligent and insightful group of editors along with their broadly constituted review committees. The quotes also serve to highlight by way of illustration the general nature of the various problems that are confronted in this effort, especially with regard to the potential distorting influence of traditional religious beliefs and customary practices upon the average receptor.² The following examples have been categorized into two main groups—those that focus upon the *form* of the vernacular

1 For a complete discussion of this principle with specific reference to Bible translation, see Ernst-August Gutt, *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*, Dallas and New York: Summer Institute of Linguistics and United Bible Societies (chapter two in particular).

2 It should be noted that any such "distortion" is evaluated as such on the basis of the original text and context of Scripture. A cognitive transfer, or "transculturation," of the biblical message must inevitably be effected, however, when it is applied to the thinking and behavior of a specific contemporary audience, that is, in order to render it meaningfully relevant to their everyday lives. Unfortunately, there will not be space enough in the proposed Chichewa study Bible to cater for this particular didactic need.

note itself and those that more directly concern the perceived *content* of the passage that is being addressed.

Form

In this section, the examples illustrate the attention to natural, even idiomatic, Chichewa linguistic usage that the new study Bible exhibits. In other words, it will not be some dry dogmatic exposition or overly simplified Sunday school speech that people will be reading and hearing, but rather a colloquial style which matches well with that of the popular language translated text itself. These notes aim primarily to explain and inform members of the target audience, but in addition the goal is to accomplish this exercise with an appropriate amount of impact and appeal. Theologizing does not necessarily have to be tedious; it can also be expressed dynamically as well as beautifully in the language concerned. This particular stylistic feature will hopefully serve to give people a little extra motivation to make an effort to actually read the note that accompanies a given passage.

Idioms

17.32 *Remember the wife of Lot.* Lot's wife was destroyed when she was just about to be saved ("saved-saved"). Because her heart was stuck on what was happening at Sodom, she failed to grab hold of her heart. She turned around—finish! She was immediately transformed into a rock of salt. Her destiny was doom at that point.

24.16 *Their eyes produced a big darkness.* This is not to say that they were blind, not at all, but in their minds they really did not expect to see Jesus, with the result that they did not recognize him even though they saw him. The sorrow of Jesus' death and their lack of hope ever to see Jesus again darkened (or "blackened") their eyes; it produced a very big darkness for them.

Figurative language

7.44-46 Jesus contrasts the work that the morally loose woman did for him and the work of that Pharisee whose reception of Jesus did not demonstrate that he really put himself out at all ("to pour out," like the contents of a container).

9.23 *He must deny himself.* These words speak of a person who is not concerned about his life, but he is willing to be persecuted and to "lay his life down upon an anthill" (to risk his life) because of his faith in Christ.

Ideophones (special graphically descriptive, phonically distinctive, and/or sensorially evocative verb forms)

14.28 *To count the cost.* ... Jesus did not beat about the bush ("he did not hide his Chichewa [language] from them"—idiom). He warned them in advance that it's not okay to follow him slackly (*mwachisenjesenje* "like loosely fitting clothes"). And he told them directly (*mwatchutchuchu!* "like maize stalks standing straight up") that everyone who wants to follow him must ...

17.24 *Like lightning.* That is to say that the coming of the Son of Man will be sudden (*kwa dzidzidzi!*), unmistakable, awesome, and visible to all (*kosakayikitsa, koopsa, ndiponso aliyense adzakuona*).

Interactive questions

20.25 *So give to the king what belongs to the king...* By answering this way, what did Jesus want to say? Here he is telling the Jews that ...

23.16 *I will just flog him.* Judgment had been given that Jesus was not guilty. Should an innocent man be punished any more? Here Pilate gives innocent Jesus the punishment of a flogging. What sin did Jesus commit that he should receive the punishment of flogging?

Novel syntax/morphology

10.13-15 *Woe to you, Chorazin ...* ... That is to say, those heathen people (*casus pendens*), had it been that he preached to them, perhaps they would have repented ("turned in the heart"), just like the people of Nineveh repented after they had heard the words of Jonah ... (*The Chewa text also displays very idiomatic tense usage here.*)

23.43 *Place of rejoicing* ("Paradise"). ... Jesus said, that very day on which they both would die, they would be together at that place of rejoicing (poetic rhythmic expression: *Yesu anati tsiku lomwelo // limene onse awiri aferewo // adzakhallira limodzi // kumalo a chisangalalowo*).

Sound play

6.5 *All authority over what concerns the Sabbath.* ... But the Jewish leaders were accustomed to add minor commands to this Sabbath law. These commands were like cords ("bowstrings") tying the people up (... *timalamulo tina pa lamuloli. Timalamulo timeneti tinali ngati nsinga ...*).

17.6 *We just did what we ought to have done.* ... Jesus reveals that the disciples were completely lacking in faith, even the slightest little bit like the small seed of the mustard plant (*ngakhale kakangonongono komwe kongwa kambewu kampiru*). Here Jesus says that it is better to have at least a small faith rather than to have completely none at all. That small faith is able to do (*kachikhulupiriro kakang'onoko kakhoza kuchita*) great, unexpected things.

Metalingual explanation (with respect to either the present idiomatic text or the earlier literal translation)

10.21 *Uneducated people.* The word in Greek means "small children" [see how it has been translated in the Sacred Book and in the Holy Writings (that is, the old Protestant and Catholic versions)], but Jesus means ordinary people who have not gone far in their education in terms of worldly wisdom.

23.2 *This fellow.* These are words that show that they didn't like Jesus and that Jesus was a person who was not wanted among them. (*The fronted Chichewa expression Uyu munthu conveys the same pejorative implication of the Greek original touton, which the notes thus call attention to, lest the negative connotation here be missed by readers, especially those reading the text aloud.*)

Content

There are any number of semantic categories that could be identified and exemplified here, but the ones specified below (including my notes in parentheses) seemed to capture the broad range and diversity of the total Lukan corpus of notes

that was surveyed. These comments best illustrate the insightful theologizing efforts that the Chewa study Bible editors displayed in their work. Considering the fact that the Book of Luke was the team's first effort, we can look forward to some even more dynamic instances of this personally interactive (text ↔ context) hermeneutical process in future publications.

Theological topics

12.10 *He (God) will not forgive him.* ... Which sin is this one? It is the sin of hardening the heart and deliberately continuing to refuse to listen to God, even when the Holy Spirit tries to convert him/her. A sin of this nature God cannot forgive because the person him-/herself refuses to be converted.

18.12 *Righteous before God.* That is to say God forgave her sins. The forgiveness of sins “praises” or is “propped up” (*chitamira kapena kutsamira*—two similar sounding verbal idioms) upon the grace (*kukoma mtima* “the good-heartedness”) of God, not on a person's works, no.

Moral-ethical issues

8.21 *My mother ... hears the words of God and does them.* Here Jesus is not at all rejecting his earthly family. (*Only a witch would do such a thing in a traditional setting.*) Jesus is encouraging his spiritual family by saying that his mother and brothers are also important in the kingdom of God ...

22.31 *He will winnow you.* Like a woman winnows the maize kernels that she has pounded up in order to remove the chaff, so they would do with wheat. In a similar way then temptations act like ways of winnowing people because it separates the steadfast and the non-steadfast, the faithful and the unfaithful.

Intertextual and interlingual references

7.2 *Roman soldiers.* At that time the region of Galilee was ruled by the government of Rome through Herod Antipas. Now when we say “of Rome” it does not mean the Catholic Church, which some call the Roman Church (*mpingo wa Aroma*), not at all ...

22.31 *Satan.* ... There's a difference between the tests of Satan, the purpose of which is to cause a person to sin, in English they say “temptation,” and the tests of God, the purpose of which is to strengthen a person's faith or to see the measure of a person's faith, in English they say “trials” or “testing.”

Biblical extratextual setting

22.38 *Two swords.* ... In keeping with their Israelite custom, men would travel about with swords. The appearance of these swords was a little like our knives, but somewhat longer, which they would use in various ways. ... However, as we read in 23-38, Jesus says that what they really need to help them in the time of temptation is a strong faith.

24.1 *The women went to the grave.* In the custom of the Jews it was not a strange thing at all for people to go to a graveyard at any time at all. ... (*This needs to be stressed because of the opposite beliefs among traditionally minded Chewa folk, who believe that a graveyard is the haunt of evil spirits and witches.*)

Chewa "local color" (context)

6.18 *Evil spirits*. ... Jesus heals diseases caused by the spirits to demonstrate that he has authority over all spirits, even the spirits of our ancestors which some people believe sometimes brings sicknesses and cause people to lose their peace of mind.

22.1 *Passover*. ... This was a festival recalling their exit from slavery in Egypt and also the time when the Jews became a nation with the power to rule themselves. This is similar to the situation with many nations here in Africa when we recall our exit from oppression like that of the colonialists.

Proverbial lore

6.36 *As my Father in heaven*. An example of love is God himself (Matt 5.48). As you know, in Chichewa there's a hidden saying that "If the mother is dusty (*mbu!* = ideophone), the child will be dusty too (*mbu!*)," meaning that a child imitates its parent. Those who believe in God imitate what God does.

10.4 *Do not stop to give greetings along the way*. Here he is really speaking about a custom that we too have in that we take a long time when greeting one another. But Jesus is warning the sent ones that since their journey is most urgent, they cannot be delayed with such greetings—they have to travel quickly because the time is short. As our ancestors said, "Eating [too much] cost the great cricket its wings!" (*This proverb refers to a tale that tells how the cricket spent too much time eating its dinner and hence missed an appointment with God, who was distributing wings to all flying creatures.*)

Personalised (editorial) reflections

13.29 *People will come from the south* These will be people who come from different nations like here in Africa, America, Europe, the Asians, and also different tribes of people like the Chewa, Tumbuka, Yao, Sena, Bemba, Lomwe, Tonga, Zulu, and Shona. In other words, in God's kingdom there is no favoritism—all believers in God will be there since they were all created by the same God.

22.44 *Sweat like drops of blood*. Here is where things really got bad for Jesus. This means that Jesus was truly a human being—with blood like any other human. Sweat like blood shows that the trouble of his heart caused his body also to be troubled, with the result that his sweat was like drops of blood, just as what happens when a person's head really pains, he gets a nosebleed.

23.34 *Forgive them*. All the things that happened to Jesus should not have been done to him. ... They are crucifying Jesus who healed and raised people from death. Can we say then that "kindness killed the partridge"? No, that's not right. Instead of getting angry at the people who were doing such evil things to him, Jesus was praying for them that ... (*The subtle reference to a proverbial saying in Chichewa as part of a rhetorical question highlights the point here in a most effective way.*)

The examples of the preceding section indicate some of the principal domains wherein the most overt and extensive amount of audience-centered theological reflection and adaptation normally occurs. Whether in these notes, the glossary, or through selected illustrations, the translation team is provided with a great

opportunity to make the message of Scripture live in the minds of their envisaged constituency. Such a supplemental contextualization of the original ancient Near Eastern setting thus encourages a more exegetically based, appealing, and apposite application of the biblical text to the contemporary TL context, one that is undoubtedly of immediate relevance to every receptor. In addition, this co-textual dimension of a translation also provides a means where a less obvious type of theologizing can be effected, namely, via the particular medium and mode whereby the message of Scripture is being conveyed. Examples that come to mind here include the creative use of typography and format, spatial text-design arrangements on the printed page, adaptations to an audio and/or visual dimension (for example, background music, sound effects, vocal characterization, culturally specific evocative imagery and settings). Along with the requisite creativity, however, an extra measure of control may also be needed in these areas simply because of the additional communicative power of these modern media, especially where both sight and sound is involved as an integral part of the message.

“De-theologizing” too within the current communicative *context* of a translation

It is important to reiterate the basic twofold purpose for including an adequate repertory of supplementary notes in a standard study Bible, such as the one being prepared for the Chichewa-speaking people. Both aspects engage translators in the dynamic hermeneutical activity of context-sensitive theologizing. First, a process of “*de-contextualization*” must be embarked upon whereby the resident (“default”) Chewa cognitive map,¹ or ideational “program” (its socially-shaped life view) is explicitly counteracted in places where it would distort or even eliminate (“overwrite”) the intended sense and implied significance of the particular Scripture passage at hand or on a global level throughout a given book. The objective is not to deliberately detract from or disparage the traditional cultural viewpoint, value system, and lifestyle, but simply to show how and in what respects it appreciably *differs* from a biblical perspective. In some instances, it will also be necessary to divest the text from certain contra-Scriptural ideas and practices that originate in the Western world and have negatively influenced contemporary society or ecclesiology, for example, with regard to church polity—1Pet 5.1-2. In any case, minds of members of the translation team and target audience alike may need to be neutralized, or “de-theologized” so that an erroneous or misleading local outlook is not applied to the current biblical text with regard to underlying human or divine motives, attitudes, beliefs, values, and so forth, for example, on the nature of evil—its cause and its cure.

Second and as pointed out by the examples above, a contemporary translation will need to be “*re-contextualized*” in terms of the basic minimum of biblical background information that is required to interpret any given passage correctly.² The aim is to provide an adequate sense of the original text, to the extent possible

1 Gehman uses this term in a somewhat different sense: “We need to ‘contextualize’ Scripture but we also need to let Scripture ‘de-contextualize’ us. If we only pick and choose those crumbs [i.e., passages, texts] that suit us, then we do not allow God to communicate ‘the whole counsel of the Word of God.’” (*African Christian Theology*, 61) My usage of the terms “de-contextualize” and “re-contextualize” is also quite different from that of B. Malina and R. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 13-14.

2 This “basic minimum” will vary of course from one TL situation and setting to the next.

given the limitations of a non-personal, interlingual, cross-cultural communication situation. This would include an "understanding [of] the range of meanings that would have been plausible to a first-century reader of the Synoptic Gospels" in order to "facilitate a reading that is consonant with the initial cultural contexts of those writings."¹ In short, it is "the translator's [annotator's] job ... not only to mediate the text, but also the relevant [conceptual] contexts to the target readers."² This is an awesome responsibility to assume; not only is it so vitally necessary to ensure reasonably successful communication, it also has the potential to confuse or mislead many if not properly done. While a theological "agenda" cannot be avoided on the part of those commissioned with this task, it can at least be conformed to a recognized majority opinion—or a common community consensus.

Theologizing *in situ*—within the context of *community*

There are several levels at which contextualization takes place. First, the Bible needs to be translated into new languages. This involves much more than simply replacing old words and sentences with new ones. Built into every language are the implicit assumptions of the culture—the worldview of the people. There is no theologically unbiased language, no philosophically neutral worldview. This task requires technical expertise, *but the principle of community check applies even here*. Individual translators often translate passages in ways that conform to their own theological positions, rather than to the text itself [or indeed, the communal context of contemporary communication].³

It is necessary to expand upon the preceding critical observation: Since all efforts at contextualizing the text and background of the biblical message are aimed at facilitating its communication for different audiences, in different environments of life and thought, it is clear that competent representatives of these disparate settings need to be regularly consulted during the various stages of Scripture production. Thus at some point or another—better sooner rather than later—the entire community should be involved in the process of theologizing the Bible translation that is meant for them. Otherwise, it is certain that the published (or recorded) outcome will produce a negative reaction in one respect or another, often unexpectedly so. Such irritation may occur in seemingly minor areas, like the spelling of certain proper names (for example, *Mariya* or *Maria* for "Mary"), or via some unintended implications in picture illustrations (for example, unnatural, perhaps derogatory hand gestures), or with respect to those major issues that are

1 Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 14. In view of space limitations for such annotation, it will often be necessary to provide information that pertains only to the "most probable" reading—that is, instead of the full range of meanings possible. Among the key social values of a biblical setting that would need explication for a contemporary Chewa audience, for example, are these: the dominant challenge-riposte form of argumentation, social stereotypes and "deviance labeling," the female-controlled "gossip network," the three-zone [human] personality, the Roman patronage system, the surrogate family of Christians, and Pharisaic rules regarding purity and pollution. Other values that are similar to (but not exactly the same as) indigenous Chewa ones but which may need to be highlighted in relation to a given biblical text include the following: non-ancestral demon possession, "ingroup/outgroup" tensions, "honor/shame" relationships, the concept of "limited good," the dyadic [human] personality, the social importance of children, and the "marriage of clans." (*Social-Science Commentary*, 19-23)

2 E. R. Hope, "Redefining a Functional Theory of Translation," *UBS Bulletin* (Current Trends in Scripture Translation) 182/183 (1997): 12.

3 Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 101-102; the italics and words in brackets are mine.

potentially very volatile or divisive in nature, such as controversial stylistic and exegetical matters (for example, whether to render the poetry of Scripture as poetry in the translation, or to employ “honorific” forms when speaking or with reference to Jesus or even God). Bible translation is not some esoteric, scholars-only exercise; it must involve the entire speech community for whom a particular version is intended, for they too contribute to the full meaning of the ultimate message that is communicated in any given situation.¹

As noted, the question is not *if*, but rather *how* and *when* to effect such a popular engagement. The latter is by far the easier issue to address: *whenever* there is opportunity to do so. In other words, people’s opinions, wishes, complaints, and reactions need to be researched *before* a translation project is undertaken so as to formulate the project guidelines (or *Brief*) especially its particular communicative purpose (*Skopos*).² The community perspective, diverse as it may be, must then be continually monitored *during* the preparation of a translation, and then assessed yet again *after* it has been produced—in whatever format, mode, or medium. The establishment of representative, active, and effective review committees is an essential part of any well-organized Bible translation program. Toward this end, participants need to be sufficiently educated and strongly encouraged to respond honestly and openly—on the basis of adequate understanding through training in translation principles—to the various drafts, portions, selections, editions, or non-translation media programs that are distributed.

Various forums, both formal (for example, a public sermon) and informal (a home Bible study course), may be utilized for the purpose of testing and evaluating a given printed, aural, or visual text. The questions that they must consider and respond to are weighty indeed: How effectively (accurately, intelligibly, acceptably) has the translation been contextualized—or theologized in terms of the projected setting of use? Has the process been taken too far at times (for example, denominationalism, eisegesis)—or not far enough (for example, literalism, traditionalism)—either as a whole or in certain specific respects? Where can corrections, modifications, or improvements be made, that is, given the project’s goals and designated audience? Do some changes need to be made in the area of staffing and support in order to enable these objectives to be successfully accomplished? How then do most people actually *use* the text that has been produced for them—within the parameters of its original intention, or somehow outside of this envisaged framework? In the latter instance, a revised, *re-contextualized* version may need to be prepared. Lay participation in such feedback-eliciting and planning activities helps them to feel part of the program—ideally, as genuine “owners” and “stewards” of the Bible that is being translated and possibly also transposed to a more audience-friendly medium for their benefit.

1 Gehman offers another perceptive comment regarding this issue: ... Bible translation is in itself a form of theologizing. Choices must be made as to the meaning of the original text. This is interpretation. Choices must be made in the way the original text is to be communicated. This is interaction with the culture. Since language is a near perfect mirror image of any given culture, the choice of language to be used in translation of the Bible involves an interaction between Gospel and Culture, between the Word of God and the worldview of the people (*African Christian Theology*, 81).

2 The technical terms *Brief* and *Skopos* are diagnostic in the functionalist approach to translation known as *Skopostheorie* (see, for example, Christiane Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997, 29, 137).