Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *The Savage Mind.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1966.

Lévy-Brühl, Lucien: *How Natives Think.* New York: Knopf 1926.

Noss, Philip A.: "The oral story and Bible translation". *BTT* 32:3 (1981) 249-318.

Olson, D.: *The world on paper: the conceptual and cognitive implications of writing and reading.* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press 1994.

Ong, W.: *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the Word.* London: Methuen 1982.

Parry, Milman: *L'Épithète traditionelle dans Homère.* Paris: Société Éditrice Les Belles Lettres 1928.

Renck, Günther: *Contextualization of Christianity and Christianization of language: a case study from the highlands of Papua-New Guinea.* Erlangen: Verlag der Ev. Luth. Mission 1990.

Scribner, S. and M. Cole: *The Psychology of Literacy.* Cambridge, U.K., Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1981.

GOSNELL YORKE

BIBLE TRANSLATION IN AFRICA: AN AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE

The author is a UBS translation consultant working in Mozambique and Angola, based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

> *we are obliged to classify all...translations...as instances of "ethnocentric violence..."*[1]

Introduction

An Afrocentric approach to Bible translation is influenced not only by the various contemporary liberationist genres of biblical theology and hermeneutics, but also by the cross- or trans-disciplinary impact of an ongoing postcolonialist discourse.[2] Such an approach to Bible translation is an attempt to translate Scripture from a premeditatedly Africa-conscious perspective—and, in doing so, to break the apparent hegemony and, at times, what, for some, seems to be a racially motivated ideological stranglehold that the various Western versions now enjoy in relation to the Bible. As a method, the Afrocentric approach to Bible translation seeks to put Africa, Africans and Africana generally (for example, fauna and flora) back into

1 Although B. Hatim and I. Mason make this remark (slightly amended) within the specific context of their recent discussion of how ideology and translation/translating are (inter)related, it is my conviction that generalization is permissible with respect to translation practice as a whole. See their *The Translator as Communicator* (London: Routledge 1997), 162. See also D. Slager, "Translation and Theology via a Study of Ruth," in *Current Trends in Scripture Translation, UBS Bulletin* 170/171 (1994) 67.

2 The literature about such issues is already vast and continues to grow. A bibliography is available from the author at PO Box 3768, 1620 Kempton Park, South Africa.

the Bible by raising their profile and visibility at the level of translation—especially into the more than 1,500 languages and creoles of Africa.

In the considered opinion of not a few, the practical usefulness of this approach is that it may encourage the African readership to embrace the Bible with even greater enthusiasm than is now the case. Not only should the Bible be translated into the languages of Africa (based as it usually is on one Western language and version or another)[1] but Africa and matters related thereto should be shown to be an integral part of the biblical drama as well—not just in a negative sense but positively too. In other words, translating (including the Bible) in an Afrocentric or postcolonialist key is not only characterised by an ideological suspicion but has now become a means of self-affirmation as well. Postcolonialist translation studies, of which the Afrocentric perspective is but a part, are as sensitive as ever to the pivotal role that translation plays in helping to shape culture and identity.

To demonstrate briefly what an Afrocentric approach might mean for Bible translation in practical terms, passages are drawn from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as a whole. In particular, Gen 2.10-14; Jer 13.23; Zeph 1.1; Mt 2.1-18; and Acts 12—28 are highlighted. The implications for such an approach are also extended to incorporate section headings and other reader's helps such as notes and maps.

Discussion of key terms

To better appreciate what is to follow, it is important that we devote a little space to a discussion of and justification for the use of the two key or operative words in the subtitle of this article, namely, Perspective and Afrocentric, in that order.

Perspective

Human language, the limitation of the human imagination, the "imprisonments" imposed on us by culture, personality, gender and upbringing, the particularities of our own socio-economic and other contexts, plus the presence of sin in the life of the believer-translator, one who is *simul iustus et peccator*[2], are all factors and forces that make what we see and say inevitably perspectival in nature. That seems true even when aided by the Holy Spirit himself. The conflicting claims of various Bible versions[3], the profusion of doctrinal positions and the mind-boggling proliferation of Churches within Protestantism alone are clear empirical testimony to the validity of this claim. As human beings, and invoking the metaphorical language of the Apostle Paul, we seem able, ultimately, to see only "through a glass darkly" (lCor 13.12). Our presuppositions, preunderstandings and biases, of whatever kind, invariably impose limits on us—limits which no amount of formal education or life-experience seems able to eradicate entirely. It is this fact of life which John Elliott, the white American New Testament scholar, captures in his own creative way. He says: "All perception is selective and constrained

1 See E.A. Nida and C.R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill 1969), 6.

2 "At the same time righteous and a sinner" (Martin Luther).

3 See, for example, S. Kubo and W. Specht, *So Many Versions? Twentieth Century English Versions of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. Co. 1975), 200-207; and, B. Hobberman, "Translating the Bible", *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1985, 43-48.

psychologically and socially; *for no mortal enjoys the gift of 'immaculate perception.'* "[1]

As already intimated, we have gleaned this basic hermeneutical insight from, among others, those Christian theologians now committed to theologising "from below"; to theologising from the postcolonialist perspective of the oppressed; from that of the poor and the powerless, women and the weak. Reference is here made to those Christian theologies often referred to as "liberation theologies", and which others choose rather to refer to as Christian theologies of the Two-Thirds World. Such theologies point to the experiences and expectations of those who now constitute the vast majority of the world's population but who find themselves, for the most part, at its periphery.[2] Felder, an African-American New Testament scholar, makes the point as follows:

> European/Euro-American biblical scholars [and Bible translators?] have asked questions that shaped answers within the framework of the racial, cultural, and gender presuppositions they held in common. This quiet consensus has undermined the self-understanding and place in history of other racial and ethnic groups.[3]

In the view of many, this undermining of one's self-understanding, especially that of Africans and those of African descent, not only tended to breed feelings of self-doubt and even self-contempt, but also fostered a profound respect bordering on awe and fear of those doing the interpreting and the translating. Feelings generated were not unlike those which Mr. Mandela describes in his autobiography. He writes: "These whites [in South Africa], appeared as grand as gods to me, and I was aware that they are to be treated with a mixture of fear and respect."[4]

The point, essentially, is this: in our post-colonial, post-modern and now post-apartheid era, African Christians of all denominations, whether they are on the continent or in the Diaspora, are "coming of age" and are therefore no longer willing to appropriate wholeheartedly and then submit obsequiously to any hermeneutical model that seemingly emanates from, and resonates with, the experiences and expectations of the privileged and the powerful, that is, those who are perceived as being mostly "Western" in orientation, white in colour and male in gender. Because of our particularities, presuppositions, pre-understandings and therefore our limited perspective on things, our "maculate perceptions", as it were, we are all being admonished to avoid the pretentious claim that it is possible for any one person or a homogeneous group of persons to mount a hermeneutical strategy that is timelessly applicable in its appeal or all-inclusively embracing in its scope—and that seems true even in Bible translation. It is for this reason, then,

---

1 Emphasis mine. See J.H. Elliott, "Social Scientific Criticism" in *Semeia* 35 (1986), 5; also J.H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press 1993); Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: a Comparative Study of Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row 1974).

2 See G. Yorke, "Biblical Hermeneutics: An Afrocentric Perspective," in *Religion and Theology/Religie & Teologie* 2 (1995) 145-158. A slightly revised version appeared in *Journal of Religious Thought* 52 (1995) 1-13.

3 C.H. Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1989), xi. Also see G. Yorke, "Seventh-day Adventists Believe.... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines: An Afro-Adventist Appraisal", *Journal of Adventist Thought in Africa* 1 (1995) 8-23.

4 See his *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London: Little, Brown and Co. 1994), 11.

that I now turn to the next operative term in the title of this article, namely, Afrocentric. Before I do so, I close this section by quoting Sheppard at length. He writes:

> ...on the basis of practical reason alone, I do not think that...there is any universal logic so that we should all agree about any trans-historical Neo-Kantian "general hermeneutic" that can be drawn from the arts and human sciences, any meta-narratives of "history" and other narratives, any globalization of personal experience.... These reservations about our capacity to make universal statements are compounded by the work of Michel Foucault, who demonstrates how different epochs of human consciousness entail significantly different "forms of knowing." In everyday jargon, what people in one Age found unthinkable may be precisely what people in another epoch cannot stop thinking about. Conversely, we, in a later generation, may find it difficult to imagine why our predecessors were so stupid as to not see what is so obvious to us.[1]

Afrocentric

The term "Afrocentric" is an adjectival spin-off from the terms Afrocentrism and Afrocentricity (used interchangeably); such terms are of relatively recent vintage. Afrocentrism appears, for example, in the relatively recent work, in English, of Ngugi wa Thion 'o, one of Kenya's foremost writers, now in exile, entitled *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms.* He wrote in 1993 as follows:

> I was horrified when I returned [from the University of Leeds, England] to Kenya in 1967, to find that the Department of English [at the University of Nairobi] was still organized on the basis that Europe was the centre of the universe. Europe, the centre of our imagination? Ezekiel Mphaphlele from South Africa, who was there before me, had fought hard to have some African texts introduced into the syllabus. Otherwise the department was still largely oblivious to the rise of the new literatures in European languages in Africa let alone the fact of the long existing tradition of African-American literature and that of Caribbean peoples. The basic question was: From what base did African peoples look at the world? Eurocentrism or Afrocentrism?[2]

Mxolisi Ntshuga, a retired Black South African (Xhosa) Presbyterian minister and a graduate of the University of Fort Hare (the foremost Black university in the country and the alma mater of Mandela, Mugabe and others), is quite right in his recent observation that, "African-Americans are now [also] talking about Afrocentrism."[3] Within biblical studies, perhaps no one does it more eloquently than Felder. Not only is he author of the ground-breaking book, *Troubling Biblical Waters,*[4] editor of a collaborative work with other African-Americans, *Stony the*

---

1 G.T. Sheppard, "Isaiah as Scroll or Codex within Jewish and Christian Scripture," *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1996), 208-209.

2 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers 1993), 8.

3 See his "IsiNTU is the Way for Africa," *Pace*, April 1997, 64. Credit must go to my wife for bringing this quote to my attention.

4 See n 7.

Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Interpretation[1] but he is also general editor of *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, based on the KJV.[2] In his chapter entitled, "Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism and Biblical Interpretation," in *Black Theology: a Documentary History*, vol 2 (1993), Felder writes:

> An examination of the term Afrocentricity will make clear what I and other Black Biblical scholars have found helpful in correcting the effects of the cultural ideological conditioning to which we have all been subjected. Afrocentricity is the idea that the land mass that the ancient Romans routinely called Africa and the peoples of African descent must be understood as having made significant contributions to world civilization as prospective subjects within history rather than being regarded as merely passive objects of historical distortions. Afrocentrism means reestablishing Africa as a center of value and source of pride, without in any way demeaning other people and their historic contributions to human achievement. The term was coined by [the African-American] Molafi kete Asante of Temple University [USA] and as used [in biblical studies] it refers to a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical traditions, their exegetical history in the West, and their allied hermeneutical implications..., [demonstrating] clearly that we have arrived at a new stage in Biblical interpretation [and translation?].[3]

In short, Afrocentric translation and hermeneutics, as conceived and practised, is meant by its practitioners to be both one of suspicion ideologically and one of liberation psychosocially.[4]

To shift from the sphere of the relatively abstract realm of principles, propositions and postulates, to that of particulars and "practicals", I will now outline what an Afrocentric hermeneutics of suspicion and liberation might mean for Bible translation as a whole. As already mentioned, we will draw out the implications of such an approach in relation to a few biblical passages, section headings and other study helps such as notes and maps.

Implications for Bible translation

This section will be more illustrative than exhaustive in scope. A full discussion of the subject would require a book rather than a paper.

---

1 C.H. Felder, ed, *Stony the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press 1991). Afrocentric, Afrocentricity and Afrocentrism are terms that also appear quite frequently in Martin Bernal's highly influential revisionist approach to the genesis and growth of Western civilization. See his *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2 vols, 1987, 1994).

2 *The Original African Heritage Study Bible: King James Version* (Nashville, Tennessee: James C. Winston 1993).

3 Felder, "Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism and Biblical Interpretation," in *Black Theology: a Documentary History* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, vol 2, 1993), 188.

4 In that sense, Afrocentric Bible translation and hermeneutics is congruent with the new constitution of South Africa predicated, as it does, on some fundamental constitutional principles such as non-discrimination on the grounds of race. See G. Bindman, "The New South Africa: a Revolution in the Making," *New Law Journal* 144 (1994) 647-648; and L.M. du Plessis, "The Genesis of South Africa's first Bill of Rights: a Few Observations from a Moral and Theological Perspective," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 86 (1994) 52-66.

Biblical Passages

Basic to the Afrocentric approach to Bible translation is the contention that we have to begin at the beginning—with Genesis, the book of beginnings. In doing so, we need to come to grips with what appears to be an African presence in the passage Gen 2.10-14. Not only do(es) the Genesis account(s) of creation serve a useful etiological function, but, in the view of some, 2.10-14 undercuts all Eurocentric pretensions and de-Africanizing tendencies. Mention there is made, for example, of four rivers (Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel and Euphrates) and the lands of Cush and Havilah. What is quite noticeable in a number of (Western) translations is that the word Hiddekel, associated with the Euphrates in Mesopotamia (v 14) is correctly (and for the sake of clarity) substituted for the less obscure Hebrew word Tigris (with or without a note to draw the reader's attention to the substitution—not to mention the *listener*, for whom a footnote would be useless).

For example:

KJV	Hiddekel
RSV	Tigris (a marginal note and cross-reference to Dan 10.4)
NIV	Tigris (no note, only cross-references to Dan 10.4 [correctly] and Gen 41.1 [incorrectly]. The latter verse refers to the Nile.
GNB	Tigris (no note)
Biblia Sagrada (em Portugues corrente)	Tigre (no note)
La Sainte Bible (Louis Segond)	Hiddekel
Dios Habla Hoy	Tigris (no note)[1]

What, for some, is also quite noticeable in such translations is that the same translational logic seems not to be applied when it comes to the possible African elements of the passage in question, in particular, the rivers Pishon and Gihon and the lands of Havilah and Cush. in terms of the location of the latter, for example, Adamo and others have shown that there is a questionable hesitation on the part of a number of (Western) scholars to identify Cush with what would pass today as a part of modern Ethiopia and all of Sudan, that is, with Africa.[2] By and large, the KJV has not been followed. There we find "Ethiopia", thus making explicit the association with the African continent.

Unlike their treatment of Hiddekel in v 14, Western scholars do not substitute the Blue and the White Nile for the Pishon and Gihon respectively and perhaps correctly so, since this is still not a settled issue. But at least, in the opinion of some, there should be a note to draw the (African) reader's attention to the possibility of

---

1 Tigris also appears in the LXX. Even at the level of a literal interlinear translation, the substitution is sometimes made. For that, see for example, The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament, vol 1, Gen.-Deut., ed. J.R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 1979), *ad loc.*

2 See D.T. Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament.* San Francisco: International Scholars Publications 1998, and "Understanding the Genesis Creation Account in an African Background", *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 10 (1989) 17-25.

this "African connection". Albright, for example, espoused the view that these two "unknown" rivers do in fact refer to the Blue and White Nile, as does the General Editor of the *Original African Heritage Study Bible.*[1] Moreover, it is quite instructive that the only other place in the LXX where both rivers are mentioned (and together) is in the deutero-canonical text of Sirach (24.25). There, in Davidson's opinion (*Cambridge Bible Commentary*), both seem to be associated with the two branches of the Nile. Further, I am informed by Dr. Mikre-Sellassie, an Ethiopian UBS translation consultant, that the Ge'ez word for the Nile is Geon, thus establishing a clear lexical link with the Hebrew of Gen 2.10-14.

As for Havilah, scholars are equally hesitant to associate it with Egypt although, when it appears in the Hebrew Bible, it is usually associated with Egypt (see Gen 10.7, 29; 25.18; 1Sam 25.8). At times one encounters what appears to be incredibly specious arguments to justify the non-association of Havilah with an area in the region of Egypt. J. Skinner, for example, in the highly respected *International Critical Commentary* argues that Havilah could not have been in Africa but was rather in Arabia. The reason for this is that bdellium and onyx, gold and other precious stones associated with Havilah in Gen 2.11-12 were, presumably, not found anywhere in Africa but in places like Arabia, India, Media, Babylonia and Greece! According to Keil and Delitzsch in their otherwise excellent commentary on the Pentateuch, the Havilah of Gen 10.29; 25.18 and 1Sam 15.7 does in fact point to a region near Egypt, but not so in Gen 2.11. Why? Because unlike the other occurrences mentioned, the Havilah of Gen 2.11 has the definite article in the Hebrew. In my view, it is rather doubtful that the location of Havilah hinges on the presence or absence of a definite article. The context strongly suggests an African location in each case. For some, it is as if Keil and Delitzsch cannot bear the thought of what that would imply, namely, that Eden, with its four rivers flowing from it (two of which had an African provenance) was at least partially located in Africa.

In my view, the African reader should be made aware of this, if not at the level of the actual translation of the passage, then at least by way of a study note or comment. I recall that sharing this "African" reading of Gen 2.10-14 with a group of translators from Chad and Cameroon at a recent workshop for translators caused a spontaneous expression of surprise and delight. One of them asked why, in all his years as a translator, he had not been made aware of this psychologically liberating reading of the passage.

An Afrocentric approach to Bible translation does not always entail an actual re-translation of the passage (as may be possible in the case of Gen. 2.10-14). Sometimes, as already mentioned, it might call for an appropriate "African comment" by way of a note—especially so in study Bibles. With regard to actual re-translation, Bailey has argued with some merit that, generally speaking, the two rhetorical questions of Jer 13.23a are generally mistranslated. In the NIV, the entire verse reads as follows:

Can the Ethiopian change his skin
or the leopard its spots?

---

1 See the study note for Gen 2.10-14 (4-5).

Neither can you do good
who are accustomed to doing evil.

First of all, Bailey correctly points out that the verb in the Hebrew translated as "can" is not *ykl* as one would have expected.[1] Instead, we find the hé-interrogative with the imperfect form of the verb, that is, *hyhpk*. A better translation, then, is:

Would the Ethiopian change his skin
or the leopard its spots?

The unarticulated response is: of course not. Why would they want to do that? They are quite happy the way they are already! Jeremiah's point is that just as there is no *desire* on the part of either the Ethiopian or the leopard to change his skin or its spots, so there is no desire on Israel's part to change from her erring ways; for that reason, God's punitive judgment is both imminent and certain. The theology underlying Jeremiah's contention is not that Judah *cannot* change (for what right would a just God then have to inflict punishment?) but that Judah, like the Ethiopian and the leopard, chooses not to change. Unlike the typical translation, the implication of the rhetorical questions is not (as is sometimes assumed) that, if it were at all possible (which it is not), both the Ethiopian and the leopard would gladly change their skin and spots—further implying that both are unhappy with the way they were meant to be. That is, the typical translation, for some, yields a negative view of what it means to be an Ethiopian in the passage, whereas a different (and better) translation projects a much more positive view of both the Ethiopian and the leopard. As Hope has pointed out in his study of the fauna of the Bible, the leopard's spots are positive features of its being. They are an integral part of its survival equipment. Its spots allow it to camouflage itself in the wilds, both for its own protection and to facilitate its ongoing hunting habits.[2]

Two passages that do not require an actual re-translation from an Afrocentric perspective, but which call for an appropriate comment, are Zeph 1.1 and Mt 2.11. The former contains the longest genealogical list of any of the writing prophets in the Hebrew Bible, and moreover tells us that Zephaniah was of African descent, being the son of Cushi. As Clark states: "it may mean that Zephaniah's father was an African and that Zephaniah himself was a black man."[3] When this was pointed out to one of the Bubi translators in Spanish-speaking Equatorial Guinea, there was a reaction of delighted surprise, not unlike that of the translators at the workshop in Cameroon, already mentioned.

The other passage, namely Mt 2.11, describes the birth of Jesus. This Matthean account mentions Jesus as an infant refugee in Egypt, and also the Magi and the gifts they bore, one of which was myrrh. As was the case with the appreciative Xironga translators in Mozambique, African readers should, I believe, at least be told explicitly, by way of a comment or note, that myrrh is not native to Palestine

---

1 R. Bailey, "Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives," in *Stony the Road We Trod*, 176-177. Bailey has also argued that Is 1.18 needs to be re-translated so as to project a negative and not a positive image of Whiteness as is generally done. See *Semeia* 76 (1996) 99-113.

2 To appear in the UBS Helps for Translators series.

3 See D.J. Clark and H.A. Hatton, *UBS Handbook on Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 1989, 144.

but that it "grows in Arabia, Abyssinia [modern-day Ethiopia] and on the Somali coast of East Africa."[1]

Section Headings

Only one example will be given here, by way of illustration. It is Acts 12—28 and the so-called "three missionary journeys or tours of Paul"—language we typically find in some highly influential versions such as the RSV. It is language we also find, for example, in the *Family Devotional Study Bible*, based on the NIV.

Townsend speaks for most if not all of us when he writes:

> Many of us can remember having to memorize the outlines of Paul's missionary journeys when we were children. Traditionally, there were three of them, each beginning in Antioch or Jerusalem.[2]

Townsend goes on to demonstrate that the idea of characterizing Paul's itinerant ministry in Acts 12—28 as "three missionary journeys" emerged in Europe at precisely the same time as that of the various missionary societies—Roman Catholic, Anglican or Protestant. The first biblical exegete and commentator to "see" a tripartite Pauline missionary schema in Acts was J.A. Bengel in 1742. Before that, neither the Fathers of the early church nor the later "reformers" of it "saw" the pattern. Bengel, however, was later followed in the section headings subsequently adopted. Townsend asks (and then hypothesizes) as follows:

> Why should a missionary-journey pattern have been imposed on Acts at this time? A likely answer is that commentators [and later translators?] were reading their own presuppositions back into apostolic times. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw an escalation of Western missionary activity. It was an era for founding missionary societies.[3]

Mention is then made, for example, of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith (1822—Roman Catholic), the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (1701), the Church Missionary Society (1799) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804). Throughout the 19th century, missionary societies proliferated on both sides of the Atlantic, and what was common to all of them was the whole notion (an ethnocentric assumption?) that Europe and North America constitute (supposedly as Antioch and/or Jerusalem did in Paul's day) the Home Base from which missionaries such as Paul were sent to the "mission fields" of Africa, Latin America and elsewhere.

Townsend again:

> The practice of reading a missionary-journey pattern into Acts has more than a strictly academic significance. It reinforces the view that the younger Christian churches are the receivers of a gospel dispensed from the largess of Europe and North America. Today, there is little overt support for such an unequal approach to the Christians of the third world.

1 See *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, UBS Helps for Translators, 2nd ed 1980, 146-148.

2 John T. Townsend, "Missionary Journeys in Acts and European Missionary Societies", in *Society for Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press 1985), 433, reprinted in *Anglican Theological Review* 68 (1986) 99-104.

3 *Ibid.*, 436.

It is time to recognize that the approach does not find support in the book of Acts.[1]

The translators of Habari Njema, the 1995 Swahili Bible, are to be commended for following this practice.

Maps

Generally speaking, the continent of Africa is given short shrift when it comes to being included in maps supposedly exhibiting the Bible lands as a whole. If Africa is included at all, it usually is just a very thin slice of its northern section, while Europe tends to get the "lion's share". To be more inclusive, maps should reflect not only Egypt and Libya to the north but also modern-day Ethiopia and Sudan further south. The African reader should see and sense that his/her continent is an integral part of the biblical drama—not just barely so as the thin northern slice would imply. Though speaking of the narrative world of Luke as reflected in his second volume (Acts), Robbins, for example, captures the spread of the early Church through the world as a whole. He writes:

> ...the implied author has in view people from as far south and west as Ethiopia and Cyrenaica, as far east as Arabia, Elam, Media, and Parthia, as far north as the Southern coast of the Euxine Sea and the northern coastal region of the Aegean Sea, and as far west as Rome.[2]

Conclusion

An Afrocentric approach to Bible translation, influenced by both a liberatory and a postcolonialist discourse, is still in its infancy, although a spate of articles have seen the light of day in recent years. As a translation strategy, it is predicated upon the conviction that all Bible translation, however "scientific" or "objective" it purports to be, is perspectival in nature and even ideological in thrust. For its practitioners, there is no such thing as a value-free theory of translation which exists in some hermeneutically abstract, absolute or autonomous realm far removed from the biases and blind spots to which we are all susceptible as fallible, "fallen", human beings.[3]

The hegemonic hold that male Western translators have long had on Bible translation is now being openly challenged not only by women (white and non-white alike) but by those committed to an Afrocentric postcolonialist hermeneutic as well. This modest article is meant to be an illustration of that.

---

1 *Ibid.*, 437.

2 See Vernon K. Robbins, "The Social Location of the Implied Author of Luke—Acts " in *The Social World of Luke—Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson 1991), 318. Interestingly enough, none of the eight contributors (all white and Western) to this volume makes explicit mention of the Ethiopian Eunuch, although he is recorded in Acts as being the first Gentile convert to early Christianity—not Cornelius, the European of Acts 10, who does get mentioned in a few places!

3 For Renita Weems, "there is an element of interpretation that is non-scientific, impressionistic, imaginative, artistic and inexplicable." See her interview (A Conversation with Renita J. Weems) in *Religious Studies News* 12 (February 1997) 15.